December Love

Robert Hichens

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By Robert Hichens

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DECEMBER LOVE

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

Alick Craven, who was something in the Foreign Office, had been living in London, except for an interval of military service during the war, for several years, and had plenty of interesting friends and acquaintances, when one autumn day, in a club, Francis Braybrooke, who knew everybody, sat down

beside him and began, as his way was, talking of people. Braybrooke talked well and was an exceedingly agreeable man, but he seldom discussed ideas. His main interest lay in the doings of the human race, the "human animal," to use a favorite phrase of his, in what the human race was "up to." People were his delight. He could not live away from the centre of their activities. He was never tired of meeting new faces, and would go to endless trouble to bring an interesting personality within the circle of his acquaintance. Craven's comparative indifference about society, his laziness in social matters, was a perpetual cause of surprise to Braybrooke, who nevertheless was always ready to do Craven a good turn, whether he wanted it done to him or not. Indeed, Craven was indebted to his kind old friend for various introductions which had led to pleasant times, and for these he was quite grateful. Braybrooke was much older than most people, though he seldom looked it, and decades older than Craven, and he had a genial way of taking those younger than himself in charge, always with a view to their social advancement. He was a very ancient hand at the social game; he loved to play it; and he wanted as many as possible to join in, provided, of course, that they were "suitable" for such a purpose. Perhaps he slightly resembled "the world's governess," as a witty woman had once called him. But he was really a capital fellow and a mine of worldly wisdom.

On the occasion in question, after chatting for about an hour, he happened to mention Lady Sellingworth—"Adela Sellingworth," as he called her. Craven did not know her, and said so in the simplest way.

"I don't know Lady Sellingworth."

Braybrooke sat for a moment in silence looking at Craven over his carefully trimmed grey and brown beard.

"How very strange!" he said at last.

"Why is it strange?"

"All these years in London and not know Adela Sellingworth!"

"I know about her, of course. I know she was a famous beauty when King Edward was Prince of Wales, and was tremendously prominent in society after he came to the throne. But I have never seen her about since I have been settled in London. To tell the honest truth, I thought Lady Sellingworth was what is called a back number."

"Adela Sellingworth a back number!"

Braybrooke bristled gently and caught his beard-point with his broad-fingered right hand. His small, observant hazel eyes rebuked Craven mildly, and he slightly shook his head, covered with thick, crinkly and carefully brushed hair.

"Well—but," Craven protested. "But surely she long ago retired from the fray! Isn't she over sixty?"

"She is about sixty. But that is nothing nowadays."

"No doubt she had a terrific career."

"Terrific! What do you mean exactly by terrific?"

"Why, that she was what used to be called a professional beauty, a social ruler, immensely distinguished and smart and all that sort of thing. But I understood that she suddenly gave it all up. I remember someone telling me that she abdicated, and that those who knew her best were most surprised about it."

"A woman told you that, no doubt."

"Yes, I think it was a woman."

"Anything else?"

"If I remember rightly, she said that Lady Sellingworth was the very last woman one had expected to do such a thing, that she was one of the old guard, whose motto is 'never give up,' that she went on expecting, and tacitly demanding, the love and admiration which most men only give with sincerity to young women long after she was no more young and had begun to lose her looks. Perhaps it was all lies."

"No, no. There is something in it."

He looked meditative.

"It certainly was a sudden business," he presently added. "I have often thought so. It came about after her return from Paris some ten years ago—that time when her jewels were stolen."

"Were they?" said Craven.

"Were they!"

Braybrooke's tone just then really did rather suggest the world's governess.

"My dear fellow—yes, they were, to the tune of about fifty thousand pounds."

"What a dreadful business! Did she get them back?"

"No. She never even tried to. But, of course, it came out eventually."

"It seems to me that everything anyone wishes to hide does come out eventually in London," said Craven, with perhaps rather youthful cynicism. "But surely Lady Sellingworth must have wanted to get her jewels back. What can have induced her to be silent about such a loss?"

"It's a mystery. I have wondered why—often," said Braybrooke, gently stroking his beard.

He even slightly wrinkled his forehead, until he remembered that such an indulgence is apt to lead to permanent lines, whereupon he abruptly became as smooth as a baby, and added:

"She must have had a tremendous reason. But I'm not aware that anyone knows what it is unless—" he paused meditatively. "I have sometimes suspected that perhaps Seymour Portman—"

"Sir Seymour, the general?"

"Yes. He knows her better than anyone else does. He cared for her when she was a girl, through both her marriages, and cares for her just as much still, I believe."

"How were her jewels stolen?" Craven asked.

Braybrooke had roused his interest. A woman who lost jewels worth fifty thousand pounds, and made no effort to get them back, must surely be an extraordinary creature.

"They were stolen in Paris at the Gare du Nord out of a first-class compartment reserved for Adela Sellingworth. That much came out through her maid."

"And nothing was done?"

"I believe not. Adela Sellingworth is said to have behaved most fatalistically when the story came out. She said the jewels were gone long ago, and there was an end of it, and that she couldn't be bothered."

"Bothered!—about such a loss?"

"And, what's more, she got rid of the maid."

"Very odd!"

"It was. Very odd! Her abdication also was very odd and abrupt. She changed her way of living, gave up society, let her hair go white, allowed her face to do whatever it chose, and, in fact, became very much

what she is now—the most charming *old* woman in London."

"Oh, is she charming?"

"Is she charming!"

Braybrooke raised his thick eyebrows and looked really pitiful.

"I will see if I can take you there one day," he continued, after a rebuking pause. "But don't count on it. She doesn't see very many people. Still, I think she might like you. You have tastes in common. She is interested in everything that is interesting—except, perhaps, in love affairs. She doesn't seem to care about love affairs. And yet some young girls are devoted to her."

"Perhaps that is because she has abdicated."

Braybrooke looked at Craven with rather sharp inquiry.

"I only mean that I don't think, as a rule, young girls are very fond of elderly women whose motto is 'never give up.'" Craven explained.

"Ah?"

Braybrooke was silent. Then, lighting a cigarette, he remarked:

"Youth is very charming, but one must say that it is set free from cruelty."

"I agree with you. But what about the old guard?" Craven asked. "Is that always so very kind?"

Then he suddenly remembered that in London there is an "old guard" of men, and that undoubtedly Braybrooke belonged to it; and, afraid that he was blundering, he changed the conversation.

CHAPTER II

A fortnight later Craven received a note from his old friend saying that Braybrooke had spoken about him to “Adela Sellingworth,” and that she would be glad to know him. Braybrooke was off to Paris to stay with the Mariguys, but all Craven had to do was to leave a card at Number 18A, Berkeley Square, and when this formality had been accomplished Lady Sellingworth would no doubt write to him and suggest an hour for a meeting. Craven thanked his friend, left a card at Number 18A, and a day or two later received an invitation to go to tea with Lady Sellingworth on the following Sunday. He stayed in London on purpose to do this, although he had promised to go into the country from Saturday to Monday. Braybrooke had succeeded in rousing keen interest in him. It was not Craven’s habit to be at the feet of old ladies. He much preferred to them young or youngish women, unmarried or married. But Lady Sellingworth “intrigued” him. She had been a reigning beauty. She had “lived” as not many English women had lived. And then—the stolen jewels and her extraordinary indifference about their loss!

Decidedly he wanted to know her!

Number 18A, Berkeley Square was a large town mansion, and on the green front door there was a plate upon which was engraved in bold lettering, “The Dowager Countess of Sellingworth.” Craven looked at this plate and at the big knocker above it as he rang the electric bell. Almost as soon as he had

pressed the button the big door was opened, and a very tall footman in a pale pink livery appeared. Behind him stood a handsome, middle-aged butler.

A large square hall was before Craven, with a hooded chair and a big fire burning on a wide hearth. Beyond was a fine staircase, which had a balustrade of beautifully wrought ironwork with gold ornamentations. He gave his hat, coat and stick to the footman—after taking his name, the butler had moved away, and was pausing not far from the staircase—Craven suddenly felt as if he stood in a London more solid, more dignified, more peaceful, even more gentlemanlike, than the London he was accustomed to. There seemed to be in this house a large calm, an almost remote stillness, which put modern Bond Street, just around the corner, at a very great distance. As he followed the butler, walking softly, up the beautiful staircase, Craven was conscious of a flavour in this mansion which was new to him, but which savoured of spacious times, when the servant question was not acute, when decent people did not move from house to house like gipsies changing camp, when flats were unknown—spacious times and more elegant times than ours.

The butler and Craven gained a large landing on which was displayed a remarkable collection of oriental china. The butler opened a tall mahogany door and bent his head again to receive the murmur of Craven's name. It was announced, and Craven found himself in a great drawing-room, at the far end of which, by a fire, were sitting three people. They were Lady Sellingworth, the faithful Sir Seymour Portman, and a beautiful girl, slim, fair, with an athletic figure, and vividly intelligent, though rather sarcastic, violet eyes. This was Miss Beryl Van Tuyn. (Craven did not know who she was, though he

recognized at once the erect figure, faithful, penetrating eyes and curly white hair—cauliflower hair—of the general, whom he had often seen about town and “in attendance” on royalty at functions.)

Lady Sellingworth got up to receive him. As she did so he was almost startled by her height.

She was astonishingly tall, probably well over six feet, very slim, thin even, with a small head covered with rather wavy white hair and set on a long neck, sloping shoulders, long, aristocratic hands on which she wore loose white gloves, narrow, delicate feet, very fine wrists and ankles. Her head reminded Craven of the head of a deer. As for her face, once marvellously beautiful according to the report of competent judges who had seen all the beauties of their day, it was now quite frankly a ruin, lined, fallen in here and there, haggard, drawn. Nevertheless, looking upon it, one could guess that once upon a time it must have been a face with a mobile, almost imperial, outline, perhaps almost insolently striking, the arrogant countenance of a conqueror. When gazing at it one gazed at the ruin, not of a cottage or of a gimcrack villa, but at the ruins of a palace. Lady Sellingworth’s eyes were very dark and still magnificent, like two brilliant lamps in her head. A keen intelligence gazed out of them. There was often something half sad, half mocking in their expression. But Craven thought that they mocked at herself rather than at others. She was very plainly dressed in black, and her dress was very high at the neck. She wore no ornaments except a wedding ring, and two sapphires in her ears, which were tiny and beautiful.

Her greeting to Craven was very kind. He noticed at once that her manner was as natural almost as a frank, manly schoolboy’s, carelessly, strikingly

natural. There could never, he thought, have been a grain of affectation in her. The idea even came into his head that she was as natural as a tramp. Nevertheless the stamp of the great lady was imprinted all over her. She had a voice that was low, very sensitive and husky.

Instantly she fascinated Craven. Instantly he did not care whether she was old or young, in perfect preservation or a ruin. For she seemed to him penetratingly human, simply and absolutely herself as God had made her. And what a rare joy that was, to meet in London a woman of the great world totally devoid of the smallest shred of make-believe! Craven felt that if she appeared before her Maker she would be exactly as she was when she said how do you do to him.

She introduced him to Miss Van Tuyn and the general, made him sit next to her, and gave him tea.

Miss Van Tuyn began talking, evidently continuing a conversation which had been checked for a moment by the arrival of Craven. She was obviously intelligent and had enormous vitality. She was also obviously preoccupied with her own beauty and with the effect it was having upon her hearers. She not only listened to herself while she spoke; she seemed also to be trying to visualize herself while she spoke. In her imagination she was certainly watching herself, and noting with interest and pleasure her young and ardent beauty, which seemed to Craven more remarkable when she was speaking than when she was silent. She must, Craven thought, often have stood before a mirror and carefully “memorized” herself in all her variety and detail. As he sat there listening he could not help comparing her exquisite bloom of youth with the ravages of time so apparent in Lady Sellingworth, and being struck by the

inexorable cruelty of life. Yet there was something which persisted and over which time had no empire —charm. On that afternoon the charm of Lady Sellingworth's quiet attention to her girl visitor seemed to Craven even greater than the charm of that girl visitor's vivid vitality.

Sir Seymour, who had the self-contained and rather detached manner of the old courtier, mingled with the straight-forward self-possession of the old soldier thoroughly accustomed to dealing with men in difficult moments, threw in a word or two occasionally. Although a grave, even a rather sad-looking man, he was evidently entertained by Miss Van Tuyn's volubility and almost passionate, yet not vulgar, egoism. Probably he thought such a lovely girl had a right to admire herself. She talked of herself in modern Paris with the greatest enthusiasm, cleverly grouping Paris, its gardens, its monuments, its pictures, its brilliant men and women as a decor around the one central figure—Miss Beryl Van Tuyn.

"Why do you never come to Paris, dearest?" she presently said to Lady Sellingworth. "You used to know it so very well, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes; I had an apartment in Paris for years. But that was almost before you were born," said the husky, sympathetic voice of her hostess.

Craven glanced at her. She was smiling.

"Surely you loved Paris, didn't you?" said Miss Van Tuyn.

"Very much, and understood it very well."

"Oh—that! She understands everything, doesn't she, Sir Seymour?"

"Perhaps we ought to except mathematics and military tactics," he replied, with a glance at Lady Sellingworth half humorous, half affectionate. "But

certainly everything connected with the art of living is her possession."

"And—the art of dying?" Lady Sellingworth said, with a lightly mocking sound in her voice.

Miss Van Tuyn opened her violet eyes very wide.

"But is there an art of dying? Living—yes; for that is being and is continuous. But dying is ceasing."

"And there is an art of ceasing, Beryl. Some day you may know that."

"Well, but even very old people are always planning for the future on earth. No one expects to cease. Isn't it so, Mr. Craven?"

She turned to him, and he agreed with her and instanced a certain old duchess who, at the age of eighty, was preparing for a tour round the world when influenza stepped in and carried her off, to the great vexation of Thomas Cook and Son.

"We must remember that that duchess was an American," observed Sir Seymour.

"You mean that we Americans are more determined not to cease than you English?" she asked. "That we are very persistent?"

"Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps we are."

She turned and laid a hand gently, almost caressingly, on Lady Sellingworth's.

"I shall persist until I get you over to Paris," she said. "I do want you to see my apartment, and my bronzes—particularly my bronzes. When were you last in Paris?"

"Passing through or staying—do you mean?"

"Staying."

Lady Sellingworth was silent for an instant, and

Craven saw the half sad, half mocking expression in her eyes.

"I haven't stayed in Paris for ten years," she said.

She glanced at Sir Seymour, who slightly bent his curly head as if in assent.

"It's almost incredible, isn't it, Mr. Craven?" said Miss Van Tuyn. "So unlike the man who expressed a wish to be buried in Paris."

Craven remembered at that moment Braybrooke's remark in the club that Lady Sellingworth's jewelry were stolen in Paris at the Gare du Nord ten years ago. Did Miss Van Tuyn know about that? He wondered as he murmured something non-committal.

Miss Van Tuyn now tried to extract a word of honour promise from Lady Sellingworth to visit her in Paris, where, it seemed, she lived very independently with a *dame de compagnie*, who was always in one room with a cold reading the novels of Paul Bourget. ("Bourget keeps on writing for *her*!" the gay girl said, not without malice.)

But Lady Sellingworth evaded her gently.

"I'm too lazy for Paris now," she said. "I no longer care for moving about. This old town house of mine has become to me like my shell. I'm lazy, Beryl; I'm lazy. You don't know what that is; nor do you, Mr. Craven. Even you, Seymour, you don't know. For you are a man of action, and at Court there is always movement. But I, my friends—" She gave Craven a deliciously kind yet impersonal smile. "I am a contemplative. There is nothing oriental about me, but I am just a quiet British contemplative, untouched by the unrest of your age."

"But it's *your* age, too!" cried Miss Van Tuyn.

"No, dear. I was an Edwardian."

"I wish I had known you then!" said Miss Van Tuyn impulsively.

"You would not have known *me* then," returned Lady Sellingworth, with the slightest possible stress on the penultimate word.

Then she changed the conversation. Craven felt that she was not fond of talking about herself.

CHAPTER III

That day Craven walked away from Lady Sellingworth's house with Miss Van Tuyn, leaving Sir Seymour Portman behind him.

Miss Van Tuyn was staying with a friend at the Hyde Park Hotel, and, as she said she wanted some air, Craven offered to accompany her there on foot.

"Do!" she said in her frank and very conscious way. "I'm afraid of London on a Sunday."

"Afraid!"

"As I'm afraid of a heavy, dull person with a morose expression. Please don't be angry."

Craven smiled.

"I know! Paris is much lighter in hand than London on a Sunday."

"Isn't it? But there are people in London! Isn't *she* a precious person?"

"Lady Sellingworth?"

"Yes. You have marvellous old women in London who do all that we young people do, and who look astonishing. They might almost be somewhere in the thirties when one knows they are really in the sixties. They play games, ride, can still dance, have perfect digestions, sit up till two in the morning and are out shopping in Bond Street as fresh as paint by eleven, having already written dozens of acceptances to invitations, arranged dinners, theatre parties, heaven knows what! Made of cast iron, they seem. They even manage somehow to be fairly attractive to young men. They are living marvels, and I take off my toque to them. But Lady Sellingworth, quite old, ravaged, devastated by time one might say, who goes nowhere and who doesn't even play bridge—she beats them all. I love her. I love her wrinkled distinction, her husky voice, her careless walk. She walks anyhow, like a woman alone on a country road. She looks even older than she is. But what does it matter? If I were a man—"

"Would you fall in love with her?" Craven interposed.

"Oh, no!"

She shot a blue glance at him.

"But I should love her—if only she would let me. But she wouldn't. I feel that."

"I never saw her till to-day. She charmed me."

"Of course. But she didn't try to."

"Probably not."

"That's it! She doesn't try, and that's partly why she succeeds, being as God has made her. Do you know that some people hate her?"

"Impossible!"

"They do."

"Who do?"

"The young-old women of her time, the young-old Edwardian women. She dates them. She shows them up by looking as she does. She is their contemporary, and she has the impertinence to be old. And they can't forgive her for it."

"I understand," said Craven. "She has betrayed the 'old guard.' She has disobeyed the command inscribed on their banner. She has given up."

"Yes. They will never pardon her, never!"

"I wonder what made her do it?" said Craven.

And he proceeded to touch on Miss Van Tuyn's desire to get Lady Sellingworth to Paris. He soon found out that she did not know about the jewels episode. She showed curiosity, and he told her what he knew. She seemed deeply interested.

"I was sure there was a mystery in her life," she said. "I have always felt it. Ten years ago! And since then she has never stayed in Paris!"

"And since then—from that moment—she has betrayed the 'old guard.'"

"How? I don't understand."

Craven explained. Miss Van Tuyn listened with an intensity of interest which flattered him. He began to think her quite lovely, and she saw the pretty thought in his mind.

When he had finished she said:

"No attempt to recover the lost jewels, the desertion of Paris, the sudden change into old age! What do you make of it?"

"I can make nothing. Unless the chagrin she felt made her throw up everything in a fit of anger. And then, of course, once the thing was done she couldn't go back."

"You mean—go back to the Edwardian youthfulness she had abandoned?"

"Yes. One may refuse to grow old, but once one has become definitely, ruthlessly old, it's practically impossible to jump back to a pretence of the thirties."

"Of course. It would frighten people. But—it wasn't that."

"No?"

"No. For if she had felt the loss of her jewels so much as you suggest, she would have made every effort to recover them."

"I suppose she would."

"The heart of the mystery lies in her not wishing to try to get the jewels back. That, to me, is inexplicable. Because we women love jewels. And no woman carries about jewels worth fifty thousand pounds without caring very much for them."

"Just what I have thought," said Craven.

After a short silence he added:

"Could Lady Sellingworth possibly have known who had stolen the jewels, do you think?"

"What! And refrained from denouncing the thief!"

"She might have had a reason."

Miss Van Tuyn's keen though still girlish eyes looked sharply into Craven's for an instant.

"I believe you men, you modern men are very apt to think terrible things about women," she said.

Craven warmly defended himself against this abrupt accusation.

"Well, but what did you mean?" persisted Miss Van Tuyn. "Now, go against your sex and be truthful for once to a woman."

"I really don't know exactly what I meant," said Craven. "But I suppose it's possible to conceive of circumstances in which a woman might know the identity of a thief and yet not wish to prosecute."

"Very well. I'll let you alone," she rejoined. "But this mystery makes Lady Sellingworth more fascinating to me than ever. I'm not particularly curious about other people. I'm too busy about myself for that. But I would give a great deal to know a little more of her truth. Do you remember her remark when I said 'I wish I had known you then'?"

"Yes. She said, 'You would not have known *me* then.'"

"There have been two Adela Sellingworths. And I only know one. I do want to know the other. But I am almost sure I never shall. And yet she's fond of me. I know that. She likes my being devoted to her. I feel she's a book of wisdom, and I have only read a few pages."

She walked on quickly with her light, athletic step. Just as they were passing Hyde Park Corner she said:

"I think I shall go to one of the 'old guard.'"

"Why?" asked Craven.

"You ask questions to which you know the answers," she retorted.

And then they talked of other things.

When they reached the hotel and Craven was about to say good-bye, Miss Van Tuyn said to him:

"Are you coming to see me one day?"

Her expression suggested that she was asking a question to which she knew the answer, in this following the example just given to her by Craven.

"I want to," he said.

"Then do give me your card."

He gave it to her.

"We both want to know her secret," she said, as she put it into her card-case. "Our curiosity about that dear, delightful woman is a link between us."

Craven looked into her animated eyes, which were strongly searching him for admiration. He took her hand and held it for a moment.

"I don't think I want to know Lady Sellingworth's secret if she doesn't wish me to know it," he said.

"Now—is that true?"

"Yes," he said, with a genuine earnestness which seemed to amuse her. "Really, really it is true."

She sent him a slightly mocking glance.

"Well, I am less delicate. I want to know it, whether she wishes me to or not. And yet I am more devoted to her than you are. I have known her for quite a long time."

"One can learn devotion very quickly," he said, pressing her hand before he let it go.

"In an afternoon?"

"Yes, in an afternoon."

"Happy Lady Sellingworth!" she said.

Then she turned to go into the hotel. Just before she passed through the swing door she looked round at Craven. The movement of her young head was delicious.

"After all, in spite of the charm that won't die," he thought, "there's nothing like youth for calling you."

He thought Lady Sellingworth really more charming than Miss Van Tuyn, but he knew that the feeling of her hand in his would not have thrilled something in him, a very intimate part of himself, as

he had just been thrilled.

He felt almost angry with himself as he walked away, and he muttered under his breath:

“Damn the animal in me!”

CHAPTER IV

Not many days later Craven received a note from Miss Van Tuyn asking him to come to see her at a certain hour on a certain day. He went and found her alone in a private sitting-room overlooking the Park. For the first time he saw her without a hat. With her beautiful corn-coloured hair uncovered she looked, he thought, more lovely than when he had seen her at Lady Sellingworth’s. She noted that thought at once, caught it on the wing through his mind, as it were, and caged it comfortably in hers.

“I have seen the ‘old guard,’” she said, after she had let him hold and press her hand for two or three seconds.

“What, the whole regiment?” said Craven.

She sat down on a sofa by a basket of roses. He sat down near her.

“No; only two or three of the leaders.”

“Do I know them?”

“Probably. Mrs. Ackroyde?”

“I know her.”

“Lady Archie Brook?”

"Her, too."

"I've also seen Lady Wrackley."

"I have met Lady Wrackley, but I can hardly say I know her. Still, she shows her teeth at me when I come into a room where she is."

"They are wonderful teeth, aren't they?"

"Astonishing!"

"And they are her own—not by purchase."

"Are you sure she doesn't owe for them?"

"Positive; except, of course, to her Creator. Isn't it wonderful to think that those three women are contemporaries of Lady Sellingworth?"

"Indeed it is! But surely you didn't let them know that you knew they were? Or shall I say know they are?"

She smiled, showing perfect teeth, and shook her corn-coloured head.

"You see, I'm so young and live in Paris! And then I'm American. They have no idea how much I know. I just let them suppose that I only knew they were old enough to remember Lady Sellingworth when she was still a reigning beauty. I implied that *they* were buds then."

"And they accepted the implication?"

"Oh, they are women of the world! They just swallowed it very quietly, as a well-bred person swallows a small easy-going bonbon."

Craven could not help laughing. As he did so he saw in Miss Van Tuyn's eyes the thought:

"You think me witty, and you're not far out."

"And did you glean any knowledge of Lady Sellingworth?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; quite a good deal. Mrs. Ackroyde showed

me a photograph of her as she was about eleven years ago."

"A year before the plunge!"

"Yes. She looked very handsome in the photograph. Of course, it was tremendously touched up. Still, it gave me a real idea of what she must once have been. But, oh! how she has changed!"

"Naturally!"

"I mean in expression. In the photograph she looks vain, imperious. Do you know how a woman looks who is always on the watch for new lovers?"

"Well—yes, I think perhaps I do."

"Lady Sellingworth in the photograph has that on the pounce expression."

"That's rather awful, isn't it?"

"Yes; because, of course, one can see she isn't really at all young. It's only a *fausse jeunesse* after all, but still very effective. The gap between the woman of the photograph and the woman of 18A Berkeley Square is as the gulf between Dives and Lazarus. I shouldn't have loved her then. But perhaps—perhaps a man might have thought he did. I mean in the real way of a man—perhaps."

Craven did not inquire what Miss Van Tuyn meant exactly by that. Instead, he asked:

"And did these ladies of the 'old guard' speak kindly of the white-haired traitress?"

"They were careful. But I gathered that Lady Sellingworth had been for years and years one of those who go on their way chanting, 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die.' I gathered, too, that her efforts were chiefly concentrated on translating into appropriate action the third 'let us.' But that no doubt was for the sake

of her figure and face. Lady Archie said that the motto of Lady Sellingworth's life at that period was 'after me the deluge,' and that she had so dinned it into the ears of her friends that when she let her hair grow white they all instinctively put up umbrellas."

"And yet the deluge never came."

"It never does. I could almost wish it would."

"Now?"

"No; after me."

He looked deep into her eyes, and as he did so she seemed deliberately to make them more profound so that he might not touch bottom.

"It's difficult to think of an after you," he said.

"But there will be, I suppose, some day when the Prince of Wales wears a grey beard and goes abroad in the winter to escape bronchial troubles. Oh, dear! What a brute Time is!"

She tried to look pathetic, and succeeded better than Craven had expected.

"I shall put up my *en tout cas* then," said Craven very seriously.

Still looking pathetic, she allowed her eyes to stray to a neighbouring mirror, waited for a moment, then smiled.

"Time's a brute, but there's still plenty of him for me," she said. "And for you, too."

"He isn't half so unpleasant to men as to women," said Craven. "He makes a very unfair distinction between the sexes."

"Naturally—because he's a man."

"What did Lady Wrackley say?" asked Craven, returning to their subject.

"Why do you ask specially what she said?"

"Because she has a reputation, a bad one, for speaking her mind."

"She certainly was the least guarded of the 'old guard.' But she said she loved Lady Sellingworth now, because she was so changed."

"Physically, I suppose."

"She didn't say that. She said morally."

"That wasn't stupid of her."

"Just what I thought. She said a moral revolution had taken place in Lady Sellingworth after the jewels were stolen."

"That sounds almost too tumultuous to be comfortable."

"Like 'A Tale of Two Cities' happening in one's interior."

"And what did she attribute such a phenomenon to?"

"Well, she took almost a clerical view of the matter."

"How very unexpected!"

"She said she believed that Adela—she called her Adela—that Adela took the loss of her jewels as a punishment for her sins."

"Do you mean to say she used the word sins?"

"No; she said 'many lapses.' But that's what she meant."

"Lapses from what?"

"She didn't exactly say. But I'm afraid she meant from a strict moral code."

"Oh, Lord!" said Craven, thinking of Lady Wrackley's smile.

"Why do you say that?"

"Please—never mind! So Lady Wrackley thinks that Lady Sellingworth considered the loss of her jewels such a fitting punishment for her many lapses from a strict moral code that she never tried to get them back?"

"Apparently. She said that Addie—she called her Addie then—that Addie bowed her head."

"Not beneath the rod! Don't tell me she used the word rod!"

"But she did!"

"Priceless!"

"Wasn't it? But women are like that when they belong to the 'old guard.' Do you think she can be right?"

"If it is so, Lady Sellingworth must be a very unusual sort of woman."

"She is—now. For she really did give up all in a moment. And she has never repented of what she did, as far as anyone knows. I think—"

She paused, looking thoughtful at the mirror.

"Yes?" said Craven gently.

"I think it's rather fine to plunge into old age like that. You go on being young and beautiful till everyone marvels, and then one day—or night, perhaps—you look in the glass and you see the wrinkles as they are—"

"Does any woman ever do that?"

"*She* must have! And you say to yourself, '*C'est fini!*' and you throw up the sponge. No more struggles for you! From one day to another you become an old woman. I think I shall do as Lady Sellingworth has done."

"When?"

"When I'm—perhaps at fifty, yes, at fifty. No man really cares for a woman, as a woman wants him to care, after fifty."

"I wonder," said Craven.

She sent him a sharp, questioning glance.

"Did you ever wonder before you went to Berkeley Square?"

"Perhaps not."

A slight shadow seemed to pass over Miss Van Tuyn's face.

"I believe there was a famous French actress who was loved after she was seventy," said Craven.

"Then the man must have been a freak."

"Lots of us are freaks."

"I don't think you are," she said provocatively.

"Why not?"

"I have my little private reasons," she murmured.

At that moment Craven was conscious of a silly desire to take her in his arms, bundle of vanities though he knew her to be. He hated himself for being so ordinary. But there it was!

He looked at her eyebrows. They were dark and beautifully shaped and made an almost unnerving contrast with her corn-coloured hair.

"I know what you are thinking," she said.

"Impossible!"

"You are thinking that I darken them. But I don't."

And then Craven gave up and became frankly foolish.

CHAPTER V

Though ordinary enough in her youthful egoism, and entirely *du jour* in her flagrantly shown vanity, Miss Van Tuyn, as Craven was to find out, was really something of an original. Her independence was abnormal and was mental as well as physical. She lived a life of her own, and her brain was not purely imitative. She not only acted often originally, but thought for herself. She was not merely a very pretty girl. She was somebody. And somehow she had trained people to accept her daring way of life. In Paris she did exactly what she chose, and quite openly. There was no secrecy in her methods. In London she pursued the same housetop course. She seldom troubled about a chaperon, and would calmly give a lunch at the Carlton without one if she wanted to. Indeed, she had been seen there more than once, making one of a party of six, five of whom were men. She did not care for women as a sex, and said so in the plainest language, denouncing their mentality as still afflicted by a narrowness that smacked of the harem. But for certain women she had a cult, and among these women Lady Sellingworth held a prominent, perhaps the most prominent, place.

Three days after his visit to the Hyde Park Hotel Craven, having no dinner invitation and feeling disinclined for the well-known formality of the club where he often dined, resolved to yield to a faint inclination towards a very mild Bohemianism which sometimes beset him, and made his way in a day suit

to Soho seeking a restaurant. He walked first down Greek Street, then turned into Frith Street. There he peeped into two or three restaurants without making up his mind to sample their cooking, and presently was attracted by a sound of guitars giving forth with almost Neapolitan fervour the well-known tune, “O Sole Mio!” The music issued from an unpretentious building over the door of which was inscribed, “Ristorante Bella Napoli.”

It was a cold, dark evening, and Craven was feeling for the moment rather depressed and lonely. The music drew his thoughts to dear Italy, to sunshine, a great blue bay, brown, half-naked fishermen pulling in nets from the deep with careless and Pagan gestures, to the thoughtless, delicious life only possible in the golden heart of the South. He did not know the restaurant, but he hesitated no longer. Never mind what the cooking was like; he would eat to the sound of those guitars which he knew were being thrummed by Italian fingers. He pushed the swing door and at once found himself in a room which seemed redolent of the country which everyone loves.

It was a narrow room, with a sanded floor and the usual small tables. The walls were painted with volcanic pictures in which Vesuvius played a principal part. Vesuvius erupted on one wall, slept in the moonlight on another, at the end of the room was decked out in all the glories of an extremely Neapolitan sunset. Upon the ceiling was Capri, stretching out from an azure sea. For the moment the guitars had ceased, but their players, swarthy, velvet eyed, and unmistakable children of Italy, sat at ease, their instruments still held in brown hands ready for further plucking of the sonorous strings. And the room was alive with the uproar of Italian voices

talking their native language, with the large and unselfconscious gestures of Italian hands, with the movement of Italian heads, with the flash and sparkle of animated Italian eyes. Chianti was being drunk; macaroni, minestra, gnocchi, ravioli, abione were being eaten; here and there Toscanas were being smoked. Italy was in the warm air, and in an instant from Craven's consciousness London was blotted out.

For a moment he stood just inside the door feeling almost confused. Opposite to him was the padrona, a large and lustrous woman with sleepy, ox-like eyes, sitting behind a sort of counter. Italian girls, with coal-black hair, slipped deftly to and fro among the tables serving the customers. The musicians stared at Craven with the fixed, unwinking definiteness which the traveller from England begins to meet with soon after he passes Lugano. Where was a table for an Englishman?

"Ecco, signorino!"

An Italian girl smiled and beckoned with a sort of intimate liveliness and understanding that quite warmed Craven's heart. There was a table free, just one, under Vesuvius erupting. Craven took it, quickly ordered all the Italian dishes he could think of and a bottle of Chianti Rosso, and then looked about the long, little room. He looked—to see Italian faces, and he saw many; but suddenly, instead of merely looking, he stared. His eyelids quivered; even his lips parted. Was it possible? Yes, it was! At a table tucked into a corner by the window were sitting Beryl Van Tuyn and actually—Santa Lucia!—Lady Sellingworth! And they were both eating—what was it? Craven stretched his neck—they were both eating Risotto alla Milanese!

At this moment the guitars struck up that most Neapolitan of songs, the “Canzona di Mergellina,” the smiling Italian girl popped a heaped-up plate of macaroni blushing gently with tomato sauce before Craven, and placed a straw bottle of ruby hued Chianti by the bit of bread at his left hand, and Miss Van Tuyn turned her corn-coloured head to have a good look at the room and, incidentally, to allow the room to have a good look at her.

The violet eyes, full of conscious assurance, travelled from table to table and arrived at Craven and his macaroni. She looked surprised, then sent him a brilliant smile, turned quickly and spoke to Lady Sellingworth. The latter then also looked towards Craven, smiled kindly, and bowed with the careless, haphazard grace which seemed peculiar to her.

Craven hesitated for an instant, then got up and threading his way among Italians, went to greet the two ladies. It struck him that Lady Sellingworth looked marvellously at home with her feet on the sanded floor. Could she ever be not at home anywhere? He spoke a few words, then returned to his table with Miss Van Tuyn’s parting sentence in his ears; “When you have dined come and smoke your Toscana with us.”

As he ate his excellently cooked meal he felt pleasantly warmed and even the least bit excited. This was a wholly unexpected encounter. To meet the old age and the radiant youth which at the moment interested him more than any other old age, any other radiant youth, in London, in these surroundings, to watch them with the music of guitars in his ears and the taste of ravioli on his lips, silently to drink to them in authentic Chianti—all this gave a savour to his evening which he had

certainly not anticipated. When now and then his eyes sought the table tucked into the corner by the window, he saw his two acquaintances plunged deep in conversation. Presently Miss Van Tuyn lit a cigarette, which she smoked in the short interval between two courses. She moved, and sat in such a way that her profile was presented to the room as clearly and definitely as a profile stamped on a finely cut coin. Certainly she was marvellously good-looking. She had not only the beauty of colouring; she had also the more distinguished and lasting beauty of line.

An Italian voice near to Craven remarked loudly, with a sort of coarse sentimentality:

"*Che bella ragassa!*"

Another Italian voice replied:

"*Ha ragione di venire qui con quella povera vecchia! Com'e brutta la vecchiezza!*"

For a moment Craven felt hot with a sort of intimate anger; but the guitars began "Santa Lucia," and took him away again to Naples. And what is the use of being angry with the Italian point of view? As well be angry with the Mediterranean for being a tideless sea. But he glanced at the profile and remembered the words, and could not help wondering whether Miss Van Tuyn's cult for Lady Sellingworth had its foundations in self-love rather than in attraction to her whom Braybrooke had called "the most charming *old* woman in London."

Presently Miss Van Tuyn, turning three-quarters face, sent him a "coffee-look," and he saw that a coffee apparatus of the hour-glass type was being placed on the table by the window. He nodded, but held up a clean spoon to indicate that his zabaione had yet to be swallowed. She smiled, understanding,

and spoke again to Lady Sellingworth. A few minutes later Craven left his table and joined them, taking his Toscana with him.

They were charmingly prepared for his advent. Three cups were on the table, and coffee for three was mounting in the hour glass. The two friends were smoking cigarettes.

As he prepared to sit down on the chair placed ready for him with his back to the window, Miss Van Tuyn said:

"One minute! Please give the musicians this!"

She put five shillings into his hand.

"And ask them to play the Sicilian Pastorale, and 'A Mezzanotte,' and the Barcarola di Sorrento, and *not* to play 'Funiculi, Funicula.' Do you mind?"

"Of course not! But do let me—"

"No, no! This is my little treat to Lady Sellingworth. She has never been here before."

Craven went round to the musicians and carried out his directions. As he did so he saw adoring looks of comprehension come into their dark faces, and, turning, he caught a wonderful smile that was meant for them flickering on the soft lips of Miss Van Tuyn. That smile was as provocative, as definitely full of the siren quality, as if it had dawned for the only lover, instead of for three humble Italians, "hairdressers in the daytime," as Miss Van Tuyn explained to Craven while she poured out his coffee.

"I often come here," she added. "You're surprised, I can see."

"I must say I am," said Craven. "I thought your beat lay rather in the direction of the Carlton, the Ritz, and Claridge's."

"You see how little he knows me!" she said,

turning to Lady Sellingworth.

“Beryl does not always tread beaten paths,” said Lady Sellingworth to Craven.

“I hate beaten paths. One meets all the dull people on them, the people who hope they are walking where everyone walks. Beaten paths are like the front at Brighton on a Sunday morning. What do you say to our coffee, dearest?”

“It is the best I have drunk for a long while outside my own house,” Lady Sellingworth answered.

Then she turned to Craven.

“Are you really going to smoke a Toscana?”

“If you really don’t mind? It isn’t a habit with me, but I assure you I know how to do it quite adequately.”

“He’s an artist,” said Miss Van Tuyn. “He knows it’s the only cigar that really goes with Vesuvius. Do light up!”

“I’m thankful I came here to-night,” he said. “I felt very dull and terrifically English, so I turned to Soho as an antidote. The guitars lured me in here. I was at the Embassy in Rome for a year. In the summer we lived at the Villa Rosebery, near Naples. Ever since that time I’ve had an almost childish love of guitars.”

Miss Van Tuyn held up a hand and formed “Sh!” with her rosy lips.

“It’s the Barcarola di Sorrento!” she whispered.

A silence fell in the narrow room. The Italian voices were hushed. The padrona dreamed behind her counter with her large arms laid upon it, like an Italian woman spread out on her balcony for an afternoon’s watching of the street below her window. And Craven let himself go to the music, as so many English people only let themselves go when

something Italian is calling them. On his left Miss Van Tuyn, with one arm leaning on the table, listened intently, but not so intently that she forgot to watch Craven and to keep track of his mind. On his right Lady Sellingworth sat very still. She had put away her only half-smoked cigarette. Her eyes looked down on the table cloth. Her very tall figure was held upright, but without any stiffness. One of her hands was hidden. The other, in a long white glove, rested on the table, and presently the fingers of it began gently to close and unclose, making, as they did this, a faint shuffling noise against the cloth.

Miss Van Tuyn glanced at those fingers and then again at Craven, but for the moment he did not notice her. He was standing by the little harbour at the Villa Rosebery, looking across the bay to Capri on a warm summer evening. And the sea people were in his thoughts. How often had he envied them their lives, as men envy those whose lives are utterly different from theirs!

But presently Miss Van Tuyn's persistent and vigorous mind must have got some hold on his, for he began to remember her beauty and to feel the lure of it in the music. And then, almost simultaneously, he was conscious of Lady Sellingworth, of her old age and of her departed beauty. And he felt her loss in the music.

Could such a woman enjoy listening to such music? Must it not rather bring a subtle pain into her heart, the pain that Italy brings to her devotees, when the years have stolen from them the last possibilities of personal romance? For a moment Craven imaginatively projected himself into old age, saw himself with white hair, a lined face, heavily-veined hands, faded eyes.

But her eyes were not faded. They still shone like lamps. Was she, perhaps, the victim of a youthful soul hidden in an old body, like trembling Love caged in a decaying tabernacle from which it could not escape?

He looked up. At the same moment Lady Sellingworth looked up. Their eyes met. She smiled faintly, and her eyes mocked something or someone; fate, perhaps, him, or herself. He did not know what or whom they mocked.

The music stopped, and, after some applause, conversation broke out again.

“Have you given up Italy as you have given up Paris?” Miss Van Tuyn asked of Lady Sellingworth.

“Oh, yes, long ago. I only go to Aix now for a cure, and sometimes in the early spring to Cap Martin.”

“The hotel?”

“Yes; the hotel. I like the pine woods.”

“So do I. But, to my mind, there’s no longer a vestige of real romance on the French Riviera. Too many grand dukes have passed over it.”

Lady Sellingworth laughed.

“But I don’t seek romance when I leave London.”

“No?”

She looked oddly doubtful for a moment. Then she said:

“Mr. Craven, will you tell us the truth?”

“It depends. What about?”

“Oh, a very simple matter.”

“I’ll do my best, but all men are liars.”

“We only ask you to do your best.”

“We!” he said, with a glance at Lady Sellingworth.

"Yes—yes," she said. "I go solid with my sex."

"Then—what is it?"

"Do you ever go travelling—ever, without a secret hope of romance meeting you on your travels, somewhere, somehow, wonderfully, suddenly? Do you?"

He thought for a moment. Then he said:

"Honestly, I don't think I ever do."

"There!" said Miss Van Tuyn triumphantly. "Nor do I."

She looked half defiantly, half inquisitively at Lady Sellingworth.

"My dear Beryl!" said the latter, "for all these lacks in your temperament you must wait."

"Wait? For how long?"

"Till you are fifty, perhaps."

"I know I shall want romance at fifty."

"Let us say sixty, then."

"Or," interrupted Craven, "until you are comfortably married."

"Comfortably married!" she cried. "*Quelle horreur!*"

"I had no idea Americans were so romantic," said Lady Sellingworth, with just a touch of featherweight malice.

"Americans! I believe the longing for romance covers both sexes and all the human race."

She let her eyes go into Craven's.

"Only up till a certain age," said Lady Sellingworth. "When we love to sit by the fire, we can do very well without it. But we must be careful to lay up treasure for our old age, mental treasure. We must cultivate tastes and habits which have nothing to do with wildness. A man in Sorrento

taught me about that."

"A man in Sorrento!" said Miss Van Tuyn, suddenly and sharply on the alert.

"Yes. He was a famous writer, and had, I dare say, been a famous lover in his time. One day, as we drove beyond the town towards the hills, he described to me the compensations old age holds for sensible people. It's a question of cultivating and preparing the mind, of filling the storehouse against the day of famine. He had done it, and assured me that he didn't regret his lost youth or sigh after its unrecoverable pleasures. He had accustomed his mind to its task."

"What task, dearest?"

"Acting in connexion with the soul—his word that—as a thoroughly efficient substitute for his body as a pleasure giver."

At this moment the adoring eyes of the three musicians who were "hairdressers in the daytime" focussed passionately upon Miss Van Tuyn, distracted her attention. She felt masculinity intent upon her and responded automatically.

"The dear boys! They are asking if they shall play the Pastorale for me. Look at their eyes!" she said.

Craven did not bother to do that, but looked instead at hers, wondering a little at her widespread energy in net casting. Was it possible that once Lady Sellingworth had been like that, ceaselessly on the lookout for worship, requiring it as a right, even from men who were hairdressers in the daytime? As the musicians began to play he met her eyes again and felt sure that it could not have been so. Whatever she had done, whatever she had been, she could never have frequented the back stairs. That thought seemed a rather cruel thrust at Miss Van

Tuyn. But there is a difference in vanities. Wonderful variety of nature!

When the players had finished the Pastorale and "A Mezzanotte," and had been rewarded by a long look of thanks from Miss Van Tuyn which evidently drove them over the borders of admiration into the regions of unfulfilled desire, Lady Sellingworth said she must go. And then an unexpected thing happened. It appeared that Miss Van Tuyn had asked a certain famous critic, who though English by birth was more Parisian than most French people, to call for her at the restaurant and take her on to join a party at the Cafe Royal. She, therefore, could not go yet, and she begged Lady Sellingworth to stay on and to finish up the evening in the company of Georgians at little marble tables. But Lady Sellingworth laughingly jibbed at the Cafe Royal.

"I should fall out of my *assiette* there!" she said.

"But no one is ever surprised at the Cafe Royal, dearest. It is the one place in London where—Ah! here is Jennings come to fetch us!"

A very small man, with a pointed black beard and wandering green eyes, wearing a Spanish sombrero and a black cloak, and carrying an ebony stick nearly as tall as himself, at this moment slipped furtively into the room, and, without changing his delicately plaintive expression, came up to Miss Van Tuyn and ceremoniously shook hands with her.

Lady Sellingworth looked for a moment at Craven.

"May I escort you home?" he said. "At any rate, let me get you a taxi."

"Lady Sellingworth, may I introduce Ambrose Jennings," said Miss Van Tuyn in a rather firm voice at this moment.

Lady Sellingworth bent kindly to the little man far

down below her. After a word or two she said:

"Now I must go."

"Must you really? Then Mr. Craven will get you a taxi."

"If it's fine, I will walk. It seems more suitable to walk home after dining here."

"Walk! Then let us all walk together, and we'll persuade you into the Cafe Royal."

"Dick Garstin will be there," said Ambrose Jennings in a frail voice, "Enid Blunt, a Turkish refugee from Smyrna who writes quite decent verse, Thapoulos, Penitence Murray, who is just out of prison, and Smith the sculptor, with his mistress, a round-faced little Russian girl. She's the dearest little Bolshevik I know."

He looked plaintively yet critically at Lady Sellingworth, and pulled his little black beard with fingers covered with antique rings.

"Dear little bloodthirsty thing!" he added to Lady Sellingworth. "You would like her. I know it."

"I'm sure I should. There is something so alluring about Bolshevism when it's safely tucked up at the Cafe Royal. But I will only walk to the door."

"And then Mr. Craven will get you a taxi," said Miss Van Tuyn. "Shall we go?"

They fared forth into the London night—Craven last.

He realized that Miss Van Tuyn had made up her mind to keep both him and Jennings as her possessions of the evening, and to send Lady Sellingworth, if she would go home early, back to Berkeley Square without an escort. Her cult for her friend, though doubtless genuine, evidently weakened when there was any question of the

allegiance of men. Craven made up his mind that he would not leave Lady Sellingworth until they were at the door of Number 18A, Berkeley Square.

In the street he found himself by the side of Miss Van Tuyn, behind Lady Sellingworth and Ambrose Jennings, who were really a living caricature as they proceeded through the night towards Shaftesbury Avenue. The smallness of Jennings, accentuated by his bat-like cloth cloak, his ample sombrero and fantastically long stick, made Lady Sellingworth look like a moving tower as she walked at his side, like a leaning tower when she bent graciously to catch the murmur of his persistent conversation. And as over the theatres in letters of fire were written the names of the stars in the London firmament—Marie Lohr, Moscovitch, Elsie Janis—so over, all over, Lady Sellingworth seemed to be written for Craven to read: "I am really not a Bohemian."

"Do you genuinely wish Lady Sellingworth to finish the evening at the Cafe Royal?" he asked of his companion.

"Yes. They would love her there. She would bring a new note."

"Probably. But would she love them?"

"I don't think you quite understand her," said Miss Van Tuyn.

"I'm quite sure I don't. Still—"

"In past years I am certain she has been to all the odd cafes of Paris."

"Perhaps. But one changes. And you yourself said there were—or was it had been?—two Adela Sellingworths, and that you only knew one."

"Yes. But perhaps at the Cafe Royal I should get to know the other."

"May she not be dead?"

"I have a theory that nothing of us really dies while we live. Our abode changes. We know that. But I believe the inhabitant is permanent. We are what we were, with, of course, innumerable additions brought to us by the years. For instance, I believe that Lady Sellingworth now is what she was, to all intents and purposes, with additions which naturally have made great apparent changes in her. An old moss-covered house, overgrown with creepers, looks quite different from the same house when it is new and bare. But go inside—the rooms are the same, and under the moss and the creepers are the same walls."

"It may be so. But what a difference the moss and the creepers make. Some may be climbing roses."

Craven felt the shrewd girlish eyes were looking at him closely.

"In her case some of them certainly are!" she said. "Oh, do look at them turning the corner! If Cirella were here he would have a subject for one of his most perfect caricatures. It is the leaning tower of Pisa with a bat."

The left wing of Ambrose Jennings's cloak flew out as he whirled into Regent Street by Lady Sellingworth's side.

CHAPTER VI

At the door of the Cafe Royal they stopped, and Miss Van Tuyn laid a hand on Lady Sellingworth's arm.

"Do come in, dearest. It will really amuse you," she said urgently. "And—I'll be truthful—I want to show you off to the Georgians as my friend. I want them to know how wonderful an Edwardian can be."

"Please—please!" pleaded Jennings from under his sombrero. "Dick would revel in you. You would whip him into brilliance. I know it. You admire his work, surely?"

"I admire it very much."

"And he is more wonderful still when he's drunk. And to-night—I feel it—he will be drunk. I pledge myself that Dick Garstin will be drunk."

"I'm sure it would be a very great privilege to see Mr. Garstin drunk. But I must go home. Good night, dear Beryl."

"But the little Bolshevik! You must meet the little Bolshevik!" cried Jennings.

Lady Sellingworth shook her deer-like head, smiling.

"Good night, Mr. Craven."

"But he is going to get you a taxi," said Miss Van Tuyn.

"Yes, and if you will allow me I am going to leave you at your door," said Craven, with decision.

A line appeared in Miss Van Tuyn's low forehead, but she only said:

"And then you will come back and join us."

"Thank you," said Craven.

He took off his hat. Miss Van Tuyn gave him a long and eloquent look, which was really not unlike

a Leap Year proposal. Then she entered the cafe with Jennings. Craven thought at that moment that her back looked unusually rigid.

A taxi was passing. He held up his hand. It stopped. Lady Sellingworth and he got in, after he had given the address to the chauffeur.

“What a lovely girl Beryl Van Tuyn is!” said Lady Sellingworth, as they drove off.

“She is—very lovely.”

“And she has a lot of courage, moral courage.”

“Is it?” he could not help saying.

“Yes. She lives as she chooses to live. And yet she isn’t married.”

“Would marriage make it all easier for her?”

“Much, if she married the man who suited her.”

“I wonder what sort of a man that would be.”

“So does she, I think. But she’s a strange girl. I should not be surprised if she were never to marry at all.”

“Don’t you think she would fall in love?”

“Yes. For I think every living woman is capable of that. But she has the sort of intellect which would not be tricked for very long by the heart. Any weakness of hers would soon be over, I fancy.”

“I dare say you are right. In fact I believe you are generally right. She told me you were a book of wisdom. And I feel that it is true.”

“Here is Berkeley Square.”

“How wrong it is of these chauffeurs to drive so fast! It is almost as bad as in Paris. They defy the law. I should like to have this man up.”

He got out. She followed him, looking immensely tall in the dimness.

"I am not going back to the Cafe Royal," he said.

"But it will be amusing. And I think they are certainly expecting you."

"I am not going there."

She rang. Instantly the door was opened by the handsome middle-aged butler.

"Then come in for a little while," she said casually. "Murgatroyd, you might bring us up some tea and lemon, or will you have whisky and soda, Mr. Craven?"

"I would much rather have tea and lemon, please," he said.

A great fire was burning in the hall. Again Craven felt that he was in a more elegant London than the London of modern days. As he went up the wide, calm staircase, and tasted the big silence of the house, he thought of the packed crowd in the Cafe Royal, of the uproar there, of the smoke wreaths, of the staring heterogeneous faces, of the shouting or sullenly folded lips, of the—perhaps—tipsy man of genius, of Jennings with his green eyes, his black beard, his tall ebony staff, of the "little bloodthirsty thing" with the round Russian face, of Miss Van Tuyn in the midst of it all, sitting by the side of Enid Blunt, smoking cigarettes, and searching the men's faces for the looks which were food for her craving. And he loved the contrast which was given to him.

"Do go in and sit by the fire, and I'll come in a moment," said the husky voice he was learning to love. "I'm just going to take off my hat."

Craven opened the great mahogany door and went in.

The big room was very dimly lighted by two standard electric lamps, one near the fireplace, the

other in a distant corner where a grand piano stood behind a huge china bowl in which a pink azalea was blooming. There was a low armchair near the fire by a sofa. He sat down in it, and picked up a book which lay on a table close beside it. What did she read—this book of wisdom?

"*Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*," by Romain Rolland.

Craven thought he was disappointed. There was no revelation for him in that. He held the book on his knee, and wondered what he had expected to find, what type of book. What special line of reading was Lady Sellingworth's likely to be? He could imagine her dreaming over "Wisdom and Destiny," or perhaps over "The Book of Pity and of Death." On the other hand, it seemed quite natural to think of her smiling her mocking smile over a work of delicate, or even of bitter, irony, such as Anatole France's story of Pilate at the Baths of Baies, or study of the Penguins. He could not think that she cared for sentimental books, though she might perhaps have a taste for works dealing with genuine passion.

He heard the door open gently, and got up. Lady Sellingworth came in. She had not changed her dress, which was a simple day dress of black. She had only taken off her fur and hat, and now came towards him, still wearing white gloves and holding a large black fan in her hand.

"What's that you've got?" she asked. "Oh—my book!"

"Yes. I took it up because I wondered what you were reading. I think what people read by preference tells one something of what they are. I was interested to know what you read. Forgive my curiosity."

She sat down by the fire, opened the fan, and held it between her face and the flames.

"I read all sorts of things."

"Novels?"

"I very seldom read a novel now. Here is our tea. But I know you would rather have a whisky-and-soda."

"As a rule I should, but not to-night. I want to drink what you are drinking."

"And to smoke what I am smoking?" she said, with a faintly ironic smile.

"Yes—please."

She held out a box of cigarettes. The butler went out of the room.

"I love this house," said Craven abruptly. "I love its atmosphere."

"It isn't a modern atmosphere, is it?"

"Neither distinctively modern, nor in the least old-fashioned. I think the right adjective for it would be perhaps—"

He paused and sat silent for a moment.

"I hardly know. There's something remote, distinguished and yet very warm and intimate about it."

He looked at her and added, almost with hardihood.

"It's not a cold, or even a reserved house."

"Coldness and unnecessary reserve are tiresome—indeed, I might almost say abhorrent—to me."

She had given him his tea and lemon and taken hers.

"But not aloofness?"

"You have travelled?"

"Yes."

“Well, you know how, when travelling, it is easy to get into intimacies with people whom one doesn’t want to be intimate with at home.”

“Yes. I know all about that.”

“At my age one has learnt to avoid not only such intimacies but many others less disagreeable, but which at moments might give one what I can only call mental gooseflesh. Is that aloofness?”

“I think it would probably be called so by some.”

“By whom?”

“Oh, by mental gooseflesh-givers!”

She laughed, laughed quite out with a completeness which had something almost of youth in it.

“I wonder,” he added rather ruefully, after the pause which the laugh had filled up, “I wonder whether I am one of them?”

“I don’t think you are.”

“And Ambrose Jennings?”

“That’s a clever man!” was her reply.

And then she changed the conversation to criticism in general, and to the type of clever mind which, unable to create, analyses the creations of others sensitively.

“But I much prefer the creators,” she presently said.

“So do I. They are like the fresh air compared with the air in a carefully closed room,” said Craven. “Talking of closed rooms, don’t you think it is strange the liking many brilliant men and women have, both creators and analysers of creators, for the atmosphere of garish or sordid cafes?”

“You are thinking of the Cafe Royal?”

"Yes. Do you know it?"

"Don't tell Beryl—but I have never been in it. Nevertheless, I know exactly what it is like."

"By hearsay?"

"Oh, no. In years gone by I have been into many of the cafes in Paris."

"And did you like them and the life in them?"

"In those days they often fascinated me, as no doubt the Cafe Royal and its life fascinates Beryl today. The hectic appeals to something in youth, when there is often fever in the blood. Strong lights, noise, the human pressure of crowds, the sight of myriads of faces, the sound of many voices—all that represents life to us when we are young. Calm, empty spaces, single notes, room all round us for breathing amply and fully, a face here or there—that doesn't seem like life to us then. Beryl dines with me alone sometimes. But she must finish up in the evening with a crowd if she is near the door of the place where the crowd is. And you must not tell me you never like the Cafe Royal, for if you do I shall not believe you."

"I do like it at times," he acknowledged. "But tonight, sitting here, the mere thought of it is almost hateful to me. It is all vermilion and orange colour, while this . . ."

"Is drab!"

"No, indeed! Dim purple, perhaps, or deepest green."

"You couldn't bear it for long. You would soon begin longing for vermilion again."

"You seem to think me very young. I am twenty-nine."

"Have you ceased to love wildness already?"

"No," he answered truthfully. "But there is something there which makes me feel as if it were almost vulgar."

"No, no. It need not be vulgar. It can be wonderful—beautiful, even. It can be like the wild light which sometimes breaks out in the midst of the blackness of a storm and which is wilder far than the darkest clouds. Do you ever read William Watson?"

"I have read some of his poems."

"There is one I think very beautiful. I wonder if you know it. 'Pass, thou wild heart, wild heart of youth that still hast half a will to stay—'"

She stopped and held her fan a little higher.

"I don't know it," he said.

"It always makes me feel that the man or woman who has never had the wild heart has never been truly and intensely human. But one must know when to stop, when to let the wild heart pass away."

"But if the heart wants to remain?"

"Then you must dominate it. Nothing is more pitiable, nothing is more disgusting, even, than wildness in old age. I have a horror of that. And I am certain that nothing else can affect youth so painfully. Old wildness—that must give youth nausea of the soul."

She spoke with a thrill of energy which penetrated Craven in a peculiar and fascinating way. He felt almost as if she sent a vital fluid through his veins.

Suddenly he thought of the "old guard," and he knew that not one of the truly marvellous women who belonged to it could hold him or charm him as this white-haired woman, with the frankly old face, could and did.

"After all," he thought, "it isn't the envelope that

matters; it is the letter inside."

Deeply he believed that just then. He was, indeed, under a sort of spell for the moment. Could the spell be lasting? He looked at Lady Sellingworth's eyes in the lamplight and firelight, and, despite a certain not forgotten moment connected with the Hyde Park Hotel, he believed that it could. And Lady Sellingworth looked at him and knew that it could not. About such a matter she had no illusions.

And yet for years she had lived a life cloudy with illusions. What had led her out from those clouds? Braybrooke had hinted to Craven that possibly Seymour Portman knew the secret of Lady Sellingworth's abrupt desertion of the "old guard" and plunge into old age. But even he did not know it. For he loved her in a still, determined, undeviating way. And no woman would care to tell such a secret to a man who loved her and who was almost certain, barring the explosion of a moral bombshell, and perhaps even then, to go on loving her.

No one knew why Lady Sellingworth had abruptly and finally emerged from the world of illusions in which she had lived. But possibly a member of the underworld, a light-fingered gentleman of brazen assurance, had long ago guessed the reason for her sudden departure from the regiment of which she had been a conspicuous member; possibly he had guessed, or surmised, why she had sent in her papers. But even he could scarcely be certain.

The truth of the matter was this.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

Lady Sellingworth belonged to a great English family, and had been brought up in healthy splendour, saved from the canker of too much luxury by the aristocratic love of sport which is a tradition in such English families as hers. As a girl she had been what a certain sporting earl described as “a leggy beauty.” Even then she had shown a decided inclination to run wild and had seldom checked the inclination. Unusually tall and athletic, rather boyish in appearance, and of the thin, greyhound type, she had excelled in games and held her own in sports. She had shot in an era when comparatively few women shot, and in the hunting-field she had shown a reckless courage which had fascinated the hard-riding men who frequented her father’s house. As she grew older her beauty had rapidly developed, and with it an insatiable love of admiration. Early she had realized that she was going to be a beauty, and had privately thanked the gods for her luck. She could scarcely have borne not to be a beauty; but, mercifully, it was all right. Woman’s greatest gift was to be hers. When she looked into the glass and knew that, when she looked into men’s eyes and knew it even more definitely, she felt merciless and eternal. In the dawn no end was in sight; in the dawn no end

seemed possible.

From the age of sixteen onwards hers was the intimate joy, certainly one of the greatest, if not the greatest of all the joys of women, of knowing that all men looked at her with pleasure, that many men looked at her with longing, that she was incessantly desired.

From the time when she was sixteen she lived perpetually in that atmosphere which men throw round a daring and beautiful woman without even conscious intention, creating it irresistibly merely by their natural desire. And that atmosphere was the breath of life to her. Soon she could not imagine finding any real value in life without it. She often considered plain girls, dull girls, middle-aged women who had never had any beauty, any saving grace but that of freshness, and wondered how they managed to get along at all. What was the use of life to them? Nobody bothered about them, except, perhaps, a few relations, or what are called “old friends”—that is, people who, having always been accustomed to you, put up with you comfortably, and wear their carpet slippers in your presence without troubling whether you like slippers or would prefer them in high-heeled shoes.

As to old women, those from whom almost the last vestiges of what they once had been physically had fallen away, she was always charming to them; but she always wondered why they still seemed to cling on to life. They were done with. It was long ago all over for them. They did not matter any more, even if once they had mattered. Why did they still keep a hold on life with their skinny hands? Was it from fear of death, or what? Once she expressed her wonder about this to a man.

"Of course," she said. "I know they can't go just because they want to. But why do they *want* to stay?"

"Oh," he said, "I think lots of old ladies enjoy themselves immensely in their own way."

"Well, I can't understand it!" she said.

And she spoke the truth.

She flirted, of course. Her youthful years were complicated by a maze of flirtations, through which she wandered with apparently the greatest assurance, gaining knowledge of men.

Finally she married. She made what is called "a great match," the sort of match in every way suitable to such an aristocratic, beautiful and daring girl.

Then began her real reign.

Although such a keen sportswoman, she was also a woman who had a good brain, a quick understanding, and a genuine love of the intellectual and artistic side of life, for its own sake, not for any reason of fashion. She was of the type that rather makes fashions than follows them. As a married woman she was not only Diana in the open country, she was Egeria elsewhere. She liked and she wanted all types of men; the hard-bitten, keen-eyed, lean-flanked men who could give her a lead or take a lead from her over difficult country, and the softer breed of men, whose more rounded bodies were informed by sharp spirits, who, many of them, could not have sat a horse over the easiest fence, or perhaps even have brought down a stag at twenty paces, but who would dominate thousands from their desks, or from the stages of opera houses, or from adjustable seats in front of pianos, or from studios hung with embroideries and strewn with carpets of the East.

These knew how to admire and long for a beautiful

woman quite as well as the men of the moors and the hunting field, and they were often more subtle in their ways of showing their feelings.

Lady Sellingworth had horses named after her and books dedicated to her. She moved in all sets which were penetrated by the violent zest for the life of the big world, and in all sets she more than held her own. She was as much at home in Chelsea as she was at Newmarket. Her beautifully disguised search for admiration extended far and wide, and she found what she wanted sometimes in unexpected places, in sombre Oxford libraries, in time-worn deaneries, in East-End settlements, through which she flashed now and then like a bird of Paradise, darting across the murk of a strange black country on its way to golden regions, as well as in Mayfair, in the Shires, in foreign capitals, and on the moors of Scotland.

Her husband was no obstacle in her way. She completely dominated him, even though she gave him no child. He knew she was, as he expressed it, “worth fifty” of him. Emphatically he was the husband of his wife, and five years after their marriage he died still adoring her.

She was sorry; she was even very sorry. And she withdrew from the great world in which she had been a moving spirit now for over ten years for the period of mourning, a year. But she was not overwhelmed by sorrow. It is so very difficult for the woman who lives by, and for, her beauty and her charm for men to be overwhelmed. One man has gone and she mourns him; but there are so many men left, all of them with eyes in which lamps may be set and with hearts to be broken.

It was at this time that she became very familiar with Paris.

She wanted to be away from London, so she took an apartment in Paris, and began to live there very quietly. Friends, of course, came to see her, and she began to study Paris thoroughly, not the gay, social Paris, but a very interesting Paris. Presently her freedom from the ordinary social ties began to amuse her. She had now so much time for all sorts of things which women very much in society miss more often than not. Never going to parties, she was able to go elsewhere. She went elsewhere. Always there had dwelt caged in her a certain wildness which did not come from her English blood. There was a foreign strain in her from the borders of Asia mingled with a strong Celtic strain. This wildness which in her girlhood she had let loose happily in games and sports, in violent flirtations, and in much daring skating over thin ice, which in her married life had spent itself in the whirl of society, and in the energies necessary to the attainment of an unchallenged position at the top of things, in her widowhood began to seek an outlet in Bohemia.

Paris can be a very kind or a very cruel city, in its gaiety hiding velvet or the claws of a tiger. To Lady Sellingworth—then Lady Manham—it was kind. It gave her its velvet. She knew a fresh type of life there, with much for the intellect, with not a little for the senses, even with something for the heart. It was there that she visited out-of-the-way cafes, where clever men met and talked over every subject on earth. A place like the Cafe Royal in London had no attraction for the Lady Sellingworth over sixty. That sort of thing, raised to the *nth* degree, had been familiar to her years and years ago, before Beryl Van Tuyn and Enid Blunt had been in their cradles.

And the freedom of her widowhood, with no tie at all, had become gradually very dear to her. She had

felt free enough in her marriage. But this manner of life had more breathing space in it. There is no doubt that in that Paris year, especially in the second half of it, she allowed the wild strain in her to play as it had never played before, like a reckless child out of sight of parents and all relations.

When the mourning was over and she returned to London she was a woman who had progressed, but whether upon an upward or a downward path who shall decide? She had certainly become more fascinating. Her beauty was at its height. The year in Paris, lived almost wholly among clever and very unprejudiced French people, had given her a peculiar polish—one Frenchman who knew English slang called it "a shine"—which made her stand out among her English contemporaries. Many of them when girls had received a "finish" in Paris. But girls cannot go about as she had gone about. They had learnt French; she had learnt Paris. From that time onward she was probably the most truly cosmopolitan of all the aristocratic Englishwomen of her day. Distinguished foreigners who visited London generally paid their first private call on her. Her house was European rather than English. She kept, too, her apartment in Paris, and lived there almost as much as she lived in London. And, perhaps, her secret wildness was more at home there.

Scandal, of course, could not leave her untouched. But her position in society was never challenged. People said dreadful things about her, but everyone who did not know her wanted to know her, and no one who knew her wished not to know her. She "stood out" from all the other women in England of her day, not merely because of her beauty—she was not more beautiful than several of her contemporaries—but because of her gay distinction,

a daring which was never, which could not be, ill bred, her extraordinary lack of all affectation, and a peculiar and delightful bonhomie which made her at home with everyone and everyone at home with her. Servants and dependents loved her. Everyone about her was fond of her. And yet she was certainly selfish. Invariably almost she was kind to people, but herself came first with her. She made few sacrifices, and many sacrificed themselves to her. There was seldom a moment when incense was not rising up before her altar, and the burnt offerings to her were innumerable.

And all through these years she was sinking more deeply into slavery, while she was ruling others. Her slavery was to herself. She was the captive of her own vanity. Her love of admiration had developed into an insatiable passion. She was ceaselessly in her tower spying out for fresh lovers. From afar off she perceived them, and when they drew near to her castle she stopped them on their way. She did not love them and cast them to death like Tamara of the Caucasus. No; but she required of them the pause on their travels, which was a tribute to her power. No one must pass her by as if she were an ordinary woman.

Probably there is no weed in all the human garden which grows so fast as vanity. Lady Sellingworth's vanity grew and grew with the years until it almost devoured her. It became an idee fixe in her. A few people no doubt knew this—a few women. But she was saved from all vulgarity of vanity by an inherent distinction, not only of manner but of something more intimate, which never quite abandoned her, which her vanity was never able to destroy. Although her vanity was colossal, she usually either concealed it, or if she showed it showed it subtly.

She was not of the type which cannot pass a mirror in a restaurant without staring into it. She only looked into mirrors in private. Nor was she one of those women who powder their faces and rouge their lips before men in public places. It was impossible for her to be blatant. Nevertheless, her moral disease led her gradually to fall from her own secret standard of what a woman of her world should be. Craven had once said to himself that Lady Sellingworth could never seek the backstairs. He was not wholly right in this surmise about her. There was a time in her life—the time when she was, or was called, a professional beauty—when she could scarcely see a man's face without watching it for admiration. Although she preserved her delightfully unselfconscious manner she was almost ceaselessly conscious of self. Her own beauty was the idol which she worshipped and which she presented to the world expectant of the worship of others. There have been many women like her, but few who have been so clever in hiding their disease. But always seated in her brain there was an imp who understood, was contemptuous and mocked, an imp who knew what was coming to her, what comes to all the daughters of men who outlive youth and its shadowy triumphs. Her brain was ironic, while her temperament was passionate, and greedy in its pursuit of the food it clamoured for; her brain watched the unceasing chase with almost a bitterness of sarcasm, merging sometimes into a bitterness of pity. In some women there seems at times to be a dual personality, a woman of the blood at odds with a woman of the grey matter. It was so in Lady Sellingworth's case, but for a long time the former woman dominated the latter, whose empire was to come later with white hair and a ravaged face.

At the age of thirty-five, after some years of brilliant and even of despotic widowhood, she married again—Lord Sellingworth.

He was twenty-five years older than she was, ruggedly handsome, huge, lean, self-possessed, very clever, very worldly, and that unusual phenomenon, a genuine atheist. There was no doubt that he had a keen passion for her, one of those passions which sometimes flare up in a man of a strong and impetuous nature, who has lived too much, who is worn out, haunted at times by physical weariness, yet still fiercely determined to keep a tight grip on life and life's few real pleasures, the greatest of which is perhaps the indulgence of love.

Like her first marriage this marriage was apparently a success. Lord Sellingworth's cleverness fascinated his wife's brain, and led her to value the pursuits of the intellect more than she had ever done before. She was proud of his knowledge and wit, proud of being loved by a man of obvious value. After this marriage her house became more than ever the resort of the brilliant men of the day. But though Lord Sellingworth undoubtedly improved his wife's mental capacities, enlarged the horizon of her mind, and gave her new interests, without specially intending it he injured her soul. For he increased her worldliness and infected her with his atheism. She had always been devoted to the world. He continually suggested to her that there was nothing else, nothing beyond. All sense of mysticism had been left out of his nature. What he called "priestcraft" was abhorrent to him. The various religions seemed to him merely different forms of superstition, the assertions of their leaders only varying forms of humbug. He was greedy in searching for food to content the passions of the

body, and was restless in pursuit of nutriment for the mind. But not believing in the soul he took no trouble about it.

Lady Sellingworth had this man at her feet. Nevertheless, in a certain way he dominated her. In hard mental power he was much her superior, and her mind became gradually subservient to his in many subtle ways. It was in his day that she developed that noticeable and almost reckless egoism which is summed up by the laconic saying, “after me the deluge.” For Lord Sellingworth’s atheism was not of the type which leads to active humanitarianism, but of the opposite type which leads to an exquisite selfishness. And he led his wife with him. He taught her the whole art of self-culture, and with it the whole art of self-worship, subtly extending to her mind that which for long had been concerned mainly with the body. They were two of the most selfish and two of the most charming people in London. For they were both thorough bred and naturally kind-hearted, and so there were always showers of crumbs falling from their well-spread table for the benefit of those about them. Their friends had a magnificent time with them and so did their servants. They liked others to be pleased with them and satisfied because of them. For they must live in a warm atmosphere. And nothing makes the atmosphere so cold about a man or woman as the egoism which shows itself in miserliness, or in the unwillingness that others should have a good time.

When Lady Sellingworth was thirty-nine Lord Sellingworth died abruptly. The doctors said that his heart was worn out; others said something different, something less kind.

For the second time Lady Sellingworth was a widow; for the second time she spent the period of

mourning in Paris. And when it was over she went for a tour round the world with a small party of friends; Sir Guy Letchworth and his plain, but gay and clever wife, and Roger Brand, a millionaire and a famous Edwardian.

Brand was a bachelor, and had long been a devoted adherent of Lady Sellingworth's, and people, of course, said that he was going to marry her. But they eventually came back from their long tour comfortably disengaged. Brand went back to his enormous home in Park Lane, and Lady Sellingworth settled down in number 18A Berkeley Square.

She was now forty-one. She had arrived at a very difficult period in the life of a beauty. The freshness and bloom of youth had inevitably left her. The adjectives applied to her were changing. The word "lovely" was dropped. Its place was taken by such epithets as "handsome," "splendid looking," "brilliant," "striking," "alluring." People spoke of Lady Sellingworth's "good days"; and said of her, "Isn't she astonishing?" The word "zenith" was occasionally used in reference to her. A verb which began to be mixed up with her a good deal was the verb "to last." It was said of her that she "lasted" wonderfully. Women put the question, "Isn't it miraculous how Adela Sellingworth lasts?"

All this might, perhaps, be called complimentary. But women are not as a rule specially fond of such compliments. When kind friends speak of a woman's "good days" there is an implication that some of her days are bad. Lady Sellingworth knew as well as any woman which compliments are left-handed and which are not. On one occasion soon after she returned to London from her tour round the world a woman friend said to her:

“Adela, you have never looked better than you do now. Do you know what you remind me of?”

The woman was an American. Lady Sellingworth replied carelessly:

“I haven’t the slightest idea.”

“You remind me of our wonderful Indian summers that come in October. How do you manage it?”

That come in October?

These words struck a chill through Lady Sellingworth. Suddenly she felt the autumn in her. She had been in America: she had known the glory of its Indian summer; she had also known that Indian summer’s startling sudden collapse. Winter comes swiftly after those almost unnaturally golden days. And what is there left in winter for a woman who has lived for her beauty since she was sixteen years old? The freedom of a second widowhood would be only chill loneliness in winter. She saw herself like a figure in the distance, sitting over a fire alone. But little warmth would come from that fire. The warmth that was necessary to her came from quite other sources than coal or wood kindled and giving out flames.

Her vanity shuddered. She realized strongly, perhaps, for the first time, that people were just beginning to think of her as a woman inevitably on the wane. She looked into her mirror, stared into it, and tried to consider herself impartially. She was certainly very good-looking. Her tall figure had never been made ugly by fatness. She was not the victim of what is sometimes called “the elderly spread.” But although she was slim, considering her great height, she thought that she discerned signs of a thickening tendency. She must take that in time. Her figure must not be allowed to degenerate. And her face?

She was so accustomed to her face, and so accustomed to its being a beautiful face, that it was difficult to her to regard it with cold impartiality. But she tried to; tried to look at it as she might have looked at the face of another woman, of say, a rival beauty.

What age did the face seem to be? If she had seen it passing by in the street what age would she have guessed its owner to be? Something in the thirties; but perhaps in the late thirties? She wasn't quite certain about it. Really it is so difficult to look at yourself quite impartially. And she did not wish to fall into exaggeration, to be hypercritical. She wished to be strictly reasonable, to see herself exactly as she was. The eyes were brilliant, but did they look like young eyes?

No, they didn't. And yet they were full of light. There was nothing faded about them. But somehow at that moment they looked terribly experienced. With a conscious effort she tried to change their expression, to make them look less full of knowledge. But it seemed to her that she failed utterly. No, they were not young eyes; they never could be young eyes. The long accustomed woman of the world was mirrored in them with her many experiences. They were beautiful in their way, but their way had nothing to do with youth. And near the eyes, very near, there were definite traces of maturity. A few, as yet very faint, lines showed; and there were shadows; and there was—she could only call it to herself "a slightly hollow look," which she had never observed in any girl, or, so far as she remembered, in any young woman.

She gazed at her mouth and then at her throat. Both showed signs of age; the throat especially, she thought. The lips were fine, finely curved,

voluptuous. But they were somehow not fresh lips. In some mysterious way, which really she could not define, life had marked them as mature. There were a couple of little furrows in the throat and there was also a slightly “drawn” look on each side just below the line of the jaw. By the temples also, close to the hair, there was something which did not look young.

Lady Sellingworth felt very cold. At that moment she probably exaggerated in her mind the effect of her appearance. She plunged down into pessimism about herself. A sort of desperation came upon her. Underneath all her conquering charm, hidden away like a trembling bird under depths of green leaves, there was a secret diffidence of which she had occasionally been conscious during her life. It had no doubt been born with her, had lived in her as long as she had lived. Very few people knew of its existence. But she knew, had known of it as long as she remembered. Now that diffidence seemed to hold her with talons, to press its beak into her heart.

She felt that she could not face the world with any assurance if she lost her beauty. She had charm, cleverness, rank, position, money. She knew all her advantages. But at that moment she seemed to be confronting penury. And as she continued to look into the mirror ugliness seemed to grow in the woman she saw like a spreading disease till she felt that she would be frightened to show herself to anyone, and wished she could hide from everyone who knew her.

That absurdly morbid fit passed, of course. It could not continue, except in a woman who was physically ill, and Lady Sellingworth was quite well. But it left its mark in her mind. From that day she began to take intense trouble with herself. Hitherto she had been inclined to trust her own beauty. She had relied

on it almost instinctively. And that strange, hidden diffidence, when it had manifested itself, had manifested itself in connexion with social things, the success of a dinner, or with things of the mind, the success or non-success of a conversation with a clever man. She had never spoken of it to anyone, for she had always been more or less ashamed of it, and had brought silence to her aid in the endeavour to stamp it out lest it should impair her power over others. But now it was quickened within her. It grew, and in its growth tortured her.

"How do you manage it?"

That not very kind question of the friend who had compared her to an Indian summer remained with Lady Sellingworth. Since she had considered herself in the mirror she had realized that she had attained that critical period in a beauty's life when she must begin incessantly to manage to continue a beauty. Hitherto, beyond always dressing perfectly and taking care to be properly "turned out," she had done less to herself than many women habitually do. Now she swung to the opposite extreme. There is no need to describe what she did. She did, or had done to her, all that she considered necessary, and she considered that a very great deal was necessary.

A certain Greek, who was a marvellous expert in his line, helped her at a very high figure. And she helped herself by much rigid abstinence, by denying natural appetites, by patient physical discipline. Her fight against the years was tremendous, and was conducted with extraordinary courage.

But nevertheless it seemed to her that a curse was put upon her; in that she was surely one of those women who, once they take the first step upon the downward slope, are compelled to go forward with a

damnable rapidity.

The more she “managed it” the more there seemed to be to manage. From the time when she frankly gave herself into the clutches of artificiality the natural physical merit of her seemed to her to deteriorate at a speed which was headlong.

A hideous leap in the downward course took place presently. She began to dye her hair. She was not such a fool as to change its natural colour. She merely concealed the fact that white hairs were beginning to grow on her head at an age when many simple people, who don’t care particularly what they look like—sensible clergymen’s wives in the provinces, and others unknown to fashion—remain as brown as a berry, or as pleasantly auburn as the rind of a chestnut.

The knowledge of those hidden white hairs haunted her. She felt horribly ashamed of them. She hated them with an intense, and almost despairing, hatred. For they stamped the terrific difference between her body and her nature.

It seemed to her that in her nature she retained all the passions of youth. This was not strictly true, for no woman over forty has precisely the same passions as an ardent girl, however ardent she may be. But the “wild heart,” spoken of by Lady Sellingworth to Craven, still beat in her breast, and the vanity of the girl, enormously increased by the passage of the years, still lived intensely in the middle-aged woman. It was perhaps this natural wildness combined with her vanity which tortured Lady Sellingworth most at this period of her life. She still desired happiness and pleasure greedily, indeed with almost unnatural greediness; she still felt that life robbed of the admiration and the longing of men would not be

worth living.

Beryl Van Tuyn had spoken of a photograph of Lady Sellingworth taken when she was about forty-nine, and had said that, though very handsome, it showed a *fausse jeunesse*, and revealed a woman looking vain and imperious, a woman with the expression of one always on the watch for new lovers. And there had been a cruel truth in her words. For, from the time when she had given herself to artificiality until the time, some nine years later, when she had plunged into what had seemed to her, and to many others, something very like old age, Lady Sellingworth had definitely and continuously deteriorated, as all those do who try to defy any natural process. Carrying on a fight in which there is a possibility of winning may not do serious harm to a character, but carrying on a fight which must inevitably be lost always hardens and embitters the combatant. During those years of her *fausse jeunesse* Lady Sellingworth was at her worst.

For one thing she became the victim of jealousy. She was secretly jealous of good-looking young women, and, spreading her evil wide like a cloud, she was even jealous of youth. To be young was to possess a gift which she had lost, and a gift which men love as they love but few things. She could not help secretly hating the possessors of it.

She had now become enrolled in the “old guard,” and had adopted as her device their motto, “Never give up.” She was one of the more or less mysterious fighters of London. She fought youth incessantly, and she fought Time. And sometimes the weariness and the nausea of battle lay heavy upon her. Her expression began to change. She never lost, she never could lose, her distinction, but it was slightly blurred, slightly tarnished. She preserved the

appearance of bonhomie, but her cordiality, her good nature, were not what they had been. Formerly she had had marvellous spirits; now she was often accompanied into the world by the black dog. And when she was alone he sat by the hearth with her.

She began to hate being a widow. Sometimes she thought that she wished she had had children. But then it occurred to her that they might have been daughters, lovely girls now perhaps, showing to society what she had once been. With such daughters she would surely have been forced into abdication. For she knew that she could never have entered into a contest with her own children. Perhaps it was best as it was, best that she was childless.

She might no doubt have married a third time. Sir Seymour Portman, a bachelor for her sake, would have asked nothing better than to become her husband. And there were other middle-aged and old men who would gladly have linked themselves with her, and who did not scruple to tell her so. But now she could not bear the idea of making a “suitable” match. Lord Sellingworth had been old, and she had been happy with him. But she had felt, and had considered herself to be, young when she had married him. The contrast between him and herself had been flattering to her vanity. It would be different now. And besides, with the coming of middle age, and the fatal fading of physical attraction, there had come into her a painful obsession.

As much as she hated youth in women she was attracted by it in men. She began secretly to worship youth as it showed itself in the other sex. Something in her clamoured for the admiration and the longing of the young men who were amorous of life, who were comparatively new to the fray, who had the

ardour and the freshness which could have mated with hers when she was a girl, but which now contrasted violently with her terribly complete experience and growing morbidity. She felt that now she could never marry a man of her own age or older than herself, not simply because she could not love such a man, but because she would be perpetually in danger of loving a man of quite another type.

She entered upon a very ugly period, perhaps the ugliest there can be in the secret life of a woman. And it was then that there came definitely into her face, and was fixed there, the expression noted by Miss Van Tuyn in the photograph in Mrs. Ackroyd's drawing-room, the expression of a woman on the pounce.

There is no food so satisfying to the vanity of a middle-aged woman as the admiration and desire of young men. Lady Sellingworth longed for, and sought for, that food, but not without inward shame, and occasionally something that approached inward horror. For she had, and never was able to lose, a sense of what was due not merely to herself but to her better self. Here the woman of the blood was at grips with the woman of the grey matter. And the imp enthroned somewhere within her watched, marked, remembered, condemned.

That imp began to persecute Lady Sellingworth. She would have slain him if she could, for he was horribly critical, and remained cold through all her intensities. In Paris he had often been useful to her, for irony is appreciated in Paris, and he was strongly ironical. Often she felt as if he had eyes fixed upon her sardonically, when she was giving way to the woman in her blood. In Paris it had been different. For there, at any rate in all the earlier years, he had been criticizing and laughing at others. Now his

attention was always on her. There were moments when she could almost hear his ugly, whispering voice telling her all he thought about her, about her appearance, her conduct, her future, about her connexions with others now, about the loneliness that was coming upon her. She saw many other women who were evidently content in, and unconscious of, their follies. Why was she not like them? Why had she been singled out for this persecution of the brain. It is terrible to have a brain which mocks at you instead of happily mocking at others. And that was her case. Later she was to understand herself better; she was to understand that her secret diffidence was connected with the imp, was the imp's child in her as it were; later, too, she was to learn that the imp was working for her eventual salvation, in the moral sense.

But she had not yet reached that turning in the path of her life.

During all this period her existence was apparently as successful and brilliant as ever. She was still a leader in London, knowing and known to everyone, going to all interesting functions, receiving at her house all the famous men and women of the day. To an observer it would have seemed that she occupied an impregnable position and that she was having a wonderful time. But she was really a very unhappy woman at violent odds with herself.

On one occasion when she was giving a dinner in her house a discussion broke out on the question of happiness. It was asked by someone, "If you could demand of the gods one gift, with the certainty of receiving it, what gift would you demand?" Various answers were given. One said, "Youth for as long as I lived"; another "Perfect health"; another "Supreme beauty"; another "The most brilliant intellect of my

time"; another "The love and admiration of all I came in contact with." Finally a sad-looking elderly man, poet, philosopher, and the former administrator of a great province in India, was appealed to. His answer was, "Complete peace of mind." And on his answer followed the general discussion about happiness.

When the party broke up and Lady Sellingworth was alone she thought almost desperately about that discussion and about the last answer to the question which had been put.

Complete peace of mind! How extraordinary it would be to possess that! She could scarcely conceive of it, and it seemed to her that even in her most wonderful days, in her radiant and careless youth, when she had had almost everything, she had never had that. But then she had not even wanted to have it. Complete peace seems but a chilly sort of thing to youth in its quick-silver time. But later on in life we love combat less.

Suddenly Lady Sellingworth realized the age of her mind, and it seemed to her that she was a horrible mixture of incongruities. She was physically aging slowly but surely. She had appetites which were in direct conflict with age. She had desires all of which turned towards youth. And her mind was quite old. It must be, she said to herself, because now she was sitting still and longing to know that complete peace of mind which an old man had talked of that evening at her dinner table.

A sort of panic shook her as she thought of all the antagonists which at a certain period of life gather together to attack and slay youth, all vestiges of youth, in the human being; the unsatisfied appetites, the revolts of the body, the wearinesses of soul, and

the subtle and contradictory desires which lie hidden deep in the mind.

She was now intensely careful about her body, had brought its care almost to the level of a finely finished art. But she had not troubled about the disciplining of her mind. Yet the undisciplined mind can work havoc in the tissues of the body. Youth of the mind, if preserved, helps the body to continue apparently young. It may not be able to cause the body actually to look young, but in some mysterious way it throws round the body a youthful atmosphere which deceives many people, which creates an illusion. And the strange thing is that the more intimate people are with one possessing that mental youthfulness, the more strong is the illusion upon them. Atmosphere has a spell which increases upon us the longer we remain bathed in it. Lady Sellingworth said all this to herself that night, and rebuked herself for letting her mind go towards old age. She rebelled against the longing for complete peace of mind because she now connected such a longing with stagnation. And men, especially young men, love vivacity, restlessness, the swift flying temperament. Such a temperament suggests to them youth. It is old age which sits still. Youth is for ever on the move.

“I must not long for peace or anything of that kind!” she said to herself.

Nevertheless the lack of all mental peace ravages the body.

She scarcely knew what to do for the best. But eventually she tried to take her mind in hand, for she was afraid of it, afraid of its age, afraid of the effect its age might eventually have upon her appearance. So she strove to train it backwards towards

youthfulness. For now she was sure that she was not one of those fortunate women who have naturally young minds which refuse to grow old. She knew a few such women. She envied them almost bitterly. There was no need for them to strive. She watched them surreptitiously, studied them, tried to master their secret.

Presently a tragic episode occurred in her life.

She fell in love with a man of about twenty-three. He was the son of people whom she knew very well in Paris, French people who were almost her contemporaries, and was the sporting type of Frenchman, very good-looking, lively, satirical and strong. He was a famous lawn tennis player and came over to London for the tournament at Wimbledon. She had already seen him in Paris, and had known him when he was little more than a boy. But she had never thought much about him in those days. For in those days she had not been haunted by the passion for youth which possessed her now.

Louis de Rocheouart visited at her house as a matter of course, was agreeable and gallant to her because she was a charming and influential woman and an old friend of his family. But he did not think of her as a woman to whom it was possible that a man of his age could make love. He looked upon her as one who had been a famous beauty, but who was now merely a clever, well-preserved and extremely successful member of the “old guard” of society in London. Her “day” as a beauty was in his humble opinion quite over. She belonged to his mother’s day. He knew that. And his mother happened to be one of those delightful Frenchwomen who are spirituelle at all ages, but who never pretend to be anything they are not. His mother’s hair was already grey, and she had two married daughters, one of whom had been

trusting enough to make her a grandmother.

While Rocheouart was in London a number of popular middle-aged women banded together and gave a very smart ball at Prince's. Lady Sellingworth was one of the hostesses, all of whom danced merrily and appeared to be in excellent spirits and health. It was certainly one of the very best balls of the season, and young men turned up at it in large numbers. Among them was young Rocheouart.

Lady Sellingworth danced with him more than once. That night she had almost managed to deceive herself as to the real truth of life. The ball was being such a success; the scramble for invitations had been so great; the young men evidently found things so lively, and seemed to be in such exuberant spirits, that she was carried away, and really felt as if youth were once more dancing through her veins and shining out of her eyes.

The "old guard" were *in excelsis* that night; the Edwardians were in their glory on the top of the world. Probably more than one of them thought, "They can say what they like but we can cut out the girls when we choose." Their savoir faire was immense. Many of them still possessed an amazing amount of the joie de vivre. And some of them were thoroughly sensible women, saved from absurdity by the blessed sense of humour.

But Lady Sellingworth was by this time desperately in love with Louis de Rocheouart, and her sense of humour was in abeyance that night. In consequence, she was the victim of a mortification which she was never to forget as long as she lived.

Towards the end of the evening she happened to be standing with Sir Seymour Portman near the entrance to the ballroom, and overheard a scrap of

conversation between two people just behind them.

A girl's light voice said:

"Have you heard the name Cora Wellingborough has given to this ball?"

(The Duchess of Wellingborough was one of the hostesses.)

"No," replied a voice, which Lady Sellingworth recognized as the voice of young Rocheouart. "What is it?"

"She calls it 'The Hags' Hop'! Isn't it delicious of her? It will be all over London to-morrow. The name will stick. In the annuals of London festivities to-night will always be remembered as the night of the famous Hags' Hop."

Lady Sellingworth heard Rocheouart's strong, manly young laugh.

"That's just like the duchess!" he said. "She's simply made of humour and always hits the nail on the head. And how clever of her to give the right name to the ball herself instead of leaving it for some pretty girl to do. The Hags' Hop! It's perfect! If she hadn't said that, you would have before the evening was out, and then all the charming hags would have been furious with you."

The girl laughed, and she and Rocheouart passed Lady Sellingworth without noticing her and went into the ballroom.

She looked at them as they began to dance; then she looked at the Duchess of Wellingborough, who was also dancing.

The duchess was frankly middle-aged. She was very good-looking, but she had let her figure go. She was quite obviously the victim of the "elderly spread." Her health was excellent, her sense of

humour unfailing. She never pretended to anything, but was as natural almost as a big child. Although a widow, she wanted no lover. She often said that she had "got beyond all that sort of thing." Another of her laughingly frank sayings was: "No young man need be afraid of me." In consequence of her gaiety, humour, frankness and hospitality she was universally popular.

But that night Lady Sellingworth almost hated her.

The Hags' Hop!

That terrible name stuck in Lady Sellingworth's mind and seemed to fasten there like a wound in a body.

As Rocheouart's partner had foretold, the name went all over London. The duchess's *mot* even got into a picture paper, and everyone laughed about it. The duchess was delighted. Nobody seemed to mind. Even Lady Sellingworth forced herself to quote the saying and to make merry over it. But from that day she gave up dancing entirely. Nothing would induce her even to join in a formal royal quadrille.

Before his return to Paris, Rocheouart came to bid her good-bye. Although she was still, as she supposed, madly in love with him, she concealed it, or, if she showed it, did so only by being rather unnaturally cold with him. When he was gone she felt desperate.

Her imp had perhaps controlled her during the short time of Rocheouart's final visit, had mocked and made her fear him. When she was alone, however, he vanished for the moment.

From that time the hidden diffidence in Lady Sellingworth was her deadly enemy, because it fought perpetually with her vanity and with her almost uncontrollable desires. Sometimes she was

tempted to give way to it entirely and to retire from the fray. But she asked herself what she had to retire to. The thought of a life lived in the shade, or of a definitely middle-aged life, prolonged in such sunshine as falls upon grey-haired heads, was terrible to her. She was not like the Duchess of Wellingborough. She was cursed with what was called in her set "a temperament," and she did not know how to conquer it, did not dare, even, to try to conquer it.

She soon forgot Louis de Rocheouart, but his place was not long left empty. She fell in love with another young man.

Eventually—by this time she had almost ceased to struggle, was not far from being a complete victim to her temperament—she seriously considered the possibility of marrying again, and of marrying a man many years younger than herself. Several women whom she knew had done this. Why should not she do it? Such marriages seldom turned out well, seldom lasted very long. But there were exceptions to every rule. Her marriage, if she made it, might be an exception. She was now only forty-eight. (She had reached the age when that qualifying word is applied to the years.) Women older, much older, than herself, had married mere boys. She did not intend to do that. But why should she not take a charming man of, say, thirty into her life?

The mere thought of having such a husband, such a companion in Number 18A, Berkeley Square, sent a glow through her mind and body. What a flood of virility, anticipation, new strength, new interests he would bring with him! She imagined his loud, careless step on the stairs, his strong bass or baritone voice resounding in the rooms; she heard the doors banged by his reckless hand; she saw his raincoats,

his caps, his golf clubs, his gun cases littering the hall. When she motored he would be at the wheel instead of a detached and rigid-faced chauffeur, and he would whirl her along, taking risk, all the time.

But would he be able to love her?

Her diffidence and her vanity fought over that question; fought furiously, and with an ugly tenacity. It seemed that the vanity conquered. For she resolved to make the trial.

Many striking advantages were on her side. She could give any man a magnificent social position, could take him into the heart of the great world. Her husband, unless he were absolutely impossible—and of course he would not be—would be welcomed everywhere because of her. She was rich. She had unusual charm. She was quick witted, intelligent, well read, full of tact and knowledge of the world. Surely she could be a splendid companion, even a great aid, to any man of the least ambition. And she was still very handsome—with difficulty.

She and her Greek alone knew exactly how much trouble had to be taken to keep her as she was when she went among people.

She had not been able to do much with her mind. It seemed uncontrollable by her. There was no harmony in her inner life. The diversities within her were sharp, intense. In her kingdom of self there was perpetual rebellion. And the disorder in her moral life had hastened the aging process more even than she was aware of. Underneath the artificial beauty of her appearance she was now older than her years.

But she was still very handsome—with difficulty.

She hardened herself after the fight and resolved that, if she chose, she could still make almost any man love her. That she could easily fascinate she

knew. Most people were subject to her easy charm and to the delightfully unaffected manner which no amount of vanity had ever been able to rid her of. Surely the temporarily fascinated man might easily be changed into the permanent lover! Fear assailed her certainly when she thought of the danger of deliberately contrasting with her maturity the vividness of youth. To do what she thought of doing would be to run a great risk. When she had married Lord Sellingworth she had provided herself with a foil to her beauty and to her comparative youth. To marry a young man would be to make herself the foil. He would emphasize her age by his lack of years. Could she dare it?

Again she hardened herself and resolved that she would dare it. The wildness in her came uppermost, rose to recklessness. After me the deluge! She might not be happy long if she married a young husband, but she might be happy for a time. The mere marriage would surely be a triumph for her. And if she had three years, two years, even one year of happiness, she would sing a *Laus Deo* and let the deluge close over her head.

She began, in woman's quiet but penetrating way, to look about her. She met many young men in the world, in fact nearly all the young eligible men of the time. Many of them came to her house, for she often gave parties to which she asked not only the "old guard" and the well-known men of the day, but also the young married women. Now she began to give small dances to which she asked pretty young girls. There was a ballroom built out at the back of her house. It was often in use. The pretty young girls began to say she was "a dear" to bother so much about them. Dancing men voted her a thundering good hostess and a most good-natured woman. In

popularity she almost cut out the Duchess of Wellingborough, who sometimes gave dances, too, for young people.

Really through it all she was on the watch, was seeking the possible husband.

Presently she found the man with whom she could imagine being almost desperately happy if he would only fall in with her hidden views. They were so carefully hidden that not one of her friends, not one of the "old guard," suspected that she had made up her mind to marry again and to make what is universally called "a foolish marriage."

His name was Rupert Louth, and he was the fourth son of an impecunious but delightful peer, Lord Blyston. He was close upon thirty, and had spent the greater part of his time, since his twentieth year, out of England. He had ranched in Canada, and had also done something vague of the outdoor kind in Texas. He had fought, and was a good man of his hands. His health was splendid. He was as hard as nails in condition, and as lively and ready as they make them. Many things he could do, but one thing he had never been able to do. He had never been able to make money. His gift lay rather in the direction of joyously spending it. This gift distracted his father, who confided to Lady Sellingworth his fears for the lad's—he would insist on calling Rupert the lad—for the lad's future. Here he was back on the family's hands with expensive tastes and no prospects whatever!

"And he's always after the women, too!" said Lord Blyston, with admiring despair. "He's been away from them so long there's no holding him."

After a pause he added:

"My dear Adela, if you want to do me a good turn

find the lad a wife. His poor mother's gone, or she would have done it. What he wants is a wife who can manage him, with a decent amount of money."

Without exactly saying so, Lady Sellingworth implied that she would see what she could do for Rupert.

From that moment Lord Blyston pushed "the lad" perpetually towards 18A Berkeley Square.

Rupert Louth was fair and very good-looking, reckless and full of go. And wherever he went he carried with him an outdoor atmosphere. He cared nothing for books, music, or intellectual pursuits. Nevertheless, he was at home everywhere, and quite as much at ease in a woman's drawing-room as rounding up cattle in Canada or lassooing wild horses in Texas. He lived entirely and wholeheartedly for the day, and was a magnificent specimen of dashing animal life; for certainly the animal predominated in him.

Lady Sellingworth fell in love with him—it really was like falling in love each time—and resolved to marry him. A wonderful breath of manhood and youth exhaled from "the lad" and almost intoxicated her. It called to her wildness. It brought back to her the days when she had been a magnificent girl, had shot over the moors, and had more than held her own in the hunting field. After she had married Lord Sellingworth she had given up shooting and hunting, had devoted herself more keenly to the arts, to mental and purely social pursuits, to the opera, the forming of a salon, to politics and to entertaining, than to the physical pleasures which had formerly played such a prominent part in her life. Since his death she had put down her horses. But now she began to change her mode of living. She went with

Rupert to Tattersalls, and they picked up some good horses together. She began riding again, and lent him a mount. She was perpetually at Hurlingham and Ranelagh, and developed a passion for polo, which he played remarkably well. She played lawn tennis at King's Club in the morning, and renewed her energy at golf.

Louth was really struck by her activity and competence, and said of her that she was a damned good sport and as active as a cat. He also said that there wasn't a country in the world that bred such wonderful old women as England. This remark he made to his father, who rejoined that Adela Sellingworth was not an old woman.

"Well, she must be near fifty!" said his son. "And if that isn't old for a woman where are we to look for it?"

Lord Blyston replied that there were many women far older than Adela Sellingworth, to which his son answered:

"Anyhow, she's as active as a cat, so why don't you marry her?"

"She's twenty years too young for me," said Lord Blyston. "I should bore her to death."

It had just occurred to him that Rupert could be very comfortable on Lord Sellingworth's and Lord Manham's combined fortunes, though he had no idea that Lady Sellingworth had ever thought of "the lad" as a possible husband.

Other people, however, noticed the new development in her life.

Every morning quite early she was to be seen, perfectly mounted, cantering in the Row, often with Rupert Louth beside her. Her extraordinary interest in every branch of athletics was generally remarked.

She even went to boxing matches, and was persuaded to give away prizes at a big meeting at Stamford Bridge.

Although she never said a word about it to anyone, this sudden outburst of intense bodily activity at her age presently began to tire, then almost to exhaust her. The strain upon her was great, too great. Whatever Rupert Louth did, he never turned a hair. But she was nearly twenty years older than he was, and decidedly out of training. She fought desperately against her physical fatigue, and showed a gay face to the world. But a horrible conviction possessed her. She began presently to feel certain that her effort to live up to Rupert Louth's health and vigour was hastening the aging process in her body. By what she was doing she was marring her chance of preserving into old age the appearance of comparative youth. Sometimes at night, when all the activities of the day were over and there was no prospect of seeing Rupert again until, at earliest, the following morning, she felt absolutely haggard with weariness of body—felt as she said to herself with a shudder, like an old hag. But she could not give up, could not rest, for Rupert expected of everyone who was not definitely laid on the shelf inexhaustible energy, tireless vitality. His own perpetual freshness was a marvel, and fascinated Lady Sellingworth. To be with him was like being with eternal youth, and made her long for her own lost youth with an ache of desperation. But to act being young is hideously different from being actually young. She acted astonishingly well, but she paid for every moment of the travesty, and Rupert never noticed, never had the least suspicion of all she was going through on account of him.

To him she was merely a magnificently hospitable pal of his father's, who took a kindly interest in him.

He found her capital company. He, like everyone else, felt her easy fascination, enjoyed being with her. But, like Rocheouart of the past days, he never thought of her as a possible lover. Nor did it ever occur to him that she was thinking of him as a possible husband. He always wanted, and generally managed to have a splendid time; and he was quite willing to be petted and spoilt and made much of; but he was not, under a mask of carelessness, a cold and persistent egoist. He really was just what he seemed to be, a light-hearted, rather uproarious, and very healthy young man, intent on enjoying himself, and recklessly indifferent to the future. He was quite willing to eat Lady Sellingworth's excellent dinners, to ride her spirited horses, to sit in her opera box and look at pretty women while others listened to music, but it never occurred to him that it would be the act of a wise man to try to put her fortune into his own pocket at the price of marrying her.

His lack of self-interest, which she divined, charmed Lady Sellingworth; on the other hand, she was tormented by his detachment from her, by his lack of all vision of the truth of the situation. And she was perpetually tortured by jealousy.

Before she had been in love with Rupert she had often felt jealous. All women of her temperament are subject to jealousy, and all middle-aged people who worship youth unsuitably have felt its sting. But she had never before known jealousy as she knew it now.

Although she was so often with Rupert she was more often not with him. He made no pretences of virtue to her or to anyone else. He was a cheery Pagan, a good sport and—no doubt—a devil among the women. Being a thorough gentleman he never talked, as some vulgar men do, of his conquests. But Lady Sellingworth knew that his silence probably

covered a multitude of sins. And her ignorance of the greater part of his life often ravaged her.

What was he doing when he was not with her? Who was he making love to?

His name was not specially connected with that of any girl whom she knew in society. But she had reason to know that he spent a lot of his time out of society in circles to which she had never penetrated. Doubtless he met quantities of women whose names she had never heard of, unknown women of the stage, women who went to night clubs, women of the curious world which floats between the aristocracy and the respectable middle classes, which is as well dressed as the one and greedier even than the other, which seems always to have unlimited money, and which, nevertheless, has often no visible means of subsistence.

She lay awake often, when she badly needed sleep, wondering where Rupert was and what he was doing.

Jealousy, combined with unnatural physical exertion, and the perpetual endeavour to throw round her an atmosphere of youth, energy and unceasing cheerfulness, wrought havoc in Lady Sellingworth. Her appearance began to deteriorate. Deeper lines became visible near her eyes, and the light of those eyes was feverish. Her nerves began to go to pieces. Restlessness increased upon her. She was scarcely able to keep still for a moment. The more she needed repose the more incapable of repose she became. The effort to seem younger, gayer, stronger than she was became at last almost convulsive. Her social art was tarnished. The mechanism began to be visible.

People noticed the change in her and began to

discuss it, and more than one of the “old guard” hit upon the reason of it. It became subtly known and whispered about that Adela Sellingworth was desperately in love with Rupert Louth. Several of her friends hinted at their knowledge to Lady Sellingworth, and she was forced to laugh at the idea as absurd, knowing that her laughter would serve no good end. These experienced women knew. Impossible to deceive them about a thing of that kind! They were mercilessly capable in detecting a hidden passion in one of their body. Their intrigues and loves were usually common property, known to, and frankly discussed by them all.

Lady Sellingworth presently had the satisfaction of knowing that the whole of the “old guard” was talking about her passion for Rupert Louth. This fact drove her to a hard decision which was not natural to her. She wanted to marry Rupert because she was in love with him. But now she felt she must marry him to save her own pride before her merciless fellow-women. She decided that the time had come when she must trample on her own delicacy and prove that she still possessed the power of a conqueror. Otherwise she would be laughed at by the greater part of the society in which she usually lived.

She resolved to open Rupert Louth’s eyes and to make him understand that she and all she stood for were at his disposal. She knew he was up to the eyes in debt. She knew he had no prospects. Lord Blyston had no money to give him, and was for ever in difficulties himself. It was a critical moment for Louth, and a critical moment for her. Their marriage would smooth out the whole situation, would set him free from all money miseries, and her from greater miseries still—torments of desire, and the horror of being laughed at or pitied by her set. And in any case

she felt that the time had arrived when she must do something drastic; must either achieve or frankly and definitely give up. She knew that she was nearing the end of her tether. She could not much longer keep up the brilliant pretence of being an untiring Amazon crammed full of the joie de vivre which she had assumed for the purpose of winning Rupert Louth as a husband. Her powers of persistence were rapidly waning. Only will drove her along, in defiance of the warnings and protests of her body. But the untiring Amazon was cracking up, to use a favourite expression of Louth's. Soon the weary, middle-aged woman must claim her miserable rights: the right to be tired occasionally, the right to "slack off" at certain hours of the day, the right to find certain things neither suitable nor amusing to her, the right, in fact, to be now and then a middle-aged woman. Certainly something in her said to Lady Sellingworth: "In your marriage, if you marry, you will have to act even better, even more strenuously, than you are acting now. Being in love as you are, you will never be able to dare to be your true self. Your whole married life will be a perpetual throwing of dust in the eyes of your husband. To keep him you will have to live backwards, or to try to live backwards, all the time. If you are tired now, what will you be then?" And she knew that the voice was speaking the truth. Her imp, too, was watching her closely and with an ugly intensity of irony as she approached her decision.

Nevertheless, she defied him; she defied the voice within her, and took it. She said to herself, or her worn nervous system said to her, that there was nothing else to be done. In her fatigue of body and nerves she felt reckless as only the nearly worn out feel. Something—she didn't know what—had cast

the die for her. It was her fate to open Rupert Louth's eyes, to make him see; it was her fate to force her will into a last strong spasm. She would not look farther than the day. She would not contemplate her married life imaginatively, held in contemplation, like a victim, by the icy hands of reason. She would kick reason out, harden herself, give her wildness free play, and act, concentrating on the present with all the force of which her diseased nerves were capable.

Instead of thinking just then "after me the deluge," her thought was "after my marriage to Rupert Louth the deluge." She would, she must, make him her husband. It would be perhaps the last assertion of her power. She knew enough of men to know that such an assertion might well be followed by disaster. But she was prepared to brave any disaster except one, the losing of Louth and the subsequent ironical amusement of the "old guard."

Two or three days later Louth called, mounted on one of her horses, to take her for a ride in the park.

During the previous night Lady Sellingworth had scarcely slept at all. She had got up feeling desperately nervous and almost lightheaded. On looking in the glass she had been shocked at her appearance, but she had managed to alter that considerably, although not so completely as she wished. Depression, following inevitably on insomnia, had fixed its claws in her. She felt deadly, almost terrible, and as if her face must be showing plainly the ugliness of her mental condition. For she seemed to have lost control over it. The facial muscles seemed to have hardened, to have become fixed. When the servant came to tell her that Louth and the horses were at the door she was almost afraid to go down, lest he should see at once in her

face the strong will power which she had summoned up; as a weapon in this crisis of her life.

As she went slowly downstairs she forced herself to smile. The smile came with difficulty, but it came, and when she met Louth he did not seem to notice any peculiarity in her. But, to tell the truth, he scarcely seemed to notice her at all with any particularity. For her strange and abnormal pre-occupation was matched by a like pre-occupation in him. He took off his hat, bade her good morning, and helped her skilfully to mount. But she saw at once that he was not as usual. His face was grave and looked almost thoughtful. The merry light had gone out of his eyes. And, strangest phenomenon of all, he was tongue-tied. They started away from the house, and rode through Mayfair towards the park in absolute silence.

She began to wonder very much what was the matter with Rupert, and guessed that he had "come an awful cropper" of some kind. It must certainly be an exceptional cropper to cloud his spirit. Perhaps he had lost a really large sum of money, or perhaps he —The thought of a woman came suddenly to her, she did not know why. Suspicion, jealousy woke in her. She glanced sideways at Rupert under her hard hat. He looked splendid on horseback, handsomer even than when he was on foot. For he was that rare thing, a really perfect horseman. His appearance disarmed her. She longed to do something for him, by some act of glowing generosity to win him completely. But they were still in the streets, and she said nothing. Directly they turned into the green quietude of the park, however, she yielded to her impulse and spoke, and asked him bluntly what was the matter.

He did not fence with her. Fencing was not easy to

him. He turned in the saddle, faced her, and told her that he had made a damned fool of himself. Still bent on generosity, on being more than a friend to him, she asked him to tell her how. His reply almost stunned her. A fortnight previously he had secretly married a Miss Willoughby—really a Miss Bertha Crouch, and quite possibly of Crouch End—who was appearing in a piece at the Alhambra Theatre, but who had not yet arrived at the dignity of a "speaking part." This young lady, it seemed, had already "landed" Louth in expenses which he didn't know how to meet. What was he to do? She was the loveliest thing on earth, but she was accustomed to living in unbridled luxury. In fact she wanted the earth, and he was longing to give it to her. But how? Where could he possibly get hold of enough money for the purchase of the earth on behalf of Miss Bertha Crouch—now Willoughby, or, rather, now the Hon. Mrs. Rupert Louth? His face softened, his manner grew almost boyishly eager, as he poured confidences into Lady Sellingworth's ears. She was his one real friend! She was a woman of the world. She had lived ever so much longer than he had and knew five times as much. What would she advise? Might he bring little Bertha to see her? Bertha was really the most splendid little sort, although naturally she wanted to have the things other women had—etc., etc.

When she got home that day Lady Sellingworth almost crumbled. By a supreme effort during the rest of the ride she had managed to conceal the fact that she had received a blow over the heart. The pride on which she had been intending to trample when she came downstairs that morning had come to her aid in that difficult moment. The woman of the world had, as Louth would have said, "come up to the

scratch." But when she was alone she gave way to an access of furious despair; and, shut up in her bedroom behind locked doors, was just a savage human being who had been horribly wounded, and who was unable to take any revenge for the wound. She would not take any revenge, because she was not the sort of woman who could go quite into the gutter. And she knew even in her writhings of despair that Rupert Louth would go scot free. She would never try to punish him for what he had done to her: and he would never know he had done it, unless one of the "old guard" told him.

It was when she thought of the "old guard" that Lady Sellingworth almost crumbled, almost went to pieces. For she knew that whatever she did, or left undone, she would never succeed in deceiving its members. She would not have been deceived herself if circumstances had been changed, if another woman had been in her situation and she had been an onlooker. "They" would all know.

For a moment she thought of flight.

But this episode ended in the usual way; it ended in the usual effort of the poor human being to safeguard the sacred things by deception. Lady Sellingworth somehow—how do human beings achieve such efforts?—pulled herself together and gave herself to pretence. She pretended to Louth that she was his best friend and had never thought of being anything else. She was the receptacle for the cascade of his confidences. She swore to help him in any way she could. Even after she received "the Crouch," once Willoughby and still Willoughby to the "nuts" who frequented the stalls of the Alhambra. She received that tall and voluptuous young woman, with her haughty face and her disdainful airs, and she bore with her horrible proprietorship of Louth.

And finally she broke it to Lord Blyston at Rupert's earnest request.

That should have been her supreme effort. But it was not. There was no rest in pretence. As soon as Lord Blyston knew, everyone knew, including the "old guard." And then, of course, Lady Sellingworth's energies had all to be called into full play.

It was no wonder if underneath the cleverness of her Greek she aged rapidly, more rapidly than was natural in a woman of her years. For she had piled effort on effort. She had been young for Rupert Louth until she had been physically exhausted; and then she had been old for him until she was mentally exhausted. The hardy Amazon had been forced to change in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, into the calm and middle-aged adviser of hot passioned youth, into the steady unselfish confidante, into the breaker of untoward news to the venerable parent—in fact, into Mother Hubbard, as Lady Sellingworth more than once desperately told herself.

"Mother Hubbard! Mother Hubbard! I'm just Mother Hubbard to him and to that horrible girl!"

And she saw herself as Mother Hubbard, a "dame." And she alone knew how absolutely bare her cupboard was at that time. But she struggled on magnificently, taking no rest; she faced the "old guard" with splendid courage, in fact with such courage that most of them pretended to be deceived, and perhaps—for is not everything possible in this life?—perhaps two or three of them really were deceived.

The Duchess of Wellingborough said often at this time: "Addie Sellingworth has the stuff in her of a leader of forlorn hopes!"

Lord Blyston paid up for "the Crouch," once

Willoughby, who had now left the Alhambra disconsolate. He paid up by selling the only estate he still possessed, and letting his one remaining country house to an extraordinarily vulgar manufacturer from the Midlands, who did not know a Turner from a Velasquez until he was told. And for the time "the Crouch" was as satisfied as a woman of her type can ever be.

Time passed on. Lady Sellingworth went about everywhere with a smiling carefully-made-up face and a heart full of dust and ashes.

But even then she could not make up her mind finally to abandon all pretence of youth, all hope of youth's distractions, pleasures, even joys. She had a terribly obstinate nature, it seemed, a terribly strong lust after life.

Even her imp could not lash her into acceptance of the inevitable, could not drive her with his thongs of irony into the dignity which only comes when the human being knows how to give up, and when.

But what the imp could not achieve was eventually achieved by a man, whose name Lady Sellingworth did not know.

This was how it happened.

One day when Lady Sellingworth was walking down Bond Street—it was in the morning and she was with the Duchess of Wellingborough—an extraordinarily handsome young man, whom neither of them knew, met them and passed by. He was tall, brown skinned, with soft, very intelligent brown eyes, and strong, manly and splendidly cut features. His thick brown hair was brushed, his little brown moustache was cut, like a Guardsman's. But he was certainly not a Guardsman. He was not even an Englishman, although he was dressed in a smart

country suit made evidently by a first-rate London tailor. There was something faintly exotic about his eyes, and his way of holding himself and moving, which suggested to Lady Sellingworth either Spain or South America. She was not quite sure which. He gave her a long look as he went by, and she felt positive that he turned to glance after her when he had passed her. But this she never knew, as naturally she did not turn her head.

"What an extraordinarily good-looking man that was!" said the Duchess of Wellingborough. "I wonder who he is. If—," and she mentioned a well-known Spanish duke, "had a brother that might be the man. Do you know who he is?"

"No," said Lady Sellingworth.

"Well, he must know who you are."

"Why?"

"He seemed deeply interested in you."

Lady Sellingworth wanted to say that a young man might possibly be deeply interested in her without knowing who she was. But she did not say it. It was not worth while. And she knew the duchess had not meant to be ill-mannered.

She lunched with the duchess that day in Grosvenor Square, and met several of the "old guard" whom she knew very well, disastrously well. After lunch the duchess alluded to the brown man they had met in Bond Street, described him minutely, and asked if anyone knew him. Nobody knew him. But after the description everyone wanted to know him. It was generally supposed that he must be one of the strangers from distant countries who are perpetually flocking to London.

"We shall probably all know him in a week or two," said someone. "A man of that type is certain to

have brought introductions."

"If he has brought one for Adela I'm sure he'll deliver that first," said the duchess, with her usual almost boisterous good humour.

And thereupon she told the "old guard" of the stranger's evident interest in Lady Sellingworth.

Although she completely concealed it, Lady Sellingworth felt decided interest in the brown man. The truth was that his long and ardent—yet somehow not impudently ardent—look at her had stirred the dust and ashes in her heart. It was as if a little of the dust rose and floated away, as if some of the ashes crumbled into a faint grey powder which was almost nothingness.

At that moment she was in the dangerous mood when a woman of her type will give herself to almost any distraction which promises a possible adventure, or which holds any food for her almost starving vanity. Her love—or was it really lust—for Rupert Louth still ravaged her. The thought of "the Crouch's" triumph still persecuted her mind. Terrible pictures of a happiness she had no share in still made every night hideous to her. She longed for Rupert Louth, but she longed also to be reinstated in her self-esteem. That glance of a stranger had helped her. She asked herself whether a man of that type, young, amazingly handsome, would ever send such a glance to Mother Hubbard. Suddenly she felt safer, as if she could hold up her head once more. Really she had always held it up, but to herself, since Louth's blunt confession, she had been a woman bowed down, old, done with, a thing fit for the scrap heap. Now a slight, almost trembling sensation of returning self-esteem stole through her. She could not have been mistaken about the brown man's interest in her, for

the Duchess of Wellingborough had specially noticed it. She wondered who he was, whether he really had brought introductions, where he was staying, whether he would presently appear in her set. His brown eyes were gentle and yet enterprising. He looked like a sportsman, she thought, and yet as if he were more intellectual, more subtle than Louth. There seemed to be a slight thread of sympathy between her and him! She had felt it immediately when they had met in Bond Street. She wondered whether he had felt it too.

In all probability if Lady Sellingworth had been in a thoroughly normal condition at this time she would not have thought twice about such a trifling episode as a stranger's glance at her in the street. But she was not in a normal condition. She was the prey of acute depression and morbidity. Life was becoming hideous to her. She exaggerated her loneliness in the midst of society. She had mentally constructed for herself a new life with Louth as her husband. Imaginatively she had lived that life until it had become strangely familiar to her, as an imagined life can become to a highly strung woman. The abrupt and brutal withdrawal of all possibility of it as a reality had made the solitude of her widowhood seem suddenly terrible, unnatural, a sort of nightmare. She had moments of desperation in which she said to herself, "This cannot go on. I can't live alone any more or I shall go mad." In such moments she sometimes thought of rewarding Sir Seymour Portman's long fidelity. But something in her, something imperious, shrank at the thought. She did not want to marry an elderly man.

And yet it seemed that no young man would ever want to marry her.

She shuddered before the mysteries of the flesh.

Often she was shaken by a storm of self-pity. Darkness yawned before her. And she still longed, as she thought no other woman could ever have longed, for happiness, companionship, a virile affection.

For some days she did not see the stranger again, although she was several times in Bond Street. She began to think, to fear, he had left London; yes—to fear! It had come to that! Realizing it, she felt humiliation. But his eyes had seemed to tell her that she possessed for him great attraction! She longed to see those eyes again, to decipher their message more carefully. The exact meaning of it might have escaped her in that brief instant of encounter. She wondered whether the young man had known who she was, or whether he had merely been suddenly struck by her appearance, and had thought, "I wish I knew that woman." She wondered what exactly was his social status. No doubt if he had been English she could have "placed" him at once, or if he had been French. But he was neither the one nor the other. And she had had little time to make up her mind about him, although, of course, his good looks had leaped to the eye.

She had begun to think that Destiny had decided against another encounter between her and this man when one day Seymour Portman asked her to lunch with him at the Carlton. She accepted and went into the restaurant at the appointed time. It was crowded with people, many of whom she knew, but one table near that allotted to the general's party had two empty chairs before it. On it was a card with the word "Reserved." Soon after the general's guests had begun to lunch, when Lady Sellingworth was in the full flow of conversation with her host, by whose side she was sitting, and with a hunting peer whom she had known all her life, and who sat on her other

side, two people made their way to the table near by and sat down in the empty chairs. One was an old woman in a coal-black wig, with a white face and faded eyes, rather vague and dull in appearance, but well dressed and quietly self-assured, the other was the man Lady Sellingworth had met in Bond Street. He took the chair which was nearly opposite to her; but whether deliberately or by accident she had no time to notice. He did not look at her for several minutes after sitting down. He was apparently busy ordering lunch, consulting with a waiter, and speaking to his old companion, whose coal-black wig made a rather strange contrast with her lined white cheeks and curiously indefinite eyes. But presently, with a sort of strong deliberation, his gaze was turned on Lady Sellingworth, and she knew at once that he had seen her when he came in. She met his gaze for an instant, and this time seemed to be definitely aware of some mysterious thread of sympathy between her and him. Sir Seymour spoke to her in his quiet, rather deep voice, and she turned towards him, and as she did so she felt she knew, as she had never known before, that she could never marry him, that something in her that was of her essence was irrevocably dedicated to youth and the beauty of youth, which is like no other beauty. The wildness of her which did not die, which probably would never die, was capable of trampling over Sir Seymour's fidelity to get to unstable, selfish and careless youth, was capable of casting away his fidelity for the infidelity of youth. As she met her host's grave eyes, she sentenced him in her heart to eternal watching at her gate. She could not, she never would be able to, let him into the secret room where she was really at home.

During lunch she now and then glanced towards

the old woman and the stranger. They evidently knew no one, for no one took any notice of them, and they did not seem to be on the look out for acquaintances. Many people passed by them, entering and leaving the restaurant, but there were no glances of recognition, no greetings. Only some of the women looked at the young man as if struck, or almost startled, by his good looks. Certainly he was amazingly handsome. His brown skin suggested the sun; his figure athletic exercises; the expression of his face audacity and complete self-possession. Yet there was in his large eyes a look of almost appealing gentleness, as if he were seeking something, some sympathy, some affection, perhaps, which he needed and had never yet found. Several times when she glanced towards him with careful casualness, Lady Sellingworth found his eyes fixed upon her with this no doubt unconsciously appealing expression in them. She knew that this man recognized her as the woman he had met in Bond Street. She felt positive that for some reason he was intent upon her, that he was deeply interested in her. For what reason? Her woman's vanity, leaping eagerly up like a flame that had been damped down for a time but that now was being coaxed into bright burning, told her that there could be only one reason. Why is a handsome young man interested in a woman whom he does not know and has only met casually in the street? The mysterious attraction of sex supplied, Lady Sellingworth thought, the only possible answer. She had not been able to attract Rupert Louth, but she attracted this man, strongly, romantically, perhaps. The knowledge—for it seemed like knowledge, though it was really only surmise—warmed her whole nature. She felt again the delicious conquering sensation which she had lost. She emerged out of

humiliation. Her vivacity grew as the lunch progressed. Suddenly she felt good-looking, fascinating, even brilliant. The horrible dreariness of life had departed from her, driven away by the look in a stranger's eyes.

Towards the end of lunch the woman on Sir Seymour's other side said to him:

"Do you know who that man is—the young man opposite to that funny South American-looking old woman with the black wig?"

Sir Seymour looked for a moment at the brown man with his cool, direct, summing-up, soldier's eyes.

"No," he answered. "I've never set eyes on him before."

"I think he is the best-looking man I have ever seen," said the woman.

"No doubt—very good-looking, very good-looking!" said her host; "but on the wrong side of the line, I should say."

"The wrong side of the line? What do you mean?"

"The shady side," said Sir Seymour.

And then he turned to speak to Lady Sellingworth.

She had overheard the conversation, and felt suddenly angry with him. But she concealed her vexation and merely said to herself that men are as jealous of each other as women are jealous, that a man cannot bear to hear another man praised by a woman. Possibly—she was not sure of this—possibly Sir Seymour had noticed that she was interested in the stranger. He was very sharp in all matters connected with her. His affection increased his natural acuteness. She resolved to be very careful, even very deceptive. And she said:

"Isn't it odd how good looks, good manners and perfect clothes, even combined with charm, cannot conceal the fact that a man is an outsider?"

"Ah, you agree with me!" Sir Seymour said, looking suddenly pleased. "That's good! Men and women are seldom at one on such matters."

Lady Sellingworth shot a glance at the man discussed and felt absurdly like a traitor.

Soon afterwards Sir Seymour's lunch party broke up.

In leaving the restaurant Lady Sellingworth passed so close to the young man that her gown almost brushed against him. He looked up at her, and this time the meaning of his glance was unmistakable. It said: "I want to know you. How can I get to know you?"

She went home feeling almost excited. On the hall table of her house she found a note from Rupert Louth asking her whether she would help "little Bertha" by speaking up for her to a certain great dressmaker, who had apparently been informed of the Louths' shaky finances. Louth's obstinate reliance on her as a devoted friend of him and his disdainfully vulgar young wife began to irritate Lady Sellingworth almost beyond endurance. She took the letter up with her into the drawing-room, and sat down by the writing-table holding it in her hand. It had come at a dangerous moment.

Louth's blindness now exasperated her, although she had desperately done her best to close his eyes to the real nature of her feeling for him and to the unexpressed intentions she had formed concerning him and had been forced to abandon. It was maddening to be tacitly rejected as a possible wife and to be enthusiastically claimed as a self-

sacrificing friend. Surely no woman born of woman could be expected to stand it. At that moment Lady Sellingworth began almost to hate Rupert Louth.

What a contrast there was between his gross misunderstanding of her and the brown man's understanding! Already she began to tell herself that this man who did not know her nevertheless in some subtle, almost occult, way had a clear understanding of her present need. He wanted sympathy—his eyes said that—but he had sympathy to give. She began to hate the controlling absurdities of civilization. All her wildness seemed to rise up and rush to the surface. How inhuman, how against nature it was, that two human beings who wished to know each other should be held back from such knowledge by mere convention, by the unwritten law of the solemn and formal introduction! A great happiness might lie in their intercourse, but conventionality solemnly and selfishly forbade it, unless they could find a common acquaintance to mumble a few unmeaning words over them. Mumbo-Jumbo! What a fantastic world of stupidly obedient puppets this world of London was! She said to herself that she hated it. Then she thought of her first widowhood and of her curious year in Paris.

There she might more easily have made the acquaintance of the unknown man in some Bohemian cafe, where people talked to each other casually, giving way to their natural impulses, drifting in and out as the whim took them, careless of the *convenances* or actively despising them. In London, at any rate if one is English and cursed by being well known, one lives in a strait waist-coat. Lady Sellingworth felt the impossibility of speaking to a stranger without an introduction in spite of her secret wildness.

And if he spoke to her?

She remembered Sir Seymour's instant judgment on him. It had made her feel very angry at the time when it was delivered, but then she had not held any mental debate about it. She had simply been secretly up in arms against an attack on the man she was interested in. Now she thought about it more seriously.

Although she had never been able to love Sir Seymour, she esteemed him very highly and valued his friendship very much. She also respected his intellect and his character. He was not a petty man, but an honest, brave and far-seeing man of the world. Such a man's opinion was certainly worth something. One could not put it aside as if it were the opinion of a fool. And after a brief glance at the stranger Sir Seymour had unhesitatingly pronounced him to be an outsider.

Was he an outsider?

As a rule Lady Sellingworth was swift in deciding what was the social status of a man. She could "place" a man as quickly as any woman. But, honestly, she could not make up her mind about the stranger. Although he was so exceptionally good-looking, perhaps, he was not exactly distinguished looking. But she had known dukes and Cabinet Ministers who resembled farmers and butlers, young men of high rank who had the appearance of grooms or bookies. It was difficult to be sure about anyone without personal knowledge of him.

When she had first seen the young man in Bond Street it had certainly not occurred to her that there was anything common or shady in his appearance. And the Duchess of Wellingborough had not hinted that she held such an opinion about him. And surely

women are quicker about such matters than men.

Lady Sellingworth decided that Seymour Portman was prejudiced. Old courtiers are apt to be prejudiced. Always mixing with the most distinguished men of their time, they acquire, perhaps too easily, a habit of looking down upon ordinary but quite respectable people.

Here Lady Sellingworth suddenly smiled. The adjective “respectable” certainly did not fit the Bond Street young man. He looked slightly exotic! That, no doubt, had set Sir Seymour against him. He was not of the usual type of club man. He “intrigued” her terribly. As the Duchess of Wellingborough would have phrased it, she was “crazy” to know him. She even said to herself that she did not care whether he was on the shady side of the line or not. Abruptly a strong democratic feeling took possession of her. In the affections, in the passions, differences of rank did not count.

Rupert Louth had married a Crouch!

Lady Sellingworth looked at his note which was still in her hand, and memories of the disdainful young beauty “queening it”—that really was the only appropriate expression—“queening it” with vulgar gentility among the simple mannered, well-bred people to whom Louth belonged rose up in her mind. How terrible were those definite airs of being a lady! How truly unspeakable were those august condescensions of the undeniable Crouch!

When Lady Sellingworth mused on them her sense of the equality before God of all human creatures decidedly weakened.

She wrote a brief letter to Louth declining to “speak up” to the great dressmaker. “Little Bertha” must manage without her aid. She made this quite

clear, but she wrote very charmingly, and sent her love at the end to little Bertha. That done, almost violently she dismissed Louth and his wife from her mind and became democratic again!

Putting Louth and little Bertha aside, when it came to the affections and the passions what could one be but just a human being? Rank did not count when the heart was awake. She felt intensely human just then. And she continued to feel so. Life was quickened for her by the presence in London of a stranger whom nobody knew. This might be a humiliating fact. But how many facts connected with human beings if sternly considered are humiliating!

And nobody knew of her fact.

Every morning at this time she woke up with the hope of a little adventure during the day. When she went out she was alive to the possibility of a new encounter with the unknown man. And she met him several times, walking about town, sometimes alone, sometimes with the old lady, and once with another man, a thin sallow individual who looked like a Frenchman. And each time he sent her a glance which seemed almost to implore her to know him.

But how could she know him? She never met him in society. Evidently he knew no one whom she knew. She began to be intensely irritated by her leaping desire which was constantly thwarted. That this man was in love with her and longing to know her she now firmly believed. She wished to know him. She wished it more than she wished for anything else in the world just then. But the gulf of conventionality yawned between them, and there seemed no likelihood of its ever being bridged. Sometimes she condemned the man for not being adventurous, for not taking his courage in both

hands and speaking to her without an introduction. At other times she told herself that his not doing this proved him to be a gentleman, in spite of what Sir Seymour Portman had thought him. In defiance of his longing to know her he would not insult her.

But if he only knew how she was pining for the insult!

And yet if he had spoke to her perhaps she would have been angry.

She discovered eventually that he was staying at the Carlton Hotel, for one day on her way to the restaurant she saw him with a key in his hand—evidently the key of his room. That same day she heard him speak for the first time. After lunch, when she was in the Palm Court, he came and stood quite close to where she was sitting. The thin, sallow individual was with him. They lighted cigars and looked about them. And presently she heard them talking in French. The thin man said something which she did not catch. In reply the other said, speaking very distinctly, almost loudly:

"I shall go over to Paris on Thursday morning next. I shall stay at the Ritz Hotel."

That was all Lady Sellingworth heard. He had intended her to hear it. She was certain of that. For immediately afterwards he glanced at her and then moved away, like a man who has carried out an intention and can relax and be idle. He sat down by a table a little way off, and a waiter brought coffee for him and his companion.

His voice, when he spoke the few words, had sounded agreeable. His French was excellent, but he had a slight foreign accent which Lady Sellingworth at once detected.

Paris! He was going to Paris on Thursday!

She was quite positive that he had wished her to know that. Why?

There could be only one reason. She guessed that he had become as fiercely irritated by their situation as she was, that he was tempting her to break away and to do something definite, that he wanted her to leave London. She still had her apartment in Paris. Could he know that? Could he have seen her in Paris without her knowledge and have followed her to London?

She began to feel really excited, and there was something almost youthful in her excitement. Yet she was on the eve of a horrible passing. For that day was her last day in the forties. On the following morning she would wake up a woman of fifty.

While the two men were still having their coffee Lady Sellingworth and her friend got up to go away. As her tall figure disappeared the brown man whispered something to his companion and they both smiled. Then they continued talking in very low voices, and not in French.

Paris! All the rest of that day Lady Sellingworth thought about Paris! Already it stood for a great deal in her life. Was it perhaps going to stand for much more? In Paris long ago—she wished it were not so long ago—she had tasted a curious freedom, had given herself to her wildness, had enlarged her boundaries. And now Paris called her again, called her through the voice of this man whom she did not yet know.

Deliberately that day he had summoned her to Paris. She had no doubt about that. And if she went? He must have some quite definite intention connected with his wish for her to go. It could only be a romantic intention.

And yet to-morrow she would be fifty!

He was quite young. He could not be more than five-and-twenty.

For a moment her imp spoke loudly in her ear. He told her that by this time she must have learnt her lesson, that it was useless to pretend that she had not, that Rupert Louth's marriage had taught her all that she needed to know, and that now she must realize that the time for adventures, for romance, for the secret indulgence of the passions, was in her case irrevocably over. "Fifty! Fifty! Fifty!" he knelled in her ears. And there were obscure voices within her which backed him up, faintly, as if half afraid, agreeing with him.

She listened. She could not help listening, though she hated it. And for a moment she was almost inclined to submit to the irony of the imp, to trample upon her desire, and to grasp hands once and for all with her self-respect.

The imp said to her: "If you go to Paris you will be making a fool of yourself. That man doesn't really want you to go. He is only a mischievous boy amusing himself at your expense. Perhaps he has made a bet with that friend of his that you will cross on the same day that he does. You are far too old for adventures. Look in the glass and see yourself as you really are. Remember your folly with Rupert Louth, and this time try to be wise."

But something else in her, the persistent vanity, perhaps, of a once very beautiful woman, told her that her attraction was not dead, and that if she obeyed her imp she would simply be throwing away the chance of a great joy. Once again her thoughts went to marriage. Once again she dreamed of a young man falling romantically in love with her, and

of taking him into her life, and of making his life wonderful by her influence and her connexions.

Once again she was driven by her wildness.

The end of it was that she summoned her maid and told her that they were going over to Paris for a few days on the following Thursday. The maid was not surprised. She supposed that my lady wanted some new gowns. She asked, and was told, what to pack.

Now Lady Sellingworth, as all her friends and many others knew, possessed an extremely valuable collection of jewels, and seldom, or never, moved far without taking a part of the collection with her. She loved jewels, and usually wore them in the evening, and as she was often seen in public—at the opera and elsewhere—her diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and pearls had often been admired, and perhaps longed for, by strangers.

When she went to Paris on this occasion she took a jewel-case with her. In it there were perhaps fifty thousand pounds' worth of gems. Her maid, a woman who had been with her for years, was in charge of the case except when Lady Sellingworth was actually in the train. Then Lady Sellingworth had it with her in a reserved first-class carriage for the whole of which she paid.

The journey was not eventful. But to Lady Sellingworth it was an adventure.

The brown man was on the train with his thin, sardonic friend, and with the old woman Lady Sellingworth had seen with him in London.

The sight of this party—she saw them stepping into the Pullman car as she was going to her reserved carriage—surprised her. She had expected that the stranger would travel alone. As she sat down in her

corner facing the engine, with the jewel-case on the seat next to her, she felt an obscure irritation. A man in search of adventure does not usually take two people—one of them an old woman in a black wig—with him when he sets out on his travels. A trio banishes romance. And how can a woman be thrilled by a family party?

For a moment Lady Sellingworth felt anger against the stranger. For a moment she wished she had not undertaken the journey. It occurred to her that perhaps she had made a humiliating mistake when she thought that the brown man wished, and intended, her to go to Paris because he was going. Her pride was alarmed. She saw plainly for a moment the mud into which vanity had led her, and she longed to get out of the train and to remain in London. But how could she account to her maid for such a sudden change of plans? What could she say to her household? She knew, of course, that she owed them no explanation. But still—and her friends? She had told everybody that she was going to Paris. They would think her crazy for giving up the journey after she was actually in the train. And she had seen two or three acquaintances on the platform. No; she must make the journey now. It was too late to give it up. But she wished intensely she had not undertaken it.

At the moment of this wish of hers, coming from the Pullman, the brown man walked slowly by on the platform, alone. His eyes were searching the train with keen attention. But Lady Sellingworth happened to be leaning back, and he did not see her. She knew he was looking for her. He went on out of her sight. She sat still in her corner, and presently saw him coming back. This time he saw her, and did something which for the moment startled her. On the

window of the carriage, next the seat opposite to hers, was pasted a label with “Reserved” printed on it in big letters. Underneath was written: “For the Countess of Sellingworth.” When the man saw Lady Sellingworth in her corner he gave no sign of recognition but he took out of the breast pocket of his travelling coat a pocket-book, went deliberately up to the window, looked hard at the label, and then wrote something—her name, no doubt—in his book. This done, he put the book back in his pocket and walked gravely away without glancing at her again.

And now Lady Sellingworth no longer regretted that she was going to Paris. What the man had just done had reassured her. It was now evident to her that the first time they had met in Bond Street he had not known who she was or anything about her. He must simply have been struck by her beauty, and from that moment had wished to know her. Ever since then he must have been longing to know who she was. The fact that he had evidently not discovered her name till he had read it on the label pasted on the railway carriage window convinced her that, in spite of his boldness in showing her his feelings, he was a scrupulous man. A careless man could certainly have found out who she was at the Carlton, by asking a waiter. Evidently he had not chosen to do that. The omission showed delicacy, refinement of nature. It pleased her. It made her feel safe. She felt that the man was a gentleman, one who could respect a woman. Sir Seymour had been wrong in his hasty judgment. An outsider would not have behaved in such a way. That the stranger had deliberately taken down her name in his book while she was watching him did not displease her at all. He wished her to know of his longing, but he was evidently determined to keep it hidden from others.

She felt now in the very heart of a romantic adventure, and thrilled with excitement about the future. What would happen when they all got to Paris? It was evident to her now that he did not know she had an apartment there—unless, indeed, he had first seen her in Paris and had, perhaps, followed her to London! But even if that were so it was unlikely that he knew where she lived.

In any case she knew he was going to the Ritz.

The train flew on towards the sea while she mused over possibilities and imagined events in Paris.

She knew now, of course, that the stranger was absolutely out of her world. His ignorance proved to her that he could not be in any society she moved in. She guessed that he was some charming young man from a distance, come to Europe perhaps for the first time—some ardent youth from Brazil, from Peru, from Mexico! The guess gave colour to the adventure. He knew her name now. She wondered what his name was. And she wondered about the old woman in the wig and about the sardonic friend. In what relation did the three people stand to each other?

She could not divine. But she thought that perhaps the old woman was the mother of the man she wished to know.

She had a private cabin on the boat. It was on the top deck. But, as the weather was fine and the sea fairly calm, her maid occupied it with the jewel-case, while she sat in the open on a deck chair, well wrapped up in a fur rug. Presently an acquaintance, a colonel in the Life Guards, joined her, established himself in a chair at her side, and kept her busy with conversation.

When the ship drew out into the Channel several

men began to pace up and down the deck with the sturdy determination of good sailors resolved upon getting health from the salt briskness of the sea. Among them were the two men of the trio. The old woman had evidently gone into hiding.

As Lady Sellingworth conversed with her colonel she made time, as a woman can, for a careful and detailed consideration of the man on whom her thoughts were concentrated. Although he did not look at her as he passed up and down the deck, she knew that he had seen where she was sitting. And, without letting the colonel see what she was doing, she followed the tall, athletic figure in the long, rough, greenish-brown overcoat with her eyes, looking away when it drew very near to her. And now and then she looked at its companion.

In the Paris *rapide* she was again alone in a carriage reserved for her. She did not go into the restaurant to lunch, as she hated eating in a crowd. Instead, her maid brought her a luncheon basket which had been supplied by the chef in Berkeley Square. After eating she smoked a cigarette and read the French papers which she had bought at the Calais station. And then she sat still and looked out of the window, and thought and dreamed and wondered and desired.

Although she did not know it, she was living through almost the last of those dreams which are the rightful property of youth, but which sometimes, obstinate and deceitful, haunt elderly minds, usually to their undoing.

The light began to fade and the dream to become more actual. She lived again as she had lived in the days when she was a reigning beauty, when there was no question of her having to seek for the joys and the adventures of life. In the twilight of France she reigned.

A shadow passed by in the corridor. She had scarcely seen it. Rather she had felt its passing. But the dream was gone. She was alert, tense, expectant.

Paris was near. And he was near. She linked the two together in her mind. And she felt that she was drawing close to a climax in her life. A conviction took hold of her that some big, some determining event was going to happen in Paris, that she would return to London different—a changed woman.

Happiness changes! She was travelling in search of happiness. The wild blood in her leaped at the thought of grasping happiness. And she felt reckless. She would dare all, would do anything, if only she might capture happiness. Dignity, self-respect, propriety, the conventions—what value had they really? To bow down to them—does that bring happiness? Out of the way with them, and a straight course for the human satisfaction which comes only in following the dictates of the nature one is born with!

Lights twinkled here and there in the gloom. Again the shadow passed in the corridor. A moment later Lady Sellingworth's maid appeared to take charge of the jewel-case.

The crowd at the Gare du Nord was great, and the station was badly lit. Lady Sellingworth did not see her reason for coming to Paris. A carriage was waiting for her. She got into it with her jewel-case, and drove away to her apartment, leaving her maid to follow with the luggage.

In the evening she dined alone, and she went to bed early.

She had made no engagements in Paris; had not told any of her friends there that she was going to be there for some days. She had no wish to go into society. Her wish was to be perfectly free. But as she lay in bed in her pretty, familiar room, she began to wonder what she was going to do. She had come to

Paris suddenly, driven by an intense caprice, without making any plans, without even deciding how long she was going to stay. She had imagined that in loneliness she would keep a hold on liberty. But now she began to wonder about things.

Even her secret wildness did not tell her that she could “knock about” in Paris like a man. For one thing she was far too well known for that. Many people might recognize her. When she had been much younger she had certainly been to all sorts of odd places, and had had a wonderful time. But somehow, with the passing of the years, she had learnt to pay some attention to the imp within her, though there were moments when she defied him. And he told her that she simply could not now do many of the daring things which she had done when she was a brilliant and lovely young woman. Besides, what would be the use? Almost suddenly she realized the difficulty of her situation.

She could not very well go about Paris alone. And yet to go about in company must inevitably frustrate the only purpose which had brought her to Paris. She had come there with an almost overwhelming desire, but with no plan for its realization.

But surely he had a plan. He must certainly have one if, as she still believed, in spite of the trio, he had meant her to come to Paris when he did. She wondered intensely what his plan was. He looked very determined, audacious even, in spite of the curious and almost pleading softness of his eyes, a softness which had haunted her imagination ever since she had first seen him. She felt convinced that, once thoroughly roused, he would be a man who would stick at very little, perhaps at nothing, in carrying out a design he had formed. His design was surely to make her acquaintance, and to make it in

Paris. Yet he had come over with two people, while she had come alone. What was he going to do? She longed to know his plan. She wished to conform to it. Yet how could she do that in total ignorance of what his plan was? Perhaps he knew her address and would communicate with her. But that morning he had not even known her name! She felt excited but puzzled. As the night grew late she told herself that she must cease from thinking and try to sleep. She must leave the near future in the lap of the gods. But she could not make her mind a blank. Over and over again she revolved the matter which obsessed her in her mind. Almost for the first time in her life she ardently wished she were a man, able to take the initiative in any matter of love.

The clocks of Paris were striking three before at last she fell asleep.

When she woke in the morning late and had had her coffee she did not know how she was going to spend the day. She felt full of anticipation, excited, yet vague, and usually lonely. The post brought her nothing. About noon she was dressed and ready for the day. She must go out, of course. It would be folly to remain shut up indoors after all the bother of the journey. She must lunch somewhere, do something afterwards. There was a telephone in her bedroom. She knew lots of people in Paris. She might telephone to someone to join her at lunch at the Ritz or somewhere. Afterwards they might go to a matinee or to a concert. But she was afraid of getting immersed in engagements, of losing her freedom. She thought over her friends and acquaintances in Paris. Which of them would be the safest to communicate with? Which would be most useful to her, and would trouble her least? Finally she decided on telephoning to a rich American spinster whom she had known for

years, a woman who was what is called “large minded,” who was very tolerant, very understanding, and not more curious than a woman has to be. Caroline Briggs could comprehend a hint without demanding facts to explain it.

She telephoned to Caroline Briggs. Miss Briggs was at home and replied, expressing pleasure and readiness to lunch with Lady Sellingworth anywhere. After a moment’s hesitation Lady Sellingworth suggested the Ritz. Miss Briggs agreed that the Ritz would be the best place.

They met at the Ritz at one o’clock.

Miss Briggs, a small, dark, elderly and animated person, immensely rich and full of worldly wisdom, wondered why Lady Sellingworth had come over to Paris, was told “clothes,” and smilingly accepted the explanation. She knew Lady Sellingworth very well, and, being extremely sharp and intuitive, realized at once that clothes had nothing to do with this sudden visit. A voice within her said: “It’s a man!”

And presently the man came into the restaurant, accompanied by the eternal old woman in the black wig.

Now Caroline Briggs had an enormous and cosmopolitan acquaintance. She was the sort of woman who knows wealthy Greeks, Egyptian pashas, Turkish princesses, and wonderful exotic personages from Brazil, Persia, Central America and the Indies. She gave parties which were really romantic, which had a flavour, as someone had said, of the novels of Ouida brought thoroughly up to date. Lady Sellingworth had been to some of them, and had not forgotten them. And it had occurred to her that if anyone she knew was acquainted with the brown man, that person might be Caroline Briggs. She had,

therefore, come to the Ritz with a faint hope in her mind.

Miss Brigs happened to be seated with her smart back to the man and old woman when they entered the restaurant, and they sat down at a table behind her, but in full view of Lady Sellingworth, who wished to draw her companion's attention to them, but who also was reluctant to show any interest in them. She knew that Miss Briggs knew a great deal about her, and she did not mind that. But nevertheless, she felt at this moment a certain *pudeur* which was almost like the *pudeur* of a girl. Had it come to her with her entrance into the fifties? Or was it a cruel gift from her imp? She was not sure; but she could not persuade herself to draw Miss Briggs's attention to the people who interested her until the bill was presented and it was almost time to leave the restaurant.

Then at last she could keep silence no longer, and she said:

"The people one sees in Paris seem to become more and more extraordinary! Many of them one can't place at all."

Miss Briggs, who had lived in Paris for quite thirty years, remarked:

"Do you think they are more extraordinary than the people one sees about London?"

"Yes, really I do. That old woman in the black wig over there, for instance, intrigues me. Where can she come from? Who can she be?"

Miss Briggs looked carelessly round, and at once understood the reason of Lady Sellingworth's remarks. "The man" was before her, and she knew it. How? She could not have said. Had she been asked she would probably have replied: "My bones told

me."

"Oh," she said, after the look. "She's the type of old woman who is born and brought up in Brazil, and who, when she is faded, comes to European spas for her health. I have met many of her type at Aix and Baden Baden."

"Ah!" replied Lady Sellingworth carelessly. "You don't know her then?"

"No. But I have seen her two or three times within the last few months—three times to be exact. Twice she has travelled in the same train as I was in, though not in the same compartment, and once I saw her dining here. Each time she was with that marvelously handsome young man. I really noticed her—don't blame me—because of him."

"Perhaps he's her son."

"He may be her husband."

"Oh—but the difference in their ages! She must be seventy at least, if not more."

"She may be very rich, too," said Miss Briggs dryly.

Lady Sellingworth remembered that it was always said that Miss Briggs's enormous fortune had kept her a spinster. She was generally supposed to be one of those unfortunately cynical millionairesses who are unable to believe in man's disinterested affection.

"Shall we go?" said Lady Sellingworth.

Miss Briggs assented, and they left the restaurant.

They spent the afternoon together at a matinee at the Opera Comique, and afterwards Miss Briggs came to tea at Lady Sellingworth's apartment. Not another word had been said about the two strangers, but Lady Sellingworth fully realized that Caroline Briggs had found her out. When her friend finally got up to

go she asked Lady Sellingworth how long she intended to stay in Paris.

“Oh, only a day or two,” Lady Sellingworth said. “I’ve got to see two or three dressmakers. Then I shall be off. I haven’t told anyone that I am here. It didn’t seem worth while.”

“And you won’t be dull all alone?”

“Oh, no, I am never dull. I love two or three days of complete rest now and then. One isn’t made of cast iron, although some people seem to think one is, or at ay rate ought to be.”

There was a tired sound in her voice as she said this, and Miss Briggs’s small and sharp, but kind, eyes examined her face rather critically. But Miss Briggs only said:

“Come and dine with me to-morrow night in my house. I shall be quite alone.”

“Thank you, Caroline.”

She spoke rather doubtfully and paused. But finally she said:

“I will with pleasure. What time?”

“Half-past eight.”

When Miss Briggs had gone Lady Sellingworth gave way to an almost desperate fit of despondency. She felt ashamed of herself, like a sensitive person found out in some ugly fault. She sat down, and almost for the first time in her life mentally she wrestled with herself.

Something, she did not quite know what, in Caroline Briggs’s look, or manner, or surmised mental attitude that day, had gone home to her. And that remark, “He may be her husband,” followed by, “she may be very rich, too,” had dropped upon her like a stone.

It had never occurred to her that the old woman in the wig might be the young man's wife. But she now realized that it was quite possible.

She had always known, since she had known Caroline, that her friend was one of those few women who are wholly free from illusions. Miss Briggs had not only never fallen into follies; she had avoided natural joys. She had perhaps even been the slave of her self-respect. Never at all good-looking though certainly not ugly, she had been afraid of the effect of her wealth upon men. And because she was so rich she had never chosen to marry. She was possibly too much of a cynic, but she had always preserved her personal dignity. No one had ever legitimately laughed at her, and no one had ever had the chance of contemptuously pitying her. She must have missed a great deal, but now in middle-age she was surround by friends who respected her.

That was something.

And—Lady Sellingworth was sure of it—Caroline was not ravaged by the Furies who attack "foolish" middle-aged women.

What did Caroline Briggs think of her? What must she think?

Caroline knew well nearly all the members of the "old guard," and most of them were fond of her. She had never got in any woman's way with a man, and she was never condemnatory. So among women she was a very popular woman. Many people confided in her. Lady Sellingworth had never done this. But now she wished that she could bring herself to do it. Caroline must certainly know her horribly well. Perhaps she could be helped by Caroline.

She needed help, for she was abominably devoid of moral courage.

She did not quite know why at this particular moment she was overwhelmed by a feeling of degradation; she only knew that she was overwhelmed. She felt ashamed of being in Paris. She even compared herself with the horrible old woman in the wig, who, perhaps, had bought the brown man as she might have bought a big Newfoundland dog.

Fifty! Fifty! Fifty! It knelled in her ears. Caroline saw her as a woman of fifty. Perhaps everyone really saw her so. And yet—why had the man given her that strange look in Bond Street? Why had he wished her to come to Paris? She tried, with a really unusual sincerity, to find some other reason than the reason which had delighted her vanity. But she failed. Sincerely she failed.

And yet—was it possible?

She thought of giving up, of becoming like Caroline. It would be a great rest. But how empty her life would be. Caroline's life was a habit. But such a life for her would be an absolute novelty. No doubt Caroline's reward had come to her in middle-age. Middle-age was bringing something to her, Adela Sellingworth, which was certainly not a reward. One got what one earned. That was certain. And she had earned wages which she dreaded having paid to her.

She had a good brain, and she realized that if she had the moral courage she might—it was possible—be rewarded by a peace of mind such as she had never yet known. She was able as it were to catch a glimpse of a future in which she might be at ease with herself. It even enticed her. But something whispered to her, "It would be stagnation—death in life." And then she was afraid of it.

She spent the evening in miserable depression, not

knowing what she could do. She distrusted and almost hated herself. And she could not decide whether or not on the morrow to give Caroline some insight into her state of mind.

On the following day she was still miserable, even tormented, and quite undecided as to what she was going to do.

She spent the morning at her dressmaker's, and walked, with her maid, in the Rue de la Paix. There she met a Frenchwoman whom she knew well, Madame de Gretigny, who begged her to come to lunch at her house in the Faubourg St. Honore. She accepted. What else could she do? After lunch she drove with her friend in the Bois. Then they dropped in to tea with some French mutual friends.

The usual Paris was gently beginning to take possession of her. What was the good of it all? What had she really expected of this visit? She had started from London with a crazy sense of adventure. And here she was plunged in the life of convention! Oh, for the freedom of a man! Or the stable content of a Caroline Briggs!

At moments she felt enraged.

She saw the crowds passing in the streets, women tripping along consciously, men—flaneurs—strolling with their well-known look of watchful idleness, and she felt herself to be one of life's prisoners. And she knew she would never again take hands with the Paris she had once known so well. Why was that? Because of something in herself, something irrevocable which had fixed itself in her with the years. She was changing, had changed, not merely in body, but in something else. She felt that her audacity was sinking under the influence of her diffidence. Suddenly it occurred to her that perhaps

this sudden visit to Paris on the track of an adventure was the last strong effort of her audacity. How would it end? In a meek and ridiculous return to London after a lunch with Caroline Briggs, a dinner with Caroline, a visit to the Opera Comique with Caroline! That really seemed the probable conclusion of the whole business. And yet—and yet she still had a sort of queer under feeling that she was drawing near to a climax in her life, and that, when she did return to London, she would return a definitely changed woman.

At half-past eight that night she walked into Caroline's wonderful house in the Champs-Elysees.

During dinner the two women talked as any two women of their types might have talked, quite noncommittally, although, in a surface way, quite intimately. Miss Briggs was a creature full of tact, and was the last person in the world to try to force a confidence from anyone. She was also not given at any time to pouring out confidences of her own.

After dinner they sat in a little room which Miss Briggs had had conveyed from Persia to Paris. Everything in it was Persian. When the door by which it was entered had been shut there was absolutely nothing to suggest Europe to those within. A faint Eastern perfume pervaded this strange little room, which suggested a deep retirement, an almost cloistered seclusion. A grille in one of the walls drew the imagination towards the harem. It seemed that there must be hidden women over there beyond it. Instinctively one listened for the tinkle of childish laughter, for the distant plash of a fountain, for the shuffle of slippers on marble.

Lady Sellingworth admired this room, and envied her friend for possessing it. But that night it brought

to her a thought which she could not help expressing.

“Aren’t you terribly lonely in this house, Caroline?” she said. “It is so large and so wonderful that I should think it must make solitude almost a bodily shape to you. And this room seems to be in the very heart of the house. Do you ever sit here without a friend or guest?”

“Now and then, but not often at night,” said Miss Briggs, with serene self-possession.

“You are an extraordinary woman!” said Lady Sellingworth.

“Extraordinary! Why?”

“Because you always seem so satisfied to live quite alone. I hate solitude. I’m afraid of it.”

Suddenly she felt that she must be partially frank with her hostess.

“Is self-respect a real companion for a woman?” she said. “Can one sit with it and be contented? Does it repay a woman for all the sacrifices she has offered up to it? Is it worth the sacrifices? That’s what I want to know.”

“I dare say that depends on the woman’s mental make up,” replied Miss Briggs. “One woman, perhaps, might find that it was, another that it was not.”

“Yes, we are all so different, so dreadfully different, one from another.”

“It would be very much duller if we weren’t.”

“Even as it is life can be very dull.”

“I should certainly not call your life dull,” said Miss Briggs.

“Anyhow, it’s dreadful!” said Lady Sellingworth, with sudden abandonment.

"Why is it dreadful?"

"Caroline, I was fifty a few days ago."

As Lady Sellingworth said this she observed her friend closely to see if she looked surprised. Miss Briggs did not look surprised. And she only said:

"Were you? Well, I shall be fifty-eight in a couple of months."

"You don't look it."

"Perhaps that's because I haven't looked young for the last thirty years."

"I hate being fifty. The difficulty with me is that my—my nature and my temperament don't match with my age. And that worries me. What is one to do?"

"Do you want me to advise you about something?"

"I think I do. But it's so difficult to explain. Perhaps there is a time to give up. Perhaps I have reached it. But if I do give up, what am I to do? How am I to live? I might marry again."

"Why not?"

"It would have to be an elderly man, wouldn't it?"

"I hope so."

"I—I shouldn't care to marry an elderly man. I don't want to."

"Then don't do it."

"You think if I were to marry a comparatively young man—"

She paused, looking almost pleadingly at the uncompromising Miss Briggs.

"I'm convinced of this, that no really normal young man could ever be contented long if he married a middle-aged woman. And what intelligent woman is happy with an abnormal man?"

"Caroline, you are so dreadfully frank!"

"I say just what I think."

"But you think so drastically. And you are so free from sentiment."

"What is called sentiment is very often nothing but what is described in the Bible as the lust of the eye."

This shaft, perhaps not intended to be a shaft, went home. Lady Sellingworth reddened and looked down.

"I dare say it is," she murmured. "But—no doubt some of us are more subject to temptation than others."

"I'm sure that is so."

"It's very difficult to give up deliberately nearly all that has made life interesting and attractive to you ever since you can remember. Caroline, would you advise me to—to abdicate? You know what I mean."

Miss Briggs's rather plain, but very intelligent, face softened.

"Adela, my dear," she said, "I understand a great deal more than you have cared to hint at to me."

"I know you do."

"I think that unless you change your way of life in time you are heading straight for tragedy. We both know a lot of women who try to defy the natural law. Many of them are rather beautiful women. But do you think they are happy women? I don't. I know they aren't. Youth laughs at them. I don't know what you feel about it, but I think I would rather be pelted with stones than be jeered at by youth in my middle age. Respect may sound a very dull word, but I think there's something very warm in it when it surrounds you as you get old. In youth we want love, of course, all of us. But in middle age we want respect too. And

nothing else takes its place. There's a dignity of the soul, and women like us—I'm older than you, but still we are neither of us very young any longer—only throw it away at a terrible price. When I want to see tragedy I look at the women who try to hang on to what refuses to stay with them. And I soon have to shut my eyes. It's too painful. It's like looking at bones decked out with jewels."

Lady Sellingworth sat very still. There was a long silence between the two friends. When they spoke again they spoke of other things.

That night Lady Sellingworth told her maid to pack up, as she was returning to London by the morning express on the following day.

At the Gare du Nord there was the usual bustle. But there was not a great crowd of travellers for England, and Lady Sellingworth without difficulty secured a carriage to herself. Her maid stood waiting with the jewel-case while she went to the bookstall to buy something to read on the journey. She felt dull, almost miserable, but absolutely determined. She knew that Caroline was right. She thought she meant to take her advice. At any rate, she would not try to pursue the adventure which had lured her to Paris. How she would be able to live when she got home she did not know. But she would go home. It had been absurd, undignified of her to come to Paris. She would try to forget all about it.

She bought a book and some papers; then she walked to the train.

"Are you going to get in, my lady?" said the maid.

"Yes. You can put in the jewel-case."

The maid did so, and Lady Sellingworth got into the carriage and sat next to the window on the platform side, facing the engine, with the jewel-case

beside her on the next seat. The corridor was between her and the platform. On the right, beyond the carriage door, the line was blocked by another train at rest in the station.

She sat still, not reading, but thinking. The maid went away to her second-class carriage.

Lady Sellingworth continued to feel very dull. Now that she was abandoning this adventure, or promise of adventure, she knew how much it had meant to her. It had lifted her out of the anger and depression in which she had been plunged by the Rupert Louth episode. It had appealed to her wildness, had given her new hope, something to look forward to, something that was food for her imagination. She had lived in an imagined future that was romantic, delicious and turbulent. Now she knew exactly how much she had counted on this visit to Paris as the door through which she would pass into a new and extraordinary romance. She had felt certain that something wonderful, something unconventional, bizarre, perhaps almost maddening, was going to happen to her in Paris.

And now—At this moment she became aware of some influence which drew her attention to the platform on her left. She had not seen anyone; she had simply felt someone. She turned her head and looked through the window of the corridor.

The brown man was on the platform alone, standing still and looking intently towards her carriage. Two or three people passed him. He did not move. She felt sure that he was waiting for her to get out, that this time he meant to speak to her.

In a moment all her good resolutions, all the worldly wise advice of Miss Briggs, all her dullness and despair were forgotten. The wildness that would

not die surged up in her. Her vanity glowed. She had been wrong, utterly wrong. Miss Briggs had been wrong. Despite the difference between their ages, this man, young, strong, amazingly handsome, must have fallen in love with her at first sight. He must have—somehow—been watching her in Paris. He must have ascertained that she was leaving Paris that morning, have followed her to the station determined at all costs to have a word with her.

Should she let him have that word?

Just for an instant she hesitated. Then, almost passionately, she gave way to a turbulent impulse. She felt reckless. At that moment she was almost ready to let the train go without her. But there were still a few, a very few, minutes before the time for its departure. She got up, left the carriage, and stood in the corridor looking out of the window. Immediately the man slightly raised his hat, sent her a long and imploring look, and then moved slowly away down the platform in the direction of the entrance to it. She gazed after him. He paused, again raised his hat, and made a very slight, scarcely noticeable gesture with his hand. Then he remained where he was.

Saying to herself that she would certainly not obey his obvious wish and follow him, but would simply get out of the train and take a few breaths of air on the platform—as any woman might to while away the time—Lady Sellingworth made her way to the end of the corridor and descended to the platform. The brown man was still there, a little way off. Several people were hurrying to take their places in the train. Porters were carrying hand luggage, or wheeling trucks of heavy luggage to the railway vans. No one seemed to have any time to take notice of her or of the man. She did not look at him, but began slowly to stroll up and down, keeping near to

her carriage. She had given him his chance. Now it was for him to take firm hold on it. She fully expected that he would come up and speak to her. She thrilled with excitement at the prospect. What would he say? How would he act? Would he explain why he had done nothing in Paris? Would he beg her to stay on in Paris? Would he ask to be allowed to visit her in London? Would he—But he did not come up to her.

After taking several short turns, keeping her eyes resolutely away from the place where he was standing, Lady Sellingworth could not resist the impulse to look towards him to see what he was doing. She lifted her eyes.

He was gone.

"*En voiture!*" cried a hoarse voice.

She stood still.

"*En voiture! En voiture!*"

Mechanically she moved. She went to her carriage, put her hand on the rail, mounted the steps, passing into the corridor, and reached her compartment just as the train began to move.

What had happened to him? What was the meaning of it all? Was he travelling to England too? Had he got into the train?

She sat down wondering, almost confused.

Mechanically she let her right hand drop on to the seat beside her. She was so accustomed when travelling to have her jewel-case beside her that her hand must have missed it though her thoughts were far from it. For immediately after dropping her hand she looked down.

The jewel-case was gone.

Instantly her feeling of confusion was swept away;

instantly she understood.

She had been caught in a trap by a clever member of the swell mob operating with a confederate. While she had been on the platform, to which she had been deliberately enticed, the confederate had entered the compartment from the line, through the doorway on the right-hand side of her carriage, and had carried off the jewel-case.

The revelation of the truth almost stunned something in her. Yet she was able to think quite clearly. She did nothing. She just sat still and understood, and went on understanding, while the train quickened its pace on its way towards the sea.

By the time it slowed down, and the dull houses of Calais appeared, she had made up her mind about the future. Her vanity had received at last a mortal blow. The climax had come. It was not what she had expected, but her imp—less satirical now than desperately tragic and powerfully persuasive, told her that it was what she deserved. And she bowed her head to his verdict, not with tears, but with a cold and stormy sense of finality.

When the train stopped at the harbour station her maid appeared in the corridor.

“Shall I take the jewel-case, my lady?”

Lady Sellingworth stood up. She had not decided what to say to her maid. She was taken by surprise. As she stood, her tall figure concealed the seat on which the jewel-case had been lying. For an instant she looked at the maid in silence. Perhaps the expression of her face as strange, for after a pause the maid said anxiously:

“Whatever is it, my lady?”

“Never mind about the jewel-case!” said Lady Sellingworth.

"But—"

"It's gone!"

"Gone, my lady!" said the maid, looking aghast. "Gone where?"

"It was taken at the station in Paris."

"Taken, my lady! But it was in the carriage by the side of your ladyship! I never left it. I had it in my own hands till your ladyship—"

"I know—I know! Don't say anything more about it. It's gone, and we shall never see it again."

The maid stared, horrified, and scenting a mystery.

"Get that porter! Make haste!"

They got down from the train. Lady Sellingworth turned to make her way to the ship.

"But, my lady, surely we ought to speak to the police? All your beautiful jewels—"

"The police could do nothing. It is too late! I should only have endless trouble, and no good would come of it."

"But your ladyship was in the carriage with them!"

"Yes, I know! Now don't say any more about the matter!"

There was something in her tone which struck the maid to silence. She said not another word till they were on the ship.

Then Lady Sellingworth went to the cabin which she had telegraphed for.

"I am going to lie down," she said. "You can leave me."

"Yes, my lady."

After arranging things in the cabin the maid was about to go when Lady Sellingworth said:

"You have been with me a long time, Henderson. You have been very useful to me. And I think I have been a good mistress to you."

"Oh, yes, my lady, indeed you have. I would do anything for your ladyship."

"Would you? Then try to hold your tongue about this unfortunate occurrence. Talking can do no good. I shall not inform the police. The jewels are gone, and I shan't get them back. I have a great dislike of fuss and gossip, and only wish to be left in peace. If you talk, all this is sure to get into the papers. I should hate that."

"Yes, my lady. But surely the police—"

"It is my business, and no one else's, to decide what is best in this matter. So hold your tongue, if you can. You will not repent it if you do."

"Yes, my lady. Certainly, my lady."

The maid was obviously horrified and puzzled. But she left her mistress without another word.

They arrived in Berkeley Square in the evening.

That evening which Lady Sellingworth spent in solitude was the turning point in her life. During it and the succeeding night she went down to the bedrock of realization. She allowed her brains full liberty. Or they took full liberty as their right. The woman of the grey matter had it out with the woman of the blood. She stared her wildness in the face and saw it just as it was, and resolved once for all to dominate it for the rest of her days. She was not such a fool as to think that she could ever destroy it. No doubt it would always be there to trouble her, perhaps often to torture her. But rule her, as it had ruled her in the past, it never should again. Her resolve about that was hard, of a rock-like quality.

She had done with a whole side of life, and it was the side for which she had lived ever since she was a girl of sixteen. The renunciation was tremendous, devastating almost. She thought of a landslide carrying away villages, whole populations. How true had been the instinct which had told her that she was drawing near to a climax in her life! Had ever a woman before her been brought in a flash to such a cruel insight? It was as if a tideless sea, by some horrible miracle, retreated, leaving naked rocks which till that moment had never been seen by mortal eyes, hideous and grotesque rocks covered with slime and ooze.

And she stood alone, staring at them.

She remembered the dinner in her house at which there had been the discussion about happiness, and the desire of the old Anglo-Indian for complete peace of mind. Could a woman gain that mysterious benefit by giving up? Could such a thing ever be hers? She did not believe it. But she knew all the torture of striving. In her renunciation she would at least be able to rest, to rest in being frankly and openly what she was. And she knew she was tired. She was very tired. Perhaps some of the “old guard” were made of cast iron. But she was not.

The “old guard”! With the thought of that body of wonderful women came a flood of memories. She remembered “The Hags’ Hop.” She saw Rocheouart standing before her; Rupert Louth; other young men, all lively, handsome, ardent, bursting with life and the wish to enjoy.

Was there ever a time when the human being could utterly forego the wish to enjoy? To her there seemed to be hidden in desire seeds of eternity. The struggle for her, then, was not yet over. Perhaps it

would only cease in the grave. And after? Sellingworth had often told her that there was no hereafter. And at the time she had believed him. But she was not sure now. For even the persistence of desire seemed to point to something beyond. But she would not bother about that. She was held fast enough in the present.

What would the "old guard" say of her, think of her, in a very short time? What a defection hers would be! For she had resolved to take a plunge into middle age. No gliding into it for her! She would let everything go which was ready to go naturally. Her Greek had already lost his job, although as yet he did not know it.

Caroline Briggs would believe that the change which was at hand, the change which would be discussed, perhaps laughed at, praised by some, condemned by others, had been brought about by the conversation in the Persian Room. She would never know the truth. No one of Lady Sellingworth's set would ever know it. For no one, except a thief and his underlings, knew of the last folly of poor old Adela Sellingworth!

Poor old Adela Sellingworth!

As Lady Sellingworth called herself bitterly by that name tears at last came into her luminous eyes. Secretly she wept over herself, although the tears did not fall down upon her cheeks. She had done many foolish things, many wild things, many almost crazy things in her life. But that day she had surely been punished for them all. When she thought of the thieves' plot against her, of the working out of it, she saw herself lying, like a naked thing, in the dust. Such men! How had they known her character? Somehow they must have got to know it, and devised

their plan to appeal to it. They had woven just the right net to catch her in its folds. She seemed to hear their hideous discussions about her. The long look in Bond Street had been the first move in the horrible game. And she in her folly had connected the game with romance, with something like love even.

Love! A life such as hers had been was the prostitution of love, and now she deserved to be loveless for the rest of her life. Vanity and sensuality had been her substitutes for love. She had dealt in travesty and had pretended, even to herself, that she was following reality. It was amazing how she had managed to deceive herself.

She would never do that again.

Very late that night, alone in her bedroom, she sat before a mirror and looked into it, saying good-bye to the self which she had cherished and fostered so long, had lived for recklessly sometimes, ruthlessly almost always. She saw a worn, but still very handsome woman. But she told herself that the woman was hideous. For really she was looking at the woman underneath, the woman who was going to emerge very soon into the daylight with a frankly lined face crowned with grey or perhaps even white hair, at the woman who was the truth, at *herself*. This woman before her was only a counterfeit, a marvellously clever artificiality.

There were two electric lights at the sides of the mirror. She turned them both on. She wanted crude light just then. Cruelty she was taking to her bosom. She was grasping her nettle with both hands.

Yes, the artificiality was marvellously clever! The Greek had been worth his money. He had created a sort of human orchid whose petals showed few, wonderfully few, signs of withering.

But she had wanted to be not the orchid but really the rose. And so she was down in the dust.

Poor old Adela Sellingworth, who in a very short time—how long exactly would the Greek's work take to crumble—would look even older than fifty!

She turned out the lights presently and got into bed. When she had made the big bedroom dark, and had stretched her long body out between the sheets of Irish linen, she felt terrifically tired, tired in body and spirit, but somehow not in mind. Her mind was almost horribly alive and full of agility. It brought visions before her; it brought voices into her ears.

She saw men of the underworld sitting together in shadows and whispering about her, using coarse words, undressing her character, commenting upon it without mercy, planning how they would make use of it to their advantage. She heard them laughing about her and about all the women like her.

And presently she saw an old woman with a white face, a withered throat and vague eyes, an old woman in a black wig, smiling as she decked herself out in the Sellingworth jewels.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

Miss Van Tuyn, enthroned among distinguished and definite Georgians in a nimbus of smoke, presently began to wonder what had become of a certain young man. Despite the clamour of voices about her, and the necessity for showing incessantly that, although she had never bothered to paint cubist pictures or to write minor poetry, or even to criticize and appreciate meticulously those who did, she was cleverer than any Georgian of them all, her mind would slip away to Berkeley Square. She had, of course, noted young Craven's tacit resistance to the pressure of her desire, and her girlish vanity had resented it. But she had remembered that even in these active days of the ruthless development of the ego a sense of politeness, of what is "due" from one human being to another, still lingers in some perhaps old-fashioned bosoms. Lady Sellingworth was elderly. Craven might have thought it was his absolute duty to protect her from the possible dangers lurking between Regent Street and Berkeley Square. But as time went on, despite the sallies of Dick Garstin, the bloodless cynicisms of Enid Blunt, who counted insolence as the chief of the virtues, the amorous sentimentalities of the Turkish refugee from Smyrna, whose moral ruin had been brought about by a few lines of praise from Pierre Loti, the touching appreciations of prison life by Penitence Murray, and the voluble intellectuality of Thapoulos, Jennings and Smith the sculptor, Miss Van Tuyn began to feel absent-minded. Her power of attraction was quite evidently being seriously challenged. She was now certain—how could she not be—that Craven had not

merely gone to Number 18A, but had also “gone in.”

That was unnecessary. It was even very strange. For she, Beryl Van Tuyn, was at least thirty-six years younger than Lady Sellingworth.

Miss Van Tuyn had an almost inordinate belief in the attraction youth holds for men. She had none of the hidden diffidence which had been such a troubling element in Lady Sellingworth’s nature. Nor was there any imp which sat out of reach and mocked her. The violet eyes were satirical; but her satire was reserved for others, and was seldom or never directed against herself. She possessed a supply of self-assurance such as Lady Sellingworth had never had, though for many years she had had the appearance of it. Having this inordinate belief and this strong self-assurance, having also youth and beauty, and remembering certain little things which seemed to her proof positive that Craven was quite as susceptible to physical emotions as are most healthy and normal young men, she wondered why he had not returned to the Cafe Royal after leaving Lady Sellingworth decorously at her door. He had known perfectly well that she wished him to return. She had not even been subtle in conveying the wish to him. And yet he had defied it.

Or perhaps Lady Sellingworth had defied it for him.

Miss Van Tuyn was really as fond of Lady Sellingworth as she could be of a woman. She felt strongly the charm which so many others had felt. Lady Sellingworth also interested her brain and aroused strongly the curiosity which was a marked feature of her “make-up.” She had called Lady Sellingworth a book of wisdom. She was also much influenced by distinction and personal prestige.

About the distinction of her friend there could be no doubt; and the prestige of a once-famous woman of the world, and of a formerly great beauty whose name would have its place in the annals of King Edward the Seventh, still lingered about the now-faded recluse of Berkeley Square. But till this moment Miss Van Tuyn had never thought of Lady Sellingworth as a possible rival to herself.

Even now when the idea presented itself to her she was inclined to dismiss it as too absurd for consideration. And yet Craven had not come back, although he must know she was expecting him.

Perhaps Lady Sellingworth had made him go in against his will.

Miss Van Tuyn remembered the photograph she had seen at Mrs. Ackroyd's. That woman had the face of one who was on the watch for new lovers. And does a woman ever change? Only that very night she herself had said to Craven, as they walked from Soho to Regent Street, that she had a theory of the changelessness of character. Or perhaps she had really meant of temperament. She had even said that she believed that the Lady Sellingworth of to-day was to all intents and purposes the Lady Sellingworth of yesterday and of the other days of her past. If that were so—and she had meant what she had said—then in the white-haired woman, who seemed now indifferent to admiration and leagues removed from vanity, there still dwelt a woman on the pounce.

Young Craven was very good-looking, and there was something interesting about his personality. His casual manner, which was nevertheless very polite, was attractive. His blue eyes and black hair gave him an almost romantic appearance. He was very quiet, but was certainly far from being cold. And he

undoubtedly understood a great deal, and must have had many experiences of which he never talked. Miss Van Tuyn was subtle enough to know that he was subtle too. She had made up her mind to explore his subtlety. And now someone else was exploring it in Berkeley Square. The line reappeared in her low white forehead, and her cult for Lady Sellingworth, like flannel steeped in water, underwent a shrinking process. She felt strongly the indecency of grasping old age. And through her there floated strange echoes of voices which had haunted Lady Sellingworth's youth, voices which had died away long ago in Berkeley Square, but which are captured by succeeding generations of women, and which persist through the ages, finding ever new dwellings.

The night was growing late, but the Georgians bitterly complained of the absurdity of London having a closing time. The heat and the noise seemed to swell with the passing of the hours, and a curious and anemic brutality dawned with the midnight upon many of the faces around the narrow tables. They looked at the same time bloodless and hard. Eyes full of languor, or feverish with apparent expectation of some impending adventure, stared fixedly through the smoke wreaths at other eyes in the distance. Loud voices hammered through the murk. Foreheads beaded with perspiration began to look painfully expressive. It was as if all faces were undressed.

Dick Garstin, the famous painter, a small, slight, clean-shaven man, who looked like an intellectual jockey with his powerful curved nose, thin, close-set lips, blue cheeks and prominent, bony chin, and who fostered the illusion deliberately by dressing in large-checked suits of a sporting cut, with big buttons and mighty pockets, kept on steadily drinking green

chartreuse and smoking small, almost black, cigars. He was said to be made of iron, and certainly managed to combine perpetual dissipation with an astonishing amount of hard and admirable work. His models he usually found—or so he said—at the Cafe Royal, and he made a speciality of painting the portraits of women of the demi-monde, of women who drank, or took drugs, who were morphia maniacs, or were victims of other unhealthy and objectionable crazes. Nothing wholly sane, nothing entirely normal, nothing that suggested cold water, fresh air or sunshine, made any appeal to him. A daisy in the grass bored him; a gardenia emitting its strangely unreal perfume on a dung heap brought all his powers into play. He was an eccentric of genius, and in his strangeness was really true to himself, although normal people were apt to assert that his unlikeness to them was a pose. Simplicity, healthy goodness, the radiance of unsmirched youth seemed to his eyes wholly inexpressive. He loved the rotten as a dog loves garbage, and he raised it by his art to fascination. Even admirable people, walking through his occasional one-man exhibitions, felt a lure in his presentations of sin, of warped womanhood, and, gazing at the blurred faces, the dilated eyes, the haggard mouths, the vicious hands of his portraits, were shiveringly conscious of missed experiences, and for the moment felt ill at ease with what seemed just there, and just then, the dullness of virtue. The evil admired him because he made evil wonderful. To the perverse he was almost as a god.

Miss Van Tuyn was an admirer of Dick Garstin. She thought him a great painter, but apart from his gift his mind interested her intensely. He had a sort of melancholy understanding of human nature and of life, a strangely sure instinct in probing to the

bottom of psychological mysteries, a cruelly sure hand in tearing away the veils which the victims hoped would shroud their weaknesses and sins. These gifts made her brain respect him, and tickled her youthful curiosity. It was really for Dick that she had specially wished Lady Sellingworth to join the Georgians that night. And now, in her secret vexation, she was moved to speak of the once famous Edwardian.

"Have you ever heard of Lady Sellingworth?" she said, leaning her elbow on the marble table in front of her, and bending towards Dick Garstin so that he might hear her through the uproar.

He finished one more chartreuse and turned his small black eyes upon her. Pin-points of piercing light gleamed in them. He lifted his large, coarse and capable painter's hand to his lips, put his cigar stump between them, inhaled a quantity of smoke, blew it out through his hairy nostrils, and then said in a big bass voice:

"Never. Why should I have? I hate society women."

Miss Van Tuyn suppressed a smile at the absurd and hackneyed phrase, which reminded her of picture papers. For a moment she thought of Dick Garstin as a sort of inverted snob. But she wanted something from him, so she pursued her conversational way, and inflicted upon him a rapid description of Lady Sellingworth, as she had been and as she was, recording the plunge from artificial youth into perfectly natural elderliness which had now, to her thinking, become definite old age.

The painter gave her a sort of deep and melancholy attention, keeping the two pin-points of light directed steadily upon her.

"Did you ever know a woman doing such a thing as that, Dick?" she asked. "Did you ever know of a woman clinging to her youth, and then suddenly, in a moment, flinging all pretence of it away from her?"

He did not trouble, or perhaps did not choose, to answer her question, but instead made the statement:

"She had been thrown off by some lover. In a moment of furious despair, thinking all was over for her for ever, she let everything go. And then she hadn't the cheek to try to take any of it back. She hadn't the *toupet*. But"—he flung a large hand stained with pigments out in an ugly, insolent gesture—"any one of these *fleurs du mal* would have jumped back from the white to the bronze age when the fit was passed, without caring a damn what anyone thought of them. All the moral bravery is in the underworld. That is why I paint it."

"That is absolute truth," said Jennings, who was sitting next to Dick Garstin and smoking an enormous pipe. "The lower you go the more truth you find."

"Then I suppose the gutter is full of it," said Miss Van Tuyn.

"The Cafe Royal is," said Garstin. "There are free women here. Your women of society are for ever waiting on the opinion of what they call their set—God help them! Your Lady Sellingworth, for instance—would she dare, after showing herself as an old woman, to become a young woman again? Not she! Her precious set would laugh at her for it. But Cora, for instance—" He pointed to a table a little way off, at which a woman was sitting alone. "Do you suppose Cora cares one single damn what you, or I, or anyone else thinks of her? She knows we all know exactly what she is, and it makes not a particle of

difference to her. She'll tell you, or anyone else, what her nature is. If you don't happen to like it, you can go to Hell—for her. That's a free woman. Look at her face. Why, it's great, because her life and what she is is written all over it. I've painted her, and I'll paint her again. She's a human document, not a sentimental Valentine. Waiter! Waiter!"

His sonorous bass rolled out, dominating the uproar around him. Miss Van Tuyn looked at the woman he had been speaking of. She was tall, emaciated, high shouldered. Her face was dead white, with brightly painted lips. She had dark and widely dilated eyes which looked hungry, observant and desperate. The steadiness of their miserable gaze was like that of an animal. She was dressed in a perfectly cut coat and skirt with a neat collar and a black tie. Both her elbows were on the table, and her sharp white chin was supported by her hands, on which she wore white gloves sewn with black. Her features were good, and the shape of her small head was beautiful. Her expression was intense, but abstracted. In front of her was a small tumbler half full of a liquid the colour of water.

A waiter brought Garstin a gin-and-soda. He mixed drinks in an almost stupefying way, as few men can without apparent ill-effects unless they are Russians.

"Cora—a free woman, by God!" he observed, lighting another of his small but deadly cigars.

Enid Blunt, who was sitting with Smith the sculptor and others at the adjoining table, began slowly, and with an insolent drawl, reciting a sonnet. She was black as the night. Even her hands looked swarthy. There were yellow lights in her eyes. Her voice was guttural, and she pronounced English with a strong German accent, although she had no

German blood in her veins and had never been in Germany. The little Bolshevik, who had the face of a Russian peasant, candid eyes and a squat figure, listened with an air of profound and somehow innocent attention. She possessed neither morals nor manners, denied the existence of God, and wished to pull the whole fabric of European civilization to pieces. Her small brain was obsessed by a desire for anarchy. She hated all laws and was really a calmly ferocious little animal. But she looked like a creature of the fields, and had something of the shepherdess in her round grey eyes. Thapoulos, a Levantine, who had once been a courier in Athens, but who was now a rich banker with a taste for Bohemia, kept one thin yellow hand on her shoulder as he appeared to listen, with her, to the sonnet. Smith, with whom the little Bolshevik was allied for the time, and who did in clay very much what Garstin did on canvas, but more roughly and with less subtlety, looked at the Levantine's hand with indifference. A large heavy man, with square shoulders and short bowed legs, he scarcely knew why he had anything to do with Anna, or remembered how they had come together. He did not understand her at all, but she cooked certain Russian dishes which he liked, and minded dirt as little as he did. Perhaps that lack of minding had thrown them together. He did not know; nobody knew or cared.

"Well, I'm a free woman," said Miss Van Tuyn, in answer to Garstin's exclamation about Cora. "But you've never bothered to paint me."

She spoke with a touch of irritation. Somehow things seemed to be going vaguely wrong for her to-night.

"I suppose I am not near enough to the gutter yet," she added.

"You're too much of the out-of-door type for me," said Garstin, looking at her with almost fierce attention. "There isn't a line about you except now and then in your forehead just above the nose. And even that only comes from bad temper."

"Really, Dick," said Miss Van Tuyn, "you are absurd. It's putting your art into a strait waistcoat only to paint Cafe Royal types. But if you want lines Lady Sellingworth ought to sit for you."

Her mind that night could not detach itself from Lady Sellingworth. In the midst of the noise, and crush, and strong light of the cafe she continually imagined a spacious, quiet, and dimly lit room, very calm, very elegant, faintly scented with flowers; she continually visualized two figures near together, talking quietly, earnestly, confidentially. Why had she allowed Jennings to lead her astray? She might have been in that spacious room, too, if she had not been stupid.

"I want to ask you something about Lady Sellingworth," she continued. "Come a little nearer."

Garstin shifted his chair.

"But I don't know her," he said, rumpling his hair with an air of boredom. "An old society woman! What's the good of that to me? What have I to do with dowagers? Bow wow dowagers! Even Rembrandt—"

"Now, Dick, don't be a bore! If you would only listen occasionally, instead of continually—"

"Go ahead, young woman! And bend down a little more. Why don't you take off your hat?"

"I will."

She did so quickly, and bent her lovely head nearer to him.

"That's better. You've got a damned fine head. Ceres might have owned it. But classical stuff is no good to me. You ought to have been painted by Leighton and hung on the line in the precious old Royal Academy."

Again the tell-tale mark appeared above the bridge of Miss Van Tuyn's charming nose.

"I painted by a Royal Academician!" she exclaimed. "Thank you, Dick!"

Garstin, who was as mischievous as a monkey, and who loved to play cat and mouse with a woman, continued to gaze at her with his assumption of fierce attention.

"But Leighton being unfortunately dead, we can't go to him for your portrait," he continued gravely. "I think we shall have to hand you over to McEvoy. Smith!" he suddenly roared.

"Well, what is it, Dick, what is it?" said the sculptor in a thin voice, with high notes which came surprisingly through the thicket of tangled hair about the cavern of his mouth.

"Who shall paint Beryl as Ceres?"

"I refuse to be painted by anyone as Ceres!" said Miss Van Tuyn, almost viciously.

"It ought to have been Leighton. But he's been translated. I suggested McEvoy."

"Oh, Lord! He'd take the substance out of her, make her transparent!"

"I have it then! Orpen! It shall be Orpen! Then she will be hung on the line."

"You talk as if I were the week's washing," said Miss Van Tuyn, recovering herself. "But I would rather be on the clothes-line than on the line at the Royal Academy. No, Dick, I shall wait."

"What for, my girl?"

"For you to get over your acute attack of Cafe Royal. You don't know how they laugh at you in Paris for always painting morphinomanes and chloral drinkers. That sort of thing was done to death in France in the youth of Degas. It may be new over here. But England always lags behind in art, always follows at the heels of the French. You are too big a man—"

"I've got it, Smith," said Garstin, interrupting in the quiet even voice of one who had been indulging an undisturbed process of steady thought, and who now announced the definite conclusion reached. "I have it. Frank Dicksee is the man!"

At this moment Jennings, who for some time had been uneasily groping through his beard, and turning the rings round and round on his thin damp fingers, broke in with a flood of speech about modern French art, in which names of all the latest painters of Paris spun by like twigs on a spate of turbulent water. The Georgians were soon up and after him in full cry. It was now nearly closing time, and several friends of Garstin's, models and others, who had been scattered about in the cafe, and who were on their way out, stopped to hear what was going on. Some adherents of Jennings also came up. The discussion became animated. Voices waxed roaringly loud or piercingly shrill. The little Bolshevik, suddenly losing her round faced calm and the shepherdess look in her eyes, burst forth in a voluble outcry in praise of the beauty of anarchy, expressing herself in broken English, spoken with a cockney accent, in broken French and liquid Russian. Enid Blunt, increasingly guttural, and mingling German words with her Bedford Park English, refuted, or strove to refute, Jennings's ecstatic praise of French verse, citing rapidly poems

composed by members of the Sitwell group, songs of Siegfried Sassoon, and even lyrics by Lady Margaret Sackville and Miss Victoria Sackville West. Jennings, who thought he was still speaking about pictures and statues, though he had now abandoned the painters and sculptors to their horrid fates in the hands of Garstin and Smith, replied with a vivacity rather Gallic than British, and finally, emerging almost with passion from his native language, burst into the only tongue which expresses anything properly, and assailed his enemy in fluent French. Thapoulos muttered comments in modern Greek. And the Turkish refugee from Smyrna quoted again and again the words of praise from Pierre Loti, which had made of him a moral wreck, a nuisance to all who came into contact with him, a mere prancing megalomaniac.

Miss Van Tuyn did not join in the carnival of praises and condemnations. She had suddenly recovered her mental balance. Her native irony was roused from its sleep. She was once more the cool, self-possessed and beautiful girl from whose violet eyes satire looked out on all those about her.

“Let them all make fools of themselves for my benefit,” was her comfortable thought as she listened to the chatter of tongues.

Even Garstin was being thoroughly absurd, although his adherents stood round catching his vociferations as if they were so many precious jewels.

“The most ridiculous human beings in the world at certain moments are those who work in the arts,” was Miss Van Tuyn’s mental comment. “Painters, poets, composers, novelists! All these people are living in blinkers. They can’t see the wide world.

They can only see studies and studios."

She wished she had Craven with her to share in her silent irony. At that moment she felt some of the very common conceit of the rich dilettante, who tastes but who never creates, for whom indeed most of the creation is arduously accomplished.

"They sweat for me, exhaust themselves for me, tear each other to pieces for me! If I were not here, if the world contained no such products as Beryl Van Tuyn and her like, female and male, what would all the Garstins, and Jenningses and Smiths and Enid Blunts do?"

And she felt superior in her incapacity to create because of her capacity to judge. Wrongly she might, and probably did, judge, but she and her like judged, spent much of their lives in eagerly judging. And the poor creators, whatever they might say, whatever airs they might give themselves, toiled to gain the favourable judgment of the innumerable Beryl Van Tuyns.

Closing time put an end at last to the fracas of tongues. Even geniuses must be driven forth from the electric light to the stars, however unwilling to go into a healthy atmosphere.

There was a general movement. Miss Van Tuyn put on her hat and fur coat, the latter with the assistance of Jennings. Garstin slipped into a yellow and brown ulster, and jammed a soft hat on to his head with its thick tangle of hair. He lit another cigar and waved his hand to Cora, who was on her way out with a friend.

"A free woman—by God!" he said once more, swinging round to where Miss Van Tuyn was standing between Jennings and Thapoulos. "I'll paint her again. I'll make a masterpiece of her."

"I'm sure you will. But now walk with me to the Hyde Park Hotel. It's on your way to Chelsea."

"She doesn't care whether I paint her or not. Cora doesn't care. Art means nothing to her. She's out for life, hunks of life. She's after life like a hungry dog after the refuse on a scrap heap. That's why I'll paint her. She's hungry. Look at her face."

Miss Van Tuyn, perhaps moved by the sudden, almost ferocious urgency of his loud bass voice, turned to have a last look at the woman who was "out for life"; but Cora was already lost in the crowd, and instead of gazing into the dead-white face which suggested to her some strange putrefaction, she gazed full into the face of a man. He was not far off —by the doorway through which people were streaming out into Regent Street—and he happened to be looking at her. She had been expecting to see a whiteness which was corpse-like. Instead she was almost startled by the sight of a skin which suggested to her one of her own precious bronzes in Paris. It was certainly less deep in colour, but its smooth and equal, unvarying tint of brown somehow recalled to her those treasures which she genuinely loved and assiduously collected. And he was marvellously handsome as some of her bronzes were handsome, with strong, manly, finely cut features—audacious features, she thought. His mouth specially struck her by its full-lipped audacity. He was tall and had an athletic figure. She could not help swiftly thinking what a curse the modern wrappings of such a figure were; the tubes of cloth or serge—he wore blue serge —the unmeaning waistcoat with tie and pale-blue collar above it, the double-breasted jacket. And then she saw his eyes. Magnificent eyes, she thought them, soft, intelligent, appealing, brown like his skin and hair. And they were gazing at her with a sort of

sympathetic intention.

Suddenly she felt oddly restored. Really she had had a bad evening. Things had not gone quite right for her. She had saved the situation in a measure just at the end by taking refuge in irony. But in her irony she had been quite alone. And to be quite alone in anything is apt to be dull. Craven had let her down. Lady Sellingworth had not played the game—or had played it too well, which was worse. Garstin had been unusually tiresome with his allusions to the Royal Academy and his preposterous concentration on the Cora woman.

This brown stranger's gaze was really like manna falling from heaven in a hungry land. She boldly returned the gaze, stared, trusting to her own beauty. And as she stared she tried to sum up the stranger, and failed. She guessed him a little over thirty, but not much. And there somehow, after the quick, instinctive guess at his age, she stuck.

"Come on, Beryl!"

Garstin's deep strong voice startled her. At that moment she felt angry with him for calling her by her Christian name, though he had done it ever since they had first made friends—if they were friends—in Paris two years ago, when he had come to have a look at her bronzes with a French painter whom she knew well.

"You are going to walk back with me?"

"To be sure I am. He is devilish good looking, but he ought to be out of those clothes."

"Dick!"

He smiled at her sardonically. She knew that he seldom missed anything, but his sharp observation in the midst of the squash of people going out of the cafe took her genuinely aback. And then he had got

at her thought, at one of her most definite thoughts at least, about the brown stranger!

"You are disgustingly clever," she said, as they made their way out, followed by the Georgians and their attendant cosmopolitans. "I believe I dislike you for it to-night."

"Then take a cab home and I'll walk."

"No, thank you. I'd rather endure your abominable intelligence."

He smiled, curling up the left corner of his sensual mouth.

"Come on then. Don't bother about good-byes to all these fools. They'll never stop talking if they once begin good-bying. Like sheep they don't know how to get away from each other since they've been herded together. Come on! Come on!"

He thrust an arm through hers and almost roughly, but forcibly, got her away through the throng. As he did so she was pushed by, or accidentally pushed against, several people. For a brief instant she was in contact with a man. She felt his side, the bone of one of his hips. It was the man who had looked at her in the cafe. She saw in the night the gleam of his big brown eyes looking down into hers. Then she and Garstin were tramping—Garstin always seemed to be tramping when he walked—over the pavement of Regent Street.

"Catch on tight! Let's get across and down to Piccadilly."

"Very well."

Presently they were passing the Ritz. They got away from the houses on that side. Now on their left were the tall railings that divided them from the stretching spaces of the Park shrouded in the

darkness and mystery of night.

"Well, my girl, what are you after?" said Garstin, who never troubled about the conventionalities, and seemed never to care what anyone thought of him and his ways. "Go ahead. Let me have it. I'm not coming in to your beastly hotel, you know. So get on with your bow wow Dowager."

"So you remember that I had begun—"

"Of course I do."

"Do you ever miss anything—let anything escape you?"

"I don't know. Well, what is it?"

"I wanted to tell you something about Lady Sellingworth which has puzzled me and a friend of mine. It is a sort of social mystery."

"Social! Oh, Lord!"

"Now, Dick, don't be a snob. You are a snob in your pretended hatred of all decent people."

"D'you call your society dames decent?"

"Be quiet if you can! You're worse than a woman."

He did not say anything. His horsey profile looked hard and expressionless in the night. As she glanced at it she could not help thinking of Newmarket. He ought surely to have been a jockey with that face and figure.

"You are listening?"

He said nothing. But he turned his face and she saw the two pin-points of light. That was enough. She told him about the theft of Lady Sellingworth's jewels, her neglect of all endeavour to recover them, her immediate plunge into middle-age after the theft, and her avoidance of general society ever since.

"What do you make of it?" she asked, when she

had finished.

"Make of it?"

"Yes."

"Does your little mind find it mysterious?"

"Well, isn't it rather odd for a woman who loses fifty thousand pounds' worth of jewels never to try to get them back?"

"Not if they were stolen by a lover."

"You think—"

"It's as obvious as that Martin, R.A., can't paint and I can."

"But I believe they were stolen at the *Gare du Nord*. Now does that look like a lover?"

"I didn't say the *Gare du Nord* looked like a lover."

"Don't be utterly ridiculous."

"I don't care where they were stolen—your old dowager's Gew-gaws. Depend upon it they were stolen by some man she'd been mixed up with, and she knew it, and didn't dare to prosecute. I can't see any mystery in the matter."

"Perhaps you are right."

"Of course I am right."

Miss Van Tuyn said nothing for two or three minutes. Her mind had gone from Lady Sellingworth to Craven, and then flitted on—she did not know why—to the man who had gazed at her so strangely in the Cafe Royal. She had been feeling rather neglected, badly treated almost, and his look had restored her to her normal supreme self-confidence. That fact would always be to the stranger's credit. She wondered very much who he was. His good looks had almost startled her. She began also to wonder what Garstin had thought of him. Garstin

seldom painted men. But he did so now and then. Two of his finest portraits were of men: one a Breton fisherman who looked like an apache of the sea, the other a Spanish bullfighter dressed in his Sunday clothes with the book of the Mass in his hand. Miss Van Tuyn had seen them both. She now found herself wishing that Garstin would paint a portrait of the man who had looked at her. But was he a Cafe Royal type? At present Garstin painted nothing which did not come out of the Cafe Royal.

"That man—" she said abruptly.

"I was just wondering when we should get to him!" interjected Garstin. "I thought your old dowager wouldn't keep us away from him for long."

"I suppose you know by this time, Dick, that I don't care in the least what you think of me."

"The only reason I bother about you is because you are a thoroughly independent cuss and have a damned fine head."

"Why don't you paint me?"

"I may come to it. But if I do I'm mortally afraid they'll make an academician of me. Go on about your man."

"Didn't you think him a wonderful type?"

"Yes."

"Tell me! If you want to paint someone, what do you do?"

"Do? Go up and tell him or her to come along to the studio."

"Whether you know them or not?"

"Of course."

"You ought to paint that man."

"Just because you want me to pick hum up and

then introduce him to you. I don't paint for reasons of that kind."

"Have you ever seen him before to-night?"

"Yes. I saw him last night."

"For the first time?"

"Yes."

"At the Cafe Royal?"

"Yes."

"What do you think he is?"

"Probably a successful blackmailer."

For some obscure reason Miss Van Tuyn felt outraged by this opinion of Garstin.

"The fact is," she said, but in quite an impersonal voice, "that your mind is getting warped by living always among the scum of London, and by studying and painting only the scum. It really is a great pity. A painter ought to be a man of the world, not a man of the underworld."

"And the *a propos* of all this?" asked Garstin

"You are beginning to see the morphia maniac, the drunkard, the cocaine fiend, the prostitute, the—"

"Blackmailer?"

"Yes, the blackmailer, if you like, in everyone you meet. You live in a sort of bad dream, Dick. You paint in a bad dream. If you go on like this you will lose all sense of the true values."

"But I honestly do believe the man you want me to pick up and then introduce to you to be a successful blackmailer."

"Why? Do you know anything about him?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Then your supposition about him is absurd and

rather disgusting."

"It isn't a supposition."

"What is it then?"

"Perhaps you don't realize, my girl, that I'm highly sensitive."

"You seldom seem so. But, of course, I realize that you couldn't paint as you do unless you were."

"Instead of using the word supposition in connexion with a fellow like myself your discrimination should have led you to choose the word instinct."

"Oh?"

"Let's cross over. Catch on!"

They crossed to the side of the road next to Hyde Park.

"My instinct tells me that the magnificently handsome man who stared at you to-night is of the tribe that lives by making those who are indiscreetly susceptible to beauty pay heavy tribute, in hard cash or its equivalent. He is probably a king in the underworld. Perhaps I really will paint him. No, I'm not coming in."

He left her on the doorstep of the hotel and tramped off towards Chelsea.

CHAPTER II

Craven went away from Berkeley Square that night

still under the spell and with a mind unusually vivid and alive. As he had told Lady Sellingworth, he was now twenty-nine and no longer considered himself young. At the F.O. there are usually a good many old young men, just as in London society there are always a great many young old women. Craven was one of the former. He was clever, discreet and careful in his work. He was also ambitious and intended to rise in the career he had chosen. To succeed he knew that energy was necessary, and consequently he was secretly energetic. But his energy did not usually show above the surface. Tradition rather forbade that. He had a quiet, even a lazy manner as a rule, and he thought he often felt old, especially in London. There was something in the London atmosphere which he considered antagonistic to youth. He had felt decades younger in Italy, especially when his ambassador had taken him to Naples in summer-time. But that was all over now. It might be a long time before he was again attached to an embassy.

When he reached his rooms, or, rather, his flat, which was just off Curzon Street, he went to look at his bookshelves, and ran his finger along them until he came to the poems of William Watson, which were next to Rupert Brooke's poems. After looking at the index he found the lyric he wanted, sat down, lit his pipe, and read it four times, thinking of Lady Sellingworth. Then he put away the book and meditated. Finally—it was after one o'clock—he went almost reluctantly to bed.

In the morning he, of course, felt different—one always feels different in the morning—but nevertheless he was aware that something definite had come into his life which had made a change in it. This something was his acquaintance with Lady

Sellingworth. Already he found it difficult to believe that he had lived for twenty-eight years without knowing her.

He was one of those rather unusual young men who feel strongly the vulgarity of their own time, and who have in them something which seems at moments to throw back into the past. Not infrequently he felt that this mysterious something was lifting up the voice of the *laudator temporis acti*. But what did he, the human being who contained this voice and many other voices, know of those times now gone? They seemed to draw him in ignorance, and had for him something of the fascination which attaches to the unknown. And this fascination, or something akin to it, hung about Lady Sellingworth, and even about the house in which she dwelt, and drew him to both. He knew that he had never been in any house in London which he liked so much as he liked hers, that in no other London house had he ever felt so much at home, so almost curiously in place. The mere thought of the hall with its blazing fire, its beehive-chair, its staircase with the balustrade of wrought ironwork and gold, filled him with a longing to return to it, to hang up his hat —and remain. And the lady of the house was ideally right in it. He wondered whether in the future he would often be there, whether Lady Sellingworth would allow him to be one of the few real intimates to whom her door was open. He hoped so; he believed so; but he was not quite certain about it. For there was something elusive about her, not insincere but just that—elusive. She might not care to see very much of him although he knew that she liked him. They had touched the fringe of intimacy on the preceding night.

After his work at the Foreign Office was over he

walked to the club, and the first man he saw on entering it was Francis Braybrooke just back from Paris. Braybrooke was buying some stamps in the hall, and greeted Craven with his usual discreet cordiality.

"I'll come in a moment," he said. "If you're not busy we might have a talk. I shall like to hear how you fared with Adela Sellingworth."

Craven begged him to come, and in a few minutes they were settled in two deep arm-chairs in a quiet corner, and Craven was telling of his first visit to Berkeley Square.

"Wasn't I right?" said Braybrooke. "Could Adela Sellingworth ever be a back number? I think that was *your* expression."

Craven slightly reddened.

"Was it?"

"I think so," said Braybrooke, gently but firmly.

"I was a—a young fool to use it."

"I fancy it's a newspaper phrase that has pushed its way somehow into the language."

"Vulgarity pushes its way in everywhere now. Braybrooke, I want to thank you very much for your introduction to Lady Sellingworth. You were right. She has a wonderful charm. It's a privilege for a young man, as I am I suppose, to know her. To be with her makes life seem more what it ought to be, what one wants it to be."

Braybrooke looked extremely pleased, almost touched.

"I am glad you appreciate her," he said. "It shows that real distinction has still a certain appeal. And so you met Beryl Van Tuyn there."

"Do you know her?"

Braybrooke raised his eyebrows.

"Know her? How should I not know her when I am constantly running over to Paris?"

"Then I suppose she's very much 'in it' there?"

"Yes. She is criticized, of course. She lives very unconventionally, although Fanny Cronin is always officially with her."

"Fanny Cronin?"

"Her *dame de compagnie*."

"Oh, the lady who reads Paul Bourget!"

"I believe she does. Anyhow, one seldom sees her about. Beryl Van Tuyn is very audacious. She does things that no other lovely girl in her position would ever dare to do, or could do without peril to her reputation. But somehow she brings them off. Mind, I haven't a word to say against her. She is exceedingly clever and has mastered the difficult art of making people accept from her what they wouldn't accept for a moment from any other unmarried girl in society. She may be said to have a position of her own. Do you like her?"

"Yes, I think I do. She is lovely and very good company."

"Frenchmen rave about her."

"And Frenchwomen?"

"Oh, they all know her. She carries things through. That really is the art of life, to be able to carry things through. Her bronzes are quite remarkable. By the way, she has an excellent brain. She cares for the arts. She is by no means a fribble. I have been surprised by her knowledge more than once."

"She seems very fond of Lady Sellingworth. She wants to get her over to Paris."

"Adela Sellingworth won't go."

"Why not?"

"She seems to hate Paris now. It is years since she had stayed there."

After a pause Craven said:

"Lady Sellingworth is something of a mystery, I think. I wonder—I wonder if she feels lonely in that big house of hers."

"Far more people feel lonely than seem lonely," said Braybrooke.

"I expect they do. But I think that somehow Lady Sellingworth seems lonely. And yet she is full of mockery."

"Mockery?"

"Yes. I feel it."

"But didn't you find her very kind?"

"Oh, yes. I meant of self-mockery."

Braybrooke looked rather dubious.

"I think," continued Craven, perhaps a little obstinately, "that she looks upon herself with irony, while Miss Van Tuyn looks upon others with irony. Perhaps, though, that is rather a question of the different outlooks of youth and age."

"H'm?"

Braybrooke pulled at his grey-and-brown beard.

"I scarcely see—I scarcely see, I confess, why age should be more disposed to self-mockery than youth. Age, if properly met and suitably faced—that is, with dignity and self-respect, such as Adela Sellingworth undoubtedly shows—has no reason for self-mockery; whereas youth, although charming and delightful might well laugh occasionally at its own foolishness."

"Ah, but it never does!"

"I think for once I shall have a cocktail," said

Braybrooke, signing to an attendant in livery, who at that moment came from some hidden region and looked around warily.

"You will join me, Craven? Let it be dry Martinis. Eh? Yes! Two dry Martinis."

As the attendant went away Braybrooke added:

"My dear boy, if you will excuse me for saying so, are you not getting the Foreign Office habit of being older than your years? I hope you will not begin wearing horn spectacles while your sight is still unimpaired."

Craven laughed and felt suddenly younger.

The two dry Martinis were brought, and the talk grew a little more lively. Braybrooke, who seldom took a cocktail, was good enough to allow it to go to his head, and became, for him, almost unbuttoned. Craven, entertained by his elderly friend's unwonted exuberance, talked more freely and a little more intimately to him than usual, and presently alluded to the events of the previous night, and described his expedition to Soho.

"D'you know the *Ristorante Bella Napoli*?" he asked Braybrooke. "Vesuvius all over the walls, and hair-dressers playing Neapolitan tunes?"

Braybrooke did not, but seemed interested, for he cocked his head to one side, and looked almost volcanic for a moment over the tiny glass in his hand. Craven described the restaurant, the company, the general atmosphere, the Chianti and Toscanas, and, proceeding with artful ingenuity, at last came to his climax—Lady Sellingworth and Miss Van Tuyn in their corner with their feet on the sanded floor and a smoking dish of Risotto alla Milanese before them.

"Adela Sellingworth in Soho! Adela Sellingworth in the midst of such a society!" exclaimed the world's

governess with unfeigned astonishment. “What could have induced her—but to be sure, Beryl Van Tuyn is famous for her escapades, and for bringing the most unlikely people into them. I remember once in Paris she actually induced Madame Marretti to go to—ha—ah!”

He pulled himself up short.

“These Martinis are surely very strong!” he murmured into his beard reproachfully.

“I don’t think so.”

“My doctor tells me that all cocktails are rank poison. They set up fermentation.”

“In the mind?” asked Craven.

“No—no—in the—they cause indigestion, in fact. How poor Adela Sellingworth must have hated it!”

“I don’t think she did. She seemed quite at home. Besides, she has been to many of the Paris cafes. She told me so.”

“It must have been a long time ago. And in Paris it is all so different. And you sat with them?”

Craven recounted the tale of the previous evening. When he came to the Cafe Royal suggestion the world’s governess looked really outraged.

“Adela Sellingworth at the Cafe Royal!” he said. “How could Beryl Van Tuyn? And with a Bolshevik, a Turkish refugee—from Smyrna too!”

“There were the Georgians for chaperons.”

“Georgians!” said Braybrooke, with almost sharp vivacity. “I really hate that word. We are all subjects of King George. No one has a right to claim a monopoly of the present reign. I—waiter, bring me two more dry Martinis, please.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What was I saying? Oh, yes—about that preposterous claim of certain groups and coteries! If anybody is a Georgian we are all Georgians together. I am a Georgian, if it comes to that.”

“Why not? But Lady Sellingworth is definitely not one.”

“How so? I must deny that, really. I know these young poets and painters like to imagine that everyone who has had the great honour of living under Queen Victoria—”

“Forgive me! It isn’t that at all.”

“Well, then—oh, our dry Martinis! How much is it, waiter?”

“Two shillings, sir.”

“Two—thank you. Well, then, Craven, I affirm that Lady Sellingworth is as much a Georgian as any young person who writes bad poetry in Cheyne Walk or paints impossible pictures in Glebe Place.”

“She would deny that. She said, in my presence and in that of Sir Seymour Portman and Miss Van Tuyn, that she did not belong to this age.”

“What an—what an extraordinary statement!” said Braybrooke, drinking down his second cocktail at a gulp.

“She said she was—or rather, had been—an Edwardian. She would not have it that she belonged to the present day at all.”

“A whim! It must have been a whim! The best of women are subject to caprice. It is the greatest mistake to class yourself as belonging to the past. It dates you. It—it—it practically inters you!”

“I think she meant that her glory was Edwardian, that her real life was then. I don’t think she chooses to realize how immensely attractive she is now in the

Georgian days."

"Well, I really can't understand such a view. I shall —when I meet her—I shall really venture to remonstrate with her about it. And besides, apart from the personal question, one owes something to one's contemporaries. Upon my word, I begin to understand at last why certain very charming women haven't a good word to say for Adela Sellingworth."

"You mean the 'old guard,' I suppose?"

"I don't wish to mention any names. It is always a mistake to mention names. One cannot guard against it too carefully. But having done what she did ten years ago dear Adela Sellingworth should really—but it is not for me to criticise her. Only there is nothing people—women—are more sensitive about than the question of age. No one likes to be laid on the shelf. Adela Sellingworth has chosen to—well—one might feel such a very drastic step to be quite uncalled for —quite uncalled for. And so—but you haven't told me! Did Adela Sellingworth allow herself to be persuaded to go to the Cafe Royal?"

"No, she didn't."

"Thank God for that!" said the world's governess, looking immensely relieved.

"I escorted her to Berkeley Square."

"Good! good!"

"But we walked to the door of the Cafe Royal."

"What—down Shaftesbury Avenue?"

"Yes!"

"Past the Cafe Monico and—Piccadilly Circus?"

"Yes!"

"What time was it?"

"Well after ten."

"Very unsuitable! I must say that—very unsuitable! That corner by the Monico at night is simply chock-a-block—I—I should say, teems, that's the word—teems with people whom nobody knows or could ever wish to know. Beryl Van Tuyn should really be more careful. She grows quite reckless. And Adela Sellingworth is so tall and unmistakable. I do hope nobody saw her."

"I'm afraid scores of people did!"

"No, no! I mean people she knows—women especially."

"I don't think she would care."

"Her friends would care *for* her!" retorted Braybrooke, almost severely. "To retire from life is all very well. I confess I think it a mistake. But that is merely one man's opinion. But to retire from life, a great life such as hers was, and then after ten years to burst forth into—into the type of existence represented by Shaftesbury Avenue and the Cafe Royal, that would be unheard of, and really almost unforgivable."

"It would, in fact, be old wildness," said Craven, with a faint touch of sarcasm.

"Old wildness! What a very strange expression!"

"But I think it covers the suggested situation. And we know what old wildness is—or if we don't some of the 'old guard' can teach us. But Lady Sellingworth will never be the one to give us such a horrible lesson. If there is a woman in London with true dignity, dignity of the soul, she has it. She has almost too much of it even. I could almost wish she had less."

Braybrooke looked suddenly surprised and then alertly observant.

"Less dignity?" he queried, after a slight but significant pause.

"Yes."

"But can a *grande dame*, as she is, ever have too much dignity of the soul?"

"I think even such a virtue as that can be carried to morbidity. It may become a weapon against the happiness of the one who has it. Those who have no dignity are disgusting. As Lady Sellingworth said to me, they create nausea—"

"Nausea!" interrupted Braybrooke, in an almost startled voice.

"Yes—in others. But those who have too much dignity wrap themselves up in a secret reserve, and reserve shuts out natural happiness, I think, and creates loneliness. I'm sure Lady Sellingworth feels terribly alone in that beautiful house. I know she does."

"Has she told you so?"

"Good heavens—no. But she never would."

"She need not be alone," observed Braybrooke. "She could have a companion to-morrow."

"I can't imagine her with a Fanny Cronin."

"I don't mean a *dame de compagnie*. I mean a husband."

Craven's ardent blue eyes looked a question.

"Seymour Portman is always there waiting and hoping."

"Sir Seymour?" cried Craven.

"Well, why not?" said Braybrooke, almost with severity. "Why not?"

"But his age!"

The world's governess, who was older than Sir

Seymour, though not a soul knew it, looked more severe.

"His age would be in every way suitable to Adele Sellingworth's," he said firmly.

"Oh, but—"

"Go on!"

"I can't see an old man like Sir Seymour as *her* husband. Oh, no! It wouldn't do. She would never marry such an old man. I am certain of that."

Braybrooke pinched his lips together and felt for his beard.

"I hope," he said, lifting and lowering his bushy eyebrows, "I hope, at any rate, she will never be so foolish as to marry a man who is what is called young. That would be a terrible mistake, both for her and for him. Now I really must be going. I am dining to-night rather early with—oh, by the way, it is with one of your chiefs—Eric Learington. A good fellow—a good fellow! We are going to some music afterwards at Queen's Hall. Good-bye. I'm very glad you realize Adela Sellingworth's great distinction and charm. But—" He paused, as if considering something carefully; then he added:

"But don't forget that she and Seymour Portman would be perfectly suitable to one another. She is a delightful creature, but she is no longer a young woman. But I need not tell you that."

And having thus done the needless thing he went away, walking with a certain unwonted self-consciousness which had its source solely in dry Martinis.

CHAPTER III

Craven realized that he had “given himself away” directly Braybrooke was gone. The two empty glasses stood on a low table in front of his chair. He looked at them and for an instant was filled with anger against himself. To be immortal—he was old-fashioned enough to believe surreptitiously in his own immortality—and yet to be deflected from the straight path of good sense by a couple of dry Martinis! It was humiliating, and he raged against himself.

Braybrooke had certainly gone away thinking that he, Craven, had fallen in love with Lady Sellingworth. That thought, too, might possibly have come out of one of those little glasses, the one on the left. But nevertheless it would stick in Braybrooke’s mind long after the Martinis were forgotten.

And what if it did?

Craven said that to himself, but he felt far less defiant than sensitively uncomfortable. He was surprised by himself. Evidently he had not known his own feelings. When Braybrooke mentioned Seymour Portman as a suitable husband for Lady Sellingworth something strong, almost violent, had risen up in Craven to protest. What was that? And why was he suddenly so angry? He was surely not going to make a fool of himself. He felt almost youthfully alarmed and also rather excited. An odd sense of romance suddenly floated about him. Did that too come from those cursed dry Martinis? Impossible to be sure for the moment. He found himself wondering whether

teetotallers knew more about their souls than moderate drinkers, or less.

But the odd sense of romance persisted when the effect of the dry Martinis must certainly have worn off. It was something such as Craven had never known, or even imagined before. He had had his little adventures, and about them had thrown the woven robes that gleam with prismatic colours; he had even had deeper, passionate episodes—as he thought them—in his life. As he had acknowledged in the *Ristorante Bella Napoli* he had seldom or never started on a journey abroad without a secret hope of romance meeting him on the way. And sometimes it had met him. Or so he had believed at the time. But in all these episodes of the past there had been something definitely physical, something almost horribly natural, a prompting of the body, the kind of thing which belongs to youth, any youth, and which any doctor could explain in a few crude words. Even then, in those now dead moments, Craven had sometimes felt sensitive youth's impotent anger at being under the yoke which is laid upon the necks of innumerable others, clever, dull, aristocratic, common, the elect and the hopelessly vulgar.

In this new episode he was emancipated from that. He was able to feel that he was peculiar, if not unique. In the strong attraction which drew him towards Lady Sellingworth there was certainly nothing of the—well, to himself he called it "the medically physical." Something of the body there might possibly be. Indeed, perhaps it was impossible that there should not be. But the predominant factor had nothing whatever to do with the body. He felt certain of that.

When he got home from the Club he found on his

table a note from Beryl Van Tuyn:

HYDE PARK HOTEL, Thursday.

My dear Mr. Craven,—What a pity you couldn't get away last night. But you were quite right to play Squire of Dames to our dear Lady Sellingworth. We had a rather wonderful evening after you had gone. Dick Garstin was in his best vein. Green chartreuse brings out his genius in a wonderful way. I wish it would do for me what it does for him. But I have tried it—in small doses—quite in vain. He and I walked home together and talked of everything under the stars. I believe he is going to paint me. Next time you make your way to the Bella Napoli we might go together. Two lovers of Italy must always feel at home there, and the sight of Vesuvius is encouraging, I think. So don't forget that my "beat," as you call it, often lies in Soho.

Isn't dear Adela Sellingworth delightful? She looked like a wonderful antique in that Italian frame. I love every line in her face and would give my best bronze to have white hair like hers. But somehow I am almost glad she didn't fall to the Cafe Royal. She is right. It is too Georgian for her. She is, as she says, definitely Edwardian and would scarcely understand the new jargon which comes as easily as how d'you do to *our* lips.

By the way, coming out of the Cafe Royal last night I saw a living bronze.—Yours,

BERYL VAN TUYN.

This note half amused and half irritated Craven on a first reading. On a second reading irritation predominated in him. Miss Van Tuyn's determined relegation of Lady Sellingworth to the past seemed somehow to strike at him, to make him—or to intend to make him—ridiculous; and her deliberate classing

of him with herself in the underlined "*our*" seemed rather like an attempt to assert authority, the authority of youth over him. But no doubt this was very natural. Craven was quite sure that Miss Van Tuyn cared nothing about him. But he was a not disagreeable and quite presentable young man; he had looked into her violet eyes, had pressed her hand, had held it longer than was at all necessary, had in fact shown that he was just a young man and easily susceptible; and so she did not choose to let an elderly woman take possession of him even for an hour without sharpening a weapon or two and bringing them into use.

No wonder that men are conceited when women so swiftly take up arms on their account!

For a moment Craven almost disliked Miss Van Tuyn, and made up his mind that there would be no "next time" for him in Soho while she was in London. He knew that whenever they met he would feel her attraction; but he now classed it with those attractions of the past which were disgustingly explicable, and which just recently he had learnt to understand in a way that was almost old.

Was he putting on horn spectacles while his eyesight was still unimpaired? He felt doubtful, almost confused for a moment. Was his new feeling for Lady Sellingworth subtly pulling him away from his youth? Where was he going? Perhaps this new sensation of movement was only deceptive; perhaps he was not on the way to an unknown region. For a moment he wished that he could talk freely, openly, with some understanding friend, a man of course. But though he had plenty of men friends he could not think of one he would be able to confide his present feelings to.

Already he began to realize the human ridicule which always attends upon any departure from what, according to the decision of all absolutely ordinary people, is strictly normal.

Everybody would understand and approve if he were to fall desperately in love with Beryl Van Tuyn; but if he were to prefer a great friendship with Lady Sellingworth to a love affair with her youthful and beautiful friend no one would understand, and everybody would be ready to laugh and condemn.

He knew this and yet he felt obstinate, mulish almost, as he sat down to reply non-committally to Miss Van Tuyn's letter. It was only when he did this that he thought seriously about its last words.

Why had she troubled to write them down? Comparatively young though he was he knew that a woman's "by the way" usually means anything rather than what it seems to mean—namely, a sentence thrown out by chance because it has just happened to turn up in the mind. "A living bronze." Miss Van Tuyn was exceptionally fond of bronzes and collected them with enthusiasm. She knew of course the Museum at Naples. Craven had often visited it when he had been staying at the Villa Rosebery. He could remember clearly almost every important bronze in that wonderful collection. He realized what "a living bronze" must mean when written of by a woman. Miss Van Tuyn had evidently seen an amazingly handsome man coming out of the Cafe Royal. But why should she tell him about it? Perhaps her motive was the very ordinary one, an attempt to rouse the swift jealousy of the male animal. She was certainly "up" to all the usual feminine tricks. He thoroughly realized her vanity and, contrasting it with Lady Sellingworth's apparently almost careless lack of self-consciousness, he wondered whether Lady

Sellingworth could ever have been what she was said to have been. If so, as a snake sheds its skin she must surely have sloughed her original nature. He was thankful for that, thankful for her absolute lack of pose and vanity. He even delighted in her self-mockery, divined by him. So few women mocked at themselves and so many mocked at others.

If Miss Van Tuyn had intended to give a flick to his jealousy at the end of her letter she had failed. If she met fifty living bronzes and added them to her collection it was nothing to him. He compared his feeling when Braybrooke had suggested Seymour Portman as a husband for Lady Sellingworth with his lack of feeling about Miss Van Tuyn and her bronze, and he was almost startled. And yet Miss Van Tuyn was lovely and certainly did not want him to go quite away out of her ken. And, when she chose, she had made him very foolish about her.

What did it all mean?

He wrote a little letter in answer to hers, charmingly polite, but rather vague about Soho. At the end of it, before signing himself “Yours”—he could do no less with her letter before him—he put, “I feel rather intrigued about the living bronze. Was it in petticoats or trousers?”

CHAPTER IV

Craven had been right in his supposition about the

world's governess. Braybrooke had gone away from the Club that evening firmly persuaded that his young friend had done the almost unbelievable thing, had fallen in love with Adela Sellingworth. He was really perturbed about it. A tremulous sense of the fitness of things governed his whole life, presided as it were over all his actions and even over most of his thoughts. He instinctively shrank from everything that was bizarre, from everything that was, as he called it, "out of keeping." He was responsible for the introduction of young Craven into Adela Sellingworth's life. It would be very unfortunate indeed, it would be almost disastrous, if the result of that well-meant introduction were to be a preposterous passion!

When the effect of the two cocktails had subsided he tried to convince himself that he was giving way to undue anxiety, that there was really nothing in his supposition except alcohol taken in the afternoon. But this effort failed. He had lived a very long time, much longer than almost anyone knew; he was intimately familiar with the world, and, although unyieldingly discreet himself, was well acquainted with its follies and sins. Life had taught him that practically nothing is impossible. He had known old men to run—or rather to walk—off with young girls; he had known old women to be infatuated with mere boys; he had known well-born women to marry grooms and chauffeurs; a Peer of his acquaintance had linked himself to a cabman's daughter and stuck to her; chorus girls of course perpetually married into the Peerage; human passions—although he could not understand it—ran as wild as the roots of eucalyptus trees planted high within reach of water. So he could not rule out as impossible a sudden affection for Adela Sellingworth in the heart of

young Craven. It was really very unfortunate. Feeling responsible, he thought perhaps he ought to do something discreetly. The question was—what?

Braybrooke was inclined to be a matchmaker, though he had neglected to make one match, his own. Thinking things over now, he said to himself that it was quite time young Craven settled down. He was a very promising fellow. Eric Learington, of whom he had made some casual inquiries during the interval between the two parts of the concert at Queen's Hall, had spoken quite warmly about Craven's abilities, industry and ambition. No doubt the young man would go far. But he ought to have a clever wife with some money to help him. A budding diplomatist needs a wife more than most men. He is destined to do much entertaining. Social matters are a part of his duty, of his career. A suitable wife was clearly indicated for young Craven. And it occurred to the world's governess that as he had apparently done harm unwittingly, or approached the doing of harm, by introducing Craven to dear Adela Sellingworth, it was incumbent on him to try to do good, if possible, by now knocking the harm on the head, of course gently, as a well-bred man does things.

Beryl Van Tuyn came into his mind.

As he had told Craven, he knew her quite well and knew all about her. She came of an excellent American family in Philadelphia. She was the only child of parents who could not get on together, and who were divorced. Both her father and mother had married again. The former lived in New York in Fifth Avenue; the latter, who was a beauty, was usually somewhere in Europe—now on the Riviera, now in Rome, at Aix, in Madrid, in London. She sometimes visited Paris, but seldom stayed long anywhere. She

professed to be fond of Beryl, but the truth was that Beryl was far too good looking to be desirable as her companion. She loved her child intensely—at a distance. Beryl was quite satisfied to be at a distance, for she had a passion for independence. Her father gave her an ample allowance. Her mother had long ago unearthed Fanny Cronin from some lair in Philadelphia to be her official companion.

Braybrooke knew all this, knew about how much money Miss Van Tuyn had, and about how much she would eventually have. Without being vulgarly curious, he somehow usually got to know almost everything.

Beryl Van Tuyn would be just the wife for young Craven when she had settled down. She was too independent, too original, too daring, and far too unconventional for Braybrooke's way of thinking. But he believed her to be really quite all right. Modern Americans held views about personal liberty which were not at all his, but that did not mean that they were not entirely respectable. Beryl Van Tuyn was clever, beautiful, had plenty of money. As a diplomatist's wife, when she had settled down, she would be quite in her element. After some anxious thought he decided that it was his duty to try to pull strings.

The ascertained fact that Craven had met Adela Sellingworth and Beryl Van Tuyn on the same day and together, and that the woman of sixty had evidently attracted him far more than the radiant girl of twenty-four, did not deter Braybrooke from his enterprise. His long experience of the world had led him to know that human beings can, and perpetually do, interfere successfully in each other's affairs, help in making of what are called destinies, head each other off from the prosecution of designs, in fact play

Providence and the Devil to each other.

His laudable intention was to play Providence.

On the following day he considered it his social duty to pay a call at Number 18A, Berkeley Square. Dear Adela Sellingworth would certainly wish to know how things were going in Paris. Although she now never went there, and in fact never went anywhere, she still, thank God, had an interest in what was going on in the world. It would be his pleasure to gratify it.

He found her at home and alone. But before he was taken upstairs the butler said he was not sure whether her ladyship was seeing anyone and must find out. He went away to do so, and returned with an affirmative answer.

When Braybrooke came into the big drawing-room on the first floor he fancied that his friend was looking older, and even paler, than usual. As he took her hand he thought, "Can I be right? Is it possible that Craven can imagine himself in love with her?"

It was an uncomplimentary thought, and he tried to put it from him as singularly unsuitable, and indeed almost outrageous at this moment, but it would not go. It defied him and stuck firmly in his mind. In his opinion Adela Sellingworth was the most truly distinguished woman in London. But that she should attract a young man, almost indeed a boy, in *that* way! It did really seem utterly impossible.

In answer to his inquiry, Lady Sellingworth acknowledged that she had not been feeling very well during the last two days.

"Perhaps you have been doing too much?" he suggested.

The mocking look came into her eyes.

"But what do I ever do now?" she said. "I lie quietly on my shelf. That surely can't be very exhausting."

"No one would ever connect you with being laid on the shelf," said Braybrooke; "your personality forbids that. Besides, I hear that you have been having quite a lively time."

He paused—it was his conception of the pause dramatic—then added:

"At the foot of a volcano!"

"Ah! you have heard about Vesuvius!"

"Yes."

"What a marvellous gatherer of news you are! Beryl Van Tuyn?"

"No. I happened to meet young Craven at the St. James's Club, and he told me of your excursion into Bohemia."

"Bohemia!" she said. "I haven't set foot in that entertaining country since I gave up my apartment in Paris. Soho is beyond its borders. But I confess to Soho. Beryl persuaded me, and I really quite enjoyed it. The coffee was delicious, and the hairdressers put their souls into their guitars. But I doubt if I shall go there again."

"It tired you? The atmosphere in those places is so mephitic."

"Oh, I didn't mind that. Besides, we blew it away by walking home, at least part of the way home."

"Down Shaftesbury Avenue? That was surely rather dangerous."

"Dangerous! Why?"

"The sudden change from stuffiness to cold and damp. Craven spoke of Toscanas. And those cheap restaurants are so very small and badly ventilated."

"Oh, we enjoyed our walk."

"That's good. Craven was quite enthusiastic about the evening."

Again the pause dramatic!

"He's a nice boy. I hope you liked him. I feel a little responsible—"

"Do you? But why?"

"Because I ventured to introduce him to you."

"Oh, don't worry. I assure you I like him very much."

Her tone was very casual, but quite cordial.

"Well, he was enthusiastic about the evening, said it was like a bit of Italy. You know he was once at the embassy in Rome."

"Yes. He told me so."

"I hear very good accounts of him from the Foreign Office. Eric Learington speaks very well of him. He ought to rise high in the career."

"I hope he will. I like to see clever young men get on. And he certainly has something in him."

"Yes, I think so too. By the way, he seems tremendously taken with Miss Van Tuyn."

As the world's governess said this he let his small hazel eyes fix themselves rather intently on Lady Sellingworth's face. He saw no change of expression there. She still looked tired, but casual, neither specially interested nor in the least bored. Her brilliant eyes still held their slightly mocking expression.

"Beryl must be almost irresistible to young men," she said. "She combines beauty with brains, and she has the audacity which nearly always appeals to youth. Besides, unconventionality is really the salt of

our over-civilized life, and she has it in abundance. She doesn't merely pretend to it. It is part of her."

"She may grow out of it in time."

"I hope she won't," said Lady Sellingworth, rather decisively. "If she did she would lose a great deal of her charm."

"Well, but when she marries?"

"Is she thinking of marrying?"

"Girls of her age usually are, I fancy."

"If she marries the right man he won't mind her unconventionality. He may even enjoy it."

It occurred to Braybrooke that Adela Sellingworth was supposed to have done a great many unconventional things at one time. Nevertheless he could not help saying:

"I think most husbands prefer their wives to keep within bounds."

"Beryl may never marry," said Lady Sellingworth, rather thoughtfully. "She is an odd girl. I could imagine—"

She paused, but not dramatically.

"Yes?" he said, with gentle insinuation.

"I could imagine her choosing to live a life of her own."

"What, like Caroline Briggs?" he said.

Lady Sellingworth moved, and her face changed, suddenly looked more expressive.

"Ah, Caroline!" she said. "I am very fond of her. She is one in a thousand. But she and Beryl are quite different in character. Caroline lives for self-respect, I think. And Beryl lives for life. Caroline refuses, but Beryl accepts with both hands."

"Then she will probably accept a husband some

day."

Suddenly Lady Sellingworth changed her manner. She leaned forward towards the world's governess, smiled at him, and said, half satirically, half confidentially:

"Now what is it you have in the back of your mind?"

Braybrooke was slightly taken aback. He coughed and half closed his eyes, then gently pulled up his perfectly creased trousers, taking hold of them just above the knees.

"I really don't think—" he began.

"You and I are old friends. Do tell me."

He certainly had not come intending to be quite frank, and this sudden attack rather startled him.

"You have formed some project," she continued. "I know it. Now let me guess what it is."

"But I assure you—"

"You have found someone whom you think would suit Beryl as a husband. Isn't that it?"

"Well, I don't know. I confess it had just occurred to me that with her beauty, her cleverness, and her money—for one has to think of money, unfortunately in these difficult days—she would be a very desirable wife for a rising ambitious man."

"No doubt. And who is he?"

It was against all Braybrooke's instincts to burst out abruptly into the open. He scarcely knew what to do. But he was sufficiently sharp to realize that Lady Sellingworth already knew the answer to her question. So he made a virtue of necessity and replied:

"It had merely occurred to me, after noting young Craven's enthusiasm about her beauty and

cleverness, that he might suit her very well. He must marry and marry well if he wishes to rise high in the diplomatic career."

"Oh, but some very famous diplomatists have been bachelors," she said, still smiling.

She mentioned two or three.

"Yes, yes, I know, I know," he rejoined. "But it is really a great handicap. If anyone needs a brilliant wife it is an ambassador."

"You think Mr. Craven is destined to become an ambassador?"

"I don't see why not—in the fullness of time, of course. Perhaps you don't know how ambitious and hard-working he is."

"I know really very little about him."

"His abilities are excellent. Learington has a great opinion of him."

"And so you think Beryl would suit him!"

"It just occurred to me. I wouldn't say more than that. I have a horror of matchmaking."

"Of course. Like all of us! Well, you may be right. She seemed to like him. You don't want me to do anything, I suppose?"

"Oh, no—no!" he exclaimed, with almost unnecessary earnestness, and looking even slightly embarrassed. "I only wished to know your opinion. I value your opinion so very highly."

She got up to stir the fire. He sprang, or rather got, up too, rather quickly, to forestall her. But she persisted.

"I know my poker so well," she said. "It will do things for me that it won't do for anyone else. There! That is better."

She remained standing by the hearth, looking tremendously tall.

“I don’t think I have an opinion,” she said. “Beryl would be a brilliant wife for any man. Mr. Craven seems a very pleasant boy. They might do admirably together. Or they might both be perfectly miserable. I can’t tell. Now do tell me about Paris. Did you see Caroline Briggs?”

When Braybrooke left Berkeley Square that day he remembered having once said to Craven that Lady Sellingworth was interested in everything that was interesting except in love affairs, that she did not seem to care about love affairs. And he had a vague feeling of having, perhaps, for once done the wrong thing. Had he bored her? He hoped not. But he was not quite sure.

When he had gone, and she was once more alone. Lady Sellingworth rang the bell. A tall footman came in answer to it, and she told him that if anyone else called he was to say, “not at home.” As he was about to leave the room after receiving this order she stopped him.

“Wait a moment.”

“Yes, my lady.”

She seemed to hesitate; then she said:

“If Mr. Craven happens to call I will see him. He was here two nights ago. Do you know him by sight?”

“I can’t say I do, my lady.”

“Ah! You were not in the hall when he called the other day?”

“No, my lady.”

“He is tall with dark hair, about thirty years old. Murgatroyd is not in to-day, is he?”

"No, my lady."

"Then if anyone calls like the gentleman I have described just ask him his name. And if it is Mr. Craven you can let him in."

"Yes, my lady."

The footman went out. A clock chimed in the distance, where the piano stood behind the big azalea. It was half past five. Lady Sellingworth made up the fire again, though it did not really need mending; then she stood beside it with one narrow foot resting on the low fender, holding her black dress up a little with her left hand.

Was Fate going to leave her alone? That was how she put it to herself. Or was she once more to be the victim of a temperament which she had sometimes hoped was dying out of her? In these last few years she had suffered less and less from it.

She had made a grand effort of will. That was now ten years ago. It had cost her more than anyone would ever know; it had cost her those terrible tears of blood which only the soul weeps. But she had persisted in her effort. A horrible incident, humiliating her to the dust, had summoned all the pride that was left in her. In a sort of cold frenzy of will she had flung life away from her, the life of the woman who was vain, who would have worship, who would have the desire of men, the life of the beauty who would have admiration. All that she had clung to she had abandoned in that dreadful moment, had abandoned as by night a terrified being leaves a dwelling that is in flames. Feeling naked, she had gone out from it into the blackness. And for ten years she had stuck to her resolution, had been supported by the strength of her will fortified by a hideous memory. She had grasped her nettle, had

pressed it to her bosom. She had taken to her all the semblance of old age, loneliness, dullness, had thrust away from her almost everything which she had formerly lived by. For, like almost all those who yield themselves to a terrific spasm of will, she had done more than it was necessary for her to do. From one extreme she had gone to another. As once she had tried to emphasize youth, she had emphasized the loss of youth. She had cruelly exposed her disabilities to an astonished world, had flung her loss of beauty, as it were, in the faces of the "old guard." She had called all men to look upon the ravages Time had brought about in her. Few women had ever done what she had done.

And eventually she had had a sort of reward. Gradually she had been enclosed by the curious tranquillity that habit, if not foolish or dangerous, brings to the human being. Her temperament, which had long been her enemy, seemed at last to lie down and sleep. There were times when she had wondered whether perhaps it would die. And she had come upon certain compensations which were definite, and which she had learnt how to value.

By slow degrees she had lost the exasperation of desire. The lust of the eye, spoken of to her by Caroline Briggs in Paris on the evening which preceded her enlightenment, had ceased to persecute her because she had taught herself deliberately the custody of the eye. She had eventually attained to self-respect, even to a quiet sense of personal dignity, not the worldly dignity of the *grande dame* aware of her aristocratic birth and position in the eyes of the world, but the unworldly dignity of the woman who is keeping her womanhood from all degradation, or possibility of degradation. Very often in those days she had recalled her conversation with Caroline

Briggs in the Persian room of the big house in the Champs-Elysees. Caroline had spoken of the women who try to defy the natural law, and had said that they were unhappy women, laughed at by youth, even secretly jeered at. For years she, Adela Sellingworth, had been one of those women. And often she had been very unhappy. That misery at least was gone from her. Her nerves had quieted down. She who had been horribly restless had learnt to be still. Sometimes she was almost at peace. Often and often she had said to herself that Caroline was right, that the price paid by those who flung away their dignity of soul, as she had done in the past, was terrible, too terrible almost for endurance. At last she could respect herself as she was now; at last she could tacitly claim and hope to receive the respect of others. She no longer decked out her bones in jewels. Caroline did not know the reason of the great and startling change in her and in her way of life, and probably supposed both to be due to that momentous conversation. Anyhow, since then, whenever she and Lady Sellingworth had met, she had been extraordinarily kind, indeed, almost tender; and Lady Sellingworth knew that Caroline had taken her part against certain of the “old guard” who had shown almost acute animosity. Caroline Briggs now was perhaps Lady Sellingworth’s best friend. For at last they were on equal terms; and that fact had strengthened their friendship. But Caroline was quite safe, and Lady Sellingworth from time to time had realized that for her life might possibly still hold peculiar dangers. There had been moments in those ten years of temptation, of struggle, of a rending of the heart and flesh, which nobody knew of but herself. But as the time went on, and habit more and more asserted its sway, they had been less and less

frequent. Calm, resignation had grown within her. There was none of the peace that passeth understanding, but sometimes there was peace. But even when there was, she was never quite certain that she had absolutely conquered herself.

Men and women may not know themselves thoroughly, but they usually know very well whether they have finally got the better of a once dominating tendency or vice, or whether there is still a possibility of their becoming again its victim. In complete victory there is a knowledge which nothing can shake from its throne. That knowledge Lady Sellingworth had never possessed. She hoped, but she did not know. For sometimes, though very seldom, the old wildness seemed to stir within her like a serpent uncoiling itself after its winter's sleep. Then she was frightened and made a great effort, an effort of fear. She set her heel on the serpent, and after a time it lay still. Sometimes, too, the loneliness of her life in her spacious and beautiful house became almost intolerable to her. This was especially the case at night. She did not care to show a haggard and lined face and white hair to her world when it was at play. And though she had defied the "old guard," she did not love meeting all those women whom she knew so well, and who looked so much younger and gayer than she did. So she had many lonely evenings at home, when her servants were together below stairs, and she had for company only the fire and a book.

The dinner in Soho had been quite an experience for her, and though she had taken it so simply and casually, had seemed so thoroughly at home and in place with her feet on the sanded floor, eating to the sound of guitars, she had really been inwardly excited. And when she had looked up and seen

Craven gazing towards her she had felt an odd thrill at the heart. For she had known Italy, too, as well as she had known Paris, and had memories connected with Italy. And the guitars had spoken to her of days and nights which her will told her not to think of any more.

And now? Was Fate going to leave her alone? Or was she once more going to be attacked? Something within her, no doubt woman's instinct, scented danger.

Braybrooke's visit had disturbed her. She had known him for years, and knew the type of man he was—careful, discreet, but often very busy. He had a kind heart, but a brain which sometimes wove little plots. On the whole he was a sincere man, except, of course, sometimes socially, but now and then he found it necessary to tell little lies. Had he told her a little lie that day about young Craven and Beryl Van Tuyn? Had he been weaving the first strands of a little plot—a plot like a net—and was it his intention to catch her in it? She knew he had had a definite motive in coming to see her, and that the motive was not connected with his visit to Paris.

His remarks about Craven had interested her because she was interested in Craven, but it was not quite clear to her why Braybrooke should suddenly concentrate on the young man's future, nor why he should, with so much precaution, try to get at her opinion on the question of Craven's marriage. When Braybrooke had first spoken to her of Craven he had not implied that he and Craven were specially intimate, or that he was deeply interested in Craven's concerns or prospects. He had merely told her that Craven was a clever and promising "boy," with an interesting mind and a nice nature, who had a great desire to meet her. And she had good-naturedly said

that Craven might call. It had all been very casual. But Braybrooke's manner had now completely changed. He seemed to think he was almost responsible for the young man. There had even been something furtive in his demeanour when speaking about Craven to her, and when she had forced him to explain and to say what was in his mind, for a moment he had been almost confused.

What had it to do with her whether Craven married Beryl Van Tuyn or did not marry her?

Although she had been interested when Braybrooke had spoken of Craven's cleverness and energy, of his good prospects in his career, and of the appreciation of Eric Learington—a man not given to undue praises—she had been secretly irritated when he had come to the question of Beryl Van Tuyn and the importance of Craven's marrying well. Why should he marry at all? And if he must, why Beryl Van Tuyn?

Lady Sellingworth hated the thought of that marriage and the idea that Braybrooke was probably intent on trying to bring it about, or at any rate was considering whether he should make the endeavour, roused in her resentment against him.

"Tiresome old man!" she said to herself, as she stood by the fire. "Why won't he let things alone? What business is it of his?"

And then she felt as if Braybrooke were meditating a stroke against her, and had practically asked her to help him in delivering the blow.

She felt that definitely. And immediately she had felt it she was startled, and the strong sensation of being near to danger took hold of her.

In all the ten years which had passed since the theft of her jewels she had never once deliberately

stretched out her hands to happiness. Palliatives she had made the most of; compensations she had been thankful for. She had been very patient, and considering what she had been, very humble. But she had definitely given up the thought of ever knowing again any intimate personal happiness. That book was closed. In ten years she had never once tried to open it.

And now, suddenly, without even being definitely conscious of what she was doing, she had laid her hands on it as if—The change in her, the abrupt and dangerous change, had surely come about two nights ago. And she felt now that something peculiar in Craven, rather than something unusual in herself, had caused it.

Beryl Van Tuyn and she were friends because the girl had professed a cult for her, had been very charming to her, and, when in London, had persistently sought her out. Beryl had amused her. She had even been interested in Beryl because she had noted in her certain traits which had once been predominant in herself. And how she had understood Beryl's vanity, Beryl's passion for independence and love of the unconventional! Although they were so different, of different nations and different breeds, there was something which made them akin. And she had recognized it. And, recognizing it, she had sometimes felt a secret pity and even fear for the girl, thinking of the inevitable fading of that beauty, of the inevitable exasperation of that vanity with the passing of the years. The vanity would grow and the beauty would diminish as time went on. And then, some day, what would Beryl be? For in her vanity there was already exaggeration. In it she had already reached a stage which had only been gained by Lady Sellingworth at a much later period in life. Already

she looked in the highways and byways for admiration. She sought for it even among Italian hairdressers! Some day it would make her suffer.

Lady Sellingworth had seen young Craven go away from his visit to her in Beryl's company with perhaps just a touch of half-ironical amusement, mingled with just a touch of half-wistful longing for the days that were over and done with. She knew so well that taking possession of a handsome young man on a first meeting. There was nothing in it but vanity. She had known and had done that sort of thing when she was a reigning beauty. Craven had interested and pleased her at once; she hardly knew why. There was something about him, about his look, bearing and manner which was sympathetic to her. She had felt a quiet inclination to know more of him. That was all. Seymour Portman had liked him, too, and had said so when the door had closed behind the young couple, leaving the old couple to themselves. He would come again some day, no doubt. And while she and Sir Seymour had remained by the fire talking quietly together, in imagination she had seen those two, linked by their youth—that wonderful bond—walking through the London twilight, chattering gaily, laughing at trifling jokes, realizing their freemasonry. And she had asked herself why it was that she could not feel that other freemasonry—of age. Seymour Portman had loved her for many years, loved her now, had never married because of her, would give up anything in London just to be quietly with her, would marry her now, ravaged though she was, worn, twice a widow, with a past behind her which he must know about, and which was not edifying. And yet she could not love him, partly, perhaps chiefly, because there was still rooted in her that ineradicable passion—it must be that, even now,

a passion—for youth and the fascination of youth. When at last he had gone she had felt unusually bitter for a few minutes, had asked herself, as human beings ask themselves every day, the eternal why. "Why, why, why am I as I am? Why can't I care for the suitable? Why can't I like the gift held out to me? Why doesn't my soul age with my body? Why must I continue to be lonely just because of the taint in my nature which forbids me to find companionship in one who finds perfect companionship in me? Why—to sum up—am I condemned eternally to be myself?"

There was no answer. The voice was not in the whirlwind. And presently she had dismissed those useless, those damnable questions, which only torture because they are never answered.

And then had come the night in Soho. And there for the first time since they had known each other she had felt herself to be subtly involved in a woman's obscure conflict with Beryl Van Tuyn. She was not conscious of having taken up weapons. Nevertheless she had no doubt about the conflict. And on her side any force brought into play against her beautiful friend must have issued simply from her personality, from some influence, perhaps from some charm, which she had not deliberately used. (At least she thought she was being sincere with herself in telling herself that.) Craven had been the cause of the conflict, and certainly he had been fully aware of Beryl Van Tuyn's part in it. And he had shown quiet determination, willfulness even. That willfulness of his had pleased Lady Sellingworth more than anything had pleased her for a very long time. It had even touched her. At first she had thought that perhaps it had been prompted by chivalry, by something charmingly old-fashioned, and delicately gentlemanly in Craven. Later on she

had been glad—intimately, warmly glad—to be quite sure that something more personal had guided him in his conduct that night.

He had simply preferred her company to the company of Beryl Van Tuyn. She was woman enough to rejoice in that fact. It was even rather wonderful to her. And it had given Craven a place in her estimation which no one had had for ten years.

Beryl's pressure upon him had been very definite. She had practically told him, and asked him, to do a certain thing—to finish the evening with her. And he had practically denied her right to command, and refused her request. He had preferred to the Georgians and their lively American contemporary, sincerely preferred, an Edwardian.

The compliment was the greater because the Edwardian had not encouraged him. Indeed in a way he had really defied her as well as Beryl Van Tuyn.

She had loved his defiance. When he had flatly told her he did not intend to go back to the Cafe Royal she had felt thankful to him—just that. And just before his almost boyish remark, made with genuine vexation in his voice, about the driving of London chauffeurs had given her a little happy thrill such as she had not known for years.

She had not had the heart to leave him on her doorstep.

But now, standing by the fire, she knew that it would have been safer to have left him there. And it would be safer now to ring the bell, summon the footman, and say that she was not at home to anyone that afternoon. While she was thinking this the footman entered the room. Hearing him she turned sharply.

"What is it?"

“Sir Seymour Portman has called, my lady. I told him you were not at home. But he asked me to make quite sure.”

Lady Sellingworth hesitated. After a moment’s pause she said, in a dry voice:

“Not at home.”

The footman went out.

There are moments in life which are full of revelation. That was such a moment for Lady Sellingworth. When she had heard the door open her instinct had played her false. She had turned sharply feeling certain that Craven had called. The reaction she felt when she heard the name of Sir Seymour told her definitely that she was in danger. She felt angry with herself, even disgusted, as well as half frightened.

“What a brute I am!”

She formed those words with her lips. An acute sense of disappointment pervaded her because Craven had not come, though she had no reason whatever to expect him. But she was angry because of her feeling about Seymour Portman. It was horrible to have such a tepid heart as hers was when such a long and deep devotion was given to it. The accustomed thing then made scarcely any impression upon her, while the thing that was new, untried, perhaps worth very little, excited in her an expectation which amounted almost to longing!

“How can Seymour go on loving such a woman as I am?” she thought.

Stretching herself a little she was able to look into an oval Venetian mirror above the high marble frame of the fireplace. She looked to scourge herself as punishment for what she was feeling.

"You miserable, ridiculous old woman!" she said to herself, as she saw her lined face which the mirror, an antique one, slightly distorted.

"You ought to be thankful to have such a friendship as Seymour's!"

She said that, and she knew that if, disobeying her order to the footman, he had come upstairs, her one desire would have been to get rid of him, at all costs, to get him and his devotion out of the house, lest Craven should come and she should not have Craven alone. If Seymour knew that surely even his love would turn into hatred!

And if Craven knew!

She felt that day as if all the rampart of will, which ten years' labour had built up between her and the dangers and miseries attendant upon such a temperament as hers, were beginning before her eyes to crumble into dust, touched by the wand of a maleficent enchanter.

And it was Craven's fault. He should have been like other young men, obedient to the call of beauty and youth; he should have been wax in Beryl Van Tuyn's pretty hands. Then this would never have happened, this crumbling of will. He had done a cruel thing without being aware of his cruelty. He had been carried away by something that was not primarily physical. And in yielding to that uncommon impulse, which proved that he was not typical, he had set in activity, in this hidden and violent activity, that which had been sleeping so deeply as to seem like something dead.

As Lady Sellingworth looked into the Venetian mirror, which made her ugliness of age look uglier than it was, she regretted sharply that she had allowed herself to grow old in this fearfully definite

way. It was too horrible to look like this and to be waiting eagerly, with an almost deceiving eagerness, for the opening of a door, a footfall, the sound of a voice that was young. Mrs. Ackroyd, Lady Archie Brook—they looked surely twenty years younger than she did. She had been a fool! She had been a passionate, impulsive fool!

No; she was being a fool now.

If only Caroline Briggs were in London! At that moment Lady Sellingworth longed to be defended against herself. She felt that she was near to the edge of a precipice, but that perhaps a strong hand could pull her away from it into the safety she had known for ten years.

"I am sixty. That settles it. There is nothing to be excited about, nothing to look for, nothing to draw back from or refuse. The fact that I am sixty and look as I do settles the whole matter."

They were brave words, but unfortunately they altered nothing. Feeling was untouched by them. Even conviction was not attained. Lady Sellingworth knew she was sixty, but she felt like a woman of thirty at that moment. And yet she was not deceived, was not deceiving herself. She did know—or felt that she absolutely knew—that the curious spell she had evidently been able, how she scarcely knew, to exert upon Craven during his visit to her that night could not possibly be lasting. He must be a quite unusual young man, perhaps even in some degree abnormal. But even so the fascination he had felt, and had shown that he felt, could not possibly be a lasting fascination. In such matters she *knew*.

Therefore surely the way was plain before her. Ten years ago she had made up her mind, as a woman seldom makes up her mind. She had seen facts, basic

facts, naked in a glare of light. Those facts had not changed. But she had changed. She was ten years older. The horror of passing into the fifties had died out in the cold resignation of passing into the sixties. Any folly now would be ten times more foolish than a folly of ten years ago. She told herself that, reiterated it.

The clock struck six. She heard it and turned from the fire. Certainly Craven would not call now. It was too late. Only a very intimate friend would be likely to call after six o'clock, and Craven was not a very intimate friend, but only a new acquaintance whom she had been with twice. When he had said good-bye to her after their long talk by the fire on the night of the dinner in Soho she had said nothing about his coming again. And he had not mentioned it. But she had felt then that to speak of such a thing was quite unnecessary, that it was tacitly understood between them that of course he would come again, and soon. And she believed that he had felt as she did. For despite her self-mockery, and even now when looking back, she had known, and still knew, that they had gone quite a long way together in a very short time.

That happens sometimes; but perhaps very seldom when one of the travellers is sixty and the other some thirty years younger. Surely something peculiar in Craven rather than something unusual in herself had been at the root of the whole thing.

That night he had seemed so oddly at home in her house, and really he had seemed so happy and at ease. They had talked about Italy, and he had told her what Italy meant to him, quite simply and without any pose, forgetting to be self-conscious in the English way. He had passed a whole summer on the bay of Naples, and he had told her all about it.

And in the telling he had revealed a good deal of himself. The prelude in Soho had no doubt prepared the way for such talk by carrying them to Naples on wings of music. They would not have talked just like that after a banal dinner at Claridge's or the Carlton. Craven had shown the enthusiasm that was in him for the sun, the sea, life let loose from convention, nature and beautiful things. The Foreign Office young man—quiet, reserved, and rather older than his years—had been pushed aside by a youth who had some Pagan blood in him, who had some agreeable wildness under the smooth surface which often covers only other layers of smoothness. He had told her of his envy of the sea people and she had understood it; and, in return, she had told him of an American boy whom she had known long ago, and who, fired by a book about life on the bay of Naples which he had read in San Francisco, had got hold of a little money, taken ship to Naples, gone straight to the point at Posilpipo, and stayed there among the fishermen for nearly two years, living their life, eating their food, learning to speak their argot, becoming at length as one of them. So thoroughly indeed had he identified himself with them that often he had acted as boatman to English and American tourists, and never had his nationality been discovered. In the end, of course, he had gone back to San Francisco, and she believed, was now a lawyer in California. But at least he had been wise enough to give up two years to a whim, and had bared his skin to the sun for two glorious summers. And not everyone has the will to adventure even so far as that.

Then they had talked about the passion for adventure, and Craven had spoken of his love, not yet lost, for Browning's poem, "Waring"; how he had

read it when quite a boy and been fascinated by it as by few other poems. He had even quoted some lines from it, and said them well, taking pains and not fearing any criticism or ridicule from her. And they had wondered whether underneath the smooth surface of Browning, the persistent diner out, there had not been far down somewhere a brown and half-savage being who, in some other existence, had known life under lateen sails on seas that lie beyond the horizon line of civilization. And they had spoken of the colours of sails, of the red, the brown, the tawny orange-hued canvases, that, catching the winds under sunset skies, bring romance, like some rare fruit from hidden magical islands, upon emerald, bright-blue or indigo seas.

The talk had run on without any effort. They had been happily sunk in talk. She had kept the fire from her face with the big fan. But the fire had lit his face up sometimes and the flames had seemed to leap in his eyes. And watching him without seeming to watch him the self-mockery had died out of her eyes. She had forgotten to mock at herself and had let herself go down the stream: floating from subject to subject, never touching bottom, never striking the bank, never brought up short by an obstacle. It had been a perfect conversation. Even her imp must have been quite absorbed in it. For he had not tormented her during it.

But at last the clock had struck one, just one clear chiming blow. And suddenly Craven had started up. His blue eyes were shining and a dusky red had come into his cheeks. And he had apologized, had said something about being “carried away” beyond all recollection of the hour. She had stayed where she was and had bidden him good night quietly from the sofa, shutting up her fan and laying it on a table.

And she had said: “I wonder what it was like with the Georgians!” And then he had again forgotten the hour, and had stood there talking about the ultra-modern young people of London as if he were very far away from them, were much older, much simpler, even much more akin to her, than they were. He had prefaced his remarks with the words, “I had forgotten all about them!” and she had felt it was true. Beryl Van Tuyn’s name had not been mentioned between them. But she was not a Georgian. Perhaps that fact accounted for the omission, or perhaps there were other reasons for their not speaking of her just then. She had done her best to prevent the evening intimacy which had been theirs. And they both knew it. Perhaps that was why they did not speak of her. Poor Beryl! Just then Lady Sellingworth had known a woman’s triumph which was the sweeter because of her disadvantages. Thirty-six years older than the young and vivid beauty! And yet he had preferred to end his evening with her! He must be an unusual, even perhaps a rather strange man. Or else—no, the tremendous humiliation she had endured ten years ago, acting on a nature which had always been impaired by a secret diffidence, had made her too humble to believe any longer that she had within herself the conqueror’s power. He was not like other young men. That was it. She had come upon an exceptional nature. Exceptional natures love, hate, are drawn and repelled in exceptional ways. The rules which govern others do not apply to them. Craven was dangerous because he was, he must be, peculiar.

When at last he had left her that night it had been nearly half-past one. But he had not apologized again. In going he had said: “Thank God you refused to go to the Cafe Royal!”

Nearly half-past one! Lady Sellingworth now looked at the clock. It was nearly half-past six.

She had a lonely dinner, a lonely evening before her.

Suddenly all her resignation seemed to leave her, to abandon her, as if it had had enough of her and could not bear to be with her for another minute. She saw her life as a desert, without one flower, one growing green thing in it. How had she been able to endure it for so long? It was a monstrous injustice that she should be condemned to this horrible, unnerving loneliness. What was the use of living if one was entirely alone? What was the use of money, of a great and beautiful house, of comfort and leisure, if nobody shares them with you? People came to see her, of course. But what is the use of visitors, of people who drop in, and drop out just when you most need someone to help you in facing life, in the evenings and when deep night closes in? At that moment she felt, in her anger and rebellion, that she had never had anything in her life, that all the women she knew—except perhaps Caroline Briggs—had had more than herself, had had a far better time than she had had. During the last ten years her brilliant past had faded until now she could scarcely believe in it. It had become like a pale aquarelle. Her memory retained events, of course, but they seemed to have happened in the life of someone she had known intimately rather than of herself. They were to her like things told rather than like things lived. There were times when she even felt innocent. So much had she changed during the last ten years. And now she revolted, like a woman who had never lived and wanted to live for the first time, like a woman who had never had anything and who demanded possession. She even got up and

stood out in the big room, saying to herself:

"What shall I do to-night? I can't stay here all alone. I must go out. I must do something unusual to take me out of myself. Mere stagnation here will drive me mad. I've got to do something to get away from myself."

But what could she do? An elderly well-known woman cannot break out of her house in the night, like an unknown young man, and run wild in the streets of London, or wander in the parks, seeking distractions and adventures.

Ten years ago in Paris she had felt something of the same angry desire for the freedom of a man, something of the same impotence. Her curbed wildness then had tortured her. It tortured her now. Life was in violent activity all about her. Even the shop girls had something to look forward to. Soon they would be going out with their lovers. She knew something of the freedom of the modern girl. Women were beginning to take what men had always had. But all that freedom was too late for her! (She forgot that she had taken it long ago in Paris and felt that she had never had it. And that feeling made part of her anger.)

The clock struck the half-hour.

Just then the door was opened and the footman appeared before she had had time to move. He looked faintly surprised at seeing her standing facing him in the middle of the room.

"Mr. Craven has called my lady."

"Mr. Craven! But I told you to let him in. Have you sent him away?"

"No, my lady. But Mr. Craven wouldn't come up till I had seen your ladyship. He said it was so late. He asked me first to tell your ladyship he had called,

and whether he might see you just for a minute, as he had a message to give your ladyship."

"A message! Please ask him to come up."

The footman went out, and Lady Sellingworth went to sit down near the fire. She now looked exactly as usual, casual, indifferent, but kind, not at all like a woman who would ever pity herself. In a moment the footman announced "Mr. Craven," and Craven walked in with an eager but slightly anxious expression on his face.

"I know it is much too late for a visit," he said. "But I thought I might perhaps just speak to you."

"Of course. I hear you have a message for me. Is it from Beryl?"

He looked surprised.

"Miss Van Tuyn? I haven't seen her."

"Yes?"

"I only wanted—I wondered whether, if you are not doing anything to-night, I could persuade you to give me a great pleasure. . . . Could I?"

"But what is it?"

"Would you dine with me at the *Bella Napoli*?"

Lady Sellingworth thought of the shop girls again, but now how differently!

"I would come and call for you just before eight. It's a fine night. It's dry, and it will be clear and starry."

"You want me to walk?"

He slightly reddened.

"Or shall we dress and go in a taxi?" he said.

"No, no. But I haven't said I can come."

His face fell.

"I will come," she said. "And we will walk. But what would Mr. Braybrooke say?"

"Have you seen him? Has he told you?"

"What?"

"About our conversation in the club?"

"I have seen him, and I don't think he is quite pleased about Shaftesbury Avenue. But never mind. I cannot live to please Mr. Braybrooke. *Au revoir*. Just before eight."

When he had gone Lady Sellingworth again looked in the glass.

"But it's impossible!" she said to herself. "It's impossible!"

She hated her face at that moment, and could not help bitterly regretting the fierce impulse of ten years ago. If she had not yielded to that impulse she might now have been looking, not at a young woman certainly, but a woman well preserved. Now she was frankly a wreck. She would surely look almost grotesque dining alone with young Craven. People would think she was his grandmother. Perhaps it would be better not to go. She was filled with a sense of painful hesitation. She came away from the glass. No doubt Craven was "on the telephone." She might communicate with him, tell him not to come, that she had changed her mind, did not feel very well. He would not believe her excuse whatever it was, but that could not be helped. Anything was better than to make a spectacle of herself in a restaurant. She had not put Craven's address and telephone number in her address book, but she might perhaps have kept the note he had written to her before their first meeting. She did not remember having torn it up. She went to her writing-table, but could not find the note. She found his card, but it had only his club

address on it. Then she went downstairs to a morning room she had on the ground floor. There was another big writing-table there. The telephone was there too. After searching for several minutes she discovered Craven's note, the only note he had ever written to her. Stamped in the left-hand corner of the notepaper was a telephone number.

She was about to take down the receiver when she remembered that Craven had not yet had time to walk back to his flat from her house, even if he were going straight home. She must wait a few minutes. She came away from the writing-table, sat down in an armchair, and waited.

Night had closed in. Heavy curtains were drawn across the tall windows. One electric lamp, which she had just turned on, threw a strong light on the writing-table, on pens, stationery, an address book, a telephone book, a big blue-and-gold inkstand, some photographs which stood on a ledge protected by a tiny gilded rail. The rest of the room was in shadow. A low fire burned in the grate.

Lady Sellingworth did not take up a book or occupy herself in any way. She just sat still in the armchair and waited. Now and then she heard a faint footfall, the hoot of a motor horn, the slight noise of a passing car. And loneliness crept upon her like something gathering her into a cold and terrible embrace.

It occurred to her that she might ask Craven presently through the telephone to come and dine in Berkeley Square. No one would see her with him if she did that, except her own servants.

But that would be a compromise. She was not fond of compromises. Better one thing or the other. Either she would go with him to the restaurant or she

would not see him at all that night.

If Caroline Briggs were only here! And yet if she were it would be difficult to speak about the matter to her. If she were told of it, what would she say? That would depend upon how she was told. If she were told all the truth, not mere incidents, but also the feelings attending them, she would tell her friend to give the whole thing up. Caroline was always drastic. She always went straight to the point.

But Caroline was in Paris.

Lady Sellingworth looked at her watch. Craven lived not far off. He might be at home by now. But perhaps she had better give him, and herself, a little more time. For she was still undecided, did not yet know what she was going to do. Impulse drove her on, but something else, reason perhaps, or fear, or secret, deep down, painfully acquired knowledge, was trying to hold her back. She remembered her last stay in Paris, her hesitation then, her dinner with Caroline Briggs, the definite decision she had come to, her effort to carry it out, the terrible breakdown of her decision at the railway station and its horrible result.

Disaster had come upon her because she had yielded to an impulse ten years ago. Surely that should teach her not to yield to an impulse now. But the one was so different from the other, as different as that horrible man in Paris had been from young Craven. That horrible man in Paris! He had disappeared out of her life. She had never seen him again, had never mentioned him to anybody. He had gone, as mysteriously as he had come, carrying his booty with him, all those lovely things which had been hers, which she had worn on her neck and arms and bosom, in her hair and on her hands. Sometimes

she had wondered about him, about the mentality and the life of such a man as he was, a creature of the underworld, preying on women, getting up in the morning, going to bed at night, with thoughts of crime in his mind, using his gift of beauty loathsomely. She had wondered, too, how it was that such loathsomeness as his was able to hide itself, how it was that he could look so manly, so athletic, even so wistful and eager for sympathy.

But Seymour Portman had seen through him at a first glance. Evidently that type of man had a power to trick women's instincts, but was less successful with men. Perhaps Caroline was right, and the whole question was simply one of the lust of the eye.

Young Craven was good-looking too. But surely she had not been attracted to him, brought into sympathy with him merely because of that. She hoped not. She tried hard to think not. A woman of her age must surely be beyond the lure of mere looks in a man unconnected with the deeper things which make up personality.

And yet ten years ago she had been lured towards a loathsome and utterly abominable personality by mere looks. Certainly her nature inclined her to be a prey to just that—the lust of the eye.

(Caroline Briggs was horribly apposite in some of her remarks.)

She tried to reconstitute her evenings with Craven in her imagination, keeping the conversation exactly as it had been, but giving him a thoroughly plain face, a bad complexion, mouse-coloured feeble hair, undistinguished features, ordinary eyes, and a short broad figure. Certainly it would have made a difference. But how much difference? Perhaps a good deal. But he had enjoyed the conversation as much

as she had, and there was nothing in her appearance now to arouse the lust of the eye. Suddenly it occurred to her that she possessed now at least one advantage. If a young man were attracted by her it must be her personality, herself in fact, which attracted him. It could not be her looks. And surely it is better to attract by your personality than by your looks.

A woman's voice whispered within her just then, "It is better to attract by both. Then you are safe."

She moved uneasily. Then she got up and went to the telephone. The chances were in favour of Craven's being in his flat by now.

As she put her hand on the receiver, but before she took it down, Lady Sellingworth thought of the Paris railway station, of what had happened there, of the stern resolution she had come to that day, of the tears of blood that had sealed it, of the will that had enabled her to stick to it during ten years. And she thought, too, of that phrase of Caroline Briggs's concerning the lust of the eye.

"I won't go!" she said to herself.

And she took the receiver down.

Almost immediately she was put through, and heard Craven's voice at the other end, the voice which had recited those lines from Browning's "Waring" by the fire, saying:

"Yes? Who is it?"

"Lady Sellingworth," she replied.

The sound of the voice changed at once, became eager as it said:

"Oh—Lady Sellingworth! I have only just come in. I know what it is."

"But how can you?"

"I do. You want me to dress for dinner. And we are to go in a cab and be very respectable instead of Bohemian. Isn't that it?"

She hesitated. Then she said:

"No; it isn't that."

"Do tell me then!"

"I think—I'm afraid I can't come."

"Oh, no—it can't be that! But I have reserved the table in the corner for us. And we are going to have gnocchi done in a special way with cheese. Gnocchi with cheese! Please—please don't disappoint me."

"But I haven't been very well the last two days, and I'm rather afraid of the cold."

"I am so sorry. But it's absolutely dry under foot. I swear it is!"

A pause. Then his voice added:

"Since I came in I have refused an invitation to dine out to-night. I absolutely relied on you."

"Yes?"

"Yes. It was from Miss Van Tuyn, to dine with her at the *Bella Napoli*."

"I'll come!" said Lady Sellingworth. "Good-bye."

And she put up the receiver.

CHAPTER V

Miss Van Tuyn had not intended to stay long in London when she came over from Paris. But now she changed her mind. She was pulled at by three interests—Lady Sellingworth, Craven and the living bronze. A cold hand had touched her vanity on the night of the dinner in Soho. She had felt angry with Craven for not coming back to the Cafe Royal, and angrier still with Lady Sellingworth for keeping him with her. Although she did not positively know that Craven had spent the last part of the evening in the drawing-room at Berkeley Square, she felt certain that he had done so. Probably Lady Sellingworth had pressed him to go in. But perhaps he had been glad to go, perhaps he had submitted to an influence which had carried him for the time out of his younger, more beautiful friend's reach.

Miss Van Tuyn resolved definitely that Craven must at once be added to the numerous men who were mad about her. So much was due to her vanity. Besides, she liked Craven, and might grow to like him very much if she knew him better. She decided to know him better, much better, and wrote her letter to him. Craven had puzzled a little over the final sentence of that letter. There were two reasons for its apparently casual insertion. Miss Van Tuyn wished to whip Craven into alertness by giving his

male vanity a flick. Her other reason was more subtle. Some instinct seemed to tell her that in the future she might want to use the stranger as a weapon in connexion with Craven. She did not know how exactly. But in that sentence of her letter she felt that she was somehow preparing the ground for incidents which would be brought about by destiny, or which chance would allow to happen.

That she would some day know “the living bronze” she felt certain. For she meant to know him. Garstin’s brutal comment on him had frightened her. She did not believe it to be just. Garstin was always brutal in his comments. And he lived so perpetually among shady, or more than shady, people that it was difficult for him to believe in the decency of anybody who was worth knowing. For him the world seemed to be divided into the hopelessly dull and conventional, who did not count, and the definitely outrageous, who were often interesting and worthy of being studied and sometimes painted. It must be obvious to anyone that the living bronze could not be numbered among the merely dull and conventional. Naturally enough, then, Garstin supposed him to be a successful blackmailer. Miss Van Tuyn was not going to allow herself to be influenced by the putrescence of Garstin’s mind. She had her own views on everything and usually held to them. She had quite decided that she would get to know the living bronze through Garstin, who always managed to know anyone he was interested in. Being totally unconventional and not, as he said, caring a damn about the proprieties, if he wished to speak to someone he spoke to him, if he wished to paint him he told him to come along to the studio. There was a simplicity about Garstin’s methods which was excused in some degree by his fame. But if he had

not been famous he would have acted in just the same way. No shyness hindered him; no doubts about himself ever assailed him. He just did what he wanted to do without *arriere pensee*. There was certainly strength in Garstin, although it was not moral strength.

The morning after the dinner in Soho Miss Van Tuyn telegraphed to Fanny Cronin to come over at once, with Bourget's latest works, and engaged an apartment at Claridge's. Although she sometime dined in the shadow of Vesuvius, she preferred to issue forth from some lair which was unmistakably smart and comfortable. Claridge's was both, and everybody came there. Miss Cronin wired obedience and would be on the way immediately. Meanwhile Miss Van Tuyn received Craven's note in answer to hers.

She grasped all its meaning, surface and subterranean, immediately. It meant a very polite, very carefully masked, withdrawal from the sphere of her influence. The passage about Soho was perfectly clear to her mind, although to many it might have seemed to convey an agreeably worded acceptance of her suggestion, only laying its translation into action in a rather problematical future, the sort of future which would become present when "neither of us has an engagement."

Craven had evidently been "got at" by Adela Sellingworth.

On the morning after Miss Van Tuyn's telegram to Paris Fanny Cronin arrived, with Bourget's latest book in her hand, and later they settled in at Claridge's. Miss Cronin went to bed, and Miss Van Tuyn, who had no engagement for that evening, went presently to the telephone. Although in her

note to Craven by implication she had left it to him to suggest a tete-a-tete dinner in Soho, she was now resolved to ask him. She was a girl of the determined modern type, not much troubled by the delicacies or inclined to wait humbly on the pleasure of men. If a man did not show her the way, she was quite ready to show the way to him. Without being precisely of the huntress type, she knew how to take bow and arrow in her hand.

She rang up Craven, and the following dialogue took place at the telephone.

"Yes? Yes?"

"Is Mr. Craven there?"

"Yes, I am Alick Craven. Who is it, please?"

"Don't you know?"

"One minute! Is it—I'm afraid I don't."

"Beryl Van Tuyn."

"Of course! I knew the voice at once, but somehow I couldn't place it. How are you, Miss Van Tuyn?"

"Dangerously well."

"That's splendid."

"And you?"

"I'm what dull people call very fit and cheery."

"How dreadful! Now, tell me—are you engaged to-night? I'm sure you aren't, because I want you to take me to dine at the *Bella Napoli*. We agreed to tell each other when we were free. So I take you at your word."

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry!"

"What?"

"I'm ever so sorry."

"Why?"

"I have a dinner engagement to-night."

"What a bore! But surely you can get out of it?"

"I'm afraid not. No, really I can't."

"Send an excuse! Say you are ill."

"I can't honestly. It's—it's rather important. Besides, the fact is, I'm the host."

"Oh!"

The timbre of Miss Van Tuyn's voice changed slightly at this crisis in the conversation.

"Oh—if you're the host, of course. . . . You really *are* the host?"

"Yes, I really am. So you see!"

"No, but I hear and understand. Never mind. Ask me another night."

"Yes—that's it. Another night. Thank you so much. By the way, does the living bronze—"

"What? The living what?"

"Bronze! . . . The living bronze—"

"Oh, yes. Well, what about it?"

"Does it wear petticoats or trousers?"

"Trousers."

"Then I think I rather hate it."

"You—"

But at this point the exchange intervened. Then something happened; and then Craven heard a voice saying:

"No, darling! It's the teeth—the teeth on the left-hand side. You know when we were at the Carlton I was in agony. Tell Annie not to—"

It was useless to persist. Besides, he did not want to. So he put up the receiver. Almost immediately afterwards he was rung up by Lady Sellingworth,

hung on the edge of disappointment for an instant, and then was caught back into happiness.

When he finally left the telephone and went to his bedroom to change his clothes, but not to "dress," he thanked God for having clinched matters so swiftly. Lady Sellingworth had certainly meant to let him down. Some instinct had told him what to say to her to make her change her mind. At least, he supposed so. For she had abruptly changed her mind after hearing of Miss Van Tuyn's invitation. But why had she meant to give up the dinner? What had happened between his exit from her house and her ringing him up? For he could not believe in the excuse of ill-health put forward by her. He was puzzled. Women certainly were difficult to understand. But it was all right now. His audacity—for he thought it rather audacious of him to have asked Lady Sellingworth to dine alone with him at the *Bella Napoli*—was going to be rewarded. As he changed his clothes he hummed to himself:

"*O Napoli! Bella Napoli*!"

At Claridge's meanwhile Miss Van Tuyn was not humming. As she came away from the telephone she felt in a very bad temper. Things were not going well for her just now in London, and she was accustomed to things going well. As in Craven's letter, so just now at the telephone, she had been aware of resistance, of a distinct holding back from her influence. This was a rare experience for her, and she resented it. She believed Craven's excuse for not dining with her. It was incredible that a young man who had nothing to do would refuse to pass an evening in her company. No; he was engaged. But she had felt at the telephone that he was not sorry he was engaged; she still felt it. He was going to do something which he preferred doing to dining with

her. The tell-tale line showed itself in her low white forehead.

Fanny Cronin had gone to bed; otherwise they might have dined downstairs in the restaurant, where they would have been sure of meeting people whom Miss Van Tuyn knew. She did not choose to go down and dine alone. A lonely dinner followed by a lonely evening upstairs did not appeal to her; for a moment, like Lady Sellingworth in Berkeley Square, she felt the oppression of solitude. She went to the window of her sitting-room, drew the curtain back, pulled aside the blind, and looked out. The night was going to be fine; the sky was clear and starry; the London outside drew her. For a moment she thought of telephoning to Garstin to come out somewhere and dine with her. He was rude to her, seldom paid her a compliment, and never made love to her. But he was famous and interesting. They could always get on in a tete-a-tete conversation. And then there was now that link between them of the living bronze and her plan with which Garstin was connected. She meant to know that man; she meant it more strongly now that Craven was behaving so strangely. She dropped the blind, drew the curtains forward, went to the fire, and lit a cigarette.

She wondered where Craven was dining. At some delightful restaurant with someone he liked very much. She was quite sure of that; or—perhaps he had told her a lie! Perhaps he was dining at Number 18A, Berkeley Square! Suddenly she felt certain that she had hit on the truth. That was it! He was dining in Berkeley Square with Adela Sellingworth. They were going to have another evening together. Possessed by this conviction, and acting on an almost fierce impulse—for her vanity was now suffering severely—she went again to the telephone and rang

up Lady Sellingworth. When she was put through, and heard the characteristic husky voice of her so-called friend at the other end of the line, she begged Lady Sellingworth to come and dine at Claridge's that night and have a quiet talk over things. As she had expected, she got a refusal. Lady Sellingworth was engaged. Miss Van Tuyn, with a discreet half-question, half-expression of disappointment, elicited the fact that Lady Sellingworth was dining out, not having people at home. The conversation concluded at both ends with charming expressions of regret, and promises to be together as soon as was humanly possible.

Again Miss Van Tuyn believed an excuse; again her instinct told her that she had invited someone to dine who was glad to be engaged. There was only one explanation of the two happy refusals. She was now absolutely positive that Lady Sellingworth and Craven were going to dine together, and not in Berkeley Square, and Craven was going to be the host, as he had said. He had invited Lady Sellingworth to go out and dine somewhere alone with him, and she had consented to do so. Where would they go? She thought of the *Bella Napoli*. It was very unlikely that they would meet anyone there whom they both knew, and they had met at the *Bella Napoli*. Perhaps they—or perhaps *she*—had romantic recollections connected with it! Perhaps they had arranged the other evening to dine there again—and without Beryl Van Tuyn this time! If so, the intervention at the telephone must have seemed an ironic stroke to them both.

For a moment Miss Van Tuyn's injured vanity made her feel as if they were involved in a plot directed against her and her happiness, as if they had both behaved abominably to her. She had always

been so charming to Lady Sellingworth, had always praised her, had taken her part, had even had quite a cult for her! It was very disgusting. It showed Miss Van Tuyn how right she had been in generally cultivating men instead of women. For, of course, Craven could not get out of things with an experienced rusee woman of the world like Adela Sellingworth. Women of that type always knew how to "corner" a man, especially if he were young and had decent instincts. Poor Craven!

But at the telephone Miss Van Tuyn had felt that Craven was glad to be engaged that evening, that he was looking forward to something.

After sitting still for a few minutes, always with the tell-tale line in her forehead, Miss Van Tuyn got up with an air of purpose. She went to a door at the end of the sitting-room, opened it, crossed a lobby, opened double doors, and entered a bedroom in which a large, mild-looking woman, with square cheeks, chestnut-coloured smooth hair, large, chestnut-coloured eyes under badly painted eyebrows, and a mouth with teeth that suggested a very kind and well-meaning rabbit, was lying in bed with a cup and a pot of camomile tea beside her, and Bourget's "*Mensonges*" in her hand. This was Fanny Cronin, originally from Philadelphia, but now largely French in a simple and unpretending way. The painted eyebrows must not be taken as evidence against her. They were the only artificiality of which Miss Cronin was guilty; and as an unkind fate had absolutely denied her any eyebrows of her own, she had conceived it only decent to supply their place.

"I've got back to '*Mensonges*,' Beryl," she said, as she saw Miss Van Tuyn. "After all, there's nothing like it. It bites right into one, even on a third reading."

"Dear old Fanny! I'm so glad you're being bitten into. I know how you love it, and I'm not going to disturb you. I only came to tell you that I'm going out this evening, and may possibly come back late."

"I hope you will enjoy yourself, dear, and meet pleasant people."

Miss Cronin was thoroughly well trained, and seldom asked any questions. She had long ago been carefully taught that the duty of a *dame de compagnie* consisted solely in being alive in a certain place—the place selected for her by the person she was *dame de compagnie* to. It was, after all, an easy enough profession so long as a beneficent Providence permitted your heart to beat and your lungs to function. The place at present was Claridge's Hotel. She had nothing to do except to lie comfortably in bed there. And this small feat, well within her competence, she was now accomplishing with complete satisfaction to herself. She took a happy sip of her camomile tea and added:

"But I know you always do that. You have such a wide choice and are so clever in selection."

Miss Van Tuyn slightly frowned.

"There isn't such a wide choice in London as there is in Paris," she said rather morosely.

"I dare say not. Paris is much smaller than London, but much cleverer, I think. Where would you find an author like Bourget among the English? Which of *them* could have written '*Mensonges*'? Which of *them* could—"

"I know, dear, I know! They haven't the bite. That is what you mean. They have only the bark."

"Exactly! And when one sits down to a book—"

"Just so, dear. The dog that can only bark is a very

dull dog. I saw a wonderful dog the other day that looked as if it could bite."

"Indeed! In London?"

"Yes. But I'm sure it wasn't English."

"Was it a poodle?"

"No, quite the contrary."

Fanny Cronin looked rather vague. She was really trying to think what dog was quite the contrary of a poodle, but, after the Channel, her mind was unequal to the effort. So she took another sip of the camomile tea and said:

"What colour was it?"

"It was all brown like a brown bronze. Well, good night, Fanny."

"Good night, dear. I really wish you would read '*Mensonges*' again when I have finished with it. One cannot read over these masterpieces too often."

"You shall lend it me."

She went out of the room, and Fanny Cronin settled comfortably down once more to the competent exercise of her profession.

It was now nearly eight o'clock. Miss Van Tuyn went to her bedroom. She had a maid with her, but she did not ring for the woman. Instead she shut her door, and began to "do" things for herself. She began by taking off her gown and putting on a loose wrapper. Then she sat down before the dressing-table and changed the way in which her corn-coloured hair was done, making it sit much closer to the head than before, and look much less striking and conspicuous. The new way of doing her hair changed her appearance considerably, made her less like a Ceres and more like a Puritan. When she was quite satisfied with her hair she got out of her wrapper,

and presently put on an absolutely plain black coat and skirt, a black hat which came down very low on her forehead, a black veil and black suede gloves. Then she took a tightly furled umbrella with an ebony handle out of her wardrobe, picked up her purse, unlocked her door and stepped out into the lobby.

Her French maid appeared from somewhere. She was a rather elderly woman with a clever, but not unpleasantly subtle, face. Miss Van Tuyn said a few words to her in a low voice, opened the lobby door and went out.

She took the lift, glided down, walked slowly and carelessly across the hall and passed out by the swing door.

“A taxi, madam?” said the commissionaire in livery.

She shook her head and walked away down Brook Street in the direction of Grosvenor Square.

As Craven had predicted it was a fine clear night, dry underfoot, starry overhead. If Miss Van Tuyn had had with her a chosen companion she would have enjoyed her walk. She was absolutely self-possessed, and thoroughly capable of taking care of herself. No terrors of London affected her spirit. But she was angry and bored at being alone. She felt almost for the first time in her life neglected and even injured. And she was determined to try to find out whether her strong suspicions about Lady Sellingworth and Craven were well founded. If really Craven was giving a dinner somewhere, and Lady Sellingworth was dining with friends somewhere else, she had no special reason for irritation. She might possibly be mistaken in her unpleasant conviction that both of them had something to do which they preferred to

dining with her. But if they were dining together and alone she would know exactly how things were between them. For neither of them had done what would surely have been the natural thing to do if there were no desire for concealment; neither of them had frankly stated the truth about the dinner.

"If they are dining together they don't wish me to know it," Miss Van Tuyn said to herself, as she walked along Grosvenor Square and turned down Carlos Place. "For if I had known it they might have felt obliged to invite me to join them, as I was inviting them, and as I was the one who introduced Adela Sellingworth to the *Bella Napoli*."

And as she remembered this she felt more definitely injured. For she had taken a good deal of trouble to persuade Lady Sellingworth to dine out in Soho, had taken trouble about the food and about the music, had, in fact, done everything that was possible to make the evening entertaining and delightful to her friend. It was even she, by the way, who had beckoned Craven to their table and had asked him to join them after dinner.

And in return for all this Adela Sellingworth had carried him off, and perhaps to-night was dining with him alone at the *Bella Napoli*!

"These old beauties are always the most unscrupulous women in the world," thought Miss Van Tuyn, as she came into Berkeley Square. "They never know when to stop. They are never satisfied. It's bad enough to be with a greedy child, but it's really horrible to have much to do with a greedy old person. I should never have thought that Adela Sellingworth was like this."

It did not occur to her that perhaps some day she would be an old beauty herself, and even then would

perhaps still want a few pleasures and joys to make life endurable to her.

In passing through Berkeley Square she deliberately walked on the left side of it, and presently came to the house where Lady Sellingworth lived. The big mansion was dark. As Miss Van Tuyn went by it she felt an access of ill-humour, and for an instant she knew something of the feeling which had often come to its owner—the feeling of being abandoned to loneliness in the midst of a city which held multitudes who were having a good time.

She walked on towards Berkeley, thought of Piccadilly, retraced her steps, turned up Hay Hill, crossed Bond Street, and eventually came into Regent Street. There were a good many people here, and several loitering men looked hard at her. But she walked composedly on, keeping at an even steady pace. At the main door of the Cafe Royal three or four men were lounging. She did not look at them as she went by. But presently she felt that she was being followed. This did not disturb her. She often went out alone in Paris on foot, though not at night, and was accustomed to being followed. She knew perfectly well how to deal with impertinent men. In Shaftesbury Avenue the man who was dogging her footsteps came nearer, and presently, though she did not turn her head, she knew that he was walking almost level with her, and that his eyes were fixed steadily on her. Without altering her pace she took a shilling out of the purse she was carrying and held it in her hand. The man drew up till he was walking by her side. She felt that he was going to speak to her. She stopped, held out the hand with the shilling in it, and said:

“Here’s a shilling! Take it. I’m sorry I can’t afford

more than that."

As she finished speaking for the first time she looked at her pursuer, and met the brown eyes of the living bronze. He stood for an instant gazing at her veil, and then turned round and walked away in the direction of Regent Street. The shilling dropped from her hand to the pavement. She did not try to find it, but at once went on.

It was very seldom that her self-possession was shaken. It was not exactly shaken now. But the recognition of the stranger whom she had been thinking about in the man who had followed her in the street had certainly startled her. For a moment a strong feeling of disgust overcame her, and she thought of Garstin's brutal comment upon this man. Was he then really one of the horrible night loungers who abound in all great cities, one of the night birds who come out when the darkness falls with vague hopes of doing evil to their own advantage? It was possible. He must have been hanging about near the door of the Cafe Royal when she passed and watching the passers-by. He must have seen her then. Could he have recognized her? In that case perhaps he was merely an adventurous fellow who had been pushed to the doing of an impertinent thing by his strong admiration of her. As she thought this she happened to be passing a lit-up shop, a tobacconist's, which had mirrors fixed on each side of the window. She stopped and looked into one of the mirrors. No, he could not have recognized her through the veil she was wearing. She felt certain of that. But he might have been struck by her figure. He might have noticed it that night at the Cafe Royal, have fancied he recognized it to-night, and have followed her because he was curious to know whether, or not, she was the girl he had already seen

and admired. And of course, as she was walking in Regent Street alone at night, he must have thought her a girl who would not mind being spoken to. It was her own fault for being so audacious, so determined always to do what she wanted to do, however unconventional, even outrageous—according to commonplace ideas—it was.

She forgave the man his impertinence and smiled as she thought of his abrupt departure. If he were really a night bird he would surely have stood his ground. He would not have been got rid of so easily. No; he would probably have coolly pocketed the shilling, and then have entered into conversation with her, have chaffed her vulgarly about her methods with admirers, and have asked her to go to a cafe or somewhere with him, and to spend the shilling and other shillings in his company.

No doubt he had been waiting for a friend at the door of the Cafe Royal, had seen her go by, and had yielded to an impulse prompting him to an adventure. He was not an Englishman or an American. She felt certain of that. And she knew very well the views many foreigners, especially Latins, even of good birth hold about the propriety of showing their admiration for women in the street.

She was glad she had had a thick veil on. If later she made acquaintance with this man, she did not wish him to know that she and the girl who had offered him a shilling were one and the same. If he knew she might be at a certain disadvantage with him.

She turned into Soho and was immediately conscious of a slightly different atmosphere. There were fewer people about and the street was not so brightly lit up, or at any rate seemed to her darker.

She heard voices speaking Italian in the shadows. The lights of small restaurants glimmered faintly on the bone-dry pavement. She was nearing the *Bella Napoli*. Soon she heard the distant sound of guitars.

Where she was walking at this moment there was no one. She stood still for an instant considering. If Lady Sellingworth and Craven were really dining together, as she suspected, and at the *Bella Napoli*, she could see them from the street if they had a table near the window. If they were not seated near the window she might not be able to see them. In that case, what was she going to do?

After a moment's thought she resolved that if she did not see them from the street she would go into the restaurant and dine there alone. They would see her of course, if they were there, and would no doubt be surprised and decidedly uncomfortable. But that could not be helped. Having come so far she was determined not to go back to the hotel without making sure whether her suspicion was correct. If, on the other hand, they were dining at a table near the window she resolved not to enter the restaurant.

Having come to this decision she walked on.

The musicians were playing "O Sole mio!" And as the music grew more distinct in her ears she felt more solitary, more injured and more ill-humoured. Music of that type makes youth feel that the world ought of right to belong to it, that the old are out of place in the regions of adventure, romance and passion. That they should not hang about where they are no longer wanted, like beggars about the door of a house in which happy people are feasting.

"Such music is for me not for Adela Sellingworth," thought Miss Van Tuyn. "Let her listen to Bach and Beethoven, or to Brahms if she likes. She can have

the classics and the intellectuals. But the songs of Naples are for me, not for her."

And at that moment she felt very hard, even cruel.

She came up to the restaurant. The window was lighted up brilliantly. No blind was drawn over it. There was opaque glass at the bottom, but not at the top. She was tall and could look through the glass at the top. She did so, and at once saw Lady Sellingworth and Craven.

They were sitting at *her* table—the table which was always reserved for her when she dined at the *Bella Napoli*, and at which she had entertained Lady Sellingworth; and they were talking—confidentially, eagerly, she thought. Lady Sellingworth looked unusually happy and animated, even perhaps a little younger than usual. Yes! Very old, but younger than usual! They were not eating at the moment, but were no doubt waiting for a course. Craven was leaning forward to his companion. The guitars still sounded. But these two had apparently so much to say to one another that they had neither time or inclination to listen to the music.

Miss Van Tuyn stood very still on the pavement staring into the restaurant.

But suddenly Craven, as if attracted by something, turned abruptly half round towards the window. Instantly Miss Van Tuyn moved away. He could not have seen her. But perhaps he had felt that she—or rather of course that someone—was there. For he could not possibly have felt that she, Beryl Van Tuyn, was there looking in.

After drawing back Miss Van Tuyn walked slowly away. She was considering something, debating something within herself. Should she go in and dine alone in the restaurant? By doing so she would

certainly make those two who had treated her badly uncomfortable; she would probably spoil the rest of their evening. Should she do that? Some indelicate devil prompted her, urged her, to do it. It would "serve them right," she thought. Adela Sellingworth especially deserved a touch of the whip. But it would be an undignified thing to do. They would never know of course why she had come alone to the *Bella Napoli*! They would think that, being audaciously unconventional, she had just drifted in there because she had nothing else to do, as Craven had drifted in alone the other night. She wanted to do it. Yet she hesitated to do it.

Finally she gave up the idea. She felt malicious, but she could not quite make up her mind to dine alone where they would see her. Probably they would feel obliged to ask her to join them. But she would not join them. Nothing could induce her to do that. And was she to come over to them when coffee was brought, as Craven had come at her invitation? No; that would be a condescension unworthy of her beauty and youth. Her fierce vanity forbade it, even though her feeling of malice told her to do it.

Her vanity won. She walked on and came into Shaftesbury Avenue.

"I know what I'll do," she said to herself. "I'll go and dine upstairs at the Cafe Royal, and go into the cafe downstairs afterwards. Garstin is certain to be there."

Garstin—and others!

This time she obeyed her inclination. Not many minutes later she was seated at a table in a corner of the restaurant at the Cafe Royal, and was carefully choosing a dinner.

CHAPTER VI

The more he thought over his visit to Adela Sellingworth the more certain did Francis Braybrooke become that it had not gone off well. For once he had not played his cards to the best advantage. He felt sure that inadvertently he had irritated his hostess. Her final dismissal of the subject of young Craven's possible happiness with Beryl Van Tuyn, if circumstances should ever bring them together, had been very abrupt. She had really almost kicked it out of the conversation.

But then, she had never been fond of discussing love affairs. Braybrooke had noticed that.

As he considered the matter he began to feel rather uneasy. Was it possible that Adela Sellingworth—his mind hesitated, then took the unpleasant leap—that Adela Sellingworth was beginning to like young Craven in an unsuitable way?

Craven certainly had behaved oddly when Adela Sellingworth had been discussed between them, and when Craven had been the subject of discussion with Adela Sellingworth she had behaved curiously. There was something behind it all. Of that Braybrooke was convinced. But his perplexity and doubt increased to something like agitation a few days later when he met a well-born woman of his acquaintance, who had "gone in for" painting and living her own life, and had become a bit of a Bohemian. She had happened to mention that she had seen his friend,

"that wonderful-looking Lady Sellingworth," dining at the *Bella Napoli* on a recent evening. Naturally Braybrooke supposed that the allusion was to the night of Lady Sellingworth's dinner with Beryl Van Tuyn, and he spoke of the lovely girl as Lady Sellingworth's companion. But his informant, looking rather surprised, told him that Lady Sellingworth had been with a very handsome young man, and, on discreet inquiry being made, gave an admirable description from the painter's point of view, of Craven.

Braybrooke said nothing, but he was secretly almost distressed. He thought it such a mistake for his distinguished friend to go wandering about in Soho alone with a mere boy. It was undignified. It was not the thing. He could not understand it unless really she was losing her head. And then he remembered her past. Although he never spoke of it, and now seldom thought about it, Braybrooke knew very well what sort of woman Adela Sellingworth had been. But her dignified life of ten years had really almost wiped her former escapades out of his recollection. There seemed to be a gulf fixed between the professional beauty and the white-haired recluse of Berkeley Square. When he looked at her, sat with her now, if he ever gave a thought to her past it was accompanied, or immediately followed, by a mental question: "Was it *she* who did that?" or "Can *she* ever have been like that?"

But now Braybrooke uneasily began to remember Lady Sellingworth's past reputation and to think of the "old guard."

If she were to fall back into folly now, after what she had done ten years ago, the "old guard" would show her no mercy. Her character would be torn to pieces. He regretted very much his introduction of

Craven into her life. But how could he have thought that she would fascinate a boy?

After much careful thought—for he took his social responsibilities and duties very seriously—he resolved to take action on the lines which had occurred to him when he first began to be anxious about Craven's feeling towards Adela Sellingworth; he resolved to do his best to bring Beryl Van Tuyn and Craven together.

The first step he took was to call on Miss Cronin when Beryl Van Tuyn was out. He went to Claridge's in inquire for Miss Van Tuyn. On ascertaining that she was not at home he sent up his name to Miss Cronin, who was practically always in the house. At any rate, Braybrooke, who had met her several times at Miss Van Tuyn's apartment in Paris, had understood so from herself. If Miss Van Tuyn needed her as a chaperon she was, of course, to be counted upon to risk taking air and exercise. Otherwise, as she frankly said, she preferred to stay quietly at home. By nature she was sedentary. Her temperament inclined her to a sitting posture, which, however, she frequently varied by definitely lying down.

On this occasion Miss Cronin was as usual in the house, and begged that Mr. Braybrooke would come up. He found her in an arm-chair—she had just vacated a large sofa—with Bourget's "*Le Disciple*" in her hand. Her eyebrows were rather dim, for she had caught a slight London cold which had led her to neglect them. But she was looking mildly cheerful, and was very glad to have a visitor. Though quite happy alone with Bourget she was always ready for a comfortable gossip; and she liked Francis Braybrooke.

After a few words about the cold, Bourget and Paris, Braybrooke turned the conversation to Miss Van Tuyn. He had understood that she meant only to make a short stay in London, and rather wondered about the change of plans which had brought Miss Cronin across the Channel. Miss Cronin, he soon discovered, was rather wondering too.

"Beryl seems to have been quite got hold of by London," she observed with mild surprise.

After a pause she added:

"It may be—mind I don't say it is, but it may be—the Wallace Collection."

"The Wallace Collection?" said Braybrooke.

"I believe she goes there every day. It is in Manchester Square, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I think it must be that. Because two or three times lately I have heard her mention Manchester Square as if it were very much on her mind. Once I remember her saying that Manchester Square was worth all the rest of London put together! And another time she said that Manchester square ought to be in Paris. That struck me as very strange, but after making inquiries I found that the Wallace Collection was situated there, or near there."

"Hertford House is in the Square."

"Then it is that. You know how wrapped up Beryl is in that kind of thing. And, of course, she knows all the Paris collections by heart. Is the Wallace Collection large? Does it contain much?"

"It contains innumerable priceless treasures," returned Braybrooke.

"Innumerable! Dear me!" murmured Fanny Cronin, managing to lift the dimly painted eyebrows in a

distinctively plaintive manner. “Then I dare say we shall be here for months.”

“You don’t think,” began Braybrooke with exquisite caution, “you don’t think that possibly she may have a more human reason for remaining in London?”

Fanny Cronin made a rabbit’s mouth and looked slightly bemused.

“Human!” she said. “You think Beryl could have a human reason?”

“Oh, surely, surely!”

“But she prefers bronzes to people. I assure you it is so. I have heard her say that you can never be disappointed by a really good bronze, but that men and women often distress you by their absurdities and follies.”

“That sort of thing is only the outcome of a passing mood of youthful cynicism.”

“Is it? I sometimes think that a born collector, like Beryl, sees more in bronze and marble than in flesh and blood. She is very sweet, but she has quite a passion for possessing.”

“Is not the greatest possession of all the possession of another’s human heart?” said Braybrooke impressively, and with sentiment.

“I dare say it is, but really I cannot speak from experience,” said Fanny Cronin, with remarkable simplicity.

“Has it never occurred to you,” continued Braybrooke, “that your lovely charge is not likely to remain always Beryl Van Tuyn?”

Miss Cronin looked startled, and slightly moved her ears, a curious habit which she sometimes indulged in under the influence of sudden emotion,

and which was indicative of mental stress.

“But if Beryl ever marries,” she said, “I might have to give up living in Paris! I might have to go back to America!”

She leaned forward, with her small, plump, and conspicuously freckled hands grasping the arms of her chair.

“You don’t think, Mr. Braybrooke, that Beryl is not here for the Wallace Collection? You don’t think that she is in love with someone in London?”

Francis Braybrooke was decidedly taken aback by this abrupt emotional outburst. He had not meant to provoke it. Indeed, in his preoccupation with Craven’s affairs and Adela Sellingworth’s possible indiscretions—really he knew of no gentler word to apply to what he had in mind—he had entirely forgotten that Fanny Cronin’s charming profession of sitting in deep arm-chairs, reposing on luxurious sofas, and lying in perfect French beds, might, indeed would, be drastically interfered with by Miss Van Tuyn’s marriage. It was very careless of him. He was inclined to blame himself almost severely.

“My dear Miss Cronin,” he hastily exclaimed. “If you were ever to think of changing your—your”—he could not find the word; “condition” would not do; “state of life” suggested the Catechism; “profession” was preposterous, besides, he did not mean that —“your sofa”—he had got it—“your sofa in the Avenue Henri Martin for a sofa somewhere else, I know of at least a dozen charming houses in Paris which would gladly, I might say thankfully, open their doors to receive you.”

This was really a lie. At the moment Braybrooke did not know of one. But he hastily made up his mind to be “responsible” for Fanny Cronin if

anything should occur through his amiable machinations.

"Thank you, Mr. Braybrooke. You are kindness itself. So, then, Beryl *is* going to marry! And she never hinted it to me, although we talked over marriage only yesterday, when I gave her Bourget's views on it as expressed in his '*Physiologie de l'amour moderne*.' She never said one word. She never—"

But at this point Braybrooke felt that an interruption, however rude, was obligatory.

"I have no reason whatever to suppose that Miss Van Tuyn is thinking of marriage at this moment," he said, in an almost shrill voice.

"But surely you would not frighten me without a reason," said Fanny Cronin with mild severity, sitting back again in her chair.

"Frighten you, dear Miss Cronin! I would not do that for the world. What have I said to frighten you?"

"You talked of my changing my sofa for a sofa somewhere else! If Beryl is not going to marry why should I think of changing?"

"But nothing lasts for ever. The whole world is in a state of flux."

"Really, Mr. Braybrooke! I am quite sure *I* am not in a state of flux!" said Miss Cronin with unusual dignity. "We American women, you must understand, have our principles and know how to preserve them."

"On my honour, I only meant that life inevitably brings with it changes. I am sure you will bear me out in that."

"I don't know about bearing you out," said Miss Cronin, looking rather helplessly at Francis Braybrooke's fairly tall and well-nourished figure.

"But why should Beryl want to change? She is very happy as she is."

"I know—I know. But surely such a lovely girl is certain to marry some day. And can we wish it otherwise? Some day a man will come who knows how to appreciate her as she deserves, who understands her nature, who is ready to devote his life to fulfilling her deepest needs."

Miss Cronin suddenly looked intelligent and at the same time like a dragon. Never before had Braybrooke seen such an expression upon her face, such a stiffening of dignity to her ample figure. She sat straight up, looked him full in the face, and observed:

"I understand your meaning, Mr. Braybrooke. You wish to marry Beryl. Well, you must forgive me for saying that I think you are much too old for her."

Braybrooke had not blushed for probably at least forty years, but he blushed scarlet now, and seized his beard with a hand that looked thoroughly unstrung.

"My dear Miss Cronin!" he said, in a voice which was almost hoarse with protest. "You absolutely misunderstood me. It is much too la—I mean that I have no intention whatever of changing my condition. No, no! Let us talk of something else. So you are reading '*Le Disciple*'" (he picked it up). "A very striking book! I always think it one of Bourget's very best."

He poured forth an energetic cataract of words in praise of Miss Cronin's favourite author, and presently got away without any further quite definite misunderstanding. But when he was out in the corridor on his way to the lift he indulged himself in a very unwonted expression of acrimonious

condemnation.

"Damn these red-headed old women!" he muttered in his beard. "There's no doing anything with them! The idea of my going to her to propose for Miss Van Tuyn! What next, I wonder?"

When he was out in Brook Street he hesitated for a moment, then took out his watch and looked at it. Half-past three! He thought of the Wallace Collection. It seemed to draw him strangely just then. He put his watch back and walked towards Manchester Square.

He had gained the Square and was about to enter the enclosure before Hertford House by the gateway on the left, when he saw Miss Van Tuyn come out by the gateway on the right, and walk slowly towards Oxford Street in deep conversation with a small horsey-looking man, whose face he could not see, but whose back and legs, and whose dress and headgear, strongly suggested to him the ring at Newmarket and the Paddock at Ascot.

Braybrooke hesitated. The attraction of the Wallace Collection no longer drew him. Besides, it was getting late. On the other hand, he scarcely liked to interrupt an earnest tete-a-tete. If it had not been that he was exceptionally strung up at that moment he would probably have gone quietly off to one of his clubs. But who knew what that foolish old woman at Claridge's might say to Miss Van Tuyn when she reached her hotel? It really was essential in the sacred interest of truth that he should forestall Fanny Cronin. The jockey—if it was a jockey—Miss Van Tuyn was with must put up with an interruption. But the interruption must be brought about naturally. It would not do to come up behind them. That would seem too intrusive. He must

manage to skip round deftly when the occasion offered, and by a piece of masterly strategy to come upon them face to face.

Seized of this intention Braybrooke did a thing he had never done before; he “dogged” two human beings, walking with infinite precaution.

His quarry presently turned into the thronging crowds of Oxford Street and made towards the Marble Arch, keeping to the right-hand pavement. Braybrooke saw his opportunity. He dodged across the road to an island, waited there till a policeman, extending a woollen thumb, stopped the traffic, then gained the opposite pavement, hurried decorously on that side towards the Marble Arch, and after a sprint of perhaps a couple of hundred yards recrossed the street almost at the risk of his life, and walked warily back towards Oxford Circus, keeping his eyes wide open.

Before many minutes had passed he discerned the graceful and athletic figure of Miss Van Tuyn coming towards him; then, immediately afterwards, he caught a glimpse of a blue shaven face with an aquiline nose beside her, and realized that the man he had taken for a jockey was Dick Garstin, the famous painter.

As Braybrooke knew everyone, he, of course, knew Garstin, and he wondered now why he had not recognized his back at Manchester Square. Perhaps his mind had been too engrossed with Fanny Cronin and the outrage at Claridge’s. He only knew the painter slightly, just sufficiently to dislike him very much. Indeed, only the acknowledged eminence of the man induced Braybrooke to have anything to do with him. But one has to know publicly acclaimed geniuses or consent to be thoroughly out of it. So

Braybrooke included Garstin in the enormous circle of his acquaintances, and went to his private views.

But now the recognition gave him pause, and he almost wished he had not taken so much trouble to meet Miss Van Tuyn and her companion. For he could say nothing he wanted to say while Garstin was there. And the man was so damnably unconventional, in fact, so downright rude, and so totally devoid of all delicacy, all insight in social matters, that even if he saw that Braybrooke wanted a quiet word with Miss Van Tuyn he would probably not let him have it. However, it was too late now to avoid the steadily advancing couple. Miss Van Tuyn had seen Braybrooke, and sent him a smile. In a moment he was face to face with them, and she stopped to greet him.

"I have been spending an hour at the Wallace Collection with Mr. Garstin," she said. "And quarrelling with him all the time. His views on French art are impossible."

"Ah! how are you?" said Braybrooke, addressing the painter with almost exaggerated cordiality.

Garstin nodded in his usual offhand way. He did not dislike Braybrooke. When Braybrooke was there he perceived him, having eyes, and having ears heard his voice. But hitherto Braybrooke had never succeeded in conveying any impression to the mind of Garstin. On one occasion when Braybrooke had been discussed in Garstin's presence, and Garstin had said: "Who is he?" and had received a description of Braybrooke with the additional information: "But he comes to your private views! You have known him for years!" he had expressed his appreciation of Braybrooke's personality and character by the exclamation: "Oh, to be sure! The beard with the

gentleman!" Braybrooke did not know this, or he would certainly have disliked Garstin even more than he did already.

As Garstin's nod was not followed by any other indication of humanity Braybrooke addressed Miss Van Tuyn, and told her of his call at Claridge's.

"And as you were not to be found I paid a visit to Miss Cronin."

"She must have bored you very much," was the charming girl's comment. "She has the most confused mind I know."

What an opening for Braybrooke! But he could not take it because of Garstin, who stood by cruelly examining the stream of humanity which flowed past them hypnotized by the shops.

"May I—shall I be in the way if I turn back with you for a few steps?" he ventured, with the sort of side glance at Garstin that a male dog gives to another male dog while walking round and round on a first meeting. "It is such a pleasure to see you."

Here he threw very definite admiration into the eyes which he fixed on Miss Van Tuyn.

She responded automatically and begged him to accompany them.

"Dick is leaving me at the Marble Arch," she said. "The reason he gives is that he is going to take a Turkish Bath in the Harrow Road. But that is a lie that even an American girl brought up in Paris is unable to swallow. What are you really going to do, Dick?"

As she spoke she walked on, having Garstin on one side of her and Francis Braybrooke on the other.

"I'm going to have a good sweat in the Harrow Road."

Braybrooke was disgusted. It was not that he really minded the word used to indicate the process which obtains in a Turkish Bath. No; it was Garstin's blatant way of speaking it that offended his susceptibilities. The man was perpetually defying the decencies and delicacies which were as perfume in Braybrooke's nostrils.

"The doctors say that it is an excellent thing to open the pores," said Braybrooke discreetly.

Garstin cast a glance at him, as if he now saw him for the first time.

"Do you mean to tell us you believe in doctors?" he said.

"I do, in some doctors," said Braybrooke. "There are charlatans in all professions unfortunately."

"And some of them are R.A.'s," said Miss Van Tuyn. "By the way, Dick is going to paint me."

"Really! How very splendid!" said Braybrooke, again with exaggerated cordiality. "With such a subject I'm sure—"

But here he was interrupted by Garstin, who said:

"She tells everyone I'm going to paint her because she hopes by reiteration to force me to do it. But she isn't the type that interests me."

"My dear Dick, I'll gladly take to morphia or drink if it will help," said Miss Van Tuyn. "I can easily get the Cafe Royal expression. One has only to sit with a glass of something the colour of absinthe in front of one and look sea-sick. I'm perfectly certain that with a week or two's practice I could look quite as degraded as Cora."

"Cora?" said Braybrooke, alertly, hearing a name he did not know.

"She's a horror who goes to the Cafe Royal and

whom Dick calls a free woman."

"Free from all the virtues, I suppose!" said Braybrooke smartly.

"Good-bye both of you!" said Garstin at this juncture.

"But we haven't got to the Marble Arch!"

"What's that got to do with it? I'm off."

He seemed to be going, then stopped, and directed the two pin-points of light at Miss Van Tuyn.

"I flatly refuse to make an Academy portrait of you, so don't hope for it," he said. "But if you come along to the studio to-morrow afternoon you may possibly find me at work on a blackmailer."

"Dick!" said Miss Van Tuyn, in a voice which startled Braybrooke.

"I don't promise," said the painter. "I don't believe in promises, unless you break 'em. But it's just on the cards."

"You are painting a blackmailer!" said Braybrooke, with an air of earnest interest. "How very original!"

"Original! Why is it original to paint a blackmailer?"

"Oh—well, one doesn't often run across them. They—they seem to keep so much to themselves."

"I don't agree with you. If they did some people would be a good deal better off than they are now."

"Ah, to be sure! That's very true. I had never looked at it in that light."

"What time, Dick?" said Miss Van Tuyn, rather eagerly.

"You might look in about three."

"I will. That's a bargain."

Garstin turned on his heel and tramped away

towards Berkeley Street.

"You are going home by Park Lane?" said Braybrooke, feeling greatly relieved, but still rather upset.

"Yes. But why don't you take me somewhere to tea?"

"Nothing I should like better. Where shall we go?"

"Let's go to the Ritz. I had meant to walk, but let us take a taxi."

There was suddenly a change in Miss Van Tuyn. Braybrooke noticed it at once. She seemed suddenly restless, almost excited, and as if she were in a hurry.

"There's one!" she added, lifting her tightly furled umbrella.

The driver stopped, and in a moment they were on their way to the Ritz.

"You like Dick Garstin?" said Braybrooke, pulling up one of the windows and wondering what Miss Cronin would say if she could see him at this moment.

"I don't like him," returned Miss Van Tuyn. "No one could do that. But I admire him, and he interests me. He is almost the only man I know who is really indifferent to opinion. And he has occasional moments of good nature. But I don't wish him to be soft. If he were he would be like everyone else."

"I must confess I find it very difficult to get on with him."

"He's a wonderful painter."

"No doubt—in his way."

"I think it a great mistake for any creative artist to be wonderful in someone else's way," said Miss Van Tuyn.

“I only meant that his way is sometimes rather startling. And then his subjects! Drugged women! Dram drinking men! And now it seems even blackmailers.”

“A blackmailer might have a wonderful face.”

“Possibly. But it would be likely to have a disgusting expression.”

“It might. On the other hand, I could imagine a blackmailer looking like Chaliapine as Mephistopheles.”

“I don’t like distressing art,” said Braybrooke, rather firmly. “And I think there is too much of it nowadays.”

“Anything is better than the merely nice. And you have far too much of that in England. Men like Dick Garstin are a violent protest against that, and sometimes they go to extremes. He has caught the secret of evil, and when he has done with it he may quite possibly catch the secret of good.”

“And then,” said Braybrooke, “I am sure he will paint you.”

It was meant to be a very charmingly turned compliment. But Miss Van Tuyn received it rather doubtfully.

“I don’t know that I want to wait quite so long as that,” she murmured. “Besides—I think I rather come in between. At least, I hope so.”

At this point in the conversation the cab stopped before the Ritz.

To Francis Braybrooke’s intense astonishment—and it might almost be added confusion—the first person his eyes lit on as they walked towards the tea-tables was Fanny Cronin, comfortably seated in an immense arm-chair, devouring a muffin in the

company of an old lady, whose determined face was completely covered with a criss-cross of wrinkles, and whose withered hands were flashing with magnificent rings. He was so taken aback that he was guilty of a definite start, and the exclamation, “Miss Cronin!” in a voice that suggested alarm.

“Oh, old Fanny with Mrs. Clem Hodson!” said Miss Van Tuyn. “She’s a school friend of Fanny’s from Philadelphia. Let us go to that table in the far corner. I’ll just speak to them while you order tea.”

“But I thought Miss Cronin never went out.”

“She never does, except with Mrs. Clem, unless I want her.”

“How singularly unfortunate I am to-day!” thought Braybrooke, as he bowed to Miss Cronin in a rather confused manner and went to do as he was told.

He ordered tea, then sat down anxiously to wait for Miss Van Tuyn. From his corner he watched her colloquy with the two school friends from Philadelphia, and it seemed to him that something very important was being told. For Fanny Cronin looked almost animated, and her manner approached the emphatic as she spoke to the standing girl. Mrs. Hodson seemed to take very little part in the conversation, but sat looking very determined and almost imperious as she listened. And presently Braybrooke saw her extremely observant dark eyes—small, protuberant and round as buttons—turn swiftly, with even, he thought, a darting movement, in his direction.

“I shall be driven, really driven, to make the matter quite clear,” he thought, almost with desperation. “Otherwise—”

But at this moment Miss Van Tuyn came away to him, and their tea was brought by a waiter.

He thought she cast a rather satirical look at him as she sat down, but she only said;

“Dear old things! They are very happy together. Mrs. Clem is extraordinarily proud of having ‘got Fanny out,’ as she calls it. A boy who had successfully drawn a badger couldn’t be more triumphant. Now let’s forget them!”

This was all very well, and Braybrooke asked for nothing better; but he was totally unable to forget the two cronies, whom he saw in the distance with their white and chestnut heads alarmingly close together, talking eagerly, and, he was quite sure, not about the dear old days in Philadelphia. What had they—or rather what had Miss Cronin said to Miss Van Tuyn? He longed to know. It really was essential that he should know. Yet he scarcely knew how to approach the subject. It was rather difficult to explain elaborately to a beautiful girl that you had not the least wish to marry her. He was certainly not at his best as he took his first cup of tea and sought about for an opening. Miss Van Tuyn talked with her usual assurance, but he fancied that her violet eyes were full of inquiry when they glanced at him; and he began to feel positive that the worst had happened, and that Fanny Cronin had informed her —no, misinformed her—of what had happened at Claridge’s. Now and then, as he met Miss Van Tuyn’s eyes, he thought they were searching his with an unusual consciousness, as if they expected something very special from him. Presently, too, she let the conversation languish, and at last allowed it to drop. In the silence that succeeded Braybrooke was seized by a terrible fear that perhaps she was waiting for him to propose. If he did propose she would refuse him of course. He had no doubt about that. But though to be accepted by her, or indeed by anyone,

would have caused him acute distress, on the other hand no one likes to be refused.

He thought of Craven. Was it possible to make any use of Craven to get him out of his difficulty? Dare he hint at the real reason of his visit to Miss Cronin? He had intended delicately to "sound" the chaperon on the subject of matrimony, to find out if there was anything on the *tapis* in Paris, if Miss Van Tuyn had any special man friend there, in short to make sure of his ground before deciding to walk on it. But he could hardly explain that to Miss Van Tuyn. To do so would be almost brutal, and quite against all his traditions.

Again he caught her eye in the desperate silence. Her gaze seemed to say to him: "When are you going to begin?" He felt that he must say something, even though it were not what she was probably expecting.

"I was interested," he hurriedly began, clasping his beard and looking away from his companion, "to hear the other day that a young friend of mine had met you, a very charming and promising young fellow, who has a great career before him, unless I am much mistaken."

"Who?" she asked; he thought rather curtly.

"Alick Craven of the Foreign Office. He told me he was introduced to you at Adela Sellingworth's."

"Oh yes, he was," said Miss Van Tuyn.

And she said no more.

"He was very enthusiastic about you," ventured Braybrooke, wondering how to interpret her silence.

"Really!"

"Yes. We belong to the same club, the St. James's. He entertained me for more than an hour with your praises."

Miss Van Tuyn looked at him with rather acute inquiry, as if she could not make up her mind about something with which he was closely concerned.

“He would like to meet you again,” said Braybrooke, with soft firmness.

“But I have met him again two or three times. He called on me.”

“And I understand you were together in a restaurant in—Soho, I think it was.”

“Yes, we were.”

“What did you think of him?” asked Braybrooke.

As he put the question he was aware that he was being far from subtle. The vision in the distance—now eating plum cake, but still very observant—upset his nervous system and deprived him almost entirely of his usual savoir faire.

“He seems quite a nice sort of boy,” said Miss Van Tuyn, still looking rather coldly inquisitive, as if she were secretly puzzled but intended to emerge into complete understanding before she had done with Braybrooke. “His Foreign Office manner is rather against him. But perhaps some day he’ll grow out of that—unless it becomes accentuated.”

“If you knew him better I feel sure you would like him. He had no reservations about you—none at all. But, then, how could he have?”

“Well, at any rate I haven’t got the Foreign Office manner.”

“No, indeed!” said Braybrooke, managing a laugh that just indicated his appreciation of the remark as an excellent little joke. “But it really means nothing.”

“That’s a pity. One’s manner should always have a meaning of some kind. Otherwise it is an absolute drawback to one’s personality.”

"That is perhaps a fault of the Englishman. But we must remember that still waters run deep."

"Do you think so? But if they don't run at all?"

"How do you mean?"

"There is such a thing as the village pond."

"How very trying she is this afternoon!" thought poor Braybrooke, endeavouring mentally to pull up his socks.

"I half promised Craven the other day," he lied, resolutely ignoring her unkind comparison of his protege to the abomination which is too often veiled with duckweed, "to contrive another meeting between you and him. But I fear he has bored you. And in that case perhaps I ought not to hold to my promise. You meet so many brilliant Frenchmen that I dare say our slower, but really I sometimes think deeper, mentality scarcely appeals to you."

(At this point he saw Fanny Cronin leaning impressively towards Mrs. Clem Hodson, as if about to impart some very secret information to that lady, who bent to receive it.)

"Again those deep waters!" said Miss Van Tuyn, this time with unmistakable satire. "But perhaps you are right. I remember a very brilliant American, who knew practically all the nations of Europe, telling me that in his opinion you English were the subtlest—I'm afraid he was rude enough to say the most artful—of the lot."

As she spoke the word "artful" her fine eyes smiled straight into Braybrooke's, and she pinched her red lips together very expressively.

"But I must confess," she added, "that at the moment we were discussing diplomats."

"Artful was rather unkind," murmured

Braybrooke. “I—I hope you don’t think my friend Craven is one of that type?”

“Oh, I wasn’t thinking of Mr. Craven.”

The implication was fairly obvious, and Braybrooke did not miss it, although he was not in possession of his full mental powers.

“Perhaps it is our own fault,” he said. “But I think we English are often misunderstood.”

As he spoke he shot a rather poignant glance in the direction of Fanny Cronin, who had now finished her tea, and was gathering her fur cloak about her as if in preparation for departure.

“In fact,” he added, “I am sure of it. This very day even—”

He paused, wondering how to put it, yet feeling that he really must at all costs make matters fairly clear to his companion.

“Yes?” said Miss Van Tuyn sweetly.

“To-day, this afternoon, I think that your dear Miss Cronin failed once or twice to grasp my full meaning when I was talking with her.”

“Oh, Fanny! But she’s an old fool! Of course she’s a dear, and I’m very fond of her, but she is essentially nebulous. And what was it that you think she misunderstood?”

Braybrooke hesitated. It really was very difficult to put what he wanted to say into words. Scarcely ever before had he felt himself so incapable of dealing adequately with a socially awkward situation. If only he knew what Miss Cronin had said to Miss Van Tuyn while he was ordering tea!

“I could scarcely say I know. I really could not put my finger upon it,” he said at last. “There was a general atmosphere of confusion, or so it seemed to

me. We—we discussed marriage."

"I hope the old dear didn't think you were proposing to her?"

"Good heavens—oh, no! no! I don't quite know what she thought." (He lowered his eyes.) "But it wasn't that."

"That's a mercy at any rate!"

Braybrooke still kept his eyes on the ground, but a dogged look came into his face, and he said, speaking more resolutely:

"I'm afraid I alarmed dear Miss Cronin."

"How perfectly splendid!" said Miss Van Tuyn.

"She is very fond of you."

"Much fonder of Bourget!"

"I don't think so," he said, with emphasis. "She is so devoted to you that quite inadvertently I alarmed her. After all, we were—we were"—nobly he decided to take the dreadful plunge—"we were two elderly people talking together as elderly people will, I thought quite freely and frankly, and I ventured—do forgive me—to hint that a great many men must wish to marry you; young men suited to you, promising men, men with big futures before them, anxious for a brilliant and beautiful wife."

"That was very charming and solicitous of you," said Miss Van Tuyn with a smile. "But I don't know that they do!"

"Do what?" said Braybrooke, almost losing his head, as he saw the vision in the distance, now cloaked and gloved, rustling in an evident preparation for something, which might be departure or might on the other hand be approach.

She observed him with a definite surprise, which she seemed desirous of showing.

"I was alluding to the promising men," she said.

"Which men?" asked Braybrooke, still hypnotized by the vision.

"The men with big futures before them who you were kind enough to tell Fanny were longing to marry me."

"Oh, yes!" (With a great effort he pulled himself together.) "Those men to be sure!"

The vision was now standing up and apparently disputing the bill, for it was evidently talking at great length to a man in livery, who had a slip of paper in his hand, and who occasionally pointed to it in a resentful manner and said something, whereupon the vision made negative gestures and there was much tossing and shaking of heads. Resolutely Braybrooke looked away. It was nothing to do with him even if the Ritz was trying to make an overcharge for plum cake.

"I just hinted that there must be men who—but you understand?"

Miss Van Tuyn smiled unembarrassed assent.

"And then Miss Cronin"—he lowered his voice —"seemed thoroughly upset. I scarcely knew what she thought I meant, but whatever it was I had not meant it. That is certain. But the fact is she is so devoted to you that the mere fact of your some day doing what all lovely and charming women are asked to do and usually consent to do—but—but Miss Cronin seems to—I think she wants to say something to you."

Miss Van Tuyn looked suddenly rather rebellious. She did not glance towards the Philadelphia school friends, but turned her shoulder towards them and said:

"Naturally my marriage would make a great difference to Fanny, but I have never known her to worry about it."

"She is worrying now!" said poor Braybrooke, with earnest conviction. "But really she—I am sure she wishes to speak to you."

The line showed itself in Miss Van Tuyn's forehead.

"Will you be kind and just go and ask her what she wants? Please tell her that I am not coming back yet as I am going to call on Lady Sellingworth when I leave here."

Braybrooke got up, trying to conceal his reluctance to obey. Miss Cronin, entrenched as it were behind her old school friend, and with dawnings of the dragon visible beneath her feathered hat, and even, strangely, mysteriously, underneath her long cloak of musquash, was endeavouring by signs and wonders to attract her Beryl's attention, while Mrs. Clem Hodson stood looking imperious, and ready for any action that would prove her solidarity with her old schoolmate.

"What she wants—and you are going to call on Lady Sellingworth!" said Braybrooke.

"Yes; and to-night I'm dining out."

"Dining out to-night—just so."

There was no further excuse for delay, and he went towards the two old ladies, a grievous ambassador. It really had been the most unpleasant afternoon he remembered to have spent. He began to feel almost in fault, almost as if he had done—or at the least had contemplated doing—something outrageous, something for which he deserved the punishment which was now being meted out to him. As he slowly approached Miss Cronin he

endeavoured resolutely to bear himself like a man who had not proposed that day for Miss Van Tuyn's hand. But preposterously, Miss Cronin's absurd misconception seemed to have power over his conscience, and that again over his appearance and gait. He was fully aware, as he went forward to convey Miss Van Tuyn's message, that he made a very poor show of it. In fact, he was just then living up to Dick's description of him as "the beard with the gentleman."

"Oh, Mr. Braybrooke," said Miss Cronin as he came up, "so you are here with Beryl!"

"Yes; so I am here with Miss Van Tuyn!"

Miss Cronin exchanged a glance with Mrs. Clem Hodson.

"You didn't tell me when you called that you were taking her out to tea!"

"No, I didn't!" said Braybrooke.

"This is my old schoolmate, Mrs. Clem Hodson. Suzanne, this is Mr. Braybrooke, a friend of Beryl's."

Mrs. Clem Hodson bowed from the waist, and looked at Braybrooke with the expression of one who knew a great deal more about him than his own mother knew.

"This hotel overcharges," she said firmly.

"Really! I should have scarcely have thought—"

"There were two pieces of plum cake on the bill, and we only ate one."

"Oh, I've just remembered," said Miss Cronin, as if irradiated with sudden light.

"What, dear?"

"I *did* have two slices. One was before the muffin, while we were waiting for it, and the other was after. And I only remembered the second."

"In that case, dear, we've done the waiter an injustice and libelled the hotel."

"I will make it all right if you will allow me," said Braybrooke almost obsequiously. "I'm well known here. I will explain to the manager, a most charming man."

He turned definitely to face Fanny Cronin.

"Miss Van Tuyn asked me to tell you what she wants."

"Indeed! Does she want something?"

"No. I mean she told me to ask you what you want."

Miss Cronin looked at Mrs. Clem Hodson, hesitated, and then made a very definite rabbit's mouth.

"I don't know that I want anything, thank you, Mr. Braybrooke. But if Beryl is going—she is not going?"

"I really don't know exactly."

"She hasn't finished her tea, perhaps?"

"I don't know for certain. But she asked me to tell you she wasn't coming back yet"—the two old ladies exchanged glances which Braybrooke longed to contradict—"as she is going to call on Lady Sellingworth presently."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Clem Hodson, gazing steadily at Fanny Cronin.

"In Berkeley Square!" added Braybrooke emphatically. "And to-night she is dining out."

"Did she say where?" asked Miss Cronin, slightly moving her ears.

"No; she didn't."

"Thank you," said Miss Cronin. "Good-bye, Mr. Braybrooke."

She held out her hand like one making a large and difficult concession to her own Christianity. Mrs. Clem Hodson bowed again from the waist and also made a concession. She muttered, “Very glad to have met you!” and then cleared her throat, while the criss-cross of wrinkles moved all over her face.

“I will make it all right with the manager,” said Braybrooke, with over-anxious earnestness, and feeling now quite definitely that he must really have proposed to Miss Cronin for Miss Van Tuyn’s hand that afternoon, and that he must have just lied about the disposal of her time until she had to dress for dinner.

“The manager?” said Miss Cronin.

“What manager?” said Mrs. Clem Hodson.

“About the plum cake! Surely you remember?”

“Oh—the plum cake!” said Mrs. Hodson, looking steadily at Fanny Cronin. “Thank you very much indeed! Very good of you!”

“Thank you,” said Miss Cronin, with a sudden piteous look. “I did eat two slices. Come, Suzanne! Good-bye again, Mr. Braybrooke.”

They turned to go out. As Braybrooke watched the musquash slowly vanishing he knew in his bones that, when he did not become engaged to Miss Van Tuyn, Fanny Cronin, till the day of her death, would feel positive that he had proposed to her that afternoon and had been rejected. And he muttered in his beard:

“Damn these red-headed old women! I will *not* make it all right with the manager about the plum cake!”

It was a poor revenge, but the only one he could think of at the moment.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Miss Van Tuyn when he rejoined her. "Has old Fanny been tiresome?"

"Oh, no—no! But old Fan—I beg your pardon, I mean Miss Cronin—Miss Cronin has a peculiar—but she is very charming. I gave her your message, and she quite understood. We were talking about plum cake. That is why I was so long."

"I see! A fascinating subject like that must be difficult to get away from."

"Yes—very! What a delightful woman Mrs. Hodson is."

"I think her extremely wearisome. Her nature is as wrinkled as her face. And now I must be on my way to Adela Sellingworth's."

"May I walk with you as far as her door?"

"Of course."

When they were out in Piccadilly he said:

"And now what about my promise to Mr. Craven?"

"I shall be delighted to meet him again," said Miss Van Tuyn in a careless voice. "And I would not have you break a promise on my account. Such a sacred thing!"

"But if he bores you—"

"He doesn't bore me more than many young men do."

"Then I will let you know. We might have a theatre party."

"Anything you like. And why not ask Adela Sellingworth to make a fourth?"

This suggestion was not at all to Braybrooke's liking, but he scarcely knew what to say in answer to it. Really, it seemed as if this afternoon was to end as

it had begun—in a contretemps.

"I am so fond of her," continued Miss Van Tuyn. "And I'm sure she would enjoy it."

"But she so seldom goes out."

"All the more reason to try to persuade her out of her shell. I believe she will come if you tell her I and Mr. Craven make up the rest of the party. We all got on so well together in Soho."

"I will certainly ask her," said Braybrooke.

What else could he say?

At the corner of Berkeley Square Miss Van Tuyn stopped and rather resolutely bade him good-bye.

When Braybrooke was alone he felt almost tired out. If he had been an Italian he would probably have believed that someone had looked on him that day with the evil eye. He feared that he had been almost maladroit. His social self-confidence was severely shaken. And yet he had only meant well; he had only been trying to do what he considered his duty. It had all begun with Miss Cronin's preposterous mistake. That had thoroughly upset him, and from that moment he had not been in possession of his normal means. And now he was let in for a party combining Adela Sellingworth with Miss Van Tuyn and Craven. It was singularly unfortunate. But probably Lady Sellingworth would refuse the invitation he now had to send her. She really went out very seldom. He could only hope for a refusal. That, too, was tragic. He could not remember ever before having actively wished that an invitation of his should be declined.

He was so reduced in self-confidence and spirits that he turned into the St. James's Club, sank down alone in a remote corner, and called for a dry Martini, although he knew quite well that it would

set up fermentation.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER I

Lady Sellingworth was “not at home” when Miss Van Tuyn called, though no doubt she was in the house, and the latter left her card, on which she wrote in pencil, “So sorry not to find you. Do let us meet again soon. I may not be in London much longer.” When she wrote the last sentence she was really thinking of Paris with a certain irritation of desire. In Paris she always had a good, even a splendid, time. London was treating her badly. Perhaps it was hardly worth while to stay on. She had many adorers in Paris, and no elderly women there ever got in her way. Frenchmen never ran after elderly women. She could not conceive of any young Frenchman doing what Craven had done if offered the choice between a girl of twenty-two and a woman of sixty. Englishmen really were incomprehensible. Was it worth while to bother

about them? Probably not. But she was by nature combative as well as vain, and Craven's behaviour had certainly given him a greater value in her estimation. If he had done the quite ordinary thing, and fallen in love with her at once, she might have been pleased and yet have thought very little of him. He would then have been in a class with many others. Now he was decidedly in a class by himself. If he loved he would not be an ordinary lover. She was angry with him. She intended some day to punish him. But he puzzled her, and very definitely now he attracted her.

No; really she would not go back to Paris of the open arms and the comprehensible behaviour without coming to conclusions with Craven. To do so would be to retreat practically beaten from the field, and she had never yet acknowledged a defeat.

Besides, she had something in prospect, something that for the moment, at any rate, would hold her in London even without the attraction, half repellent, of Craven. Evidently Dick Garstin, for whatever reason, had done something, or was about to do something, for her. Always he managed to be irritating. It was just like him to spend two hours alone with her without saying one word about the living bronze, and then to rouse her curiosity when it was impossible that it should be gratified owing to the presence of Braybrooke. Garstin could never do anything in a pleasant and comfortable way. He must always, even in kindness, be semi-malicious. There was at times something almost Satanic in his ingenious avoidance of the common humanities. But it seemed that he was about to comply with her expressed whim. He had surely spoken to the Cafe Royal man, and had perhaps already received from him a promise to visit the studio.

She had not seen the stranger again. He had not been at the Cafe Royal on the night when she had dined there alone. But Garstin must have seen him again, unless, indeed, Garstin was being absolutely disgusting, was condescending to a cheap and vulgar hoax.

That was just possible. But somehow she believed in Garstin this time. She felt almost sure that he had done what she wished, and that to-morrow afternoon in Glebe Place she would meet the man to whom she had offered the shilling.

That would be distinctly amusing. She felt on the edge of a rather uncommon adventure.

On the following day, very soon after three, she pushed the bell outside Garstin's studio door in Glebe Place. It was not answered immediately, and, feeling impatient, she rang again without waiting long. Garstin opened the door, and smiled rather maliciously on seeing her.

"What a hurry you're in!" he said. "Come along in, my girl."

As he shut the heavy door behind her she turned in the lobby and said:

"Well, Dick?"

"I'm working in the upstairs studio," he returned blandly.

"What are you at work on?"

"Go up and you'll see for yourself."

She hastened through the studio on the ground floor, which was hung with small landscapes, and sketches in charcoal, and audacious caricatures of various well-known people. At the end of it was a short and wide staircase. She mounted it swiftly, and came into another large studio built out at the back

of the building. Here Garstin worked on his portraits, and here she expected to come face to face with the living bronze. As she drew near to the entrance of the studio she felt positive that he was waiting for her. But when she reached it and looked quickly and expectantly round she saw at once that the great room was empty. Only the few portraits on easels and on the pale walls looked at her with the vivid eyes which Garstin knew how to endow with an almost abnormal life.

Evidently Garstin had stopped below for a moment in the ground floor studio, but she now heard his heavy tramp on the stairs behind her and turned almost angrily.

"Dick, is this intended for a joke?"

"What do you mean by 'this'?"

"You know! Have you brought me here under false pretences? You know quite well why I came."

"Why don't you take off your hat?"

But for once Miss Van Tuyn's vanity was not on the alert; for once she did not care whether Garstin admired her head or not.

"I shall not take off my hat," she said brusquely. "I don't intend to stay unless there is the reason which I expected and which induced me to come here. Have you seen that remarkable-looking man again or not?"

"I have," said Garstin with a mischievous smile.

Miss Van Tuyn looked slightly mollified, but still uncertain.

"Did you speak to him?" she asked.

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"I told him to come along to the studio."

"You did! And—?"

"Why don't you take off your hat?"

"Because it suits me particularly well. Now tell me at once, don't be malicious and tiresome—are you expecting him?"

"I couldn't say that."

"You are not expecting him!"

"My good girl, we expect from those we rely on. What do I know about this fellow's character? I told him who I was, and what I wanted with him, and that I wanted it with him at three this afternoon. He's got the address. But whether we have any reason to expect him is more than I can say."

She looked quickly at the watch on her wrist.

"It is past three. I was late."

After an instant of silence she sat down on an old-fashioned sofa covered with dull green and red silk. Just behind it on an easel stood a half-finished portrait of the Cora woman, staring with hungry eyes over an empty tumbler.

"Give me a cigarette, Dick," she said. "Did he say he would come?"

The painter went over to an old Spanish cabinet and rummaged for a box of cigarettes, with his horsey-looking back turned towards her.

"Did he?" she repeated. "Can't you tell me what happened when you spoke to him? Why force me to cross-examine you in this indelicate way?"

"Here you are!" said Garstin, turning round with a box of cigarettes.

"Thank you."

"I gave him my name."

"He knew it, of course?"

“He didn’t say so. There was no celebrity-start of pleasure. I had to explain that I occasionally painted portraits and that I wished to make a study of his damned remarkable head. Upon that he handed me his card. Here it is.”

And Garstin drew out of a side pocket a visiting-card, which he gave to Miss Van Tuyn.

She read: “Nicolas Arabian.”

There was no address in the corner.

“What a curious name!”

She sat gazing at the card and smoking her cigarette.

“Do you know where he is staying?”

“No.”

“Did you speak English to him?”

“I did.”

“And he spoke good English?”

“Yes, with a foreign accent of some kind.”

At this moment an electric bell sounded below.

“There he is!” said Miss Van Tuyn, quickly giving back the card to Garstin, who dropped it into his pocket. “Do go down quickly and let him in, or he may think it is all a hoax and go away.”

The painter stood looking at her keenly, with his hands in his pockets and his strong, thin legs rather wide apart.

“Well, at any rate you’re damned unconventional!” he said. “At this moment you even look unconventional. What are your eyes shining about?”

“Dick—do go!”

She laid a hand on his arm. There was a strong grip in her fingers.

"This is a little adventure. And I love an adventure," she said.

"I only hope it ends badly," said Garstin, as he turned towards the staircase. "He's more patient than you. He hasn't rung twice."

"I believe he's gone away," she said, almost angrily as he disappeared down the stairs.

She got up. There was a grand piano in the studio at the far end. She moved as if she were going towards it, then returned and went to the head of the stairs. She heard the front door open and listened. Dick Garstin's big bass voice said in an offhand tone:

"Halloh! Thought you weren't coming! Glad to see you. Come along in!"

"I know I am late," said a warm voice—the voice of a man. "For me this place has been rather difficult to find. I am not well acquainted with the painters' quarter of London."

A door banged heavily. Then Miss Van Tuyn heard steps, and again the warm voice saying:

"I see you do caricatures. Or are these not by you?"

"Every one of them!" said Garstin. "Except that. That's a copy I made of one of Leonardo's horrors. It's fine. It's a thing to live with."

"Leonardo—ah, yes!" said the voice.

"I wonder if that man has ever heard of Leonardo?" was Miss Van Tuyn's thought just then.

"Up those stairs right ahead of you," said Garstin.

Miss Van Tuyn quickly drew back and sat down again on the sofa. An instant after she had done so the living bronze appeared at the top of the stairs, and his big brown eyes rested on her. No expression either of surprise, or of anything else, came into his

face as he saw her. And she realized immediately that whatever else this man was he was supremely self-possessed. Yet he had turned away from her shilling. Why was that? In that moment she began to wonder about him. He stood still, waiting for Garstin to join him. As he did this he looked formal but amazingly handsome, though there were some lines about his eyes which she had not noticed in the Cafe Royal. He was dressed in a dark town suit and wore a big double-breasted overcoat. He was holding a black bowler hat, a pair of thick white gloves and a silver-topped stick. As Garstin joined him, Miss Van Tuyn slowly got up from her sofa.

"A friend of mine—Beryl Van Tuyn," said Garstin. "Come to have a look round at what I'm up to." (He glanced at Miss Van Tuyn.) "Mr. Arabian," he added. "Take off your coat, won't you? Throw it anywhere."

Arabian bowed to Miss Van Tuyn, still looking formal and as if she were a total stranger whom he had never set eyes on before. She bowed to him. As she did so she thought that he was a little older than she had supposed. He was certainly over thirty. She wondered about his nationality and suspected that very mixed blood ran in his veins. Somehow, in spite of his quite extraordinary good looks, she felt almost certain that he was not a pure type of any nation. In her mind she dubbed him on the spot "a marvellous mongrel."

He obeyed Garstin's suggestion, took off his coat, and laid it with his hat, gloves and stick on a chair close to the staircase. Then for the first time he spoke to Miss Van Tuyn, who was still standing.

"I always love a studio, mademoiselle," he said, "and when Mr. Dick Garstin"—he pronounced the name with careful clearness—"was good enough to

invite me to his I was very thankful. His pictures are famous."

"You've been getting me up," said Garstin bluntly. "Reading 'Who's Who'!"

Arabian raised his eyebrows.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Don't be absurd and put on false modesty, Dick," said Miss Van Tuyn. "As if you weren't known to everyone!"

It was the first time she had spoken in Arabian's hearing since the episode in Shaftesbury Avenue, and, as she uttered her first words, she thought she detected a faint and fleeting look of surprise—it was like a mental start made visible—slip over his face, like a ray of pale light slipping over a surface. Immediately afterwards a keen expression came into his eyes, and he looked rather more self-possessed than before, rather harder even.

"Everyone, of course, knows your name, Mr. Dick Garstin, as mademoiselle says."

"Right you are!" said Garstin gruffly. "Glad to hear it!"

He now directed the two pin-points of light to the new visitor, stared at him with almost cruel severity, and yet with a curiously inward look, frowning and lifting his long pursed lips, till the upper lip was pressed against the bottom of his beaked nose.

"Are you going to allow me to paint you?" he said. "That's what I'm after. I should like to do a head and bust of you. I could make something of it—something—yes!"

He still stared with concentrated attention, and suddenly a faint whistle came from his lips. Without removing his eyes from Arabian he whistled several

times a little tune of five notes, like the song of a thrush. Arabian meanwhile returned his gaze rather doubtfully, slightly smiling.

“Ever been painted?” said Garstin at last.

“No, never. Once I have sat to a sculptor for the figure. But that was when I was very young. I was something of an athlete as a boy.”

“I should say so,” said Garstin. “Well, what do you think, eh?”

Miss Van Tuyn had sat down on the sofa again, and was lighting another cigarette. She looked at the two men with interest. She now knew that what Garstin had done he had really done for himself, not for her. As he had said, he did not paint for the pleasure of others, but only for reasons of his own. Apparently he would never gratify her vanity. But he gratified something else in her, her genuine love of talent and the ruthlessness of talent. There was really something of the great man in Garstin, and she appreciated it. She admired him more than she liked him. Even in her frequent irritation against him she knew what he genuinely was. At this moment something in her was sharply disappointed. But something else in her was curiously satisfied.

In reply to Garstin’s question Arabian asked another question.

“You wish to make a portrait of me?”

“I do—in oils.”

“Will it take long?”

“I couldn’t say. I might be a week over it, or less, or more. I shall want you every day.”

“And when it is done?” said Arabian. “What happens to it?”

“If it’s up to the mark—my mark—I shall want to

exhibit it."

Arabian said nothing for a moment. He seemed to be thinking rather seriously, and presently his large eyes turned towards Miss Van Tuyn for an instant, almost, she thought, as if they wished to consult her, to read in her eyes something which might help him to a decision. She felt that the man was flattered by Garstin's request, but she felt also that something—she did not know what—held him back from granting it. And again she wondered about him.

What was he? She could not divine. She looked at him and felt that she was looking at a book not one of whose pages she could read. And yet she thought he had what is sometimes called an "open" face. There was nothing sly in the expression of his eyes. They met other eyes steadily, sometimes with a sort of frank audacity, sometimes with—apparently—an almost pleading wistfulness.

Finally, as if coming to a conclusion as to what he considered it wise to do for the moment, Arabian said:

"Excuse me, but are these pictures which I see portraits painted by you?"

"Every one of them," said Garstin, rather roughly and impatiently.

"Will you allow me to look at them?"

"They're there to be looked at."

Again Arabian glanced at Miss Van Tuyn. She got up from the sofa quickly.

"I will show Mr. Arabian the pictures," she said.

She had noticed the cloud lowering on Garstin's face and knew that he was irritated by Arabian's hesitation. As Garstin had once said to her he could be "sensitive," although his manners were often

rough, and his face was what is usually called a "hard" face. And he was quite unaccustomed to meet with any resistance, even with any hesitation, when he was disposed to paint anyone, man or woman. Besides, the fact of Arabian's arrival at the studio had naturally led Garstin to expect compliance with his wish already expressed at the Cafe Royal. He was now obviously in a surly temper, and Miss Van Tuyn knew from experience that when resisted he was quite capable of an explosion. How, she wondered, would Arabian face an outburst from Garstin? She could not tell. But she thought it wise if possible to avoid anything disagreeable. So she came forward smiling.

"That will be very kind," said Arabian, in his soft and warm voice, and with his marked but charming foreign accent. "I am not expert in these matters."

Garstin pushed up his lips in a sort of sneer. Miss Van Tuyn sent him a look, and for once he heeded a wish of hers.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said. "Have a good stare at my stuff, and if you don't like it—why, damn it, you're free to say so."

Miss Van Tuyn's look had sent him away down the stairs to the ground floor studio. Arabian had not missed her message, but he was apparently quite impassive, and did not show that he had noticed the painter's ill humour.

For the first time Miss Van Tuyn was quite alone with the living bronze.

"Do you know much about pictures?" she asked him.

"Not very much," he answered, with a long, soft look at her. "I have only one way to judge them."

"And what way is that?"

"If they are portraits, I mean."

"Yes?"

"I judge them by their humanity. One does not want to be made worse than one is in a picture."

"I'm afraid you won't like Dick Garstin's work," she said decisively.

She was rather disappointed. Had this audaciously handsome man a cult for the pretty-pretty?

"Let us see!" he replied, smiling.

He looked round the big studio. As he did so she noticed that he had an extraordinarily quick and all-seeing glance, and realized that in some way, in some direction, he must be clever, even exceptionally clever. There were some eight to ten portraits in the studio, a few finished, others half finished or only just begun. Arabian went first to stand before the finished portrait of a girl of about eighteen, whose face was already plainly marked—blurred, not sharpened—by vice. Her youth seemed obscured by a faint fog of vice—as if she had projected it, and was slightly withdrawn behind it. Arabian looked at her in silence. Miss Van Tuyn watched him, standing back, not quite level with him. And she saw on his face an expression that suggested to her a man contemplating something he was very much at home with.

"That is a bad girl!" was his only comment, as he moved on to the next picture.

This was also the portrait of a woman, but of a woman well on in life, an elderly and battered siren of the streets, wrecked by men and by drink. Only the head and bust were shown, a withered head crowning a bust which had sunken in. There was an old pink hat set awry on the head. From beneath it escaped coarse wisps of almost orange-coloured hair.

The dull, small eyes were deep-set under brows which looked feverish. A livid spot of red glowed almost like a torch-end on each high cheek-bone. The mouth had fallen open.

Arabian examined this tragedy, which was one of Garstin's finest bits of work in Miss Van Tuyn's estimation, with careful and close attention, but without showing the faintest symptom of either pity or disgust.

"In my opinion that is well painted," was his comment. "They do get to be like that. And then they starve. And that is because they have no brains."

"Garstin swears that woman must once have been very beautiful," said Miss Van Tuyn.

"Oh—quite possible," said Arabian.

"Well, I can't conceive it."

He turned and gave her a long, steady look, full of softness and ardour.

"It would be very sad if you could," he said. "Excuse me, but are you American?"

"Yes."

"Well, Americans never get like that. They are too practical."

"And not romantic—do you mean?" she said, not without irony.

"They can be romantic, but they save themselves from disaster with their practical sense. I hope I put it right."

She smiled at him.

"You speak very good English. What do you think of this?"

"But I have seen her!" he said.

They had come to the easel on which was the half-

finished portrait of Cora, staring across her empty glass.

"She goes to the Cafe Royal."

He looked again at Miss Van Tuyn.

"Do you ever go there?" he asked gravely.

"No, never," she said with calm simplicity, returning his gaze.

"Well she—that woman—sits there alone just like that. She has a purpose. She is waiting for someone to come in who will come some night. And she knows that, and will wait, like a dog before a hole which contains something he intends to kill. This Mr. Dick Garstin is very clever. He is more than a painter; he is an understander."

"Ah!" she said, intimately pleased by this remark. "You do appreciate him! Garstin is great because he paints not merely for the eye that looks for a sort of painted photograph, but for the eye that demands a summing up of character."

Arabian looked sideways at her.

"What is that—of character, mademoiselle?"

"A summing up! That is a presentation of the sum total of the character."

"Oh, yes."

He looked again at Cora.

"One knows what she is by that," he said.

Then, standing still, he looked rapidly all round the studio, glancing first at one portrait then at another, with eyes which despite their lustrous softness, seemed to make a sort of prey of whatever they lighted on.

"But they are all women and all of a certain world!" he said, almost suspiciously. "Why is that?"

"Garstin is passing through a phase just now. He paints from the Cafe Royal."

"Oh!"

He paused, and his brown face took on a look of rather hard meditation.

"Does he never paint what they call decent people?" he inquired. "One may occasionally spend an hour at the Cafe Royal—especially if one is not English—without belonging to the *bas-fonds*. I do not know whether Mr. Dick Garstin understands that."

"Of course he does," she said, instantly grasping the meaning of his hesitation. "But there is one portrait—of a man—which I don't think you have looked at."

"Where?"

"On that big easel with its back to us. If you want a decent person"—she spoke with a slightly ironical intonation—"go and see what Garstin can do with decency."

"I will."

And he walked over to the side of the room opposite to the grand piano, and went to stand in front of the easel she had indicated. She stood where she was and watched him. For two or three minutes he looked at the picture in silence, and she thought his expression had become slightly hostile. His audacious and rather thick lips were set together firmly, almost too firmly. His splendid figure supple, athletic and harmonious, looked almost rigid. She wondered what he was feeling, whether he disliked the portrait of the judge of the Criminal Court at which he was looking. Finally he said:

"I think Mr. Dick Garstin is a humorist. Do not you?"

"But—why?"

"To put this gentleman in the midst of all the law breakers."

Miss Van Tuyn crossed the room and joined him in front of the picture, which showed the judge seated in his wig and robes.

"And that is not all," added Arabian. "This man's business is to judge others, naughty people who do God knows what, and, it seems, have to be punished sometimes. Is it not?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"But Mr. Dick Garstin when painting him is saying to himself all the time, 'And he is naughty, too! And who is going to put on wig and red clothes and tell him he, too, deserves a few months of prison?' Now is not that true, mademoiselle? Is not that man bad underneath the judge's skin? And has not Mr. Dick Garstin found this out, and does not he use all his cleverness to show it?"

Miss Van Tuyn looked at Arabian with a stronger interest than any she had shown yet. It was quite true. Garstin had a peculiar faculty for getting at the lower parts of a character and for bringing it to the surface in his portraits. Perhaps in the exercise of this faculty he showed his ingrained cynicism, sometimes even his malice. Arabian had, it seemed, immediately discovered the painter's predominant quality as a psychologist of the brush.

"You are quite right," she said. "One feels that someone ought to judge that judge."

"That is more than a portrait of one man," said Arabian. "It is a portrait of the world's hypocrisy."

In saying this his usually soft voice suddenly took on an almost biting tone.

"The question is," he added, "whether one wishes to be painted as bad when perhaps one is not so bad. Many people, I think, might fear to be painted by this very famous Mr. Dick Garstin."

"Would you be afraid to be painted by him?" she said.

He cast a sharp glance at her with eyes which looked suddenly vigilant.

"I did not say that."

"He'll be furious if you refuse."

"I see he is accustomed generally to have what he wishes."

"Yes. And he would make a magnificent thing of you. I am certain of that."

She saw vanity looking out of his eyes, and her vanity felt suddenly almost strangely at home with it.

"It is a compliment, I know, that he should wish to paint me," said Arabian. "But why does he?"

The question sounded to Miss Van Tuyn almost suspicious.

"He admires your appearance," she answered. "He thinks you a very striking type."

"Ah! A type! But what of?"

"He didn't tell me," she answered.

Arabian was silent for a moment; then he said:

"Does Mr. Dick Garstin get high prices for his portraits? Are they worth a great deal?"

"Yes," she said, with a sudden light touch of disdain, which she could not forego. "The smallest sketch of a head painted by him will fetch a lot of money."

"Ah—indeed!"

"Let him paint you! There he is—coming back."

As Garstin reappeared Arabian turned to him with a smile that looked cordial and yet that seemed somehow wanting in real geniality.

"I have seen them all."

"Have you? Well, let's have a drink."

He went over to the Spanish cabinet and brought out of it a flagon of old English glass ware, soda-water, and three tall tulip-shaped glasses with long stems.

"Come on. Let's sit down," he said, setting them down on a table. "I'll get the cigars. Squat here, Beryl. Here's a chair for you, Arabian. Help yourselves."

He moved off and returned with a box of his deadly cigars. Arabian took one without hesitation, and accepted a stiff whisky and soda. While he had been downstairs Garstin had apparently recovered his good humour, or had deliberately made up his mind to take a certain line with his guest from the Cafe Royal. He said nothing about his pictures, made no further allusion to his wish to paint Arabian's portrait, but flung himself down, lit a cigar, and began to drink and smoke and talk, very much as if he were in the bar of an inn with a lot of good fellows. When he chose Garstin could be human and genial, at times even rowdy. He was genial enough now, but Miss Van Tuyn, who was very sharp about almost everything connected with people, thought of a patient's first visit to a famous specialist, and of the quarter of an hour so often apparently wasted by the great physician as he talks about topics unconnected with symptoms to his anxious visitor. She was certain that Garstin was determined to paint Arabian whether the latter was willing to be painted or not, and she was equally certain that already Garstin had

begun to work on his sitter, not with brushes but with the mind. For his own benefit, and incidentally for hers, Garstin was carelessly, but cleverly, trying to find out things about Arabian, not things about his life, but things about his education, and his mind and his temperament. He did not ask him vulgar questions. He just talked, and watched, and occasionally listened in the midst of the cigar smoke, and often with the whisky at his lips.

She had refused to take any whisky, but smoked cigarette after cigarette quickly, nervously almost. She was enjoying herself immensely, but she felt unusually excited, mentally restless, almost mentally agitated. Her usual coolness of mind had been changed into a sort of glow by Garstin and the living bronze. She always liked being alone with men, hearing men talk among themselves or talking with them free from the presence of women. But to-day she was exceptionally stimulated for she was exceptionally curious. There was something in Arabian which vaguely troubled her, and which also enticed her almost against her will. And now she was following along a track, pioneered by a clever and cunning leader.

Garstin talked about London, which Arabian apparently knew fairly well, though he said he had never lived long in London; then about Paris, which Arabian also knew and spoke of like a man who visited it now and then for purposes of pleasure. Then Garstin spoke of the art he followed, of the old Italian painters and of the Galleries of Italy. Arabian became very quiet. His attitude and bearing were those of one almost respectfully listening to an expert holding forth on a subject he had made his own. Now and then he said something non-committal. There was no evidence that he had any knowledge of

Italian pictures, that he could distinguish between a Giovanni Bellini and a Raphael, tell a Luini from a Titian.

Miss Van Tuyn wondered again whether he had ever heard of Leonardo.

Garstin mentioned some Paris painters of the past, but of more recent times than those of the grand old Italians, spoke of Courbet, of Manet, of Renoir, Guilaumin, Sisley, the Barbizon school, Cezanne and his followers. Finally he came to the greatest of the French Impressionist painters, to Pissaro, for whom, as Miss Van Tuyn knew, he had an admiration which amounted almost to a cult.

"He's a glorious fellow, isn't he?" he said in his loud bass voice to Arabian. "You know his 'Pont Neuf,' of course?"

He did not wait for an answer, but drove on with immense energy, puffing away at his cigar and turning his small, keen eyes swiftly from Arabian to Miss Van Tuyn and back again. The talk, which was now a monologue, fed by frequent draughts of the excellent whisky, included a dissertation on Pissaro's oil paintings, his water-colours, his etchings and lithographs, his pupils, Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, his friendships, his troubles, and finally a paean on his desperate love of work, which was evidently shared by the speaker.

"Work—it's *the* thing in life!" roared Garstin. "It's the great consolation for all the damnableness of the human existence. Work first and the love of women second!"

"Thank you very much for your chivalry, Dick," said Miss Van Tuyn, sending one of her most charming blue glances to the living bronze, who returned it, almost eagerly, she thought.

"And the love of women betrays," continued Garstin. "But work never lets you down."

He flung out his right arm and quoted sonorously from Pissaro: "I paint portraits because doing it helps me to live!" he almost shouted. "Another cigar!" He turned to Arabian.

"Thank you. They are beauties and not too strong."

"You've got a damned strong constitution if you can say that. You have been like me; you have fortified it by work."

"I fear not," he said with a smile. "I have been a flaneur, an idler. It has been my great misfortune to have enough money for what I want without working."

"Like poor me!" said Miss Van Tuyn, feeling suddenly relieved.

"I pity you both!" said Garstin.

And he branched away to literature, to music, to sculpture. Lowering his big voice suddenly he spoke of the bronzes of the Naples Museum, half shutting his eyes till they were two narrow slits, and looking intently at Arabian.

"You have the throat of one of those bronzes," he said bluntly, "and should never wear that cursed abomination, a starched linen collar."

"What is one to do in London?" murmured Arabian, suddenly stretching his brown throat and lifting his strong chin.

"Show it something worth looking at," said Garstin.

And he returned to the subject of women, and spoke on it so freely and fully that Miss Van Tuyn presently pulled him up. Rather to her surprise he showed unusual meekness under her interruption.

"All right, my girl! I've done! I've done! But I always forget you're not a young man."

"*Ma foi!*" said Arabian, almost under his breath.

Garstin looked across at him

"She's a Tartar. She'd keep the devil himself in order."

"He deserves restraint far less than you do," said Miss Van Tuyn.

"She won't leave me alone," continued Garstin, flinging one leg over the arm of his easy chair. "She even attacks me about my painting, says I only paint the rats of the sewers."

"I never said that," said Miss Van Tuyn. "I said you were a painter of the underworld, and so you are."

"But Mr. Dick Garstin also paints judges, mademoiselle," said Arabian.

"Oh, lord! Drop the Mister! I'm Dick Garstin *tout court* or I'm nothing. Now, Arabian, you know the reason, part of the reason, why I want to stick you on canvas."

"You mean because—"

He seemed to hesitate, and touched his little Guardsman's moustache.

"Because you're a jolly fine subject and nothing to do with the darlings that live in the sewers."

"Ah! Thank you!" said Arabian. "But you paint judges."

"I only put that red-faced old ruffian here as a joke. Directly I set eyes on him I knew he ought to have been in quod himself! Come now, what do you say? Look here! I'll make a bargain with you. I'll give you the thing when it's done."

Miss Van Tuyn looked at Garstin in amazement,

and missed the sudden gleam of light that came into Arabian's eyes. But Garstin did not miss it and repeated:

"I'll give you the thing! Now what do you say? Is it a bargain?"

"But how can I accept?" said Arabian, quickly adding: "And how can I refuse? Mr.—"

"Drop the Mister, I say."

"Dick Garstin then."

"That's better."

"I wish to tell you that I am not a connoisseur of art. On the other hand, please, I have an eye for what is fine. Mademoiselle, I hope, will say it is so?"

He looked at Miss Van Tuyn.

"Mr. Arabian made some remarkably cute remarks about the portraits, Dick," she said in reply to the glance.

"I care for a fine painting so much that really I do not know how to refuse the temptation you offer me —Dick Garstin."

Garstin poured himself out another whisky.

"I'll start on it to-morrow," he said, staring hard at the man who had now become definitely his subject.

Soon afterwards Arabian got up and said he must go. As he said this he looked pleadingly at Miss Van Tuyn. But she sat still in her chair, a cigarette between her lips. He said "good-bye" to her formally. Garstin went down with Arabian to let him out, and was away for three or four minutes. From her chair Miss Van Tuyn heard a murmur of voices, then presently a loud bass: "To-morrow morning at eleven sharp," then the bang of a door. A minute later Garstin bounded up the stairs heavily, yet with a strong agility.

"I've got him, my girl! He's afraid of it like the devil, but I've got him. I hit on the only way. I found the only bait which my fish would take. Now for another cigar."

He seized the box.

"Did you see his eyes when I said I'd give him the picture?"

"No; I was looking at you."

"Then you missed revelation. I had diagnosed him all right."

"Tell me your diagnosis."

"I told it you long ago. That fellow is a being of the underworld."

Miss Van Tuyn slightly reddened.

"I wonder!" she said. "I'm not at all sure that you're right, Dick."

"What did you gather when I put him through his paces just now?" he asked, sending out clouds of strong-smelling smoke.

"Oh, I don't know! Not very much. He seems to have been about, to have plenty of money."

"And no education. He doesn't know a thing about pictures, painters. Just at first I thought he might have been a model. Not a bit of it! Books mean nothing to him. What that chap has studied is the pornographic book of life, my girl. He has no imagination. His feeling runs straight in the direction of sensuality. He's as ignorant and as clever as they're made. He's never done a stroke of honest work in his life, and despises all those who are fools enough to toil, me among them. He is as acquisitive as a monkey and a magpie rolled into one. His constitution is made of iron, and I dare say his nerves are made of steel. He's a rare one, I tell you, and I'll

make a rare picture of him."

"I don't know whether you are right, Dick."

Garstin seemed quite unaffected by her doubt of his power to read character. Perhaps at that moment he was coolly reading hers, and laughing to himself about women. But if so, he did not show it. And she said in a moment:

"You are really going to give him the portrait?"

"Yes, when I've exhibited it. Not before, of course. The gentleman isn't going to have it all his own way."

Miss Van Tuyn looked rather thoughtful, even preoccupied. Almost immediately afterwards she got up to go.

"Coming to-morrow?" he said.

"What—to see you paint?"

"Coming?"

"You really mean that I may?"

"I do. You'll help me."

She looked rather startled, and then, immediately, keenly curious.

"I don't see how."

"No reason you should! Now off with you! I've got things to do."

"Then good-bye."

As she was going away she stopped for a moment before the portrait of the judge.

"He found out why you painted that portrait."

"Arabian?" said Garstin.

"Yes. And he said something about it that wasn't stupid."

"What was that?"

"He said it was more than a portrait of one man, that it was a portrait of the world's hypocrisy."

"Damned good!" said Garstin with a sonorous chuckle. "And his portrait will be more than the portrait of one man."

"Yes?" she said, looking eagerly at him.

But he would not say anything more, and she went away full of deep curiosity, but thankful that she had decided to stay on in London.

CHAPTER II

Two days after the visit of Arabian to Dick Garstin's studio Lady Sellingworth received a note from Francis Braybrooke, who invited her to dine with him at the Carlton on the following evening, and to visit a theatre afterwards. "Our young friends, Beryl Van Tuyn and Alick Craven" would be of the party, he hoped. Lady Sellingworth had no engagement. She seldom left home in the evening. Yet she hesitated to accept this invitation. She had not seen Miss Van Tuyn since the evening in Soho, nor Braybrooke since his visit to Berkeley Square to tell her about his trip to Paris, but she had seen Craven three times, and each time alone. Their intimacy had deepened with a rapidity which now almost startled her as she thought of it, holding Braybrooke's unanswered note. Already it seemed very strange to recall the time when she had not known Craven, when she had never seen him, had never heard of him. Sixty years she had lived without this young man in her life. She could hardly believe that. And now, with this call to meet him in public, before very watchful eyes, and in the company of two people who she was sure were in different ways hostile to her intimacy with him, she felt the cold touch of fear. And she doubted what course to take.

She wondered why Braybrooke had asked her and

suspected a purpose. In a moment she believed that she had guessed what that purpose was. Braybrooke was meditating a stroke against her. She had felt that in her drawing-room with him. For some reason—perhaps only that of a social busybody—he wanted to bring about a match between Craven and Miss Van Tuyn. He had said with emphasis that Craven had almost raved about the lovely American. Lady Sellingworth did not believe that assertion. She felt sure that when he had made it Braybrooke had told her a lie. Craven had amply proved to her his indifference towards Miss Van Tuyn. Braybrooke's lie surely indicated a desire to detach his old friend's attention from the young man he had introduced into her life, and must mean that he was a little afraid of her influence. It had been practically a suggestion to her that youth triumphant must win in any battle with old age; yet it had implied a doubt, if not an actual uneasiness. And now came this invitation to meet "our young friends." Lady Sellingworth thought of the contrast between herself and Beryl Van Tuyn. She had not worried about it in the *Bella Napoli* when she and the young friends were together. But now—things were different now. She had, or believed she had, something to lose. And she did not want to lose it. It would be horrible to lose it!

Perhaps Braybrooke wished Craven to see her with Beryl Van Tuyn in the glare of electric light. Perhaps that was the reason of this unexpected invitation. If so, it was an almost diabolically cruel reason.

She resolved to refuse the invitation. But again a voice through the telephone caused her to change her mind. And again it was Craven's voice. It asked her whether she had received an invitation from Braybrooke, and on her replying that she had, it begged her to accept it if she had not done so

already. And she yielded. If Craven wished her to go she would go. Why should she be afraid? In her ugliness surely she triumphed as no beauty could ever triumph. She told herself that and for a moment felt reassured, more than reassured, safe and happy. For the inner thing, the dweller in the temple, felt that it, and it alone, was exercising intimate power. But then a look into the glass terrified her. And she sat down and wrote two notes. One was to Francis Braybrooke accepting the invitation; the other was to a man with a Greek name and was addressed to a house in South Moulton Street.

Francis Braybrooke felt rather uneasy about his party when the day came, but he was a man of the world, and resolved to "put a good face on it." No more social catastrophes for him! Another fiasco would, he was certain, destroy his nerve and render him quite unfit to retain his place in society. He pulled himself together, using his will to the uttermost, and dressed for dinner with a still determination to carry things through with a high hand. The worst of it was that he had an uneasy feeling—quite uncalled for, he was sure of that—of being a false friend. For Lady Sellingworth was his friend. He had known her for many years, whereas Craven and Beryl Van Tuyn were comparatively new-comers in his life. And yet he was engaged in something not quite unlike a conspiracy against this old friend. Craven had said she was lonely. Perhaps that was true. Women who lived by themselves generally felt lonelier than men in a like situation. Craven, perhaps, was bringing a little solace into this lonely life. And now he, Braybrooke, was endeavouring to make an end of that solace. For he quite understood that, women being as they are, a strong friendship between Adela Sellingworth and

Craven was quite incompatible with a love affair between Craven and Beryl Van Tuyn. He hoped he was not a traitor as he carefully arranged his rather large tie. But anything was better than a tragedy. And with women of Adela Sellingworth's reputed temperament one never knew quite what might happen. Her emergence, after ten years, into Shaftesbury Avenue and Soho had severely shaken Braybrooke's faith in her sobriety, fostered though it had been, created even, by her ten years of distinguished retirement. Damped-down fires sometimes blaze forth unexpectedly and rage with fury. He hoped he was doing the right thing. Anyhow, it was not his fault that Lady Sellingworth was to be of his party tonight. Miss Van Tuyn was responsible for that.

He rang the bell, which was answered by his valet.

"Please fetch the theatre ticket, Walter. It is in the drawer of my writing-table in the library. A box for the Shaftesbury Theatre."

"Yes, sir."

Walter went out and returned in a moment with the ticket. He was an old servant and occasionally exchanged ideas with his master. As he gave Braybrooke the envelope containing the ticket, he said:

"A very remarkable play, sir. I think you will enjoy it."

"What! Have you seen it?"

"Yes, sir, *The Great Lover*. My wife would go. She liked the name, sir. About a singer, sir, who kept on loving like a young man when the age for it was really what one might call over, sir. But it seems that for some it never is over, sir."

"Good heavens, have I done the wrong thing

again?" thought Braybrooke, who had chosen the play almost at random, without knowing much about it except that an actor unknown to him, one Moscovitch, was said to be very fine in it.

"How old is the singer?" he inquired anxiously.

"I couldn't say for certain, sir. But somewhere in the forties, I should think, and nearing fifty. He loses his voice, sir, but still answers to young women at the telephone."

"Dear! Dear!"

"But as my wife says, sir, with a man it's not such a great matter. But with a woman—well!"

He pursed his narrow lips and half-shut his small grey eyes.

"Ah!" said Braybrooke, feeling extremely uncomfortable. "Good night, Walter. You needn't sit up."

"Thank you, sir. Good night, sir."

"Really the evil eye must have looked at me!" thought Braybrooke, as he went downstairs. "I'm thoroughly out of luck."

He arrived in good time at the Carlton and waited for his guests in the Palm Court. Craven was the first to arrive. He looked cheerful and eager as he came in, and, Braybrooke thought, very young and handsome. He had got away from the F. O. that afternoon, he said, and had been down at Beaconsfield playing golf. Apparently his game had been unusually good and that fact had put him into spirits.

"There's nothing like being in form with one's drive for bucking one up!" he acknowledged.

And he broke out into an almost boyish paean in praise of golf.

"But I always thought you preferred lawn tennis!" said Braybrooke.

"Oh, I don't know! Yes, I'm as keen as ever on tennis, but anyone can play golf. Mrs. Sandhurst was out to-day playing a splendid game, and she's well over sixty. That's the best of golf. People can play, and play decently, too, up to almost any age."

"Well, but my dear boy you're not in the sixties yet!"

"No. But I wasn't thinking about myself."

Braybrooke looked at him rather narrowly, and wondered of whom he had been thinking. But he said nothing more, for at this moment Miss Van Tuyn appeared in the doorway at the end of the court. Braybrooke went to meet her, but Craven stayed were he was.

"Is Adela Sellingworth coming?" she asked instantly, as Braybrooke took her hand.

"She promised to come. I'm expecting her."

He made a movement, but she stood still, though they where close to the doorway.

"And what are we going to see?"

"A play called *The Great Lover*. Here is Alick Craven."

At this moment Craven joined them. Seeing Miss Van Tuyn standing still with a certain obstinacy he came up and took her hand.

"Nice to meet you again," he said.

Braybrooke thought of Miss Van Tuyn's remark about the Foreign Office manner, and hoped Craven was going to be at his best that evening. It seemed to him that there was a certain dryness in the young people's greeting. Miss Van Tuyn was looking lovely, and almost alarmingly youthful and self-possessed, in

a white dress. Craven, fresh from his successes at golf, looked full of the open-air spirit and the robustness of the galloping twenties. In appearance the two were splendidly matched. The faint defiance which Braybrooke thought he detected in their eyes suited them both, giving to them just a touch of the arrogance which youth and health render charming, but which in old people is repellent and ugly. They wore it like a feather set at just the right rakish angle in a cap. Nevertheless, this slight dryness must be got rid of if the evening were to be a success, and Braybrooke set himself to the task of banishing it. He talked of golf. Like many American girls, Miss Van Tuyn was at home in most sports and games. She was a good whip, a fine skater and lawn tennis player, had shot and hunted in France, liked racing, and had learnt to play golf on the links at Cannes when she was a girl of fifteen. But to-night she was not enthusiastic about golf, perhaps because Craven was. She said it was an irritating game, that playing it much always gave people a worried look, that a man who had sliced his first drive was a bore for the rest of the day, that a woman whom you beat in a match tried to do you harm as long as you and she lived. Finally she said it was certainly a fine game, but a game for old people. Craven protested, but she held resolutely to her point. In other games—except croquet, which she frankly loathed in spite of its scientific possibilities—you moved quickly, were obliged to be perpetually on the alert. In tennis and lawn tennis, in racquets, in hockey, in cricket, you never knew what was going to happen, when you might have to do something, or make a swift movement, a dash here or there, a dive, a leap, a run. But in golf half your time was spent in solemnly walking—toddling, she chose to call it—from point

to point. This was, no doubt, excellent for the health, but she preferred swiftness. But then she was only a light-footed girl, not an elderly statesman.

“When I play golf much I always begin to feel like a gouty Prime Minister who has been ordered to play for the good of the country,” she said. “But when I’m an old woman I shall certainly play regularly for the sake of my figure and my complexion. When I am sixty you will probably see me every day on the links.”

Braybrooke saw a cloud float over Craven’s face as she said this, but it vanished as he looked away towards the hall. There, through the glass of the dividing screen, Lady Sellingworth’s tall and thin figure, wrapped in a long cloak of dark fur, was visible, going with her careless, trampish walk to the ladies’ cloak-room.

“Ah, there is Adela Sellingworth!” said Braybrooke.

Miss Van Tuyn turned quickly, with a charming, youthful grace, made up of a suppleness and litheness which suggested almost the movement of a fluid. Craven noted it with a little thrill of unexpected pleasure, against which an instant later something in him rebelled.

“Where is she?” said Miss Van Tuyn.

“She’s just gone into the ladies’ cloak-room,” answered Braybrooke.

“But not to powder her face!” said Miss Van Tuyn. “She keeps us waiting, like the great prima donna in a concert, just long enough to give a touch of excitement to her appearance. Dear Lady Sellingworth! She has a wonderful knowledge of just how to do things. That only comes out of a vast experience.”

"Or—don't you think that kind of thing may be instinctive?" said Craven.

She sought his eyes with a sort of soft hardihood which was very alluring.

"Women are not half as instinctive as men think them," she said. "I'll tell you a little secret. They calculate more than a senior wrangler does."

"Now you are maligning yourself," he said, smiling.

"No. For I haven't quite got to the age of calculation yet."

"Oh—I see."

"Here she comes!" said Braybrooke.

And he went towards the door, leaving "our young friends" for a moment.

"But what has she done to herself?" said Miss Van Tuyn.

"Done! Lady Sellingworth?"

"Yes. Or is it only her hair?"

Craven wondered, too, as Lady Sellingworth joined them, accompanied by her host. For there was surely some slight, and yet definite, change in her appearance. She looked, he thought, younger, brighter, more vivid than she generally looked. Her white hair certainly was arranged differently from the way he was now accustomed to. It seemed thicker; there seemed to be more of it than usual. It looked more alive, too, and it marked in, he thought, an exquisite way the beautiful shape of her head. A black riband was cleverly entangled in it, and a big diamond shone upon the riband in front above her white forehead, weary with the years, but uncommonly expressive. She wore black as usual, and had another broad black riband round her throat

with a fine diamond broach fastened to it. Her gown was slightly open at the front. There were magnificent diamond earrings in her ears. They made Craven think of the jewels stolen long ago at the station in Paris. This evening the whiteness of her hair seemed wonderful, as the whiteness of thickly powdered hair sometimes seems. And her eyes beneath it were amazingly vivid, startlingly alive in their glancing brightness. They looked careless and laughingly self-possessed as she came up to greet the girl and young man, matching delightfully her careless and self-possessed movement.

At that moment Craven realized, as he had certainly never realized before, what a beauty—in his mind he said what a "stunning beauty"—Lady Sellingworth must once have been. Even her face seemed to him in some way altered to-night, though he could not have told how.

Certainly she looked younger than usual. He was positive of that: still positive when he saw her standing by Miss Van Tuyn and taking her hand. Then she turned to him and gave him a friendly and careless, almost haphazard, greeting, still smiling and looking ready for anything. And then at once they went into the restaurant up the broad steps. And Craven noticed that everyone they passed by glanced at Lady Sellingworth.

At that moment he felt very proud of her friendship. He even felt a touch of romance in it, of a strange and unusual romance far removed from the sort of thing usually sung of by poets and written of by novelists.

"She is unusual!" he thought. "And so am I; and our friendship is unusual too. There has never before been anything quite like it."

And he glowed with a warming sense of difference from ordinary life.

But Miss Van Tuyn was claiming his urgent attention, and a waiter was giving him Whitstable oysters, and Chablis was being poured into his glass, and the band was beginning to play a selection from the music of Grieg, full of the poetry and the love of the North, where deep passions come out of the snows and last often longer than the loves of the South. He must give himself up to it all, and to the wonderful white-haired woman, too, with the great diamonds gleaming in her ears.

It really was quite a buoyant dinner, and Braybrooke began to feel more at ease. He had told them all where they were going afterwards, but had said nothing about Walter's description of the play. None of them had seen it, but Craven seemed to know all about it, and said it was an entertaining study of life behind the scenes at the opera, with a great singer as protagonist.

"He was drawn, I believe, from a famous baritone."

During a great part of her life Lady Sellingworth had been an ardent lover of the opera, and she had known many of the leading singers in Paris and London.

"They always seemed to me to be torn by jealousy," she said, "and often to suffer from the mania of persecution! Really, they are like a race apart."

And the conversation turned to jealousy. Braybrooke said he had never suffered from it, did not know what it was. And they smiled at him, and told him that then he could have no temperament. Craven declared that he believed almost the whole

human race knew the ugly intimacies of jealousy in some form or other.

“And yourself?” said Miss Van Tuyn.

“I!” he said, and looking up saw Lady Sellingworth’s brilliant eyes fixed on him.

“Do you know them?”

“I have felt jealousy certainly, but never yet as I could feel it.”

“What! You are conscious of a great capacity for feeling jealous, a capacity which has never yet had its full fling?” said the girl.

“Yes,” he said.

And his lips were smiling, but there was a serious look in his eyes.

And they discussed the causes of jealousy.

“We shall see it to-night on the stage in its professional form,” said Craven.

“And that is the least forgivable form,” said Lady Sellingworth. “Jealousy which is not bound up with the affections is a cold and hideous thing. But I cannot understand a love which is incapable of jealousy. In fact, I don’t think I could believe it to be love at all.”

This remark, coming from those lips, surprised Braybrooke. For Lady Sellingworth was not wont to turn any talk in which she took part upon questions concerned with the heart. He had frequently noticed her apparent aversion from all topics connected with deep feeling. To-night, it seemed, this aversion had died out of her.

In answer to the last remark Miss Van Tuyn said:

“Then, dear, you rule out perfect trust in a matter of love, do you? All the sentimentalists say that perfect love breeds perfect trust. If that is so, how

can great lovers be jealous? For jealousy, I suppose—I have never felt it myself in that way—is born out of doubt, but can never exist side by side with complete confidence."

"Ah! But Beryl, in how many people in the course of a lifetime can one have *complete confidence* I have scarcely met one. What do you say?"

She turned her head towards Braybrooke. He looked suddenly rather plaintive, like a man who realizes unexpectedly how lonely he is.

"Oh, I hope I know a few such people," he rejoined rather anxiously. "I have been very lucky in my friends. And I like to think the best of people."

"That is kind," said Lady Sellingworth. "But I prefer to know the truth of people. And I must say I think most of us are quicksands. The worst of it is that so often when we do for a moment feel we are on firm ground we find it either too hard for our feet or too flat for our liking."

At that moment she thought of Sir Seymour Portman.

"You think it is doubt which breeds fascination?" said Craven.

"Alas for us if it is so," she answered, smiling.

"The human race is a very unsatisfactory race," said Miss Van Tuyn. "I am only twenty-four and have found that out already. It is very clever of the French to cultivate irony as they do. The ironist always wears clothes and an undershirt of mail. But the sentimentalist goes naked in the east wind which blows through society. Not only is he bound to take cold, but he is liable to be pierced by every arrow that flies."

"Yes, it is wise to cultivate irony," said Lady

Sellingworth.

"You have," said Miss Van Tuyn. "One often sees it in your eyes. Isn't it true?"

She turned to Craven; but he did not choose to agree with her.

"I'm a sentimentalist," he said firmly. "And I never look about for irony. Perhaps that's why I have not found it in Lady Sellingworth."

Miss Van Tuyn sent him a glance which said plainly, but prettily, "You humbug!" But he did not mind. Once he had discussed Lady Sellingworth with Miss Van Tuyn. They had wondered about her together. They had even talked about her mystery. But that seemed to Craven a long time ago. Now he would far rather discuss Miss Van Tuyn with Lady Sellingworth than discuss Lady Sellingworth with Miss Van Tuyn. So he would not even acknowledge that he had noticed the mocking look in Lady Sellingworth's eyes. Already he had the feeling of a friend who does not care to dissect the mentality and character of his friend with another. Something in him even had an instinct to protect Lady Sellingworth from Miss Van Tuyn. That was surely absurd; unless, indeed, age always needs protection from the cruelty of youth.

Francis Braybrooke began to speak about Paris, and again Miss Van Tuyn said that she would never rest till she had persuaded Lady Sellingworth to renew her acquaintance with that intense and apparently light-hearted city, which contains so many secret terrors.

"You will come some day," she said, with a sort of almost ruthless obstinacy.

"Why not?" said Lady Sellingworth. "I have been very happy in Paris."

"And yet you have deserted it for years and years! You are an enigma. Isn't she, Mr. Braybrooke?"

Before Braybrooke had time to reply to this direct question an interruption occurred. Two ladies, coming in to dinner accompanied by two young men, paused by Braybrooke's table, and someone said in a clear, hard voice:

"What a dinky little party! And where are you all going afterwards?"

Craven and Braybrooke got up to greet two famous members of the "old guard," Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Ackroyde. Lady Sellingworth and Miss Van Tuyn turned in their chairs, and for a moment there was a little disjointed conversation, in the course of which it came out that this quartet, too, was bound for the Shaftesbury Theatre.

"You are coming out of your shell, Adela! Better late than never!" said Lady Wrackley to Lady Sellingworth, while Miss Van Tuyn quietly collected the two young men, both of whom she knew, with her violet eyes. "I hear of you all over the place."

She glanced penetratingly at Craven with her carefully made-up eyes, which were the eyes of a handsome and wary bird. Her perfectly arranged hair was glossy brown, with glints in it like the colour of a horse-chestnut. She showed her wonderful teeth in the smile which came like a sudden gleam of electric light, and went as if a hand had turned back the switch.

"I'm becoming dissipated," said Lady Sellingworth. "Three evenings out in one month! If I have one foot in the grave, I shall have the other in the Shaftesbury Theatre to-night."

One of the young men, a fair, horsey-looking boy, with a yellow moustache, a turned-up nose, and an

almost abnormally impudent and larky expression, laughed in a very male and soldierly way; the other, who was dark, with a tall figure and severe grey eyes, looked impenetrably grave and absent minded.

"Well, I shall die if I don't have a good dinner at once," said Mrs. Ackroyde. "Is that a Doucet frock, Beryl?"

"No. Count Kalinsky designed it."

"Oh—Igor Kalinsky! Adela, we are in Box B. We must have a powwow between the acts."

She looked from Lady Sellingworth to Craven and back again. Short, very handsome, always in perfect health, with brows and eyes which somehow suggested a wild creature, she had an honest and quite unaffected face. Her manner was bold and direct. There was something lasting—some said everlasting—in her atmosphere.

"I cannot conceive of London without Dindie Ackroyde," said Braybrooke, as Mrs. Ackroyde led the way to the next table and sat down opposite to Craven.

And they began to talk about people. Craven said very little. Since the arrival of the other quartet he had begun to feel sensitively uncomfortable. He realized that already his new friendship for Lady Sellingworth had "got about," though how he could not imagine. He was certain that the "old guard" were already beginning to talk of Addie Sellingworth's "new man." He had seen awareness, that strange feminine interest which is more than half hostile, in the eyes of both Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Ackroyde. Was it impossible, then, in this horrible whispering gallery of London, to have any privacy of the soul? (He thought that his friendship really had something of the soul in it.) He felt

stripped by the eyes of those two women at the neighbouring table, and he glanced at Lady Sellingworth almost furtively, wondering what she was feeling. But she looked exactly as usual, and was talking with animation, and he realized that her long habit of the world enabled her to wear a mask at will. Or was she less sensitive in such matters than he was?

"How preoccupied you are!" said Miss Van Tuyn's voice in his ear. "You see I was right. Golf ruins the social qualities in a man."

Then Craven resolutely set himself to be sociable. He even acted a part, still acutely conscious of the eyes of the "old guard," and almost made love to Miss Van Tuyn, as a man may make love at a dinner table. He was sure Lady Sellingworth would not misunderstand him. Whether Miss Van Tuyn misunderstood him or not did not matter to him at that moment. He saw her beauty clearly; he was able to note all the fluid fascination of her delicious youthfulness; the charm of it went to him; and yet he felt no inclination to waver in his allegiance to Lady Sellingworth. It was as if a personality enveloped him, held his senses as well as his mind in a soft and powerful grasp. Not that his senses were irritated to alertness, or played upon to exasperation. They were merely inhibited from any activity in connexion with another, however beautiful and desirable. Lady Sellingworth roused no physical desire in Craven, although she fascinated him. What she did was just this: she deprived him of physical desire. Miss Van Tuyn's arrows were shot all in vain that night. But Craven now acted well, for women's keen eyes were upon him.

Presently they got up to go to the theatre, leaving the other quartet behind them, quite willing to be

late.

"Moscovitch doesn't come on for some time," said Mrs. Ackroyde. "And we are only going to see him. The play is nothing extraordinary. Where are you sitting?"

Braybrooke told her the number of their box.

"We are just opposite to you then," she said.

"Mind you behave prettily, Adela!" said Lady Wrackley.

"I have almost forgotten how to behave in a theatre," she said. "I go to the play so seldom. You shall give me some hints on conduct, Mr. Craven."

And she turned and led the way out of the restaurant, nodding to people here and there whom she knew.

Her big motor was waiting outside, and they all got into it. Braybrooke and Craven sat on the small front seats, sideways, so that they could talk to their companions; and they flashed through the busy streets, coming now and then into the gleam of lamplight and looking vivid, then gliding on into shadows and becoming vague and almost mysterious. As they crossed Piccadilly Circus Miss Van Tuyn said:

"What a contrast to our walk that night!"

"This way of travelling?" said Lady Sellingworth.

"Yes. Which do you prefer, the life of Soho and the streets and raw humanity, or the Rolls-Royce life?"

"Oh, I am far too old, and far too fixed in my habits to make any drastic change in my way of life," said Lady Sellingworth, looking out of the window.

"You didn't like your little experience the other night enough to repeat it?" said Miss Van Tuyn.

As she spoke Craven saw her eyes gazing at him in the shadow. They looked rather hard and searching,

he thought.

"Oh, some day I'll go to the *Bella Napoli* again with you, Beryl, if you like."

"Thank you, dearest," said Miss Van Tuyn, rather drily.

And again Craven saw her eyes fixed upon him with a hard, steady look.

The car sped by the Monico, and Braybrooke, glancing with distaste at the crowd of people one could never wish to know outside it, wondered how the tall woman opposite to him with the diamonds flashing in her ears had ever condescended to push her way among them at night, to rub shoulders with those awful women, those furtive and evil-looking men. "But she must have some kink in her!" he thought, and thanked God because he had no kink, or at any rate knew of none which disturbed him. The car drew up at the theatre, and they went to their box. It was large enough for three to sit in a row in the front, and Craven insisted on Braybrooke taking the place between the two women, while he took the chair in the shadow behind Lady Sellingworth.

The curtain was already up when they came in, and a large and voluble man, almost like a human earthquake, was talking in broken English interspersed with sonorous Italian to a worried-looking man who sat before a table in a large and gaudily furnished office.

The talk was all about singers, contracts, the opera.

Craven glanced across the theatre and saw a big, empty box on the opposite side of the house. The rest of the house was full. He saw many Jews.

Lady Sellingworth leaned well forward with her

eyes fixed on the stage, and seemed interested as the play developed.

"They are just like that!" she whispered presently, half turning to Craven.

Miss Van Tuyn looked round. She seemed bored. Paris, perhaps, had spoiled her for the acting in London, or the play so far did not interest her. Braybrooke glanced at her rather anxiously. He did not approve of the way in which he and his guests were seated in the box, and was sure she did not like it. Craven ought to be beside her.

"What do you think of it?" he murmured.

"The operatic types aren't bad."

She leaned with an elbow on the edge of the box and looked vaguely about the house.

"I shall insist on a change of seats after the interval!" thought Braybrooke.

A few minutes passed. Then the door of the box opposite was opened and Lady Wrackley appeared, followed by Dindie Ackroyde and the two young men who had dined with them. Lady Wrackley, looking—Craven thought—like a remarkably fine pouter pigeon, came to the front of the box and stared about the house, while the young man with the turned-up nose gently, yet rather familiarly, withdrew from her a long coat of ermine. Meanwhile Mrs. Ackroyde sat down, keeping on her cloak, which was the colour of an Indian sky at night, and immediately became absorbed in the traffic of the stage. It was obvious that she really cared for art, while Lady Wrackley cared about the effect she was creating on the audience. It seemed a long time before she sat down, and let the two young men sit down too. But suddenly there was applause and no one was looking at her. Moscovitch had walked upon the stage.

"*That* man can act!"

Miss Van Tuyn had spoken.

"He gets you merely by coming on. That is acting!"

And immediately she was intent on the stage.

When the curtain fell Braybrooke got up resolutely and stood at the back of the box. Craven, too stood up, and they all discussed the play.

"It's a character study, simply that," said Miss Van Tuyn. "The persistent lover who can't leave off—"

"Trying to love!" interposed Lady Sellingworth. "Following the great illusion."

And they debated whether the great singer was an idealist or merely a sensualist, or perhaps both. Miss Van Tuyn thought he was only the latter, and Braybrooke agreed with her. But Lady Sellingworth said no.

"He is in love with love, I think, and everyone who is in love with love is seeking the flame in the darkness. We wrong many people by dubbing them mere sensualists. The mystery has a driving force which many cannot resist."

"What mystery, dearest?" said Miss Van Tuyn, not without irony.

But at this moment there was a tap at the door of the box, and Craven opened it to find Mrs. Ackroyde and the young man with the severe eyes waiting outside.

"May we come in? Is there room?" said Mrs. Ackroyde.

There was plenty of room.

"Lena will be happier without us," Mrs. Ackroyde explained, without a smile, and looking calmly at Lady Sellingworth. "If I sit quite at the back here I can smoke a cigarette without being stopped. Bobbie

you might give me a match."

The severe young man, who looked like a sad sensualist, one of those men who try to cloak intensity with grimness, did as he was bid, and they renewed the discussion which had been stopped for a moment, bringing the newcomers into it. Lady Sellingworth explained that the mystery she had spoken of was the inner necessity to try to find love which drives many human beings. She spoke without sentimentality, almost with a sort of scientific coldness as one stating facts not to be gainsaid. Mrs. Ackroyde said she liked the theory. It was such a comfortable one. Whenever she made a sidestep she would now be able to feel that she was driven to it by an inner necessity, planted in her family by the Immanent Will, or whatever it was that governed humanity. As she spoke she looked at the man she had called Bobbie, who was Sir Robert Syng, private secretary to a prominent minister, and when she stopped speaking he said he had never been able to believe in free will, though he always behaved as if he thought he possessed it.

Miss Van Tuyn thereupon remarked that as some people are born with tempers and intellects and some without them, perhaps it was the same with free will. She was quite positive she had a free will, but the very first time she had seen Sir Robert she had had her doubts about his having that precious possession. This sally, designed to break up the general conversation and to fasten Sir Robert's attention on herself, led to an animated discussion between her and Mrs. Ackroyde's "man." But Mrs. Ackroyde, though her large dark eyes showed complete understanding of the manoeuvre, did not seem to mind, and, turning her attention to Craven, she began to speak about acting. Meanwhile Lady

Sellingworth went out into the corridor with Braybrooke to “get a little air.”

While Mrs. Ackroyde talked Craven felt that she was thinking about him with an enormously experienced mind. She had been married twice, and was now a widow. No woman knew more about life and the world in a general way than she did. Her complete but quiet self-possession, her rather blunt good nature, and her perfect health, had carried her safely, and as a rule successfully, through multifarious experiences and perhaps through many dangers. It was impossible to conceive of her being ever “knocked out” by any happening however untoward it might be. She was one of the stalwarts of the “old guard.” Craven certainly did not dislike her. But now he felt almost afraid of her. For he knew her present interest in him arose from suspicions about him and Lady Sellingworth which were floating through her brain. She had heard something; had been informed of something; someone had hinted; someone had told. How do such things become suspected in a city like London? Craven could not imagine how the “old guard” had come already to know of his new friendship with Lady Sellingworth. But he was now quite sure that he had been talked about, and that Mrs. Ackroyde was considering him, his temperament, his character, his possibilities in connexion with the famous Adela, once of the “old guard,” but long since traitress to it.

And he felt as if he were made of glass beneath those experienced and calmly investigating eyes, as he talked steadily about acting till the bell went for the second act, and Lady Sellingworth and Braybrooke returned to the box.

“Come and see me,” said Mrs. Ackroyde, getting up. “You never come near me. And come down to

Coombe to lunch one Sunday."

"Thank you very much. I will."

"And bring Adela with you!"

With a casual nod or two, and a "Come, Bobbie, I am sure you have flirted quite enough with Beryl by this time!" she went out of the box, followed by her grim but good-looking cavalier.

"You must sit in front through this act."

Braybrooke spoke.

"Oh, but—"

"No, really—I insist! You don't see properly behind."

Craven took the chair between the two women. As he did so he glanced at Miss Van Tuyn. His chair was certainly nearer to hers than to Lady Sellingworth's, much nearer. Syng had sat in it and must have moved it. As she half turned and said something to Craven her bare silky arm touched his sleeve, and their faces were very near together. Her eyes spoke to him definitely, called him to be young again with her. And as the curtain went up she whispered:

"It was I who insisted on a party of four to-night."

Lady Sellingworth and Braybrooke were talking together, and Craven answered:

"To Mr. Braybrooke?"

"Yes; so that we might have a nice little time. And Adela and he are old friends and contemporaries! I knew they would be happy together."

Craven shrank inwardly as he heard Miss Van Tuyn say "Adela," but he only nodded and tried to return adequately the expression in her eyes. Then he looked across the theatre, and saw Mrs. Ackroyde speaking to Lady Wrackley. After a moment they both gazed at him, and, seeing his eyes fixed on her,

Lady Wrackley let go her smile at him and made a little gesture with her hand.

"She knows too—damn her!" thought Craven, impolitely.

He set his teeth.

"They know everything, these women! It's useless to try to have the smallest secret from them!"

And then he said to himself what so many have said:

"What does it matter what they know, what they think, what they say? I don't care!"

But he did care. He hated their knowing of his friendship with Lady Sellingworth, and it seemed to him that they were scattering dust all over the dew of his feeling.

The second act of the play was more interesting than the first, but, as Miss Van Tuyn said, the whole thing was rather a clever character study than a solidly constructed and elaborately worked out play. It was the fascination of Moscovitch which held the audience tight and which brought thunders of applause when the curtain fell.

"If that man acted in French he could have enormous success in Paris," said Miss Van Tuyn. "You have chosen well," she added, turning to Braybrooke. "You have introduced us to a great temperament."

Braybrooke was delighted, and still more delighted when Lady Sellingworth and Craven both said that it was the best acting they had seen in London for years.

"But it comes out of Russia, I suppose," said Lady Sellingworth. "Poor, wonderful, horrible, glorious Russia!"

"Forgive me for a moment," said Braybrooke. "Lady Wrackley seems to want me."

Indeed, the electric-light smile was being turned on and off in the box opposite with unmistakable intention, and, glancing across, Craven noticed that the young men had disappeared, no doubt to smoke cigarettes in the foyer. Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Ackroyde were alone, and, seeing them alone, it was easier to Craven to compare their appearance with Lady Sellingworth's.

Lady Wrackley looked shiningly artificial, seemed to glisten with artificiality, and her certainly remarkable figure suggested to him an advertisement for a corset designed by a genius with a view to the concealment of fat. Mrs. Ackroyde was far less artificial, and though her hair was dyed it did not proclaim the fact blatantly. Certainly it was difficult to believe that both those ladies, whom Braybrooke now joined, were much the same age as Lady Sellingworth. And yet, in Craven's opinion, to-night she made them both look ordinary, undistinguished. There was something magnificent in her appearance which they utterly lacked.

Braybrooke sat down in their box, and Craven was sure they were all talking about Lady Sellingworth and him. He saw Braybrooke's broad-fingered hand go to his beard and was almost positive his old friend was on the defensive. He was surely saying, "No, really, I don't think so! I feel convinced there is nothing in it!" Craven's eyes met Lady Sellingworth's, and it seemed to him at that moment that she and he spoke together without the knowledge of Miss Van Tuyn. But immediately, and as if to get away from their strange and occult privacy, she said:

"What have you been doing lately, Beryl? I hear Miss Cronin has come over. But I thought you were not staying long. Have you changed your mind?"

Miss Van Tuyn said she might stay on for some time, and explained that she was having lessons in painting.

"In London! I didn't know you painted, and surely the best school of painting is in Paris."

"I don't paint, dearest. But one can take lessons in an art without actually practising the art. And that is what I am doing. I like to know even though I cannot, or don't want to, do. Dick Garstin is my master. He has given me the run of his studio in Glebe Place."

"And you watch him at work?" said Craven.

"Yes."

She fixed her eyes on him, and added:

"He is painting a living bronze."

"Somebody very handsome?" said Lady Sellingworth, glancing across the house to the trio in the box opposite.

"Yes, a man called Nicolas Arabian."

"What a curious name!" said Lady Sellingworth, still looking towards the opposite box. "Is it an Englishman?"

"No. I don't know his nationality. But he makes a magnificent model."

"Oh, he's a model!" said Craven, also looking at the box opposite.

"He isn't a professional model. Dick Garstin doesn't pay him to sit. I only mean that he is a marvellous subject for a portrait and sits well. Dick happened to see him and asked him to sit. Dick paints the people he wants to paint, not those who

want to be painted by him. But he's a really big man. You ought to know him."

She said the last words to Lady Sellingworth, who replied:

"I very seldom make new acquaintances now."

"You made Mr. Craven's!" said Miss Van Tuyn, smiling.

"But that was by special favour. I owe Mr. Braybrooke that!" said Craven. "And I shall be eternally grateful to him."

His eyes met Lady Sellingworth's, and he immediately added, turning to Miss Van Tuyn:

"I have to thank him for two delightful new friends —if I may use that word."

"Mr. Braybrooke is a great benefactor," said Miss Van Tuyn. "I wonder how this play is going to end."

And then they talked about Moscovitch and the persistence of a ruling passion till Braybrooke came back. He looked rather grave and preoccupied, and Craven felt sure that the talk in the opposite box had been about Lady Sellingworth and her "new man," himself, and, unusually self-conscious, or moved, perhaps, by an instinct of self-preservation, he devoted himself almost with intensity to Miss Van Tuyn till the curtain went up. And after it went up he kept his chair very close to hers, sat almost "in her pocket," and occasionally murmured to her remarks about the play.

The last act was a panorama of shifting moods, and although there was little action they all followed it with an intense interest which afterwards surprised them. But a master hand was playing on the audience, and drew at will from them what emotions he chose. Now and then, during the progress of this

act, Braybrooke sent an anxious glance to Lady Sellingworth. All this about loss, though it was the loss of a voice, about the end of a great career, about age and desertion, was dangerous ground. The love-scene between Moscovitch and the young girl seriously perturbed Braybrooke. He hoped, he sincerely hoped, that Adela Sellingworth would not be upset, would not think that he had chosen the Shaftesbury Theatre for their place of entertainment with any *arriere pensee*. He fancied that her face began to look rather hard and "set" as the act drew near its end. But he was not sure. For the auditorium was rather dark; he could not see her quite clearly. And he looked at Craven and Miss Van Tuyn and thought, rather bitterly, how sane and how right his intentions had been. Youth should mate with youth. It was not natural for mature, or old, age to be closely allied with youth in any passionate bond. In such a bond youth was at a manifest disadvantage. And it seemed to Braybrooke that age was sometimes, too often indeed, a vampire going about to satisfy its appetite on youth, to slake its sad thirst at the well-spring of youth. He looked, too, at the women in the box opposite, and at the young men with them, and he regretted that so many human beings were at grips with the natural. He at any rate, although he carefully concealed his age, never did unsuitable things, or fell into anything undignified. Yet was he rewarded for his intense and unremitting carefulness in life?

A telephone bell sounded on the stage, and the unhappy singer, bereft of romance, his career finished, decadence and old age staring him in the face, went to answer the call. But suddenly his face changed; a brightness, an alertness came into it and even, mysteriously, into all his body. There was a

woman at the other end of the wire, and she was young and pretty, and she was asking him to meet her. As he was replying gaily, with smiling lips, and a greedy look in his eyes that was half child-like, half satyr-like, the curtain fell. The play was at an end, leaving the impression upon the audience that there is no end to the life of a ruling passion in a man while he lives, that the ruling passion can only die when he dies.

Miss Van Tuyn and Craven, standing up in the box, applauded vigorously.

"That's a true finish!" the girl said. "He's really a modern Baron Hulot. When he's seventy he'll creep upstairs to a servant girl. We don't change, I've always said it. We don't change!"

And she looked from Craven to Lady Sellingworth.

Moscovitch bowed many times.

"Well, Mr. Braybrooke," said Miss Van Tuyn, "I've seen some acting in London to-night that I should like to show to Paris. Thank you!"

She was more beautiful and more human than Craven had ever seen her before in her genuine enthusiasm. And he thought, "Great art moves her as nothing else moves her."

"What do you say about it, dearest?" she said, as Craven helped her to put on her cloak.

(Braybrooke was attending to Lady Sellingworth.)

"It's a great piece of acting!"

"And horribly true! Don't you think so?"

"I dare say it is," Lady Sellingworth answered.

She turned quickly and led the way out of the box.

In the hall they encountered the other quartet and stood talking to them for a moment, and Craven noticed how Miss Van Tuyn had been stirred up by

the play and how silent Lady Sellingworth was. He longed to go back to Berkeley Square alone with the latter, and to have a long talk; but something told him to get away from both the white-haired woman and the eager girl. And when the motor came up he said very definitely that he had an engagement and must find a cab. Then he bade them good-bye and left them in the motor with Braybrooke. As he was turning away to get out of the crowd a clear, firm voice said to him:

"I am so glad you have performed the miracle, Mr. Craven."

He looked round and saw Mrs. Ackroyde's investigating eyes fixed upon him.

"But what miracle?" he asked.

"You have pulled Adela Sellingworth out of the shell in which she has been living curled up for over ten years."

"Yes. You are a prodigy!" said Lady Wrackley, showing her teeth.

"But I'm afraid I can't claim that triumph. I'm afraid it's due to Mr. Braybrooke's diplomacy."

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Ackroyde said calmly. "Adela would never yield to his cotton-glove persuasions. Besides, his diplomacy would shy away from Soho."

"Soho!" said Craven, startled.

"Yes!"

"Oh, but Miss Van Tuyn performed that miracle!" said Craven, recovering himself.

"I don't think so. You are too modest. But now, mind, I expect you to come down to Coombe to lunch on the first fine Sunday, and to bring Adela with you. Good night! Bobbie, where are you?"

And she followed Lady Wrackley and the young

man with the turned-up nose to a big and shining motor which had just glided noiselessly up.

"Damn the women!" muttered Craven, as he pushed through the crowd into the ugly freedom of Shaftesbury Avenue.

CHAPTER III

Miss Van Tuyn and the members of the "old guard" went home to bed that night realizing that Lady Sellingworth had had "things" done to herself before she came out to the theatre party.

"She's beginning again after—how many years is it?" said Lady Wrackley to Mrs. Ackroyde in the motor as they drove away from Shaftesbury.

"Ten," said Mrs. Ackroyde, who was blessed with a sometimes painfully retentive memory.

"I suppose it's Zotos," observed Lady Wrackley.

"Who's Zotos?" inquired young Leving of the turned-up nose and the larky expression.

"A Greek who's a genius and who lives in South Moulton Street."

"What's he do?"

"Things that men shouldn't be allowed to know anything about. Talk to Bobbie for a minute, will you?"

She turned again to Mrs. Ackroyde.

"It must be Zotos. But even he will be in a

difficulty with her if she wants to have very much done. She made the mistake of her life when she became an old woman. I remember saying at the time that some day she would repent in dust and ashes and want to get back, and that then it would be too late. How foolish she was!"

"She will be much more foolish now if she really begins again," said Mrs. Ackroyde in her cool, common-sense way.

The young men were talking, and after a moment she continued:

"When a thing's once been thoroughly seen by everyone and recognized for what it is, it is worse than useless to hide it or try to hide it. Adela should know that. But I must say she looked remarkably well to-night—for her. He's a good-looking boy."

"He must be at least twenty-eight years younger than she is."

"More, probably. But she prefers them like that. Don't you remember Rochecouart? He was a mere child. When we gave our hop at Prince's she was mad about him. And afterwards she wanted to marry Rupert Louth. It nearly killed her when she found out he had married that awful girl who called herself an actress. And there was someone else after Rupert."

"I know. I often wonder who it was. Someone *we* don't know."

"Someone quite out of our world. Anyhow, he must have broken her heart for the time. And it's taken ten years to mend. Do you think that she sold her jewels secretly to pay that man's debts, or gave them to him, and that then he threw her over? I have often wondered."

"So have we all. But we shall never know. Adela is very clever."

"And now it's another boy! And only twenty-eight or so. He can't be more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight. Poor old Adela!"

"Perhaps he likes white hair. There are boys who do."

"But not for long. Beryl was furious."

"It is hardly a compliment to her. I expect her cult for Adela will diminish rapidly."

"Oh, she'll very soon get him away. Even Zotos won't be able to do very much for Adela now. She burnt all her boats ten years ago. Her case is really hopeless, and she'll very soon find that out."

"Do you remember when she tried to live up to Rupert Louth as an Amazon?"

"Yes. She nearly killed herself over it; but I must say she stuck to it splendidly. She has plenty of courage."

"Is Alick Craven athletic? I scarcely know him."

"Well, he's never been a rough rider like Rupert Louth; but I believe he's a sportsman, does all the usual things."

"Then I dare say we shall soon see Adela on the links and at Kings'."

"Probably. I'll get them both down to Coombe and see if she'll play tennis on my hard court. I shouldn't wonder. She has pluck enough for anything."

"Ask me that Sunday. I wonder how long it will last."

"Not long. It can't."

"And then she'll go crash again. It must be awful to have a temperament like hers."

"Her great mistake is that apparently she puts some heart into it every time. I can't think how she

manages it, but she does. Do you remember twelve years ago, when she was crazy about Harry Blake? Well—"

But at this moment the motor drew up at the Carlton, and a huge man in uniform opened the door.

Mrs. Ackroyde was right in her comment on Miss Van Tuyn. In spite of Craven's acting that night Miss Van Tuyn had thoroughly understood how things really were. She had persuaded Braybrooke to invite Lady Sellingworth to make a fourth in order that she might find out whether any link had been forged between Craven and Lady Sellingworth, whether there was really any secret understanding between them, or whether that tete-a-tete dinner in Soho had been merely a passing pleasure, managed by Lady Sellingworth, meaning little, and likely to lead to nothing. And she had found out that there certainly was a secret understanding between Lady Sellingworth and Craven from which she was excluded. Craven had preferred Adela Sellingworth to herself, and Adela Sellingworth was fully aware of it.

It was characteristic of Miss Van Tuyn that though her vanity was so great and was now severely wounded she did not debate the matter within herself, did not for a moment attempt to deceive herself about it. And yet really she had very little ground to go upon. Craven had been charming to her, had replied to her glances, had almost made love to her at dinner, had sat very close to her during the last act of the play. Yes; but it had all been acting on his part. Quite coolly she told herself that. And Lady Sellingworth had certainly wished him to act, had even prompted him to it.

Miss Van Tuyn felt very angry with Lady Sellingworth. She was less angry with Craven. Indeed, she was not sure that she was angry with him at all. He was several years older than herself, but she began to think of him as really very young, as much younger in mind and temperament than she was. He was only a clever boy, susceptible to flattery, easily influenced by a determined will, and probably absurdly chivalrous. She knew the sort of chivalry which was a symptom really of babyhood in the masculine mind. It was characteristic of sensitive natures, she believed, and it often led to strange aberrations. Craven was only a baby, although a baby of the world, and Adela Sellingworth with her vast experience had, of course, seen that at a glance and was now busily playing upon baby's young chivalry. Miss Van Tuyn could almost hear the talk about being so lonely in the big house in Berkeley Square, about the freedom of men and the difficulty of having any real freedom when one is a solitary woman with no man to look after you, about the tragedy of being considered old when your heart and your nature are really still young, almost as young as ever they were. Adela Sellingworth would know how to touch every string, would be an adept at calling out the music she wanted. How easily experienced women played upon men! It was really pathetic! And as Craven had thought of protecting Lady Sellingworth against Miss Van Tuyn, so now Miss van Tuyn felt inclined to protect Alick Craven against Lady Sellingworth. She did not want to see a nice and interesting boy make a fool of himself. Yet Craven was on the verge of doing that, if he had not already done it. Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Ackroyde had seen how things were, had taken in the whole situation in a moment. Miss Van Tuyn knew that,

and in her knowledge there was bitterness. These two women had seen Lady Sellingworth preferred before her by a mere boy, had seen her beauty and youth go for nothing beside a woman of sixty's fascination.

There must be something quite extraordinary in Craven. He must be utterly unlike other young men. She began to wonder about him intensely.

On the following morning, as usual, she went to Glebe Place to take what she had called her "lesson" from Dick Garstin. She arrived rather early, a few minutes before eleven, and found Garstin alone, looking tired and irritable.

"You look as if you had been up all night," she said as he let her in.

"So I have!"

She did not ask him what he had been doing. He would probably refuse to tell her. Instead she remarked:

"Will you be able to paint?"

"Probably not. But perhaps the fellow won't come."

"Why not. He always—" She stopped; then said quickly, "So he was up all night too?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know you knew him out of the studio."

"Of course I know him wherever I meet him. What do you mean?"

"I didn't know you did meet him."

Garstin said nothing. She turned and went up the staircase to the big studio. On an easel nearly in the middle of the room, and not very far from the portrait of the judge, there was a sketch of Nicolas Arabian's head, neck and shoulders. No collar or

clothes were shown. Garstin had told Arabian flatly that he wasn't going to paint a magnificent torso like his concealed by infernal linen and serge, and Arabian had been quite willing that his neck and shoulders should be painted in the nude.

In the strong light of the studio Garstin's unusual appearance of fatigue was more noticeable, and Miss Van Tuyn could not help saying:

"What on earth have you been doing, Dick? You always seem made of iron. But to-day you look like an ordinary man who has been dissipating."

"I played poker all night," said Garstin.

"With Arabian?"

"And two other fellows—picked them up at the Cafe Royal."

"Well, I hope you won."

"No, I didn't. Both Arabian and I lost a lot. We played here."

"Here!"

"Yes. And I haven't had a wink since they left. I don't suppose he'll turn up. And if he does I shan't be able to do anything at it."

He went to stand in front of the sketch, which was in oils, and stared at it with lack-lustre eyes.

"What d'you think of it?" he said at last.

Miss Van Tuyn was rather surprised by the question. Garstin was not in the habit of asking other people's opinions about his work.

"It's rather difficult to say," she said, with some hesitation.

"That means you think it's rotten."

"No. But it isn't finished and—I don't know."

"Well, I hate it."

He turned away, sat down on a divan, and let his big knuckly hands drop down between his knees.

“Fact is, I haven’t got at the fellow’s secret,” he said meditatively. “I got a first impression—”

He paused.

“I know!” said Miss Van Tuyn, deeply interested. “You told me what it was.”

“The successful blackmailer. Yes. But now I don’t know. I can’t make him out. He’s the hardest nut to crack I ever came across.”

He moved his long lips from side to side three or four times, then pursed them up, lifted his small eyes, which had been staring between his feet at a Persian rug on the parquet in front of the divan, looked at Miss Van Tuyn, who was standing before him, and said:

“That’s why I sat up all night playing poker with him.”

“Ah!” she said, beginning to understand

She sat down beside him, turned towards him, and said eagerly:

“You wanted to get really to know him?”

“Yes; but I didn’t. The fellow’s an enigma. He’s bad. And that’s practically all I know about him.”

He glanced with distaste at the sketch he had made.

“And it isn’t enough. It isn’t enough by a damned long way.”

“Is he a good loser?” she asked.

“The best I ever saw. Never turned a hair, and went away looking as fresh as a well-watered gardenia, damn him!”

“Who were the others?”

"Two Americans I've seen now and then at the Cafe Royal. I believe they live mostly in Paris."

"Friends of his?"

"I don't think so. He said they came and sat down at his table in the cafe and started talking. I suggested the poker. They didn't. So it wasn't a plant."

"Perhaps he isn't bad," she said; "and perhaps that's why you can't paint him."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean because you have made up your mind that he is. I think you have a fixed idea about that."

"What?"

"You have painted so many brutes, that you seek for the brute in everyone who sits to you. If you were to paint me you'd—"

"Now, now! There you are at it again! I'll paint you if I ever feel like it—not a minute before."

"I was only going to say that if you ever painted me you'd try to find something horrible in me that you could drag to the surface."

"Well, d'you mean that you have the *toupet* to tell me there is nothing horrible in you?"

"Now we are getting away from Arabian," she said, with cool self-possession.

"Owing to your infernal egoism, my girl!"

"Override it, then, with your equally infernal altruism, my boy!"

Garstin smiled, and for a moment looked a little less fatigued, but in a moment his almost morose preoccupation returned. He glanced again towards the sketch.

"I should like to slit it up with a palette knife!" he

said. “The devil of it is that I felt I could do a really great thing with that fellow. I struck out a fine phrase that night. D’you remember?”

“Yes. You called him a king in the underworld.”

Abruptly he got up and began to walk about the studio, stopping now here, now there, before his portraits. He paused for quite a long time before the portraits of Cora and the judge. Then he came back to the sketch of Arabian.

“You must help me!” he said at last.

“I!” she exclaimed, with almost sharp surprise. “How can I help you?”

He turned, and she saw the pin-points of light.

“What do you think of the fellow?” he said. “After all, you asked me to paint him. What do you think of him?”

“I think he’s magnificently handsome.”

“Blast his envelope!” Garstin almost roared out. “What do you think of his nature? What do you think of his soul? I’m not a painter of surfaces.”

Miss Van Tuyn sat for a moment looking steadily at him. She was unusually natural and unself-conscious, like one thinking too strongly to bother about herself. At last she said:

“Arabian is a very difficult man to understand, and I don’t understand him.”

“Do you like him?”

“I couldn’t exactly say that.”

“Do you hate him?”

“No.”

Garstin suddenly looked almost maliciously sly.

“I can tell you something that you feel about him.”

“What?”

"You are afraid of him."

Miss Van Tuyn's silky fair skin reddened.

"I'm not afraid of anyone," she retorted. "If I have one virtue, I think it's courage."

"You're certainly not a Miss Nancy as a rule. In fact, your cheek is pretty well known in Paris. But you're afraid of Arabian."

"Am I really?" said the girl, recovering from her surprise and facing him hardily. "And how have you found that out?"

"You took a fancy to the fellow the first time you saw him."

"I did not take a fancy. I am not an under-housemaid."

"There's not really a particle of difference between an under-housemaid and a super-lady when it comes to a good-looking man."

"Dick, you're a great painter, but you're also a great vulgarian!"

"Well, my father was a national schoolmaster and my mother was a butcher's daughter. I can't help my vernacular. You took a fancy to this fellow in the Cafe Royal, and you begged me to paint him so that you might get to know him. I obeyed you—"

"The heavens will certainly fall before you become obedient."

"—and asked him here. Then I asked you. You came. He came. I started painting. How many sittings have I had?"

"Three."

"Then you've met him here four times?"

"Yes."

"And why have you always let him go away alone

from the studio?"

"Why should I go with him? I much prefer to stay on here and have a talk with you. You are far more interesting than Arabian is. He says very little. Probably he knows very little. I can learn from you."

"That's all very well. I will say you're damned keen on acquiring knowledge. But Arabian interests you in a way I certainly don't; in a sex way."

"That'll do, Dick!"

"And directly a woman gets to that all the lumber of knowledge can go to the devil for her! When Nature drives the coach brain interests occupy the back seat. That is a rule with women to which I've never yet found an exception. Every day you're longing to go away from here with Arabian; every day he does his level best to get you to go. Yet you don't go. Why's that? You're held back by fear. You're afraid of the fellow, my girl, and it's not a bit of use your denying it. When I see a thing I see it—it's there. I don't deal in hallucinations."

All this time his small eyes were fixed upon her, and the fierce little lights in them seemed to touch her like the points of two pins.

"You talk about fear! Does it never occur to you that Arabian's a man you picked up at the Cafe Royal, that we neither of us know anything about him, that he may be—"

"Anyhow, he's far more presentable than I am."

"Of course he's presentable, as you call it. He's very well dressed and very good-looking, but still—"

At that moment she thought of Craven, and in her mind quickly compared the two men.

"But still you're afraid of him. Where is your frankness? Why don't you acknowledge what I

already know?"

Miss Van Tuyn looked down and sat for a moment quite still without speaking. Then she began to take off her gloves. Finally, she lifted her hands to her head, took off her hat, and laid it on the divan beside her.

"It isn't that I am afraid of Arabian," she then said, at last looking up. "But the fact is I am like you. I don't understand him. I can't place him. I don't even know what his nationality is. He knows nobody I do. I feel certain of that. Yet he must belong somewhere, have some set of friends, some circle of acquaintances, I suppose. He isn't at all vulgar. One couldn't call him genteel, which is worse, I think. It's all very odd. I'm not conventional. In Paris I'm considered even terribly unconventional. I've met all sorts of men, but I've never met a man like Arabian. But the other day—don't you remember?—you summed him up. You said he had no education, no knowledge, no love of art or literature, that he was clever, sensual, idle, acquisitive, made of iron, with nerves of steel. Don't you remember?"

"To be sure I do."

"Isn't that enough to go upon?"

"For the painting? No, it isn't. Besides, you said you weren't sure I was right in my diagnosis of the chap's character and physical part."

"I wasn't sure, and I'm not sure now."

"Tell me God's own truth, Beryl. Come on!"

He came up to her, put one hand on her left shoulder, and looked down into her eyes.

"Aren't you a bit afraid of the fellow?"

She met his eyes steadily.

"There's something—" She paused.

"Go ahead, I tell you!"

"I couldn't describe it. It's more like an atmosphere than anything else. It seems to hang about him. I've never felt anything quite like it when I've been with anyone else."

"An atmosphere! Now we're getting at it."

He took his heavy hand away from her shoulder.

"A woman feels that sort of thing more sensitively than a man does. Sex! Go on! What about it?"

"But I scarcely know what I mean—really, Dick. No! But it's—it's an unsafe atmosphere."

"Ah!"

"One doesn't know where one is in it. At least, I don't. Once in London I was lost for a little while in Regents Park in a fog. It's—it's something like that. I couldn't see the way, and I heard steps and voices that sounded strange and—I don't know."

"Find out!"

"That's all very well. You are terribly selfish, Dick. You don't care what happens so long as you can paint as you wish to paint. You'd sacrifice me, anyone—"

The girl seemed strangely uneasy. Her usual coolness had left her. The hot blood had come back to her cheeks and glowed there in uneven patches of red. Garstin gazed at her with profound and cruel interest.

"Sacrifice!" he said. "Who talked of sacrificing you? Who wishes to sacrifice you? I only want—"

"One doesn't know—with a man like that one doesn't know where it would lead to."

"Then you think he's a thundering blackguard? And yet you defended him just now, said perhaps I couldn't paint him just because I'd made up my mind

he was a brute. You're a mass of contradictions."

"I don't say he's bad. He may not be bad."

"Fact is, as I said, you're in a mortal funk of him."

"I am not!" she said, with sudden anger. "No one shall say I'm afraid of any man. You can ask anyone who knows me really well, and you will always hear the same story. I'm afraid of no one and nothing, and I've proved it again and again."

"Well then, what's to prevent you proving it to me, my girl?"

"I will!"

She lifted her chin and looked suddenly impudent.

"What do you wish me to do to prove it?" she asked him defiantly.

"If Arabian does come to-day go away with him when he goes. Get to know him really. You could, I believe. But ever since he's come here to sit he has shut up the box which contains the truth of what he is, locked it, and lost the key. His face is a mask, and I don't paint masks."

"Very well. I will."

"Good!" said Garstin sonorously, and looking suddenly much less tired and morose.

"But why do you think *I* could get to know him?"

"Because he's—but you know why better than I do."

"I don't."

"Arabian's in love with you, my girl. By Jove! There he is!"

The bell had sounded below.

With a swift movement Garstin got hold of a palette knife, sprang at the sketch of Arabian, and ripped up the canvas from top to bottom. Miss Van

Tuyn uttered a cry.

"Dick!"

"That's all right!"

He threw the knife down.

"We'll do better than that by a long way."

He got hold of her hand.

"Stick to your word, my girl, and I'll paint you yet —and not an Academy portrait. But you've got to *live*. Just now, with your cheeks all in patches you looked stunning."

The bell went again.

"Now for him!"

He hurried downstairs.

CHAPTER IV

Lady Sellingworth was afraid. In spite of her many triumphs in the past she had a deep distrust of life. Since the tragedies of her middle age her curious natural diffidence, which the habit of the world had never been able to subdue, had increased. In ten years of retirement, in the hundreds of hours of solitude which those ten years had held for her, it had grown within her. And now it began to torment her.

Life brings gifts to almost everyone, and often the gift-bearer's approach is absolutely unexpected. So it had been in Lady Sellingworth's case. She had had

no premonition that a change was preparing for her. Nothing had warned her to be on the alert when young feet turned into Berkeley Square on a certain Sunday in autumn and made towards her door. Abruptly, after years of neglect, it seemed as if life suddenly remembered that there was a middle-aged woman, with lungs which still mechanically did their work, and a heart which still obstinately persisted in beating, living in Berkeley Square, and that scarcely a bare bone had been thrown to her for some thousands of days. And then life brought her Craven, with an unusual nature, with a surely romantic mind, with a chivalrous sense that was out of the fashion, with faculties making for friendship; life offered, or seemed to offer her Craven, to whisper in her ear, "You have been starving alone for a long time. To tell the truth, I had forgotten all about you. I did not remember you were there. I don't quite know why you persist in being there. But, as you do, and as you are wearing thin for want of sustenance, here is something for you!"

And now, because of what life had done, Lady Sellingworth was afraid. When she had parted from her friends after the theatre party, and was once more alone in her big house, she knew thoroughly, absolutely, for the first time what life had done.

All the calm, the long calm of her years of retirement from the world, had gone. She now knew how strangely safe she had felt in her loneliness. She had felt surely something of the safety of a nun of one of the enclosed orders. In her solitude she had learnt to understand how dangerous the great world is, how full of trials for the nerves, the temper, the flesh, the heart. The woman who goes into it needs to be armed. For many weapons thrust at her. She must be perpetually on the alert, ready to hold her

own among the attacking eyes and tongues. And she must not be tired, or dull, or sad, must not show, or follow, her varying moods, must not quietly rest in sincerity. When she had lived in the world Lady Sellingworth had scarcely realized all this. But in her long retirement she had come fully to realize it. There had been a strange and embracing sense of safety permeating her solitary life. She had got up in the morning, she had gone to bed at night, feeling safe. For the storms of the passions were stilled, and though desire might stir sometimes, it soon slept again. For she never took her desire into danger. She did not risk the temptations of the world.

But now all the old restlessness, all the old anxiety and furtive uneasiness of the mind, had returned. She was again what she had often been more than ten years ago—a woman tormented. And—for she knew herself now—she knew what was in store for her if she gave herself again to life and her own inclinations.

For it had all come back; the old greedy love of sympathy and admiration, the old worship of strength and youth and hot blood and good looks, the old longing for desire and love, the old almost irritable passion to possess, to dominate, to be first, to submerge another human being in her own personality.

After ten years she was in love again, desperately in love. But she was an elderly woman now, so elderly that many people would no doubt think that it was impossible that she should be in love. How little such people knew about human nature! The evening had been almost as wonderful and as exciting to her as it could have been to a girl. When she had come into the hall of the Carlton and had seen Craven through the glass, had seen his tall

figure, smooth, dark hair, and animated face glowing with health after the breezes and sunrays of Beaconsfield, she had known a feeling that a girl might have understood and shared.

And she was sixty!

What was to be done?

Craven was certainly fond of her already. Quietly she had triumphed that night. Three women had seen and had quite understood her little triumph. Probably all of them had wondered about it, had been secretly irritated by it. Certainly Beryl had been very much irritated. But in spite of that triumph, Lady Sellingworth felt almost desperately afraid that night when she was alone. For she knew how great the difference was between her feeling for Craven and his feeling for her. And with greater intimacy that difference, she felt sure, must even increase. For she would want from him what he would never want or even dream of wanting, from her. He would be satisfied in their friendship while she would be almost starving. He would never know that cruel longing to touch which marks the difference between what is love and what is friendship.

If she now let herself go, took no drastic step, just let life carry her on, she could have a strange and unusual, and, in its way, beautiful friendship, a friendship which to a woman with a different nature from hers might seem perfect. She could have that—and what would it be to her?

She longed to lay violent hands on herself; she longed to tear something that was an essential part of her to pieces, to scatter it to a wind, and let the wind whirl it away.

She knelt down that night before getting into bed and prayed. And when she did that she thought of

Sellingworth and of his teachings and opinions. How he would have laughed at her if he had ever seen her do that! She had not wanted to do it in the years when she had been with him. But now, if his opinions had been well founded, he was only dust and perhaps a few fragments of bone. He could not laugh at her now. And she felt a really desperate need of prayer.

She did not pray to have something that she wanted. She knew that would be no use. Even if there was a God who attended to individuals, he would certainly not give her what she wanted just then. To do so would be deliberately to interfere with the natural course of things, arbitrarily to change the design. And something in Lady Sellingworth's brain prevented her from being able even for a moment to think that God would ever do that. She prayed, therefore, that she might cease to want what she wanted; she prayed that she might have strength to do a tremendously courageous thing quickly; she prayed that she might be rewarded for doing it by afterwards having physical and mental peace; she prayed that she might be permanently changed, that she might, after this last trial, be allowed to become passionless, that what remained of the fiercely animal in her might die out, that she might henceforth be as old in nature as she already was in body. "For," she said to herself, "only in that oldness lies safety for me! Unless I can be all old—mind and nature, as well as body—I shall suffer horribly again."

She prayed that she might feel old, so old that she might cease from being attracted by youth, from longing after youth in this dreadful tormenting way.

When she got up from her knees it was one o'clock. She took two tablets of aspirin and got into

bed. And directly she was in bed an idea seemed to hit her mind, and she trembled slightly, as if she had really received a blow. She had just been praying for something earnestly, almost violently, and she had prayed with clear understanding, with the understanding that a long and fully lived life brings to every really intelligent human being. Did she really want her prayer to be answered, or had she been trying to humbug herself? She had thought of a test which would surely prove whether she was genuine in her desire to escape from the torment that was lying in wait for her or not. Instead of receiving a visit from her Greek to-morrow, instead of being at home to Craven in the late afternoon, instead of giving herself up to the lure which must, she knew, certainly lead her on to emotional destruction, she might do this: she might telephone to Sir Seymour Portman to come to her and tell him that she would reward his long faithfulness.

It would be a way out. If she could bring herself to do it she would make herself safe. For though Seymour Portman had been so faithful, and she had never rewarded him, he was not a man any woman would dare to play with. Lady Sellingworth knew that she would never break a promise to him, would never play fast and loose with him. He was strong and he was true, and he had very high ideals and an almost stern code of honour. In accepting him as her husband she would shut a door of steel between herself and her past, with its sins and its many follies. She would begin again, as an old woman with a devoted husband who would know—none better—how to make himself respected, how to hold by his rights.

People might smile at such a marriage, but it would be absolutely suitable. Seymour was a few

years older than she was. But he was still strong and upright, could still sit a horse as well as any man, still had a steady hand with his gun. He was not a ruin. She would be able to rest on him. A more perfect support for a woman than Seymour, if he loved, was surely not created. He was a gentleman to the core, and totally incapable of insincerity. He was fearless. He belonged to her world. He was *persona grata* at Court and in society. And he loved her in that extraordinary and very rare way—as the one woman. All he needed in a woman quite evidently he found in her. How? Why? She did not know, could not understand. But so it was. She would absolutely satisfy his desires.

The aspirin was stilling her nerves. She lay without moving. Had she been a humbug when she prayed? Had she prayed knowing quite well that her prayer was not going to be answered, not intending, or wishing, really, that it should be answered? Had she prayed without any belief in a Being who had the power and probably the will to give her what she asked for? Would she have prayed at all had she been sure that if she offered up a petition to be made old in nature as well as in body it would certainly be granted?

“I don’t know! I don’t know!” she whispered to herself.

The darkness of the big room suddenly seemed very strange. And she thought how odd it was that human beings need in every twenty-four hours a long period of blackness, that they make blackness by turning out light, and stretch themselves out in it as if getting ready for burial.

“Burial! If I’m not a humbug, if really I wish for peace, to-morrow I shall send for Seymour,” she said

to herself. “Through him I can get peace of mind. He will protect me against myself, without even knowing that he is doing it. I have only to speak a sentence to him and all possibility of danger, torment and wildness will be over for ever.”

And then she thought of the safety of a prison. But anything was surely better than misery of mind and body, than wanting terribly from someone what he never wants to give you, what he never wants from you.

Torment in freedom, or stagnant peace in captivity behind the prison door—which was the more desirable? Craven’s voice through the telephone—their conversation about Waring—Seymour’s long faithfulness—if he were here now! How would it be? And if Craven—No! No!

Another tablet of aspirin—and sleep!

Lady Sellingworth did not pray the next morning. But she telephoned to Seymour Portman, and said she would be at home about five in the afternoon if he cared for an hour’s talk. She gave no hint that she had any special reason for asking him to come. If he only knew what was in her mind! His firm, quiet, soldier’s voice replied through the telephone that of course he would come. Somehow she guessed that he had had an engagement and was going to give it up for her. What would he not give up for her? And yet he was a man accustomed to command, and to whom authority was natural. But he was also accustomed to obey. He was the perfect courtier, devoted to the monarchy, yet absolutely free from the slave instinct. Good kings trust such men. Many women love them.

“Why not I?” Lady Sellingworth thought that day.

And it seemed to her that perhaps even love might

be subject to will power, that a determined effort of will might bring it or banish it. She had never really tested her will in that way in connexion with love. But the time had come for the test to be made.

"Perhaps I can love Seymour!" she said to herself. "Perhaps I could have loved him years ago if I had chosen. Perhaps I have only to use my will to be happy with him. I have never controlled my impulses. That has been my curse and the cause of all my miseries."

At that moment she entirely forgot the ten years of self-control which were behind her. The sudden return to her former self had apparently blotted them out from her memory.

After telephoning to Seymour Portman she wrote a little note to Craven and sent it round to the Foreign Office. In the note she explained briefly that she was not able to see him that afternoon as had been arranged between them. The wording of the note was cold. She could not help that. She wrote it under the influence of what she thought of just then as a decision. If she did what she believed she intended to do that afternoon she would have to be cold to Craven in the future. With her temperament it would be impossible to continue her friendship with Craven if she were going to marry Sir Seymour. She knew that. But she did not know how frigid, how almost brusque, her note to Craven was.

When he read it he felt as if he had received a cold douche. It startled him and hurt him, hurt his youthful sensitiveness and pride. And he wondered very much why Lady Sellingworth had written it, and what had happened to make her write to him like that. She did not even ask him to call on her at some other time on some other day. And it had been

she who had suggested a cosy talk that afternoon. She had been going to show him a book of poems by a young American poet in whose work she was interested. And they would have talked over the little events of the preceding evening, have discussed Moscovitch, the play, the persistence of love, youth, age, everything under the sun.

Craven was severely disappointed. He even felt rather angry and hurt. Something in him was up in arms, but something else was distressed and anxious. It was extraordinary how already he had come to depend upon Lady Sellingworth. His mother was dead. He certainly did not think of Lady Sellingworth as what is sometimes called "a second mother." There was nothing maternal about her, and he was fully aware of that. Besides, she did not fascinate him in the motherly way. No; but owing to the great difference in their ages he felt that he could talk to her as he could talk to nobody else. For he was in no intimate relation with any other woman so much older than himself. And to young women somehow one can never talk so freely, so companionably. Even in these modern days sex gets in the way. Craven told himself that as he folded up Lady Sellingworth's letter. She was different. He had felt that for him there was quite a beautiful refuge in Berkeley Square. And now! What could have happened? She must surely be vexed about something he had done, or about something which had occurred on the previous evening. And he thought about the evening carefully and minutely. Had she perhaps been upset by Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Ackroyde? Was she self-conscious as he was, and had she observed their concentration upon herself and him? Or, on the other hand, could she had misunderstood his manner with Miss Van Tuyn? He knew how very sensitive women

are about each other. And Lady Sellingworth, of course, was old, although he never bothered, and seldom thought, about her age. Elderly women were probably in certain ways even more sensitive than young women. He could well understand that. And he certainly had rather made love to Miss Van Tuyn because of the horribly observing eyes of the "old guard." And then, too, Miss Van Tuyn had finally almost required it of him. Had she not told him that she had insisted on Lady Sellingworth's being asked to the theatre to entertain Braybrooke so that Craven and she, the young ones, might have a nice little time? After that what could he do but his duty? But perhaps Lady Sellingworth had not understood. He wondered, and felt now hurt and angry, now almost contrite and inclined to be explanatory.

When he left the Foreign Office that day and was crossing the Mall he was very depressed. A breath of winter was in the air. There was a bank of clouds over Buckingham Palace, with the red sun smouldering just behind their edges. The sky, as it sometimes does, held tenderness, anger and romance, and was full of lures for the imagination and the soul. Craven looked at it as he walked on with a colleague, a man called Marshall, older than himself, who had just come back from Japan, and was momentarily translated. He voyaged among the clouds, and was carried away across that cold primrose and delicate green, and his journey was into the ineffable, and beyond the rim of the horizon towards the satisfaction of the unexpressed, because inexpressible, desires. And Marshall talked about Japanese art and presently about geishas, not stupidly, but with understanding. And Craven thought: "If only I were going to Berkeley Square!" He had come down to earth, but in the condition

which yearns for an understanding mind. Lady Sellingworth understood him. But now—he did not know. And he went with Marshall drearily to the St. James's Club and went on hearing about geishas and Japanese art.

The bell sounded in Berkeley Square, and a footman let in Sir Seymour Portman, who was entirely unconscious that Fate had been working apparently with a view to the satisfaction of his greatest desire. He had long ago given up hope of being Adela Sellingworth's husband. Twice that hope had died—when she had married Lord Manham, and when she had married Sellingworth. Adela could not care for him in that way. But now for many years she had remained unmarried, had joined him, as it were, in the condition of being lonely. That fact had helped him along the road. He could go to her and feel that he was in a certain degree wanted. That was something, even a good deal, in the old courtier's life. He valued greatly the welcome of the woman whom he still loved with an undeviating fidelity. He was thankful, selfishly, no doubt—he often said so to himself—for her loneliness, because he believed himself able to cheer it and to alleviate it. And at last he had ceased to dread any change in her way of life. His Adela had evidently at last "settled down." Her vivacious temperament, her almost greedy love of life, were abated. He had her more or less to himself.

As he mounted the staircase with his slow, firm step, holding his soldierly figure very upright, he was looking forward to one of the usual quiet, friendly conversations with Adela which were his greatest enjoyments, and as he passed through the doorway of the drawing-room his eyes turned at once towards the sofa near the big fireplace, seeking for the tall figure of the woman who so mysteriously had

captured his heart in the long ago and who had never been able to let it out of her keeping.

But there was no one by the fire, and the butler said:

"I will tell her ladyship that you are here, sir."

"Thank you, Murgatroyd," said Sir Seymour.

And he went to the fireplace, turned round, and began to warm his flat back.

He stood there thus till his back was quite warm. Adela was rather slow in coming. But he did not mind that. It was happiness for him to be in her house, among her things, the sofas and chairs she used, the carpet her feet pressed every day, the books she read, the flowers she had chosen. This house was his idea of a home who had never had a home because of her.

Meanwhile upstairs, in a big bedroom just overhead, Lady Sellingworth was having a battle with herself of which her friend was totally unconscious. She did not come down at once because she wanted definitely and finally to finish that battle before she saw again the man by the fire. But something said to her: "Don't decide till you have seen him again. Look at him once more and then decide." She walked softly up and down the room after Murgatroyd had told her who was waiting for her, and she felt gnawed by apprehension. She knew her fate was in the balance. All day she had been trying to decide what she was going to do. All day she had been saying to herself: "Now, this moment, I will decide, and once the decision is made there shall be no going back from it." It was within her power to come to a decision and to stick to it; or, if it were not within her power, then she was not a sane but an insane woman. She knew herself sane. Yet the

decision was not arrived at when Sir Seymour rang the bell. Now he was waiting in the room underneath and the matter must be settled. An effort of will, the descent of a flight of stairs, a sentence spoken, and her life would be made fast to an anchor which would hold. And for her there would be no more drifting upon dangerous seas at the mercy of tempests.

"Look at him once more and then decide."

The voice persisted within her monotonously. But what an absurd injunction that was. She knew Seymour by heart, knew every feature of him, every expression of his keen, observant, but affectionate eyes, the way he held himself, the shapes of his strong, rather broad hands—the hands of a fine horseman and first-rate whip—every trick of him, every attitude. Why look at him, her old familiar friend, again before deciding what she was now going to do?

"Look at him as the man who is going to be your husband!"

But that was surely a deceiving insidious voice, suggesting to her weakness, uncertainty, hesitation, further mental torment and further debate. And she was afraid of it.

She stood still near the window. She must go down. Seymour had already been waiting some time, ten minutes or more. He must be wondering why she did not come. He was not the sort of man one cares to keep waiting—although he had waited many years scarcely daring to hope for something he longed for. She thought of his marvellous happiness, his wonderful surprise, if she did what she meant—or did she mean it—to do. Surely it would be a splendid thing to bring such a flash of radiance into a life of

twilight. Does happiness come from making others happy? If so, then—She must go down.

"I will do it!" she said to herself. "Merely his happiness will be enough reward."

And she went towards the door. But as she did so her apprehension grew till her body tingled with it. A strange sensation of being physically unwell came upon her. She shrank, as if physically, from the clutching hands of the irrevocable. If in a hurry, driven by her demon, she were to say the words she had in her mind there would be no going back. She would never dare to unsay them. She knew that. But that was just the great advantage she surely was seeking—an irrevocable safety from herself, a safety she would never be able to get away from, break out of.

In a prison there is safety from all the dangers and horrors of the world outside the prison. But what a desperate love of the state she now called freedom burned within her! Freedom for what, though? She knew and felt as if her soul were slowly reddening. It was monstrous that thought of hers. Yet she could not help having it. It was surely not her fault if she had it. Was she a sort of monster unlike all other women of her age? Or did many of them, too, have such thoughts?

She must go down. And she went to the door and opened it. And directly she saw the landing outside and the descending staircase she knew that she had not yet decided, that she could not decide till she had looked at Seymour once more, looked at him with the almost terrible eyes of the deeply experienced woman who can no longer decide a thing swiftly in ignorance.

"I shall do it," she said to herself. "But I must be

reasonable, and there is no reason why I should force myself to make up my mind finally up here. I have sent for Seymour and I know why. When I see him, when I am with him, I shall do what I intended to do when I asked him to come."

She shut her bedroom door and began to go downstairs, and as she went she imagined Seymour settled in that house with her. (For, of course, he would come to live in Berkeley Square, would leave the set of rooms he occupied now in St. James's Palace.) She had often longed to have a male companion living with her in that house, to smell cigar smoke, to hear a male voice, a strong footstep in the hall and on the stairs, to see things that implied a man's presence lying about, caps, pipes, walking sticks, golf clubs, riding crops. The whole atmosphere of the house would be changed if a man came to live with her there, if Seymour came.

But—her liberty?

She had gained the last stair and was on the great landing before the drawing-room door. Down below she heard a faint and discreet murmur of voices from Murgatroyd and the footman in the hall. And as she paused for a moment she wondered how much those two men knew of her and of her real character, whether they had any definite knowledge of her humanity, whether they had perhaps realized in their way what sort of woman she was, sometimes stripped away the *Grande Dame*, the mistress, and looked with appraising eyes at the stark woman.

She would never know.

She opened the door and instantly assumed her usual carelessly friendly look.

Sir Seymour had left the fire, and was sitting in an armchair with a book in his hand reading when she

came in; and as she had opened the door softly, and as it was a long way from the fireplace he did not hear her or instantly realize that she was there. She had an instant in which to contemplate him as he sat there, like a man quietly at home. Only one lamp was lit. It stood on a table behind him and threw light on his rather big head thickly covered with curly and snow-white hair, the hair which he sometimes smilingly called his “cauliflower.” The light fell, too, aslant on his strong-featured manly face, the slightly hooked nose, large-lipped, firm mouth, shaded by a moustache in which some dark hairs were mingled with the white ones, and chin with a deep dent in the middle of it. His complexion was of that weather-beaten red hue which is often seen in oldish men who have been much out in all weathers. There were many deep lines in the face, two specially deep ones slanting downwards from the nose on either side of the mouth. Above the nose there was a sort of bump, from which the low forehead slightly retreated to the curves of strong white hair. The ears were large but well shaped. In order to read he had put on pince-nez with tortoise-shell rimmed glasses, from which hung a rather broad black riband. His thin figure looked stiff even in an arm-chair. His big brown-red hands held the book up. His legs were crossed, and his feet were strongly defined by the snowy white spats which partially concealed the varnished black boots. He looked a distinguished old man as he sat there—but he looked old.

“Is it possible that I look at all that sort of age?” was Lady Sellingworth’s thought as, for a brief instant, she contemplated him, with an intensity, a sort of almost fierce sharpness which she was scarcely aware of.

He looked up, made a twitching movement; his pince-nez fell to his black coat, and he got up alertly.

"Adela!"

She shut the door and went towards him, and as she did so she thought:

"If I had seen Alick Craven sitting there reading!"

"I was having a look at this."

He held up the book. It was Baudelaire's "*Les Fleurs du Mal*."

"Not the book for you!" she said. "Though your French is so good."

"No."

He laid it down, and she noticed the tangle of veins on his hand.

"The dandy in literature doesn't appeal to me. I must say many of these poets strike me as decadent fellows, not helped to anything like real manliness by their gifts."

She sat down on the sofa, just where she had sat to have those long talks with Craven about Waring and Italy, the sea people, the colours of the sails on those ships which look magical in sunsets, which move on as if bearing argosies from gorgeous hidden lands of the East.

"But never mind Baudelaire," he continued, and his eyes, heavily lidded and shrouded by those big bushy eyebrows which seem to sprout almost with ardent violence as the body grows old, looked at her with melting kindness. "What have you been doing, my dear? The old dog wants to know. There is something on your mind, isn't there?"

Lady Sellingworth had once said to Sir Seymour that he reminded her of a big dog, and he had laughed and said that he was a big dog belonging to

her. Since that day, when he wrote to her, he had often signed himself “the old dog.” And often she had thought of him almost as one thinks of a devoted dog, absolutely trustworthy, ready for instant attack on your enemies, faithful with unquestioning faithfulness through anything.

As he spoke he gently took her hand, and she thought, “If Alick Craven were taking my hand!”

The touch of his skin was warm and very dry. It gave her a woman’s thoughts, not to be told of.

“What is it?” he asked.

Very gently she released her hand, and as she did so she looked on it almost sternly.

“Why?” she said. “Do I look unhappy—or what? Sit down, Seymour dear.”

She seemed to add the last word with a sort of pressure, with almost self-conscious intention.

He drew the tails of his braided morning coat forward with both hands and sat down, and she thought, “How differently a young man sits down!”

“Unhappy!” he said, in his quiet and strong, rather deep voice.

He looked at her with the scrutinizing eyes of affection, whose gaze sometimes is so difficult to bear. And she felt that something within her was writhing under his eyes.

“I don’t think you often look happy, Adela. No; it isn’t that. But you look to-day as if you had been going through something which had tried your nerves—some crisis.”

He paused. She remained silent and looked at his hands and then at his eyelids and eyebrows. And there was a terrible coldness in her scrutiny, which she did not show to him, but of which she was

painfully aware. His nails were not flat, but were noticeably curved. For a moment the thought in her mind was simply, “Could I live with those nails?” She hated herself for that thought; she despised herself for it; she considered herself almost inhuman and certainly despicable, and she recalled swiftly what Seymour was, the essential beauty and fineness of his character, his truth, his touching faithfulness. And almost simultaneously she thought, “Why do old men get those terribly bushy eyebrows, like thickets?”

“Perhaps I think too much,” she said. “Living alone, one thinks—and thinks. You have so much to do and I so little.”

“Sometimes I think of retiring,” he said.

“From the court?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, but they would never let you!”

“My place could be filled easily enough.”

“Oh, no, it couldn’t.”

And she added, leaning forward now, and looking at him differently:

“Don’t you ever realize how rare you are, Seymour? There is scarcely anyone left like you, and yet you are not old-fashioned. Do you know that I have never yet met a man who really was a man—”

“Now, now, Adela!”

“No, I will say it! I have never met a real man who, knowing you, didn’t think you were rare. They wouldn’t let you go. Besides, what would you retire to?”

Again she looked at him with a scrutiny which she felt to be morally cruel. She could not refrain from it just then. It seemed to come inevitably from her own misery and almost desperation. At one moment she

felt a rush of tenderness for him, at another an almost stony hardness.

"Ah—that's just it! I dare say it will be better to die in harness."

"Die!" she said, as if startled.

At that moment the thought assailed her, "If Seymour were suddenly to die!" There would be a terrible gap in her life. Her loneliness then would be horrible indeed unless—she pulled herself up with a sort of fierce mental violence. "I won't! I won't!" she cried out to herself.

"You are very strong and healthy, Seymour," she said, "I think you will live to be very old."

"Probably. Palaces usually contain a few dodderers. But is anything the matter, Adela? The old dog is very persistent, you know."

"I've been feeling a little depressed."

"You stay alone too much, I believe."

"It isn't that. I was out at the theatre with a party only last night. We went to *The Great Lover*. But he wasn't like you. You are a really great lover."

And again she leaned forward towards him, trying to feel physically what surely she was feeling in another way.

"The greatest in London, I am sure."

"I don't know," he said, very simply. "But certainly I have the gift of faithfulness, if it is a gift."

"We had great discussions on love and jealousy last night."

"Did you? Whom were you with?"

"I went with Beryl Van Tuyn and Francis Braybrooke."

"An oddly uneven pair!"

"Alick Craven was with us, too."

"The boy I met here one Sunday."

Lady Sellingworth felt an almost fierce flash of irritation as she heard him say "boy."

"He's hardly a boy," she said. "He must be at least thirty, and I think he seems even older than he is."

"Does he? He struck me as very young. When he went away with that pretty girl it was like young April going out of the room with all the daffodils. They matched."

The intense irritation grew in Lady Sellingworth. She felt as if she were being pricked by a multitude of pins.

"Beryl is years and years younger than he is!" she said. "I don't think you are very clever about ages, Seymour. There must be nearly ten years difference between them."

Scarcely had she said this than her mind added, "And about thirty years' difference between him and me!" And then something in her—she thought of it as the soul—crumpled up, almost as if trying to die and know nothing more.

"What is it, Adela?" again he said, gently. "Can't I help you?"

"No, no, you can't!" she answered, almost with desperation, no longer able to control herself thoroughly.

Suddenly she felt as if she were losing her head, as if she might break down before him, let him into her miserable secret.

"The fact is," she continued, fixing her eyes upon him, as a criminal might fix his eyes on his judge while denying everything. "The fact is that none of us really can help anyone else. We may think we can

sometimes, but we can't. We all work out our own destinies in absolute loneliness. You and I are very old friends, and yet we are far away from each other, always have been and always shall be. No, you haven't the power to help me, Seymour."

"But what is the matter, my dear?"

"Life—life!" she said, and there was a fierce exasperation in her voice. "I cannot understand the unfairnesses of life, the cruel injustices."

"Are you specially suffering from them to-day?" he asked, and for a moment his eyes were less soft, more penetrating, as they looked at her.

"Yes!" she said.

A terrible feeling of "I don't care!" was taking possession of her, was beginning to drive her. And she thought of the women of the streets who, in anger or misery, vomit forth their feelings with reckless disregard of opinion in a torrent of piercing language.

"I'm really just like one of them!" was her thought. "Trimmed up as a lady!"

"Some people have such happy lives, years and years of happiness, and others are tortured and tormented, and all their efforts to be happy, or even to be at peace, without any real happiness, are in vain. It is of no use rebelling, of course, and rebellion only reacts on the rebel and makes everything worse, but still—"

Her face suddenly twisted. In all her life she thought she had never felt so utterly hopeless before.

Sir Seymour stretched out a hand to put it on hers, but she drew away.

"No, no—don't! I'm not—you can't do anything, Seymour. It's no use!"

She got up from the sofa, and walked away down the long drawing-room, trying to struggle with herself, to get back self-control. It was like madness this abrupt access of passion and violent despair, and she did not know how to deal with it, did not feel capable of dealing with it. She looked out of the window into Berkeley Square, after pulling back curtain and blind. Always Berkeley Square! Berkeley Square till absolute old age, and then death came! And she seemed to see her own funeral leaving the door. Good-bye to Berkeley Square! She let the blind drop, the curtain fall into its place.

Sir Seymour had got up and was standing by the fire. She saw him in the distance, that faithful old man, and she wished she could love him. She clenched her hands, trying to will herself to love him and to want to take him into her intimate life. But she could not bring herself to go back to him just then, and she did not know what she was going to do. Perhaps she would have left the room had not an interruption occurred. She heard the door open and saw Murgatroyd and the footman bringing in tea.

"You can turn up another light, Murgatroyd," she said, instantly recovering herself sufficiently to speak in a natural voice.

And she walked back down the room to Sir Seymour, carrying with her a little silver vase full of very large white carnations.

"These are the flowers I was speaking about," she said to him. "Have you ever seen any so large before? They look almost unnatural, don't they?"

When the servants were gone she said:

"You must think me half crazy, Seymour."

"No; but I don't understand what has happened."

"*I* have happened, I and my miserable disgusting

mind and brain and temperament. That's all!"

"You are very severe on yourself."

"Tell me—have you ever been severe on me in your mind? You don't really know me. Nobody does or ever will. But you know me what is called well. Have you ever been mentally severe, hard on me?"

"Yes, sometimes," he answered gravely.

She felt suddenly rather cold, and she knew that his answer had surprised her. She had certainly expected him to say, "Never, my dear!"

"I thought so," she said.

And, while saying it, she was scarcely conscious that she was telling a lie.

"But you must not think that such thoughts about you ever make the least difference in my feeling for you," he said. "That has never changed, never could change."

"Oh—I don't know!" she said in a rather hard voice. "Everything can change, I think."

"No."

"I suppose you have often disapproved of things I have done?"

"Sometimes I have."

"Tell me, if—if things had been different, and you and I had come together, what would you have done if you had disapproved of my conduct?"

"What is the good of entering upon that?"

"Yes; do tell me! I want to know."

"I hope I should find the way to hold a woman who was mine," he said, with a sort of decisive calmness, but with a great temperateness.

"But if you married an ungovernable creature?"

"I doubt if anybody is absolutely ungovernable. In

the army I have had to deal with some stiff propositions; but there is always a way."

"Is there? But in the army you deal with men. And we are so utterly different."

"I think I should have found the way."

"Could he find the way now?" she thought. "Shall I do it? Shall I risk it?"

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked; "almost as if you were looking at me for the first time and were trying to make me out?"

She did not answer, but gave him his tea and sat back on her sofa.

"You sent for me for some special reason. You had some plan, some project in your mind," he continued. "I did not realize that at first, but now I am sure of it. You want me to help you in some way, don't you?"

She was still companioned by the desperation which had come upon her when she had made that, for her, terrible comparison between Beryl Van Tuyn's age and Craven's. Somehow it had opened her eyes—her own remark. In hearing it she had seemed to hear other voices, almost a sea of voices, saying things about herself, pitying things, sneering things, bitter things; worst of all, things which sent a wave of contemptuous laughter through the society to which she belonged. Ten years multiplied by three! No, it was impossible! But there was only one way out. She was almost sure that if she were left to herself, were left to be her own mistress in perfect freedom, her temperament would run away with her again as it had so often done in the past. She was almost sure that she would brave the ridicule, would turn a face of stone to the subtle condemnation, would defy the contempt of the "old guard," the

sorrow and pity of Seymour, the anger of Beryl Van Tuyn, even her own self-contempt, in order to satisfy the imperious driving force within her which once again gave her no rest. Seymour could save her from all that, save her almost forcibly. Safety from it was there with her in the room. Rocheouart, Rupert Louth, other young men were about her for a moment. The brown eyes of the man who had stolen her jewels looked down into hers pleading for—her property. After all her experiences could she be fool enough to follow a marshlight again? But Alick Craven was different from all these men. She gave him something that he really seemed to want. He would be sorry, he would perhaps be resentful, if she took it away.

"Adela, if you cannot trust the old dog whom can you trust?"

"I know—I know!"

But again she was silent. If Seymour only knew how near he perhaps was to his greatest desire's fulfilment! If he only knew the conflict which was raging in her! At one moment she was on the edge of giving in, and flinging herself into prison and safety. At another she recoiled. How much did Seymour know of her? How well did he understand her?

"You said just now that you had sometimes been hard on me in your mind," she said abruptly. "What about?"

"That's all long ago."

"How long ago?"

"Years and years."

"Ten years?"

"Yes—quite."

"You have—you have respected me for ten years?"

"And loved you for a great many more."

"Never mind about love! You have respected me for ten years."

"Yes, Adela."

"Tell me—have you loved me more since you have been able to respect me?"

"I think I have. To respect means a great deal with me."

"I must have often disgusted you very much before ten years ago. I expect you have often wondered very much about me, Seymour?"

"It is difficult to understand the great differences between your own temperament and another's, of course."

"Yes. How can faithfulness be expected to understand its opposite? You have lived like a monk, almost, and I—I have lived like a courtesan."

"Adela!"

His deep voice sounded terribly hurt.

"Oh, Seymour, you and I—we have always lived in the world. We know all its humbug by heart. We are both old—old now, and why should we pretend to each other? You know how lots of us have lived, no one better. And I suppose I have been one of the worst. But, as you say, for ten years now I have behaved myself."

She stopped. She longed to say, "And, my God, Seymour, I am sick of behaving myself!" That would have been the naked truth. But even to him, after what she had just said, she could not utter it. Instead, she added after a moment:

"A great many lies have been lifted up as guiding lamps to men in the darkness. One of them is the saying: 'Virtue is its own reward.' I have behaved for

ten years, and I know it is a lie."

"Adela, what is exasperating you to-day? Can't you tell me?"

Once more she looked at him with a sharp and intense scrutiny. She thought it was really a final look, and one that was to decide her fate; his too, though he did not know it. She knew his worth. She knew the value of the dweller in his temple, and had no need to debate about that. But she was one of those to whom the temple means much. She could not dissociate dweller from dwelling. The outside had always had a tremendous influence upon her, and time had not lessened that influence. Perhaps Sir Seymour felt that she was trying to come to some great decision, though he did not know, or even suspect, what that decision was. For long ago he had finally given up all hope of ever winning her for his wife. He sat still after asking this question. The lamplight shone over his thick, curly white hair, his lined, weather-beaten, distinguished old face, broad, cavalryman's hands, upright figure, shone into his faithful dog's eyes. And she looked and took in every physical detail, as only a woman can when she looks at a man whom she is considering in a certain way.

The silence seemed long. At last he broke it. For he had seen an expression of despair come into her face.

"My dear, what is it? You must tell me!"

But suddenly the look of despair gave place to a mocking look which he knew very well.

"It's only boredom, Seymour. I have had too much of Berkeley Square. I think I shall go away for a little."

"To Cap Martin?"

"Perhaps. Where does one go when one wants to run away from oneself?"

And then she changed the conversation and talked, as she generally talked to Sir Seymour, of the life they both knew, of the doings at Court, of politics, people, the state of the country, what was likely to come to old England.

She had decided against Seymour. But she had not decided for Craven. After a moment of despair, of feeling herself lost, she had suddenly said to herself, or a voice had said in her, a voice coming from she knew not where:

"I will remain free, but henceforth I will be my own mistress in freedom, not the slave of myself."

And then mentally she had dismissed both Seymour and Craven out of her life, the one as a possible husband, the other as a friend.

If she could not bring herself to take the one, then she would not keep the other. She must seek for peace in loneliness. Evidently that was her destiny. She gave herself to it with mocking eyes and despair in her heart.

PART FIVE

CHAPTER I

Three days later, soon after four o'clock, Craven rang the bell at Lady Sellingworth's door. As he stood for a moment waiting for it to be answered he wondered whether she would be at home to him, how she would greet him if she chose to see him. The door was opened by a footman.

"Is her ladyship at home?"

"Her ladyship has gone out of town, sir."

"When will she be back?"

"I couldn't say, sir. Her ladyship has gone abroad."

Craven stood for a moment without speaking. He was amazed, and felt as if he had received a blow. Finally, he said:

"Do you think she will be long away?"

"Her ladyship has gone for some time, sir, I believe."

The young man's face, firm, with rosy cheeks and shallow, blue eyes, was strangely inexpressive. Craven hesitated, then said:

"Do you know where her ladyship has gone? I—I wish to write a note to her."

"I believe it's some place near Monte Carlo, sir. Her ladyship gave orders that no letters were to be forwarded for the present."

"Thank you."

Craven turned away and walked slowly towards Mayfair. He felt startled and hurt, even angry. So this was friendship! And he had been foolish enough to think that Lady Sellingworth was beginning to value his company, that she was a lonely woman, and that perhaps his visits, his sympathy, meant something, even a great deal to her. What a young fool he had been! And what a humbug she must be! Suddenly London seemed empty. He remembered the coldness in the wording of the note she had sent him saying that she could not see him the day after the theatre party. She had put forward no excuse, no explanation. What had happened? He felt that something must have happened which had changed her feeling towards him. For though he told himself that she must be a humbug, he did not really feel that she was one. Perhaps she was angry with him, and that was why she had not chosen to tell him that she was going abroad before she started. But what reason had he given her for anger? Mentally he reviewed the events of their last evening together. It had been quite a gay evening. Nothing disagreeable had happened unless—Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Ackroyde came to his mind. He saw them before him with their observant, experienced eyes, their smiling, satirical lips. They had made him secretly

uncomfortable. He had felt undressed when he was with them, and had realized that they knew of and were probably amused by his friendship for Lady Sellingworth. And he had hated their knowledge. Perhaps she had hated it too, although she had not shown a trace of discomfort. Or, perhaps, she had disliked his manner with Miss Van Tuyn, assumed to hide his own sensitiveness. And at that moment he thought of his intercourse with Miss Van Tuyn with exaggeration. It was possible that he had acted badly, had been blatant. But anyhow Lady Sellingworth had been very unkind. She ought to have told him that she was going abroad, to have let him see her before she went.

He felt that this short episode in his life was quite over. It had ended abruptly, undramatically. It had seemed to mean a good deal, and it had really meant nothing. What a boy he had been through it all! His cheeks burned at the thought. And he had prided himself on being a thorough man of the world. Evidently, despite his knowledge of life, his Foreign Office training, his experience of war—he had been a soldier for two years—he was really something of a simpleton. He had "given himself away" to Braybrooke, and probably to others as well, to Lady Wrackley, Mrs. Ackroyde, and perhaps even to Miss Van Tuyn. And to Lady Sellingworth!

What had she thought of him? What did she think of him? Nothing perhaps. She had belonged to the "old guard." Many men had passed through her hands. He felt at that moment acute hostility to women. They were treacherous, unreliable, even the best of them. They had not the continuity which belonged to men. Even elderly women—he was thinking of women of the world—even they were not to be trusted. Life was warfare even when war was

over. One had to fight always against the instability of those around you. And yet there was planted in a man—at any rate there was planted in him—a deep longing for stability, a need to trust, a desire to attach himself to someone with whom he could be quite unreserved, to whom he could "open out" without fear of criticism or of misunderstanding.

He had believed that in Lady Sellingworth he had found such an one, and now he had been shown his mistake. He reached the house in which he lived, but although he had walked to it with the intention of going in he paused on the threshold, then turned away and went on towards Hyde Park. Night was falling; the damp softness of late autumn companioned him wistfully. The streets were not very full. London seemed unusually quiet that evening. But when he reached the Marble Arch he saw people streaming hither and thither, hurrying towards Oxford Street, pouring into the Edgware Road, climbing upon omnibuses which were bound for Notting Hill, Ealing and Acton, drifting towards the wide and gloomy spaces of the Park. He crossed the great roadway and went into the Park, too. Attracted by a small gathering of dark figures he joined them, and standing among nondescript loungers he listened for a few minutes to a narrow-chested man with a long, haggard face, a wispy beard and protruding, decayed teeth, who was addressing those about him on the mysteries of life.

He spoke of the struggle for bread, of materialism, of the illusions of sensuality, of the Universal Intelligence, of the blind cruelty of existence.

"You are all unhappy!" he exclaimed, in a thin but carrying voice, which sounded genteel and fanatical. "You rush here and there not knowing why or wherefore. Many of you have come into this very

Park to-night without any object, driven by the wish for something to take you out of your miseries. Can you deny it, I say?"

A tall soldier who was standing near Craven looked down at the plump girl beside him and said:

"How's that, Lil? We're both jolly miserable, ain't we?"

"Go along with yer! Not me!" was the response, with an impudent look.

"Then let's get on where it's quieter. What ho!"

They moved demurely away.

"Can you deny," the narrow-chested man continued, sawing the air with a thin, dirty hand, "that you are all dissatisfied with life, that you wonder about it, as Plato wondered, as Tolstoi wondered, as the Dean of St. Paul's wonders, as I am wondering now? From this very Park you look up at the stars, when there are any, and you ask yourselves —"

At this point in the discourse Craven turned away, feeling that edification was scarcely to be found by him here.

Certainly at this moment he was dissatisfied with life. But that was Lady Sellingworth's fault. If he were sitting with her now in Berkeley square the scheme of things would probably not seem all out of gear. He wondered where she was, what she was doing! The footman had said he believed she was near Monte Carlo. Craven remembered once hearing her say she was fond of Cap Martin. Probably she was staying there. It occurred to him that possibly she had told some of her friends of her approaching departure, though she had chosen to conceal it from him. Miss Van Tuyn might have known of it. He resolved to go to Brook Street and find out whether

the charming girl had been in the secret. Claridge's was close by. It would be something to do. If he could not see Lady Sellingworth he wanted to talk about her. And at that moment his obscure irritation made him turn towards youth. Old age had cheated him. Well, he was young; he would seek consolation!

At Claridge's he inquired for Miss Van Tuyn, and was told she was out, had been out since the morning. Craven was pulling his card-case out of his pocket when he heard a voice say: "Are there any letters for me?" He swung round and there stood Miss Van Tuyn quite near him. For an instant she did not see him, and he had time to note that she looked even unusually vivid and brilliant. An attendant handed her some letters. She took them, turned and saw Craven.

"I had just asked for you," he said, taking off his hat.

"Oh! How nice of you!"

Her eyes were shining. He felt a controlled excitement in her. Her face seemed to be trying to tell something which her mind would not choose to tell. He wondered what it was, this secret which he divined.

"Come upstairs and we'll have a talk in my sitting-room."

She looked at him narrowly, he thought, as they went together to the lift. She seemed to have a little less self-possession than usual, even to be slightly self-conscious and because of that watchful.

When they were in her sitting-room she took off her hat, as if tired, put it on a table and sat down by the fire.

"I've been out all day," she said.

"Yes? Are you still having painting lessons?"

"That's it—painting lessons. Dick is an extraordinary man."

"You mean Dick Garstin. I don't know him."

"He's absolutely unscrupulous, but a genius. I believe genius always is unscrupulous. I am sure of it. It cannot be anything else."

"That's a pity."

"I don't know that it is."

"But how does Dick Garstin show his unscrupulousness?"

Miss Van Tuyn looked suddenly wary.

"Oh—in all sorts of ways. He uses people. He looks on people as mere material. He doesn't care for their feelings. He doesn't care what happens to them. If he gets out of them what he wants it's enough. After that they may go to perdition, and he wouldn't stretch out a finger to save them."

"What a delightful individual!"

"Ah!—you don't understand genius."

Craven felt rather nettled. He cared a good deal for the arts, and had no wish to be set among the Philistines.

"And—do you?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. I'm not creative, but I'm very comprehending. Artists of all kinds feel that instinctively. That's why they come round me in Paris."

"Yes, you do understand!" he acknowledged, remembering her enthusiasm at the theatre. "But I think *you* are unscrupulous, too."

He said it hardily, looking straight at her, and wondering what she had been doing that afternoon

before she arrived at the hotel.

She smiled, making her eyes narrow.

“Then perhaps I am half-way to genius.”

“Would you be willing to sacrifice all the moral qualities if you could have genius in exchange?”

“You can’t expect me to say so. But it would be grand to have power over men.”

“You have that already.”

She looked at him satirically.

“Do you know you’re a terrible humbug?” she said.

“And are not you?”

“No; I think I show myself very much as I really am.”

“Can a woman do that?” he said, with sudden moodiness.

“It depends. Mrs. Ackroyde can and Lady Wrackley can’t.”

“And—Lady Sellingworth?” he asked.

“I’m afraid she is a bit of a humbug,” said Miss Van Tuyn, without venom.

“I wonder when she’ll be back?”

“Back? Where from?”

“Surely you know she had gone abroad?”

The look of surprise in Miss Van Tuyn’s face was so obviously genuine that Craven added:

“You didn’t? Well, she has gone away for some time.”

“Where to?”

“Somewhere on the Riviera, I believe. Probably Cap Martin. But letters are not to be forwarded.”

“At this time of year! Has she gone away alone?”

“I suppose so.”

Miss Van Tuyn looked at him with a sort of cold, almost hostile shrewdness.

“And she told you she was going?”

“Why should she tell me?” he said, with a hint of defiance.

Miss Van Tuyn left that at once.

“So Adela has run away!” she said.

She sat for a moment quite still, like one considering something carefully.

“But she will come back,” she said presently, looking up at him, “bringing her sheaves with her.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you remember—in the Bible?”

“But what has that to do with Lady Sellingworth?”

“Perhaps you’ll understand when she comes back.”

“I am really quite in the dark,” he said, with obvious sincerity. “And it’s nothing to me whether Lady Sellingworth comes back or stops away.”

“I thought you joined with me in adoring her.”

“Adoration isn’t the word. And you know it.”

“And letters are not to be forwarded?” said Miss Van Tuyn.

“I heard so.”

“Ah! when you went to call on her!”

“Now you are merely guessing!”

“It must be terrible to be old!” said Miss Van Tuyn, with a change of manner. “Just think of going off alone to the Riviera in the autumn at the age of sixty! Beauties ought to die at fifty. Plain women can live to a hundred if they like, and it doesn’t really matter. Their tragedy is not much worse then than it is at thirty-five. But beauties should never live

beyond fifty—at the very latest."

"Then you must commit suicide at that age."

"Thank you. The old women in hotels!"

She shivered, and it seemed to him that her body shook naturally, as if it couldn't help shaking.

"But—remember—she'll come back with her sheaves!" she added, looking at him. "And then the 'old guard' will fall upon her."

For a moment she looked cruel, and though he did not understand her meaning Craven realized that she would not have much pity for Lady Sellingworth in misfortune. But Lady Sellingworth was cruel, too, had been cruel to him. And he saw humanity without tenderness, teeth and claws at work, barbarity coming to its own through the varnish.

He only said:

"I may be very stupid, but I don't understand."

And then he changed the subject of conversation. Miss Van Tuyn became gradually nicer to him, but he felt that she still cherished a faint hostility to him. Perhaps she thought he regarded her as a substitute. And was not that really the fact? He tried to sweep the hostility away. He laid himself out to be charming to her. The Lady Sellingworth episode was over. He would give himself to a different side of his nature, a side to which Miss Van Tuyn appealed. She did not encourage him at first, and he was driven to force the note slightly. When he went away they had arranged to play golf together, to dine together one night at the *Bella Napoli*. It was he who had suggested, even urged these diversions. For she had almost made him plead to her, had seemed oddly doubtful about seeing more of him in intimacy. And when he left her he was half angry with himself for making such a fuss about trifles. But the truth was—

and perhaps she suspected it—that he was trying to escape from depression, caused by a sense of injury, through an adventure. He felt Miss Van Tuyn's great physical attraction, and just then he wished that it would overwhelm him. If it did he would soon cease from minding what Lady Sellingworth had done. A certain recklessness possessed him.

He dined with a friend at the club and stayed there rather late. When he was leaving about half past eleven Braybrooke dropped in after a party, and he told Braybrooke of Lady Sellingworth's departure for the Continent. The world's governess showed even more surprise than Miss Van Tuyn had shown. He had had no idea that Adela Sellingworth was going abroad. She must have decided on it very abruptly. He had seen nothing in the *Morning Post*. Had she gone alone? And no letters to be forwarded! Dear me! It was all very odd and unexpected. And she had gone on the Riviera at this time of year! But it was a desert; not a soul one knew would be there. The best hotels were not even open, he believed.

As he made his comments he observed Craven closely with his small hazel eyes, but the young man showed no feeling, and Braybrooke began to think that really perhaps he had made a mountain out of a molehill, that he had done Adela Sellingworth an injustice. If she had really been inclined to any folly about his young friend she would certainly not have left London in this mysterious manner.

"I suppose she let you know she was going?" he hazarded.

"Oh, no. I happened to call and the footman gave me the news."

"I hope she isn't ill," said Braybrooke with sudden gravity.

"Ill? Why should you think—?"

"There are women who hate it to be known when they are ill. Catherine Bewdley went away without a word and was operated on at Lausanne, and not one of us knew of it till it was all over. I don't quite like the look of things. Letters not being forwarded—ha!"

"But near Monte Carlo!"

"*Is* it near Monte Carlo?"

He pursed his lips and went into the club looking grave, while Craven went out into the night. It was black and damp. The pavement seemed sweating. The hands of both autumn and winter were laid upon London. But soon the hands of autumn would fail and winter would have the huge city as its possession.

"*Is* it Monte Carlo?"

Braybrooke's question echoed in Craven's mind. Could he have done Lady Sellingworth a wrong? Was there perhaps something behind her sudden departure in silence which altogether excused it? She might be ill and have disappeared without a word to some doctor's clinic, as Braybrooke had suggested. Women sometimes had heroic silences. Craven thought she could be heroic. There was something very strong in her, he thought, combined perhaps with many weaknesses. He wished he knew where she was, what she was doing, whom she was with or whether she was alone. His desire trailed after her against his will. Undoubtedly he missed her, and felt oddly homeless now she was gone.

CHAPTER II

Miss Van Tuyn believed that things were coming her way after all. Young Craven was suddenly released, and another very strong interest was dawning in her life. Craven had not been wrong in thinking that she was secretly excited when he met her in the hall at Claridge's. She had fulfilled her promise to Dick Garstin, driven to fulfilment by his taunt. No one should say with truth that she was afraid of anyone, man or woman. She would prove to Garstin that she was not afraid of the man he was trying to paint. So, on the day of their conversation in the studio, she had left Glebe Place with Arabian. For the first time she had been alone with him for more than a few minutes.

She had gone both eagerly and reluctantly; reluctantly because there was really something in Arabian which woke in her a sort of frail and quivering anxiety such as she had never felt before in any man's company; eagerly because Garstin had put into words what had till then been only a suspicion in her mind. He had told her that Arabian was in love with her. Was that true? Even now she was not sure. That was part of the reason why she was not quite at ease with Arabian. She was not sure of anything about him except that he was marvellously handsome. But Garstin was piercingly sharp. What he asserted about anyone was usually the fact. He could hardly be mistaken. Yet how could a woman be in doubt about such a thing? And she was still, in spite of her vanity, in doubt.

When Arabian had come into the studio that day, and had seen the sketch of him ripped up by the palette knife, he had looked almost fierce for a

moment. He had turned towards Garstin with a sort of hauteur like one demanding, and having the right to demand, an explanation.

"What's the row?" Garstin had said, with almost insolent defiance. "I destroyed it because it's damned bad. I hadn't got you."

And then he had taken the canvas from the easel and had thrown it contemptuously into a corner of the studio.

Arabian had said nothing, but there had been a cloud on his face, and Miss Van Tuyn had known that he was angry, as a man is angry when he sees a bit of his property destroyed by another. And she had remembered her words to Arabian, that the least sketch by Garstin was worth a great deal of money.

Surely Arabian was a greedy man.

No work had been done in the studio that morning. They had sat and talked for a while. Garstin had said most. He had been more agreeable than usual, and had explained to Arabian, rather as one explains to a child, that a worker in an art is sometimes baffled for a time, a writer by his theme, a musician by his floating and perhaps half-nebulous conception, a painter by his subject. Then he must wait, cursing perhaps, damning his own impotence, dreading its continuance. But there is nothing else to be done. *Pazienza!* And he had enlarged upon patience. And Arabian had listened politely, had looked as if he were trying to understand.

"I'll try again!" Garstin had said. "You must give me time, my boy. You're not in a hurry to leave London, are you?"

And then Miss Van Tuyn had seen Arabian's eyes turn to her as he had said, but rather doubtfully:

"I don't know whether I am."

Garstin's eyes had said to her with sharp imperativeness:

"Keep him! You're not to let him go!"

And she had kept her promise; she had gone away from the studio with Arabian leaving Garstin smiling at the door. And at that moment she had almost hated Garstin.

Arabian had asked her to lunch with him. She had consented. He had suggested a cab, and the Savoy or the Carlton, or the Ritz if she preferred it. But she had quickly replied that she knew of a small restaurant close to Sloane Square Station where the food was very good. Many painters and writers went there.

"But we are not painters and writers!" Arabian had said.

Nevertheless they had gone there, and had lunched in a quiet corner, and she had left him about three o'clock.

On the day of Craven's call at Claridge's she had been with Arabian again. Garstin had begun another picture, and had worked on through the lunch hour. Later they had had some food, a sort of picnic, in the studio, and then she had walked away with Arabian. She had just left him when she met Craven in the hall of the hotel. Garstin had not allowed either her or Arabian to look at what he had done. He had, Miss Van Tuyn thought, seemed unusually nervous and diffident about his work. She did not know how he had gone on, and was curious. But she was going to dine with him that night. Perhaps he would tell her then, or perhaps he had only asked her to dinner that she might tell him about Arabian.

And in the midst of all this had come Craven with his changed manner and his news about Lady

Sellingworth.

Decidedly things were taking a turn for the better. To Miss Cronin's increasingly plaintive inquiries as to when they would return to Paris Miss Van Tuyn gave evasive replies. She was held in London, and had almost forgotten her friends in Paris.

She wondered why Adela had gone away so abruptly. Although she had half hinted to Craven that she guessed the reason of this sudden departure, and had asserted that Adela would presently come back bringing sheaves with her, she was not at all sure that her guess was right. Adela might return mysteriously rejuvenated and ready to plunge once more into the fray, braving opinion. It might be a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*. On the other hand, it might be a flight from danger. Miss Van Tuyn was practically certain that Adela had fallen in love with Alick Craven. Was she being sensible and deliberately keeping out of his way, or was she being mad and trying to be made young at sixty in order to return armed for his captivation. Time would show. Meanwhile the ground was unexpectedly clear. Craven was seeking her, and she, by Garstin's orders and in the strict service of art, was pushing her way towards a sort of intimacy with Arabian. But the difference between the two men!

Craven's visit to Claridge's immediately after the hours spent with Arabian had emphasized for her the mystery of the latter. Her understanding of Craven underlined her ignorance about Arabian. The confidence she felt in Craven—a confidence quite independent of his liking, or not liking her—marked for her the fact that she had no confidence in Arabian. Craven was just an English gentleman. He might have done all sorts of things, but he was obviously a thoroughly straight and decent fellow. A

woman had only to glance at him to know the things he could never do. But when she looked at Arabian—well, then, the feeling was rather that Arabian might do anything. Craven belonged obviously to a class, although he had a strong and attractive individuality. English diplomacy presented many men of his type to the embassies in foreign countries. But to what class did Arabian belong? Even Dick Garstin was quite comprehensible, in spite of his extraordinary manners and almost violent originality. He was a Bohemian, with touches of genius, touches of vulgarity. There were others less than him, yet not wholly unlike him, men of the studios, of the painting schools, smelling as it were of Chelsea and the *Quartier Latin*. But Arabian seemed to stand alone. When with him Miss Van Tuyn could not tell what type of man must inevitably be his natural comrade, what must inevitably be his natural environment. She could see him at Monte Carlo, in the restaurants of Paris, in the *Galleria* at Naples, in Cairo, in Tunis, in a dozen places. But she could not see him at home. Was he the eternal traveller, with plenty of money, a taste for luxury and the wandering spirit? Or had he some purpose which drove him about the world?

After Craven had left her that day at Claridge's she had a sudden wish to bring him and Craven together, to see how they got on together, to hear Craven's opinion of Arabian. Perhaps she could manage a meeting between the two men presently. Why not?

Arabian had not attempted to make love to her on either of the two occasions when she had been with him alone. Only his eyes had seemed to tell her that he admired her very much, that he wanted something of her. His manner had been noncommittal. He had seemed to be on his guard.

There was something in Arabian which suggested to Miss Van Tuyn suspicion. He was surely a man who, despite his "open" look, his bold features, his enormously self-possessed manner, was suspicious of others. He had little confidence in others. She was almost certain of that. There was nothing cat-like in his appearance, yet at moments when with him she thought of a tomcat, of its swiftness, suppleness, gliding energies and watchful reserve. She suspected claws in his velvet, too. And yet surely he looked honest. She thought his look was honest, but that his "atmosphere" was not. Often he had a straight look —she could not deny that to herself. He could gaze at you and let you return his gaze. And yet she had not been able to read what he was in his eyes.

He was not very easy to get on with somehow, although there was a great deal of charm in his manner and although he was full of self-confidence and evidently accustomed to women. But to what women was he accustomed? That was a question which Miss Van Tuyn asked herself. Craven was obviously at home in the society of ordinary ladies and of women of the world. You knew that somehow directly you were with him. But—Arabian?

Miss Van Tuyn could see him with smart *cocottes*. He would surely be very much at ease with them. And many of them would be ready to adore such a man. For there was probably a strain of brutality somewhere under his charm. And they would love that. She could even see him, or fancied that she could, with street women. For there was surely a touch of the street in him. He must have been bred up in cities. He did not belong to any fields or any woods that she knew or knew of. And—other women? Well, she was numbered among those other women. And how was he with her so far? Charming,

easy, bold—yes; but also reserved, absolutely non-committal. She was not at all sure whether she was going to be of much use to Dick Garstin, except perhaps in her own person. Instead of delivering to him the man he wanted to come at perhaps she would end by delivering a woman worth painting—herself.

For there was something in Arabian that was certainly dangerous to her, something in him that excited her, that lifted her into an unusual vitality. She did not quite know what it was. But she felt it definitely. When she was with him alone she seemed to be in an adventure through which a current of definite danger was flowing. No other man had ever brought a sensation like that into her life, although she had met many types of men in Paris, had known well talented men of acknowledged bad character, reckless of the *convenances*, men who snapped their fingers at all the prejudices of the orthodox, and who made no distinction between virtues and vices, following only their own inclinations.

Such a man was Dick Garstin. Yet Miss Van Tuyn had never with him had the sensation of being near to something dangerous which she had with Arabian. Yet Arabian was scrupulously polite, was quiet, almost gentle in manner, and had a great deal of charm.

She remembered his following her in the street at night. What would he be like with women of that sort? Would his gentleness be in evidence with them, or would a totally different individual rise to the surface of him, a beast of prey perhaps with the jungle in its eyes?

Something in her shrank from Arabian as she had never yet shrunk from a human being. But something

else was fascinated by him. She had the American woman's outlook on men. She expected men to hold their own in the world with other men, to be self-possessed, cool-headed, and bold in their careers, but to be subservient in their relations with women. To be ruled by a husband would have seemed to her to be quite unnatural, to rule him quite natural. She felt sure that no woman would be likely to rule Arabian. She felt sure that his outlook on women was absolutely unlike that of the American man. When she looked at him she thought of the rape of the Sabines. Surely he was a primitive under his mask of almost careful smartness and conventionality. There was something primitive in her, too, and she became aware of that now. Hitherto she had been inclined to believe that she was essentially complex, cerebral, free from any trace of sentimentality, quiveringly responsive to the appealing voices of the arts, healthily responsive to the joys of athleticism almost in the way of a Greek youth in the early days of the world, but that she was free from all taint of animalism. Men had told her that, in spite of her charm and the fascination they felt in her, she lacked one thing—what they chose to call temperament. That was why, they said, she was able to live as she did, audaciously, even eccentrically, without being kicked out of society as "impossible." She was saved from disaster by her interior coldness. She lived by the brain rather than by the senses. And she had taken this verdict to herself as praise. She had felt refinement in her freedom from ordinary desire. She had been proud of worshipping beauty without any coarse longing. To her her bronzes had typified something that she valued in herself. Her immense vanity had not been blended with those passions which shake many women, which had devastated

Lady Sellingworth. A coarseness in her mind made her love to be physically desired by men, but no coarseness of body made her desire them. And she had supposed that she represented the ultra modern type of woman, the woman who without being cold —she would not acknowledge that she was cold— was free from the slavish instinct which makes all the ordinary women sisters in the vulgar bosom of nature.

But since she had seen Arabian she felt less highly civilized; she knew that in her, too, lurked the horrible primitive. And that troubled and at the same time fascinated her.

Was that why when she had seen Arabian for the first time she had resolved to get to know him? She had called him a living bronze, but she had thought of him from the first, perhaps, with ardour as flesh and blood.

And yet at moments he repelled her. She, who was so audacious, did not want to show herself with him at the Ritz, to walk down Piccadilly with him in daylight. As she had said to Dick Garstin, an atmosphere seemed to hang about Arabian—an unsafe atmosphere. She did not know where she was in it. She lost her bearings, could not see her way, heard steps and voices that sounded strange. And the end of it all was—"I don't know." When she thought of Arabian always that sentence was in her mind—"I don't know."

She was strangely excited. And now Craven came to her. And he attracted her, too, but in such a different way!

Suddenly London was interesting! And "I don't know when we shall go back to Paris!" she said to Miss Cronin.

"Is it the Wallace Collection, Beryl?" murmured "Old Fanny," with plaintive suspicion over her cup of camomile tea.

"Yes, it's the Wallace Collection," said Miss Van Tuyn.

And she went away to dress for her dinner with Dick Garstin.

She met him at a tiny and very French restaurant in Conduit Street, where the cooking was absolutely first rate, where there was no sound of music, and where very few English people went. There were only some eight or ten tables in the cosy, warm little room, and when Miss Van Tuyn entered it there were not a dozen people dining. Dick Garstin was not there. It was just like him to be late and to keep a woman waiting. But he had engaged a table in the corner of the room on the right, away from the window. And Miss Van Tuyn was shown to it by a waiter, and sat down. On the way she had bought *The Westminster Gazette*. She opened it, lit a cigarette, and began to glance at the news. There happened to be a letter from Paris in which the writer described a new play which had just been produced in an outlying theatre. Miss Van Tuyn read the account. She began reading in a casual mood, but almost immediately all her attention was grasped and held tight. She forgot where she was, let her cigarette go out, did not see Garstin when he came in from the street. When he came up and laid a hand on her arm she started violently.

"Who's—Dick!"

An angry look came into her face.

"Why did you do that?"

"What's the matter?"

He stared at her almost as if fascinated.

"By Jove . . . you look wonderful!"

"I forbid you to touch me like that! I hate being pawed, and you know it."

He glanced at the pale green paper.

"The sea-green incorruptible!"

He stretched out his hand, but she quickly moved the paper out of his reach.

"Let us dine. You've kept me waiting for ages."

Garstin sent a look to his waiter, and sat down opposite to Miss Van Tuyn with his back to the room.

"I'll buy a *Westminster* going back," he observed. "Bisque! Bring a bottle of the Lanson, Raoul."

He addressed the waiter in French.

"*Oui, m'sieu*."

"Well iced!"

"*Certainement*, Monsieur Garstin."

"Better tempered now, Beryl?"

"You always make out that I have the temper of a fiend. I hate being startled. That's all."

"You're awfully nervy these days."

"I think you are the cruellest man I know. If it weren't for your painting no one would have anything to do with you."

"I shouldn't care."

"Yes, you would. You love being worshipped and run after."

"Good soup, isn't it?"

She made no answer to this. After a silence she said:

"Why were you so late?"

"To give you time to study the evening paper."

"Were you working?"

"No—cursing."

"Why?"

"This damned portrait's going to be no good either!"

"Then you'd better give it up."

He shot a piercing glance at her.

"It isn't my way to give things up once I've put my hand to them," he observed drily. "And you seem to forget that you put me up to it."

"That was only a whim. You didn't take it seriously."

"I do now, though."

"But if you're baffled?"

"For the moment. I've nearly always found that the best work comes hardest. One has to sweat blood before one reaches the big thing. I may begin on him half a dozen times, cut him to ribbons half a dozen times—and then do a masterpiece."

"I don't think he'll wait long enough. Another stab of the palette knife and you'll probably see the last of him."

"Ah—he didn't like it, did he?"

"He was furious."

"Did he say anything about it afterwards to you?"

"Not a word. But he was furious. You stabbed money!"

Garstin smiled appreciatively. Raoul was pouring out the champagne. Garstin lifted his glass and set it down half empty.

"Had you told him—"

He paused.

"He knows everything you do is worth money, a

lot of money."

"He's got the hairy heel. I always knew that. We'll get to his secret yet, you and I between us."

"I am not sure that I can stay over here very much longer, Dick. Paris is my home, and I can't waste my money at Claridge's for ever."

"If you like I'll pay the bill."

She reddened.

"Do you really think that if I were to go he—Arabian—"

"He'd follow you by the next boat."

"I'm sure he wouldn't."

"You're not half so vain as I thought you were."

"When we are alone he never attempts to make love to me. We talk platitudes. I know him no better than I did before."

"He's a wary bird. But the dawn must come and with it his crow."

"Well, Dick, I tell you frankly that I may go back to Paris any day."

"I knew you were nervy to-night. I wish I could find a woman who was a match for a man in the nervous system. But there isn't one. That's why we are so superior. We've got steel where you've all got fiddle strings. Raoul!"

He drank again and ate heartily. He was a voracious eater at times. But there were days when he ate nothing and worked incessantly.

They had begun dinner late, and the little restaurant was getting empty. Three sets of diners had gone out since they had sat down. The waiters were clearing some of the tables. A family party, obviously French, lingered at a round table in the

middle of the room over their coffee. A pale man sat alone in a corner eating pressed duck with greedy avidity. And Raoul, leaving Miss Van Tuyn and Garstin, placed a large vase of roses on a table close to the window near the door.

Miss Van Tuyn happened to see this action, and a vagrant thought slipped through her mind. “Then we are not the last!”

“My nerves are certainly not fiddle strings,” she said. “But I have interests which pull me towards Paris.”

“Greater interests here. Have some more champagne! Raoul!”

“M’sieu!”

“You can’t deceive me, Beryl.”

“Your pose of omniscience bores me. Apart from your gift you’re a very ordinary man, Dick, if you could only be brought to see it.”

“Arabian fascinates you.”

“He doesn’t.”

“And that’s why you’re afraid of him. You’re afraid of his power because you don’t trust him. He’s doing a lot for you. You’re waking up. You’re becoming interesting. A few days ago you were only a beautiful spoilt American girl, as cool and as hard as ice, brainy, vain, and totally without temperament as far as one could see. Your torch was unlit. Now this blackguard’s put the match to it.”

“What nonsense, Dick!”

“Raoul!”

“M’sieu?”

“That’s all very well. But my intention is to paint him, not you. Why don’t you get to work hard? Why don’t you put your back into it?”

"This is beyond bearing, Dick, even from you!"

She was looking really indignant. Her cheeks and forehead had reddened, her eyes seemed to spit fire at him, and her hands trembled.

"Your absolute lack of decent consideration is—you're canaille! Because you're impotent to paint I am to—no, it's too much! Canaille! Canaille! That's what you are! I shall go back to Paris. I shall—"

Suddenly she stopped speaking and stared. The red faded out of her face. A curiously conscious and intent look came into her eyes. She began to move her head as if in recognition of some one, stopped and sat rigid, pressing her lips together till her mouth had a hard grim line. Garstin, who could only see her and the wall at her back, watched all this with sharp interest, then, growing curious, turned round. As he did so he saw a tall, very handsome dark girl, who had certainly not been in the room when he entered it, going slowly, and as if reluctantly, towards the doorway. She was obviously a woman of the demi-monde and probably French. As she reached the door she turned her smart, impudent head and covered Miss Van Tuyn with an appraising look, cold, keen, vicious in its detached intensity, a look such as only a woman can send to another woman.

Then she went out, followed by Raoul, who seemed rather agitated, and whose back looked appealing.

"Black hair with blue lights in it!" said Garstin. "What a beauty!"

Miss Van Tuyn sighed.

"Why wouldn't she stay?"

He was still sitting half turned towards the door.

"A table with flowers all ready for her! And she goes! Was she alone? Ah—who was with her?"

"Arabian!" said Miss Van Tuyn, coldly.

"And he—"

"He saw us!"

"And took her away! What a lark! Too timid to face us! The naughty boy caught out in an escapade! I'll chaff him to-morrow. All their dinner wasted, and I'll bet it was a good one."

He chuckled over his wine.

"Did he know that you saw him?"

"I don't know. He was behind her. He barely showed himself, saw us and vanished. He must have called to her, beckoned from the hall. She went quite up to the table."

"So—you've taught him timidity! He doesn't want you to know of his under life."

"Oh, for heaven's sake let us talk of something else!" said Miss Van Tuyn, with an almost passionate note of exasperation. "You bore me, bore me, bore me with this man! He seems becoming an obsession with you. Paint him, for God's sake, and then let there be an end of him as far as we are concerned. There are lots of other men better-looking than he is. But once you have taken an idea into your head there is no peace until you have worked it out on canvas. Genius it may be, but it's terribly tiresome to everyone about you. Paint the man—and then let him sink back into the depths!"

"Like a sea monster, eh?"

"He is horrible. I always knew it."

"Come, now! You told me—"

"It doesn't matter what I told you. He is horrible."

"What! Just because he comes out to dine with a pretty girl of a certain class? I had no idea you were such a Puritan. Raoul!"

"M'sieu!"

Garstin was evidently enjoying himself.

"I know those women! Arabian's catching it like the devil in Conduit Street. She's giving him something he'll remember."

"No!" said Miss Van Tuyn, with hard emphasis.

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that Arabian is the sort of man who can frighten women. Now if you don't talk of something else I shall leave you here alone. Another word on that subject and I go!"

"Tell me, Beryl. What do you really think of Wyndham Lewis? You know his portrait of Ezra Pound?"

"Of course I do."

"Don't you think it's a masterpiece?"

"Do you? I can never get at your real ideas about modern painting."

"And I thought I wore them all down in my own pictures."

"You certainly don't sit on the fence when you paint."

And then they talked pictures. Perhaps Garstin at that moment for once laid himself out to be charming. He could fascinate Miss Van Tuyn's mind when he chose. She respected his brain. It could lure her. As a worker she secretly almost loved Garstin, and she believed that the world would remember him when he was gone to the shadows and the dust.

Two champagne bottles had been emptied when

they got up to go. The little room was deserted and had a look of being settled in for the night. Raoul took his tip and yawned behind his big yellow hand. As Miss Van Tuyn was about to leave the restaurant he bent down to the floor and picked up a paper which had fallen against the wall near her seat.

"Madame—" he began.

Miss Van Tuyn, who was on her way to the door, did not hear him, and Garstin swiftly and softly took the paper and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat. When he had said good-bye to Beryl he went back to Glebe Place. He mounted the stairs to the studio on the first floor, turned on the lights, went to the Spanish cabinet, poured himself out a drink, lit one of the black cigars, then sat down in a worn arm-chair, put his feet on the sofa, and unfolded *The Westminster Gazette*. What had she been reading so intently? What was it in the paper that had got on her nerves?

The political news, the weather, the leading article, notes, reviews of new books. He looked carefully at each of the reviews. Not there! Then he began to read the news of the day, but found nothing which seemed to him capable of gripping Beryl's attention. Finally, he turned to the last page but one of the paper, saw the heading, "Our Paris Letter," and gave the thrush's call softly. Paris—Beryl! This was sure to be it. He began to read, and almost immediately was absorbed. His brows contracted, his lips went up towards his long, hooked nose. A strong light shone in his hard, intelligent eyes, eyes surely endowed with the power to pierce into hidden places. Presently he put the paper down. So that was it! That was why Beryl had been so startled when he touched her in the restaurant!

He got up and walked to the easel on which was the new sketch for Arabian's portrait, stood before it and looked at it for a very long time. And all the time he stood there what he had just read was in his mind. Fear! The fascination of fear! There were women who could only love what they could also fear. Perhaps Beryl was one of them. Perhaps underneath all her audacity, her self-possession, her "damned cheek," her abnormal vanity, there was the thing that could shrink, and quiver, and love the brute.

Was that her secret? And his? Arabian's?

Garstin threw himself down presently and looked at the paper again. The article which he felt sure had gripped Miss Van Tuyn's attention described a new play which had just made a sensation in Paris. A woman, apparently courageous almost to hardness, self-engrossed, beautiful and cold, became in this play fascinated by a man about whom she knew nothing, whom she did not understand, who was not in her circle of society, who knew none of her friends, who came from she knew not where. Her instinct hinted to her that there was in him something abominable. She distrusted him. She was even afraid of him. But he made an enormous impression upon her. And she said of him to a man who warned her against him, "But he means a great deal to me and other men mean little or nothing. There is something in him which speaks to me and in others there is nothing but silence. There is something in him which leads me along a path and others leave me standing where I am."

Eventually, against the warning of her own instinct, and, as it were, in spite of herself, she gave herself up to the man, and after a very short association with him—only a few days—he strangled

her. She had a long and very beautiful neck. Hidden in him was a homicidal tendency. Her throat had drawn his hands, and, behind his hands, him. And she? Apparently she had been drawn to the murderer hidden in him, to the strong, ruthless, terribly intent, crouching thing that wanted to destroy her.

As the writer of the article pointed out, the play was a Grand Guignol piece produced away from its proper environment. It was called *The Lure of Destruction*.

How Beryl had started when a hand had touched her in the restaurant! And how angry she had been afterwards! Garstin smiled as he remembered her anger. But she had looked wonderful. She might be worth painting presently. He did not really care to paint a Ceres. But she was rapidly losing the Ceres look.

Before he went to bed he again stood in front of the scarcely begun sketch for the portrait of Arabian, and looked at it for a long time. His face became grim and set as he looked. Presently he moved his lips as if he were saying something to a listener within. And the listener heard:

“In the underworld—but is the fellow a king?”

CHAPTER III

Francis Braybrooke was pleased. Young Craven and Beryl were evidently “drawing together” now

Adela Sellingworth was happily out of the way. He heard of them dining together at the *Bella Napoli*, playing golf together at Beaconsfield—or was it Chorley Wood? He was not quite sure. He heard of young Craven being seen at Claridge's going up in the lift to Miss Van Tuyn's floor. All this was very encouraging. Braybrooke's former fears were swept away and his confidence in his social sense was re-established upon its throne. Evidently he had been quite mistaken, and there had been nothing in that odd friendship with Adela Sellingworth. This would teach him not to let himself go to suspicion in the future.

He still did not know where Lady Sellingworth was. Nothing had appeared in the *Morning Post* about her movements. Nobody seemed to know anything about her. He met various members of the "old guard" and made inquiry, but "Haven't an idea" was the invariable reply. Even, and this was strangest of all, Seymour Portman did not know where she was. Braybrooke met him one day at the Marlborough and spoke of the matter, and Seymour Portman, with his most self-contained and reserved manner, replied that he believed Lady Sellingworth had gone abroad to "take a rest," but that he was not sure where she was "at the moment." She was probably moving about.

Why should she take a rest? She never did anything specially laborious. It really was quite mysterious. One day Braybrooke inquired discreetly in Berkeley Square, alleging a desire to communicate with Lady Sellingworth about a charity bazaar in which he was interested; but the footman did not know where her ladyship was or when she was coming back to town. And still letters were not being forwarded.

Meanwhile Fanny Cronin felt that Paris was drifting quite out of her ken. The autumn was deepening. The first fogs of winter had made a premature appearance, and the spell of the Wallace Collection was evidently as strong as ever on Beryl. But was it the Wallace Collection? Miss Cronin never knew much about what Beryl was doing. Still, she was a woman and had her instincts, rudimentary though they were. Mr. Braybrooke must certainly have received his conge. Mrs. Clem Hodson quite agreed with Miss Cronin on that point. Beryl had probably refused the poor foolish old man that day at the Ritz when there had been that unpleasant dispute about the plum cake. But now there was this Mr. Craven! Miss Cronin had found him once with Beryl in the latter's sitting-room; she had reason to believe they had played golf together. The young man was certainly handsome. And then Beryl had seemed quite altered just lately. Her temper was decidedly uncertain. She was unusually restless and preoccupied. Twice she had been exceedingly cross about Bourget. And she looked different, too; even Suzanne Hodson had noticed it. There was something in her face—"a sort of look," Miss Cronin called it, with an apt feeling for the choice of words—which was new and alarming. Mrs. Clem declared that Beryl had the expression of a woman who was crazy about a man.

"It's the eyes and the cheek-bones that tell the tale, Fanny!" she had observed. "They can't deceive a woman. Don't talk to me about the Wallace Collection."

Poor Miss Cronin was very uneasy. The future looked almost as dark as the London days. As she lay upon the French bed, or reclined upon the sofa, or sat deep in her arm-chair, she envisaged an awful

change, when the Avenue Henri Martin would know her no more, when she might have to return to the lair in Philadelphia from which Miss Van Tuyn had summoned her to take charge of Beryl.

One day, when she was almost brooding over the fire, between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, the door opened and Beryl appeared. She had been out since eleven in the morning. But that was nothing new. She went out very often about half-past ten and scarcely ever came back to lunch.

"Fanny!" she said. "I want you."

"What is it, dear?" said Miss Cronin, sitting forward a little in her chair and laying aside her book.

"I've brought back a friend, and I want you to know him. Come into my sitting-room."

Miss Cronin got up obediently and remembering Mrs. Clem's words, looked at Beryl's cheek-bones and eyes.

"Is it Mr. Craven?" she asked in a quavering voice.

"Mr. Craven—no! You know him already."

"I have seen him once, dear."

"Come along!"

Miss Cronin followed her into the lobby. The door of the sitting-room was open, and by the fire was standing a stalwart-looking man in a dark blue overcoat. As Miss Cronin came in he gazed at her, and she thought she had never before seen such a pair of matching brown eyes. Beryl introduced him as Mr. Arabian.

The stranger bowed, and then pressed Miss Cronin's freckled right hand gently, but strongly too.

"I have been hoping to meet you," he said, in a strong but gentle voice which had, Miss Cronin

thought, almost caressing inflexions.

"Very glad to meet you, indeed!" said the companion.

"Yes. Miss Van Tuyn has told me what you are to her."

"Forgive me for a minute!" said Miss Van Tuyn. "I must take off my things. They all feel as if they were full of fog. Fanny, entertain Mr. Arabian until I come back. But don't talk about Bourget. He's never read Bourget, I'm sure."

She looked at Fanny Cronin and went out of the room. And in that look old Fanny, slow in the uptake though she undoubtedly was, read a tremendous piece of news.

This must be the Wallace Collection!

That was how her mind put it. This must be the great reason of Beryl's lingering in London, this total stranger of whom she had never heard till this moment. Her instinct had not deceived her. Beryl had at last fallen in love. And probably Mr. Braybrooke had been aware of it when he had called that afternoon and talked so persistently about the changes and chances of life. In that case Miss Cronin had wronged him. And he had perhaps come to plead the cause of another.

"The weather—it is really terrible, is it not? You are wise to stay in the warm."

So the conversation began between Miss Cronin and Arabian, and it continued for quite a quarter of an hour. Then Miss Van Tuyn came back in a tea gown, looking lovely with her uncovered hair and her shining, excited eyes, and some twenty minutes later Arabian went away.

When he had gone Miss Van Tuyn said carelessly:

"Fanny, darling, what do you think of him?"

Fanny, darling! That was not Beryl's usual way of putting things. Miss Cronin was much shaken. She felt the ground of her life, as it were, rocking beneath her feet, and yet she answered—she could not help it:

"I think Mr. Arabian is the most—the most—he is fascinating. He is a charming man. And how very good-looking!"

"Yes, he's a handsome fellow. And so you liked him?"

"No one has ever been so charming to me as he was—that I can remember. He must have a most sympathetic make-up. Who is he?"

"A friend of Dick Garstin, the painter. And so he attracted you?"

"I think him certainly most attractive. I should imagine he must have a very kind heart. There is something almost childlike about him, so simple!"

"So—so you find nothing repellent in him?"

"Repellent!" said Miss Cronin, almost with fear. "Do you mean to say—then don't you like him?"

"I like him well enough. But, as you ought to know, I'm not given to raving about men."

"Well," said Miss Cronin almost severely, "Mr. Arabian—Is that his true name?"

"Yes. I told you so."

"It's such an odd name! Mr. Arabian is a most kind and warm-hearted man. I am certain of that. And he is not above being charming and thoughtful to an ordinary old woman like me. He understands me, and that shows he has sympathy. I am sure Suzanne would like him too."

"Really, you quite rave about him!" said Miss Van

Tuyn, with a light touch of sarcasm.

But her eyes looked pleased, and that evening she was exceptionally kind to old Fanny.

She had not yet brought Arabian and Alick Craven together. Somehow she shrank from that far more than she had shrunk from the test with Fanny. Craven was very English, and Englishmen are apt to be intolerant about men of other nations. And Craven was a man, and apparently was beginning to like her very much. He would not be a fair judge. Undoubtedly he would be prejudiced.

And at this point in her mental communings Miss Van Tuyn realized that she was losing her independence of mind. What did it matter if Fanny thought this and Alick Craven that? What did it matter what anyone thought but herself?

But she was surely confused, was walking in the clouds. Dick Garstin had given her a lead that night of the meeting of the Georgians. She had certainly been affected by his words. Perhaps he had even infected her with his thought. Thought can infect, and Garstin had a powerful mind. And now she was seeking to oppose to Garstin's thought the opinion of others. How terribly weak that was! And she had always prided herself on her strength. She was startled, even angered, by the change in herself.

Her connexion with Craven was peculiar.

Ever since Lady Sellingworth's abrupt departure from England he had persistently sought her out, had shown a sort of almost obstinate desire to be in her company. Remembering what had happened when Lady Sellingworth was still in Berkeley Square, Miss Van Tuyn had been on her guard. Craven had hurt her vanity once. She did not quite understand him. She suspected him of peculiarity. She even wondered

whether he had had a quarrel with Adela which had been concealed from her, and which might account for Adela's departure and for Craven's present assiduity. Possibly, but for one reason, her injured vanity would have kept Craven at a distance—at any rate, for a time. It would have been pleasant to deal out suitable punishment to one who certainly deserved it. But there was the reason for the taking of the other course—Arabian.

An obscure instinct drove her into intimacy with Craven because of Arabian. She was not sure that she wanted Craven just now, but she might want him, perhaps very much, later. She knew he was not really in love with her, but they were beginning to get on well together. He admired her; she held out a hand to his youth. There was something of comradeship in their association. And their minds understood each other rather well, she thought. For they were both genuinely interested in the arts, though neither of them was an artist. And she felt very safe with Alick Craven. So she forgave Craven for his behaviour with Adela Sellingworth. She let him off his punishment. She relied upon him as her friend. And she needed to rely upon someone. For the calm self-possession of her nature was beginning to be seriously affected. She was losing some of her hitherto immense self-assurance. Her faith in the coolness and dominating strength of her own temperament was shaken.

Arabian troubled her increasingly.

That night at the restaurant in Conduit Street she had felt that she hated him, and when she had left Garstin she had realized something, that the measure of her nervous hatred was the measure of something else. Why should she mind what Arabian did? What was his way of life to her? Other men could do what they chose and her well-poised, well-disciplined

brain retained its normal calm. So long as they gave her the admiration which her vanity needed, she was not persecuted by any undue anxieties about the secret conduct of their lives. But she was tormented by the memory of that girl in the restaurant. And she remembered the conversation about jealousy round the dinner table at the Carlton. She was jealous now. That was why she had been so angry with Garstin. That was why she had lain awake that night.

And yet the next morning she had gone to the studio in Glebe Place. She had greeted Arabian as usual. She had never let him know that she had seen him in the restaurant, and she had persuaded Dick Garstin to say nothing about it. No doubt Arabian supposed that he had been too quick for them, and that they did not know he was with the woman who had come in and had almost immediately gone out.

But since that night Miss Van Tuyn had been persecuted by a secret jealousy such as she had never known till now.

Let him sink back to the depths! She had said that, but she did not want him to disappear out of her life. She had said, too, that he was horrible. The words were spoken in a moment of intense nervous irritation. But were they true? She thought of him as a night bird. Yet she brought him to Claridge's and introduced him to Fanny, and sought Fanny's opinion of him, and been pleased that it was favourable. And she saw him almost daily. And she knew she would go on seeing him till—what?

She could not foresee the end of this adventure brought about by her own audacious wilfulness. Some day she supposed Dick Garstin would be satisfied with his work. A successful portrait of Arabian would stand on the easel in Glebe Place.

Garstin was not at all satisfied yet. She knew that. He had put aside two more beginnings angrily, had started again, had paused, taken up other work, taken a rest, sent for Arabian once more. But this strange impotence of Garstin to satisfy himself would surely not last for ever. Either he would succeed, or he would abandon the attempt to succeed, or—a third possibility presented itself to Miss Van Tuyn's mind—his model would get tired of the conflict and refuse to "sit" any more.

And then—the depths?

Till now Arabian's patience had been remarkable. Evidently Garstin's obstinacy was matched by an obstinacy in him. Although he had once perhaps been secretly reluctant to sit, had been tempted to become Garstin's model by the promise of the finished picture, he now seemed determined to do his part, endured Garstin's irritability, dissatisfaction, abandoned and renewed attempts to "make a first-rate job of him" with remarkable good temper. He was evidently resolved not to give up this enterprise without his reward. There was fixed purpose in his patience.

"By God he's a stayer!" Garstin had said of him in a puffing breath one day when the palette knife had been angrily used once more. "Either he's waiting for the money value of a portrait by me like a cat for a mouse, or he's afraid of the finish."

"Why?" Miss Van Tuyn had asked.

"Well, you're in the thing! Perhaps he's afraid that when he says good-bye to my studio he says good-bye to you too. Or perhaps the two reasons govern him—love of money, love of woman. Anyhow he's a sticker!"

"He only wants the picture," she had said.

But that remark had been made for the benefit of Garstin. By this time she knew that Arabian had a further purpose, and that it was connected with herself. She was sure that he was intent on her. And she wondered very much what he would do when at last the picture was finished. Surely then something definite must happen. She both longed for and dreaded that moment. She knew Garstin, and she knew that once he had achieved what he was trying —"sweating blood," he called it—to achieve his interest in Arabian would almost certainly cease. Arabian would then be nothing but used material of no more value in Garstin's life. The picture would be exhibited, and then handed over to Arabian, and Garstin would be off on some other track.

She had now been with Arabian probably as many times as she had been with Craven. Yet she thoroughly understood the essential qualities of the Englishman, or believed that she did, and she still knew very little about Arabian. She did not even know what race he belonged to. He had evidently travelled a great deal. Sometimes he casually mentioned having been here or there. He spoke of America as one who had often been in New York. Once he had mentioned San Francisco as if he were very familiar with it. Miss Van Tuyn had relatives there, and had asked him if he knew them. But he had not known them. Whom did he know? She often wondered. He must know somebody besides that horrible girl she had seen for a moment in the restaurant in Conduit Street. But she did not like to ask him direct questions. To do that would be to show too much interest in him. And something else, too, prevented her from questioning him. She had no faith in his word. She felt that he was a man who would say anything which suited his purpose. She

had never caught him out in a direct lie, but she was quite certain he would not mind telling one. Of course she had often known men about whom she knew really very little. But she could not remember ever having known a man about whose character, position, education and former life she was so ignorant as she was about Arabian's.

He was still a vague sort of Cosmopolitan to her, a floating foreign man whom she could not place. He was still the magnificent mongrel belonging to no known breed.

Certain things about him she did know, however. She knew he was at present living at the Charing Cross Hotel, though he said he was looking for a flat in the West End. He spoke several languages; certainly English, French, German and Spanish. He had some knowledge of horseflesh, and evidently took an interest in racing. He seemed interested, too, in finance. And he played the piano and sang.

That gift of his had surprised her. One day in the studio, when Garstin had finished painting, and they had lingered smoking and talking, the conversation had turned on music, and Garstin, who had some knowledge of all the arts, had spoken about Stravinsky, whom he knew, and whose music he professed to understand. Miss Van Tuyn had joined in, and had given her view on *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *The Nightingale*, and other works. Arabian had sat smoking in discreet silence, till she had said to him bluntly:

"Do you care about music?"

And then Arabian had said that he was very fond of music, and played and sang a little himself, but that he had been too lazy to study seriously and had an uneducated ear.

Garstin had told him bluntly to go to the piano and show them what he could do. And Arabian had surprised Miss Van Tuyn by at once complying with this request, which had sounded like an order.

His performance had been the sort of thing she, having "advanced" views on musical matters, was generally inclined to sneer at or avoid. He had played two or three coon songs and a tango. But there had been in his playing a sheer "musicalness," as she had called it afterwards, which had enticed her almost against her will. And when he had sung some little Spanish songs she had been conquered, though she had not said so.

His voice was a warm and soft tenor, and he had sung very naturally, carelessly almost. But everything had been just right. When he had stolen time, when he had given it back, the stealing and repayment had been right. His expression had been charming and not overdone. There had been at moments a delightful impudence in his singing. The touches of tenderness had been light as a feather, but they had had real meaning. Through his last song he had kept a cigarette alight in his mouth. He had merely hummed the melody, but it had been quite delicious. Even Garstin had approved, and had said: "The stuff was sheer rot, but it was like a palm tree singing."

And then Arabian had given them a piece of information.

"I was brought up among palm trees."

"Florida?" Garstin had said.

But somehow the question had not been answered. Perhaps she—Beryl—had spoken just then. She was not sure. But she had been "got at" by the music. And at that moment she had realized why Arabian was dangerous to her. Not only his looks appealed to

her. He had other, more secret weapons. Charm, suppleness of temperament, heat and desire were his. Otherwise he could not have sung and played that rubbish as he had done.

That day, later on, he had not actually said, but had implied that some Spanish blood ran in his veins.

"But I belong to no country," he had added quickly. "I am a *gamin* of the world."

"Not a citizen?" she had said.

"No; I am the eternal *gamin*. I shall never be anything else."

All very well! But at moments she was convinced that there was a very hard and a very wary man in Arabian.

Perhaps sitting under the singing palm tree there was a savage!

She wanted to know what Arabian was. She began to feel that she must know. For, in spite of her ignorance, their intimacy was deepening. And now people were beginning to talk. Although she had been so careful not to show herself with Arabian in any smart restaurants, not to walk with him in the more frequented parts of the West End, they had been seen together. On the day when she had brought him to Claridge's some American friends had seen them pass through the hall, and afterwards had asked her who he was. Another day, when she was coming away with him from the studio, she had met Lady Archie Brooke at the corner of Glebe Place. She had not stopped to speak. But Lady Archie had stared at Arabian. And Miss Van Tuyn knew what that meant. The "old guard" would be told of Beryl's wonderful new man.

She felt nervously sensitive about Arabian. And yet

she had been about Paris with all sorts of men, and had not cared what people had thought or said. But those men had been clever, workers in the arts, men with names that were known, or that would be known presently. Arabian was different. She felt oddly shy about being seen with him. Her audacity seemed fading away in her. She realized that and felt alarmed. If only she knew something definite about Arabian, who he was, what his people were, where he came from, she would feel much easier. She began to worry about the matter. She lay awake at night. At moments a sort of desperation came upon her like a wave. Sometimes she said to herself, "I wish I had never met him." And yet she knew that she did not want to get rid of him. But she wished no one to know of her friendship; with this man—if it were a friendship.

Garstin was watching her through it all. She hated his eyes. He did not care what was happening to her. He only cared what appearance it caused; how it affected her eyes, her manner, her expression, the line of her mouth, the movements of her hands. He had said that she was waking up. But—to what?

All this time she seemed to be aware of an almost fatal growing intention in Arabian. Nevertheless, he waited. She had never been able to forget the article she had read in the *Westminster Gazette*. When she had read about the woman in the play she had instinctively compared herself with that woman. And then something in her revolted. She had thought of it as her Americanism, which loathed the idea of slavery in any form. But nevertheless, she had been aware of alarming possibilities within her. She was able to understand the woman in the play. And that must surely be because she was obscurely akin to her. And she knew that when she had read the article

the man in the play had made her think of Arabian. That, of course, was absurd. But she understood why it was. That woman had been attracted by a man of whom she knew nothing. She, Beryl Van Tuyn, was in the same situation. But of course she did not compare poor Arabian in her mind with a homicidal maniac.

He was gentle and charming. Old Fanny liked him immensely, said he had a kind heart. And Fanny was sensitive.

Yet again she thought of the savage sitting under the palm tree and of Dick Garstin's allusion to a king in the underworld.

She resented being worried. She resented having her nerves on edge. She was angry with Dick Garstin, and even angry with herself. In bed at night, when she could not sleep, she read books on New Thought, and tried to learn how to govern her mind and to control her thought processes. But she was not successful in the attempt. Her mind continually went to Arabian, and then she was filled with anxiety, with suspicion, with jealousy, and with a strange sort of longing mysteriously combined with repulsion and dread. And underneath all her feelings and thoughts there was a basic excitement which troubled her and which she could not get rid of.

One morning she got up full of restlessness. That day Dick Garstin was not painting. It was a Sunday, and he had gone into the country to stay with some friends. Miss Van Tuyn had made no arrangement to see Arabian. Indeed, she never saw him except on the painting days, for she still kept up the pretence that he was merely an acquaintance, and that she only met him because of her interest in Garstin's work and her wish to learn more of the technique of

painting. The day was free before her. She went to the telephone and called up Alick Craven.

It was a fine morning, cold and crisp, with a pale sun. She longed to be out of town, and she suggested to Craven to join her in hiring a Daimler car, to run down to Rye, and to have a round of golf on the difficult course by the sea. She had a friend close to Rye who would introduce them as visiting players. They would take a hamper and lunch in the car on the way down.

Craven agreed with apparent eagerness. By ten they were off. Soon after one they were on the links. They played the full round, eighteen holes, and Craven beat her. Then they had tea in the house below the club-house on the left-hand side of the road as you go towards Camber Sands.

After tea Miss Van Tuyn suggested running a little farther on in the car and taking a walk on the sands before starting on the journey back to London.

“I love hard sands and the wind and the lines upon lines of surf!” she said. “The wind blows away some of my civilization.”

“I know!” said Craven, looking at her with admiration.

He liked her strength and energy, the indefatigable youth of her.

“*En route!*”

Soon the car stopped. They got out, and over the sandy hill, with its rough sea-grasses, they made their way to the sands.

The tide was low. There was room and to spare on the hard, level expanse. Lines of white surf stretched to right and left far as the eyes could see. The piercing cries of the gulls floating on the eddying

wind were relieved against the blooming diapason of the sea. And the solitude was as the solitude of some lost island of the main. They descended, sinking in the loose, fine sand of the banks, and the soft, pale sand that edged them, and made their way to the yellow and vast sands that extended to the calling monster, whose voice filled their ears, and seemed to be summoning them persistently, with an almost tragic arrogance, away from all they knew, from all that was trying to hold and keep them, to the unknown, to the big things that lie always far off over the edge of the horizon.

"Let us turn our backs on Rye!" said the girl.

They swung round with the wind behind them, and walked on easily side by side, helped by the firm and delicate floor under their feet.

She was wearing a wine-coloured "jumper," a short skirt of a rough heathery material, a small brown hat pinned low on her head, pressed down on her smooth forehead. Her cheeks were glowing. The wind sent the red to them. She stepped along with a free, strongly athletic movement. There was a hint of the Amazon in her. On her white neck some wisps of light yellow hair, loosened by the wind's fingers, quivered as if separately alive and wilful with energy.

Craven, striding along in knickerbockers beside her, felt the animal charm of her as he had never felt it in London. She had thrust her gloves away in some hidden pocket. Her right hand grasped a stick firmly. The white showed at the knuckles. He felt through her silence that she was giving herself heart and soul to the spirit of the place, to the sweeping touch of the wind, to the eternal sound in the voice of the sea.

They walked on for a long time into the far away.

There was a dull lemon light over the sea pushing through the grey, hinting at sunset. A flock of gulls tripped jauntily on some wet sand near to them, in which radiance from the sky was mysteriously retained. A film of moving moisture from the sea spread from the nearest surf edge, herald of the turning tide. Miss Van Tuyn raised her arms, shook them, cried out with all her force. And the gulls rose, easily, strongly, and flew insolently towards their element.

"Let us turn!" she said.

"All right!"

Those were the first words they had spoken.

"Let us go and sit down in a sand-bank and see the twilight come."

"Yes."

They sat down presently among the spear-like blades of the spiky grass, facing the tides and the evening sky, and Craven, with some difficulty, lit his pipe and persuaded it to draw, while she looked at his long-fingered brown hands.

"I couldn't sit here with some people I know," she said. "Desolation like this needs the right companion. Isn't it odd how some people are only for certain places?"

"And I suppose *the* one person is for all places."

"Do you feel at home with me here?" she asked him, rather abruptly and with a searching look at him.

"Yes, quite—since our game. A good game is a link, isn't it?"

"For bodies."

"Well, that means a good deal. We live in the body."

“Some people marry through games, or hunting. They’re the bodily people. Others marry through the arts. Music pulls them together, or painting, or literature. They are mental.”

“Bodies—minds! And what about hearts?” asked Craven.

“The tide’s coming in. Hearts? They work in mystery, I believe. I expect when you love someone who hasn’t a taste in common with you your heart must be hard at work. Perhaps it is only opposites who can really love, those who don’t understand why. If you understand why you are on the ground, you have no need of wings. Have you ever been afraid of anyone?”

Craven looked at her with a dawning of surprise.

“Do you mean of a German soldier, for instance?” he said.

“No, no! Of course not. Of anyone you have known personally; afraid of anyone as an individual? That’s what I mean.”

“I can’t remember that I ever have.”

“Do you think it possible to love someone who inspires you at moments with unreasoning dread?”

“No; candidly I don’t.”

“I think there can be attraction in repulsion.”

“I should be very sorry for myself if I yielded to such an attraction.”

“Why?”

“Because I think it would probably lead to disaster.”

“How soberly you speak!” said Miss Van Tuyn, almost with an air of distaste.

After a moment of silence she added:

"I don't believe an Englishman has the power to lose his head."

Craven sat a little nearer to her.

"Would you like to see me lose mine?" he asked.

"I don't say that. But I should like you to be able to."

"And you? You are an American girl. Don't you pride yourself on your coolness, your self-control, your power to deal with any situation? If Englishmen are sober minded, what about American women? Do *they* lose their heads easily?"

"No. That's why—"

She stopped abruptly.

"What is it you want to say to me? What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing!" she answered.

And her voice sounded almost sulky.

The bar of lemon light over the sea narrowed. Clouds, with gold tinted edges, were encroaching upon it. The tide had turned, and, because they knew it, the voice of the sea sounded louder to them. Already they could imagine those sands by night, could imagine their bleak desolation, could almost feel the cold thrill of their loneliness.

Craven stretched out his hand and took one of hers and held it.

"Why do you do that?" she said. "You don't care for me really."

He pressed her hand. He wanted to kiss her at that moment. His youth, the game they had played together, this isolation and nearness, the oncoming night—they all seemed to be working together, pushing him towards her mysteriously. But just at that moment on the sands close to them two dark

figures appeared, a fisherman in his Sunday best walking with his girl. They did not see Miss Van Tuyn and Craven on the sandbank. With their arms spread round each other's waists, and slightly lurching in the wind, they walked slowly on, sinking at each step a little in the sand. Their red faces looked bovine in the twilight.

Almost mechanically Craven's fingers loosened on Miss Van Tuyn's hand. She, too, was chilled by this vision of Sunday love, and her hand came away from his.

"They are having their Sunday out," she said, with a slight, cold laugh. "And we have had ours!"

And she got up and shook the sand grains from her rough skirt.

"And that's happiness!" she added, almost with a sneer.

Like him she felt angry and almost tricked, hostile to the working of sex, vulgarized by the sight of that other drawing together of two human beings. Oh! the ineptitude of the echoes we are! Now she was irritated with Craven because he had taken her hand. And yet she had been on the edge of a great experiment. She knew that Craven did not love her—yet. Perhaps he would never really love her. Certainly she did not love him. And yet that day she had come out from London with a desire to take refuge in him. It almost amounted to that. When they started she had not known exactly what she was going to do. But she had set Craven, the safe man, the man whom she could place, could understand, could certainly trust up to a point, in her mind against Arabian, the unsafe man, whom she could not place, could not understand, could not trust. And, mentally, she had clung to Craven. And if those

two bovine sentimentalists had not intruded flat-footed upon the great waste of Camber and the romance of the coming night, and Craven had yielded to his impulse and had kissed her, she might have clung to him in very truth. And then? She might have been protected against Arabian. But evidently it was not to be. At the critical moment Fate had intervened, had sent two human puppets to change the atmosphere.

She had really a sense of Fate upon her as she shook the sand from her skirt. And the voice of the slowly approaching sea sounded in her ears like the voice of the inevitable.

What must be must be.

The lemon in the sky was fast fading. The gold was dying away from the edges of the clouds. The long lines of surf mingled together in a blur of tangled whiteness. She looked for a moment into the gathering dimness, and she felt a menace in it; she heard a menace in the cry of the tides. And within herself she seemed to be aware of a menace.

"It's all there in us, every bit of it!" she said to herself. "That's the horrible thing. It doesn't come upon us. It's in us."

And she said to Craven:

"Come!"

It was rapidly getting dark. The ground was uneven and rough, the sand loose and crumbling.

"Do take my arm!" he said, but rather coldly, with constraint.

She hesitated, then took it. And the feeling of his arm, which was strong and muscular, brought back to her that strange desire to use him as a refuge.

Somewhat as Lady Sellingworth had thought of

Seymour Portman, Beryl Van Tuyn thought of Craven, who would certainly not have enjoyed knowledge of it.

When they had scrambled down to the road, and saw the bright eyes of the car staring at them from the edge of the marshes, she dropped his arm.

“How Adela Sellingworth would have enjoyed all this if she had been here to-day instead of me!” she said.

“Lady Sellingworth!” said Craven, as if startled. “What made you think of her just then?”

“I don’t know. Stop a moment!”

She stood very still.

“I believe she has come back to London,” she said. “Perhaps she sent the thought to me from Berkeley Square. How long has she been away?”

“About five weeks, I should think.”

“Would you be glad if she were back?”

“It would make very little difference to me,” he said in a casual voice. “Now put on your coat.”

He helped her into the car, and they drove away from the sands and the links, from the sea and their mood by the sea.

They drove through the darkness towards London, Lady Sellingworth and Arabian.

CHAPTER IV

On the following day Miss Van Tuyn, remembering her feeling at Camber in the twilight, went to the telephone and called up Number 18A, Berkeley Square. The solemn voice of a butler—she knew at once a butler was speaking—replied inquiring her business. She gave her name and asked whether Lady Sellingworth had returned to London. The answer was that her ladyship had arrived in London from the Continent on Saturday evening.

"Please tell her ladyship that her friend, Miss Van Tuyn, will call on her this afternoon about five o'clock," said Miss Van Tuyn.

Soon afterwards she put on her hat and fur coat and set off on her way to Chelsea.

A little before five she turned into Berkeley Square on foot, coming from Carlos Place.

She felt both curious and slightly hostile. She wondered very much why Adela had gone away so mysteriously; she wondered where Adela had been and whether she had returned changed. When Miss Van Tuyn had alluded to the sheaves the thought in her mind had been markedly feminine. It had occurred to her that Adela might have stolen away to have "things" done to her; that she might come back to London mysteriously rejuvenated. Such a thing was possible even at sixty. Miss Van Tuyn had known of waning beauties who had vanished, and who had returned to the world looking alarmingly young. Certainly she had never known of a woman as old in appearance as Adela becoming transformed. Nevertheless in modern days, when the culture of beauty counts in its service such marvellous experts, almost all things are possible. If Adela had gone quite mad about Alick Craven the golden age might be found suddenly domiciled in Number 18A. Then

Adela's intention would be plain. She would have returned from abroad armed *cap-a-pie* for conquest.

The knowledge that Adela was in London had revived in Miss Van Tuyn the creeping hostility which she had felt before her friend's departure. She remembered her lonely walk to Soho, what she had seen through the lit-up window of the *Bella Napoli*. The sensation of ill treatment returned to her. She would have scorned to acknowledge even to herself that she was afraid of Adela, that she dreaded Adela's influence on a man. But when she thought of Craven she was conscious of a strange fluttering of anxiety. She wanted to keep Craven as a friend. She wanted him to be her special friend. This he had been, but only since Lady Sellingworth had been out of London. Now she had come back. Over there shone the light above the door of the house in which she was at this moment. How would it be now?

A hard, resolute look came into Miss Van Tuyn's face as she walked past the block of flats at the top of the square. She had a definite and strong feeling that she must keep Craven as her friend, that she might need him in the future. And of what use is a man who belongs to another woman?

Arabian had told her that day that he had found a flat which suited him in Chelsea looking over the river, and that he was leaving the Charing Cross Hotel. For some reason the news had startled her. He had spoken in a casual way, but his eyes had not been casual as they looked into hers. And she had felt that Arabian had taken a step forward, that he was moving towards some project with which she was connected in his mind, and that the taking of this flat was part of the project.

She must not lose Craven as a friend. If she did she

would lose one on whom she was beginning to rely. Women are of no use in certain contingencies, and a beautiful woman can seldom thoroughly trust another woman. Miss Van Tuyn absolutely trusted no woman. But she trusted Craven. She thought she must be very fond of him. And yet she had none of the feeling for him which persecuted her now when she was with Arabian. Arabian drew her in an almost occult way. She felt his tug like the mysterious tug of water when one stands near a weir in a river. When she was with him she sometimes had a physical impulse to lean backward. And that came because of another strong and opposing impulse which seemed mental.

Adela should not entice Craven back to her. She was long past the age of needing trusty comrades and possible helpers, in Beryl's opinion. Whatever she did, or hoped, or wanted, or strove for, life was really over for her, the life that is life, with its unsuspected turns, and intrigues, and passions and startling occurrences. Even if for a time such a man as Craven were hypnotized by a woman's strong will-power, such an unnatural condition could not possibly last. But Beryl made up her mind that she would not suffer even a short interim of power exercised by Adela. Even for poor Adela's own sake such an interim was undesirable. It would only lead to suffering. And while it lasted she, Beryl, might need something and lack it. That must not be. Adela was finished, and she must learn to understand that she was finished. No woman ought to seek to prolong her reign beyond a certain age. If Adela had come back with her sheaves they must be resolutely scattered to the winds—by somebody.

Arabian had taken a flat in Chelsea looking over the river. Evidently he was going to settle down in

London.

"But I live in Paris!" thought Miss Van Tuyn, as she pushed Lady Sellingworth's bell.

Her ladyship was at home, and Miss Van Tuyn mounted the stairs full of expectation.

When she came into the big drawing-room she noticed at once how dimly lit it was. Besides the firelight there was only one electric lamp turned on, and that was protected by a rather large shade, and stood on a table at some distance from Lady Sellingworth's sofa. A tall figure got up from this sofa as Miss Van Tuyn made her way towards the fire, and the well-remembered and very individual husky voice said:

"Dear Beryl! It's good of you to come to see me so soon. I only arrived on Saturday."

"Dearest! How dark it is! I can scarcely see you."

"I love to give the firelight a chance. Didn't you know that? Come and sit down and tell me what you have been doing. You have quite given up Paris?"

"Yes, for the time. I've become engrossed in painting. Dick Garstin has given me the run of his studio. But where have you been?"

As she put the question Miss Van Tuyn looked closely at her friend, and, in spite of the dimness, she noticed a difference in her appearance. The white hair still crowned the beautifully shaped head, but it looked thicker, more alive than formerly. The change which struck her most, however, was in the appearance of the face. It seemed, she thought, markedly younger and fresher, smoother than she remembered it, firmer in texture. Surely some, many even, of the wrinkles had disappeared. And the lips, once so pale and weary, were rosy now—if the light was not deceiving her. The invariable black dress,

too, had vanished. Adela wore a lovely gown of a deep violet colour and had a violet band in her hair. She sat very upright. Her tall figure seemed almost braced up. And surely she looked less absolutely natural than usual. There was something—a slight hardness, perhaps, a touch of conscious imperviousness in look and manner, a watchful something—which made Miss Van Tuyn for a moment think of a photograph she had seen on a member of the "old guard's" table.

The sheaves! The sheaves!

But the girl longed for more light. She knew she was not deceived entirely by the dimness, but she longed for crude revelation. Already her mind was busily at work on the future. She felt, although she had only been in the room for two or three minutes, that the Lady Sellingworth who had just come back to London must presently be her enemy. And she wished to get in the first blow, since blows there would have to be.

"Where have I been?" said Lady Sellingworth. "In the place of the swans—in Geneva."

"Geneva! We thought you had gone to the Riviera, probably to Cap Martin."

"I did go to the Riviera first."

"It must have been a desert."

"Not quite. Cannes would have been quite pleasant. But I had to go on to Geneva to see a friend."

Miss Van Tuyn thought of Lausanne, of doctors. Many women whom she knew in Paris swore by the doctors of Berne and Lausanne. There were wonderful treatments now for old women. Extraordinary things were done with monkey glands and other mysterious preparations and inoculations.

Was not Adela's manner changed? Did she not diffuse an atmosphere of intention, of vigour, which had not been hers before? Did she not seem younger?

"Did you stay long at the Beau Rivage?" she asked.

"Yes, I did."

"We have missed you."

"I like to think that."

"London loses its most characteristic note for me when you are not in it."

Miss Van Tuyn's curiosity was becoming intense, but how could she gratify it? She sought about for an opening, but found none. For it was seldom her way to be quite blunt with women, though with men she was often blunt.

"Everyone has been wondering where you were," she said. "Mr. Braybrooke was quite in a turmoil. Does he know you are back?"

"I haven't told him. But he gets to know everything in less than five minutes. And what have you been doing?"

This simple question suddenly gave Miss Van Tuyn the idea for a plan of campaign. It sprang into her brain, flashed upon it like an inspiration. For a moment she was rigid. Her body was strongly influenced. Then as the idea made itself at home in her she became supple and soft again.

"I've got a lot to tell you," she said, "if you won't be bored."

"You never bore me, Beryl."

"No, I don't believe I do. Well, first I must tell you how good Dick Garstin has been to me."

"Garstin the painter?"

"Yes."

And she enlarged upon her intense interest in painting, her admiration for Garstin's genius, her curiosity about his methods and aims, her passion for understanding the arts although she could not create herself. Lady Sellingworth, who knew the girl's genuine interest in all art developments, listened quite convinced of Beryl's sincerity. Arabian was never mentioned. Miss Van Tuyn did not go into details. She spoke only of models, of Garstin's varying moods, of his way of getting a thing on to canvas, of his views on colour and technique.

"It must be absorbingly interesting to watch such a man at work," Lady Sellingworth said presently.

"It is. It's fascinating."

"And so that is the reason why you are staying so long in smoky old London?"

"No, Adela, it isn't. At least, that's not the only reason."

The words were spoken slowly and were followed by a curiously conscious, almost, indeed, embarrassed look from the girl's violet eyes.

"No?"

After a long pause Beryl said:

"You know I have always looked upon you as a book of wisdom."

"It's very difficult to be wise," said Lady Sellingworth, with a touch of bitterness. "And sometimes very dull."

"But you are wise, dearest. I feel it. You have known and done so much, and you have had brains to understand, to seek out the truth from experience. You have lived with understanding. You are not like the people who travel round the world and come back just the same as if they had been from

Piccadilly Circus to Hampstead Heath and back. One *feels* you have been round the world when one is with you."

"Does one?" said Lady Sellingworth, rather drily. "But I fancied nowadays the young thought all the wisdom lay with them."

"Well, I don't. And, besides, I think you are marvellously discreet."

"Wise! Discreet! I begin to feel as if I ought to sit on the Bench!"

Again there was the touch of bitterness in the voice. A very faint smile hovered for an instant about Miss Van Tuyn's lips.

"Judging the foolish women! Well, I think you are one of the few who would have a right to do that. You are so marvellously sensible."

"Anyhow, I have no wish to do it. But—you were going to tell me?"

"In confidence."

"Of course. The book of wisdom never opens its leaves to the mob."

"I want very much to know your opinion of young Alick Craven."

As she heard the word "young" Lady Sellingworth had great difficulty in keeping her face still. Her mouth wanted to writhe, to twist to the left. She had the same intense shooting feeling that had hurt her when Seymour Portman had called Alick Craven a boy.

"Of Mr. Craven!" she said, with sudden severe reserve. "Why? Why?"

Directly she had spoken she regretted the repetition. Her mind felt stiff, unyielding. And all her body felt stiff too.

"That's what I want to tell you," said Miss Van Tuyn, speaking with some apparent embarrassment.

And immediately Lady Sellingworth knew that she did not want to hear, that it would be dangerous, almost deadly, for her to hear. She longed to spread out her hands in the protesting gesture of one keeping something off, away from her, to say, "Don't! Don't! I won't hear!" And she sat very still, and murmured a casual "Yes?"

And then Miss Van Tuyn shot her bolt very cleverly, her aim being careful and good, her hand steady as a rock, her eyes fixed undeviatingly on the object she meant to bring down. She consulted Lady Sellingworth about her great friendship with Craven, told Lady Sellingworth how for some time, "ever since the night we all went to the theatre," Craven had been seeking her out persistently, spoke of his visits, their dinners together, their games of golf at Beaconsfield, finally came to Sunday, "yesterday."

"In the morning the telephone rang and we had a little talk. A Daimler car was suggested and a run down to Rye. You know my American ideas, Adela. A long day alone in the country with a boy—"

"Mr. Craven is scarcely a boy, I think!"

"But we call them boys!"

"Oh, yes!"

"With a boy means nothing extraordinary to a girl with my ideas. But I think he took it rather differently. Anyhow, we spent the whole day out playing golf together, and in the evening, when twilight was coming on, we drove to Camber Sands. Do you know them?"

"No."

"They are vast and absolutely deserted. It was

rather stormy, but we took a long walk on them, and then sat on a sand bank to watch the night coming on. I dare say it all sounds very ridiculous and sentimental to you! I am sure it must!"

"No, no. Besides, I know you Americans do all these things with no sentiment at all, merely *pour passer le temps*."

"Yes, sometimes. But he isn't an American."

Again she looked slightly embarrassed and seemed to hesitate.

"You mean—you think that he—?"

"It was that evening . . . last night only, in fact—"

"Oh, yes, of course it was last night. To-day is Monday."

"That I began to realize that we were getting into a rather different relation to each other. When it began to get dark he wanted to hold my hand and—but I needn't go into all that. It would only seem silly to you. You see, we are both young, though, of course, he is older than I. But he is very young, quite a boy in feeling and even in manner very often. I have seen him lately in all sorts of circumstances, so I know."

She stopped as if thinking. Lady Sellingworth sat very upright on her sofa, with her head held rather high, and her hands, in their long white gloves, quite still. And there was a moment of absolute silence in the drawing-room. At last Miss Van Tuyn spoke again.

"I feel since last night that things are different between Alick and me."

"Are you engaged to him—to Mr. Craven?"

"Oh, no. He hasn't asked me to be. But I want to know what you think of him. It would help me. I like him very much. But you know far more about men

than I do."

"I doubt it, Beryl. I see scarcely anyone now. You live in Paris surrounded by clever men and—"

"But you have had decades more of experience than I have. In fact, *you* have been round the world and I have, so to speak, only crossed the Channel. Do help me, Adela. I am full of hesitation and doubt, and yet I am getting very fond of Alick. And I don't want to hurt him. I think I hurt him a little yesterday, but—"

"Sir Seymour Portman!" said Murgatroyd's heavy voice at the door.

And the old courtier entered almost eagerly, his dark eyes shining under the thatch of eyebrows and the white gleam of the "cauliflower."

And very soon Miss Van Tuyn went away, without the advice which she was so anxious to have. As she walked through Berkeley Square she felt more at ease than when she had come into it. But she was puzzled about something. And she said to herself:

"Can she have tried monkey glands too?"

CHAPTER V

Lady Sellingworth of course understood Beryl's purpose in visiting her so soon and in being so unreserved to her. The girl's intention was absolutely clear to her mind horribly experienced in the cruel ways of women. Nevertheless she believed that Beryl

had spoken the truth about what had happened at Camber.

When it began to get dark Craven had wanted to hold Beryl's hand.

Lady Sellingworth felt that she hated Beryl, hated Alick Craven. And herself? She did not want to contemplate herself. It seemed to her that she was fastened up with, chained to, a being she longed to ignore, to be without knowledge of. Something of her was struggling to be away from something else of her that was hideous. Battle, confusion, dust, dying cries, flying, terror-stricken feet! She was aware of tumult and despair in the silence of her beautiful house. And she was aware also of that slow and terrible creeping of hatred, the thing that did harm to her, that set her far away from any nobility she possessed.

She had gone abroad to fight, and had come back having lost her battle. And already she was being scourged for her failure.

When she had been striving alone these two had evidently forgotten her existence. Directly she had passed for a short time out of their lives they had come together. Youth had instinctively sought out youth, and she, the old woman, had been as one dead to them. If she had stayed away for years, if she had never come back, it would not have mattered to them.

Beryl's lack of all affection for her did not seriously trouble her. She knew the dryness of vanity; she knew that it was practically impossible for a girl so vain as Beryl to care deeply, or at all unselfishly, for another woman. But Craven's conduct was not what she had looked for. It seemed to stamp him as typical, and she had supposed him to be exceptional.

When Beryl had told her about Camber—so little and yet so much—she had been struck to the heart; and yet she had seen a vision of servants, the footman out in the dark with the under housemaid.

Seymour Portman's observant old eyes, the terrible eyes of affection, took in the change in her, not quite as a woman's eyes would have done, but in their own adequate way. His Adela looked different. Something had happened to her. The envelope had been touched up in some, to him, quite mysterious manner. And he did not like it. It even gave him a mild sort of shock. The touch of artificiality was cold on this amazingly straightforward old man. He loved his Adela with all the wrinkles, with the sagging skin, and the lined throat, and the curiously experienced weariness about the temples. She lived for him in the brilliant eyes, and was loved by him in them. And why should she suddenly try to change her appearance? It had certainly not been done for him—this Something. She was looking handsomer than usual, and yet he seemed to be aware that beneath the improved surface there was a tragic haggardness which had come into existence while she had been away.

He did not reproach her for the mystery of her absence, or for her silence; he did not ask her questions about where she had been, what she had done; he just sat with her and loved her. And his love made her horribly uneasy that day. She could not be still under it. She felt as if the soul of her kept shifting about, as a child shifts about under the watchful eyes of an elder. She felt the physical tingle of guilt. And she was thankful when at last Seymour went away and left her alone with her hatred.

All those weeks! She had deliberately left the ground free to Beryl for all those weeks, and she had

returned with no expectation of the thing that of course had happened. And yet she had believed that she had an excellent knowledge of life and of human beings. No doubt she had been so concentrated upon herself, and the struggle within herself that she had been unable to make any use of that knowledge. And so now she was full of hatred and of profound humiliation.

When she had abruptly left England she had made up her mind to "have done with it," that is to have done with love, to have done even with sentimental friendship. She had resolved to plunge into complete loneliness. Since she could not take Seymour into her intimate life, since she now knew that was absolutely impossible, she must somehow manage to get along permanently with nothing. And so, yielding to a desperate impulse, she had resolved to seek an unaccustomed solitude. She had fled from London. But she had stopped in Paris; although she had intended to pass through it and to go straight on to Marseilles and the Riviera. When the train had run in to the Gare du Nord she had told her surprised maid that she was tired and would not go on that night. Suddenly she had decided to seek out Caroline Briggs, to make a confession, to ask for help and sympathy. And she had sent her maid to a hotel, and had driven to Caroline's house.

But Caroline was not in Paris. A blue-cheeked, close-shaven French footman had informed her that his mistress had been obliged to sail for America three days before.

It had been a great blow to her. Confession, the cry for help, had been almost on her lips as she had stood at the door before the keen-eyed young man. And she had gone away feeling strangely lost and abandoned.

On the following morning she had left Paris and had travelled to the Riviera. And, there, she had fought against herself and had lost the battle.

Perhaps if she had been able to see Caroline the issue would have been different. She almost believed that if she had once told the absolute truth about herself to someone she might have found the courage to put personal dignity in its right place at the head of her life as the arbiter of what must not be done. Although she had defied Caroline ten years ago, and had been punished for her defiance, she still had a deep belief in Caroline's strength of character and clear insight. And she knew that Caroline was really fond of her.

But Fate had removed her friend from her. And was it not because of that removal that she had lost her battle? The sense of loneliness, of a cold finality, had been too great for her. She had had too much time for remembrance. And she had remembered certain hours with Craven by the fire, had remembered the human warmth of them, till the longing for happiness had overpowered everything else in her. They had been very happy together. She had been able to make him happy. His eager eyes had shown it. And their joy had been quite innocent; there had been no harm in it at all. Why should she deliberately forego such innocent contentment? Walking alone on the sea front at Cannes in the warm and brilliant weather she had asked herself that question. If Craven were there! And in the long loneliness she had begun presently, as often before, to try to cheat herself. The drastic heart of London had seemed to change into another heart. And at last she had followed the example of a woman in Paris some ten years ago.

She had as it were got out of the train once more.

She had not, perhaps, been fully conscious of the terrible repetition brought about by a temperament which apparently refused to change. She had no doubt tried to deceive herself though she had not deceived herself ten years ago at the Gare du Nord. She had even lied to herself, saying that in London she had given way to a foolish and morbid mood of fear, induced in her by memories of disasters in the past, that she had imagined danger where no danger existed. In London panic had seized her. But now in a different atmosphere and environment, quite alone and able, therefore, to consider things carefully and quietly, to see them in their true light, she had told herself that it was preposterous to give up an innocent joy merely because long ago she had been subject to folly. Ten years had elapsed since her last fit of folly. She must have changed since then. It was inevitable that she had changed. She had lied to herself in London when she had told herself that Craven would be satisfied in their friendship, while she would be almost starving. Her subsequent prayer had been answered. Passion was dead in her. A tender, almost a motherly feeling—that really was what she felt and would always feel for Alick Craven. She need not fear such a feeling. She would not fear it. Morbidity had possessed her. The sunshine of Cannes had driven it away. She had presently been glad that she had not found Caroline in Paris. For if she had made that confession she would have put an obstacle in the path which she now resolved to tread.

She had told herself that, and finally she had decided to return to London.

But she had gone first to Geneva, and had put herself there into the hands of a certain specialist, whose fame had recently reached the ears of a prominent member of the “old guard,” no other than

the Duchess of Wellingborough.

And now she had come back with her sheaves and had been met on the threshold by Beryl with her hideous confidences.

She had not yet told Craven of her return. For the moment she was glad that she had not given way to her impulse and telephoned to him on the Sunday. She might have caught him with her message just as he was starting for Rye with Beryl. That would have been horrible. Of course she would not telephone to him now. She resolved to ignore him. He had forgotten all about her. She would seem to forget about him. There was nothing else to be done. Pride, the pride of the *Grande Dame* which she had never totally lost, rose up in her, hot, fiery even; it mingled with an intense jealousy, and made her wish to inflict punishment. She was like a wounded animal that longs to strike, to tear with its claws, to lacerate and leave bleeding. Nevertheless she had no intention of taking action against either of those who had hurt her. Beryl should have her triumph. Youth should be left in peace with its own cruelty.

Two days passed before Craven knew of Lady Sellingworth's return to Berkeley Square. Braybrooke told him of it in the club, and added the information that she had arrived on the previous Saturday.

"Oh!" said Craven, with apparent indifference. "Have you seen her?"

Braybrooke replied that he had seen her, and that she was looking, in his opinion, remarkably well, even somewhat younger than usual.

"She seems to have had an excellent time on the Riviera and in Switzerland."

"In Switzerland!" said Craven, thinking of Braybrooke's remarks about Catherine Bewdley and

Lausanne.

"Yes, but I don't think she has been ill. I ventured to—just to say a word as to doctors, and she assured me she had been perfectly well all the time she was away. Are you going to see her?"

"I've got a good deal to do just now," said Craven, coldly and with a slight rise of colour. "But of course I hope to see Lady Sellingworth again some day. She is a charming woman. It's always a pleasure to have a talk with her."

"Yes, indeed! By the way, who is Beryl Van Tuyn's extraordinarily good-looking young friend? Do you happen to know?"

"What friend?" asked Craven, with sudden sharpness.

"The tall man she has been seen about with lately."

"I don't know."

After a slight pause, very intentional on Braybrooke's part, Craven replied:

"Miss Van Tuyn knows such lots of people."

"To be sure! And Lady Archie, though a dear woman, is perhaps a little inclined to gossip."

"Lady Archie Brooke?"

"Yes. She has met Miss Van Tuyn two or three times in Glebe Place, it seems, walking with a man whom she describes as a marvel of good looks. But there's Antring. I must have a word with him. He is just over from Paris."

And Braybrooke walked away with his usual discreet gait. He was feeling decidedly satisfied. Young Craven had certainly not been pleased with the information so casually imparted. It had aroused —Braybrooke was convinced of it—a sensation of

jealousy which promised well for the future. Braybrooke was almost sure now that his young friend had fallen thoroughly in love with Beryl Van Tuyn. The coldness about Adela Sellingworth, the sudden touch of heat about Beryl Van Tuyn, surely indicated that. Braybrooke was not seriously upset about Lady Archie's remarks. She really was a tremendous gossip, although of course a delightful woman. And Miss Van Tuyn was always surrounded by men. Nevertheless he was decidedly curious about the good-looking stranger who had been seen in Glebe Place. He had a retentive memory, and had not forgotten Dick Garstin's extraordinary remark about the blackmailer.

Braybrooke was not mistaken about Craven. The information about Adela Sellingworth had renewed Craven's hot sense of injury. Braybrooke did not understand that. But the subsequent remark about Beryl Van Tuyn had added fuel to the fire, and the sharp jealousy of sensitive youth mingled with the feeling of injury. Craven had been hurt by the elderly woman. Was he now to be hurt by the girl? Braybrooke's news had made him feel really angry. Yet he knew he had no right to be angry. He began to wish that he had never gone to Berkeley Square on that autumn afternoon, had never met the two women who were beginning to complicate his life. For a moment he thought of dropping them both. But had not one of them already dropped him? He would certainly not call again in Berkeley Square. If Lady Sellingworth did not ask him to go there he would not attempt to see her. He was not going to fight for her friendship. And as to Beryl Van Tuyn—The curious name—Nicolas Arabian—came into his mind and a conversation at a box at a theatre. Miss Van Tuyn had told him about this magnificently

handsome man, this “living bronze,” but somehow he had never thought of her as specially intimate with a fellow who frequented the Cafe Royal, and who apparently sat as a model to painters. But now he realized that this must be the man of Glebe Place, and he felt more angry, more injured than before.

Yet he was not in love with Beryl Van Tuyn. Or had he fallen in love with her without being aware of it? She attracted him very much physically at times. She amused him, interested him. He liked being with her. He was angry at the thought of another man’s intimacy with her. He wanted her to be fond of him, to need him, to prefer him to all other men. But he often felt critical about her, about her character, though not about her beauty. A lover surely could not feel like that. A lover just loved, and there was an end of it.

He could not understand his own feelings. But when he thought of Beryl Van Tuyn he felt full of the fighting instinct, and ready to take the initiative. He would never fight to retain Lady Sellingworth’s friendship, but he would fight to assert himself with the beautiful American. She should not take him up and use him merely as a means to amusement without any care for what was due to him. Lady Sellingworth was old, and in a sense famous. Such a woman could do as she pleased. With her, protest would be ridiculous. But he would find a way with Beryl Van Tuyn.

On that day and the next Craven did not see Miss Van Tuyn. No message came to him from Lady Sellingworth. Evidently the latter wished to have nothing more to do with him. She had now been in London for nearly a week without letting him know it. Miss Van Tuyn had telephoned once suggesting a meeting. But Craven had charmingly put her off,

alleging a tiresome engagement. He did not choose now to seem eager to meet her. He was considering what he would do. If he could manage to meet her in Glebe Place! But how to contrive such an encounter? While he was meditating about this he was again rung up by Miss Van Tuyn, who suggested that he should play golf with her at Beaconsfield on the following day, Saturday.

"You can't pretend you are working overtime at the F.O. to-morrow," she said.

Craven replied that the F.O. kept him very long even on Saturdays.

"What's the matter? What are you angry about?" asked Miss Van Tuyn through the telephone.

Craven intended to make a quietly evasive reply, but he found himself saying:

"If I work overtime at the F.O., are there not others who do much the same—in Glebe Place?"

After a pause Miss Van Tuyn said:

"I haven't an idea what you mean."

Craven said nothing. Already he was angry with himself, and regretted his impulsiveness.

"Well?" said Miss Van Tuyn.

"Well?" retorted Craven, feeling rather absurd.

Again there was a pause. Then, speaking quickly, Miss Van Tuyn said: "If you can escape from the F.O. you might be in Glebe Place about five on Monday. Good-bye!"

And she rang off, leaving Craven with the pleasant sensation that, as often before, he had "given himself away." Certainly he had shown Miss Van Tuyn his jealousy. She must have guessed what his mention of Glebe Place meant. And yet she had asked him to go there on the following Monday. If he did not go

perhaps that neglect would cancel his imprudence at the telephone.

He made up his mind not to go.

Nevertheless, when he left the Foreign Office on the Monday about half-past four, instead of going towards Mayfair he found himself walking quickly in the direction of Chelsea.

CHAPTER VI

Miss Van Tuyn was in Garstin's studio on that day. Although apparently calm and self-possessed she was in a condition of acute nervous excitement. Craven's mention of Glebe Place through the telephone had startled her. At once she had understood. People had begun to gossip, and the gossip had reached Craven's ears. She had reddened as she stood by the telephone. A definite sensation of anxiety mingled with shame had crept in her. But it had been succeeded by a decisive feeling more really characteristic of her. As Craven now evidently knew of her close acquaintance with Arabian the two men should meet. She would conquer her reluctance, and put Arabian to the test with Craven. For a long time she had wished to know what Craven would think of Arabian; for a long time, too, she had been afraid to know. But now she would hesitate no more. Dick Garstin was to have a sitting from Arabian on the Monday afternoon. It ought to be over about half-past four. She could easily manage to prolong matters in the studio till five, so that Craven might have time to get to Glebe Place from the Foreign Office. Of course, he might not choose to come. But if he were really jealous she thought he would come.

Now she was anticipating the coming interview with an uneasiness which she could only conceal by

a strong effort.

At last, after repeated failures, Garstin was beginning to work with energy and real satisfaction. Of late he had been almost venomous. His impotence to do what he wished to do had made him more disagreeable, more brutal even than usual. His habitual brusqueness had often degenerated into downright rudeness. But suddenly a change had come, one of those mysterious changes in the mood and powers of an artist which neither he nor anyone else can understand. Abruptly the force which had abandoned him had returned.

The change had occurred on the day of Miss Van Tuyn's conversation through the telephone with Craven, a Friday.

Arabian had refused to sit on the Saturday and Sunday. He said he was moving into his Chelsea flat, and had many things to do. He could not come to the studio again till the Monday afternoon at half-past two. Garstin had been furious, but he had been met by a will apparently as inflexible as his own.

"I am sorry, but I cannot help it, Dick Garstin," Arabian had said.

And after a pause he had added:

"I hope I have not shown impatience all this long time?"

Garstin had cursed, but he had not persisted. Evidently he had realized that persistence would be useless. On the Monday he had received Arabian with frigid hauteur, but soon he had become intent on his work and had apparently forgotten his grievance.

Half-past four struck—then the quarter to five. Garstin had been painting for more than two hours. Now he put down his brush and frowned, still

looking at Arabian, who was sitting in an easy, almost casual position, with his magnificent brown throat and shoulders exposed.

"Finished!" he said in his loud bass voice.

Miss Van Tuyn, who was curled up on a divan in a corner of the studio, moved and put down a book which she had been pretending to read. Garstin had forbidden her to come near to him that day while he was painting.

"Finished!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean—"

"No, damn it, I don't!" said Garstin, with exasperation. "I don't! Do you take me for a magician, or what? I have finished for to-day! Now then!"

He began to move the easel. Miss Van Tuyn got up, and Arabian, without saying a word, stretched himself, looked at her steadily for a moment, then pulled up his silk vest and carefully buttoned it with his strong-looking fingers. Then he too got up, and went away to the dressing-room to put on his shirt, waistcoat, collar and tie.

"May I see, Dick?" asked Miss Van Tuyn.

"No, you mayn't."

"Are you satisfied?"

"He's coming out more as I want him this time."

"Do you think you have found his secret?"

"Or yours, eh? What is happening in you, my girl?"

Before she could answer a telephone bell rang below.

"Damn!" said Garstin, going towards the staircase.

Before he went down he turned round and said:

"You're travelling fast."

And he disappeared. She heard him below tramping to the telephone. Then she went to a small square window in the studio, pushed it open, and looked out. There was a tiny space of garden below. She saw a plane tree shivering in the wind, yellow leaves on the rain-sodden ground. A sparrow flitted by and perched on the grimy coping of a low wall. And she shivered like the plane tree.

"Beryl!"

She started, turned, and went to the head of the stairs.

"What is it?"

"The telephone's for you. Come along down!"

"Coming!" she answered.

"Who is it?" she said, as she saw him standing by the telephone with the receiver in his hand.

"Some old woman, by the voice. She says she must speak to you. Here—take it, my girl!"

"It must be old Fanny!" said Miss Van Tuyn, with a touch of irritation. "Nobody else would know I was here. But I stupidly told Fanny."

She took the receiver out of his hand.

"I'm here! Who is it? Do make haste. I'm in a hurry."

She was thinking of Craven. It was nearly five o'clock, and she did not want to be late in Glebe Place, though she dreaded the encounter she expected there.

"Oh, Beryl, there's bad news!"

"Bad news! What news?"

"I can't tell you like this."

"Nonsense! Tell me at once!"

"I can't! I simply cannot. Oh, my dear, get into a

taxi and come back at once."

"I insist on your telling me what is the matter!" said Miss Van Tuyn sharply.

Her nerves were already on edge, and something in the sound of the voice through the telephone frightened her.

"Tell me at once what it is! Now speak plainly!"

There was a pause; then the agitated voice said:

"A cable has come from the Bahamas."

"The Bahamas! Well? Well?"

"Your poor father has—"

The voice failed.

"Oh, do tell me! For Heaven's sake, what is it?"

"Your poor father is dead. Oh, Beryl!"

Miss Van Tuyn stood quite still for a moment.

"My father—dead!" she thought.

She felt surprised. She felt shocked. But she was not conscious of any real sorrow. She very seldom saw her father. Since he had married again—he had married a woman with whom he was very much in love—his strongly independent daughter had faded into the background of his life. Beryl had not set her eyes upon him during the last eighteen months. It was impossible that she could miss him much, a father with whom she had spent for years so little of her time. She knew that she would not miss him. Yet she had had a shock. After an instant she said:

"Thank you, Fanny. I shall be home very soon. Of course, I shall leave the studio at once. Good-bye."

She hung up the receiver and went upstairs slowly. And as she went she resolved not to say anything about what had happened to Dick Garstin. He was incapable of expressing conventional sympathy, and

would probably say something bizarre which would jar on her nerves if she told him.

She found the two men standing together in the studio. Arabian had on his overcoat and gloves, and was holding his hat and umbrella.

“It was only Fanny Cronin!” she said.

As she spoke she looked narrowly at Garstin. Could Fanny have told him the news? The casual expression on his face set her mind at ease on that point. She was certain that he knew nothing.

“I must go,” she said.

“I will walk with you to a taxi if you kindly allow me,” said Arabian, getting her fur coat.

“Thank you!”

As he stood behind her helping her to get into the coat she was conscious of a strange and terrible feeling of fear mingled with an intense desire to give herself up to the power in this man. Was Craven outside? Something in her hoped, almost prayed, that he might be. It was surely the part of her that was afraid.

“Good-bye, Dick!” she said in an offhand voice.

“Good-bye!” he said. “Take care of her, Arabian.”

She sent him a look full of intense and hostile inquiry. He met it with a half-amused smile.

“I shall do better now,” he said.

“Ah?” said Arabian, looking polite and imperturbable.

“Come along!” said Miss Van Tuyn. “It must be getting late.”

As she spoke a clock in the room began striking five. For a moment she felt confused and almost ill. Her brain seemed too full of rushing thoughts for its

holding capacity. Her head throbbed. Her legs felt weak.

"Anything the matter?" asked Garstin, gazing at her with keen attention and curiosity.

"No," she said coldly. "Good-bye."

And she went down the stairs followed by Arabian.

Garstin did not accompany them. He had gone to stand before his picture of Arabian.

Miss Van Tuyn opened the door. A soft gust of wind blew some small rain into her face.

"Let me hold my umbrella over you, please," said Arabian. "Do take my arm while we look for a taxi."

"No, no!"

She walked on.

"There is nothing the matter, I hope?"

"I had some bad news through the telephone."

She felt impelled to say this to him, though she had said nothing to Garstin. Her brain still felt horribly overcharged, and an impulse had come to her to seek instant relief.

"My father is dead," she added.

As she spoke she looked up at him, and she saw a sharp quiver distort his lips for an instant.

"Did you know him?" she exclaimed, standing still.

"I? Indeed no! Why should you suppose so?"

"I thought—I don't know!"

He was now looking so calm, so earnestly sympathetic, that she almost believed that her eyes had played her a trick and that his face had not changed at her news.

"I'm not normal to-day," she thought.

"I am deeply grieved, deeply. Please accept from

me my most full sympathy."

"Thank you. I scarcely ever saw my father, but naturally this news has upset me. He died in the Bahamas."

"How very sad! So far away!"

"Yes."

They were still standing together, and he was holding his umbrella over her head and gazing down at her earnestly, when Craven turned the corner of the road and came up to them. Miss Van Tuyn flushed. Although she had asked Craven to come, she felt startled when she saw him, and her confusion of mind increased. She did not feel competent to deal with the situation which she had deliberately brought about. Craven had come upon them too suddenly. She had somehow not expected him just at that moment, when she and Arabian were standing still. Before she was able to recover her normal self-possession, Craven had taken off his hat to her and gone rapidly past them. She had just time to see the grim line of his lips and the hard, searching glance he sent to her companion. Arabian, she noticed, looked after him, and she saw that, while he looked, his large eyes lost all their melting gentleness. They had a cruel, almost menacing expression in them, and they were horribly intelligent at that moment.

"What does this man not know?" she thought.

He might have little, or no, ordinary learning, but she was positive that he had an almost appallingly intimate knowledge of many chapters in the dark books of life.

"Shall we—?" said Arabian.

And they walked on slowly together.

"May I make a suggestion, Miss Van Tuyn," he said

gently.

"What is it?"

"My little flat is close by, in Rose Tree Gardens. It is not quite arranged, but tea will be ready. Let me please offer you a cup of tea and a cigarette. There is a taxi!"

He made a signal with his left hand.

"We will keep it at the door, so that you may at once leave when you feel refreshed. You have had this bad shock. You need a moment to recover."

The cab stopped beside them.

"No, I must really go home," she said, with an attempt at determination.

"Of course! But please let me have the privilege. You have told me first of all of your grief. This is real friendship. Let me then be also friendly, and help you to recover yourself."

"But really I must—"

"Four, Rose Tree Gardens! You know them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good!"

The taxi glided away from the kerb.

And Miss Van Tuyn made no further protest. She had a strange feeling just then that her will had abandoned her. Fanny Cronin's message must have had an imperious effect upon her. Yet she still felt no real sorrow at her father's death. She seemed to be enveloped in something which made mental activity difficult, indeed almost impossible.

When the cab stopped, she said:

"I can only stay five minutes."

"Certainly! Dear Mademoiselle Cronin will expect you. Please wait for the lady!"

Miss Van Tuyn was vaguely glad to hear him say that to the chauffeur.

She got out and looked upwards. She saw a big block of flats towering up in front of her.

“On the other side they face the river Thames,” said Arabian. “All my windows except three look out that way. We will go up in the elevator.”

They passed through a handsome hall and stepped into the lift, which carried them up to the fourth floor of the building. Arabian put a latch-key into a polished mahogany door with a big letter M in brass nailed to it.

“Please!” he said, standing back for Miss Van Tuyn to pass in.

But she hesitated. She saw a pretty little hall, a bunch of roses in a vase on a Chippendale table, two or three closed doors. She was aware of a very faint and pleasant odour, like the odour of flowers not roses, and guessed that someone had been burning some perfume in the flat. There was certainly nothing repellent in this temporary home of Arabian. Yet she felt with a painful strength that she had better go away without entering it. While she paused, but before she had said anything, she heard a quiet step, and a thin man of about thirty with a very dark narrow face and light, grey eyes appeared.

“Please bring tea for two at once,” said Arabian in Spanish.

“Yes, sir, in a moment,” said the man, also in Spanish.

Miss Van Tuyn stepped in, and the door was gently shut behind her by Arabian’s manservant.

Arabian opened the second door on the left of the hall.

"This is my little salon," he said. "May I—"

"No, thank you. I'll keep on my coat. I must go home in a minute. I shall have a good deal to do. Really I oughtn't to be here at all. If anyone—after such news—"

She looked at Arabian. She had just had news of the death of her father, and she had come out to tea with this man. Was she crazy?

"I don't know why I came!" she said bluntly, angrily almost.

"Do please sit down," he said, pushing forward a large arm-chair. "If these curtains were not drawn we could see the river Thames from here. It is a fine view."

He bent down and poked the fire, then stood beside it, looking down at her as she sat in the chair.

She glanced round the room. It was well furnished and contained two or three good pieces, but there was nothing in it which showed personality, a thoughtful guiding mind and taste; there was nothing in it even which marked it definitely as the home of a woman rather than a man, or vice versa.

"I rent it furnished," said Arabian, evidently guessing her thought.

"Are you here for long?"

"I do not quite know. That depends."

His large eyes were fixed upon her as he said this, and she longed to ask him what intentions he had with regard to her. He had never made love to her. He had never even been what is sometimes called "foolish" with her. Not a word to which she could object had ever come from his lips. By no action had he ever claimed anything from her. And yet she felt that in some way he was governing her, was

imposing his will on her. Certainly he had once followed her in the street. But on that occasion he had not known who she was. Now, as he gazed at her, she felt certain that he had formed some definite project with regard to her, and meant to carry it out at whatever cost. Garstin said he, Arabian, was in love with her. Probably he was. But if he was in love with her, why did he never hint at it when they were alone together except by the expression in his eyes? She asked herself why she was afraid of him, and the answer she seemed to get was that his reticence frightened her. There was something in his continued inaction which alarmed her. It was a silence of conduct which lay like a weight upon her. She felt it now as he stared at her.

"What do you want with me?"

That was what she longed, and yet was afraid, to say to him. Did he know how violently she was attracted by him and how fiercely he sometimes repelled her? No doubt he did. No doubt he knew that at times she believed him to be horrible, suspected him of nameless things, of abominable relationships; no doubt he knew that she was degradingly jealous of him. When his eyes were thus fixed upon her she felt that he knew everything that was going on in her with which he had to do. Yet he never spoke of his knowledge.

His reserve almost terrified her. That was the truth.

The dark man with the light eyes brought in tea on a large silver tray. She began to drink it hastily.

"You—forgive me for asking—you will not leave London because of this sad news?" said Arabian.

"Do you mean for America?"

"Yes."

Miss Van Tuyn had not thought of such a possibility till he alluded to it. She could not, of course, be at her father's funeral. That was impossible. But suddenly it occurred to her that she had no doubt come into a very large fortune. There might be business to do. She might have to cross the Atlantic. At the thought of this possibility her sense of confusion and almost of mental blackness increased, and yet she realized more vividly than before the death of her father.

"I don't know. I don't think so. No, thank you. I won't smoke. I must go. I ought never to have come after receiving such news."

She stood up. He took her hand. His was warm and strong, and a great deal of her personality seemed to her to be in its clasp—too much indeed. His body fascinated hers, made her realize in a startling way that the coldness of which some men had complained had either been overcome by something that could burn and be consumed, or perhaps had never existed.

"You will not go to America without telling me?" he said.

"No, no. Of course not."

"You told me first of your sorrow!"

"Why—why did I?" she thought, wondering.

"And you did not tell Dick Garstin."

"No."

"And you came here to me."

"No, no! With you!"

"To my rooms in spite of your grief. We are friends from to-night."

"To-night . . . but it is afternoon!"

He still had her hand in his. She felt, or fancied she

felt, a pulse beating in his hand. It gave her a sense of terrible intimacy with him, as if she were close to the very sources of his being. And yet she knew nothing about him.

"It gets dark so early now," he said.

Dark! As he said it she thought, "That's his word! That's his word!" Everyone has his word, and dark was Arabian's.

"Good-bye!" she said.

"I will take you down."

Quietly and very naturally, he let her hand go. And at once she had a sensation of being out in the cold.

They went down together in the lift. Just as they left it, and were in the hall, a woman whom Miss Van Tuyn knew slightly, a Mrs. Birchington, an intimate of the Ackroyde and Lady Wrackley set, met them coming from the entrance.

"Oh, Miss Van Tuyn!" she said, stopping.

She held out her hand, looking from Miss Van Tuyn to Arabian.

"How are you?"

Her light eyes were searching and inquisitive. She had an evening paper in her hand.

"I—I am so grieved," she added, again looking at Arabian.

"Mr. Arabian—Mrs. Birchington!" Miss Van Tuyn felt obliged to say.

Mrs. Birchington and Arabian bowed.

"Grieved!" said Miss Van Tuyn.

"Yes. I have just seen the sad news about your father in the paper."

Miss Van Tuyn realized at once that she was

caught, unless she lied. But she did not choose to lie before Arabian. Something—her pride of a free American girl, perhaps—forbade that. And she only said:

"Thank you for your sympathy. Good-bye."

"Good-bye!"

Mrs. Birchington bowed again to Arabian, swept him with her sharp inquisitive eyes, and stepped into the lift.

"She lives here," he said, "in the apartment opposite to mine."

As Miss Van Tuyn drove away towards Claridge's she wondered whether Arabian was glad because of that fortuitous meeting.

Because of it her close intimacy with him—it would certainly now be called, and thought of, as that—would very soon be public property. All those women would hear about it. How crazy she had been to visit Arabian's flat at such a moment! She was angry with herself, and yet she believed that in like circumstances she would do the same thing again. Her power of will had deserted her, or this man, Arabian, had the power to inhibit her will. And Craven? What could he be thinking about her? She knew he was a sensitive man. What must he be thinking? That she had asked him to come all the way to Glebe Place merely in order that he might see her in deep conversation with another man. And she had not even spoken to him. He would be furious. She remembered his face. He was furious. By what she had done she had certainly alienated Craven.

And her father was dead!

She leaned back in the darkness of the cab, feeling weak and miserable, almost terrified. Surely Fate had her in a tight grip. She remembered Arabian's

question: would it be necessary for her to go to America? Her father was very rich. She was his only child. He must certainly have left her a great deal of his money, for his second wife was wealthy and would not need it. There might be business to do which would necessitate her presence in New York. At that moment she almost wished for an urgent summons from the New World. A few hours in a train, the crossing of a gang-plank, the hoot of a siren, and she would be free from all these complications! The sea would lie between her and Arabian—Adela Sellingworth—Craven. She would stay away for months. She would not come back at all.

But this man, Arabian, would he let her go without a word, without doing something? Would his strange and horrible reserve last till her ship was at sea? She could not believe it. If she made up her mind to sail, and he knew it, he would speak, act. Something would happen. There would be some revelation of character, of intention. She was sure of it. Arabian was a man who could wait—but not for ever.

She still seemed to feel the pulse beating in his warm hand as she drove through the rain and the darkness.

PART SIX

CHAPTER I

Mrs. Ackroyde had a pretty little house in Upper Grosvenor Street, but she spent a good deal of her time in a country house which she had bought at Coombe close to London. She was always there from Saturday to Monday, when she was not paying visits or abroad, and Coombe Hall, as her place was called, was a rallying ground for members of the "old guard." Invariably guests came down on the Sunday to lunch and tea. Bridge was the great attraction for some. For others there were lawn tennis and golf. And often there was good music. For Mrs. Ackroyde was an excellent musician as well as an ardent card-player.

Lady Sellingworth had occasionally been to Coombe Hall, but for several years now she had ceased from going there. She did not care to show her white hair and lined face in Mrs. Ackroyde's rooms, which were always thronged with women she knew too well and with men who had ceased from admiring her. And she was no longer deeply interested in the gossip of a world in which formerly she had been one of the ruling spirits. She was, therefore, rather surprised at receiving a note from Mrs. Ackroyde soon after her return from Geneva urging her to motor to Coombe on the following Sunday for lunch.

"I suppose there will be the usual crowd," Mrs. Ackroyde wrote. "And I've asked Alick Craven and

two or three who don't often come. What do you think of Beryl Van Tuyn's transformation into an heiress? I hear she's come into over three million dollars. I suppose she'll be more unconventional than ever now. Minnie Birchington met her just after her father's death, in fact the very day his death was announced in the papers. She'd just been to tea with a marvellously good-looking man called something Arabian, who has taken a flat in Rose Tree Gardens opposite to Minnie's. Evidently this is the newest way of going into deep mourning."

Lady Sellingworth hesitated for some time before answering this note. Probably, indeed almost certainly, she would have refused the invitation but for the last three sentences about Beryl Van Tuyn. She did not want to see the girl again, for she could not help hating her. She had, of course, sent a note of sympathy to Claridge's, and had received an affectionate reply, which she had torn up and burnt after reading it. But she had not gone to tell her regret at this death to Beryl, and Beryl had expressed no wish to see her.

In her heart Lady Sellingworth hated humbug, and she knew, of course, that any pretence of real friendship between Beryl and her would be humbug in an acute form. She might in the future sometimes have to pretend, but she was resolved not to rush upon insincerity. If Beryl sought her out again she would play her part of friend gallantly to conceal her wounds. But she would certainly not seek out Beryl.

She had not seen Craven since her return to London. In spite of her anger against him, which was complicated by a feeling of almost contemptuous disgust, she longed to see him again. Each day, when she had sat in her drawing-room in the late afternoon and had heard Murgatroyd's heavy step

outside and the opening of the door, her heart beat fast, and she had thought, “Can it be he?” Each day, after the words “Sir Seymour Portman!” her heart had sunk and she had felt bitter and weary.

And now came this invitation, putting it in her power to meet Craven again naturally. Should she go?

She read Dindie Ackroyde’s note once more carefully, and a strange feeling stung her. She had been angry with Beryl for being fond of Craven. (For she had supposed a real fondness in Beryl.) Now she was angry with Beryl for a totally different reason. It was evident to her that Beryl was behaving badly to Craven. As she looked at the note in her hand she remembered a conversation in a box at the theatre. Arabian! That was the name of the man Dick Garstin was painting, or had been painting. Dindie Ackroyde called him “Something Arabian.” Lady Sellingworth’s mind supplied the other name. It was Nicolas. Beryl had described him as “a living bronze.”

She had gone out to tea with him in a flat on the day her father’s sudden death had been announced in the papers. And yet she had pretended that she was hovering on the verge of love for Alick Craven. She had even implied that she was thinking of marrying him. Lady Sellingworth saw Beryl as a treacherous lover, as well as an unkind friend and a heartless daughter, and suddenly her anger against Craven died in pity. She had believed for a little while that she hated him, but now she longed to protect him from pain, to comfort him, to make him happy, as surely she had once made him happy, if only for an hour or two. She forgot her pride and her sense of injury in a sudden rush of feeling that was new to her, that perhaps, really, had something of motherliness in it. And she sat down quickly and

wrote an acceptance to Mrs. Ackroyde.

When Sunday came she felt excited and eager, absurdly so for a woman of sixty. But her secret diffidence troubled her. She looked into her mirror and thought of the piercing eyes of the "old guard," of those merciless and horribly intelligent women who had marked with amazement her sudden collapse into old age ten years ago, who would mark with a perhaps even greater amazement this bizarre attempt at a partial return towards what she had once been.

And what would Alick Craven think?

Nevertheless she put a little more red on her lips, called her maid, had something done to her hair.

"It has been a great success!" said the little Frenchwoman. "Miladi looks wonderful to-day. Black and white is much better than unrelieved black for miladi. And the *soupcon* of blue on the hat and in the earrings of miladi lights up the whole personality. Miladi never did a wiser thing than when she visited Switzerland."

"You think not, Cecile?"

"Indeed yes, miladi. There is no specialist even in Paris like Monsieur Paulus. And as to the Doctor Lavallois, he is a marvel. Every woman who is no longer a girl should go to him."

Lady Sellingworth picked up a big muff and went down to the motor, leaving Cecile smiling behind her. As she disappeared down the stairs Cecile, who was on the bright side of thirty, with a smooth, clear skin and chestnut-coloured hair, pushed out her under-lip slowly and shook her head.

"*La vieillesse!*" she murmured. "*La vieillesse amoureuse! Quelle horreur!*"

Lady Sellingworth had never given the maid any confidence about her secret reasons for doing this or that. But Cecile was a Parisian. She fully understood the reason for their visit to Geneva. Miladi had fallen in love.

Lady Sellingworth's excitement increased as she drove towards Coombe. It was complicated by a feeling of shyness. To herself she said that she was like an old debutante. She had been out of the world for so long, and now she was venturing once more among the merciless women of the world that never rests from amusing itself, from watching the lives of others, from gossiping about them, from laughing at them. She had been a leader of this world until she had denied it, had shut herself away from it. And now she was venturing back—because of a man. As she drove on swiftly through the wintry and dull-looking streets, streets that seemed to grow meaner, more dingy, more joyless, as she drew near to the outskirts of London, she looked back over the past. And she saw always the same reason for the important actions of her life. All of them had been committed because of a man. And now, even at sixty —Presently she saw by the look of the landscape that she was nearing Coombe, and she drew a little mirror out of her muff and gazed into it anxiously.

"What will they say? What will he think? What will happen to me to-day?"

The car turned into a big gravel sweep between tall, red-brick walls, and drew up before Mrs. Ackroyde's door.

In the long drawing-room, with its four windows opening on to a terrace, from which Coombe Woods could be seen sunk in the misty winter, Lady Sellingworth found many cheerful people whom she

knew. Mrs. Ackroyde gave her blunt, but kindly, greeting, with her strange eyes, fierce and remote, yet notably honest, taking in at a glance the results of Geneva. Lady Wrackley was there in an astonishing black hat trimmed with bird of paradise plumes. Glancing about her while she still spoke to Dindie Ackroyde carelessly, Lady Sellingworth saw young Leving; Sir Robert Syng; the Duchess of Wellingborough, shaking her broad shoulders and tossing up her big chin as she laughed at some joke; Jennie Farringdon, with her puffy pale cheeks and parrot-like nose, talking to old Hubert Mostine, the man of innumerable weddings, funerals and charity fetes, with his blinking eyelids and moustaches that drooped over a large and gossiping mouth; Magdalen Dearing, whose Mona Lisa smile had attracted three generations of men, and who had managed to look sad and be riotous for at least four decades; Francis Braybrooke, pulling at his beard; Mrs. Birchington; Lady Anne Smith, wiry, cock-nosed, brown, ugly, but supremely smart and self-assured; Eve Colton, painted like a wall, and leaning, with an old hand blazing with jewels, on a stick with a jade handle; Mrs. Dews, the witty actress, with her white, mobile face, and the large irresponsible eyes which laughed at herself, the critics and the world; Lord Alfred Craydon, thin, high church and political, who loved pretty women but receded farther and farther from marriage as the years spun by; and Lady Twickenham, a French *poupee*; and Julian Lamberhurst, the composer, who looked as if he had grown up to his six foot four in one night, like the mustard seed; and Hilary Lane, the friend of poets; and—how many more! For Dindie Ackroyde loved to gather a crowd for lunch, and had a sort of physical love of noise and human complications.

At the far end of the room there was a section which was raised a few inches above the rest. Here stood two Steinway grand pianos, tail to tail, their dark polished cases shining soberly in the pale light of November. There were some deep settees on this species of dais, and, looking towards it, over the heads of the crowd in the lower part of the room, Lady Sellingworth saw Craven again.

He was sitting beside a pretty girl, whom Lady Sellingworth did not know, and talking. His face looked hard and bored, but he was leaning towards the girl as if trying to seem engrossed, intent, on the conversation and on her.

Francis Braybrooke came up. Lady Sellingworth was busy, greeting and being greeted. Once more she made part of the regiment. But the ranks were broken. There was no review order here. Only for an instant had she been aware of formality, of the "eyes right" atmosphere—when she had entered the room. Then the old voices hummed about her. And she saw the well-known and experienced eyes examining her. And she had to listen and to answer, to be charming, to "hold her own."

"I'm putting Alick Craven next to you at lunch, Adela. I know you and he are pals. He's over there with Lily Bright."

"And who is Lily Bright?" said Lady Sellingworth in her most offhand way.

"A dear little New Englander, Knickerbocker to the bone."

She turned away composedly to meet another guest.

Francis Braybrooke began to talk to Lady Sellingworth, and almost immediately Lady Wrackley and Mrs. Birchington joined them.

"How marvellous you look, Adela!" said Lady Wrackley, staring with her birdlike eyes. "You will cut us all out. I must go to Geneva. Have you heard about Beryl? But of course you have. She was so delighted at coming into a fortune that she rushed away to Rose Tree Gardens to celebrate the event with a man without even waiting till she had got her mourning. Didn't she, Minnie?"

Francis Braybrooke was looking shocked.

"I cannot believe that Miss Van Tuyn—" he began.

But Mrs. Birchington interrupted him.

"But I was there!" she said.

"I beg your pardon!" said Braybrooke.

"It was the very day the death of her father was in the evening papers. I came back from the club with the paper in my hand, and met Beryl Van Tuyn getting out of the lift in Rose Tree Gardens with the man who lives opposite to me. She absolutely looked embarrassed."

"Impossible!" said Lady Wrackley. "She couldn't!"

"I assure you she did! But she introduced me to him."

"She cannot have heard of her father's death," said Braybrooke.

"But she had! For I expressed my sympathy and she thanked me."

Braybrooke looked very ill at ease and glanced plaintively towards the place where Craven was sitting with the pretty American.

"No doubt she had been to visit old friends," he said, "American friends."

"But this man, Nicolas Arabian, lives alone in his flat. And I'm sure he's not an American. Lady Archie has seen him several times with Beryl."

"What's he like?" asked Lady Wrackley.

"Marvellously handsome! A *charmeur* if ever there was one. Beryl certainly had good taste, but—"

At this moment there was a general movement. The butler had murmured to Mrs. Ackroyde that lunch was ready.

Lady Sellingworth was among the first few women who left the drawing-room, and was sitting at a round table in the big, stone-coloured dining-room when Baron de Melville, an habitue at Coombe, bent over her.

"I'm lucky enough to be beside you!" he said. "This is a rare occasion. One never meets you now."

He sat down on her right. The place on her left was vacant. People were still coming in, talking, laughing, finding their seats. The Duchess of Wellingborough, who was exactly opposite to Lady Sellingworth, leaned forward to speak to her.

"Adela . . . Adela!"

"Yes? How are you, Cora?"

"Very well, as I always am. Isn't Lavallois a marvel?"

"He is certainly very clever."

"You are proud of it, my dear. Have you heard what the Bolshevist envoy said to the Prime Minister when—"

But at this moment someone spoke to the duchess, who was already beginning to laugh at the story she was intending to tell and Lady Sellingworth was aware of a movement on her left. She felt as if she blushed, though no colour came into her face.

"How are you, Lady Sellingworth?"

She had not turned her head, but now she did, and met Craven's hard, uncompromising blue eyes and

deliberately smiling lips.

"Oh, it's you! How nice!"

She gave him her hand. He just touched it coldly. What a boy he still was in his polite hostility! She thought of Camber Sands and the darkness falling over the waste, and, in spite of her self-control and her pity for him, there was an unconquerable feeling of injury in her heart. What reason, what right, had he to greet her so frigidly? How had she injured him?

A roar of conversation had begun in the room. Everyone seemed in high spirits. Mrs. Ackroyde, who was at the same table as Lady Sellingworth, with Lord Alfred Craydon on her right and Sir Robert Syng on her left, looked steadily round over the multitude of her guests with a comprehensive glance, the analyzing and summing-up glance of one to whom everything social was as an open book containing no secrets which her eyes did not read. Those eyes travelled calmly, and presently came to Craven and Adela Sellingworth. She smiled faintly and spoke to Robert Syng.

"This is her second debut," she said. "I'm bringing her out again. They are all amazed."

"What about?" said Sir Robert, in his grim and very masculine voice.

"Bobbie, you know as well as I do. I had a bet with Anne that she would accept. I'm five pounds to the good. Adela is a creature of impulses, and that sort of creature does young things to the day of its death."

"Is it doing a young thing to accept a luncheon invitation from you?"

"Yes—for *her* reason."

"Well, that's beyond me."

"How indifferent you are!"

He looked at her in silence.

Lady Sellingworth talked to the baron till half-way through lunch. He was a financier of rather obscure origin, long naturalized as an Englishman, and ardently patriotic. The noble words "we British people" were often upon his strangely foreign-looking lips. Many years ago the "old guard" had taken him to their generous bosoms. For he was enormously rich, and really not a bad sort. And he had been clever enough to remain unmarried, so hope attended him with undeviating steps.

Miss Van Tuyn was presently the theme of his discourse. Evidently he did not know anything about her and Alick Craven. For he discussed her and her change of fortune without embarrassment or any *arriere pensee*, and he, too, spoke of the visit to Rose Tree Gardens. Evidently all the Coombe set was full of this mysterious visit, paid to an Adonis whom nobody knew, in the shadow of a father's death.

The baron greatly admired Miss Van Tuyn, not only for her beauty but for her daring. And he was not at all shocked at what she had done.

"She never lived with her father. Why should she pretend to be upset at his death? The only difference it makes to her is an extremely agreeable one. If she celebrates it by a mild revel over the tea cups with an exceptionally good-looking man, who is to blame her? The fact is, we Britishers are all moral humbugs. It seems to be in the blood," etc.

He ran on with wholly un-English vivacity about Beryl and her wonderful man. Everybody wished to know who he was and all about him, but he seemed to be a profound mystery. Even Minnie Birchington, who lived opposite to him, knew little more than the

rest of them. Since she had been introduced to him she had never set eyes on him, although she knew from her maid that he was still in the flat opposite, which he had rented furnished for three months with an option for a longer period. He had a Spanish manservant in the flat with him, but whether he, too, was Spanish Mrs. Birchington did not know. Where had Beryl Van Tuyn picked him up, and how had she come to know him so well? All the women were asking these questions. And the men were intrigued because of the report, carried by Lady Archie, and enthusiastically confirmed by Mrs. Birchington, of the fellow's extraordinary good looks.

Lady Sellingworth listened to all this with an air of polite, but rather detached, interest, wondering all the time whether Craven could overhear what was being said. Craven was sometimes talking to his neighbour, Mrs. Farringdon, but occasionally their conversation dropped, and Lady Sellingworth was aware of his sitting in silence. She wished, and yet almost feared, to talk to him, but she knew that she was interested in no one else in the room. Now that she was again with Craven she realized painfully how much she had missed him. Among all these people, many of them talented, clever, even fascinating, she was only concerned about him. To her he seemed almost like a vital human being in the midst of a crowd of dummies endowed by some magic with the power of speech. She only felt him at this moment, though she was conscious of the baron, Mrs. Ackroyde, Bobbie Syng, the duchess, and others who were near her. This silent boy—he was still a boy in comparison with her—crumbling his bread, wiped them all out. Yet he was no cleverer than they were, no more vital than they. And half of her almost hated him still.

"Oh, why do I worry about him?" she thought, while she leaned towards the baron and looked energetically into his shifting dark eyes. "What is there in him that holds me and tortures me? He's only an ordinary man—horribly ordinary, I know that."

And she thought of Camber Sands and the twilight, and saw Craven seeking for Beryl's hand—footman and housemaid. What had she, Adela Sellingworth, with her knowledge and her past, her great burden of passionate experiences—what had she to do with such an ordinary young man?

"Nicolas might possibly be Greek or Russian. But what are we to make of Arabian?"

It was still the voice of the Baron—full, energetic, intensely un-English.

"Have you heard the name before, Lady Sellingworth?"

"Yes," she said.

"Really! What country does it belong to? Surely not to our England?"

"No."

Craven was not speaking at this moment, and she felt that he was listening to them. She remembered how Beryl had hurt her and, speaking with deliberate clearness, she added:

"Garstin, the painter, has had this man, Nicolas Arabian, as a sitter for a long time, certainly for a good many weeks. And Beryl is just now intensely interested in portrait painting."

"What—he's a model! But with a flat in Rose Tree Gardens!"

"He is evidently not an ordinary model. I believe Mr. Garstin picked him up somewhere, saw him by

chance, probably at the Cafe Royal or some place of that kind, and asked him to sit."

"Do you know him?" asked the Baron, with sharp curiosity.

"Oh, no! I have never set eyes upon him. Beryl told me."

"Miss Van Tuyn! We all thought she was trying to keep the whole matter a secret."

"Well, she told me quite openly. You were there, weren't you?"

She turned rather abruptly to Craven. He started.

"What? I beg your pardon. I didn't catch what you were saying."

"He's lying!" she thought.

The Baron was addressed by his neighbour, Magdalen Dearing, whose husband he was supposed, perhaps quite wrongly, to finance, and Lady Sellingworth was left free for a conversation with Craven.

"We were speaking about Beryl," she began.

Suddenly she felt hard, and she wanted to punish Craven, as we only wish to punish those who can make us suffer because they have made us care for them.

"It seems that—they are all saying—"

She paused. She wanted to repeat the scandalous gossip about Beryl's visit to this mystery man, Arabian, immediately after her father's death. But she could not do it. No, she could not punish him with such a dirty weapon. He was worthy of polished steel, and this would be rusty scrap-iron.

"It's nothing but stupid gossip," she said. "And you and I have never dealt in that together, have we?"

"Oh, I enjoy hearing about my neighbours," he answered, "or I shouldn't come here."

She felt a sharp thrust of disappointment. His voice was cold and full of detachment; the glance of his blue eyes was hard and unrelenting. She had never seen him like this till to-day.

"What are they saying about Miss Van Tuyn?" he added. "Anything amusing?"

"No. And in any case it's not the moment to talk nonsense about her, just when she is in deep mourning."

With an almost bitter smile she continued, after a slight hesitation:

"There is a close time for game during which the guns must be patient. There ought to be a close time for human beings in sorrow. We ought not to fire at them all the year round."

"What does it matter? They fire at us all the year round. The carnage is mutual."

"Have you turned cynic?"

"I don't think I was ever a sentimentalist."

"Perhaps not. But must one be either the one or the other?"

"I am quite sure you are not the latter."

"I should be sorry to be the former," she said, with unusual earnestness.

Something in his voice made her suddenly feel very sad, with a coldness of sorrow that was like frost binding her heart. She looked across the big table. A long window was opposite to her. Through it she saw distant tree-tops rising into the misty grey sky. And she thought of the silence of the bare woods, so near and yet so remote. Why was life so heartless? Why could not he and she understand

each other? Why had she nothing to rest on? Winter! She had entered into her winter, irrevocable, cold and leafless. But the longing for warmth would not leave her. Winter was terrible to her, would always be terrible.

How the Duchess of Wellingborough was laughing! Her broad shoulders shook. She threw up her chin and showed her white teeth. To her life was surely a splendid game, even in widowhood and old age. The crowd was enough for her. She fed on good stories. And so no doubt she would never go hungry. For a moment Lady Sellingworth thought that she envied the Duchess. But then something deep down in her knew it was not so. To need much—that is greater and better, even if the need brings that sorrow which perhaps many know nothing of. At that moment she connected desire with aspiration, and felt released from her lowest part.

Craven was speaking to Mrs. Farringdon; Lady Sellingworth heard her saying, in her curiously muffled, contralto voice:

"Old Bean is a wonderful horse. I fancy him for the next Derby. But some people say he is not a stayer. On a hard course he might crack up. Still, he's got a good deal of bone. The Farnham stable is absolutely rotten at present. Don't go near it."

"Oh, why did I come?" Lady Sellingworth thought, as she turned again to the Baron.

She had lost the habit of the world in her long seclusion. In her retreat she had developed into a sentimentalist. Or perhaps she had always been one, and old age had made the tendency more definite, had fixed her in the torturing groove. She began to feel terribly out of place in this company, but she knew that she did not look out of place. She had long

ago mastered the art of appearance, and could never forget that cunning. And she gossiped gaily with the Baron until luncheon at last was over.

As she went towards the drawing-room Mrs. Ackroyde joined her.

"You were rather unkind to Alick Craven, Adela," she murmured. "Has he offended you?"

"On the contrary. I think he's a charming boy."

"Don't punish him all the afternoon then."

"But I am not going to be here all the afternoon. I have ordered the car for half-past three."

"It's that now."

"Well, then I must be going almost directly."

"You must stay for tea. A lot of people are coming, and we shall have music. Alick Craven only accepted because I told him you would be here."

"But you told me he had accepted when you asked me."

"That's how I do things when I really want people who may not want to come. I lied to both of you, and here you both are."

"Well at any rate you are honest in confession."

"I will counterorder your car. Henry, please tell Lady Sellingworth's chauffeur that he will be sent for when he is wanted. Oh, Anne, welcome the wandering sheep back to the social fold!"

She threaded her way slowly through the crowd, talking calmly to one and another, seeing everything, understanding everything, tremendously at home in the midst of complications.

Lady Sellingworth talked to Lady Anne, who had just come back from Mexico. It was her way to dart about the world, leaving her husband in his arm-

chair at the Marlborough. She brought gossip with her from across the seas, gossip about exotic Presidents and their mistresses, about revolutionary generals and explorers, about opera singers in Havana, and great dancers in the Argentine. In her set she was called “the peripatetic pug,” but she had none of the pug’s snoring laziness. Presently someone took her away to play bridge, and for a moment Lady Sellingworth was standing alone. She was close to a great window which gave on to the terrace at the back of the house facing the falling gardens and the woods. She looked out, then looked across the room. Craven was standing near the door. He had just come in with a lot of men from the dining-room. He had a cigar in his hand. His cheeks were flushed. He looked hot and drawn, like a man in a noisy prison of heat which excited him, but tormented him too. His eyes shone almost feverishly. As she looked at him, not knowing that he was being watched he drew a long breath, almost like a man who feared suffocation. Immediately afterwards he glanced across the room and saw her.

She beckoned to him. With a reluctant air, and looking severe, he came across to her.

“Are you going to play bridge?” she said.

“I don’t think so.”

“Dindie has persuaded me to stay on for the music. Shall we take a little walk in the garden? I am so unaccustomed to crowds that I am longing for air.”

She paused, then added:

“And a little quiet.”

“Certainly,” he said stiffly.

“Does he hate me?” she thought, with a sinking of despair. He went to fetch her wrap. They met in the hall.

"Where are you two going?"

Dindie Ackroyde's all-seeing eyes had perceived them.

"Only to get a breath of air in the garden," said Lady Sellingworth.

"How sensible!"

She gave them a watchful smile and spoke to Eve Colton, who was hunting for the right kind of bridge, stick in hand.

"I'll find Melville for you. Jennie and Sir Arthur are waiting in the card-room."

"I hope you don't mind coming out for a moment?"

Lady Sellingworth's unconquerable diffidence was persecuting her. She spoke almost with timidity to Craven on the doorstep.

"Oh, no. I am delighted."

His young voice was carefully frigid.

"More motors!" she said. "The whole of London will be here by tea time."

"Great fun, isn't it? Such a squash of interesting people."

"And I am taking you away from them!"

"That's all right!"

"Oh, what an Eton's boy's voice!" she thought.

But she loved it. That was the truth. His youngness was so apparent in his coldness that he was more dangerous than ever to her who had an unconquerable passion for youth.

"Let us go through this door in the wall. It must lead to the gardens."

"Certainly!"

He pushed it open. They passed through and were away from the motors, standing on a broad terrace which turned at right angles and skirted the back of the house.

"Don't let us go round the corner before all the drawing-room windows."

"No?" he said.

"Unless you prefer—"

"I will go wherever you like."

"I thought—what about this path?"

"Shall we do down it?"

"I think it looks rather tempting."

They walked slowly on, descending a slight incline, and came to a second long terrace on a lower level. There was a good deal of brick-work in Mrs. Ackroyde's garden, but there were some fine trees, and in summer the roses were wonderful. Now there were not many flowers, but at least there were calm and silence, and the breath of the winter woods came to Lady Sellingworth and Craven.

Craven said nothing, and walked stiffly beside his companion looking straight ahead. He seemed entirely unlike the man who had talked so enthusiastically in her drawing-room after the dinner in the *Bella Napoli*, and again on that second evening when they had dined together without the company of Beryl Van Tuyn. But Dindie Ackroyde had said he had come down that day because he had been told he would meet her. And Dindie was scarcely ever wrong about people. But this time surely she had made a mistake.

"Oh, there's the hard court!" Lady Sellingworth said.

"Yes."

"It looks a beauty."

"Do you play?"

"I used to. But I have given it up."

After a silence she added:

"You know I have given up everything. There comes a time—"

She hesitated.

"Perhaps you will not believe it, but I feel very strange here with all these people."

"But you know them all, don't you?"

"Nearly all. But they mean nothing to me now."

They were walking slowly up and down the long terrace.

"One passes away from things," she said, "as one goes on. It is rather a horrible feeling."

Suddenly, moved by an impulse that was almost girlish, she stopped on the path and said:

"What is the matter with you to-day? Why are you angry with me?"

Craven flushed.

"Angry! But I am not angry!"

"Yes, you are. Tell me why."

"How could I—I'm really not angry. As if I could be angry with you!"

"Then why are you so different?"

"In what way am I different?"

She did not answer, but said:

"Did you hear what the baron and I were talking about at lunch?"

"Just a few words."

"I hope you didn't think I wished to join in gossip about Beryl Van Tuyn?"

"Of course not."

"I hate all such talk. If that offended you—"

She was losing her dignity and knew it, but a great longing to overcome his rigidity drove her on.

"If you think—"

"It wasn't that!" he said. "I have no reason to mind what anyone says about Miss Van Tuyn."

"But she's your friend!"

"Is she? I think a friend is a very rare thing. You have taught me that."

"I? How?"

"You went abroad without letting me know."

"Is that it?" she said.

And there was a strange note, like a note of joy, in her voice.

"I think you might have told me. And you put me off. I was to have seen you—"

"Yes, I know."

She was silent. She could not explain. That was impossible. Yet she longed to tell him how much she had wished to see him, how much it had cost her to go without a word. But suddenly she remembered Camber. He was angry with her, but he had very soon consoled himself for her departure.

"I went away quite unexpectedly," she said. "I had to go like that."

"I—I hope you weren't ill?"

He recalled Braybrooke's remarks about doctors. Perhaps she had really been ill. Perhaps something had happened abroad, and he had done her a wrong.

"No, I haven't been ill. It wasn't that," she said.

The thought of Camber persisted, and now

persecuted her.

"I am quite sure you didn't miss me," she said, with a colder voice.

"But I did!" he said.

"For how long?"

The mocking look he knew so well had come into her eyes. How much did she know?

"Have you seen Miss Van Tuyn since you came back?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. She paid me a visit soon after I arrived."

Craven looked down. He realized that something had been said, that Miss Van Tuyn had perhaps talked injudiciously. But even if she had, why should Lady Sellingworth mind? His relation with her was so utterly different from his relation with the lovely American. It never occurred to him that this wonderful elderly woman, for whom he had such a peculiar feeling, could care for him at all as a girl might, could think of him as a woman thinks of a man with whom she might have an affair of the heart. She fascinated him. Yes! But she did not fascinate that part of him which instinctively responded to Beryl Van Tuyn. And that he fascinated her in any physical way simply did not enter his mind. Nevertheless, at that moment he felt uncomfortable and, absurdly enough, almost guilty.

"Have you seen Beryl since her father's death?" said Lady Sellingworth.

"No," he said. "At least—yes, I suppose I have."

"You suppose?"

Her eyes had not lost their mocking expression.

"I happened to see her in Glebe Place with that fellow they are all chattering about, but I didn't speak to her. I believe her father was dead then. But

I didn't know it at the time."

"Oh! Is he so very handsome, as they say?"

She could not help saying this, and watching him as she said it.

"I should say he was a good-looking chap," answered Craven frigidly. "But he looks like a wrong 'un."

"It is difficult to tell what people are at a glance."

"Some people—yes. But I think with others one look is enough."

"Yes, that's true," she said, thinking of him. "Shall we go a little farther towards the woods?"

"Yes; let us."

She knew he was suffering obscurely that day, perhaps in his pride, perhaps in something else. She hoped it was in his pride. Anyhow, she felt pity for him in her new-found happiness. For she was happier now in comparison with what she had been. And with that happiness came a great longing to comfort him, to draw him out of his cold reserve, to turn him into the eager and almost confidential boy he had been with her. As they passed the red tennis court and walked towards the end of the garden which skirted the woods she said:

"I want you to understand something. I know it must have seemed unfriendly in me to put you off, and then to leave England without letting you know. But I had a reason which I can't explain."

"Yes?"

"I shall never be able to explain it. But if I could you would realize at once that my friendship for you was unaltered."

"Well, but you didn't let me know you were back. You did not ask me to come to see you."

"I did not think you would care to come."

"But—why?"

"I—perhaps you—I don't find it easy now to think that anyone can care much to be bothered with me."

"Oh—Lady Sellingworth!"

"That really is the truth. Believe it or not, as you like. You see, I am out of things now."

"You need never be out of things unless you choose."

"Oh, the world goes on and leaves one behind. Don't you remember my telling you and Beryl once that I was an Edwardian?"

"If that means un-modern I think I prefer it to modernity. I think perhaps I have an old-fashioned soul."

He was smiling now. The hard look had gone from his eyes; the ice in his manner had melted. She felt that she was forgiven. And she tried to put the thought of Camber out of her mind. Beryl was unscrupulous. Perhaps she had exaggerated. And, in any case, surely she had treated, was treating, him badly.

She felt that he and she were friends again, that he was glad to be with her once more. There was really a link of sympathy between them. And he had been angry because she had gone abroad without telling him. She thought of his anger and loved it.

That day, after tea, while the music was still going on in Dindie Ackroyde's drawing-room, they drove back to London together, leaving their reputations quite comfortably behind them in the hand of the "old guard."

CHAPTER II

Beryl Van Tuyn found that it was not necessary for her to cross the ocean on account of her father's sudden death. He had left all his affairs in excellent order, and the chief part of his fortune was bequeathed to her. She had always had plenty of money. Now she was rich. She went into mourning, answered suitably the many letters of condolence that poured in upon her, and then considered what she had better do.

Miss Cronin pleaded persistently for an immediate return to Paris. What was the good of staying on in London now? The winter was dreary in London. The flat in Paris was far more charming and elegant than any hotel. Beryl had all her lovely things about her there. Her chief friends were in Paris. She could see them quietly at home. And it was quite impossible for her to go about London now that she was plunged in mourning. What would they do there? She, Miss Cronin, could go on as usual, of course. She never did anything special. But Beryl would surely be bored to death living the life of a hermit in Claridge's.

Miss Van Tuyn listened to all that old Fanny had to say, and made no attempt to refute her arguments or reply to her exhortations. She merely remarked that she would think the matter over.

"But what is there to think over, darling?" said Miss Cronin, lifting her painted eyebrows. "There is nothing to keep us here. You never go to the Wallace

Collection now."

"Do please allow me to be the judge of what I want to do with my life, Fanny," said Miss Van Tuyn, curtly. "When I wish to pack up I'll tell you."

And old Fanny collapsed like a pricked bladder. She could not understand Beryl any longer. The girl seemed to be quite beyond her reach. She thought of Alick Craven and of the man in the blue overcoat with the strange name. Nicolas Arabian. She had seen neither of them again. Beryl never mentioned them. But Fanny was sure that one, or both, of them held her in London. Something must be in the wind, something dangerous to any companion. She felt on the threshold of an alarming, perhaps disastrous, change. As she went nowhere she knew nothing of Beryl's visit to Rose Tree Gardens and of the gossip it had set going in certain circles in London. But she had never been able to forget the impression she had had when Beryl had introduced her to the man with the melting brown eyes. Beryl was surely in love. Yet she did not look happy. Certainly her father's death might have upset her. But Miss Cronin did not think that was sufficient to account for the change in the girl. She had something on her mind besides that. Miss Cronin was certain of it. Beryl's cool self-assurance was gone. She was restless. She brooded. She seemed quite unable to settle to anything or to come to any decision.

Old Fanny began to be seriously alarmed. Mrs. Clem Hodson had gone back to Philadelphia. She had no one to consult, no one to apply to. She felt quite helpless. Even Bourget could give her no solace. She had a weak imagination, but it now began to trouble her. As she lay upon her sofa, she, always feebly, imagined many things. But oftenest she saw a vague vision of Mr. Craven and Mr. Arabian fighting a duel

because of Beryl. They were in a forest clearing near Paris in early morning. It was a duel with revolvers, as Bourget might have described it. She saw their buttoned-up coats, their stretched-out arms. Which did she wish to be the victor? And which would Beryl wish to return unwounded to Paris? Surely Mr. Arabian. He was so kind, so enticingly gentle; he had such beautiful eyes. And yet—and at this point old Fanny's imagination ceased to function, and something else displayed a certain amount of energy, her knowledge of the world. What would Mr. Arabian be like as a husband? He was charming, seductive even, caressingly sympathetic—yes, caressingly! But—as a husband? And old Fanny felt mysteriously that something in her recoiled from the idea of Arabian as the husband of Beryl, whereas she could think of Mr. Craven in that situation quite calmly. It was all very odd, and it made her very uncomfortable. It even agitated her, and she felt her solitude keenly. There had never been a real link between Beryl and her, and she knew it. But now she felt herself strangely alone in the midst of perhaps threatening dangers. If only Beryl would become frank, would speak out, would consult her, ask her advice! But the girl was enclosed in a reserve that was flawless. There was not a single breach in the wall. And the dark winter had descended on London.

One evening Miss Van Tuyn felt almost desperate. Enclosed in her reserve she longed for a confidante; she longed to talk things over, to take counsel with someone. She had even a desire to ask for advice. But she knew no one in London to whom she could unbosom herself. Fanny did not count. Old Fanny was a fool and quite incapable of being useful mentally to anyone with good brains. And to what other woman could she speak, she, Beryl Van Tuyn,

the notoriously clever, notoriously independent, young beauty, who had always hitherto held the reins of her own destiny? If only she could speak to a man! But there the sex question intruded itself. No man would be impartial unless he were tremendously old. And she had no tremendously old man friend, having always preferred those who were still in possession of all their faculties.

No young man could be impartial, least of all Alick Craven, and yet she wished intensely that she had not lost her head that day in Glebe Place, that she had carried out her original intention and had introduced Craven to Arabian.

She knew what people were saying of her in London. Although she was in deep mourning and could not go about, several women had been to see her. They had come to condole with her, and had managed to let her understand what people were murmuring. Lady Archie had been with her. Mrs. Birchington had looked in. And two days after Lady Sellingworth's visit to Coombe Dindie Ackroyde had called. From her Miss Van Tuyn had heard of Craven's walk in the garden with Adela Sellingworth and early departure to London in Adela's motor. In addition to this piece of casually imparted news, Mrs. Ackroyde had frankly told Miss Van Tuyn that she was being gossiped about in a disagreeable way and that, in spite of her established reputation for unconventionality, she ought to be more careful. And Miss Van Tuyn—astonishingly—had not resented this plain speaking. Mrs. Ackroyde, of course, had tried to find out something about Nicolas Arabian, but Miss Van Tuyn had evaded the not really asked questions, and had treated the whole matter with an almost airy casualness which had belied all that was in her mind.

But these visits, and especially Dindie Ackroyde's, had deepened the nervous pre-occupation which was beginning seriously to alarm old Fanny.

If she took old Fanny's advice and left London? If she returned to Paris? She believed, indeed she felt certain, that to do that would not be to separate from Arabian. He would follow her there. If she took the wings of the morning and flew to the uttermost parts of the earth there surely she would find him. She began to think of him as a hound on the trail of her. And yet she did not want him to lose the trail. She combined fear with desire in a way that was inexplicable to herself, that sometimes seemed to her like a sort of complex madness. But her reason for remaining in London was not to be found in Arabian's presence there. And she knew that. If she went to Paris she would be separated from Alick Craven. She did not want to be separated from him. And now Dindie Ackroyde's news intensified her reluctance to yield to old Fanny's persuasions and to return to her bronzes. Her clever visit to Adela Sellingworth had evidently not achieved its object. In spite of her so deliberate confession to Adela the latter had once more taken possession of Craven.

Miss Van Tuyn felt angry and disgusted, even indignant, but she also felt saddened and almost alarmed.

Knowing men very well, being indeed an expert in male psychology, she realized that perhaps, probably even, her own action had driven Craven back to his friendship with Adela. But that fact did not make things more pleasant for her. She knew that she had seriously offended Craven. She remembered the look in his face was he passed quickly by her and Arabian in Glebe Place. He had not been to see her since, and had not written to condole with her. She knew that

she had outraged his pride, and perhaps something else. Yet she could not make up her mind to leave England and drop out of his life. To do that would be like a confession of defeat. But it was not only her vanity which prompted her to stay on. She had a curious and strong liking for Craven which was very sincere. It was absolutely unlike the painful attraction which pushed her towards Arabian. There was trust in it, a longing for escape from something dangerous, something baleful, into peace and security. There was even a moral impulse in it such as she had never felt till now.

What was she to do? She suffered in uncertainty. Her nerves were all on edge. She felt irritable, angry, like someone being punished and resenting the punishment. And she felt horribly dull. Her mourning prohibited her from seeking distractions. People were gossiping about her unpleasantly already. She remembered Dindie Ackroyde's warning, and knew she had better heed it. She felt heartless because she was unable to be really distressed about the death of her father. Old Fanny bored her when she did not actively worry her. She was terribly sorry for herself.

In the evening, while she was sitting alone in her room listlessly reading a book on modern painting by an author with whose views she did not agree, and looking forward to a probably sleepless night, there was a knock on the door, and a rose cheeked page boy, all alertness and buttons, tripped in with a note on a salver.

"Any answer?" she said.

"No, mum."

She took the note, and at once recognized Dick Garstin's enormous handwriting. Quickly she opened

it and read.

GLEBE.

Wed.

Dear B.—Does your mourning prevent you from looking at a damned good picture? If not, come round to the studio to-morrow any time after lunch and have a squint at a king in the underworld.

D. G.

At once her feeling of acute boredom left her, was replaced by a keen sense of excitement. She realized immediately that at last Garstin had finished his picture, that at last he had satisfied himself. She had not seen Garstin since the day when she had heard of her father's death. Nor had she seen Arabian. Characteristically, Garstin had not taken the trouble to send her a letter of condolence. He never bothered to do anything conventional. If he had written he would probably had congratulated her on coming into a fortune. Arabian's sympathy had already been expressed. Naturally, therefore, he had not written to her. But he had made no sign in all these days, had not left a card, had not attempted to see her. Day after day she had wondered whether he would do something, give some evidence of life, of intention. Nothing! He had just let her alone. But in his inaction she had felt him intensely, far more than she felt other men in their actions. He had, as it were, surrounded her with his silence, had weighed upon her by his absence. She feared and was fascinated by his apparent indifference, as formerly, when with him, she had feared and been fascinated by his reticence of speech and of conduct. Only once had he taken the initiative with her, when he had ordered the taxi-cab driver to go to Rose Tree Gardens. And even then, when he had had her there alone in his

flat, nothing had happened. And he had let her go without any attempt to detain her.

In his passivity there was something hypnotic which acted upon her. She felt it charged with power, with intention, even almost with brutality. There was a great cry for her in his silence.

She did not answer Garstin's note. That was not necessary. She knew she would see him on the morrow.

Directly after lunch on the following day she walked to Glebe Place, wondering whether Arabian would be there.

As usual, Garstin answered the door and covered her with a comprehensive glance as she stood on the doorstep.

"Black suits you," he said. "You ought never to go out of mourning."

"Thank you for your kind sympathy, Dick," she answered. "One can always depend on you for delicacy of feeling and expression in time of trouble."

He smiled as he shut the door.

"You tartar!" he said. "Be careful you don't develop into a shrew as you get on in life."

She noticed at once that he was looking unusually happy. There was even something almost of softness in his face, something almost of kindness, certainly of cordiality, in his eyes.

"Evidently coming into money hasn't had a softening influence upon you," he added.

To her surprise he took her into the ground floor studio and sat down on the big divan there.

"Aren't we going upstairs?" she said.

"In a minute. Don't be in such a blasted hurry, my girl!"

"Well, but—"

She followed his example and sat down.

"Is anyone up there?"

"Not a soul. Who should there be?"

"Well, I don't know. I thought perhaps—"

"Old Nick was there? Well, he isn't!"

"How absurd you are!" she said, almost with confusion, and looking away from him. "I only wondered whether you had a model with you."

"I know, I know!"

After a rather long pause she said:

"What are we waiting here for?"

"Oh—just to rest!"

"But I'm not tired."

"I didn't suppose you were."

Again there was a pause, in which Miss Van Tuyn felt a tingling of impatient irritation.

"I suppose you are doing this merely to whet my appetite," she said presently, unable to bear the unnatural silence. "Of course I know you have finished the picture at last. You have asked me to come here to see it. Then why on earth not let me see it? All this waiting can't come from timidity. I know you don't care for opinion so long as your own is satisfied."

He sent her an odd look that was almost boyish in its half mischievous, half wistful roguishness.

"My girl, you speak about a painter with great assurance, and, let me add, with great ignorance. I'll tell you the plain truth for once. I've been keeping you down here out of sheer diffidence. Now then!"

"Dick!"

His lean blue cheeks slightly reddened as he looked at her. She knew he had spoken the truth, and was touched. She got up quickly, went to him, and put one hand on his shoulder.

"You are afraid of me! But no—I can't believe it!"

"Ha!"

He got up.

"It is finished?"

"Yes, at last it's done."

"Has—have you shown—I suppose he has seen it?"

Garstin shook his head, and a dark lock of hair fell over his forehead.

"He doesn't even know it is finished, the ruffian! He's given me a damned lot of trouble. I'll keep him on the gridiron a bit longer. Grilling will do him good."

"Then I am the first?"

"Yes, you are the first."

"Thank you, Dick," she said soberly. "May I go up now?"

"Yes, come on!"

He went before her and mounted the stairs, taking long strides. She followed him eagerly, yet with a feeling of apprehension. What would it be—this portrait finished at last? Dick Garstin was cruelly fond of revelation. She thought of his judge who ought to be judged, of other pictures of his. Had he caught and revealed the secret of Arabian?

"Now then!"

But Garstin still hesitated.

"Sit here!"

She obeyed, and sat down on a sofa with the window behind her.

"I'll have a smoke."

"Oh!"

He went to the Spanish cabinet, and stood with his back to her, apparently searching. He lifted things, put them back. She glowed with almost furious impatience. At last he found the cigars. Probably he had never had to seek for them. He lit up.

"Now then—a drink!"

"Oh, Dick!" she breathed.

But she made no other protest.

"Will you?"

"No!" she said sharply.

Then she gazed at him and said:

"Yes."

He poured out whisky for her and himself, added some soda water, and lifted his glass.

"To Arabian!" he said.

"Why should we drink to Mr. Arabian?"

"He has done me a good turn."

There was a look in his eyes now which she did not like, a very intelligent and cruel look. She knew it well. It expressed almost blatantly the man's ruthlessness. She did not inquire what the good turn was, but raised her glass slowly and drank.

"Your hand trembles, my girl!" said Garstin.

"Nonsense! It does not! Now please show me the portrait. I will not wait any longer."

"Here you are then!"

He went over to a distant easel, pulled it forward with its back to them, then, when it was near to the sofa, turned it round.

"There he is!"

Miss Van Tuyn sat very still and gazed. After turning the easel Dick Garstin had gone to stand behind the sofa and her. She heard him making a little “t’p! t’p!” with his lips, getting rid, perhaps, of an adherent scrap of tobacco leaf. After what seemed to both of them a very long time she spoke.

“I don’t believe it!” she said. “I don’t believe it!”

“Like the man when he saw a giraffe for the first time? But he was wrong, my girl, for nature does turn out giraffes.”

“No, Dick! It’s too bad!”

Her cheeks were flaming with red.

“Too bad! Don’t you think it’s well painted?”

“Well painted? Of course it’s well—it’s magnificently painted!”

He chuckled contentedly behind her.

“Then what’s the matter? What’s the trouble?”

“You know what’s the matter. You know quite well.”

She turned sharply round on the sofa and faced him with angry eyes.

“There was a great actor once whose portrait was painted by a great artist, an artist as great as you are. It was exhibited and then handed over to the actor. From that moment it disappeared. No one ever saw it. The actor never mentioned it. And yet it was a masterpiece. When the actor died a search was made for the portrait, and it was found hidden in an attic of his house. It had been slashed almost to pieces with a knife. Till to-day I could not understand such a deed as that—the killing of a masterpiece. But now I can understand it.”

“He shall have it and put a knife through it if he likes. But”—he snapped out the word with sudden

fierce emphasis—"*but* I'll exhibit it first."

"He'll never let you!" Miss Van Tuyn almost cried out.

"Won't he? That was the bargain!"

"He didn't promise. I remember quite well all that was said. He didn't promise."

"It was understood. I told him I should exhibit the picture and that afterwards I'd hand it over to him."

"When is he going to see it?"

"Why do you ask? Do you want to be here when he does?"

She did not answer. She was staring at the portrait, and now the hot colour had faded from her face.

"If you do you can be here. I don't mind."

"I don't believe it," she repeated slowly.

All that she had sometimes fancied, almost dimly, and feared about Arabian was expressed in Garstin's portrait of him. The man was magnificent on the canvas, but he was horrible. Evil seemed to be subtly expressed all over him. That was what she felt. It looked out of his large brown eyes. But that was not all. Somehow, in some curious and terrible way, Garstin had saturated his mouth, his cheeks, his forehead, even his bare neck and shoulders with the hideous thing. Danger was everywhere, the warning that the living man surely did not give, or only gave now and then for a fleeting instant.

In Garstin's picture Arabian was unmistakably a being of the underworld, a being of the darkness, of secret places and hidden deeds, a being of unspeakable craft, of hideous knowledge, of ferocious cynicism. And yet he was marvellously handsome and full of force, even of power. It could not be said that great intellect was stamped on his

face, but a fiercely vital mentality was there, a mentality that could frighten and subdue, that could command and be sure of obedience. In the eyes of a tiger there is a terrific mentality. Miss Van Tuyn thought of that as she gazed at the portrait.

In her silence now she was trying to get a strong hold on herself. The first shock of astonishment, and almost of horror, had passed. She was more sharply conscious now of Garstin in connexion with herself. At last she spoke again.

"Of course you realize, Dick, that such a portrait as that is an outrage. It's a master work, I believe, but it is an outrage. You cannot exhibit it."

"But I shall. This man, Arabian, isn't known."

"How can we tell that?"

"Do you know a living creature he knows or who knows him?"

"Everyone has acquaintances. Everyone almost has friends. He must certainly have both."

"God knows who or where they are."

"You cannot exhibit it," she repeated obstinately.

"I hate art in kid gloves. But this is too merciless. It is more. It is a libel."

"That's just where you're wrong."

"No."

"Beryl, my girl, you are lying. That's no use with me."

"I am not lying!" she said with hot anger.

Suddenly she felt that tears had come into her eyes.

"How hateful you are!" she exclaimed.

She felt frightened under the eyes of the portrait. Garstin's revelation had struck upon her like a blow.

She felt dazed by it. Yet she longed to hit back. She wanted to defend Arabian, perhaps because she felt that she needed defence.

Garstin came abruptly round the sofa and sat down by her side.

"What's up?" he said in a kinder voice.

"Why do you paint like that? It's abominable!"

"Tell me the honest truth—God's own truth, as they call it, I don't know why—is that picture fine, is it my best work, or isn't it?"

"I've told you already. It's a technical masterpiece and a moral outrage. You have taken a man for a model and painted a beast."

"Beryl," he said almost solemnly, "believe it or not, as you can, that *is* Arabian!"

He pointed at the picture as he spoke. His keen eyes, half shut, were fixed upon it.

"That *is* the real man, and what you see is only the appearance he chooses to give of himself."

"How do you know? How can you know that?"

"Haven't I the power to show men and women as in essence they are?"

His eyes travelled round the big studio slowly, travelled from canvas to canvas, from the battered old siren of the streets to the girl who was dreaming of sins not yet committed; from Cora waiting for her prey to the judge who had condemned his.

"Haven't I? And don't you know it?"

"You are wrong this time," she said with mutinous determination, but still with the tears in her eyes. "You couldn't sum up Arabian. You tried and tried again. And now at last you have forced yourself to paint him. You have got angry. That's it. You have got furious with yourself and with him, because of

your own impotence, and you have painted him in a passion."

"Oh, no!"

He shook his head.

"I never felt colder, more completely master of myself and my passions, than when I painted that portrait."

"But you asked me to find out his secret. You pushed me into his company that I might find it out and help you."

"I did!"

"Well!" she said, almost triumphantly, "I have never found it out."

"Oh, yes, you have."

"No. He is the most reserved, uncommunicative man I have ever known."

"Subconsciously you have found it out, and you have conveyed it to me. And that is the result. I suspected what the man was the first time I laid eyes on him. When I got him here I seemed to get off the track of him. For he's very deceptive—somehow. Yes, he's damned deceptive. But then you put me wise. Your growing terror of him put me wise."

He looked hard into her eyes.

"Beryl, my girl, your sex has intuitions. One of them, one of yours, I have painted. And there it is!"

The bell sounded below.

"Ha!" said Garstin, turning his head sharply.

He listened for an instant. Then he said:

"I'll bet you anything you like that's the king himself."

"The king?"

"In the underworld. Did you walk here?"

"Yes."

"He must have seen you. He's followed you. What a lark!"

His eyes shone with a sort of malicious glee.

"There goes the bell again! Beryl, I'll have him up. We'll show him himself."

He put a finger to his lips and went down, leaving her alone with the portrait.

CHAPTER III

"Come up! Come up, my boy! I've something to show you!"

She heard steps mounting the stairs, and got up from the sofa. She looked once more at the portrait, then turned round to meet the two men, standing so that she was directly in front of it. Just then she had a wish to conceal it from Arabian, to delay, if only for a moment, his knowledge of what had been done.

Arabian came into the studio and saw her in her mourning facing him. At once he came up to her with Dick Garstin behind him. He looked grave, sympathetic, almost reverential. His brown eyes held a tender expression of kindness.

"Miss Van Tuyn! I did not know you were here."

She saw Garstin smiling ironically. Arabian took her hand and pressed it.

"I am glad to see you again."

His look, his pressure, were full of ardent sympathy.

"I have been thinking often of you and your great sorrow."

"Thank you!" she said, almost stammering.

"And what is it I am to see?" said Arabian, turning to Garstin.

"Stand away, Beryl!" said Garstin roughly.

She moved. What else could she do? Arabian saw the portrait and said:

"Oh, my picture at last!"

Then he took a step forward, and there was a silence in the studio.

Miss Van Tuyn looked at the floor at first. Then, as the silence continued, she raised her eyes to Arabian's. She did not know what she expected to see, but she was surprised at what she did see. Standing quite still immediately in front of the picture, with his large eyes fixed upon it, Arabian was looking very calm. There was, indeed, scarcely any expression in his face. He had thrust both hands into the pockets of his overcoat. Miss Van Tuyn wondered whether those hands would betray any feeling if she could see them. In the calmness of his face she thought there was something stony, but she was not quite sure. She was, perhaps, too painfully moved, too violently excited just then to be a completely accurate observer. And she was aware of that. She wished Arabian would speak. When was he going to speak?

"Well?" said Garstin at last, perhaps catching her feeling. "What do you think of the thing? Are you satisfied with it? I've been a long time over it, but

there it is at last."

He laughed slightly, uneasily, she thought.

"What's the verdict?"

"One moment—please!" said Arabian in an unusually soft voice.

Miss Van Tuyn was again struck, as she had been struck, when she first met Arabian in the studio, by the man's enormous self-possession. She felt sure that he must be feeling furiously angry, yet he did not show a trace of anger, of surprise, of any emotion. Only the marked softness of his voice was unusual. He seemed to be examining the picture with quiet interest and care.

"Well? Well?" said Garstin at last, with a sort of acute impatience which betrayed to her that he was really uneasy. "Let's hear what you think, though we know you don't set up for being a judge of painting."

"I think it is very like," said Arabian.

"Oh, Lord—like!" exclaimed Garstin, on an angry gust of breath. "I'm not a damned photographer!"

"Should not a portrait be like?" said Arabian, still in the very soft voice. "Am I wrong, then?"

"Of course not!" said Miss Van Tuyn, frowning at Garstin.

At that moment absolutely, and without any reserve, she hated him.

"Then you're satisfied?" jerked out Garstin.

"Indeed—yes, Dick Garstin. This is a valuable possession for me."

"Possession?" said Garstin, as if startled. "Oh, yes, to be sure! You're to have it—presently!"

"Quite so. I am to have it. It is indeed very fine. Do not you think so, Miss Van Tuyn?"

For the first time since he had seen the portrait he looked away from it, and his eyes rested on her. She felt that she trembled under those eyes, and hoped that he did not see it.

"You do not say! Surely this is a very fine picture?"

He seemed to be asking her to tell him whether or not the portrait ought to be admired. There was just then an odd simplicity, or pretence of simplicity, in his manner which was almost boyish. And his eyes seemed to be appealing to her.

"It is a magnificent piece of painting," she forced herself to say.

But she said it coldly, reluctantly.

"Then I am not wrong."

He looked pleased.

"My eye is not very educated. I fear to express my opinion before people such as you"—he looked towards Garstin, and added—"and you, Dick Garstin."

And then he turned away from the picture with the manner of a man who had done with it. She was amazed at his coolness, his perfect ease of manner.

"May I ask for a cigar, Dick Garstin?" he said.

"Pardon!" said Garstin gruffly.

Miss Van Tuyn noticed that he seemed very ill at ease. His rough self-possession had deserted him. He looked almost shy and awkward. Before going to the cabinet he went to the easel and noisily wheeled it away. Then he fetched the cigar and poured out a drink for Arabian.

"Light up, old chap! Have a drink!"

There was surely reluctant admiration in his voice.

Arabian accepted the drink, lit the cigar, sat down,

and began to talk about his flat. At that moment he dominated them both. Miss Van Tuyn felt it. He talked much more than she had ever before heard him talk in the studio, and expressed himself better, with more fluency than usual. Garstin said very little. There was a fixed flush on his cheek-bones and an angry light in his eyes. He sat watching Arabian with a hostile, and yet half-admiring, scrutiny, smoking rapidly, nervously, and twisting his large hands about.

Presently Miss Van Tuyn got up to go.

"Going already?" said Garstin.

"Yes, I must."

"Oh, well—"

"I will accompany you," said Arabian.

She looked away from him and said nothing. Garstin went with them downstairs and opened the door.

"Bye-bye!" he said in a loud voice. "See you again soon. Good luck to you!"

Arabian held out his hand.

"Good-bye."

Miss Van Tuyn nodded without speaking. Garstin shut the door noisily.

They walked down Glebe Place in silence. When they got to the corner Arabian said:

"Are you in a hurry to-day?"

"No, not specially."

"Shall we take a little walk? It is not very late."

"A walk? Where to?"

"Shall we go along by the river?"

She hesitated. She was torn by conflicting feelings. She was very angry with Garstin. She still continued

to say, though now to herself, “I don’t believe it! I don’t believe it!” And yet she knew that Garstin’s portrait had greatly increased her strange fear of Arabian.

“This way will take us to the river.”

She knew he was looking straight at her though she did not look at him. At that moment a remembrance of Craven and Camber flashed through her mind.

“Yes, I know,” she said, “But—”

“I am fond of the river,” he said.

“Yes—but in winter!”

“Let us go. Or will you come back to—”

“No, I will go. I like it too. London looks its best from the waterside.”

And she walked on again with him. He said nothing more, and she did not speak till they had crossed the broad road and were on the path by the dark river, which flowed at full tide under a heavy blackish grey sky. Then Arabian spoke again, and the peculiar softness she had noticed that afternoon had gone out of his voice.

“I am fortunate, am I not,” he said, “to be the possessor of that very fine picture by Dick Garstin? Many people would be glad to buy it, I suppose.”

“Oh, yes!”

“Do you consider it one of Dick Garstin’s best paintings? I know you are a good judge. I wish to hear what you really think.”

“He has never painted anything more finely that I have seen.”

“Ah! That is indeed lucky for me.”

“Yes.”

"I shall send and fetch it away."

"Oh, but—"

She stopped speaking. She was startled by his tone and also by what he had said. She glanced at him, then looked away and across the dark river. Dead leaves brushed against her feet with a dry, brittle noise.

"What is that you say, please?"

"I only—I thought it was arranged that the picture was to be exhibited," she said, falteringly.

"Oh, no. I shall not permit Dick Garstin to exhibit that picture."

Now intense curiosity was born in her and seemed for the moment to submerge her uneasiness and fear.

"But wasn't it understood?" she said.

"Please, what do you say was understood?"

"Didn't Mr. Garstin say he meant to exhibit the picture and afterwards give it to you?"

"But I say that I shall not permit Dick Garstin to exhibit my picture."

"Why won't you allow it?" she asked.

In her curiosity she was at last regaining some of her usual self-possession. She scented a struggle between these two men, both of them of tough fibre, both of them, she believed, far from scrupulous, both of them likely to be enormously energetic and determined when roused.

"Do you not know?" he asked.

"No! How can I know such a thing? How can I know what is in your mind unless you tell me?"

"Oh, but I will tell you then! I will not let Dick Garstin exhibit that picture because it is a lie about me."

"A lie? How can that be?"

"A man can speak a lie. Is it not so?"

"Of course."

"Cannot a man write a lie?"

"Yes."

"And a man can paint a lie. Dick Garstin has painted a lie about me."

"But then—if it is so—"

"Certainly it is so."

There was now a hard sound in his voice, and, when she looked at him, she saw that his face had changed. The quiet self-control which had amazed her in the studio was evidently leaving him. Or he no longer cared to exercise it.

"But, then, do you wish to possess the picture? Do you wish to possess a lie?"

"Is it not right that I possess it rather than someone else?"

"Yes, perhaps it is."

"Certainly it is. I shall take that picture away."

"But Dick Garstin intends to exhibit it. I know that. I know he will not let you have it till it has been shown."

"What is the law in England that one man should paint a wicked portrait of another man and that this other should be helpless to prevent it from being shown to all the world? Is that just?"

"No, I don't think it is."

He stopped abruptly and stood by the river wall. It was a cold and dreary afternoon, menacing and dark. Few people were out in that place. She stood still beside him.

"Miss Van Tuyn," he said, looking hard at her with

an expression of—apparently—angry sincerity in his eyes. “This happens. I sit quietly in the Cafe Royal, a public place. A strange man comes up. Never have I seen him before. He says himself to be a painter. He asks to paint me—he begs! I go to his studio, as you know. I hesitate when I have seen his pictures—all of horrible persons, bad women and a beastly old man. At last he persuades me to be painted, promising to give me the picture when finished. He paints and paints, destroys and destroys. I am patient. I give up nearly all my time to him. I sit there day after day for hours. At last he has painted me. And when I look I find he has made of me a beast, a monster, worse than all the other horrible persons. And when I come in he is showing this monster to you, a lady, my friend, one I respect and admire above all, and who, perhaps, has thought of me with kindness, who has been to me in trouble, to my flat, who has told me her sorrow and put trust in me as in none other. ‘Here he is!’ says Dick Garstin. ‘This beast, this monster—it is he! Look at him. I introduce you to Nicolas Arabian!’ Am I, in return for such things, to say, ‘All right! Now take this beast, this monster, and show him to all the world and say, “There is Nicolas Arabian!”’ Do you say I should do this?”

“But I have nothing to do with it.”

“Have you not?”

Her eyes gave way before his and looked down.

“Anyhow,” he said, “I will not do it. I have a will as well as he.”

“Yes,” she thought. “You have a will, a tremendous will.”

“To you,” he said, “I show what I would not show to him, that I have feelings and that I am very much hurt to-day.”

"I am sorry. I told Dick Garstin—"

"Yes? What?"

"Before you came I told him he ought not to exhibit the picture."

"Ah! Thank you! Thank you!"

He smiled, and the lustrously soft look came into his eyes.

"A woman—she always knows what a man is!" he said, in a low voice.

"It is cold standing here!" she said.

She shivered as she spoke and looked at the water.

"We will go to my flat," he said, with a sudden air of authority. "There is a big fire there."

"Oh, no, I can't!"

"Why not? You have been there."

"Yes, but I ought not to have gone. I am in mourning."

"You go to Dick Garstin. What is the difference?"

"People are so foolish. They talk."

"But you go to Dick Garstin!"

He had turned, and now made her walk back by his side along the river bank among the whirling leaves.

"People have begun to talk about us," she said, almost desperately. "That women, Mrs. Birchington, who lives opposite to you—she's a gossip."

"And do you mind such people?" he asked, with an air of surprised contempt.

"A girl has to be careful what she does."

As Miss Van Tuyn said this she marvelled at her own conventionality. That she should be driven to such banality, she who had defied the opinion of

both Paris and London!

"Please come once more. I want you to help me."

"I! How can I help you?"

"With Dick Garstin. I do not want to fight with that man. I am not what he thinks, but I do not wish to quarrel. You can help."

"I don't see how."

"By the fire I will tell you."

"I don't think I ought to come."

"What is life if it is always what ought and what ought not? I do not go by that. I am not able to think always of that. And do you? Oh, no!"

He cast a peculiar glance at her, full of intense shrewdness. It made her remember the Cafe Royal on the evening of her meeting with the Georgians, her pressure put on Dick Garstin to make Arabian's acquaintance, her lonely walk in the dark when Arabian had followed her, her first visit to Garstin's studio, her pretended reason for many subsequent visits there. This man must surely have understood always the motive which had governed her in what she had done. His glance told her that. It pierced through her pretences like a weapon and quivered in the truth of her. He had always understood her. Was he at last going to let her understand him? His eyes seemed to say, "Why pretend any longer with me? You wanted to know me. You chose to know me. It is too late now to play the conventional maiden with me."

It is too late now.

Her will seemed to be dying out of her. She walked on beside him mechanically. She knew that she was going to do what he wished, that she was going to his flat again; and when they reached Rose Tree

Gardens without any further protest she got into the lift with him and went up to his floor. But when he was putting the latchkey into the door the almost solemn words of Dick Garstin came back to her: "Beryl, believe it or not, as you can, that *is* Arabian!" And she hesitated. An intense disinclination to go into the flat struggled with the intense desire to yield herself to Arabian's will. Arabian was before her eyes, standing there by the opening door, and Garstin's portrait was before the eyes of her mind in all its magnificent depravation. Which showed the real man and which the unreal? Garstin said that he had painted her intuition about Arabian, that she knew Arabian's secret and had conveyed it to him. Was that true?

"Please!" said Arabian, holding open the door.

"I cannot come in," she said, in a dull, low voice.

Beyond the gap of the doorway there lay perhaps the unknown territory called by Garstin the underworld. She remembered the piercingly shrewd look Arabian had cast at her by the river, a look which had surely included her with him in the region which lies outside all the barriers. But she did not belong to that region. Despite her keen curiosities, her resolute defiance of the conventions, her intensely modern determination to live as she chose to live, she would never belong to it. A horrible longing which she could not understand fought with the fear which Garstin that day had dragged up from the depths of her to the surface. But she now gave herself to the fear, and she repeated doggedly:

"I cannot come in."

But just at this moment her intention was changed, and her subsequent action was determined in her by a trifling event, one of those events which teach the

world to believe in Fate. A door, the door of Mrs. Birchington's flat, clicked behind her. Someone was coming out.

Instantly, driven by the thought "I mustn't be seen!" Miss Van Tuyn stepped into Arabian's flat. She expected to hear the front door of it close immediately behind her. But instead she heard Mrs. Birchington's high soprano voice saying:

"Oh, how d'you do? Glad to meet you again!"

Quickly she opened the second door on the left and stepped into Arabian's drawing-room. Why had he been so slow in shutting the front door? She must have been seen. Certainly she had been seen by that horrible Minnie Birchington. There would be more gossip. It would be all over London that she was perpetually in this man's flat. Why had not he shut the door directly she had stepped into the hall? Her nervous tension found momentary relief in sudden violent anger against him, and when at length she heard the door shut, and his footstep outside, she turned round to meet him with fierce resolution.

"Why did you do that?"

"Beg pardon!" he said, gently, and looking surprised.

"Why didn't you shut the front door? That—Mrs. Birchington must have seen me. I know she has seen me!"

"I had no time. I could not refuse to speak to her, could I? I could not be rude to a lady."

"But I didn't wish her to see me!"

She was losing her self-control and knew it. She was angry with herself as well as with him, but she could not regain her self-possession.

"Why not?" he said, still very gently. "What is the

harm? Are we doing wrong? I cannot see it. I say again, I had no time to shut the door."

"Did she see me?"

"Really I do not know."

He shut the sitting-room door.

"I hope," he said, "that you are not ashamed to be acquainted with me."

His voice sounded hurt, and now an expression of acute vexation had come into his face.

"Really after what has happened with Dick Garstin to-day I—"

His face now had an expression almost of pain.

"I am really not *canaille*," he said. "I am not accustomed to be thought of and treated as if I were *canaille*."

"It's all right," she said. "But—you see my mourning! I am in deep mourning, and I ought not —"

She stopped. She felt the uselessness of her protest, the ungraciousness of her demeanour. Without another word she went to the sofa by one of the windows and sat down. He came and sat down beside her.

"I want you to help me about Dick Garstin," he said.

"How? What can I do? I have no influence with him."

"Oh, yes, you have. A lady like you has always influence with a man."

"Not with him."

"But I say you have."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to tell him what I have said to you to-

day."

"That you won't have the picture exhibited?"

"Yes."

"He'll only laugh."

"Beg him for your sake to yield."

"But what have I to do with it?"

"Very much, I think. It will be better that he yields —really."

She raised her eyes to his.

"We do not want a scandal, do we?"

"But—"

"If it should come to a fight between Dick Garstin and me there might be a scandal."

"But my name wouldn't—"

Again she was silent.

"I might try. But it wouldn't be any use."

He put out a hand and took one of hers.

"But it all came through you. Didn't it?"

"But—but you said you had never seen Dick Garstin till he came up and asked you to sit to him."

"That was not true. I saw him with you that night at the Cafe Royal. That is why I came to the studio. I knew I should meet you there. And—you knew."

Again the terribly shrewd glance came into his eyes. She saw it and felt no strength for denial. From the first he must have thoroughly understood her.

"You and I, we are not babies," he said gently. "We wanted to know each other, and so it happened. I have done all this for you. Now I ask you to tell Dick Garstin for me."

"I'll do what I can," she said.

He pressed her hand softly.

"You are not one of those who are afraid," he said. "You do what you choose—even at night."

She thought of the episode in Shaftesbury Avenue.

"Then you—you—"

"But I do not need to take a shilling from a lady!"

"You didn't know me that night!" she said defiantly.

"Ah, but when I heard you speak in the studio I knew!"

"And you follow women like that at night!"

She tried to draw away her hand, but he would not let her.

"You drew me after you—not knowing. It was what they call occult."

"Then why did you go away?"

"I felt that I had been wrong, that you didn't wish me to speak to you."

"Do you mean when I—that you suspected what I was?"

"Something said to me, 'This is a lady. She does strange things, she is not like others, but she is a lady. Go away.'"

"And in the studio—"

"When you spoke I knew."

She felt degraded. She could not explain. And she felt confused. She did not understand this man. His curious reticence that night, after his audacity, was inexplicable to her. What could he think of her? What must he think?

"I was going out that night to dine in a restaurant in Soho with some friends," she said, trying to speak very naturally. "I wanted some fresh air, so I walked."

"Why not? I beg you to forgive me for my rudeness. I feel very ashamed of it now. I have learnt in all these days to respect you very much."

His voice sounded so earnest, so sincere, that she felt suddenly a sense of relief. After all, he had always treated her with respect. He had never been impertinent, or even really audacious, and yet he had always known that she had wanted to meet him, that she had meant to meet him! He had never taken advantage of that knowledge. If he were really what Dick Garstin said he was, surely he would have acted differently.

"Do you really respect me?" she said.

"Yes. Have I not shown it in all these days? Have I ever done anything a lady could object to?"

"No."

Her hand still lay in his, and his touch had aroused in her that strange and intense desire to belong to him which seemed a desire entirely of the body, something with which the mind had little or nothing to do.

"Are you evil?" her eyes were asking him.

And his eyes, looking straight down into hers, seemed steadily and simply to deny it.

"Do you believe the lie of Dick Garstin?" they said to her.

And she no longer knew whether she believed it or not.

He drew a little nearer to her.

"I respect you—yes," he said. "But that is not all. I have another feeling for you. I have had it ever since I first saw you that night, when I was standing by the door in the Cafe Royal and you looked at me."

"But—but you—"

"Yes?"

Her lips trembled. Again jealousy seized her.

"I saw you that night in Conduit Street," she said. "You thought I didn't, but I did."

He still looked perfectly calm and untroubled.

"You were dining with Dick Garstin. May I not dine with someone?"

"Then why did you leave the restaurant?"

"I did not want you to see me."

"Ah!"

"I thought you might not understand."

"I do understand. I understand perfectly!"

She drew her hand sharply away from his.

"Are you angry with me?"

"Angry? No! What does it matter to me?"

"I am a man. I live alone. My life is lonely. Must I give up everything before I know that some day I shall have the only thing I really wish? You know men. You know how we are. I do not defend. I only say that I am not better than the other men. I want to be happy. If that is not for me, then I want to make the time pass. I do not pretend. Men generally pretend very much to beautiful girls. But you would not believe such nonsense."

"Then why didn't you stay in the restaurant?"

"Because I thought to do that would be like an insult for you. Such girls as that—mud—they must not come into your life even by chance, even for a few minutes. No man wishes to show himself with mud to a lady he respects. I tell you just the truth."

"Have you—have you seen her again?"

"She is in Paris. She has been in Paris for many days. But she is nothing. Why speak of such people?"

“I don’t know. But I hate—”

She moved restlessly. Then she got up and went to the fire. He followed her. She could not understand her own jealousy. It humiliated her as she had never been humiliated before. She felt jealous of this man’s absolute freedom, of his past. A sort of rage possessed her when she thought of all the experiences he must certainly have had. She almost hated him for those experiences. She wished she could lay hands on them, tear them out of him, so that he should not have them any longer in memory’s treasury. And yet she knew that, without them, he would probably attract her much less.

“Do you care then?” he said.

“Care?”

“Do you care what I do?”

“No, of course not!”

“But—you do care!” he said.

He said it without any triumph of the male, quite simply, almost as a boy might have said it.

“You do care!” he repeated.

And very gently, slowly, he put his arm round her, drew her close to him, bent down and gave her a long kiss.

For a moment she shut her eyes. She was giving herself up entirely to physical sensation. Fear, thought, everything except bodily feeling, seemed to cease in her entirely at that moment. Some fascination which he possessed, an intense fascination for women, entirely mysterious and inexplicable, a thing rooted in the body, absolutely overpowered her at that moment.

It was he who broke the physical spell. He lifted his lips from hers and she heard the words:

"I want you to marry me. Will you?"

Instantly she was released. A flood of thoughts, doubts, wonderings, flowed through her. She felt terribly startled.

Marriage with this man! Marriage with Nicolas Arabian! In all her thoughts of him she had never included the thought of marriage. Yet she had imagined many situations in which he and she played their parts. Wild dreams had come to her in sleepless nights, the dreams that visit women who are awake under fascination. She had lived through romances with him. She had been with him in strange places, had travelled with him in sandy wastes, seen the night come with him in remote corners of the earth, stood with him in great cities, watched the sea waves slipping away with him on the decks of Atlantic liners. All this she had done in imagination with him. But never had she seen herself as his wife.

To be the wife of Arabian!

He let her go directly he felt the surprise in her body.

"Marry you!" she said.

"It could not be anything else," he said, very simply. "Could it?"

She flushed as if he had punished her by his respect for her.

"But—but we scarcely know each other!" she stammered.

"You say that now!"

Again she felt rebuked, as if she were lighter than he and as if he were surprised by her lightness.

"But we are only—I mean—"

"Let us not talk of it then now if you dislike. But I

cannot take such a thing any way but seriously, knowing what you are. I love you; I would follow you anywhere. Naturally, therefore, I must think of marriage with you, or that I am to have nothing."

He stopped. She said nothing; could not say anything.

"With light women one is light. I do not pretend to be a very good man, better than the others. Those so very good men, I do not believe in them very much. But I know that many women are good. Just at first, let me confess, I was not sure how you were. At the Cafe Royal that night, seeing you with all those funny people, I made a mistake. I thought, 'She is beautiful. She is audacious. She likes adventures. She wishes an adventure with me.' And I came to Dick Garstin's thinking of an adventure. But soon I knew —no! I heard you talk. I got to know your cultivation, your very fine mind. And then you held back from me, waiting till you should know me better. That pleased me. It taught me the value of you. And when at last you did not hold back, were willing to be alone with me, to lunch with me, to walk with me, I understood you had made up your mind: 'He is all right!' But, best of all, you at last asked me to your hotel, introduced me to the dear lady you live with. I understood what was in your mind: '*She*, too, must be satisfied.' Then I knew it was not an adventure. And when you told me first about your sorrow! Ah! That was the great day for me! I knew you would not have told such a thing, kept from even Dick Garstin, unless you put me in your mind away from the others. That was a very great day for me!"

She shivered slightly by the fire. He was telling her things. She could not in return tell him the truth of herself. Perhaps he really believed all he had just

said. And yet that shrewd glance he had given her by the river and again in that room! What had it meant if now he had spoken the truth?

"I knew then that you cared," he said, quietly and with earnest conviction. "I knew then that some day I could ask you to marry me. Anything else—it is impossible between you and me."

"Yes, of course! I never—you mustn't suppose—"

"I do not suppose. I know you as now you know me."

He did not touch her again, though, of course, he must know—any man must have known by this time—his physical power to charm, even to overwhelm her. His power over himself amazed her. It proved to her the strength in his character. The man was strong, and in two ways. She worshipped strength, but his still made her afraid.

"Now let us leave it," he said, with a change of manner. "It is getting dark. It is dreary outside. I will shut the curtains. I will sing to you in the firelight."

He went over to the windows, drew down the blinds, pulled forward the curtains. She watched him, sitting motionless, wondering at herself and at him. For the moment he was certainly her master. He governed her as much by what he did not do as by what he did. And it had always been so ever since she had known him. The assurance in his quiet was enormous. How many things he must have carried through in his life, the life of which she knew absolutely nothing! But this—would he carry through this? She tried to tell herself with certainty that he would not. And yet, as she looked at him, she was not sure. Will can drown will. Great power can overcome lesser power, mysteriously sometimes, but certainly. That play of which she had read an

account in the *Westminster Gazette* was founded on the possibilities, was based upon a solid foundation. To the ignorant it might seem grotesque, incredible even, but not to those who had really studied life and the eddying currents of life. In life, almost all that is said to be impossible happens at times, though perhaps not often. And who knows, who can say with absolute certainty, that he or she is not an exception, was not born an exception?

As Miss Van Tuyn watched Arabian drawing the curtains across the windows which looked upon the Thames she did not know positively that she would not marry him. She remembered her sensation under his kiss. It had been a sensation of absolute surrender. That was why she had shut her eyes.

She might shut her eyes again. He might even make her do that.

After the curtains were drawn, and only the light from the fire lit up the room, Arabian went over to the piano, a baby grand, and sat down on the music-stool. He was looking very grave, almost romantically grave, but quite un-self-conscious. She wondered whether, even now, he cared what she thought about him. He showed none of the diffidence of the not-yet-accepted lover, eager to please, anxious about the future. But he showed nothing of triumph. The firelight played over his face as he struck a few chords. She wondered whether his manservant was with them in the flat, or whether they were quite alone—shut in together. He had not offered her tea. Perhaps the man had gone out. She did not feel afraid of Arabian at this moment. After what he had said she knew she had no reason to be afraid of him just now. But if she gave herself to him, if they ever were married? How would it be then? Life with him would surely be an extraordinary

business. She remembered her solicitude about not being seen with him in public places. Already that seemed long ago. Dick Garstin had told her she had travelled. No doubt that was true. One may travel far perhaps in mind and in feeling without being self-consciously aware of it. But when one was aware, when one knew, it must surely be possible to stop. He had made to her a tremendous suggestion. She could refuse to entertain it. And when she refused, if she did refuse, what would happen? What would he say, do, when he realized her determination? How would he take a determined refusal? She could not imagine. But she knew that she could not imagine Arabian ever yielding his will to hers in any big matter which would seriously upset his life.

"Now, shall I sing to you?" he said, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Yes, please do," she answered, looking away from him into the fire.

"You know how I sing. I am not a musician of cultivation, but I have music in me. I have always had it. I have always sung, even as a boy. It is natural to me. But I have been very idle in my life. I have never been able to work, alas!"

She looked at him again. Always he was playing softly, improvising.

"Have you really never done any work?"

"Never. Unfortunately, perhaps, I have always had enough money to be idle."

"He's not poor!" she thought.

And then she felt glad, suddenly remembering how rich she was now, since the death of her father.

He said nothing more, but played a short prelude and began to sing in his small, but warm, tenor

voice. And, sitting there by the fire, she watched him while he sang, and wondered again, as she had wondered in the studio, at the musical sense that was in him and that could show itself so easily and completely, without apparently any strong effort. The fascination she felt in him filled all his music, and appealed not only to her senses but to her musical understanding. She had a genuine passion for the right in all the arts, for the inevitable word in literature, the inevitable touch of colour that lights up a painting, fusing the whole into harmony, the inevitable emotional colouring of a musical phrase, the slackening or quickening of time, which make a song exactly what it should be. And to that passion he was able to appeal with his gift. He sang two Italian songs, and she felt Italy in them. Then he sang in French, and finally in Spanish—guitar songs. And presently she gave herself entirely to him as a singer. He had temperament, and she loved that. It meant, perhaps, too much to her. That, no doubt, was what drew her to him more surely than his remarkable physical beauty—temperament which has the keys of so many doors, and can open them at will, showing glimpses of wonderful rooms, and of gardens bathed in sunshine or steeped in mysterious twilight, and of savage wastes, the wilderness, the windy tracts by the sea, landscapes in snow, autumn breathing in mist; temperament which can even simulate knowledge, and can rouse all the under-longings which so often lie sleeping and unknown in women.

"With that man I could never be dull!"

That thought slipped through her while she listened. Where did he come from? In how many lands had he lived? How had his life been passed? She ought to know. Perhaps some day he would tell her. He must surely tell her. One cannot do great

things which affect one's life in the dark.

Dark—that's his word! When had she thought that? She remembered. It had been in that room. And since then she had seen Garstin's terrible portrait.

But he was like a palm tree singing. Even Garstin had been forced to say that of him.

When at last he stopped all the artistic part of her was under his spell. He had, perhaps deliberately, perhaps at haphazard—she could not tell—aroused in her a great longing for multifarious experiences such as she had never yet suffered under or enjoyed. He had let her recklessness loose from its tethering chain. Was she just then the same woman who a short time ago had feared Minnie Birchington's curious eyes? She could scarcely believe it.

He got up from the piano. She too got up. He came up to her, put his hands on her shoulders gently, pressed them, contracting his strong brown fingers, and said, looking down into her eyes:

"How beautiful you are! Mon Dieu! how beautiful you are!"

And her vanity was gratified as it had never been gratified before by all the compliments she had received, by all the longings she had aroused in men.

Still holding her shoulders he said:

"Do something for me to-night."

"What is it? What do you want?"

"Oh, only a very simple thing."

She felt disappointed, but she said nothing.

"Let us dine together to-night! Afterwards I will take you to your hotel and leave you to think."

He smiled down at her.

"I am no longer afraid to let you think. Will you

come?"

"Yes," she said.

"Where was it you were walking to that night when I was so rude as to follow after you?"

"To a restaurant in Soho."

"Yes?"

"To the *Bella Napoli*."

"*Napoli*!"

He half shut his eyes.

"I love Naples. Is it Italian?"

"Yes."

"Really Italian?"

"Yes."

"Let us go there. And before we go I will sing you a street song of Naples."

"You—you are not a Neapolitan?" she asked.

"No. I come from South America. But I know Naples very, very well. Listen!"

And almost laughing, and looking suddenly buffo, he spoke a few sentences in the Neapolitan patois.

"Ah, they are rascals there! But one forgives them because they are happy in their naughtiness, or at any rate they seem happy. And there is nothing like happiness for getting forgiveness. We will be happy to-night, and we shall get forgiven. We will go to the *Bella Napoli*."

She did not say "yes" or "no." She was thinking at that moment of Craven and Adela Sellingworth. It was just possible that they might be there. But if they were? What did it matter? Minnie Birchington had seen her with Arabian. Lady Archie Brooke had seen her. Craven had seen her. And why should she be ashamed. Ought and ought not! Had she ever been

governed in her life and her doing by fear of opinion?

"Do you say yes?" he asked. "Or must you go back to dear Mademoiselle Cronin?"

She shook her head.

"Then what do you say?"

"Yes, I'll go there with you," she answered.

But there was a sound of defiance in her voice, and at that moment she had a feeling that she was going to do something more decisively unconventional, even more dangerous, than she had ever yet done.

If *they* were there! She remembered Craven's look at Arabian. She remembered, too, the change in Arabian's face as Craven had passed them.

But Craven had gone back to Adela Sellingworth. Arabian, perhaps, had been the cause of that return.

"Why do you look like that? What are you thinking of?"

"Naples," she said.

"I will sing you the street song. And then, presently, we will go. I know we must not be too late, or your dear Mademoiselle Cronin will be frightened about you."

He left her, and went once more to the piano.

CHAPTER IV

About seven o'clock that evening Lady Sellingworth was sitting alone in her drawing-room. Sir Seymour Portman had been with her for an hour and had left her at half past six, believing that she was going to spend one of her usual solitary evenings, probably with a book by the fire. He would gladly, even thankfully, have stayed to keep her company. But no suggestion of that kind had been made to him. And, beyond calling regularly at the hour when he believed that he was welcome, he never pressed his company upon his dearly loved friend. Even in his great affection he preserved a certain ceremoniousness. Even in his love he never took a liberty. In modern days he still held to the reserve of the very great gentleman, old-fashioned perhaps now, but nevertheless precious in his sight.

He would have been not a little surprised had he been able to see his Adela at this moment.

She had changed the plain black gown in which she had received him, and was dressed in dark red velvet. She wore a black hat. Two big rubies gleamed in her ears, and there was another, surrounded with diamonds, at her throat. Her gown was trimmed with an edging of some dark fur. As usual her hands were covered by loose white gloves. She was shod for walking out. Her eyebrows had been carefully

darkened. There was some artificial red on her lips. Her white hair was fluffed out under the hat brim, and looked very thick and vital. Her white skin was smooth and even. Her eyes shone, as Cecile had just told her, "*comme deux lampes*." She was a striking figure as she sat on her sofa very upright near a lamp, holding a book in her hand. She even looked very handsome and, of course, very distinguished. But her face was anxious, her bright eyes were uneasy, and there was a perceptible stamp of artificiality upon her. A woman would have noticed it instantly. Even an observant man would probably not have missed it.

She seemed to be reading at first, and presently there was a faint rustle. She had turned a page. But soon she put the book down in her lap, still keeping her hand on it, and sat looking about the room. The clock chimed seven. She moved and sighed. Then again she sat very still like one listening. After a while she lifted the book, glanced at it again, and then put it down, got up and went to the fireplace. She turned on the lights there, leaned forward and looked into the glass. Her face became stern with intentness when she did that. She put up a hand to her hair, turned her head a little to one side, smiled faintly, then a little more, and looked grave, then earnest. Finally she put both her hands on the mantelpiece, grasped it and stared into the glass.

In that moment she was feeling afraid.

She had arranged to dine with Alick Craven once more at the *Bella Napoli*. He would come for her in a few minutes. She was wondering very much how exactly she would appear to him, how old, how good-looking—or plain. She had tried, with Cecile's help, to look her very best. Cecile had declared the result was a success. "*Miladi est merveilleusement belle*

ce soir, mais vraiment belle!" But a maid, of course, would not scruple to lie about such a matter. One could not depend on a maid's word. She was in love with Alick Craven, desperately in love as only an elderly woman can be with a man much younger than herself. And that love made her afraid.

There was a tiny mole on her face, near the mouth. She wished she had had it removed in Geneva. Why had not she had that done? No doubt because she was so accustomed to it that for years she had never thought of it, had never even seen it. Now suddenly she saw it, and it seemed to her noticeable, an ugly blemish. Anyone who looked at her must surely look at it, think of it. For a moment she felt desperate about it, and her whole body was suddenly hot as if a flame went over it. Then the mocking look came into her eyes. She was trying to laugh at herself.

"He doesn't think of me in *that* way! No man will ever think of me in *that* way again!"

But the mocking expression died out and the fear did not go. She was afraid of Craven's young eyes. It was terrible to feel so humble, so full of trembling diffidence. Oh, for a moment of the conquering sensation she had sometimes known in the years long ago when men had made her aware of her power!

Since their meeting in Dindie Ackroyde's drawing-room her friendship with Craven, renewed, had grown into something like intimacy. But there was an uneasiness in it which she felt acutely. There were humbug and fear in this friendship. Because she was desperately in love she was forced to be insincere with Craven. Haunted perpetually by the fear of losing what she had, the liking of a man who was not, and could never be, in love with her, she had to give Craven the impression that she was beyond the

age of love, that the sensations of love were dead in her beyond hope of resurrection. She had to play at detachment when her one desire was to absorb and to be absorbed, had to sustain an appearance of physical coldness while she was burning with physical fever. She had to create a false atmosphere about her, and to do it so cleverly that it seemed absolutely genuine, the emanation of her personality in unstudied naturalness.

Her lack of all affection helped her to deceive. Though in moments she might seem constrained, oddly remote, frigidly detached, she was never affected. Now and then Craven had wondered about her, but he had never guessed that she was acting a part. The charm of her was still active about him, and it was the charm of apparent sincerity. To him so far the false atmosphere seemed real, and he was not aware of the fear.

Lady Sellingworth feared being found out by Craven, and feared what might happen if he found out that she was in love with him. She feared her age and the addition each passing day made to it. She feared her natural appearance, and now strove to conceal it as much as possible without being unskilful or blatant. And she feared the future terribly.

For Time galloped now. She often felt herself rushing towards the abyss of the seventies.

The worst of it all was that in humbug she was never at ease. Instead of, like many women, living comfortably in insincerity, she longed to be sincere. To love as she did and be insincere was abominable to her. To her insincerity now seemed to be the direct contradiction of love. Often when she was deceiving Alick Craven she felt almost criminal.

Perhaps if she had been much younger she might not have been so troubled in the soul by the necessity for constant pretence. But to those who are of any real worth the years bring a growing need of sincerity, a growing hunger which only true things can satisfy. And she knew that need and suffered that hunger.

She was feeling it now as she waited for Craven. She longed to be able to let him see her as she was and to be accepted by him as she was. But he would not accept her. She knew that. He did not want her as she wanted him. He was satisfied with things as they were. She was at a terrible disadvantage with him, for she was in his power, while he was not in hers. He could ruin such happiness as she now had. But she could not ruin his happiness. If he gave her up she would be broken, though probably no one would know it. But if she gave him up he would not mind very much, though no doubt his pride would be hurt. Perhaps, even now, she was only a palliative in his life. Beryl Van Tuyn had evidently treated him badly. He turned to others for some casual consolation.

Lady Sellingworth often wondered painfully what Craven felt about the American girl. Was she only comforting Craven, playing a sort of dear old mother's part to him? Did he come to her because he considered her a skilful binder up of wounds? Could Beryl whenever she chose take him away?

Lady Sellingworth's instinct told her that while she had been abroad Craven and Beryl had travelled in their friendship. But she did not yet know exactly how far Craven had gone. It seemed evident now that Beryl had been suddenly diverted, no doubt by some strong influence, on to another track; Lady Sellingworth knew that she and Craven were no longer meeting. Something had happened which had

interfered with their intimacy. Rumour said that Beryl Van Tuyn was in love with another man, with this Nicolas Arabian, whom nobody knew. Everyone in the Coombe set was talking about it. How keenly did Craven feel this sudden defection? That it had hurt his young pride Lady Sellingworth was certain. But she was not certain whether it had seriously wounded his heart.

"Am I a palliative?" she thought as she gazed into the glass.

And then came the terrible question:

"How can I be anything else?"

She heard the door opening behind her, took her hands from the mantelpiece, and turned round quickly.

"Mr. Craven, my lady."

"You're all ready? Capital! I say, am I late?"

"No. It's only a little past seven."

He had taken her hand. She longed to press his, but she did not press it. He looked at her, she thought, rather curiously.

"I've got a taxi at the door. It's rather a horrid night. You're not dressed for walking?"

Again his look seemed to question her.

She put up a hand to her face, near the mouth, nervously.

"We had better drive. In these winter evenings walking isn't very pleasant. We must be a little less Bohemian in taste, mustn't we?"

He seemed now slightly constrained. His eyes did not rest upon her quite naturally, she thought.

"Shall we go down?" she said.

"Yes, do let us."

As she moved to go she looked into the glass. She could not help doing that. He noticed it, and thought:

"I wonder why she has begun making her face up like this?"

He did not like it. He preferred her as she had been when he had first come to her house on an autumn evening. To him there was something almost distressing in this change which he noticed specially to-night. And her look into the glass had shown him that she was preoccupied about her appearance. Such a preoccupation on her part seemed foreign to her character as he had conceived of it. Her greatest charm had been her extraordinary lack, or apparent lack, of all self-consciousness. She had never seemed to bother about herself, to be thinking of the impression she was making on others.

But she was certainly looking very handsome.

She put on a fur. They got into the cab and drove to Soho.

Craven had ordered the table in the window to be reserved for them. The restaurant was fairly, but not quite, full. The musicians were in their accustomed places looking very Italian. The lustrous *padrona* smiled a greeting to them from her counter. Their bright-eyed waitress hurried up and welcomed them in Italian. Vesuvius erupted at them from the walls. There was a cozy warmth in the unpretentious room, an atmosphere of careless intimacy and good fellowship.

"Let me take off your fur!"

She slipped out of it, and he hung it up on a hook among hats and coats which looked as if they could never have anything to do with it.

"I'll sit with my back to the window," she said. She

sat down, and he sat on her left facing the entrance.

Then the menu was brought, and they began to consult about what they would eat. She did not care what it was, but she pretended to care very much. To do that was part of the game. If only she could think of all this as a game, could take it lightly, merrily! She resolved to make a strong effort to conquer the underlying melancholy which had accompanied her into this new friendship, and which she could not shake off. It came from a lost battle, from a silent and great defeat. She was afraid of it, for it was black and profound beyond all plumbing. Often in her ten years of retirement she had felt melancholy. But this was a new sort of sadness. There was an acrid edge to it. It had the peculiar and subtle terror of a grief that was not caused only by events, but also, and specially, by something within herself.

"Gnocchi—we must have gnocchi!"

"Oh, yes."

"But wait, though! There are ravioli! It would hardly do to have both, I suppose, would it?"

"No; they are too much alike."

"Then which shall we have?"

She was going to say, "I don't mind!" but remembered her role and said:

"Please, ravioli for me."

And she believed that she said it with gusto, as if she really did care.

"For me too!" said Craven.

And he went on considering and asking, with his dark head bent over the menu and his blue eyes fixed upon it.

"There! That ought to be a nice dinner!" he said, at last. "And for wine Chianti, I suppose?"

"Yes, Chianti Rosso," she answered, with the definiteness, she hoped, of the epicure.

This small fuss about what they were going to eat marked for her the severing difference between Craven's mental attitude at this moment and hers. For him this little dinner was merely a pleasant way of spending a casual evening in the company of one who was kind to him, whom he found sympathetic, whom he admired probably as a striking representative of an era that was past, the Edwardian era. For her it was an event full of torment and joy. The joy came from being alone with him. But she was tortured by yearnings which he knew nothing of. He was able to give himself out to her naturally. She was obliged to hold herself in, to conceal the horrible fact that she was obsessed by him, that she was longing to commit sacrifices for him, to take him as her exclusive possession, to surround him with love and worship. He wanted from her what she was apparently giving him and nothing more. She wanted from him all that he was not giving her and would never give her. The dinner would be a tranquil pleasure for him, and a quivering torture for her, mingled with some moments of forgetfulness in which she would have a brief illusion of happiness. She made the comparison and thought with despair of the unevenness of Fate. Meanwhile she was smiling and praising the vegetable soup sprinkled with Parmesan cheese.

One of the musicians came up to their table, and inquired whether the *signora* would like any special thing played. Lady Sellingworth shook her head. She was afraid of their songs of the South, and dared not choose one.

"Anything you like!" she said.

"They are all much the same," she added to Craven.

"But I thought you were so fond of the songs of Naples and the Bay. Don't you remember that first evening when—"

"Yes, I remember," she interrupted him, almost sharply. "But still these songs are really all very much alike. They all express the same sort of thing—Neapolitan desires."

"And not only Neapolitan desires, I should say," said Craven.

At that moment a hard look came into his eyes, a grimness altered his mouth. His face completely changed, evidently under the influence of some sudden and keen gust of feeling. He slightly bent his head, and the colour rose in his cheeks.

Lady Sellingworth who, for the moment, had been wholly intent on Craven, now looked to see what had caused this sudden and evidently uncontrollable exhibition of feeling. She saw two people, a tall girl and a man, walking down the restaurant towards the further end. The girl she immediately recognized.

"Oh—there's Beryl!" she said.

Her heart sank as she looked at Craven.

"Yes," he said.

"Did she see me?"

"I don't know. Probably she did. But she seemed in a hurry."

"Oh! Whom is she with?"

"That fellow they are all talking about, Arabian. At least, I suppose so. Anyhow, it's the fellow I saw in Glebe Place. Ah, there they go with *Sole mio*!"

The musicians were beginning the melody of which Italians never seem to weary. Lady

Sellingworth listened to it as she looked down the long and narrow room now crowded with people. Beryl Van Tuyn was standing by a table near the wall. Lady Sellingworth saw her in profile. Her companion stood beside her with his back to the room. Lady Sellingworth noticed that he was tall with an athletic figure, that he was broad-shouldered, that his head was covered with thickly growing brown hair. He gave her the impression of a strong and good-looking man. She gazed at him with an interest she scarcely understood at that moment, an interest surely more intense than even the gossip she had heard about him warranted.

He helped Miss Van Tuyn out of her coat, then took off his, and went to hang them on a stand against the wall. In doing this he turned, and for a moment showed his profile to Lady Sellingworth. She saw the line of his brown face, his arm raised, his head slightly thrown back.

So that was Nicolas Arabian, the man all the women in the Coombe set were gossiping about! She could not see him very well. He was rather a long way off, and two moving people, a waitress carrying food, an Italian man going to speak to a gesticulating friend, intervened and shut him out from her sight while he was still arranging the coats. But there was something in his profile, something in his movement and in the carriage of his head which seemed familiar to her. And she drew her brows together, wondering. Craven spoke to her through the music. She looked at him, answered him. Then once more she glanced down the room. Beryl and Arabian had sat down. Beryl was facing her. Arabian was at the side. Lady Sellingworth still saw him in profile. He was talking to the waitress.

“I am sure I know that man’s face!” Lady

Sellingworth thought.

And she expressed her thought to Craven.

"If that is Nicolas Arabian I think I must have seen him about London," she said. "His side face seems familiar to me somehow."

Why would not Beryl look at her?

"I wonder whether Beryl saw me when she came in," continued Lady Sellingworth. "She saw you, of course."

"Yes, she saw me."

From the sound of Craven's voice, from the constraint of his manner, Lady Sellingworth gathered the knowledge that her evening was spoilt. A few minutes before she had been quivering with anxiety, had been struggling to conquer the melancholy which, she knew, put her at a disadvantage with Craven, had been seized with despair as she compared her fate with his. Now she looked back at that beginning of the evening and thought of it as happy. For Craven had seemed contented then. Now he was obviously restless, ill at ease. He never looked down the room. He devoted himself to her. He talked even more than usual. But she was aware of effort in it all, and knew that his thoughts were with Beryl Van Tuyn and the stranger who seemed vaguely familiar to her.

Formerly—with what intensity she remembered, visualized, the occasions—Craven had been restless with Beryl Van Tuyn because he wished to be with her; now he was restless with her. And she did not need to ask herself why.

This remembrance made her feel angry in her despair. Her hatred of Beryl revived. She recalled the girl's cruelty to her. Now Beryl had been cruel to Craven. And yet Craven was longing after her. What

was the good of kindness, of the warm heart full of burning desires to be of use, to comfort, to bring joy into a life? The cruel fascinated, perhaps were even loved. Men were bored by any love that was wholly unselfish.

But was her love unselfish? She put that question from her. She felt injured, wounded. It was difficult for her any longer to conceal her misery. But she tried to talk cheerfully, naturally. She forced her lips to smile. She praised the excellence of the cooking, the efforts of the musicians.

Nevertheless the conversation presently languished. There was no spontaneity in it. All around them loud voices were talking volubly in Italian. She glanced from table to table. It seemed to her that everyone was feeling happy and at ease except herself and Craven. They were ill matched. She became horribly self-conscious. She felt as if people were looking at them with surprise, as if an undercurrent of ridicule was creeping through the room. Surely many were wondering who the painted old woman and the young man were, why they sat together in the corner by the window! She saw one of the musicians smile and whisper to the companion beside him, and felt certain he was speaking about her, was smiling, at some ugly thought which he had just put into words.

To an Italian she must certainly seem an old wreck of a woman, "*una vecchia*," an object of contempt, or of smiling pity. She looked down at her red dress, remembered the jewels in her ears and at her throat. How useless and absurd were her efforts to look her best! A terrible phrase of Caroline Briggs came into her mind: "I feel as if I were looking at bones decked out in jewels." And again she was back in Paris ten years ago; again she saw a contrast bizarre as the

contrast she and Craven now presented to the crowd in the restaurant. Before the eyes of her mind there rose an old woman in a black wig and a marvellously handsome young man.

Suddenly a thrill shot through her. It was like a sharp physical pain, a sword-thrust of agony.

That profile which had seemed vaguely familiar to her just now, was it not like his profile? She tried to reason with herself, to tell herself that she was yielding to a crazy fancy, brought about by her nervous excitement and by the mental pain she was suffering. Many men slightly, sometimes markedly, resemble other men. One face seen in profile is often very much like another. But the even dark brown of the complexion! That was not very common, not the type of complexion one sees every day.

She glanced at the men near to her. Most of them were Italians and swarthy. But not one had that peculiar, almost bronze-like darkness.

Beryl had spoken of "a living bronze."

Craven was speaking to her again. She forced herself to reply to him, though she scarcely knew what she was saying. She saw a look of surprise in the eyes which he fixed on her.

"Isn't it getting very hot?" she said quickly.

"It is rather hot. Shall I ask them to open the window a little? But it is just behind you."

"It doesn't matter. I have brought my fan."

She picked the fan up and began to use it unsteadily.

"The room is so very crowded to-night," she murmured.

"Yes. No wonder with such cooking. Here is the Zabaione."

The waitress put two large glasses before them filled with the thick yellow custard, then brought them a plate of biscuits.

Lady Sellingworth laid down the fan and picked up her spoon. She must eat. But she did not know how she was going to force herself to do it. Although she kept on saying to herself: “It’s impossible!” she could not get rid of the horrible suspicion which had assailed her. On the contrary, it seemed to grow in her till it was almost a conviction. She tried to eat tranquilly. She praised the Zabaione. She sipped her Chianti Rosso. But she tasted nothing, and when the musicians struck up another melody she did not know what they were playing.

“Are you tired of it?”

Craven had spoken to her.

“Of what?” she asked, as if almost startled.

“That—Santa Lucia?”

“Oh—is it?”

He looked astonished.

“Oh—yes, I must say I am rather sick of it!” she said quickly.

She laid down her spoon.

“Don’t you like the Zabaione?”

“Yes, it’s delicious. But I have had enough. You ordered such a very good dinner!”

She began to use her fan again. The noise of voices in the room was becoming like the noise of voices in a nightmare. She was longing to confirm or banish her suspicion by a long look at Beryl’s companion. She felt sure now that if she looked again at Arabian she would be absolutely certain, even from a distance, whether he was or was not the man who had brought about the robbery of her jewels at the

Gard du Nord ten years ago. Her mind was fully awake now, and she would be able to see. But, knowing that, she did not dare to look towards Arabian. She was miserable in her uncertainty, but she was afraid of having her horrible suspicion confirmed. She was a coward at that moment, and she knew it.

Craven finished his Zabaione and put down his spoon. They had not ordered another course. The dinner was over. But they had not had their coffee yet, and he asked for it.

"Are you going to smoke a Toscana?" she said, forcing herself to smile.

"Yes, I think I will. Do let me give you a cigarette."

He drew out his case and offered it to her. She took a cigarette, lit it, and began to smoke. Their coffee was brought.

"Oh, it's too hot to drink!" she said, almost irritably.

"But we aren't in a hurry, are we?" he said, looking at her with surprise.

"No, of course not."

Now she was gazing resolutely down at the tablecloth. She was afraid to raise her eyes, was afraid of what they might see. Her whole mind now was bent upon getting away from the restaurant as soon as possible. She had decided to go without making sure whether Arabian was the man who had robbed her or not. Even uncertainty would surely be better than a certainty that might bring in its train necessities too terrible to contemplate mentally.

As she was looking down she did not see something which just then happened in the room. It was this:

Miss Van Tuyn, who had not said a word to Arabian of her friends who were dining by the window, although she guessed that he had probably noticed Alick Craven when they came in, resolved to take a bold step. It was useless any longer to play for concealment. Since she came out to dine in public with Arabian, since he had asked her to marry him and she had not refused—though she had not accepted—since she knew very well that she had not the will power to send him out of her life, she resolved to do what she had not done in Glebe Place and introduce him to Craven. She even decided that if it seemed possible that the two men could get on amicably for a few minutes she would go a step farther; she would introduce Arabian to Adela Sellingworth.

Adela should see that she, Beryl, was absolutely indifferent to what Craven did, or did not do. And Craven should be made to understand that she went on her way happily without him, and not with an old man, though he had chosen as his companion an old woman. And, incidentally, she would put Arabian to the test which had been missed in Glebe Place. With this determination in her mind she said to Arabian:

“There are two friends of mine at the table in the corner by the window.”

“Yes?” he said.

And he turned his head to look.

As he did so, perhaps influenced by his eyes, or by the fact that the attention of two minds was at that moment concentrated on him, Craven looked towards them.

“I want to introduce you to them if possible,” said Miss Van Tuyn.

And she made a gesture to Craven, beckoned to

him to come to her. He looked surprised, reluctant. She saw that he flushed slightly. But she persisted in her invitation. She had lost her head in Glebe Place, but now she would retrieve the situation. Vanity, fear, an obscure jealousy, and something else pushed her on. And she beckoned again. She saw Craven lean over and say something to Lady Sellingworth. Then he got up and came down the room towards her, threading his way among the many tables.

Miss Van Tuyn was looking at him just then and not at Arabian.

Craven came up, looking stiff, almost awkward, and markedly more English than usual. At least she thought so.

"How d'you do, Miss Van Tuyn? How are you?"

She gave him her hand with a smile.

"Very well! You see, I've not forgotten my old haunts. And I see you haven't, either. Let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Arabian. Mr. Craven —Mr. Arabian."

Arabian got up and bowed.

"Pleased to meet you!" he said in a formal voice.

"Good evening!" said Craven, staring hard at him.

"I mustn't ask you to sit down," said Miss Van Tuyn. "As you are tied up with Adela. But"—she hesitated for an instant, then continued with hardihood—"can't you persuade Adela to join us for coffee?"

At this moment Arabian made a movement and opened his lips as if about to say something.

"Yes?" she said, looking at him.

"I was only going to say that these tables are so very small. Is it not so? How should we manage?"

"Oh, we can tuck in somehow."

She turned again to Craven.

"Do ask her. Or we might come over to you."

"Very well!" said Craven, still stiffly.

He glanced round towards the window and started.

"What's the matter?"

Miss Van Tuyn leaned forward and looked.

There was no longer anyone sitting at the table by the window.

Lady Sellingworth had disappeared.

CHAPTER V

"What has become of Adela?" exclaimed Miss Van Tuyn.

"I haven't the least idea," said Craven, looking uncomfortable. "Perhaps—She complained of the heat just now. She may have gone to the door to get some air. Please forgive me!"

He glanced from Miss Van Tuyn to Arabian, who was still standing up stiffly, with a rigidly polite expression on his face.

"I must just see!"

He turned away and walked down the restaurant.

When he got to the counter where the *padrona* sat enthroned he found their waitress standing near it.

"Where is the signora?" he asked.

"The signora took her fur and went out, signorino," said the woman.

"The bill, please!"

"*Ecco, signorino!*"

The woman presented the bill. Craven paid it, tipped her, got his coat and hat, and went hurriedly out.

He expected to find Lady Sellingworth on the doorstep, but no one was there, and he looked down the street, first to the right, then to the left. In the distance on the left he saw the tall figure of a woman walking slowly near a lamp-post, and he hurried down the street.

As his footsteps rang on the pavement the woman turned round, and showed the white face and luminous eyes of Lady Sellingworth.

"You have given me quite a turn, as the servants say!" he exclaimed, coming up to her. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

He looked anxiously at her.

"What made you go away so suddenly? You didn't mind my—"

"No, no!" she interrupted. "But I do feel unwell. I feel very unwell."

"I'm most awfully sorry! Why didn't you tell me? Why did you let me leave you?"

"Beryl wanted you."

"It was only—she only wanted to suggest our all having coffee together."

Her mouth went awry.

"Oh, do take my arm!" he exclaimed. "What is it? Are you suffering?"

After a pause she said:

"Yes."

There seemed to him something ominous in the sound of the word as she spoke it.

"I'm horribly sorry. I must find you a cab."

"Yes, please do."

"But in Soho, it's so difficult! Can you manage—can you walk a little way?"

"Oh yes."

"Directly we get into Shaftesbury Avenue we are sure to see one. It's only a step."

She had taken his arm, but she did not lean heavily on it, only just touched it. He hardly felt the weight of her hand. Evidently she was not feeling faint, or very weak. He wondered intensely what was the matter. But she did not give any explanation. She had made that ominous answer to his question, and there she left it. He did not dare to make any further inquiry, and as she said nothing they walked on in silence. As they were turning into Shaftesbury Avenue an empty taxicab passed them with the flag up.

"There's a taxi!" said Craven. "One minute!"

He let her arm go and ran after it, while she stood waiting at the corner. In a moment he came back followed by the cab, which drew up by the kerb. He opened the door and she got in. He was preparing to follow her when she leaned forward and put her hand on the door.

"Mayn't I? Don't you wish me to come with you?"

She shook her head.

"But do let me see you home. If you are ill you really oughtn't to be alone."

"But I'm spoiling your evening. Why not go back?"

"Go back?"

"Yes—go back to Beryl?"

He stiffened, and the hard look came into his face. She saw his jaw quiver slightly.

"To Miss Van Tuyn? But she is with someone."

"But she asked you!"

"She asked both of us. I shall certainly not go back alone."

"Really, I wish you would! Go back and—and see Beryl home."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly do that! There was no suggestion—I couldn't do that, really. I wonder you ask me to. Well—"

She took her hand away from the door and he shut it. But he remained beside it—did not give the chauffeur her address.

"Why won't you let me take you back?" he said. "I don't understand."

She smiled, and he thought it was the saddest smile he had ever seen.

"One is only a bore to others when one is ill," she said. "Good-bye. Tell the man, please."

He obeyed her, then took off his hat. His face was grim and perplexed. As she was driven away in the night she gave him a strange look; tragic and pleading, he thought, a look that almost frightened him, that sent a shiver through him.

"Is she horribly ill?" he asked himself. "What can it be? Perhaps she did go to Switzerland to see a doctor. Perhaps . . . can he have condemned her to death?"

He shivered again. The expression of her eyes

haunted him.

He stood for a moment at the street corner, pondering over her words. What could have induced her to ask him to go back to Beryl Van Tuyn, to see Beryl Van Tuyn home? She wanted him to interfere between Miss Van Tuyn and that man, Nicolas Arabian! She tried metaphorically to push him towards Miss Van Tuyn. It was inexplicable. Lady Sellingworth was a woman of the world, past mistress of all the *convenances*, one in whom any breach of good manners was impossible, unthinkable! And yet she had asked him to go back to the restaurant, and to thrust himself into the company of a girl and a man who were dining by themselves. She had even asked him, a young fellow, certainly younger than Beryl Van Tuyn's escort, to play the part of chaperon to the girl!

Did she—could she know something about Arabian?

Certainly she did not know him. In the restaurant she had inquired who he was. But, later, she had said that his profile seemed familiar to her, that perhaps she had seen him about London. Her departure from the restaurant had been strangely abrupt. Perhaps—could she have recognized Arabian after he, Craven, had left her alone and had gone to speak to Miss Van Tuyn? The man looked a wrong 'un. Craven felt certain he was a wrong 'un. But if so, surely Lady Sellingworth could not know him, or even know anything about him. There was something so remote and distinguished about her life, her solitary, retired life. She did not come in contact with such people.

"Get you a kib, gentleman?" said a soft cockney voice in Craven's ear.

He started, and walked on quickly. In Lady

Sellingworth's conduct that night, in the last look she had given him, there was mystery. He was quite unable to fathom it, and he went home to his flat in the greatest perplexity, and feeling very uneasy.

When Murgatroyd opened the door to his mistress it was not much after nine, and he was surprised to see her back so early and alone.

"Tea, please, Murgatroyd!" she said.

"Yes, my lady."

She passed by him and ascended the big staircase. He heard her go into the drawing-room and shut the door.

When, a few minutes later, he brought in the tea, she was standing by the fire. She had taken off her big hat and laid it on a table.

"I shall want nothing more. Good night."

"Good night, my lady."

He went towards the door. When he was just going out he heard her say, "Murgatroyd!" and turned.

"My lady!"

"Please let Cecile know I shan't want her to-night. She is not to sit up for me. I'll manage for myself."

"Yes, my lady."

"Make it quite understood, please."

"Certainly, my lady."

He went out and shut the door.

When she was quite alone Lady Sellingworth stood for several minutes by the fire quite still, with her head bent down and her hands folded together. Then she went to the tea table, poured out a cup of tea, sat down and sipped it slowly, looking into vacancy with the eyes of one whose real gaze was turned inwards upon herself. She finished the tea, sat still for a little

while, then got up, went to the writing-table, sat before it, took a pen and a sheet of note-paper, and began slowly to write.

She wrote first at the top of the sheet in the left-hand corner, “Strictly private,” and underlined the words. Then she wrote:

“DEAR BERYL,—Please consider this letter absolutely private and personal. I rely on your never speaking of it to anyone, and I ask you to burn it directly you have read it. Although I hate more than anything else interfering in the private affairs of another, I feel that it is my absolute duty to send this to you. I am a very much older woman than you—indeed, almost an old woman. I know the world very well—too well—and I feel I can ask you to trust me when I give you a piece of advice, however unpleasant it may seem at the moment. You were dining to-night alone with a man who is totally unfit to be your companion, or the companion of any decent woman. I cannot explain to you how I know this, nor can I tell you why he is unfit to be in any reputable company. But I solemnly assure you—I give you my word—that I am telling you the truth. That man is a blackguard in the full acceptation of the word. I believe you met him by chance in a studio. I am quite positive that you know nothing whatever about him. I do. I know—”

She hesitated, leaning over the paper with the pen lifted, frowning painfully and with a look of fear in her eyes. Then her face hardened in an expression of white resolution, and she wrote:

“I know that he ought to be in prison. He is beyond the pale. You must never be seen with him again. I have said nothing of this to anyone. Mr. Craven has not a suspicion of it. Nor has anyone else

whom we know. Drop that man at once. I don't think he will ask you for your reason. His not doing so will help to prove to you that I am telling you the truth. —Yours sincerely,

"ADELA SELLINGWORTH."

When she had finished this letter Lady Sellingworth read it over carefully twice, then put it into an envelope and wrote on the envelope Beryl's address, and in the corner "strictly private." But having done this she did not fasten the envelope, though she lit a red candle that was on the table and took up a stick of sealing-wax. Again hesitation seized her.

The written word remains. Might it not be very dangerous to send this letter? Suppose Beryl did show it to that man who called himself Nicolas Arabian? He might—it was improbable, but he might —bring an action for libel against the writer. Lady Sellingworth sickened as she thought of that, and rapidly she imagined a hideous scandal, all London talking of her, the Law Courts, herself in the witness-box, cross-examination. What evidence could she give to prove that the accusation she had written was true?

But surely Beryl would not show the letter. It would be dishonourable to show it, and though she could be very cruel Lady Sellingworth did not believe that Beryl was a dishonourable girl. But if she was in love with that man? If she was under his influence? Women in love, women under a spell, are capable of doing extraordinary things. Lady Sellingworth knew that only too well. She remembered her own madnesses, the madnesses of women she had known, women of the "old guard." And Arabian had fascination. She had felt it long

ago. And Beryl was young and had wildness in her.

It might be very dangerous to send that letter.

But if she did not send it, what was she going to do? She could not leave things as they were, could not just hold her peace. To do that would be infamous. And she could not be infamous. She felt the obligation of age. Beryl had been cruel to her, but she could not leave the girl in ignorance of the character of Arabian. If she did something horrible might happen, would almost certainly happen. Beryl was very rich now, and no doubt that man knew it. The death of her father had been put in all the papers. There had been public chatter about the fortune he had left. Men like Arabian knew what they were about. They worked with deliberation, worked according to plan. And Beryl was beautiful as well as rich.

Things could not be left as they were.

If she did not send that letter Lady Sellingworth told herself that she would have to see Beryl and speak to her. She would have to say what she had written. But that would be intolerable. The girl would ask questions, would insist on explanations, would demand to be enlightened. And then—As she sat by the writing-table, plunged in thought, Lady Sellingworth lost all count of time. But at last she took the sealing-wax, put it to the candle flame, and sealed up the letter. She had resolved that she would take the risk of sending it. Anything was better than seeing Beryl, than speaking about this horror. And Beryl would surely not be dishonourable.

Having sealed the letter Lady Sellingworth took it with her upstairs. She had decided to leave it herself at Claridge's Hotel on the morrow.

But after a wretched night she was again seized by

hesitation. A devil came and tempted her, asking her what business this was of hers, why she should interfere in this matter. Beryl was audacious, self-possessed, accustomed to take her own way, to live as she chose, to know all sorts and conditions of men. She was not an ignorant girl, inexperienced in the ways of the world. She knew how to take care of herself. Why not destroy the letter and just keep silence? She had really no responsibility in this matter. Beryl was only an acquaintance who had tried to harm her happiness. And then the tempter suggested to her that by taking any action she must inevitably injure her own life. He brought to her mind thoughts of Craven. If she let Beryl alone the fascination of Arabian might work upon the girl so effectually that Craven would mean nothing to her any more; but if she sent the letter, or spoke, and Beryl heeded the warning, eventually, perhaps very soon, Beryl would turn again to Craven.

By warning Beryl Lady Sellingworth would very probably turn a weapon upon herself. And she realized that fully. For she had no expectation of real gratitude from the girl expressing itself in instinctive unselfishness.

“I should merely make an enemy by doing it,” she thought. “Or rather two enemies.”

And she locked the letter up. She thought she would do nothing. But as the day wore on she was haunted by a feeling of self-hatred. She had done many wrong things in her life, but certain types of wrong things she had never yet done. Her sins had been the sins of what is called passion. There had been strong feeling behind them, prompting desire, a flame, though not always the purest sort of flame. She had not been a cold sinner. Nor had she been a contemptible coward. Now she was beset by an ugly

sensation of cowardice which made her ill at ease with herself. She thought of Seymour Portman. He was able to love her, to go on loving her. Therefore, in spite of all her caprices, in spite of all she had done, he believed in that part of her which men have agreed to call character. She could not love him as he wished, but she had an immeasurable respect for him. And she knew that above all the other virtues he placed courage, moral and physical. Noblesse oblige. He would never fail. He considered it an obligation on those who were born in what he still thought of as the ruling class to hold their heads high in fearlessness. And in her blood, too, ran something of the same feeling of obligation.

If she put her case before Seymour what would he tell her to do? To ask that question was to answer it. He would not even tell. He would not think it necessary to do that. She could almost hear his voice saying: “There’s only one thing to be done.”

She was loved by Seymour; she simply could not be a coward.

And she unlocked the box in which the letter was lying, and ordered her car to come round.

“Please drive to Claridge’s!” she said as she got into it.

On the way to the hotel she kept saying to herself: “Seymour! Seymour! It’s the only thing to do. It’s the only thing to do.”

When the car stopped in front of the hotel she got out and went herself to the bureau.

“Please give this to Miss Van Tuyn at once. It is very important.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Is she in?”

"I'm not sure, my lady, but I can soon—"

"No, no, it doesn't matter. But it is really important."

"It shall go up at once my lady."

"Thank you."

As Lady Sellingworth got into her car she felt a sense of relief.

"I've done the right thing. Nothing else matters."

CHAPTER VI

Miss Van Tuyn was not in the hotel when Lady Sellingworth called. She did not come back till late, and when she entered the hall she was unusually pale, and looked both tired and excited. She had been to Dick Garstin on an unpleasant errand, and she had failed in achieving what she had attempted to bring about. Garstin had flatly refused not to exhibit Arabian's portrait. And she had been obliged to tell Arabian of his refusal.

The man at the bureau gave her Lady Sellingworth's note, and she took it up with her to her sitting-room. As she sat down to read it she noticed the words on the envelope, "Strictly private," and wondered what it contained. She did not recognize the handwriting as Adela's. She took the letter out of the envelope and saw again the warning words.

"What can it be about?"

Before she read further she felt some unpleasant information was in store for her, and for a moment she hesitated. Then she looked at the address on the paper: “18A Berkeley Square.”

It was from Adela! She frowned. She felt hostile, already on the defensive, though she had, of course, no idea what the letter was about. But when she had read it her cheeks were scarlet, and she crushed the paper up in her hand.

“How dare she write to me like that! I don’t believe it. I don’t believe a word of it! She only wants to take him away from me as she is trying to take Alick Craven.”

Instantly she had come to a conclusion about Adela’s reason for writing that letter. She remembered the strange episode in the *Bella Napoli* on the previous evening—Adela’s extraordinary departure when Craven had come to speak to her and Arabian. She had not seen Craven again. There had been no explanation of that flight. In this letter, between the lines, she read the explanation. Adela must know Arabian, must have had something to do with him in the past. They had, perhaps, even been lovers. She did not know the age of Arabian, but she guessed that he was about thirty-five, perhaps even thirty-eight. Adela was sixty now. They might have been lovers when Arabian was quite young, perhaps almost a boy. At that time Adela had been a brilliant and conquering beauty, middle-aged certainly, over forty, but still beautiful, still full of charm, still bent on conquest. Miss Van Tuyn remembered the photograph of Adela which she had seen at Mrs. Ackroyde’s. Yes, that was it. Adela knew Arabian. They had been lovers. And now, out of jealousy, she had written this abominable letter.

But the girl read it again, and began to wonder. It was strangely explicit, even for a letter of a jealous and spiteful woman. It told her that Arabian was beyond the pale, that he ought to be in prison. In prison! That was going very far in attack. To write that, unless it were true, was to write an atrocious libel. But a jealous woman would do anything, risk anything to "get her own back."

Nevertheless Miss Van Tuyn felt afraid. This strange and terrible letter dovetailed with Dick Garstin's warning, and both fitted in as it were with the underthings in her own mind, with those things which Garstin had summed up in one word "intuition."

Arabian had taken her news about Garstin quite coolly.

"I will see about that myself," he had said. "But now—"

And then he had made passionate love to her. There had been—she had noticed it all through her visit—a new pressure in his manner, a new and, as she now began to think, almost desperate authority in his whole demeanour. His long reticence, the reserve which had puzzled and alarmed her, had given place to a frankness, a heat, which had almost swept her away. She still tingled at the memory of what she had been through. But now she began to think of it with a certain anxiety. In spite of her anger against Adela her brain was beginning to work with some of its normal calmness.

Arabian had been very slow in advances. But now was not he like a man in great haste, like a man who wished to bring something to a conclusion rapidly, if possible immediately? Passion for her, perhaps, drove him on now that at last he had spoken, had

held her in his arms. But suppose he had another reason for haste? He had seen Lady Sellingworth. He knew that she was a friend of the girl he wanted to marry. Miss Van Tuyn remembered that he had not welcomed her suggestion that the two couples, he and she, Lady Sellingworth and Craven, should have coffee together. He had spoken of the smallness of the tables in the *Bella Napoli*. But that might have been because he was jealous of Craven.

She read the letter a third time, very slowly and carefully. Then she put it back into its envelope and rang the bell.

A waiter came.

"It's about seven, isn't it?" she said.

"Half past seven, madam."

"Please bring me up some dinner at once—anything. Bring me a sole and an omelette. That will do. But I want it as soon as possible."

"Yes, madame."

The waiter went out. Then Miss Van Tuyn went to see old Fanny, and explained that she must dine alone that evening as she was in a hurry.

"I have to go to Berkeley Square directly after dinner to visit a friend, Lady Sellingworth."

"Then I am to dine by myself, dear?" said Miss Cronin plaintively.

"Yes, you must dine alone. Good night, Fanny."

"Shan't I see you when you come in?"

"I may be late. Don't bother about me."

She went out and shut the door, leaving old Fanny distressed. Something very serious was certainly happening. Beryl looked quite unusual, so strung up, so excited. What could be the matter? If only they could get back to Paris! There everything went so

differently! There Beryl was always in good spirits. The London atmosphere seemed to hold poison. Even Bourget's spell was lessened in this city of darkness and strange inexplicable perturbations.

That night, about a quarter to nine when Lady Sellingworth had just finished her solitary dinner and gone up to the drawing-room, a footman came in and said:

"Will you see Miss Van Tuyn, my lady? She has called and is in the hall. She begs you to see her for a moment."

Two spots of red appeared in Lady Sellingworth's white cheeks. For a moment she hesitated. A feeling almost of horror had come to her, a longing for instant flight. She had not expected this. She did not know what exactly she had expected, but it had certainly not been this.

"Did you say I was in?" she said, at last.

The footman—a new man in the house—looked uncomfortable.

"I said your Ladyship was not out, but that I did not know whether your Ladyship was at home to anyone."

After another pause Lady Sellingworth said:

"Please ask Miss Van Tuyn to come up."

As she spoke she got up from her sofa. She felt that she could not receive Beryl sitting, that she must stand to confront what was coming to her with the girl.

The footman went out and almost immediately returned.

"Miss Van Tuyn, my lady."

"Do forgive me, Adela!" said Miss Van Tuyn, coming in with her usual graceful self-possession and

looking, Lady Sellingworth thought in that first moment, quite untroubled. “This is a most unorthodox hour. But I knew you were often alone in the evening, and I thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind seeing me for a few minutes.”

She took Lady Sellingworth’s hand and started. For the hand was cold. Then she looked round and saw that the footman had left the room. The big door was shut. They were alone together.

“Of course you know why I’ve come, Adela,” she said. “I’ve had your letter.”

As she spoke she drew it out of the muff she was carrying.

“I was obliged to write it,” said Lady Sellingworth. “It was my duty to write it.”

“Yes?”

“But I don’t want to discuss it.”

They were both still standing. Now Miss Van Tuyn said;

“Do you mind if I sit down?”

“No; do sit.”

“And may I take off my coat?”

Lady Sellingworth was obliged to say:

“Yes, do.”

Very composedly and rather slowly Miss Van Tuyn took off her fur coat, laid aside her muff, and sat down near the fire.

“I’m very sorry, Adela, but really, we must discuss this letter,” she said. “I don’t understand it.”

“Surely it is explicit enough.”

“Yes. It is too explicit not to be discussed between us.”

“Beryl, I don’t want to discuss it. I can’t discuss it.”

"Why not?"

"Because it is too painful—a horrible subject. You must take my word for it that I have written you the plain truth."

"Please don't think I doubt your word, Adela."

"No, of course not. And that being so let the matter end there. It must end there."

"But—where? I don't quite understand really."

"I felt obliged to send you a warning, a very serious warning. I greatly disliked, I hated doing it. But I couldn't do otherwise. You are young—a girl. I am an—I am almost an old woman. We have been friends. I saw you in danger. What could I do but tell you of it? I knew of course you were quite innocent in the matter. I am putting no blame whatever on you. You will do me that justice."

"Oh, yes."

"So there is nothing more to discuss. I have done what I was bound to do, and I know you will heed my warning."

She looked at the letter in Beryl's hand, and remembered her feeling of danger when she wrote it.

"And now please burn that letter, Beryl. Throw it into the fire."

As she spoke she pointed to the fire on the hearth. But Miss Van Tuyn kept the letter in her hand.

"Please wait a minute, Adela!" she said.

And a mutinous look came into her face.

"You don't quite understand how things are. It's all very well to think you can make me give up my friend—any friend of mine—at a moment's notice and at a word from you. But I don't see things quite in the same light."

"That—that man isn't your friend. Don't say that."

"But I do say it," said the girl, with a now intense obstinacy.

"You met him in Mr. Garstin's studio, didn't you?"

"Perhaps I did. There is nothing against him in that."

"I do not say there is. But I do say you know nothing about him."

"But how do you know that? You assume a great deal, Adela."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Suppose I were to ask you questions in my turn?"

"Questions? But I have told you—"

"Yes, you have told me certain things, but you have explained nothing. You seem to expect everything from me. Am I not to expect anything from you?"

"Anything! But what?"

"An explanation, surely."

Lady Sellingworth was silent. She was still standing. The two spots of red still glowed in her white face. Her eyes looked like the eyes of one who was in dread. They had lost their usual expression of self-command, and resembled the eyes of a creature being hunted. Miss Van Tuyn saw that and wondered. A fierce animosity woke in her and made her more obstinate, more determined to get at the truth of this mystery. She would not leave this house until light was given to her. She had a strong will. It was now fully roused, and she was ready to pit it against Adela's will. And she had another weapon in her armoury. She was now very angry, with an anger which she did not fully understand, and which was made up of several elements. One of these elements

was certainly passion. This anger rendered her merciless.

"Well, Adela?" she said at length, as Lady Sellingworth did not speak.

"What is it you want, Beryl?" said Lady Sellingworth, looking into her eyes and then quickly away.

"But I have told you—an explanation."

She unfolded the letter slowly.

"I can't give you one. I have told you the truth, and I ask you to accept it, and I beg, I implore you to act upon it."

"Suppose I were to make a violent attack on one of your friends, on Mr. Craven for instance?"

"Please don't bracket Mr. Craven and that man together!" said Lady Sellingworth sharply.

Beryl Van Tuyn flushed with anger.

"But I do!" she said. "I choose to do that for the sake of argument."

"Two such men have nothing in common, nothing! One is a gentleman, the other is a blackguard!"

Miss Van Tuyn thought of the previous evening, when Lady Sellingworth had dined with Craven while she had dined with Arabian, and she was stung to the quick.

"I cannot allow you to speak like this of a friend of mine without an explanation," she said bitterly. "And now"—she spoke more hurriedly, as if fearing to be interrupted—"I will finish what I was going to say, if you will allow me. Suppose I were to make an attack on, say, Mr. Craven, to tell you that I happened to know he was thoroughly bad, immoral, a liar, anything you like. Do you mean to say you would give him up at once without insisting on knowing

from me my exact reasons for branding him as unfit for your company? Of course you wouldn't. And not only you! No one would do such a thing who had any courage or any will in them."

She lifted the letter.

"In this letter you say that Mr. Arabian is unfit to be the companion of any decent woman, that he is a blackguard in the full acceptance of the word, that he is beyond the pale, and finally, that he ought to be in prison. Very well! I don't say for a moment that I doubt your word, but I do ask you to justify it. Of course I know that you easily can. Otherwise I am sure that you would never have written such awful accusations against anyone. It would be too wicked, and I know you are not wicked. Please tell me your exact reason for writing this letter, Adela."

"I can't."

"You really mean that?"

"I won't. It's impossible."

Miss Van Tuyn's face became very hard.

"Well, then, Adela—"

She paused. Suddenly there had come into her mind the thought of a possible way of forcing the confidence which Lady Sellingworth refused to give her. Should she take it? She hesitated. Arabian's will was upon her even here in this quiet drawing-room. His large eyes seemed fixed upon her. She still felt the long and soft touch of his lips clinging to hers like the lips of a thirsty man. Would he wish her to take this way? For a moment she felt afraid of him. But then her strong independence of an American girl rose up to combat this imaginative, almost occult, domination. Arabian himself, his fate perhaps, was concerned in this matter. She could not, she would not allow even Arabian, whose will

imposed itself on hers, who had gathered her strangely, mysteriously, into a grip which she felt almost like a thing palpable upon her, to prevent her from finding out the truth which Lady Sellingworth seemed resolved to keep from her. She still believed, indeed she felt practically certain, that Lady Sellingworth and Arabian in the past had been lovers. Her jealousy was furiously awake. She felt reckless of consequences and ready to take any course which would bring to her what she needed, full knowledge of what had led Adela Sellingworth to send her that letter.

Lady Sellingworth was looking at her now steadily, with, she thought, a sort of almost fierce pleading. But she cared very little for Adela's feelings just then.

"You really refuse to tell me?"

"I must, Beryl."

"I don't think that's fair. It isn't fair to me or to him."

"I can't help that. Please don't ask me anything more. And please destroy that letter. Or let me destroy it."

She held out her hand, but Miss Van Tuyn sat quite still.

"I must tell you something," she said. "If you will not explain to me I think I ought to go for an explanation to someone else."

"Someone else!" said Lady Sellingworth in a startled voice. "But—do you know—to whom would you go?"

"I think I ought to go to him, to the man you accuse of nameless things."

"But you can't do that!"

"Why not? It would only be fair."

"But what reason could you give?"

"Naturally I should have to say that you had warned me against him."

"No—no, you mustn't do that."

"Really? I am to be bound hand and foot while you —"

"You saw what I wrote in that letter."

"Yes, of course. Naturally I will not show it. But I shall have to say that you warned me to drop him."

"I can't have my name mentioned to that man," said Lady Sellingworth desperately.

"And I can't drop him without telling him why."

"Beryl, you haven't read to the end of my letter."

"But I have!"

"Then have you forgotten it? Look! I wrote in it that I don't think he will ask for your reason if you refuse to see him again."

"That only proves how little you know about him. I shall not do it, Adela. You are not very frank with me, but I am sincere with you. Either you must give me an explanation of your reason for writing this letter, or you must give me permission to tell Mr. Arabian of your warning, or—if you won't do either the one or the other—I shall take no action because of this letter. I shall behave as if I had never received it and read it."

"Beryl! What reason could I have for writing as I have written if I had nothing against this man?"

"I don't know. It is very difficult to understand the reasons women have for doing what they do. But I have come here to ask you what your reason is. That's why I am here now."

"Could I have a bad reason, a selfish reason?"

"How can I tell?"

"Then have you a bad opinion of me, of my character?"

"I have always admired you very much. You know that."

"Once—once you called me a book of wisdom."

"Did I?"

"Don't you remember?"

"I dare say I did."

"And I think you meant of worldly wisdom. Then can't you, won't you, trust my opinion of this man?"

"Oh if it's only your opinion!"

"But it is not. It is knowledge."

"Then you know Mr. Arabian?"

"I didn't say that."

"Do you know him?"

Lady Sellingworth turned away for a moment. She stood with her back to Miss Van Tuyn and her face towards the fire, holding the mantelpiece with her right hand. Miss Van Tuyn, motionless, stared at her tall figure. She felt this was a real battle between herself and her friend, or enemy. She was determined to win it somehow. She still had a weapon in reserve, the weapon she had thought of just now when she had resolutely put away her fear of Arabian. But perhaps she would not be forced to use it, perhaps she could overcome Adela's extraordinary resistance without it. As she looked at the woman turned from her she began to think that might be possible. Adela was surely weakening. This pause, this sudden moving away, this long hesitation suggested weakness. At last Lady Sellingworth turned round.

"You ask me whether I know that man."

"I asked you whether you knew *Mr. Arabian*!" said Miss Van Tuyn, on a note of acute exasperation.

"I don't know him."

"That is a lie!" said Miss Van Tuyn to herself.

To Lady Sellingworth she said:

"Then if you don't know Mr. Arabian you are only repeating hearsay."

"No!"

"But you must be!"

"I am not."

"Adela, you are incomprehensible, or else I must be densely stupid. One or the other!"

"One may know things about a man's character and life without being personally acquainted with him."

"Then it's hearsay. I am not going to drop Mr. Arabian because of hearsay, more especially when I don't even know what the hearsay is."

"It is not hearsay."

"It doesn't come from other people?"

"No."

"Then"—a sudden thought struck her—"is it from the newspapers? Has he ever been in some case, some scandal, that's been in the newspapers?"

"Not that I know of. It isn't that."

"Really this is like the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,'" said Miss van Tuyn, concealing her anger and her burning curiosity under a pretence of petulance. "And I really can't take it seriously."

"But you must, Beryl. You must!"

Lady Sellingworth came to her quickly and sat

down beside her.

"I know my conduct must seem very strange."

"It does, indeed!"

"And I dare say all sorts of suspicions, ugly suspicions perhaps, have come into your mind. But try to put them away. Try to believe that I am honestly doing my best to be a friend to you, a true friend."

"Forgive me, Adela, for being brutally frank with you. But I don't think you care very much for me."

"I wrote that letter against my own desire simply because I thought I ought to. I wrote it simply for your sake. I would have given a great deal not to write it. I knew that there was even danger in writing it."

"What danger?"

"It was possible that you might disregard my request and show my letter. I felt practically certain you wouldn't, but you might have done so."

"And if I had?"

"If you had—then—but I only tell you this to prove that in this instance I was trying to be a friend to you."

"If I had shown this letter, or if I were to show it to Mr. Arabian he might bring an action for libel on it, I should think."

"I dare say he could do that."

"Well—but if you could justify!"

"But I couldn't!"

"You couldn't! You write me a libel about a friend of mine which you yourself say you couldn't justify!"

"I can't bear to hear you speak of that man as your friend."

"He is my friend. I like him very much indeed. And I know him, have known him for weeks, while you tell me you don't know him. I shall venture to set my knowledge, my personal knowledge, against your ignorance, Adela, and to go on with my friendship. But you need not be afraid." She smiled contemptuously. "I will not show Mr. Arabian this cruel letter which you yourself say you couldn't justify."

As she spoke she returned the letter to her muff, which was lying on a table beside her.

"Well," she added, "I don't know that there is anything more I need say. I came here to have it out with you. That is my way, perhaps an American way, of doing things. We don't care for underhand dealings. We like things fair and square."

She got up.

"You have your way of doing things and we have ours! I'll tell you what mine would have been, Adela, if the situation had been reversed. I should not have written at all. I should have come to see you, and if I had had some grave, hideous charge to make I should have made it, and fully explained my reasons for making it to you. I should have put you in the same state of complete knowledge as I was in. That is my idea of friendship and fair dealing. But you think otherwise. So what is the good of our arguing any more about the matter?"

Lady Sellingworth was still sitting. For a moment she did not move, but remained where she was looking up at the girl. Just then she was assailed by a fierce temptation. After all, had not she done her part? Had not she done all that anyone could expect from her, from any woman under the existing circumstances? Had not she done even much more

than many women could have brought themselves to do? Beryl had not been very kind to her. Beryl was really the enemy of her happiness, of her poor little attempt after happiness. And yet she had taken a risk in order to try and save Beryl from danger. And the girl would not be saved. Headstrong, wilful, embittered, she refused to be saved. Then why not let her go? She had been warned. She chose to defy the warning. That was not Lady Sellingworth's fault.

"I've done enough! I've done all I can do."

She said this to herself as she sat and looked at the girl.

"I can't do any more!"

Miss Van Tuyn reached out for her coat and began very deliberately to put it on. Then she picked up the muff in which the letter lay hidden.

"Well, good night, Adela!"

Lady Sellingworth got up slowly.

"I promise that I will not show your letter. So don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid."

Miss Van Tuyn held out her hand.

"No doubt you have your reasons for doing what you have done. I don't pretend to understand them. And I don't understand you. But women are often incomprehensible to me. Perhaps that is why I usually prefer men. They don't plunge you in subtleties. They let you understand things."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Sellingworth.

And there was a passion of acute irony in the exclamation.

"What's the matter?" said Miss Van Tuyn, looking surprised, almost startled.

But Lady Sellingworth did not tell her.

"If you will go like this, Beryl—go!" she said. "I cannot force you to do, or not to do, anything. But"—she laid a hand on the girl's arm and pressed it till her hand almost hurt Beryl—"but I tell you that you are in danger, in great danger. I dread to think of what may be in store for you."

Something in the grasp of her hand, in her manner, in her eyes, impressed Miss Van Tuyn in spite of herself. Again fear, a fear mysterious and cold, crept in her. Garstin had warned her in his way. Now Adela was warning her. And she remembered that other warning whispered by something within herself. She stood still looking into Lady Sellingworth's eyes. Then she looked down. She seemed to be considering something. At last she looked up again and said:

"You said to me to-night that you did not know Mr. Arabian—now."

"I don't know him."

"But have you known him? Did you know him long ago?"

"I have never known him."

"Then I don't understand. And—and I will not act in ignorance. It isn't fair to expect me to do that."

"I have done all that I can do," said Lady Sellingworth, with a sort of despair, taking her hand from the girl's arm.

"Very well."

Beryl moved and went slowly towards the door. Lady Sellingworth stood looking after her. She thought the hideous interview was over. But she did not know Beryl even yet, did not realize even yet the passionate force of curiosity which possessed Beryl at

this moment. When the girl was not far from the door, and when Lady Sellingworth was reaching out her hand to touch the bell in order that the footman might know that her visitor was leaving her, Beryl turned round.

"Adela!" she said.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Perhaps you think that I have been very persistent to-night, that I have almost cross-examined you."

"I don't blame you. It is natural that you wished to know more."

"Yes, it is natural, because Mr. Arabian wants me to marry him."

"To marry him!"

Lady Sellingworth started forward impulsively.

"Marry? He wants—you—you—"

"He loves me. He has asked me to marry him."

She turned away, and went to the door and opened it.

"Beryl, come here!"

"Why?"

"Beryl!"

"But what is the good? You refuse to tell me anything, I tell you everything. Now you understand why I feel angry at these horrible accusations."

"You don't mean to tell me you have ever dreamed of marrying such a man!"

"Don't abuse him! I don't wish to hear him abused. I hate it. I won't have it."

"But—Beryl! But only a few days ago you as good as told me you cared for Alick Craven. You—you gave me to understand that you liked him very much, that you—"

"Oh, this is intolerable!" said Miss Van Tuyn. "Really! Why do you interfere in my life like this? What have I done to set you against me? You talk of being my friend, but you do everything you can to upset my happiness. It is enough that I like anyone for you to try to come between us. First it was Alick Craven! Now it is Mr. Arabian! It is unbearable. You have had your life. You have had a splendid life, everything any woman could wish to have. I am a girl. I am only beginning. Why can't you leave me alone? Why can't you let me have some happiness without thrusting yourself in and trying to spoil everything for me? Won't you ever have had enough? Ever since I have known Mr. Craven you have tried to get him away from me. And now you are doing your best to make me give up a man who loves me and wants to marry me."

"Beryl! Please!"

"No, I will not bear it. I will not! I admired you. I had a cult for you. Everyone knew it. I went about praising you, telling everyone you were the most wonderful woman I had ever known. You can ask anybody. People used to laugh at me about my infatuation for you. I stood up for you always. They told me—but I wouldn't believe!"

"What did they tell you?"

"Never mind. But now I begin to believe it is true. You can't bear to see other women happy. That's what it is."

"Beryl, it isn't that! No, it isn't that!"

"You have had it all. But that doesn't satisfy you. You want to prevent other women from having any of the happiness that you can't have now. It is cruel. I never thought you were like that. I took you as a pattern of what a woman of your age should be. I

looked up to you. I would have come to you for counsel, for advice. You were my book of wisdom. I thought you were far above all the pettinesses that disfigure other women, the women who hate us girls, who want to snatch everything from us. And now you are trying to do me more harm than any other woman has ever tried to do me!"

"I—I will prove to you that it isn't so!" said Lady Sellingworth. "Please shut the door."

Miss Van Tuyn obeyed.

"But—but—first tell me something."

"What?"

"Tell me the absolute truth."

"I am not a liar, Adela."

"But sometimes—truth is difficult sometimes."

"What is it you want to know?"

"Do you care for this—do you care for Mr. Arabian?"

"Perhaps I do."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean that you are really thinking of doing what he wishes you to do?"

"I haven't told him yet."

"But you are thinking of marrying him?"

"I know nothing against him. He cares for me very much."

Lady Sellingworth was silent.

"Perhaps you don't believe that? Perhaps you think that's impossible?"

"Oh, no! But—"

"I know exactly what you are thinking. You are

thinking that I am rich now that my father is dead. But he is rich too. He does not need my money. He has never done any work. He has been an idler all his life. He has often told me that he has had too much money and that it has done him harm, made him an idler."

"And you believe all that?"

"I believe that he cares for me very much. I know he does."

"Once I thought that man—"

She stopped.

"Promise me one thing," she said at last in a different voice. "Promise me that you will not marry Mr. Arabian. I won't ask anything else of you; only that."

"But I won't promise. I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because—because I don't know what I am going to do, what I might do." She looked down, then added in a low voice; "He fascinates me."

For the first time since she had come into the room there was a helpless sound in Miss Van Tuyn's voice, a sound that was wholly girlish, absolutely, transparently sincere. Lady Sellingworth did not miss it.

"I haven't made up my mind," she said. "But he fascinates me."

And at that moment Lady Sellingworth knew she was speaking the truth. She remembered her own madnesses, sunk away in the past, but still present to her, gripped between the tentacles of memory. Beryl, too, was then capable of the great follies which often exist side by side with great vanity. The wild heart confronted Lady Sellingworth in another. And she

felt suddenly a deep sense of pity, a sense that seemed flooded with tears, the pity that age sometimes feels for youth coming on into life, on into the devious ways, with their ambushes, their traps, their pitfalls full of darkness and fear. She was even conscious of a tenderness of age which till now had been a rare visitor in her difficult nature. Seymour Portman seemed near her, almost with her in the room. She could almost hear his voice speaking of spring with all its daffodils.

Noblesse oblige. In her torn heart could she find a nobleness sufficient for this occasion? Seymour's eyes, the terrible eyes of affection, which require so much and which sometimes, because of that, seem to be endowed with creative power, forcing into life that which they long to see, were surely upon her, watching for her nobility, asking for it, demanding it of her.

She took Beryl Van Tuyn by the wrist and led her away from the shut door back to the fire.

"Sit down, Beryl," she said.

The girl looked at her wondering, feeling a great change in her and not understanding it.

"Why?" she said.

"I have something I must say to you."

Beryl dropped her muff and sat down. Lady Sellingworth stood near her.

"Beryl," she said, "you think I have been and am your enemy. I must show you I am not. And there's only one way. You say I can't bear to see you happy. I don't think that's true. I hope it isn't. I don't think I wish unhappiness to others, but, even at my age, I still wish to have a little happiness myself. There's never a time in one's life, I suppose, when one doesn't long to be happy. But I don't want to

interfere with your happiness, I only want to interfere between you and a very great danger, something which would certainly bring disaster into your life."

She stopped speaking. She was looking grave, indeed almost tragically sad, but calm and resolute. The spots of red had faded out of her cheeks. There was no fever in her manner. Miss Van Tuyn's wonder grew as she looked at her former friend, who now dominated her, and began to extort from her a strange and unwilling admiration, which recalled to her the admiration of that past time when she had first met Alick Craven in this drawing-room.

After a long pause Lady Sellingworth continued, with a sort of strong simplicity in which there was moral power:

"Don't be angry with me, Beryl, when I tell you that you have one of my dominant characteristics."

"What is it?" Miss Van Tuyn asked, in a low voice.

"Vanity. You and I—we were both born with great vanity in us. Mine has troubled me, tortured me, been a curse to me, all my life. It led me at last into a very horrible situation, in which the—that man who calls himself Nicolas Arabian was mixed up."

"But you said you didn't know him, that you had never known him!"

"That's quite true. I have never spoken to him in my life. But it was he who led me to change my life. You must have heard of it. You must have heard how, ten years ago, I suddenly gave up everything and began to lead a life of retirement."

"Yes."

"But for that man I should probably never have done that. But for him I might have been going about

London now with dyed hair, pretending to be ten or fifteen years younger than I really am."

"But—if you never knew him? I can't understand!"

"Did you ever hear that about ten years ago I lost a great quantity of jewels, that they were stolen out of a train at the Gare du Nord in Paris?"

A look of fear, almost of horror, came into Beryl Van Tuyn's eyes. She got up from the sofa on which she was sitting.

"Adela!"

Already she knew what was coming, what Lady Sellingworth was going to tell her. She even knew the very words Lady Sellingworth was about to say, and when she heard them it was as if she herself had spoken them.

"That man stole them."

"Adela!"

"You said that he had money, that he was not obliged to work. Now you know why he has money and what his work is."

"Adela! But—but why didn't you—"

Her voice faded away.

"I couldn't. My hands were tied."

"How?"

"He caught me in a trap. He laid a bait for my vanity, Beryl, and I took the bait.

"But what was it?"

"He made me believe that he had fallen in love with me. I was a woman of fifty and he made me believe that! That is how vanity leads us!"

And then she told the girl all the truth about Arabian and herself, all the truth of ten years ago. Having made up her mind, having begun to do what

Seymour would have called “the right thing,” she did not hesitate, did not spare herself. She went on to the bitter end. But the strange, the wonderful thing was that it was less bitter than she had thought it must be. While she was speaking, while she was exposing her own folly, her own shame even, she began to feel a sense of relief. She gave the secret which she had kept for ten years to this girl who had treated her cruelly, and in the giving, instead of abject humiliation, she was conscious of liberation. Her mind seemed to be released from a long bondage. Her soul seemed to breathe more freely, like a live thing let out from a close prison into the air. A strange feeling of being at peace with herself came to her and comforted her.

“And that is all, Beryl!” she said at last. “Now, do you forgive me?”

Beryl had been standing quite still, with her eyes fixed on Lady Sellingworth. She had listened without moving. Even her hands had been still, folded together in front of her. But the colour had come and gone in her face as she had listened, as it can only come and go in a face that is young. She was very pale now. Even her lips looked much paler than usual. She stood there and did not say anything. But her eyes were no longer fastened on Lady Sellingworth’s face. She was looking down now. Lady Sellingworth could not see her eyes, but only her white eyelids fringed with long lashes which curled up at the ends.

“I had to tell you, Beryl.”

Still the girl said nothing and did not move. But Lady Sellingworth saw two tears come from under her eyelids and fall down her face. Other tears followed. She did not take out her handkerchief to

wipe them away. She did not seem to be aware of them, or of any necessity for trying to stop them from coming. And then she began to shake. She shook from head to foot, still keeping her hands folded. And that—the folded hands—made her look like a tall doll shaking. There was something so peculiar and horrible in the contrast between her attitude and the evident agony which was convulsing her that for a moment Lady Sellingworth felt helpless, did not dare to speak to her or to touch her. It was impossible to tell whether she was shaken by anger, by self-pity, or by the despair of youth deceived and outraged. But as she continued to weep, and as her body went on trembling, Lady Sellingworth at last could not bear it any longer. She felt that she must do something, must try to help her, and she put a hand on the girl's shoulder gently.

"Beryl!" she said. "Beryl! I didn't want to hurt you, but I had to tell you."

The girl suddenly turned and caught her by the arms.

"Oh, Adela!" she said, in a faltering voice. "No other woman would have—how could you? Oh, how could you?"

Her face was distorted. She looked at Lady Sellingworth with eyes that were bloodshot behind their tears.

"Both of us! Both of us!" she exclaimed. "It's too horrible!"

She still held Lady Sellingworth's arms.

"*I* couldn't have done it! I should have let you go on. I shouldn't have written—I shouldn't have spoken! And I have been alone with him. I have let him—I have let him—"

"Beryl!"

"No, no! It isn't too late! Don't be afraid!"

"Thank God!" said Lady Sellingworth.

She had no feeling of self-pity now. All her compassion for herself was obscured for the moment in compassion for the girl. The years at last were helping her, those years which so often had brought her misery.

"But what am I to do? I'm afraid of him. Oh, do help me."

"Hush, Beryl! What can he do? There's nothing to be afraid of."

"But I've nobody. I'm all alone. Fanny is no use. And he means—he won't give it up. I know he won't give it up. I was always afraid in a way. I always had suspicions, but I trampled them down. Dick Garstin told me, but I would not listen. Dick Garstin showed me what he was."

"How could he?"

"He did. It's there in the studio—that horrible picture, the real man, the man I couldn't see. But I must always have known what he was. Something in me must always have known!"

She seemed to make a violent effort to recover her self-control. She dropped her hands, took out a handkerchief and wiped the tears from her eyes. Then she went to the sofa where her muff was lying, drew out the letter that was in it, went over to the fireplace and threw the letter into the flames.

"Adela," she said, "I've been a beast to you. You know—my last visit to you. You're brave. I suppose I always felt there was something fine in you, but I didn't know how fine you could be. All I can do in return is this—never to tell. It isn't much, is it?"

"It's quite enough, Beryl."

"There isn't anything else I can do, is there?"

Her eyes were asking a question. Lady Sellingworth met them calmly, earnestly. She knew what the girl was thinking at that moment. She was thinking of Alick Craven.

"No, there isn't anything else."

"Are you quite sure, Adela? I owe you a great deal. I may forget it. One never knows. And I suppose I'm horribly selfish. But if I make you a promise now I'll keep it. If you want me to promise anything, tell me now."

"But I don't want anything from you," said Lady Sellingworth.

She said it very quietly, without emotion. There was even a coldness in her voice.

The great effort she had just made seemed to have changed her. By making it she felt as if, unwittingly, she had built up an insurmountable barrier between herself and youth. She had not known, perhaps, what she was doing, but now, suddenly, she knew.

I grow too old a comrade, let us part. Pass thou away!

The words ran in her mind. How often she had thought of them! How often she had struggled with that wild heart which God had given her, which in a way she clung to desperately, and yet which, as she had long known, she ought to give up. She was too old a comrade for that wild heart, and now surely she was saying farewell to it—this time a final farewell. But she had felt, had really felt as if in her very entrails, for a moment the appeal of youth. And she could never forget that, and, having responded, she knew that she could never struggle against youth again.

Beryl had conquered her without knowing it.

CHAPTER VII

The winter night was dark when Miss Van Tuyn stood in the hall of Lady Sellingworth's house waiting for the footman to find a taxicab for her. A big fire was burning on the hearth; the old-fashioned hooded chair stood beside it; and presently, as no taxicab came, she went to the chair and sat down in it. She felt very tired. Her whole body seemed to have been weakened by what she had just been through. But her mind was charged with intense vitality. The thoughts galloped through it, and they were dark as the night. The cold air of winter stole in through the doorway of the hall. She felt it and shivered as she lay back in the great chair which, with its walls and roof, was like a hiding-place; and for the first time in her life she longed to hide herself. She had never before known acute fear—fear that was based on ascertained facts. But she knew it now.

The young footman stood on the doorstep bareheaded, looking this way and that into the blackness, and she sat waiting. In her independence she had never before known what it was to feel abandoned to loneliness. She had always enjoyed her freedom. Now she felt a great longing to cling to someone, to be protected, to lean on somebody who was much stronger than herself, and who would defend her against any attack. At that moment she

envied Lady Sellingworth safe above stairs in this silent and beautiful house, which was like a stronghold. She even envied, or thought she did, Lady Sellingworth for her years. In old age there was surely a security that youth could never have. For the riot of life was over and the greatest dangers were past.

She longed to stay with Adela that night. She thought of her as security. But she dared not expect anything more from Adela. She had already received a gift which she had surely not deserved, a gift which few women, if indeed any other woman, would have given her.

She looked towards the open door and saw the footman's flat back, and narrow head covered with carefully plastered hair. He was calling now with both hands to his mouth: "Taxi! Taxi!"

But there came no sound of wheels in the night, and she put her hands on the sides of the chair and got up.

"Can't you find a cab?"

"No, ma'am. I've very sorry, but there doesn't seem to be one about. Shall I go to the nearest cab rank?"

Miss Van Tuyn hesitated. Then she determined to fight her fear.

"It isn't raining, is it?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then I'll walk. It's not far. I shall pick up a cab on the way probably."

The young man looked relieved and stood aside to let her go out. He watched her as she walked down the square towards the block of flats which towered up where the pavement turned at right angles. The

light from the hall shone out and made a patch of yellow about his feet. He noticed presently that the girl he was watching turned her head and looked back, almost as if she were hesitating. Then she walked on resolutely, and he stepped in and shut the door.

"Wonder if she's afraid of going like that all by herself!" he thought. "I only wish she was my class. I wouldn't mind seeing her home."

Just before she was out of sight of Lady Sellingworth's house Miss Van Tuyn looked back again. The light was gone. She knew that the door was shut and she shivered. She felt shut out. What was she going to do? She was going back to Claridge's of course. But—after that? She longed to take counsel with someone, with someone who was strong and clear brained, and who really cared for her. But who did care for her? Perhaps for the first time in her life she was the victim of sentimentality, of what she would have thought of certainly as sentimentality in another. A sort of yearning for affection came to her. A wave of self-pity swept over her. Her independence of spirit was in abeyance or dead. Arabian, it seemed, had struck her down to the ground. She felt humiliated, terrified, and strangely, horribly young, like a child almost who had been cruelly treated. She thought of her dead father. If he had been alive and near could she have gone to him? No; for years he had not cared very much about her. He had been kind, had given her plenty of money, but he had been immersed in pleasures and had always been in the hands of some woman or other. He had not really loved her. No one, she thought with desperation, had ever really loved her. She did not ask herself whether that was her fault, whether she had ever given to anyone what she wanted so

terribly now, whether she had any right to expect generosity of feeling when she herself was niggardly. She was stricken in her vanity and, because of that, she had come down to the dust.

It was frightful to her to think, to be obliged to think, that Arabian all this time had looked upon her as a prey, had marked her down as a prey. She understood everything now, his fixed gaze at her in the Cafe Royal when she had seen him for the first time, his coming to Garstin's studio, his subtle acting through the early days of their acquaintance. She understood his careful self-repression, his reticence, his evident reluctance to be painted, overcome no doubt by two desires—the desire to become intimate with her, and the desire to possess eventually a piece of work that would be worth a great deal of money. She understood the determination not to allow his portrait to be exhibited. She understood the look in his face when she had told him of her father's sudden death, the change in his demeanour to her since he had known the fact, the desire to hurry things on, to sweep her off her feet. She understood—ah, how she understood!—why he had not wished Adela to join them in the restaurant! She remembered a hundred things about him now, all mixed up together, in no coherent order, little things at which she had wondered but which she wondered at no longer; his distaste for Garstin's portraits because they were of people belonging to the underworld, his understanding of them, his calm contemplation of the victims of vice, his lack of all pity for them, his shrewd verdict on the judge which had so delighted Garstin. And how he had waited for her, how he had known how to wait! It was frightful—that deliberation of his! Garstin had been right about him. Garstin's instinct for people had not betrayed

him. Although later Arabian's craft had puzzled even him he had summed up Arabian at a first glance. Garstin was diabolically clever. If only he were less hard, less brutally cynical, she might perhaps go to him now. For he had in his peculiar way warned her against Arabian. She flushed in the dark as she thought of Garstin's probable comments on her situation if he knew of it! And yet Garstin had told her that Arabian was in love with her. Was that possible? Her vanity faintly stirred like something, albeit feebly, reviving. Arabian had marked her down as a prey. She had no doubt about that. Her brain refused to doubt it. But perhaps, mingled with his hideous cupidity of the accomplished adventurer, the professional thief, there was something else, the lust, or even the sensual love, of the primitive man. Perhaps—she realized the possibility—he believed he had found in her the great opportunity of his life, the unique chance of combining the satisfaction of his predatory instincts with the satisfaction of his intimate personal desires, those desires which he shared with the men who lived far from the underworld.

If that were so—and suddenly she felt that it was so, that she had hit upon the truth—then she was surely in great danger. For Arabian was not the man to let an unique opportunity slip through his fingers without putting up a tremendous fight.

She must find someone to help her against this man. Again she thought of Garstin. But he had his own battle to fight, the battle about the portrait. Then she thought of Craven. Obscurely long ago—it seemed at least long ago—she had felt that she might some day need Craven in her life. How strange that was! What mysterious instinct had warned her then? But now Craven was hostile to her. How could she go

to him? And then there flashed upon her the thought:

"But I can't go to anybody! I have promised Adela."

That thought struck her like a blow, struck her so hard that she stood still on the pavement. And she realized immediately that either she must do without any help at all, or that, in spite of all that had happened, she must ask Adela to help her. For she could never break her promise to Adela. She knew that. She knew that she would rather go under than betray Adela's confidence. Adela had done a fine thing, something that she, Beryl, had not believed it was in any woman to do. She could not have done it, but on the other hand she could not be vile. It was not in her to be vile.

She heard a step in the darkness and realized what she was doing. Instantly she hurried on, almost running. She must gain shelter, must be in the midst of light, must be between four walls, must speak to someone who knew her, and who would not do her harm. Claridge's—old Fanny! A few minutes later she entered the hotel almost breathless.

CHAPTER VIII

On the following afternoon Craven called on Lady Sellingworth about five o'clock and was told by the new footman in a rather determined manner that she

was “not at home.”

“I hope her ladyship is quite well?” he said.

“I believe so, sir,” replied the man. “Her ladyship has been out driving to-day.”

“Please give her that card. Wait one moment.”

He pencilled on the card, “I hope you are better,—A.C.,” gave it to the man, and walked away, feeling sure that Lady Sellingworth was in the house but did not choose to see him.

In the evening he received the following note from her:

18A, BERKELEY SQUARE,

Thursday.

DEAR MR. CRAVEN,—How kind of you to call and to write that little message. I am sorry I could not see you. I’m not at all ill, and have been out driving. But, between you and me—for I hate to make a fuss about trifling matters of health—I feel rather played out. Perhaps it’s partly old age! You know nothing about that. Any variation in my quiet life seems to act as a disturbing influence. And the restaurant the other night really was terribly hot. I mustn’t go there again, though it is great fun. I suppose you didn’t see Beryl? She has been to see me, but said nothing about it. Be nice to her. I don’t think she has many real friends in London.—Yours very sincerely,

ADELA SELLINGWORTH.

“What is it? What has happened?” Craven thought, as he put down the letter.

He felt that some drama had been played out, or partially played out, within the last days which he did not understand, which he was not allowed to understand. Lady Sellingworth chose to keep him in the dark. Well, she had the right to do that. As he

thought over things he realized that the heat in the restaurant could certainly not have been the sole reason of her strange conduct on the night when they had dined together. Something had upset her mentally. A physical reason only could not account for her behaviour. And again he thought of Arabian.

Instinctively he hated the man. Who was he? Where did he come from? Craven could not place him. Beyond feeling sure that he was a “wrong ‘un” Craven had no very definite opinion about him. He was well dressed, good looking—too good looking—and no doubt knew how to behave. He might even possibly be a gentleman of sorts, come to England from some exotic land where the breed of gentleman was quite different from that which prevailed in England. But he was surely a beast. Craven detested his good looks, loathed his large and lustrous brown eyes. He was the sort of beast who did nothing but make up to women. Something inherently clean in Craven rejected the fellow, wished to drive him into outer darkness.

Could Lady Sellingworth know such a man?

That seemed quite impossible. Nevertheless, certain things persistently suggested to Craven that at least she had some knowledge of Arabian which she was deliberately concealing from him. The most salient of these things was her reiterated attempt to push him into the company of Beryl Van Tuyn. It was impossible not to think that Lady Sellingworth wished him to interfere between Beryl Van Tuyn and Arabian. On the night of the dinner in Soho she had attempted to persuade him to go back to the restaurant and to see Beryl home. And now here in this letter she returned to the matter.

“Be nice to her. I don’t think she has many real

friends in London."

"Go to see Beryl; don't come to see me."

Between the lines of Lady Sellingworth's letter Craven read those words and wondered at the ways of women. But he did not mean to obey the unwritten command. And he felt angry with Lady Sellingworth for giving it by implication. She might have what she considered a good reason for her extraordinary behaviour. But as she did not allow him to understand it, as she chose to keep him entirely in the dark, he would be passive. It was not his business to run after Beryl Van Tuyn, to interfere almost forcibly between her and another man, even if that man were a scoundrel. Miss Van Tuyn was a free agent. She had the right to choose her own friends, her own lovers. Once he had decided that he would not give up his intimacy with her in favour of another man without a struggle, the sort of polite, and perhaps subtle, struggle which is suitable to the twentieth century, when man must only be barbarous in battle. But since the encounter in Glebe Place he had changed his mind. Disgust had seized him that day. What could he think but that Beryl Van Tuyn had deliberately induced him to come to Glebe Place, in order that he might see not only her absolute indifference to him but also her intimacy with Arabian? Her reason for such a crude exposure of her lightness of conduct escaped Craven. He could not conceive what she was up to, unless her design was to arouse in him violent jealousy. He did feel jealous, but he was certainly not going to show it. Besides, the delicacy that was natural in him was disquieted by what he thought of as the coarseness of her behaviour.

As once more he looked at Lady Sellingworth's letter he was struck by something final in the

wording of it. There was nothing explicit in it. On the contrary, that seemed to be carefully avoided. But the allusions to old age, to disturbing influences, the decision not to go again to the *Bella Napoli*—these seemed to hint an intention to return to a former state of being, to abandon a new path of life. And he remembered a conversation with Francis Braybrooke at the club, the interest it had roused in him. Some slumbering feeling for romance had been stirred in him, he now thought, by that conversation, by the information he had received about the distinguished recluse who had lived a great life and then suddenly plunged into old age and complete retirement.

Now he seemed to hear a door shutting, and he was outside it. She had allowed him to enter her life for a short time, to enter it almost intimately. But she was surely repenting of that intimacy. He did not know why. Did he ever know why a woman did this or that? There was no suggestion in the letter that he should ever call again, no hint of a desire to see him. She was only sorry, politely sorry, that she had not been able to see him that day. But no reason was given for the inability. She had not considered it necessary to give him a reason. When she had gone abroad without letting him know he had said to himself that his brief friendship with her had come to an end. He felt that more acutely now. For she had come back from abroad. She was close to him in London. She had tried him again. Evidently she must have found him wanting. For once more she was giving him up. Perhaps he was too young. Perhaps he bored her. He did not know.

"I don't suppose I shall ever know."

To that conclusion he came at last. And the sense of finality grew in him, cold and inexorable. She was

a mystery to him. He did not love her. He had never thought of her as she had thought of him. He had never known or suspected what her feelings for him had been. But he felt that something which might have meant a good deal, even perhaps a great deal, to him was being withdrawn from his life. And this withdrawal hurt him and saddened him.

He locked up her letter in his dispatch box. It would be a souvenir of a friendship which had seemed to promise much and which had ended abruptly in mystery. He did not answer it. Perhaps, probably, he would have done so but for the last two sentences in it.

CHAPTER IX

After Lady Sellingworth had written and sent her note to Craven she felt that she was facing a new phase of life, and she thought of it as the last phase. Her sacrifice of self was surely complete at last. She had exposed her nature naked to Beryl Van Tuyn. She had given up her friendship with Alick Craven. There was nothing more for her to do. The call of youth had wrung from her a response which created loneliness around her. And now she had to find within herself the resolution to face this loneliness bravely.

When she wrote to Craven she had meant him to understand something of what he had understood. Yet she did not desire to hurt him. She would not

have hurt him for the world. Secretly her heart yearned over him. But she could never let him know that. He might be puzzled by her letter. He might even resent it. But he would soon forget any feeling roused by it. And he would no doubt soon forget her, the old woman who had been kind to him for a time, who had even been almost Bohemian with him in a very mild way, and who had then tacitly given him up. Perhaps she would see him again. Probably she would. She had no intentions of permanently closing her door against him. But she would not encourage him to come. She would never dine out with him again. If he came he must come as an ordinary caller at the ordinary caller's hour.

Seymour Portman called on her in the late afternoon of the day when she wrote to Craven. Just before his arrival she was feeling peculiarly blank and almost confusedly dull. She had gone through so much recently, had lived at such high tension, had suffered such intense nervous excitement, in the restaurant of the *Bella Napoli* and afterwards, that both body and mind refused to function quite normally. Long ago she had stayed at St. Moritz in the depth of the winter, and had got up each morning to greet the fierce blue sky, the blazing sun, the white glare of the enveloping snows with a strange feeling of light, yet depressed, detachment. She began to have a similar feeling now. Far down she was horribly sad. But her surface seemed to say, "Nothing matters, because I am in an abnormal condition, and while I remain in this condition nothing can really matter to me." Surface and depths were in contradiction, yet she was not even fully aware of that. A numbness held her, and yet she was nervous.

She heard the drawing-room door open and

Murgatroyd's voice make the familiar announcement; she saw Seymour's upright, soldierly figure come into the room; she smiled a greeting to her old friend; and the sound of Murgatroyd's voice, the sight of Seymour coming towards her, her own response to sound and sight, did not conquer the sensation of numbness.

"Yes, he is here. He does not forget me. He loves me and will always love me. But what does it matter?"

A voice seemed to be saying that within her. Recently she had suffered acutely; she had made a great effort; she had conquered herself and been conquered by another. And it had all been just too much for her. She was, she thought, like one who had fought desperately lying in deadly silence and calm on the deserted battlefield, utterly passive because utterly tired out.

But Seymour did not know that. He knew nothing of all that had happened, and Beryl knew everything. And she thought of a picture called "Love locked out." It was hardly fair that Seymour should know so little. And while he was quietly talking to her, telling her little bits of news which he thought would interest her, letting her in by proxy as it were to the life of the great world which she had abandoned but in which he still played a part, she was thinking, "If Seymour knew what I have done! If I told him, what would he think, what would he say?" He would be pleased, no doubt. But would he be surprised? And while she listened and talked she began to wonder, but always without intensity, about that. Seymour would think she had done the inevitable thing, what any thoroughbred was bound to do. And yet—would he be surprised nevertheless that she had been able to do it? She began presently to feel a slight tingle of

curiosity about that. Had she, perhaps, to a certain extent justified Seymour's fidelity? He had a splendid character. She certainly had not. She had done countless things that Seymour must have hated, and secretly condemned. And yet he had somehow been able to go on loving her. Was that because he had always instinctively known that somewhere within her there was a traditional virtue which marched with his, that there was a voice which spoke his language?

"I suppose, in spite of all, in a way we are akin," she thought.

And she began to wish vaguely that he knew it, that he knew what had happened between her and Beryl. As she looked at his "cauliflower," bent towards her while he talked, at his strong soldier's face, at his faithful eyes, the eyes of the "old dog," she wished that it were possible to let Seymour know a little bit of the best of her. Not that she was proud of what she had done. She was too much akin to Seymour to be proud of such a thing, But Seymour would be pleased with her. And it would be pleasant to give him pleasure. It would be like giving him a small, a very small, reward for his long faithfulness, for his very beautiful and touching loyalty.

"What is it, Adela?" he said.

And a keen, searching look had come into his eyes.

She smiled vaguely, meeting his gaze. She still felt curiously detached, although she was able to think quite connectedly.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I feel you are not as usual to-day."

"In what way?"

"Something has happened. I don't, of course, wish to know what it is. But it has changed you, my dear."

"In what way?" she said again.

His reply startled her, set her free from her feeling of numbness, of light detachment, from what she called to herself her "St. Moritz feeling."

"I feel as if you were coming into possession of your true self at last," he said very gravely. "But as if perhaps you scarcely knew it yet."

A slow red crept in her cheeks, which would never know again the touch of the artificial red.

"Dear Seymour! My true self! I wonder what sort of self you think that is?"

"That's easily told. It is the self I have been loving for so many years. And now—"

He got up, still alert in his movement, out of his chair.

"You are going?"

"Yes. I have to meet 'Better not' at the Marlborough to talk over His Majesty's visit to Manchester."

"Ah!" she said.

"Better not" was the nickname given at Court to a certain much-valued gentleman about the king.

She did not try to detain Seymour. But when he had gone deep depression overcame her. She was the helpless victim of a tremendous reaction. So long as she had been in activity she had been able to endure. Even the horror of the *Bella Napoli*, complex and cruelly intense as the probing of steel among the nerves of the body, she had been able to live through without obvious flinching. But then there had been something to do, something to deal with, something to get the better of. There had been a necessity for

action. And now there was nothing. Her activities were over. Seymour had broken the curious spell which for a short time had bound her, and now she realized everything with unnatural acuteness.

What was the good of coming into possession of her true self? What was the good of anything? Life was activity. Her late close contact with youth, her obligation to do something difficult and, to her, tremendous for youth had taught her that anew, and now she must somehow reconcile herself to extinction. For this was really what lay before her now—extinction while still alive. Better surely to be struggling with horrors than to be merely dying away. She even looked back to the scene with Beryl and thought of it almost with longing. For how she had lived in that scene! At moments during it she had entirely forgotten herself.

Was that perhaps life, the only real life—entire forgetfulness of self? If so, how seldom she had lived! In all her sixty years, in all her so-called "great life," for how short a time she had lived!

She had just then, even in the midst of her reaction, a feeling of illumination. She was in darkness, but around the darkness, as if enclosing it and her in it, there was light, a light she had never been really aware of till now. Something within her said:

"I see!"

She went up to her bedroom, shut herself in, went to a bookshelf, and took down a Bible which stood on it. She turned its pages till she came to the Sermon on the Mount. Then she began to read. And presently, as she read, a queer thought came to her. "If the 'old guard' could see me now!"

It was late when she stopped reading. She shut up

the Holy Book, put it back on the shelf, and took down a volume of poems. And after reading the Bible she read the poem of the Wild Heart. And then she read nothing more. But her reading had waked up in her a longing which was not familiar to her except in connexion with what she supposed was the baser part of her, the part which had troubled, had even tortured her so many times in her life. She had often longed to do things for men whom she loved, or fancied she loved. Now she was conscious of a yearning more altruistic. She wished to be purely unselfish, if that were ever possible. And she believed it to be possible. For was not Seymour unselfish? He surely often forgot himself in her. But she had always remembered herself in others.

"What a monstrous egoist I have been all my life!" she thought, with a sense of despair. "Only once have I acted with a purely unselfish motive, and that was with Beryl. Yes, Beryl gave me the one opportunity I took advantage of. And now it is all over. Everything is finished. It is too late to try a new way of living."

She forgot many little sacrifices she had made in the war, or she did not count them to her credit. For patriotism in war seemed as natural to her as drawing breath. She was thinking of her personal life in connexion with individuals. She had once been unselfish—for Beryl. That was over. Everything was over. And yet Seymour had said that he felt as if at last she were coming into possession of her true self. So he had noticed a difference. It was as if what she had been able to do for Beryl had subtly altered her. But there was nothing more for her to do.

That evening she felt loneliness as she had never felt it before. A sort of mental nausea seized her as she dressed for her solitary dinner. For whom was

she changing her gown? For Murgatroyd! How grotesque the unwritten regulations of a life like hers were! Why go down to dinner at all? She had no appetite. Nevertheless, everything was done in due order. Her hair was arranged. Cecile looked at her critically to see that everything was right. For Murgatroyd! Even a jewel was brought to be pinned in to the front of her gown. It was a big ruby surrounded by diamonds, and as it flashed in the light it brought back to her the hideous memory of Arabian.

What would he do now? It was very strange that after ten years she had been able, indeed she had been obliged, to revenge herself upon him, this man whom she had never known, to whom she had never even spoken. And she had never dreamed of revenge. She had let him go with his prey. Probably her jewels had enabled him to live as he wished to live for years. And now she had paid him back! Did Fate work blindly, or was there a terribly subtle and inexorable plan at work through all human life?

“Miladi does not like to wear this ruby?” said Cecile.

“Why do you say that?”

“Milady looks at it so strangely!”

“It reminds me of something. Yes, I will wear it to-night. But what’s the good?”

“Miladi—?”

“No one will see it but myself.”

“Milady should go out more, much more, and receive company here.”

“Perhaps I’ll give a series of dinners,” said Lady Sellingworth with a smile.

And she turned away and went down.

Murgatroyd and a footman were waiting for her. On the dining table was a menu telling her what she had to eat, what her cook had been, and was, busy over in the kitchen. She sat down at the big table, picked up the menu and glanced at it. But she did not see what was written on it. She saw only in imagination the years before her, perhaps five years, perhaps ten, perhaps even more. For her race was a long living one. She might, like some of her forbears, live to be very old. Ten years more of dinners like this one in Berkeley Square! Could that be endured? As she sipped her soup she thought of travelling. She might shut up the house, go over the seas, wander through the world. There were things to be seen. Nature spread her infinite variety for the sons and the daughters of men. She might advertise in *The Times* for a travelling companion. There would be plenty of answers. Or she might get one of her many acquaintances to come with her, some pleasant woman who would not talk too much, or too little.

Fish!

When, finally, some fruit had been put before her, and Murgatroyd and the footman had left the room, she remained—so she thought of it—like a mummy in the tomb which belonged to her. And presently through the profound silence she heard the hoot of a motor-horn. Someone going somewhere! Someone who had something to do, somewhere to go! Someone from whom all the activities had not passed away for ever!

The motor-horn sounded again nearer. Now she heard the faint sound of wheels. The car was coming down her side of the Square. The buzz of the machine reached her ears now, then the grinding of brakes. The car had stopped somewhere close by, at the next house perhaps.

She heard an electric bell. That was in her own house. Then the car had stopped at her door.

She listened, and immediately heard a step in the hall. Murgatroyd, or the footman, was going to the door. She wondered who the caller could be. Possibly Seymour! But he never came at that hour.

A moment later Murgatroyd appeared in the room.

"Miss Van Tuyn has called, my lady, and begs you to see her."

"Miss Van Tuyn! Ask her—take her up to the drawing-room, please. I am just finishing. I will come in a minute."

"Yes, my lady."

Murgatroyd went out and shut the door behind him.

Then Lady Sellingworth took a peach from a dish in front of her and began to peel it. She had not intended to eat any fruit before Murgatroyd had given her this news. But she felt that she must have a few minutes by herself. Not long ago she had been appalled by the thought of extinction: had yearned for activity, had even desired opportunities for unselfishness. Now, suddenly, she was afraid, and clung to her loneliness. For she felt certain that Beryl had come to ask her to do something in connexion with Arabian. Something must have happened since their interview yesterday, and the girl had come to her to ask her help.

She ate the peach very slowly, scarcely tasting it. At last it was finished, and she got up from the table. She must not keep Beryl waiting any longer. She must go upstairs. But she went reluctantly, almost in fear, wondering, dreading what was coming upon her.

When she opened the drawing-room door she saw Beryl standing by the fire.

"Adela!"

Beryl came forward hurriedly with a nervous manner Lady Sellingworth had never noticed in her before. Her face was very pale. There were dark rings under her eyes. She looked apprehensive, distracted even.

"Do forgive me for bursting in on you like this at such an hour!"

"Of course!"

She took Beryl's hand. It was hot, and clasped hers with a closeness that was almost violent.

"What is it? Is anything the matter?"

"I want your advice. I don't—I don't quite know what to do. You see, there's nobody but you I can come to. I know I have no right—I have no claim upon you. You have been so good to me already. No other woman would have done what you have done. But you see, I promised never to—I can't speak to anyone else. I might have gone to Dick Garstin perhaps. . . . I don't know! But as it is I can't speak to a soul but you."

"Is it something about that man?"

"Yes. I'm afraid of him."

"Why?"

"I'm sure he doesn't mean to—I'm sure he won't give me up easily. I know he won't!"

"Sit down, Beryl."

"Yes—may I?"

"Have you seen him?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"Has he written?"

"Yes. And he has called to-day. Last night directly I got back to the hotel I gave orders at the bureau that if he called they were to say 'not at home.'"

"Well then—"

"But he got in!"

"How could he?"

"When they said I was out he asked for Fanny—Fanny Cronin, my companion. He sent up his card to her, and as I hadn't spoken to her—you know I promised not to say anything—she told them to let him come up. She likes him!"

"And were you in the hotel?"

"No, thank God I was really out. But I came back while he was still there."

"Then—"

"No, I didn't see him, as I told you. When I was just going up in the lift, something—it was almost like second sight, I think—prompted me to go to the bureau and ask if anyone was in our rooms. And they told me *he* was with Fanny, had been with her for over an hour."

"What did you do?"

"I went out at once. I called on one or two people, I stayed out till nearly half-past seven. I walked about in the dark. I was afraid to go near the hotel. It was horrible. Finally I thought he must have gone and I ventured to go back. I hurried through the hall. The lift was there. I went into it at once. I didn't look round. I was afraid he might have come down and be waiting about for me. When I got to our apartment I went straight to my bedroom and rang for my maid. She said he was gone. Then I went to Fanny. He had been having tea with her and had stayed two hours. He had—she's very foolish, poor old thing!—he had

completely fascinated her."

Suddenly she blushed violently.

"I have no right to say that about Fanny. But I mean he had laid himself out to—"

"I quite understand," said Lady Sellingworth, with a sort of awkward dryness which she could not evade though she hated herself for it.

It was hideous, she felt, being mixed up with this old Miss Cronin and Beryl Van Tuyn in a sort of horrible sisterhood of victims of this vile man's fascination. Her flesh crept at the indignity of it, and all her patrician pride revolted at being remembered among his probably innumerable conquests. At that moment she felt punished for having so often in her life betrayed the best part of her nature.

"I quite understand, Beryl. You need not explain."

"No."

There was an unpleasant silence during which neither woman looked at the other. Then Lady Sellingworth said:

"But you haven't told me everything. And if I am to—if anything is to be done, can be done, I suppose you had better tell me everything."

"Yes. I want to. I must. Mr.—he told Fanny that I was—that I had promised to marry him."

"Ah!"

"He told her that I had been to his flat on the very day that I had heard of my father's death and since. He promised Fanny that—that when we were married she should have a home with us. Isn't that horrible? Fanny has been afraid of my marrying because, you see, she depends in a way on me. She doesn't want to leave me. She's got accustomed—"

"Yes—yes."

"He told her that people knew about my visits to him. Mrs. Birchington lives in the flat opposite his, and she knows. He contrived that she should know. I realize that now."

"A man like that lays his plans carefully."

"Yes. Oh—how humiliating it all is! Fanny was enthusiastic about him."

"What did you say?"

"I was very careful. Because I promised you! But I know she thinks—she must think I am in love with him. But that doesn't matter. Only it makes things difficult. But it isn't that which brought me here. I'm afraid of him."

"Have you ever written to him?"

"No—never!"

"But you say he has written to you."

"Yes. When he left Fanny he wrote a letter in the hotel and had it sent up to my room. Fanny gave it me just now. I've got it here."

She drew a letter out of a little bag she had brought with her.

"I—I can't show it—"

"Oh—please—I don't want to see it!" said Lady Sellingworth, with an irrepressible shrinking of disgust.

"No, of course not. Adela, please don't think I imagined you did! But I must tell you—I know you hate all this. You must hate it. Oh, do forgive me for coming here! I know I oughtn't to. But I'm afraid—I'm afraid of him!"

"Why are you so afraid? What can he do?"

"A man like that might do anything!"

"Are you sure? I think such a man is probably a

coward at heart."

But Miss Van Tuyn shook her head.

"He's got nerves of steel. I am sure of it. Besides—"

She paused, and a strange conscious look came into her face—a look which Lady Sellingworth did not understand.

"Yes?" she said at last, as Beryl did not speak.

"Adela, I know you will not believe me. I know—you spoke once of my being very vain, but—but there are things a girl does know about a man, really there are! They may seem ridiculous, crazy to others, but—"

"What is it, Beryl?"

"I believe besides wanting my money he wants *me*. That's why I'm afraid. If it weren't for that I—perhaps I shouldn't have come to-night. Can you believe it?"

Lady Sellingworth looked at the girl with eyes which in spite of herself were hard. She knew they were hard, but she could not help it. Then she said:

"Yes, I can believe it."

"And that he may—he may persist in spite of all. He may refuse to give it up."

"Haven't you got a will?"

"Yes."

"Can't you use it?"

"Yes. But I'm afraid of him. I believe I've always been afraid of him. No one else has ever been able to make me feel as I do about him. Once I read an article in a paper. It was about a horrible play—a woman who was drawn to a man irresistibly in spite of herself, to a hateful man, a murderer. And she went; she had to go. I remember I thought of *him*

then. It was a fascination of fear, Adela. There are such things."

"Do you mean to say that after what I have told you—"

"I want someone to get him away, to drive him away from me so that I shall never see him, so that he will never come near me again! I might go to Paris. But it would be no use. He would follow me there. I might go to America. But that would be just the same. He says so in this letter."

She held up the letter in her hand.

"Does he threaten you?"

"No—not exactly! No, he doesn't! It's worse than that. If he did I think I might find the courage. He's subtle, Adela. He's horribly subtle! Besides, he doesn't know—he can't know that you have told me what he is."

"He might guess it. He probably guessed it. He recognized me in the restaurant."

"Yes. He didn't want you to come to our table. But he never spoke of you afterwards. He didn't say a word, or show the slightest sign. But in this letter I feel that he suspects—that he is afraid something may happen through you, and that—"

"Perhaps he knows you came to see me last night."

"How could he?"

"It wouldn't be difficult for a man of that type."

"I walked home alone, and nobody—"

"That doesn't prove anything. He is subtle, as you say."

"I am sure from this letter that he guesses something has happened, that I may have been set against him, and that he doesn't mean to give me up, whatever happens. I feel that in his letter. And I want

someone to drive him away from me. Oh, I wish I had never seen him! I wish I had never seen him!"

Again Lady Sellingworth heard the cry of youth, and this time it was piteous, almost despairing. She did not answer it in words. Indeed, instead of showing any pity, any strong instinct of protection, she turned away from Beryl.

The girl wondered why she did this, and for a moment thought that perhaps she was angry. The situation was difficult, horribly difficult. Beryl had delicacy enough to understand that. Perhaps she ought not to have come to Adela again. Perhaps she was asking too much, more than any woman could bring herself to do, or to try to do. But she had no one else to go to, and she was really afraid, miserably afraid.

Lady Sellingworth stood quite still by the fire with her back to Beryl, and as the silence continued at last Beryl made up her mind that there was nothing to be hoped for from her and got up slowly.

"Adela," she said, trying to summon some pride, some courage, "I understand. You can't do anything more. I oughtn't to have come. It was monstrous, I suppose. But—it's like that in life. So few people will help. And those that do—well, they get asked for more. I'll—I'll manage somehow. It's all my own fault. I must try to—"

Then Lady Sellingworth turned round. Her white face was very grave, almost stern, like the face of one who was thinking with concentration.

"I'm ready to try to do what I can, Beryl," she said. "But there's only one way I can think of. And to take it I shall have to tell the whole truth."

"About me?"

"About you and myself."

"Oh—but you couldn't do that!"

"I believe that I ought to."

"But—but—to whom?"

"There's only one person I could possibly speak to, and he's the finest man I have ever met. He might do something. I'm thinking of Seymour Portman."

"Adela! But you couldn't tell *him*!"

"Why not?"

"Adela—he loves you. Everyone knows that."

"And that's just why I could tell him—him only."

Miss Van Tuyn looked down. Suddenly she felt that she had tears in her eyes.

"You have kept your cab, haven't you?" said Lady Sellingworth.

"Yes."

"Go home now. I will telephone to Seymour. I'll let you know later—to-morrow morning perhaps—what he thinks had better be done. Now, good night, Beryl!"

She held out her hand. Beryl took it, but did not press it. Somehow she felt awed, and at a distance from this pale quiet woman.

Lady Sellingworth touched the bell, and Beryl Van Tuyn left the room.

CHAPTER X

As soon as Beryl had gone Lady Sellingworth went downstairs to her writing-room. She turned on the electric light as she went in to the room, and glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. The hands pointed to half-past nine. She wondered where Seymour was dining. He might chance to be at home. It was much more likely that he was dining out, at one of his clubs or elsewhere. If he were at home and alone he would come to her at once; if not she would perhaps have to wait till half-past ten or eleven. She hoped to find him at St. James's Palace. As this thing had to be done—and now she had burnt her boats, for she had promised Beryl—she wished to do it quickly.

She inquired through the telephone if Seymour was at home. His servant replied that he was out. She asked where. The servant did not know. His master had dressed and gone out at a quarter to eight without saying where he was dining. Lady Sellingworth frowned as she received this information. She hesitated for a moment, then she said:

"As soon as Sir Seymour comes in, however late it may be, I want to see him on an urgent matter. If you go to bed before he comes back, will you please leave a written message in the hall asking him to visit Lady Sellingworth at once in Berkeley Square. It

is very important."

"Yes, my lady," said the voice.

"You won't forget? I shall be sitting up for Sir Seymour."

"No, my lady. I will stay up and inform Sir Seymour."

"Thank you."

She put the receiver back in its place and again looked at the clock. She had not much hope of seeing Seymour before eleven at the earliest. He might be at a big dinner. He might be at the theatre. Probably he would go to his club afterwards. She might not see him till midnight, even later perhaps. Well, it could not be helped. She must just be patient, must wait calmly. But she did not want to wait. She was beginning to feel nervous, and she knew that the nervousness would increase in suspense. How unlucky that Seymour was out!

She rang the bell. Murgatroyd came.

"I am expecting Sir Seymour to-night, Murgatroyd," she said, "about some important business. But I can't find out where he is, so he won't know till he goes home. That may be late. But he will come here directly he gets my message. I'm sorry to keep you up, but I should like you to let him in."

"Certainly, my lady," said Murgatroyd.

"I shall be waiting for him in the drawing-room. Bring me up some camomile tea, will you? And put out a cigar and whisky and Perrier for Sir Seymour."

"Yes, my lady."

"That's all."

Murgatroyd stood back to let her pass out of the room. She thought at that moment there was something sympathetic in his face.

"I believe he's rather devoted to me, and to Seymour too," she said to herself as she went upstairs. "I don't think he'll say anything to the others. Not that it matters if he does!"

Nevertheless she felt oddly shy about Seymour coming to her very late at night, and wondered what Murgatroyd thought of that long friendship. No doubt he knew, no doubt all the servants knew, how devoted to her Seymour was.

She went into the drawing-room and sat down by the fire, and very soon Murgatroyd brought in the camomile tea. Then he placed on a side table a box of cigars, whisky and Perrier water, and went out.

The clock chimed the quarter before ten.

Camomile tea is generally supposed to be good for the nerves. That was why Lady Sellingworth had ordered it; that was why she drank it now. For now she was beginning to feel horribly nervous, and the feeling seemed to increase in her with every passing moment. It was dreadful waiting for Seymour like this. She felt all her courage and determination oozing away. When Beryl had been there, and that strange and abrupt decision had been come to, Lady Sellingworth had felt almost glad. Seymour would know what Beryl knew, the worst and perhaps the best, of his old friend. And there was no one else she could go to. Seymour was an old soldier, a thorough man of the world, absolutely discreet, with a silent tongue and proved courage and coolness. No one surely existed more fitted to deal drastically with a scoundrel than he. Lady Sellingworth had no idea what he would do. But he would surely find a way to get rid of Arabian, to "drive" him, as Beryl had put it, out of the girl's life for ever. Yes, he would find a way. Lady Sellingworth felt positive of that, and,

feeling thus positive, she realized how absolutely she trusted Seymour, trusted his heart, his brain, his whole character.

Nevertheless she looked again and again at the clock, and began to feel almost sick with anxiety.

The thought of confession had scarcely frightened her when Beryl was with her. Indeed, it had brought her a sense of relief. But now she began to feel almost panic-stricken at the knowledge of what was before her. And she began to wonder exactly how much Seymour understood of her character, exactly how much he knew of her past. He must certainly know a great deal, and perhaps suspect more than he knew. She had once been almost explicit with him, on the terrible day when she had tried to make up her mind to marry him, and had failed. And yet he might be surprised, he might even be horrified when she told him. It was such an ugly story, such a hideous story. And Seymour was full of natural rectitude. Whatever he had done in his life, he must always have been incapable of stooping down to the gutter, as she had stooped. She grew hot and then cold at the thought of telling him. Perhaps he would not be able to bear it. Perhaps even his love could not stand so much as that. If, after she had told him, he looked at her with different eyes, if he changed towards her! He would not want to change, but if he could not help it!

How awful that would be! Something deep down within her seemed to founder at the mere thought of it. To lose Seymour! That would indeed be the end of everything that made life worth living for her. She shuddered on her sofa. Then she got up and stood before the blazing fire. But still she felt cold. Surely she had acted imprudently when Beryl was there. She had been carried away, had yielded to a sudden

impulse. And yet no! For she had stood with her back to Beryl for several minutes before she had said she was going to tell Seymour. And through those minutes she had been thinking hard. Yes; but she had not thought as she was thinking now.

She began to feel desperate. It was nearly eleven o'clock. The time had flown. Why had she asked Seymour to come to-night? She might just as well have waited till to-morrow, have "slept on it." The night brings counsel. Yet how could she break her promise to Beryl? It would be no use debating, for she had promised.

The clock struck eleven.

Seymour might come now in a moment. On the other hand, he might not reach home till midnight, or even later. It would really be a shame to bring him out again at such an hour. She had been thoughtless when she was at the telephone. And she was keeping his man up; Murgatroyd too. That was scarcely fair. It would not matter if Seymour came now, but if he did not get home till much later, as was possible, even probable! She had surely been rather selfish in her desire to do something quickly for Beryl. There was no such terrible hurry about the matter.

An overwhelming desire to postpone things took hold of her. She wanted to have time to think over how she would put it to Seymour. Would not it perhaps be possible to obtain his help for Beryl without telling him the whole truth about Arabian? She might just say that she knew the man was a blackguard without saying why she knew. There was perhaps no need to be absolutely explicit. Seymour would take it from her without asking awkward questions. He was the least curious of men. He would

probably much rather not know the truth. It would be as horrible for him to hear it as for her to tell it. But she must have time to think carefully over how she would put it to him. Yes, she must have time. Better to see him to-morrow morning.

A quarter-past eleven!

It would really be monstrous to drag Seymour out to have a long confabulation about a girl whom he scarcely knew, and could have no interest in, at this time of night.

And she turned from the fire and went decisively towards the door. She would go down at once and telephone to Seymour's apartment in St. James's Palace cancelling her request to his manservant.

She found Murgatroyd waiting in the hall. He looked faintly surprised at seeing her.

"Oh, Murgatroyd!" she said. "It's getting so late that I've decided to put off Sir Seymour till to-morrow. I'm just going to telephone now. So you needn't sit up any longer."

"Very well, my lady."

"Good night."

"Good night, my lady."

"I'll turn out the lights when I go up."

"Shan't I—"

"No—you needn't. Good night."

She went into the writing-room and shut the door behind her. The thought of the intense relief she would feel directly she had spoken through the telephone and put off Seymour, directly it was settled that he was not to come and see her that night, sent her straight to the telephone. She was eager to communicate with his servant. But she wished now intensely that she had not waited so

long. She might possibly be too late. Seymour might have returned home, had her message, and started for Berkeley Square. She took the receiver in her hand and was just going to speak when she heard a cab outside in the Square. She listened. It came up and stopped at her door.

That was Seymour! She was certain of it. She put the receiver back in its place and stood quite still, listening. The bell was rung. Murgatroyd could not have gone to bed. He would answer the bell no doubt. If he did not she would have to answer it. After a pause she heard the bell again, then, almost immediately the front door being opened, and a faint murmur of voices. An instant later she heard the cab drive away. Perhaps—had Seymour called and gone away? Could Murgatroyd have—The door behind her opened. She turned sharply.

"Sir Seymour Portman has called to see you, my lady."

Looking beyond Murgatroyd she saw Seymour standing in the hall, in evening dress and a thick black overcoat.

Seymour had sent away his cab!

She went into the hall smiling faintly.

"So you have come! I was just going to speak to your man through the telephone, to tell him not to bother you, that it didn't matter, and that to-morrow would do as well. It's so very late."

He began to take off his overcoat, helped by Murgatroyd.

"Not a bit too late!" he said. "I shall enjoy a little talk with you by the fire. Thanks, Murgatroyd! I was dining out with the Montgomeries in Eaton Square."

"Come upstairs."

She led the way, and as she mounted slowly with him close behind her she felt weak and now horribly afraid. She went into the drawing-room. He followed and shut the door, then came slowly, with his firm tread, towards her and the fire.

"Ah!" he said. "You thought of me!"

He had seen the cigar-box, the whisky and Perrier. A very gentle, intensely kind, almost beaming look came into his lined face.

"Or—was it Murgatroyd?"

"No."

"I wonder whether you know what it means to an old fellow like myself to be thought of now and then in these little ways!"

"Oh—Seymour!" she said.

Tears stood in her eyes. His few simple words had suddenly brought home to her in a strange, intense way the long loneliness to which she had condemned him. And now he was an old fellow! And he was grateful, beamingly grateful, for a little commonplace thought about his comfort such as any hostess might surely have had!

"Don't!" she added. "You hurt me when you say such a thing."

"Do I? And if I take a cigar?"

"Here! Let me clip it for you!"

As she clipped it he said:

"There is nothing serious the matter, is there, Adela? When I had your message I felt a little anxious."

She lit a match for him. She felt very tender over him, but she felt also very much afraid of him.

"Your hand is trembling, my dear!"

He took hold of her wrist, and held it while she lit his cigar. And his dry, firm fingers seemed to send her some strength.

"If only I had as little to be ashamed of as he has!" she thought, with a sort of writhing despair.

And she longed, as never before, for an easy conscience.

"I've had rather a trying time just lately," she said. "Come and sit down. Will you drink something?"

"Not yet, thank you."

He sat down in an arm-chair and crossed his legs, putting the right leg over the left, as he always did. She was on her sofa, leaning on her left arm, and looking at him. She was trying to read him, to read his whole character, to force her way to his secret, that she might be sure how much she might dare. Could he ever turn against her? Was that possible? His kind, dark eyes were fixed upon her. Could they ever look unkindly at her? She could scarcely believe that they could. But she knew that in human nature few things are impossible. Such terrible changes can take place in a moment. And the mystery is never really solved.

"Well, my dear, would you like to tell me what is troubling you? Perhaps I can do something."

"I want you to do something for me. Or rather—it would really be for somebody else. You remember Beryl Van Tuyn?"

"The daffodil girl—yes."

"She has been here to-night. She is in a great difficulty. By the way, of course she knows about my consulting you. I told her I would do it."

"I did not suppose you would give away a confidence."

"No! Seymour, has it ever struck you that there is something in you and in me which is akin in spite of the tremendous differences in our natures?"

"Oh yes."

"I'm glad. I like to feel that and—and I want you to feel it."

"I do. I feel it strongly."

"Whatever happens it would always be there."

"Yes, of course."

"It helps you to understand me, I expect."

"Surely it must."

"I wonder if you could ever—"

"What is it, Adela?"

"I wonder if you could ever turn against me."

"I don't think that is very likely," he said.

She looked at him. He was smiling.

"But—could nothing cause you to change towards me?"

"Some things might cause me to change towards anyone."

"Ah!"

"But as they are not in your nature we need not consider them."

"But how do you know?"

"I do know."

"But—what?"

"I know what you might do, or may have done. I know just as well what you have never done and could never do."

"But I have done some horrible things, Seymour."

"They are past. Let us forget them."

"But—horrible things come back in one's life! They are like *revenants*. After years—they rise up."

"What is the matter, Adela? Do tell me."

"I want to, but I'm afraid."

And directly she had told him that she felt less afraid.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of you."

"Of me?"

"Of what you may think of me, feel towards me, if I tell you."

"Then—you do care what I feel?"

"I care very much. I care terribly."

Sir Seymour uncrossed his legs and made a slight movement as if he were going to get up. Then he sat still and took a pull at his cigar, and then he said:

"You need not be afraid of me, Adela. I have made up my mind about you. Do you know what that means? It means that you cannot surprise me. And I think it is surprise which oftenest brings about changes in feeling. What is it? You say it is something to do with Miss Van Tuyn?"

"Yes, but my life is in it, too; a horrible bit of my life."

"What can I do unless you tell me?"

"That's true."

She sat for a moment in silence gazing at him, at the lean figure, the weather-beaten face, the curly white hair, and at the dark eyes which were looking steadily at her, but not penetratingly, not cruelly. And then she sat straight up, took her arm from the sofa, folded her hands on her lap with an effort to make them look calm, and began to tell him. She

spoke very simply, very steadily. She dressed nothing up. She strove to diminish nothing. Her only aim was to be quite unemotional and perfectly truthful. She began with Beryl Van Tuyn's acquaintance with Arabian, how she had met him in Garstin's studio, and went on till she came to the night when she and Craven had seen them together at the *Bella Napoli*.

"I recognized the man Beryl was with," she said. "I knew him to be a blackguard."

She described her abrupt departure from the restaurant, Craven's following her, her effort to persuade him to go back and to take Beryl home.

"I went home alone," she said, "and considered what I ought to do. Finally I wrote Beryl a letter, it was something like this."

She gave him the gist of the letter. Seymour sat smoking and did not say a word. Her narrative had been so consecutive and plain that he had no need to ask any question. And she was glad of his silence. Any interruption, she felt, would have upset her, perhaps even have confused her.

"Beryl was not satisfied with that letter," she went on. "On the night when she had it—last night—she came to me to ask for an explanation. I didn't want to give one. I did my best to avoid giving one. But when I found she was obstinate, and would not drop this man unless I gave her my reasons for warning her against him, when I found she had even thought of marrying him, I felt that it was my duty to tell her everything. So I told her—this."

And then she told him all the truth about the affair of the jewels, emphasizing nothing, but omitting nothing. She looked away from him, turned her eyes towards the fire, and tried to feel very calm and very detached. It was all ten years ago. But did that make

any difference? For was she essentially different from the woman who had been Arabian's victim?

Still Seymour sat as before and went on smoking. As she was gazing at the fire she did not know for certain whether he was still looking at her or not.

At last she had finished the personal part of her narrative, though she had still to tell him how Beryl had taken it and what had happened that day. Before going on to that she paused for a moment. And immediately she heard Seymour move. He got up and went slowly to the table where the whisky and Perrier water had been placed by Murgatroyd. Then she looked at him. He stood with his back to her. She saw him bend down and pour out a glass of the water. Without turning he lifted the glass to his mouth and drank. Then he put the glass down; and then he stood for a moment quite still, always keeping his back towards her. She wondered what he was looking at. That was the question in her mind. "What can Seymour be looking at?"

At last he turned round. She thought that his face looked unusually stern, and his bushy eyebrows seemed—so she fancied—to be drawn down low above his eyes.

"Go on—my dear," he said in a rather gruff and very low voice.

She quivered. She, perhaps, scarcely knew why. At the moment she really believed that she did not know why. Suddenly emotion began to gain on her. But she struggled resolutely against it.

"Aren't you—don't you mean to sit down again?" she said.

"No. I think I'll stand."

And he came slowly to stand by the fire.

"Well," she began again, making a great effort, "I thought that was all. I didn't think there was anything more for me to do. But Beryl came back again to-night and begged me to help her. She is terrified of what he may do. I tried to reassure her. But it was no good."

And again she narrated, now with difficulty forcing herself to seem calm and unembarrassed, exactly what had happened that day between Beryl Van Tuyn and herself, till she came to the moment when she had turned away from Beryl and had gone to stand by the fire. Then once more she paused and seemed seized by hesitation. As Sir Seymour said nothing, did not help her out, at last she went on:

"Then I thought of you. I had never meant to tell anyone but Beryl, but as *I* could do nothing to help her, and as she is perhaps, really in danger—she is only a girl, and she spoke of the fascination of fear—I felt I must make a further effort to do something. And I thought of you."

"Why was that?" asked Sir Seymour, turning towards her, but not impulsively.

"Because I knew if anyone could stop this thing you could."

"That was your reason?"

"That—and—and I knew that I could never tell all this—about myself, I mean—to anyone but you. For ten years no one has known it."

"You felt you could tell me!"

The way in which he said those words was so inexpressive that Lady Sellingworth did not know what was the feeling behind them, whether it was astonishment, indignation, or something quite different.

"I—I didn't want to—" She almost faltered, again full of fear, almost of terror. "I was afraid to. But I felt I could, and I had told Beryl so."

"I wonder what made you feel you could," he said, still in the same curiously inexpressive way.

She said nothing. She leaned back on the sofa and her hands began to move restlessly, nervously. She plucked at her dress, put a hand to the ruby pinned in the front of her bodice, lifted the hand to her face, laid it on the back of the sofa.

"What was it?" he said.

"I hardly feel I can tell you," she said.

"Then don't, if you would rather not. But I should be glad to know."

"Would you? I told Beryl the reason."

She felt forced to say that, forced to speak that bit of truth.

"Then, if so, cannot you tell me?"

"I said—I said I could tell you because I knew you were fond of me."

"Ah—that was it!"

He was silent. At last he said:

"I should like to ask you a question. May I?"

"Yes—please do."

"Are you very fond of Beryl Van Tuyn?"

"Oh, no!"

"Aren't you at all fond of her?"

"I'm afraid not. No. But I like her much better than I did."

"Since you have done something for her?"

"Perhaps it is that."

"It is that."

He came towards the sofa and stood by it looking down at her.

"I told you just now, Adela, that you couldn't surprise me. What you have done in connexion with Beryl Van Tuyn has not surprised me. I always knew you were capable of such a thing; yes, even of a thing as fine as that. Thank God you have had your opportunity. Of course you took it. But thank God you have had it."

"I had to take it. I couldn't do anything else."

"Of course *you* couldn't."

She got up. She did not know why. She just felt that she had to get up. Seymour put his hands on her shoulders.

"Have you ever wondered why I was able to go on loving you?" he asked her.

"Yes, very often."

"Well, now perhaps you won't wonder any more."

And he lifted his hands from her shoulders. But he stood there for a moment looking at her. And in his eyes she read her reward.

CHAPTER XI

Early on the following morning, soon after ten o'clock Miss Van Tuyn was startled by a knock on her bedroom door. Everything at all unexpected startled her just now. Her nerves, as even old Fanny

could not help noticing, had gone “all to pieces.” She lived in perpetual fear. Nearly all the previous night she had been lying awake turning over and over in her mind the horrible possibilities of the future. It was in vain that she tried to call her normal common sense to the rescue, in vain that she tried to look at facts calmly, to sum them up dispassionately, and to draw from them reasonable conclusions. She could not be reasonable. Her brain said to her: “You have no reason for fear. You are perfectly safe. Your folly and wilfulness, your carelessness of opinion, your reckless spirit of defiant independence, your ugly and abominable desires”—her brain did not spare her —“might easily have brought you to irretrievable ruin. They might have destroyed you. But Fate has intervened to protect you. You have been saved from the consequences of your own imprudence—to call it by no other name. Give thanks to the God of luck, and to the woman who sacrificed her pride for your sake, and live differently in the future.” Her brain, in fact, told her she was saved. But something else that she could not classify, something still and remote and persistent, told her that she was in great danger. She said to herself, thinking of Arabian: “What can he do? I am my own mistress. If I choose to cut him dead he must accept my decision to have nothing more to do with him and go out of my life. He simply can’t do anything else. I have the whole thing in my hands. He hasn’t a scrap of my writing. He can’t blackmail me. He can’t compromise me more than I have already compromised myself by going about with him and being seen in his flat. He is helpless, and I have absolutely nothing to be afraid of.” She said all this to herself, and yet she was full of fear. That fear had driven her to Lady Sellingworth on the previous evening, and it had

grown in the night. The thought of Arabian tormented her. She said to herself that he could do nothing and, even while she said it, the inexorable something within her whispered: “What might not that man do?” Her imagination put no limit now to his possibilities for evil. All the horrors of the underworld were, for her, congregated together in him. She trembled at the memory of having been in his arms, shut up alone with him in the flat by the river. She attributed to him nameless powers. Something mysterious in him, something occult, had reduced her apparently to the level of an imaginative child, who peoples the night with spectres and conceives of terrors she cannot describe.

She felt that Arabian was not as other men, that he really was what Garstin had called him, a king in the underworld, and that that was why he had had power over her. She felt that he had within him something which ruled, which would have its way. She felt that he was more persistent than other men, more crafty, more self-possessed, more capable, more subtle. She felt that he had greatness as a ruffian, as another man might have greatness as a saint. And she felt above all that he was an expert with women.

If he had wanted Adela Sellingworth as well as her jewels, how would it have been then? What would have happened ten years ago? He had not wanted Adela Sellingworth. But he wanted her. She was positive of that. That he had known she was well off and was going to be rich she did not doubt for a moment. She could never forget as long as she lived the fleeting expression which had changed his face when she had told him of the death of her father. At that moment he had certainly felt that a fortune was probably almost within his grasp. Nevertheless she was positive, she was absolutely certain as a girl can

be about such a thing, that he wanted and had long wanted her. He had waited because mingled with his man's desire for her there had been the other desire. He might have rushed at an intrigue. Such a man could have no real delicacies. He was too wise to rush at a marriage. And he must have had marriage in his mind almost ever since he had met her. He must have made inquiries, have found out all about her, and then laid his plans. Her looks had probably brought him for the first time to Garstin's studio. But it was not only his admiration for her appearance which had brought him there again and again, which had taught him detached self-control, almost distant respect, puzzling reserve, secrecy in intimacy, which had taught him to wait—till he knew.

And when he had not waited, when he had chosen to give way because the right moment had come, when he had made her go with him to his flat, when he had shown her what he wanted! His warmth then had not been a pretending. And yet, just before he had taken her in his arms, he had deliberately managed so that Mrs. Birchington should see her go into his flat. What a horrible mingling of elements there was in this man! Even his natural passions were intertwined with his hideous professional instincts The stretched-out hand of the lover was also the stretched-out hand of the thief.

When she heard the knock on her bedroom door she trembled.

"Yes?" she said, after a moment of hesitation.

She was up and was sitting in an arm-chair near the window having breakfast, and looking at her post.

"Yes?"

Another knock.

"Come in!" she cried.

The door was gingerly opened and a page-boy showed himself. Miss Van Tuyn looked at him with dread.

"What is it? Something for me?"

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, ma'am."

"I can't see anyone. I told them so at the bureau. Where is he?"

"Down below, ma'am."

"Send him away. Say I'm still asleep. Say—"

She noticed for the first time that the boy had a card. He had been hiding it pressed to a salver against his trouser-leg. Now he lifted the salver. But Miss Van Tuyn did not take the card. She was certain the man below was Arabian.

"I can't see anyone. It's much too early."

"The gentleman said it was very important, ma'am, and I was to say so," said the page, with a certain chubby dignity that was almost official.

Miss Van Tuyn was now terrified. It was Arabian, and he would not go till he had seen her. She was certain of that. He would wait downstairs. She would be a prisoner in her rooms. All her fear of him seemed to rush upon her intensified, a fear such as she had never felt before. She got up tingling all over, and with a feeling as if all the blood had suddenly sunk away from her temples.

"You must tell him—"

The page-boy was now holding out the salver with the card on it, almost as if in self-protection. Her eyes fell on it against her will, and she saw there were four printed words on it. On Arabian's card there were only two: Nicolas Arabian. Instantly she stretched out her hand and took the card up—

"General Sir Seymour Portman."

Her relief was so great that she could not conceal it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"Ma'am?" said the boy, looking more official.

"Please run down—"

"Run ma'am?"

"Yes—down at once and bring the gentleman up to my sitting-room. Be as quick as you can."

The page retired with a stiff back and rather slow-moving legs.

So Adela had wasted no time! She had been as good as her word. What a splendid woman she was!

Miss Van Tuyn did something to her gown, to her hair. Not that she wanted to make an impression on Sir Seymour. Circumstances were combining at present to drive her away from her vanity. Really she acted mechanically. Then she prepared to go to the sitting-room. And then, at the bedroom door she hesitated, suddenly realizing what lay before her. Finally she opened the door and listened. She heard almost immediately another door opened and a boy's chirpy voice say:

"This way, sir, please!"

Then she went out and came upon Sir Seymour Portman in the lobby.

"How very kind of you to come!" she said, with an attempt at eager cordiality but feeling now strangely shy and guilty. "And so early!"

"Good morning! May I put my hat here?"

"Yes, do. And leave your coat. Is it cold out?"

"Rather cold."

"This is my little room."

She went before him into the sitting-room which had a dreadfully early morning air, with its only just beginning fire, and its wintry dimness of the poor and struggling day.

"If only we could have met in the evening!" she thought.

It was awful to discuss such a situation as hers when the milkman had scarcely finished his rounds, and when her vitality had not been warmed up.

"Do sit down, Sir Seymour!" she said.

"Thank you!"

And he sat down in a businesslike sort of way, and at once began.

"Rather late last night I saw Lady Sellingworth."

"Oh? Yes?"

"She sent for me. You know why, I understand."

"Yes. I had been with her."

"She told me the whole matter."

"Oh! Did she? I—I've been awfully foolish. I deserve to—I deserve everything. I know that. Adela has been so good to me. I can never say how good. She might so easily have—I mean considering the way I have—"

She stopped. Adela could not have told Sir Seymour about the unkindness of the girl she had sent him to help. Miss Van Tuyn remembered that just in time.

"Lady Sellingworth did what you wished," said Sir Seymour, still in a quiet and businesslike way, "and consulted me. She told me what you wanted; that this man, Arabian, should be made to understand that he must finally give up any plans he had formed with regard to you."

Miss Van Tuyn felt the red beginning to creep in her cheeks.

“Yes,” she said, looking down.

“Perhaps this can be done,” continued Sir Seymour, in a practical way, rather like a competent man at a board meeting. “We must see.”

He did not suggest that she could do it herself. She was thankful to him for that.

“Have you a photograph of this man?” he continued.

“Oh—no!”

“That is a pity.”

“But why do you want—”

“I should like to have his photograph to show at Scotland Yard.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed.

Her face was scarlet now. Her forehead was burning. An acute and horrible sense of shame possessed her, seemed to be wrapped round her like a stinging garment.

“I’ve—I’ve never had a photograph of him,” she said.

After a short pause Sir Seymour said:

“You’ve got his address.”

The words seemed a statement as he said them.

“Yes,” she said.

“Will you kindly write it down for me?”

“Yes.”

She got up, still wrapped up in shame, and went to the writing-table. She took up a pen to write Arabian’s address. But she could not remember the number of the flat. Her memory refused to give it to

her.

"I can't remember the number," she said, standing by the writing-table.

"If you can give me the address of the flats I can easily find out the number."

"It is Rose Tree Gardens"—she began writing it down—"Rose Tree Gardens, Chelsea. It is close to the river."

She came away from the writing-table, and gave him the paper with the address on it.

"Thank you!"

He took the paper, folded it up, drew out a leather case from an inner pocket of his braided black jacket, and consigned the paper to it. Miss Van Tuyn sat down again.

"I understand you met this man at the studio of Mr. Garstin, the painter?" said Sir Seymour.

"Yes. But he wasn't a friend of Mr. Garstin's. Mr. Garstin saw him at the Cafe Royal and wished to paint him, so he asked him to come to the studio."

"And he has painted a portrait of him?"

"Yes."

"Is it a good one?"

"Yes, wonderful!" she said, with a shudder.

"I mean really is it a good likeness?"

"Oh! Yes, it is very like in a way, horribly like."

"In a way?"

"I mean that it gives the worst side. But it is like."

"I suppose the portrait is still in Mr. Garstin's studio?"

"I suppose it is. I haven't seen Mr. Garstin for two or three days. But I suppose it's there."

"Please give me Mr. Garstin's address—the studio address," said Sir Seymour.

"Yes."

She got up again and went to the writing-table. There seemed to her to be something deadly in this interview. She could not feel humanity in it. Sir Seymour was terribly impersonal. There was something almost machine like about him. She did not know him well, but how different he had been to her in Berkeley Square! There he had been a charming old courtier. He had shown a sort of gallant admiration of her. He had beamed kindly upon her youth and her daring. Now he showed nothing.

But—Adela had told him!

She wrote down Dick Garstin's address in Glebe Place, and was about to come away from the writing-table when Sir Seymour said:

"Could you also kindly give me your card with a line of introduction to Mr. Garstin? I don't know him."

"Oh, I will of course!"

She found one of her cards and hesitated.

"What shall I put?" she asked.

"You might put 'To introduce,' and then my name."

"Yes."

She wrote the words on the card.

"Perhaps it might be as well to add '*Please see him*,' and underline it. I understand Mr. Garstin is a brusque sort of fellow."

"Yes, he is."

She added the words he had suggested.

"It's very—it's more than kind of you to take all this trouble," she said, again coming to him. "I am ashamed."

She gave him the card. She could not look into his face.

"I am ashamed," she repeated, in a low voice.

"Well now," he said, "try to get the matter off your mind. Don't give way to useless fears. Most of us fear far more than there is any occasion for."

He stood up.

"Yes?"

"If you wish for me, call me up. I am at St. James's Palace. But I don't suppose you will have need of me. By the way, there's one thing more I perhaps ought to ask you. Forgive me! Has there ever been anything in the nature of a threat from this fellow?"

"Oh, no!" she said. "No, no, no!"

She was swallowing sobs that suddenly began rising in her throat, sobs of utter shame and of stricken vanity.

"It's all too horrible!" she thought.

For a moment she hated the straight-backed, soldierly old man who was standing before her. For he saw her in the dust, where no one ought ever to see her.

"He's in love with me!" she said.

It was as if the words were forced out of her against her will. Directly she had said them she bitterly regretted them. They were the cry of her undying vanity that must try to put itself right, to stand up for itself at whatever cost. Directly she had spoken them she saw a slight twitch pull the left side of his face upward. It had upon her a moral effect. She felt it as his irresistible comment—a comment of

the body, but coming from elsewhere—on her and her nature, and her recent association with Arabian. And suddenly her hatred died, and she longed to do something to establish herself in his regard, to gain his respect.

Already he was holding out his hand to her. She took his hand and held it tightly.

"Don't think too badly of me," she said imploringly. "I want you not to. Because I think you see clearly—you see people as they are. You saw Adela as she is. And perhaps no one else did. But you don't know how fine she is—even you don't. I had treated her badly. I had been unkind to her, very unkind. I had—I had been spiteful to her, and tried to harm her happiness. And yet she told me! I am sure no other woman would ever have done what she has done."

"She had to do it," he said gravely.

But his hand now slightly pressed hers.

"*Had* to? But why?"

"Because she happens to be a thoroughbred."

"Ah!" she breathed.

She was looking into his dark old eyes, and now they were kind, almost soft.

"We must take care," he added, "that what she had done shall not be done in vain. We owe her that. Good-bye."

"And you don't think too badly about me?"

"Once I called you the daffodil girl to her."

"Did you?"

"Youth is pretty cruel sometimes. When you've forgotten all this, don't forget to be kind."

"To her! But how could I?"

"But I don't mean only to her!"

And then he left her.

When he had gone she sat still for a long while, thinking. And the strange thing was that for once she was not thinking about herself.

CHAPTER XII

Rather late in the afternoon of the same day, towards half-past five, Dick Garstin, who was alone in his studio upstairs smoking a pipe and reading Delacroix's "Mon Journal," heard his door bell ring. He was stretched out on a divan, and he lay for a moment without moving, puffing at his pipe with the book in his hand. Then he heard the bell again, and got up. Arabian's portrait stood on its easel in the middle of the room. Garstin glanced at it as he went toward the stairs. Since the day when he had shown it for the first time to Beryl Van Tuyn and Arabian he had not seen either of them. Nor had he had a word from them. This had not troubled him. Already he was at work on another sitter, a dancer in the Russian ballet, talented, decadent, impertinent, and, so Garstin believed, marked out for early death in a madhouse—altogether quite an interesting study. But now, looking at Arabian's portrait, Garstin thought:

"Probably the man himself. I knew he would come back, and we should have a battle. Now for it!"

And he smiled as he went striding downstairs.

But when he opened the door he found standing outside in the foggy darkness a tall, soldierly old man, with an upright figure, white hair, and moustache, a lined red face and dark eyes which looked straight into his.

“Who are you, sir?” said Garstin. “And what do you want?”

“Are you Mr. Dick Garstin?” said the old man.

“Or rather, elderly,” Garstin now said to himself, glancing sharply over his visitor’s strong, lean frame and broad shoulders.

“Yes, I am.”

The stranger opened a leather case and took out a card.

“Perhaps you will kindly read that.”

Garstin took the card.

“Beryl!” he said. “What’s up?”

And he read: “To introduce Sir Seymour Portman, *please see him.* B. V. T.”

“Are you Sir Seymour Portman?”

“Yes.”

“Come in.”

Sir Seymour stepped in.

“Take off your coat?”

“If you’ll allow me. I won’t keep you long.”

“The longer the better!” said Garstin with offhand heartiness. He had taken a liking to his visitor at first sight.

“A damned fine old chap!” had been his instant mental comment on seeing Sir Seymour. “A fellow to swear by!”

“Come upstairs. I’ll show you the way,” he added.

He tramped up and Sir Seymour followed him.

“I do most of my painting here,” said Garstin. “Sit down. Have a cigar.”

“Thank you very much, but I won’t smoke,” said Sir Seymour, looking round casually at the portraits in the room before sitting down and crossing his right leg over his left leg. “And I won’t take up your time for more than a few minutes.”

At this moment he noticed at some distance the portrait of Arabian on its easel, and he put up his eyeglasses. Then he moved.

“Will you allow me to look at that portrait over there?” he asked.

“Rather! It’s the last thing I’ve done, and not so bad either!”

Sir Seymour got up and went to stand in front of the portrait. He was puzzled, and his face showed that; he frowned and pursed his lips, bending forward.

“This is a portrait of a man called Arabian, isn’t it?” he said at length, turning round to Garstin.

“Yes. D’you know the fellow?”

“I haven’t that—privilege,” replied Sir Seymour with an extraordinarily dry intonation. “But I must have seen him somewhere.”

“About town. He’s been here some time.”

“But he’s altered!” said Sir Seymour, still looking hard at the portrait.

“I’m not a photographer, you know!”

“A photographer!” said Sir Seymour, who was something of a connoisseur in painting, and had a few good specimens of the Barbizon School in his apartment at St. James’s Palace. “No. This isn’t a photograph in paint. It’s a”—he gazed again at the

portrait—“it’s a masterly study of a remarkable and hideous personality.”

“Hideous!” said Garstin sharply.

“Yes, hideous,” said Sir Seymour grimly. “An abominable face! Ah!”

He had been bending, but now pulled himself up.

“I saw that man at the Ritz Hotel a good many years ago,” he said. “I was giving a lunch. He was lunching close by with—let me see—an old woman, yes, in a rusty black wig. Someone spoke to me about him, and I—, Yes! I remember it all perfectly. But he looked much younger then. It must be over ten years ago. I spotted him at once as a shady character. One would, of course. But you have brought it all to the surface in some subtle way. Does he like it?”

“To tell the truth I don’t believe he does.”

“I wish to speak to you about that man.”

“Sit down again. Have a whisky?”

“No, thanks.”

“What is it? Are the police after him?”

“I’m not aware of it.”

“I know everything about him, as you see”—he shot out an arm towards the portrait—“and nothing. I picked him up at the Cafe Royal. He’s a magnificent specimen.”

“No doubt. What I want to know is whether you will allow me to bring two or three people here to see this portrait? I’m doing this—I’m here now, and want to come here again, if you are so kind as to allow me—”

“Always jolly glad to see you!” interjected Garstin, with a sort of gruff heartiness.

“Thank you! I’m doing this for your friend, Miss

Beryl Van Tuyn."

"Ha!" said Garstin.

"I don't think I need to go into the matter further than to say that she does not wish to have anything more to do with this Mr. Arabian."

"Oh, she's found him out at last, has she, and put you up to—"

Garstin paused. Then he added:

"It's like Beryl's cheek to ask a man of your type to interfere in such a matter. Fellows like Arabian are hardly in your line."

"Oh, I've had to deal with men of all classes."

"And quite able to, I should say. So Beryl's had enough of that chap?"

"Mr. Garstin, I am going to be frank with you, frank to this extent. Arabian is a blackguard."

"No news to me!"

"Miss Van Tuyn can have no further acquaintance with him, and I am going to do my best to see to that. But I believe this fellow is very persistent."

"I should say so. He's a hard nut to crack. You may depend on that."

"And therefore strong measures may be necessary."

"Whom do you want to bring here to look at my stuff?"

"Two or three officials from Scotland Yard."

Garstin uttered the thrush's song through half-closed lips.

"That's it! Well, you can bring them along whenever you like."

"Thank you. They may not be art experts, but they, or one of them, may possibly be useful for my

purpose."

"Right you are! So you know something definite about the fellow?"

"Yes."

"Don't bother yourself! I don't want to know what it is," snapped out Garstin abruptly.

Sir Seymour smiled, and it was almost what Lady Sellingworth called his "beaming" smile. He got up and held out his hand.

"Thank you," he said.

Garstin gave him a strong grip.

"Glad I've met you!" he said. "Beryl's done me a good turn."

"Perhaps you will allow me to say—though I'm no expert, and my opinion may therefore have no value in your eyes—but you've painted a portrait such as one very seldom sees nowadays."

"D'you mean you think it's fine?"

"Very fine! Wonderful!"

Garstin's usually hard face softened in an extraordinary way.

"Your opinion goes down in my memory in red letters."

Sir Seymour turned to go. As he did so he cast a look round the studio, which suggested to Garstin that he would perhaps like to examine the other portraits dotted about on easels and hanging on the walls. A faint reddish line appeared in the painter's shaven blue cheeks.

"Not worth your while!" he almost muttered.

"Eh?" said Sir Seymour.

"A lot of decadent stuff. I've been choosing my models badly. But—" he paused, looking almost

diffident for a moment.

"Yes?" said Sir Seymour.

"Perhaps, if we ever get to know each other a bit better, you'd let me have a shy at you for a change?"

"That would be an honour," said Sir Seymour with a touch of his very simple, courtly manner.

"In return you know for my letting in the detectives!" said Garstin, with a laugh. "Hulloh!"

He had heard the bell ring downstairs.

"If it's our man!" he said, instinctively lowering his voice.

"Arabian! Are you expecting him?"

"No. But it's just as likely as not. Want to meet him?"

"I can hardly say that!" said Sir Seymour, looking suddenly, Garstin thought, remarkably like a very well-bred ramrod.

"Well, then—"

"But it may be necessary." He hesitated obviously, then added: "If it should be Arabian by chance, perhaps it would be as well if I did see him."

"Just as you like."

"I'll stay if you will allow me," said Sir Seymour, with sudden decision, like a man who had just overcome something.

The bell rang again.

"Can you act?" said Garstin, quickly.

"Sufficiently, I dare say," said Sir Seymour, with a very faint and grim smile.

"Then you'd better! He can!"

And Garstin sprang down the stairs. Two or three minutes later Arabian walked into the studio with

Garstin just behind him. When he saw Sir Seymour a slight look of surprise came into his face, and he half turned towards Garstin as if in inquiry. Sir Seymour realized that Garstin had not mentioned that there was a visitor in the studio.

"A friend of mine, Sir Seymour Portman," said Garstin. "Mr. Nicolas Arabian!"

Arabian bowed and said formally:

"Very glad to meet you."

Sir Seymour bowed, and said:

"Thanks."

"Sit down, my boy!" said Garstin, with sudden heartiness, laying a hand on Arabian's shoulder. "And I know you'll put your lips to a whisky."

"Thank you," said Arabian.

And he sat down in a deep arm-chair. Sir Seymour saw his brown eyes, for a moment hard and inquiring, rest upon the visitor he had not expected to find, and wondered whether Arabian remembered having seen him before. If so Arabian would also remember that he, Seymour, was a friend of Adela Sellingworth, who had been with him at the Ritz on that day ten years ago.

"Say how much," said Garstin, coming up with the whisky.

Sir Seymour noticed that Arabian took a great deal of the spirit and very little soda-water with it. Directly his glass was filled—it was a long glass—he drank almost greedily.

"A cigar?" said Garstin. "But I know without asking."

"I do not refuse," said Arabian.

And Sir Seymour hated his voice, while realizing that it was agreeable, perhaps even seductive.

"There! Now we're cozy!" said Garstin. "But I wish Sir Seymour you'd join us!"

"If you will allow me I will smoke a light cigar I have here."

And Sir Seymour drew out a cigar-case and lit up a pale and long Havannah.

"That's better!" said Garstin, drinking. "How's Beryl, my boy?"

"I have not seen Miss Van Tuyn to-day," said Arabian. "But I hope to see her to-morrow."

He looked at Sir Seymour, and there seemed to be a flicker of suspicion in his eyes.

"DO you know Miss Van Tuyn?" he asked.

"Very slightly," said Sir Seymour. "I have met her once or twice in London. She is a very beautiful creature."

There was constraint in the room. Sir Seymour felt it strongly and feared that it came from something in him. Evidently he was not a very good actor. He found it difficult to be easy and agreeable with a man whom he longed to get hold of by the collar and thrash till it was time to hand him over to the police. But he resolved to make a strong effort to conceal what he could not conquer. And he began to talk to Arabian. Afterwards he could not remember what they had talked about just then. He could only remember the strangeness which he had realized as he sat there smoking his Havannah, the strangeness of life. That he should be smoking and chatting with the scoundrel who had changed Adela's existence, who had tricked her, robbed her, driven her into the solitude which had lasted ten years! And why was he doing it? He did not absolutely know. But his instinct had told him to stay on in Garstin's studio when everything else in him, revolting, had shrunk from

meeting this beast, unless and until he could deal with him properly.

He had smoked about half his cigar, and the constraint in the room seemed to him to be lessened, though not abolished, when the conversation took a turn quite unexpected by him. And all that was said in the studio from that moment remained firmly fixed in his memory. Garstin got up to fetch some more whisky for Arabian, whose glass was now empty, and as he came back with the decanter he said to Arabian:

"Sir Seymour's had a good look at your portrait, Arabian."

"Indeed!" said Arabian.

"And he thinks it's damn fine. As I'm giving it to you, I thought you'd like to know that it's appreciated."

There was an unmistakably malicious expression on Garstin's face as he spoke, and his small eyes travelled quickly from Arabian to Sir Seymour.

"In fact," added Garstin, lifting the decanter to pour the whisky into Arabian's glass, "Sir Seymour is so pleased with my work that I shouldn't wonder if he lets me paint him."

"Ah!" said Arabian, looking at Sir Seymour, with a sudden hard intensity which strangely transformed his face, "this is good news. I am pleased. But—thank you!" (to Garstin who poured out some more whisky) "that will do, please! But you are not afraid of the drawback?"

"What drawback?" asked Sir Seymour.

"Mr. Dick Garstin makes us all look like *canaille*!"

"Indeed!"

"But have you not noticed this?" said Arabian.

And the agreeable softness of his voice altered, giving way to an almost rasping quality of sound. He put down his glass and got up, with a lithe and swift movement that seemed somehow menacing. It was so light, so agile, so noiseless and controlled.

"Surely you have. Please, look at all these!"

He made a sweeping circular movement with his arm. Sir Seymour got on his feet.

"Do you not see? There is the same thing in all. We are all placed by Mr. Dick Garstin in the same boat. Even the judge, he is there too. Look!"

Sir Seymour looked from canvas to canvas and then at Arabian.

"Well?" said Arabian, still in the rasping voice. "Do I say true? Are we not all turned into *canaille* by Dick Garstin?"

Sir Seymour did not answer.

"With you if you are painted," continued Arabian, "it will be the same. Dick Garstin must see bad in us all."

He laughed and his laugh was oddly shrill and ugly.

"It is an *idee fixe*," he said. "You see, I am frank. I say what I think, Dick Garstin."

"No objection to that!" said Garstin, with a mischievous smile. "But if you don't like your picture you won't want to have it. So let us consider our bargain cancelled."

"Oh, no," said Arabian, "the picture is mine."

"The bargain we made," said Garstin, turning to Sir Seymour, "was this: Mr. Arabian was to be kind enough to sit to me on two conditions. One was in my favour, the other in his."

"I beg your pardon!" said Arabian sharply.

But Garstin continued inflexibly:

"I was to have the right to exhibit the picture, and, after that, I was to hand it over as a present to Arabian."

"No, that was not the bargain, please!" said Arabian.

"Not the bargain?" said Garstin, with an air of humorous surprise.

"Oh, no. You kindly said that if I gave up my time to you, as I have done, very much of my time, you would give me the picture when it was finished. That was the bargain between us. But I did not say I would allow you to exhibit my picture."

"But I told you before I ever put a smudge of paint on the canvas that I should want to exhibit it."

"That is quite true."

"Well, then?"

"Two must speak to make a bargain. Is it not so?" He spoke to Sir Seymour.

"I presume so," said the latter, very solemnly.

He had realized that this odd scene had been brought about deliberately, and perhaps by both of the men who stood before him. Garstin had certainly started it, but Arabian had surely with purpose, taken the cue from Garstin.

"Ah! You hear!"

"I do!" said Garstin, composedly.

"Well, Dick Garstin, I did not say I would permit my picture to be exhibited by you. And that was on purpose. I intended to wait until I saw how you would make me appear. I have waited. There I am!" He pointed to the portrait. "It is fine, perhaps, as you say. But I do not choose that people should see that and be told, 'That is Nicolas Arabian.' I do not give

you permission to show that portrait."

"You don't like it?"

"You have made of me a beast. That is what I say."

"Sorry you think so! But what's to be done? That picture is worth from eight hundred to a thousand pounds at the very least. You don't suppose I am going to give it to you without letting the people who care about my stuff have a look at it? Why, where is your sense of fairness, my boy?"

"I do not know really what you mean by that!"

"Well, I ask you, Sir Seymour, would it be fair that I should have all my trouble for nothing? He can have the picture. But I want my *kudos*. Eh?"

"I quite understand that," said Sir Seymour, calmly.

Arabian turned round and faced him. And as he did so Sir Seymour said to himself:

"The fellow's been drinking heavily."

This thought had not occurred in his mind till this moment, but he felt certain that Garstin's sharp eyes had noticed the fact sooner, probably directly they had seen Arabian at the street door. No doubt the very stiff whisky-and-soda Arabian had just drunk had made it more obvious. Anyhow, Sir Seymour had no doubt at all about it now. It was not noticeable in Arabian's face. But his manner began to show it to the experienced eyes of the old campaigner.

"But, please, do you understand my feeling? Would you like to be made what you are not—a beast?"

Sir Seymour saw Garstin, perhaps with difficulty, shutting off a smile.

"I can't say I should," he answered, with absolute gravity.

"Would you," pursued Arabian, apparently in desperate earnest, "would you allow a picture of you like this to be shown to all your friends?"

"I think," returned Sir Seymour, still with an absolute and simple gravity, "that I should object to that—strongly."

"You hear!" said Arabian to Garstin. "It is your friend who says this."

"I can't help that," said Garstin, totally unperturbed. "I'm going to exhibit that picture."

"No! No!" said Arabian.

And as he spoke he suddenly bared his teeth.

Garstin, without making any rejoinder to this almost brutally forcible exclamation, which was full of violent will, thrust a hand into his waistcoat pocket and pulled out a big gold watch.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," he said, with a swift glance at Sir Seymour, which the latter did not miss, "but I must turn you both out. I'm dining at the Arts Club to-night. Jinks—you know the Slade Jinks—is coming to pick me up. You'll forgive me, Sir Seymour?"

His voice was unusually gentle as he said the last words.

"Of course. I've stayed an unconscionable time. Are you going my way, Mr. Arabian?"

Garstin's mouth twitched. Before Arabian could reply, Garstin said:

"Look here, Arabian!"

"Yes—please?" said Arabian.

"You and I differ pretty badly about this business of your damned portrait."

"Ah, yes!"

"Sir Seymour's a just man, a very just man. Let's hear what he has to say."

"But you tell us you have no time!"

"Exactly! Jinks you know! He's a devil for punctuality. They set the clocks by him at the Slade! But *you*—"

"Yes?"

"Talk it over with Sir Seymour. Get his unbiased verdict. And let me hear from you any time to-morrow. He'll say what's fair and square. I know that."

While speaking he went towards the head of the stairs, followed by Sir Seymour and Arabian. As Arabian passed the place where the whisky stood he picked up his glass and drunk it off at a gulp.

A minute later Sir Seymour and he were out in the night together.

CHAPTER XIII

"Which way do you go, please?" asked Arabian.

"I'll go your way if you like. I live in St. James's Palace. But I'm in no hurry. Do you live in my direction?"

"Oh, no. I live quite near in Chelsea."

"I can walk to your door then if you don't mind

having my company," said Sir Seymour.

"Thank you!"

And they walked on together in silence. Sir Seymour wondered what was passing in the mind of the man beside him. He felt sure that Arabian had been at first suspicious of him in the studio. Had he been able by his manner to lull that suspicion to rest? He was inclined to believe so. But it was impossible for him to be sure. After two or three minutes of silence he spoke again. But he made no allusion to the recent scene in the studio, or to Garstin's parting words. His instinct counselled silence on that point. So he talked of London, the theatres, the affairs of the day, trying to seem natural, like a man of the world with a casual acquaintance. He noticed that Arabian's answers and comments were brief. Sometimes when he did speak he spoke at random. It was obvious that he was preoccupied. He seemed to Sir Seymour to be brooding darkly over something. This state of things continued until they reached Rose Tree Gardens.

"This is it," said Arabian, stopping before the big porch.

Sir Seymour stopped, too, hesitated, then said:

"I'll say good night to you."

Arabian shot a piercing and morose glance at him, moved his right hand as if about to extend it, dropped it and said:

"Well, but we have not spoken any more about my picture!"

"No."

"Dick Garstin said you would decide."

"Scarcely that—was it?"

"But I think it was."

"Well, but it's really not my affair."

"But he made it so."

"Perhaps. But you didn't say—"

"But I should like to know what you think."

"Very good of you. But I'm an outsider. I wasn't there when you made what you say was a bargain."

"No, but—"

Again he sent a piercing glance to Sir Seymour, who received it with absolute sangfroid, and stood looking completely detached, firm and simple. At that moment Sir Seymour felt positive that a struggle was going on in Arabian in which the drink he had taken was playing a part. The intensely suspicious nature of the enemy of society, always on the alert, because always liable to be in danger, was at odds with the demon that steals away the wits of men, unchains their recklessness, unlocks their tongues, uncovers often their most secret inclinations. Arabian was hesitating. At that moment the least thing would turn him one way or the other, would prompt him to give himself to the intense caution which was probably natural to him, or would drive him to the incaution which he would regret when he was physically normal again. It seemed to Sir Seymour that he knew this, and that he had it in his power just then to turn the scale, to make it drop to whichever side he wished. And as Arabian hesitated at that moment so Sir Seymour hesitated too. He longed to get away from the man, to have done with him forever. But he had put his hand to a task. He had here an opportunity. Garstin had certainly given it to him deliberately. It would be weak not to take advantage of it. He was not accustomed to yield to his weak inclinations, and he resolved not to do so now. He was sure that if he showed the least sign of

wishing to push himself into Arabian's affairs the man would recoil at once, in spite of the drink which was slightly, but definitely, clouding his perceptions. So he took the contrary course. He forced himself to hold out his hand to the beast, and said:

"Well—good-night!"

But Arabian did not take his hand.

"Oh, but please come in for a moment!" he said. "Why go away?"

"It's getting late."

"But I will not keep you long. Dick Garstin said you should judge between us, that I was to come to-morrow and tell him. I know you will say I have the right. Come up. I will explain to you."

"Very well," said Sir Seymour, with apparent reluctance, "but really I must not stay long."

"No, no! You are very good. It is not your business. But really it is important. Here! We will take the elevator."

As he got into the lift Sir Seymour wondered whether he would have tricked Arabian if the latter had not been drinking. While the lift was going swiftly and smoothly up he decided that before he came down in it he would make quite plain to Arabian why he had been to Dick Garstin's studio that day. The opportunity which was given to him he would take advantage of to the full. If only he could strike a blow for Adela instead of for Miss Van Tuyn! But Adela had let this brute go. And could she have done anything else? For she had had her own folly to be afraid of. But all that was ten years ago. And now —She was different now! He reiterated that to himself as he stood in the lift almost touching Arabian. Adela was quite different now. She had given herself to the best that was in her.

"Here it is!"

The lift had stopped. They got out on a landing, and Arabian put a key into a door.

"Do please take off your coat. It is all warm in here!"

"Yes, and some brute's been burning scent in a shovel!" thought Sir Seymour, as he stepped into the flat.

"I think I'll keep my coat," he said. "I shan't be staying long."

"Oh, if you are in such a hurry!" said Arabian, with sudden moody irritation.

He shut the door with a bang. In the electric light he looked tired and menacing. At least Sir Seymour thought so. But the light in the little hall was shaded and not very strong.

"You will be much too hot truly!" said Arabian.

"Then I'll leave my coat," said Sir Seymour.

And he took it off, laid it on a chair and went into a room on the left, the door of which Arabian held open.

"This is my salon. I take the flat furnished. The river is there."

He pointed towards the windows now covered by curtains.

"Please sit down by the fire. I will explain. I know you will be on my side."

He pressed a bell on the right of the mantelpiece.

Almost instantaneously the door was opened and a thin man—who looked about thirty, Sir Seymour thought—showed himself. He had a very dark narrow face and curiously light-grey eyes. Arabian spoke to him in Spanish. He listened, motionless,

turned and went softly out.

"You must have a little whisky with me!" said Arabian.

"No, thank you!"

"But—why not?"

"I never take it at this time."

"Well, I must have some. I have got a cold. This climate in winter—it is awful!"

He shook his broad shoulders and blinked rapidly several times, then suddenly opened his eyes very wide and yawned.

"Well now!" he said. "But please sit down."

Sir Seymour sat down. Arabian stood with his back to the fire and his hands thrust into his trouser pockets. Sir Seymour noticed what a magnificently made man he was. He had certainly been endowed with physical gifts for the undoing of women. But his brown face, strikingly handsome though it undoubtedly was, had the hard stamp of vice on it. Long ago at a first glance Sir Seymour had seen that this man was a wrong 'un, and now, as he looked at Arabian, he found himself wondering how anyone could fail to see that.

"Now I will tell you exactly," Arabian said.

And he explained carefully and lucidly enough—though through occasional yawns—what had happened between Garstin and himself. He did not mention Miss Van Tuyn's name. As he was getting towards the end of his narrative his servant came in with a tray on which were bottles and glasses. He said nothing and Arabian said nothing to him, but went on talking and did not appear to notice him. But directly he had gone Arabian poured out some whisky, added a little soda and drank it.

"There! That is how we did!" he said at last.

And he dropped softly, with an odd lightness, into a chair near Sir Seymour, and nodded:

"Now, have I not the right over the picture? Can I not send to-morrow and take it away? Is it not just?"

"Just!" said Sir Seymour. "Do you care so much about justice?"

"Eh?" said Arabian, suddenly leaning forward in his chair. "What is that?"

The bitter sarcasm which Sir Seymour had not been able to keep out of his voice had evidently startled Arabian.

"You are English," he said, as Sir Seymour said nothing. "Do you not care that a stranger in your country should have justice?"

"Oh, yes. I care very much about that."

The intense dryness of the voice that answered evidently made an impression on Arabian. For he fixed his eyes on his guest with intense and hard inquiry, and laid his brown hands on the arms of his chair, as if in readiness for something. But he only said:

"Well—please?"

Sir Seymour's inclination was to get up. But he did not obey it. He sat without moving, and returned Arabian's stare with a firm, soldier's gaze. The fearlessness of his eyes was absolute, unflinching.

"I thoroughly understand why you don't want Mr. Garstin to show people that picture," he said.

"Ah!"

"The biggest fool in creation, if he saw it, would understand."

"Understand what—please?"

"Understand you."

"Pardon!" said Arabian sharply. "What do you mean?"

He was up. But Sir Seymour sat still.

"Mr. Garstin uncovered your secret," he said. "A man such as you are naturally objects to that."

"What have you come here for?" said Arabian.

"You asked me to come."

"What did you go to Dick Garstin for?"

"That is my business."

Sir Seymour got up slowly, very deliberately even, from his chair.

"My secret, you say. What do you know about me?"

In the voice there was intense suspicion.

"We needn't discuss that. I am not going to discuss it."

"What did you go to Dick Garstin for?"

"I went to ask him if he would allow me to bring two or three people to his studio to look at his portrait of you."

"My portrait! What is my portrait to you? Why should you bring people?"

But Sir Seymour did not answer the question. Instead he put one hand on the mantelpiece, leaned slightly towards Arabian, and said:

"You wanted my verdict on the rights of the case between you and Mr. Garstin. That isn't my affair. You must fight it out between you. But I should seriously advise you not to take too long over the quarrel. You said just now that the English climate was awful. Get out of it as soon as you can."

"Get out of it! What is it to you whether I stay or

go?"

"I'm afraid if you delay here much longer you may be sorry for it."

"Who are you?" said Arabian fiercely.

"I'm a friend of Miss Van Tuyn."

"What has that to do with me? Why do you try to interfere with me?"

"Miss Van Tuyn—I saw her this morning—wishes me to see to it that you leave her alone, get out of her life."

"Are you her father, a relation?"

"No."

"Then what have you to do with it? You—you impertinent old man!"

Sir Seymour's brick-red, weather-beaten face took on a darker, almost a purplish, hue, and the hand that had been holding the mantelpiece tightened into a fist.

"You will leave this young lady alone," he said sternly. "Do you hear? You will leave her alone. She knows what you are."

Arabian had pushed out his full under-lip and was staring now intently at Sir Seymour. His gaze was intense, and yet there was a cloudy look in his eyes. The effect of what he had drunk was certainly increasing upon him in the heat of the rather small room.

"When I came into the studio," he said after a moment's silence, "I remembered your face, and, 'Why is he here?' That was my thought. Why is he there? Where did I see you?"

"That doesn't matter. You will give up your acquaintance with Miss Van Tuyn. You will get out of London. And then no measures will be taken

against you."

"Where was it?" persisted Arabian. "Do you remember me?"

"Yes," said Sir Seymour.

He debated within himself for an instant, and then took a decision.

"I saw you at the Ritz Hotel in Piccadilly ten years or more ago."

"At the Ritz!"

"I was lunching with a friend. I was lunching with Lady Sellingworth."

"Ah!" exclaimed Arabian. "That was it! I remember. So—*she* sent—I see! I see!"

He half shut his eyes and a vein in his forehead swelled, giving to his brow a look of violence.

"She has—She has—"

He shut his mouth with a snap of the teeth. Sir Seymour was aware of a struggle taking place in him. Something, urged on by drink, was fighting hard with his natural caution. But the caution, long trained, no doubt, and kept in almost perpetual use, was fighting hard too.

"No one sent me," said Sir Seymour with contempt. "But that's no matter. You understand now that you are to leave this young lady alone. Her acquaintance with you has ceased. It won't be renewed. If you call on her you will be sent off. If you write to her your letters will be burnt without being read. If you try to persecute her in any way means will be found to protect her and to punish you. I shall see to that."

Arabian's mouth was still tightly shut and he was standing quite still and seemed to be thinking, or trying to think, deeply. For his eyes now had a

curiously inward look. If Sir Seymour had expected a burst of rage as the sequel to his very plain speaking he was deceived. Apparently this man was serenely beyond that society in which a human being can be insulted and resent it. Or else had he been thinking with such intensity that he had not even heard what had just been said to him? For a moment Sir Seymour was inclined to believe so. And he was about to reiterate what he had said, to force it on Arabian's attention, when the latter stopped him.

"Yes—yes!" he said. "I hear! Do not!"

He seemed to be turning something over in his mind with complete self-possession under the eyes of the man who had just scornfully attacked him. At last he said:

"I fear I was rude just now. You startled me. I said it was impertinence. But I see, I understand now. The women—they are clever. And when age comes—ah, we have no longer much defence against them."

And he smiled.

"What d'you mean?" said Sir Seymour, longing to knock the fellow down, and feeling an almost insuperable difficulty in retaining his self-control.

"This I mean! You say you come to me sent by Miss Van Tuyn. But I say—no! You come to me sent by Lady Sellingworth."

Sir Seymour was startled. Was the fellow so brazen that he was going to allude to what had happened over ten years ago? That seemed incredible, but with such a man perhaps everything was possible.

"It is like this!" continued Arabian, in a suave and explanatory voice. "Lady Sellingworth she hates Miss Van Tuyn. They have quarrelled about a young man. His name is Craven. I have met him in a restaurant. I dine there with Miss van Tuyn. He dines there that

night with Lady Sellingworth, who is in love with him, as old women are with nice-looking boys, and —”

“Hold your tongue, you infernal blackguard!”

“Miss Van Tuyn calls Craven to us, and Lady Sellingworth is so jealous that she runs out of the restaurant, so that he is obliged to follow her and leave Miss Van Tuyn—”

“You damned ruffian!” said Sir Seymour.

His face was congested with anger. He put out his arm as if he were going to seize Arabian by the collar of his jacket. For once in his life he “saw red”; for once he was forced by indignation into saying something he would never have said had he given himself time to think. He was carried away by impulse like a youth in spite of his years, of his white hair, of his immense natural self-control.

Arabian moved backwards with a swift, wary movement. Sir Seymour did not follow him. He stood where he was and said again:

“You damned ruffian! If you don’t get out of the country I’ll set the police on you.”

“Indeed! What for, please?”

“For stealing Lady Sellingworth’s jewels in Paris ten years ago!”

Arabian bared his teeth like an animal and half shut his eyes. There was a strange look about his temples, as if under the deep brown of his skin something had gone suddenly white.

“Miss Van Tuyn knows that you stole them!”

Arabian drew in his breath sharply. His mouth opened wide.

Sir Seymour turned and went out of the room. He shut the door behind him. In the little scented hall he

caught up his coat and hat. He heard a door click. The dark man with the light grey eyes showed himself.

"Keep away, you!" said Sir Seymour.

The man stood where he was, and Sir Seymour went out of the flat.

CHAPTER XIV

When Sir Seymour was going out of the main hall of the building in which Arabian lived a taxicab happened to drive up. A man got out of it and paid the chauffeur. Sir Seymour made a sign to the chauffeur, who jerked his head and said:

"Yes, sir."

"Drive me to Claridge's Hotel, please," said Sir Seymour.

He got into the taxicab and was soon away in the night. When he reached the hotel he went to the bureau and inquired if Miss Van Tuyn was at home. The man at the bureau, who knew him well, said that she was in, that she had not been out all day. He would inquire at once if she was at home to visitors. As he spoke he looked at Sir Seymour with an air of discreet interest. After a moment at the telephone he asked Sir Seymour to go upstairs, and called a page-boy to accompany him and show him the way.

"Henriques," said Sir Seymour, pausing as he was about to follow the page. "You're a discreet fellow, I

know."

"I hope so, Sir Seymour."

"If by chance a man called Arabian should come here, while I am upstairs, get rid of him, will you? I am speaking on Miss Van Tuyn's behalf and with her authority."

"I won't let the gentleman up, Sir Seymour."

"Has he called to-day?"

"Yes, Sir Seymour. He called early this afternoon. I had orders to say Miss Van Tuyn and Miss Cronin were both out. He wrote a note downstairs which was sent up."

"He may call again at any time. Get rid of him."

"Yes, Sir Seymour."

"Thanks. I rely on your discretion."

And Sir Seymour went towards the lift, where the page-boy was waiting.

Miss Van Tuyn met him at the threshold of her sitting-room. She was very pale. She greeted him eagerly.

"How good of you to call again! Do come in. I haven't stirred. I haven't been out all day."

She shut the sitting-room door.

"*He* has been here!"

"So I heard."

"How? Who has—"

"I ventured to speak to Henriques, the young man at the bureau, before coming up. I know him quite well. I took it on myself to give an order on your behalf."

"That he wasn't to be allowed to come up?"

"Yes. I told Henriques to get rid of him."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you! I've been in misery all day thinking at every moment that he might open my door and walk in."

"They won't let him up."

"But they mightn't happen to see him. If there were many people in the hall he might pass by unnoticed and—"

"In a hotel of this type people don't pass by unnoticed. You need not be afraid."

"But I am horribly afraid. I can't help it. And it's so dreadful not daring to move. It's—it's like living in a nightmare!"

"Come, Miss Van Tuyn!" said Sir Seymour, and in his voice and manner there was just a hint of the old disciplinarian, "pull yourself together. You're not helpless, and you've got friends."

"Oh, do forgive me! I know I have. But there's something so absolutely hideous in feeling like this about a man who—whom I—"

She broke off, and sat down on a sofa abruptly, almost as if her limbs had given way under her.

"I quite understand that. I've just been with the fellow."

Miss Van Tuyn started up.

"You've seen him?"

"Yes."

"Where? Here?"

"I went to Mr. Garstin's studio to have a look at the portrait and say a word to him. While I was there Arabian called. I stayed on and sat with him for some time. Afterwards I walked with him to the building where he is living temporarily and went in."

"Went in? *You* went into his flat!"

"As I say."

Miss Van Tuyn looked at him without speaking. Her expression showed intense astonishment, amounting almost to incredulity.

"I had it out with him," said Sir Seymour grimly, after a pause. "And in the heat of the moment I told him something which I had not intended to tell him, which I had not meant to speak of at all."

"What? What?"

"I told him I knew about the theft of ten years ago."

"Oh!"

"And I told him also that you knew about it."

"That I—oh! How did he take it? What did he say?"

"I didn't wait to hear. The flat was—well—scented, and I wanted to get out of it."

His face expressed such a stern and acute disgust that Miss Van Tuyn's eyes dropped beneath his.

"You may think—it would be natural to think that the fact of my having told the man about your knowledge of his crime would prevent him from ever attempting to see you again," Sir Seymour continued, "but I don't feel sure of that."

"You think that even after that he might—"

"I'll be frank with you. I can't tell what he might or might not do. He may follow my suggestion—"

"What did you—"

"I suggested to him that he had better clear out of the country at once. It's quite possible that he may take my view and go, but in case he doesn't, and tries to bother you any more—"

"He's been! He's written! He says he *will* see me.

He has guessed that something has turned me against him."

"He knows now what it is. Now I want you to write a note to him which I will leave at the bureau in case he calls to-night or to-morrow morning."

"Yes."

She went to the writing-table and sat down.

"If you will allow me to suggest the wording."

"Please—please do!"

She took up a pen and dipped it in the ink. Then Sir Seymour dictated:

SIR,—Sir Seymour Portman has told me of his meeting with you to-day and of what occurred at it. What he said to you about me is true. I *know*. If you call you will not see me. I refuse absolutely to see you or to have anything more to do with you, now or at any future time.

"And then your name at the end."

Miss van Tuyn wrote with a hand that slightly trembled. "B. VAN TUYN."

"If you will put that into an envelope and address it I will take it down and leave it at the bureau."

"Thank you."

Miss Van Tuyn put the note into an envelope, closed the envelope and addressed it.

"That's right."

Sir Seymour held out his hand and she gave him the note.

"Now, good night."

"You are going!"

He smiled slightly.

"I don't sleep at Claridge's as you and Miss Cronin

do."

"No, of course not. Thank you so very, very much! But I can never thank you properly."

She paused. Then she said with sudden bitterness:

"And I used to pride myself on my independence!"

"Ah—independence! A word!" said Sir Seymour.

He turned away to go, but when he was near the door he stopped and seemed hesitating.

"What is it?" said Miss Van Tuyn anxiously.

"Even men sometimes have instincts," he said, turning round.

"Yes?"

"May I use your telephone?"

"Of course! But—do—you—"

"Where—Oh, there it is!"

He went to it and called up the bureau. Then he said: "Sir Seymour Portman is speaking from Miss Van Tuyn's sitting-room . . . is that Mr. Henriques? Please tell me, has that man, Arabian, of whom we spoke just now, called again?"

There was a silence in which Miss Van Tuyn, watching, saw a frown wrinkle deeply Sir Seymour's forehead.

"Ah! Has he gone? Did you get rid of him? . . . How long ago? . . . Only two or three minutes! . . . Do you think he knows I am here? . . . Thank you. I'll be down in a moment."

He put the receiver back.

"Oh, but don't leave me!" said Miss Van Tuyn distractedly. "You see, in spite of what you told him he *has* come!"

"Yes. He has been. He's a determined fellow."

"He'll never give it up! What can I do?"

"All you can do at present is to remain quietly up here in your comfortable rooms. Leave the rest to me."

"But if he gets in?"

"He won't. Even if he came upstairs—and he won't be allowed to—he has no key of your outer door. Now I'll go down and leave this note at the bureau. If he comes back and receives it, that will probably decide him to give the thing up. He is counting on the weakness of your will. This note will show him you have made up your mind. By the way"—he fixed his dark eyes on her—"you *have* made up your mind?"

She blushed up to her hair.

"Oh, yes—yes!"

"Very well. To-morrow I shall go to Scotland Yard. We'll get him out of the country one way or another."

She accompanied him to the outer door of the apartment. When he had gone out she shut it behind him, and he heard the click of a bolt being pushed home.

Before leaving the hotel Sir Seymour again sought his discreet friend Henriques, to whom he gave Miss Van Tuyn's note.

"So the fellow has been?" he said.

"Yes, Sir Seymour."

"Did you get rid of him easily?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Sir Seymour, he tried to be obstinate. I think—if you'll excuse me—I certainly think that he was slightly under the influence of drink. Not drunk, you'll understand, not at all as much as that! But still—"

"Yes—yes. If he comes back give him that note. And—do you think it would be wise to give him a hint that any further annoyance might lead to the intervention of the police? The young lady is very much upset and frightened. Do you think you might drop a word or two—at your discretion?"

"I'll manage it, Sir Seymour. Leave it to me!"

"Very good of you, Henriques. Good night."

"Good night, Sir Seymour. Always very glad to do anything for you."

"Thank you."

As Sir Seymour stepped out into Brook Street he glanced swiftly up and down the thoroughfare. But he did not see the man he was looking for. He stood still for a moment. There was hesitation in his mind. The natural thing, he felt, would be to go at once to Berkeley Square and to have a talk with Adela. It was late. He was beginning to feel hungry. Adela would give him some dinner. But—could he go to Adela just now? No; he could not. And he hailed a cab and drove home. Something the beast had said had made a horrible impression upon the faithful lover, an impression which remained with him, which seemed to be eating its way, like a powerful acid, into his very soul, corroding, destroying.

Adela—young Craven!

Was it possible? Was there then never to be an end to that mania, which had been Adela's curse, and the tragedy of the man who had loved her with the long love which is so rare among men?

There was bitterness in Sir Seymour's heart that night, and that bitterness sent him home, to the home that was no real home, to the solitude that *she* had given him.

CHAPTER XV

On the following morning, true to his word, Sir Seymour visited Scotland Yard, and had a talk with a certain authority there who was a very old friend of his. The authority asked a few questions, but no questions that were indiscreet, or that Sir Seymour was unable to answer without betraying Lady Sellingworth's confidence. The sequel to this conversation was that a tall, thin, lemon-coloured man, with tight lips and small, dull-looking eyes, which saw much more than most bright eyes ever see, accompanied Sir Seymour in a cab to Glebe Place. They arrived there about half-past eleven. Sir Seymour rang the bell, and in a moment Dick Garstin opened the door.

"What's the matter?" was Sir Seymour's unconventional greeting to him.

For the painter's face was flushed in patches and his small eyes glowed fiercely.

"Who's this?" he said, looking at Sir Seymour's companion.

"Detective Inspector Horridge—Mr. Dick Garstin," said Sir Seymour.

"Oh, come to see the picture! Well, you're too late!" said Garstin in a harsh voice.

"Too late!"

"Yes, a damned sight too late! But come up!"

They went in, and Garstin, without any more words, took them up to the studio.

“There you are!” he said, still in the harsh and unnatural voice.

He flung out his arm towards the easel which stood in the middle of the room. Sir Seymour and the inspector went up to it. Part of the canvas on which Arabian’s portrait had been painted was still there. But the head and face had been cleanly cut away. Only the torso remained.

“When was this done?” asked Sir Seymour.

“Some time last night, I suppose.”

“But—”

“I didn’t sleep here. I often don’t, more often than not. But last night I was a fool to be away. Well, I’ve paid for my folly!”

“But how—”

“God knows! The fellow got in. It doesn’t much matter how. A false key, I suppose.”

“Does anyone know?”

“Not a soul, except us.”

Sir Seymour was silent. He had realized at once that Miss Van Tuyn was safe now, safe, too, from further scandal, unless Garstin chose to make trouble. He looked at the painter, and from him to the inspector.

“What are you going to do?” he said to Dick Garstin.

“I don’t know!” said Garstin.

And he flung himself down on the old sofa by the wall.

“I don’t know!”

For a moment he put his hands up to his temples

and stared on the ground. As he sat there thus he looked like a man who had just been thrashed. After a moment Sir Seymour went over to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

Garstin looked up.

"What's that for?"

He stared into Sir Seymour's face for an instant. Perhaps he read something there. For he seemed to pull himself together, and got up.

"Well, inspector," he said, "you've had your visit for nothing. It wasn't a bad picture, either. I should like you to have had a squint at it. But—perhaps I'll do better yet. Who knows? Perhaps I've stuck to those Cafe Royal types too long. Eh, Sir Seymour? Perhaps I'd better make a start in a new line. Have a whisky?"

"Thank you. But it's rather too early," said the lemon-coloured man. "Do you wish—"

"No, I don't!" said Garstin. "We'll leave it at that?"

Again he flung out his arm towards the mutilated canvas.

"I made a bargain with the fellow whose portrait that was. I was to paint it and exhibit it, and then he was to have it. Well, I suppose we're about quits. I can't exhibit it, but I'm damned if he can make much money out of it. We're quits!"

Sir Seymour turned to the inspector.

"Well, inspector, I'm very sorry to have given you this trouble for nothing," he said. "I know you're a busy man. You take the cab back to Scotland Yard. Here—you must allow me to pay the shot. I'll stay on for a few minutes. And"—he glanced towards Garstin —"by the way, we may as well keep this matter between us, if Mr. Garstin is good enough to agree."

"I agree! I agree!" said Garstin.

"The fact is there's a woman in it, quite a girl. We don't want a scandal. It would distress her. And I suppose this is really—this outrage—I suppose it is purely a matter for Mr. Garstin to decide whether he wishes any sequel to it or not."

"Oh, certainly," said the inspector. "If Mr. Garstin doesn't wish any action to be taken—"

"I don't! That's flat!"

"Very well," said the inspector. "Good morning."

"Back in a moment," said Garstin to Sir Seymour. And he went downstairs to let the inspector out.

"So that's how it ends!" said Sir Seymour to himself when he was alone. "That's how it ends!"

And he went over to what had been Arabian's portrait, and gazed at the hole which surmounted the magnificent torso. He had no doubt that Arabian had gone out of Miss Van Tuyn's life for ever. Probably, almost certainly, he had returned to the hotel on the previous evening, had been given the note Miss Van Tuyn had written to dictation, and also a hint from that very discreet and capable fellow, Henriques, of what might happen if he persisted in trying to force himself upon her. And then he had come to the decision which had led to the outrage in the studio. Where was he now? No longer in Rose Tree Gardens if Sir Seymour knew anything of men.

"The morning boat to Paris, and—the underworld!" Sir Seymour muttered to himself.

"Not much to look at now, is it?" said Garstin's voice behind him.

He turned round quickly.

Garstin was gazing at his ruined masterpiece with a curious twisted smile.

"What can one say?" said Sir Seymour. "When Horridge was here I thought: 'When he's gone I'll tell Mr. Garstin!' And now he is gone, and—and—"

He went up to Garstin and held out his hand.

"I know I don't understand what you feel about this. No one could but a fellow-painter as big as you are. But I wish I could make you understand what I feel about something else."

"And what's that?" said Garstin, as he took Sir Seymour's hand, almost doubtfully.

"About the way you've taken it, and your letting the blackguard off."

"Oh, as to that, I bet you he'll be in Paris by five to-day."

"Just what I think. But still—"

He pressed Garstin's hand, and Garstin returned the pressure.

"Beryl wanted me to paint him, but I painted him to please myself. I'm a selfish brute, like most painters, I suppose."

"But you're letting him go because of Miss Van Tuyn."

"Damn it, I believe I am. I say, are you ever coming here again?"

"If I may."

"I wish you would."

He gazed at Sir Seymour's strong head.

"I've spent half my life in showing people up on canvas," he said. "I should like to try something else."

"And what's that?"

"I should like to try to reveal the underneath fine instead of the underneath filth. It'd be a new

experiment for me."

He laughed.

"Perhaps I should make a failure of it. But—if you'd allow me—I would try to make a start with you."

"I can only say I shall be honoured," said Sir Seymour, with a touch of almost shamefaced modesty which he endeavoured to hide with a very grave courtliness. "Please let me know, if you don't change your mind. I'm a good bit battered, but such as I am I am always at your service—out of work hours."

His last words to Garstin at the street door were:

"You've taught an old soldier how to take a hard knock."

CHAPTER XVI

Sir Seymour usually called on Lady Sellingworth about five o'clock in the afternoon when he was not detained by work or inevitable engagements. On the day of his visit to Garstin's studio with the inspector he felt that he owed it to Adela to go to Berkeley Square and to tell her what had happened in connexion with Arabian since he had last seen her. She must be anxious for news. It was not likely that she had seen Miss Van Tuyn, that beautiful prisoner in Claridge's hotel. Miss Van Tuyn might have telephoned to her and told her of his visits to the

hotel. But Adela would certainly expect to see him, would certainly be waiting for him. He ought to go to her. Since the morning he had been very busy. He had not had time to call again on Miss Van Tuyn, who could, therefore—so at least he believed—know nothing of the outrage in the studio. That piece of news which would surely be welcome to her if she understood what it implied, should rightly come to her from the woman who had been unselfish for her sake. Adela ought to tell her that. But first it was his duty to tell Adela. He must go to Berkeley Square.

And he decided to go and set out on foot. But as he walked he was conscious of a strange and hideous reluctance to pay the customary visit—the visit which had been the bright spot in his day for so long. He had interfered with the design of Arabian. But Arabian unconsciously had stabbed him to the heart with a sentence, meant to be malicious, about Adela, but surely not intended to pierce him.

Young Craven! Young Craven!

When he reached the familiar door and was standing before it he hesitated to press the bell. He feared that he would not be perfectly natural with Adela. He feared that he would be constrained, that he would be unable not to seem cold and rigid. Almost he was tempted to turn away. He could write his news to her. Perhaps even now young Craven was in the house with her. Perhaps he, the old man, would be unwanted, would only be in the way if he went in. But it was not his habit to recoil from anything and, after a moment of uneasy waiting, he put his hand to the bell.

Murgatroyd opened the door.

“Good day, Murgatroyd. Is her Ladyship at home?”

“Yes, Sir Seymour.”

He stepped into the hall, left his hat, coat and stick, and prepared to go upstairs.

"Anyone with her Ladyship?"

"No, Sir Seymour. Her Ladyship is alone."

A moment later Murgatroyd opened the drawing-room door and made the familiar announcement:

"Sir Seymour Portman!"

Adela was as usual on the sofa by the tea-table, near to the fireplace in which ship logs were blazing. She got up to greet him, and looked at him eagerly, almost anxiously.

"I was hoping you would come. Has anything happened?"

"Yes, a great deal," he said, as he took her hand.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked.

"But—do I look at you differently from—"

"Yes," she interrupted him.

He lowered his eyes, feeling almost guilty.

"But in what way?"

"As if you wanted to know something, as if—have you changed towards me?"

"My dear Adela! What a question from you after all these years!"

"You might change."

"Nonsense, my dear."

"No, no, it is not! Anyone may change. We are all incalculable."

"Give me some tea now. And let me tell you my news."

She sat down again, but her luminous eyes were still fixed on him, and there was an almost terrified expression in them.

"You haven't seen—him?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You have! I felt it! He has said something about me, something horrible!"

"Adela, do you really think I would take an opinion of you from a blackguard like that?"

"Please tell me everything," she said.

She looked painfully agitated, and something in her agitation made him feel very tender, for it gave her in his eyes a strange semblance of youthfulness. Yes, despite all she had done, all the years she had lived through, there was something youthful in her still. Perhaps it was that which persistently held out hands to youth! The thought struck him and the tenderness was lessened in his eyes.

"Seymour, you are hiding something from me," she said.

"Adela, give me a little time! I am going to tell you my news."

"Yes, yes, please do!"

"I want my tea," he said, with a smile.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"How young you are!" he said.

"Young! How can you say such a thing?"

"Now really, Adela! As if I could ever be sarcastic with you!"

"That remark could only be sarcastic."

He sipped his tea.

"No; you will always have youth in you. It is undying. It makes half your charm, my dear. And perhaps—"

"Yes?"

"Well, perhaps it has caused most of the trouble in your life."

She looked down.

"Our best gifts have their—what shall I say—their shady side, I suppose. And we seem to have to pay very often for what are thought of as gifts. But now I must tell you."

"Yes."

And then he began to relate to her, swiftly although he was old, the events of his mission. She listened, and while she listened she sat very still. She had looked up. Her eyes were fixed upon him. Presently he reached the point in his narrative where Arabian walked into Dick Garstin's studio. Then she moved. She seemed suddenly seized with an uncontrollable restlessness. He went on without looking at her, but he heard her movements, the rustle of her gown, the touch of her hand on a sofa cushion, on the tea-table, the chink of moved china, touching other china. And two or three times he heard the faint sound of her breathing. He knew she was suffering intensely, and he believed it was because of the haunting, inexorable remembrance of the enticement that abominable fellow, Arabian, had had for her. But he had to go on. And he went on till he came to the scene in the flat at Rose Tree Gardens.

"You—you went to his room!" she then said, interrupting him.

"Yes."

He heard her sigh. But she said nothing more. He told what had happened in the flat, but not fully. He said nothing of Arabian's mention of her name, but he did tell her that he himself had spoken of her, had said that he was a friend of hers. And finally he told

her how, carried away by indignation, he had spoken of his and Miss Van Tuyn's knowledge that Arabian had stolen her jewels.

"I didn't mean to tell him that," he added. "But—well, it came out. I—I hope you forgive me?"

He did not wait for her answer, but told her of his abrupt departure from the flat, and of his subsequent visit to Miss Van Tuyn, of what he had learnt at the hotel, and of what he had done there.

"The police!" she said, as if startled. "But if—if there should be a scandal! Oh, Seymour, that would be too horrible! I couldn't bear that! He might—it might come out! And my name—"

She got up from the sofa. Her face looked drawn with an anxiety that was like agony. He got up too.

"It was only a threat. But in any case it will be all right, Adela."

"But we don't know what he may do!" she said, with desperation.

"Wait till you know what he has done."

"What has he done?"

And then he told her of the outrage in the studio. When he was silent she made a slight swaying movement and took hold of the mantelpiece. He saw by her face that she had grasped at once what Arabian's action implied.

Flight!

"You see—he's done with. We've done with the fellow!" he said at last as she did not speak.

"Yes."

Her face, when not interfered with, was always pale. But now it looked horribly, unnaturally white. Relief, he believed, had shaken her in the very soul.

“Adela, did you think your good deed was going to recoil on you?” he said. “Did you really think it was going to bring punishment on you? I don’t believe things go like that even in this distracted, inexplicable old world.”

“Don’t they? Mightn’t they?”

“Surely not. You have saved that girl. You have paid back that scoundrel. And you have nothing to fear.”

“Why did you look at me like that when you came into the room?”

“But you are—”

“No. You haven’t told me something. Tell me!”

“Be happy in the good result of your self-sacrifice, Adela.”

“I want you to tell me. There is something. I know there is.”

“Yes. But it only concerns me.”

“Seymour, I don’t believe that!”

He was silent, looking at her with the old dog’s eyes. But now there was something else in them besides faithfulness.

“Well, Adela,” he said at last, “I believe very much in absolute sincerity between real friends. But I suppose friendship must be very real indeed to stand absolute sincerity. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes, I do. But our friendship is as real as any friendship can be, I think.”

“Yes, but on my side it is mixed up, it has always been mixed up, with something else.”

“Yes, I know,” she said in a low voice.

“And besides I’m afraid, if I speak quite frankly, I shall hurt you, my dear!”

"Then—hurt me, Seymour!"

"Shall I? Can I do that?"

"Be frank with me. I have been very frank with you. I have told *you*."

"Yes, indeed. You have been nobly, gloriously frank. Well, then—that horrible fellow did say something which I haven't told you, something that, I confess it, has upset me."

"What was it?" she said, still in the low voice, and bending her small head a little like one expecting punishment.

"He alluded to a friend of yours. He mentioned that nice boy I met here, young Craven?"

"Yes?"

"I really can't get what he said over my lips, Adela."

"I know what he said. You needn't tell me."

The were both silent for a minute. Then she came close to him.

"Seymour, perhaps you want to ask me a question about Mr. Craven. But—don't! You needn't. I have done, absolutely done, with all that side of my life which you hate. A part of my nature has persecuted me. It has often led me into follies and worse, as you know. But I have done with it. Indeed, indeed I can answer for myself. I wouldn't dare to speak like this to you, the soul of sincerity, if I couldn't. But I'll prove it to you. Seymour, you know what I am. I dare say you have always known. But the other night I told you myself."

"Yes."

"If I hadn't I shouldn't dare now to ask you what I am going to ask you. Is it possible that you still love me enough to care to be more than the friend you

have always been to me?”

“Do you mean—”

He paused.

“Yes,” she said.

“I ask nothing more of life than that, Adela.”

“Nor do I, dear Seymour.”

CHAPTER XVII

That evening Miss Van Tuyn learnt through the telephone from Lady Sellingworth what had happened in Dick Garstin's studio during the previous night. On the following morning at breakfast time she learnt from Sir Seymour that the flat in Rose Tree Gardens had been abruptly deserted by its tenant, who had left very early the day before.

She was free from persecution, and, of course, she realized her freedom; but, so strange are human impulses, she was at first unable to be happy in her knowledge that the burden of fear had been lifted from her. The misfortune which had fallen on Dick Garstin obsessed her mind. Her egoism was drowned in her passionate anger at what Arabian had done. She went early to the studio and found Garstin there alone.

"Hulloh, Beryl, my girl!" he said, in his usual offhand manner. "Come round to see the remains?"

"Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed, grasping his hand. "Oh, I'm so grieved, so horrified! What an awful thing to happen to you! And it's all my fault! Where—what have you done with—"

"What's left do you mean? Go and see for yourself."

She hurried upstairs to the studio. When he followed he found her standing before the mutilated

picture, which was still in its place, with tears rolling down her flushed cheeks.

"Good God! Beryl! What's up? What are you whimpering about?"

"How you must hate me!" she said, in a broken voice. "How you must hate me!"

"Rubbish! What for?"

"This has all happened because of me. If it hadn't been for me you would never have painted him."

"I painted the fellow to please myself."

"But I asked you to get him to come here."

"What you ask, or don't ask, doesn't bother me."

She gazed at him through her tears as if in surprise.

"Dick, I never thought you could be like this," she said.

"Like what? What's all the fuss about?" he exclaimed irritably.

"I always thought you were really a brute."

"That showed your sound judgment."

"How can you take it like this? Your masterpiece—ruined! For you'll never do anything like it again."

"That's probably gospel truth. My girl, you are standing in front of my epitaph on the Cafe Royal. There it is. Look well at it! I've buried my past, and I'm going to start again. And who do you think is to be my next victim?"

"Who?"

"You'll never guess—a gentleman!"

"A gentleman? What do you mean, Dick? The word has gone out."

"But not the thing, thank God, so long as Sir

Seymour Portman keeps about on his dear old pins."

"You are going to paint Sir Seymour?"

"I am! Think I can do him?"

She looked at him for a moment, and her violet eyes searched him as if to see whether he were worthy. Then she said soberly:

"Yes, Dick."

"Then let's turn the damned epitaph with its hole to the wall!"

And he lifted what remained of Arabian's portrait from the easel and threw it into a dark corner of the studio.

CHAPTER XVIII

One evening, some ten days later, before any rumour of Lady Sellingworth's new decision had gone about in the world of London, before even Braybrooke knew, on coming home from the Foreign Office Craven found a note lying on the table in the tiny hall of his flat. He picked it up and saw Miss Van Tuyn's handwriting. He had not seen either her or Lady Sellingworth since the evening when they had met in the *Bella Napoli*. Both women had come into his life together. And it seemed to him that both had gone out of it together. His acquaintance, or friendship, with them had been a short episode in his pilgrimage, and apparently the episode was definitely over.

But now—here was a letter from the beautiful girl! He took it up, carried it into his sitting-room, and tore open the envelope.

"CLARIDGE'S.

"Thursday.

"MY DEAR MR. CRAVEN,—I am going back to Paris almost directly and should very much like to see you if possible to say good-bye. Have you a few minutes to spare any time? If so, do come round to the hotel and let us have a last little talk.—Yours sincerely,

"BERYL VAN TUYN."

When he had read this brief note Craven was struck, as he had been struck when he had read Lady Sellingworth's letter to him, by a certain finality in the wording. Good-bye—a last little talk! Miss Van Tuyn might have put "au revoir," might have omitted the word "last."

He looked at the clock. It was not very late—only half-past five. He decided to go at once to the hotel. And he went. Miss Van Tuyn was at home. He went up in the lift and was shown into her sitting-room. He waited there for a few minutes. Then the door opened and she came in smiling.

"How good of you to come so soon! I hardly expected you."

"But—why not?" he said, as he took her hand.

She glanced at him inquiringly, he thought, then said:

"Oh, I don't know! You're a busy man, and have lots of engagements. Let us sit by the fire."

"Yes."

They sat down, and there was a moment of silence. For once Miss Van Tuyn seemed slightly embarrassed

—not quite at her ease. Craven did not help her. He still remembered the encounter in Glebe Place with a feeling of anger. He still felt that he moved in a certain darkness, that both Lady Sellingworth and Miss Van Tuyn had been unkind to him, had treated him if not badly, at any rate in a way that was unfriendly, and, to him, inexplicable. He did not want to seem hurt, but, on the other hand, he did not feel that it was incumbent upon him to rush forward with gracious eagerness, or to show any keen desire for the old, intimate relations. So he just sat there trying not to look stiff, but not making any effort to look charming and sympathetic.

"Have you seen Adela lately?" Miss Van Tuyn said at last, breaking the silence.

"No," he said. "Not since the night when we met in the *Bella Napoli*."

"Oh, that's too bad!"

"Why too bad?"

"I thought you were such friends!"

"Scarcely that, I think," replied Craven, in his most definitely English manner. "I like Lady Sellingworth very much, but she has swarms of friends, and I can't expect her to bother very much about me."

"But I don't think she has swarms of friends."

"Perhaps nobody does. Still, she knows a tremendous number of people."

"I am sure she likes you," said Miss Van Tuyn. "Do go and see her sometimes. I think—I think she would appreciate it."

"No doubt I shall see her again. Why not?"

"Don't you like her anymore?"

"Of course I do."

Suddenly she leaned forward, almost impulsively,

and said:

"You remember I had a sort of cult for Adela?"

"Did you?"

"But you know I had! Well, I only want to tell you that it isn't a cult now. I have got to know Adela better, to know her really. I used to admire her as a great lady. Now I love her as a splendid woman. She's rare. That is the word for her. Once—not long ago—I was talking to a man who knows what people are. And he summed Adela up in a phrase. He said she was a thoroughbred. We young ones—modern, I suppose we are—we can learn something from her. I have learnt something. Isn't that an admission? For the young generation to acknowledge that it has something to learn from—from what are sometimes called the 'has beens'!"

Craven looked at her and noticed with surprise that her violet eyes were clouded for a moment, as if some moisture had found its way into them. Perhaps she saw that look of his. For she laughed, changed the conversation, and from that moment talked in her usual lively way about less intimate topics. But when Craven presently got up to go she returned for a moment to her former more serious mood. As he took her hand to say good-bye she said:

"Perhaps we shall meet again—perhaps not. I don't know when I shall be back in London. I'm soon going over to America with Fanny. But don't think too badly of me."

"I? How could I think badly of you?"

"Oh, yes—you might! There are things I can't explain which may easily have given you a nasty impression of me. If I could explain them perhaps you would remember me more pleasantly. Anyhow, I shall always think of you as one of my *friends*. Good-

bye."

And then she moved away, and he went to the door.

But just as he was going he turned round and said:

"Au revoir!"

She made a little kind gesture with her left hand, but she said nothing.

At that moment she was thinking of Adela.

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