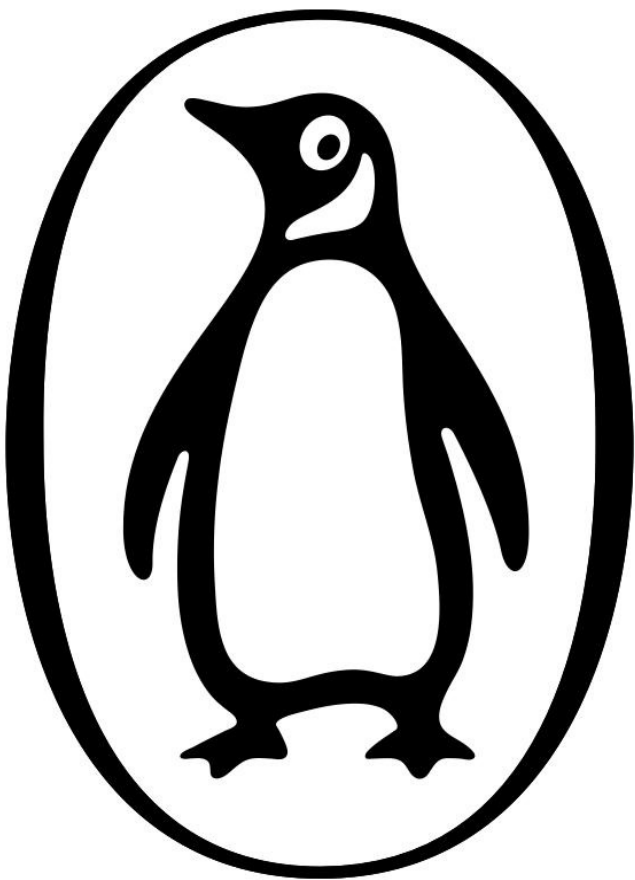




PENGUIN BOOKS

The Forsyte Saga
Volume 3

John Galsworthy, the son of a solicitor, was born in 1867 and educated at Harrow and New College, Oxford. He was called to the Bar in 1890, but a chance meeting with Joseph Conrad, and the strong influence of his future wife, turned him to writing. A collection of short stories, *From the Four Winds* (1897), was followed by a novel entitled *Jocelyn* (1898). *The Man of Property* appeared in 1906

and, together with *In Chancery* and *To Let*, completed the first volume of the Forsyte trilogy, *The Forsyte Saga*, published in 1922. His playwrighting career began in 1906 with *The Silver Box*, the first of a long line of plays with social and moral themes. The second Forsyte trilogy, which contained *The White Monkey*, *The Silver Spoon* and *Swan Song*, was published as *A Modern Comedy* in 1929. In 1931 Galsworthy followed the immense success of the Forsyte books with a further collection of stories, *On Forsyte Change*. The final Forsyte trilogy, containing *Maid in Waiting*,

Flowering Wilderness and *Over the River*, was published posthumously as *The End of the Chapter* in 1934. The nine novels in his three Forsyte trilogies are all published by Penguin. A television serial of the Forsyte chronicles, presented by the BBC in 1967, received great critical acclaim in Great Britain and over the world.

The first President of the PEN Club, John Galsworthy was the recipient of several honorary degrees and other literary honours. He was made an OM in 1929 and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in

1932. He lived on Dartmoor for many years and afterwards at Bury on the Sussex Downs. He died in 1933.

John Galsworthy

THE FORSYTE SAGA

Volume 3



MAID IN WAITING

FLOWERING WILDERNESS

OVER THE RIVER



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MAID IN WAITING



TO

Frank Galsworthy

Chapter One



THE Bishop of Porthminster was sinking fast; they had sent for his four nephews, his two nieces and their one husband. It was not thought that he would last the night.

He who had been ‘Cuffs’ Cherrell (for so the name Charwell is pronounced) to his cronies at Harrow and Cambridge in the sixties, the Reverend Cuthbert Cherrell in his two London parishes, Canon Cherrell in the days of his efflorescence as a

preacher, and Cuthbert Porthminster for the last eighteen years, had never married. For eighty-two years he had lived and for fifty-five, having been ordained rather late, had represented God upon certain portions of the earth. This and the control of his normal instincts since the age of twenty-six had given to his face a repressed dignity which the approach of death did not disturb. He awaited it almost quizzically, judging from the twist of his eyebrow and the tone in which he said so faintly to his nurse:

‘You will get a good sleep

tomorrow, nurse. I shall be punctual, no robes to put on.'

The best wearer of robes in the whole episcopacy, the most distinguished in face and figure, maintaining to the end the dandyism which had procured him the nickname 'Cuffs', lay quite still, his grey hair brushed and his face like ivory. He had been a bishop so long that no one knew now what he thought about death, or indeed about anything, except the prayer book, any change in which he had deprecated with determination. In one never remarkable for expressing his feelings the

ceremony of life had overlaid the natural reticence, as embroidery and jewels will disguise the foundation stuff of vestment.

He lay in a room with mullion windows, an ascetic room in a sixteenth-century house, close to the Cathedral, whose scent of age was tempered but imperfectly by the September air coming in. Some zinnias in an old vase on the window-sill made the only splash of colour, and it was noticed by the nurse that his eyes scarcely left it, except to close from time to time. About six o'clock they informed him that all the family of his long-

dead elder brother had arrived.

‘Ah! See that they are comfortable. I should like to see Adrian.’

When an hour later he opened his eyes again, they fell on his nephew Adrian seated at the foot of the bed. For some minutes he contemplated the lean and wrinkled brownness of a thin bearded face, topped with grizzling hair, with a sort of faint astonishment, as though finding his nephew older than he had expected. Then, with lifted eyebrows and the same just quizzical tone in his faint voice, he

said:

‘My dear Adrian! Good of you! Would you mind coming closer? Ah! I haven’t much strength, but what I have I wanted you to have the benefit of; or perhaps, as you may think, the reverse. I must speak to the point or not at all. You are not a Churchman, so what I have to say I will put in the words of a man of the world, which once I was myself, perhaps have always been. I have heard that you have an affection, or may I say infatuation, for a lady who is not in a position to marry you – is that so?’

The face of his nephew, kindly and wrinkled, was gentle with an expression of concern.

‘It is, Uncle Cuthbert. I am sorry if it troubles you.’

‘A mutual affection?’

His nephew shrugged.

‘My dear Adrian, the world has changed in its judgements since my young days, but there is still a halo around marriage. That, however, is a matter for your conscience and is not my point. Give me a little water.’

When he had drunk from the glass held out, he went on more

feebly:

‘Since your father died I have been somewhat *in loco parentis* to you all, and the chief repository, I suppose, of such traditions as attach to our name. I wanted to say to you that our name goes back very far and very honourably. A certain inherited sense of duty is all that is left to old families now; what is sometimes excused to a young man is not excused to those of mature age and a certain position like your own. I should be sorry to be leaving this life knowing that our name was likely to be taken in vain by the Press, or

bandied about. Forgive me for intruding on your privacy, and let me now say good-bye to you all. It will be less painful if you will give the others my blessing for what it is worth – very little, I'm afraid. Good-bye, my dear Adrian, good-bye!'

The voice dropped to a whisper. The speaker closed his eyes, and Adrian, after standing a minute looking down at the carved waxen face, stole, tall and a little stooping, to the door, opened it gently and was gone.

The nurse came back. The Bishop's lips moved and his

eyebrows twitched now and then, but he spoke only once:

‘I shall be glad if you will kindly see that my neck is straight, and my teeth in place. Forgive these details, but I do not wish to offend the sight...’

Adrian went down to the long panelled room where the family was waiting.

‘Sinking. He sent his blessing to you all.’

Sir Conway cleared his throat. Hilary pressed Adrian’s arm. Lionel went to the window. Emily Mont took out a tiny handkerchief and

passed her other hand into Sir Lawrence's. Wilmet alone spoke:

‘How does he look, Adrian?’

‘Like the ghost of a warrior on his shield.’

Again Sir Conway cleared his throat.

‘Fine old boy!’ said Sir Lawrence, softly.

‘Ah!’ said Adrian.

They remained, silently sitting and standing in the compulsory discomfort of a house where death is visiting. Tea was brought in, but, as if by tacit agreement, no one touched it. And, suddenly, the bell

tolled. The seven in that room looked up. At one blank spot in the air their glances met and crossed, as though fixed on something there and yet not there.

A voice from the doorway said:
‘Now please, if you wish to see him.’

Sir Conway, the eldest, followed the bishop's chaplain; the others followed Sir Conway.

In his narrow bed jutting from the centre of the wall opposite the mullion windows the bishop lay, white and straight and narrow, with just the added dignity of

death. He graced his last state even more than he had graced existence. None of those present, not even his chaplain, who made the eighth spectator, knew whether Cuthbert Porthminster had really had faith, except in that temporal dignity of the Church which he had so faithfully served. They looked at him now with all the different feelings death produces in varying temperaments, and with only one feeling in common, aesthetic pleasure at the sight of such memorable dignity.

Conway – General Sir Conway Cherrell – had seen much death. He

stood with his hands crossed before him, as if once more at Sandhurst in the old-time attitude of 'stand at ease'. His face was thin-templed and ascetic, for a soldier's; the darkened furrowed cheeks ran from wide cheek-bones to the point of a firm chin, the dark eyes were steady, the nose and lips thin; he wore a little close grizzly dark moustache – his face was perhaps the stillest of the eight faces, the face of the taller Adrian beside him, the least still. Sir Lawrence Mont had his arm through that of Emily his wife, the expression on his thin twisting countenance was

as of one saying: 'A very beautiful performance – don't cry, my dear.'

The faces of Hilary and Lionel, one on each side of Wilmet, a seamed face and a smooth face, both long and thin and decisive, wore a sort of sorry scepticism, as if expecting those eyes to open. Wilmet had flushed deep pink; her lips were pursed. She was a tall thin woman. The chaplain stood with bent head, moving his lips as though telling over internal beads. They stayed thus perhaps three minutes, then as it were with a single indrawn breath filed to the door. They went each to the room

assigned.

They met again at dinner, thinking and speaking once more in terms of life. Uncle Cuthbert, except as a family figure-head, had never been very near to any one of them. The question whether he was to be buried with his fathers at Condaford or here in the Cathedral was debated. Probably his Will would decide. All but the General and Lionel, who were the executors, returned to London the same evening.

The two brothers, having read through the Will, which was short, for there was nothing much to

leave, sat on in the library, silent, till the General said:

‘I want to consult you, Lionel. It’s about my boy, Hubert. Did you read that attack made on him in the House before it rose?’

Lionel, sparing of words, and now on the eve of a Judgeship, nodded.

‘I saw there was a question asked, but I don’t know Hubert’s version of the affair.’

‘I can give it you. The whole thing is damnable. The boy’s got a temper, of course, but he’s straight as a die. What he says you can rely

on. And all I can say is that if I'd been in his place, I should probably have done the same.'

Lionel nodded. 'Go ahead.'

'Well, as you know, he went straight from Harrow into the War, and had one year in the R.A.F. under age, got wounded, went back and stayed on in the army after the war. He was out in Mesopotamia, then went on to Egypt and India. He got malaria badly, and last October had a year's sick leave given him, which will be up on October first. He was recommended for a long voyage. He got leave for it and went out through the

Panama Canal to Lima. There he met that American professor, Hallorsen, who came over here some time ago and gave some lectures, it appears, about some queer remains in Bolivia; he was going to take an expedition there. This expedition was just starting when Hubert got to Lima, and Hallorsen wanted a transport officer. Hubert was fit enough after his voyage and jumped at the chance. He can't bear idleness. Hallorsen took him on; that was in December last. After a bit Hallorsen left him in charge of his base camp with a lot of half-caste

Indian mule men. Hubert was the only white man, and he got fever badly. Some of those half-caste Indian fellows are devils, according to his account; no sense of discipline and perfect brutes with animals. Hubert got wrong with them – he's a hot-tempered chap, as I told you, and, as it happens, particularly fond of animals. The half-castes got more and more out of hand, till finally one of them, whom he'd had to have flogged for ill-treating mules and who was stirring up mutiny, attacked him with a knife. Luckily Hubert had his revolver handy and shot him

dead. And on that the whole blessed lot of them, except three, cleared out, taking the mules with them. Mind you, he'd been left there alone for nearly three months without support or news of any kind from Hallorsen. Well, he hung on some-how, half dead, with his remaining men. At last Hallorsen came back, and instead of trying to understand his difficulties, pitched into him. Hubert wouldn't stand for it; gave him as good as he got, and left. He came straight home, and is down with us at Condaford. He's lost the fever, luckily, but he's pretty well worn out, even now.

And now that fellow Hallorsen has attacked him in his book; practically thrown the blame of failure on him, implies he was tyrannical and no good at handling men, calls him a hot-tempered aristocrat – all that bunkum that goes down these days. Well, some Service member got hold of this and asked that question about it in Parliament. One expects Socialists to make themselves unpleasant, but when it comes to a Service member alluding to conduct unbecoming to a British officer, it's another matter altogether. Hallorsen's in the States. There's

nobody to bring an action against: besides, Hubert could get no witnesses. It looks to me as if the thing has cut right across his career.'

Lionel Cherrell's long face lengthened.

'Has he tried Headquarters?'

'Yes, he went up on Wednesday. They were chilly. Any popular gup about high-handedness scares them nowadays. I daresay they'd come round if no more were said, but how's that possible? He's been publicly criticized in that book, and practically accused in Parliament of violent conduct unbecoming to

an officer and gentleman. He can't sit down under that; and yet – what can he do?’

Lionel drew deeply at his pipe.

‘D’you know,’ he said, ‘I think he’d better take no notice.’

The General clenched his fist.

‘Damn it, Lionel, I don’t see that!’

‘But he admits the shooting and the flogging. The public has no imagination, Con – they’ll never see his side of the thing. All they’ll swallow is that on a civilian expedition he shot one man and flogged others. You can’t expect them to understand the conditions

or the pressure there was.'

'Then you seriously advise him to take it lying down?'

'As a man, no; as a man of the world, yes.'

'Good Lord! What's England coming to? I wonder what old Uncle Cuffs would have said? He thought a lot of our name.'

'So do I. But how is Hubert to get even with them?'

The General was silent for a little while and then said:

'This charge is a slur on the Service, and yet his hands seem tied. If he handed in his

Commission he could stand up to it, but his whole heart's in the Army. It's a bad business. By the way, Lawrence has been talking to me about Adrian. Diana Ferse was Diana Montjoy, wasn't she?

'Yes, second cousin to Lawrence – very pretty woman, Con, Ever seen her?'

'As a girl, yes. What's her position now, then?'

'Married widow – two children, and a husband in a Mental Home.'

'That's lively. Incurable?'

Lionel nodded. 'They say so. But of course, you never know.'

‘Good Lord!’

‘That’s just about it. She’s poor and Adrian’s poorer; it’s a very old affection on Adrian’s part, dates from before her marriage. If he does anything foolish, he’ll lose his curator-ship.’

‘Go off with her, you mean? Why, he must be fifty!’

‘No fool like an— She’s an attractive creature. Those Montjoys are celebrated for their charm. Would he listen to you, Con?’

The General shook his head.

‘More likely to Hilary.’

‘Poor old Adrian – one of the

best men on earth. I'll talk to Hilary, but his hands are always full.'

The General rose. 'I'm going to bed. We don't smell of age at the Grange like this place – though the Grange is older.'

'Too much original wood here. Good-night, old man.'

The brothers shook hands, and, grasping each a candle, sought their rooms.

Chapter Two



CONDAFORD GRANGE had passed from the de Campforts (whence its name) into possession of the Cherrells in 1217, when their name was spelt Kerwell and still at times Keroual, as the spirit moved the scribe. The story of its passing was romantic, for the Kerwell who got it by marrying a de Campfort had got the de Campfort by rescuing her from a wild boar. He had been a landless wight whose father, a Frenchman from Guienne, had come to England after Richard's

crusade; and she had been the heiress of the landed de Campforts. The boar was incorporated on the family 'shield', and some doubted whether the boar on the shield did not give rise to the story, rather than the story to the boar. In any case parts of the house were certified by expert masons to go back to the twelfth century. It had undoubtedly been moated; but under Queen Anne a restorative Cherrell, convinced of the millennium perhaps, and possibly inconvenienced by insects, had drained off the water, and there was now little sign that a moat had

ever been.

The late Sir Conway, elder brother of the bishop, knighted in 1901 on his appointment to Spain, had been in the diplomatic service. He had therefore let the place down badly. He had died in 1904, at his post, and the letting-down process had been continued by his eldest son, the present Sir Conway, who, continually on Service, had enjoyed only spasmodic chances of living at Condaford till after the Great War. Now that he did live there, the knowledge that folk of his blood had been encamped there practically since the Conquest had

spurred him to do his best to put it in order, so that it was by now unpretentiously trim without and comfortable within, and he was almost too poor to live in it. The estate contained too much covert to be profitable, and, though unencumbered, brought in but a few hundreds a year of net revenue. The pension of a General and the slender income of his wife (by birth the Honourable Elizabeth Frensham) enabled the General to incur a very small amount of supertax, to keep two hunters, and live quietly on the extreme edge of his means. His wife was one of

those Englishwomen who seem to count for little, but for that very reason count for a good deal. She was unobtrusive, gentle, and always busy. In a word, she was background; and her pale face, reposeful, sensitive, a little timid, was a continual reminder that culture depends but slightly on wealth or intellect. Her husband and her three children had implicit confidence in her coherent sympathy. They were all of more vivid nature, more strongly coloured, and she was a relief.

She had not accompanied the General to Porthminster and was

therefore awaiting his return. The furniture was about to come out of chintz, and she was standing in the tea room wondering whether that chintz would last another season, when a Scotch terrier came in, followed by her eldest daughter Elizabeth – better known as ‘Dinny’. Dinny was slight and rather tall; she had hair the colour of chestnuts, an imperfect nose, a Botticellian mouth, eyes cornflower blue and widely set, and a look rather of a flower on a long stalk that might easily be broken off, but never was. Her expression suggested that she went through

life trying not to see it as a joke. She was, in fact, like one of those natural wells, or springs, whence one cannot procure water without bubbles: ‘Dinny’s bubble and squeak’, her uncle Sir Lawrence Mont called it. She was by now twenty-four.

‘Mother, do we have to go into black edging for Uncle Cuffs?’

‘I don’t think so, Dinny; or very slight.’

‘Is he to be planted here?’

‘I expect in the Cathedral, but Father will know.’

‘Tea, darling? Scaramouch, up

you come, and don't bob your nose into the Gentleman's Relish.'

'Dinny, I'm so worried about Hubert.'

'So am I, dear; he isn't Hubert at all, he's like a sketch of himself by Thom the painter, all on one side. He ought never to have gone on that ghastly expedition, Mother. There's a limit to hitting it off with Americans, and Hubert reaches it sooner than almost anybody I know. He never could get on with them. Besides, I don't believe civilians ever ought to have soldiers with them.'

'Why, Dinny?'

‘Well, soldiers have the static mind. They know God from Mammon. Haven’t you noticed it, dear?’

Lady Cherrell had. She smiled timidly, and asked:

‘Where is Hubert? Father will be home directly.’

‘He went out with Don, to get a leash of partidges for dinner. Ten to one he’ll forget to shoot them, and anyway they’ll be too fresh. He’s in that state of mind into which it has pleased God to call him; except that for God read the devil. He broods over that business, Mother. Only one thing would do

him good, and that's to fall in love. Can't we find the perfect girl for him? Shall I ring for tea?'

'Yes, dear. And this room wants fresh flowers.'

'I'll get them. Come along, Scaramouch!'

Passing out into September sunshine, Dinny noted a green woodpecker on the lower lawn, and thought: 'If seven birds with seven beaks should peck for half a term, do you suppose, the lady thought, that they could find a worm?' It *was* dry! All the same the zinnias were gorgeous this year; and she proceeded to pick some.

They ran the gamut in her hand from deepest red through pink to lemon-yellow – handsome blossoms, but not endearing. ‘Pity,’ she thought, ‘we can’t go to some bed of modern maids and pick one for Hubert.’ She seldom showed her feelings, but she had two deep feelings not for show – one for her brother, the other for Condaford, and they were radically entwined. All the coherence of her life belonged to Condaford; she had a passion for the place which no one would have suspected from her way of talking of it, and she had a deep and jealous desire to bind her

only brother to the same devotion. After all, she had been born there while it was shabby and run-down, and had survived into the period of renovation. To Hubert it had only been a holiday and leave-time perch. Dinny, though the last person in the world to talk of her roots, or to take them seriously in public, had a private faith in the Cherrells, their belongings and their works, which nothing could shake. Every Condaford beast, bird and tree, even the flowers she was plucking, were a part of her, just as were the simple folk around in their thatched cottages, and the

Early-English church, where she attended without belief to speak of, and the grey Condaford dawns which she seldom saw, the moonlit, owl-haunted nights, the long sunlight over the stubble, and the scents and the sounds and the feel of the air. When she was away from home she never said she was homesick, but she was; when she was at home she never said she revelled in it, but she did. If Condaford should pass from the Cherrells, she would not moan, but would feel like a plant pulled up by its roots. Her father had for it the indifferent affection of a man

whose active life had been passed elsewhere; her mother the acquiescence of one who had always done her duty by what had kept her nose to the grindstone and was not exactly hers; her sister treated it with the matter-of-fact tolerance of one who would rather be somewhere more exciting; and Hubert – what had Hubert? She really did not know. With her hands full of zinnias and her neck warm from the lingering sunshine, she returned to the drawing-room.

Her mother was standing by the tea table.

‘The train’s late,’ she said. ‘I do

wish Clare wouldn't drive so fast.'

'I don't see the connexion, darling.' But she did. Mother was always fidgety when Father was behind time.

'Mother, I'm all for Hubert sending his version to the papers.'

'We shall see what your Father says – he'll have talked to your Uncle Lionel.'

'I hear the car now,' said Dinny.

The General was followed into the room by his younger daughter. Clare was the most vivid member of the family. She had dark fine shingled hair and a pale expressive

face, of which the lips were slightly brightened. The eyes were brown, with a straight and eager glance, the brow low and very white. Her expression was old for a girl of twenty, being calm and yet adventurous. She had an excellent figure and walked with an air.

‘This poor dear has had no lunch, Mother,’ she said.

‘Horrible cross-country journey, Liz. Whisky-and-soda and a biscuit’s all I’ve had since breakfast.’

‘You shall have an egg-nogg, darling,’ said Dinny, and left the room. Clare followed her.

The General kissed his wife. ‘The old boy looked very fine, my dear, though, except for Adrian, we only saw him after. I shall have to go back for the funeral. It’ll be a swell affair, I expect. Great figure – Uncle Cuffs. I spoke to Lionel about Hubert; he doesn’t see what can be done. But I’ve been thinking.’

‘Yes, Con?’

‘The whole point is whether or not the Authorities are going to take any notice of that attack in the House. They might ask him to send in his commission. That’d be fatal. Sooner than that he’d better

hand it in himself. He's due for his medical on October the first. Can we pull any strings without his knowing ? – the boy's proud. I can go and see Topsham and you could get at Follanby, couldn't you?'

Lady Cherrell made wry her face.

'I know,' said the General, 'it's rotten; but the real chance would be Saxenden, only I don't know how to get at him.'

'Dinny might suggest something.'

'Dinny? Well, I suppose she *has* more brains than any of us, except

you, my dear.'

'I,' said Lady Cherrell, 'have no brains at all.'

'Bosh! Oh! Here she is.'

Dinny advanced, bearing a frothy liquor in a glass.

'Dinny, I was saying to your mother that we want to get into touch with Lord Saxenden about Hubert's position. Can you suggest any way?'

'Through a country neighbour, Dad. Has he any?'

'His place marches with Wilfred Bentworth's.'

'There it is, then. Uncle Hilary or

Uncle Lawrence.’

‘How?’

‘Wilfred Bentworth is Chairman of Uncle Hilary’s Slum Conversion Committee. A little judicious nepotism, dear.’

‘Um! Hilary and Lawrence were both at Porthminster – wish I’d thought of that.’

‘Shall I talk to them for you, Father?’

‘By George, if you would, Dinny! I hate pushing our affairs.’

‘Yes, dear. It’s a woman’s job, isn’t it?’

The General looked at his

daughter dubiously – he never quite knew when she was serious.

‘Here’s Hubert,’ said Dinny, quickly.

Chapter Three



HUBERT CHERRELL, followed by a spaniel dog and carrying a gun, was crossing the old grey flagstones of the terrace. Rather over middle height, lean and erect, with a head not very large and a face weathered and seamed for so young a man, he wore a little darkish moustache cut just to the edge of his lips, which were thin and sensitive, and hair with already a touch of grey at the sides. His browned cheeks were thin too, but with rather high cheek-bones,

and his eyes hazel, quick and glancing, set rather wide apart over a straight thin nose under gabled eyebrows. He was, in fact a younger edition of his father. A man of action, forced into a state of thought, is unhappy until he can get out of it; and, ever since his late leader had launched that attack on his conduct, he had chafed, conscious of having acted rightly, or rather, in accordance with necessity. And he chafed the more because his training and his disposition forbade him giving tongue. A soldier by choice, not accident, he saw his soldiering

imperilled, his name as an officer, and even as a gentleman, aspersed, and no way of hitting back at those who had aspersed it. His head seemed to him to be in Chancery for anyone to punch, most galling of experiences to anyone of high spirit. He came in through the French window, leaving dog and gun outside, aware that he was being talked about. He was now constantly interrupting discussions on his position, for in this family the troubles of one were the troubles of all. Having taken a cup of tea from his mother, he remarked that birds were getting

wild already, covert was so sparse, and there was silence.

‘Well, I’m going to look at my letters,’ said the General, and went out followed by his wife.

Left alone with her brother, Dinny hardened her heart, and said:

‘Something must be done, Hubert.’

‘Don’t worry, old girl; it’s rotten, but there’s nothing one can do.’

‘Why don’t you write your own account of what happened, from your diary? I could type it, and Michael will find you a publisher,

he knows all those sort of people. We simply can't sit down under this.'

'I loathe the idea of trotting my private feelings into the open; and it means that or nothing.'

Dinny wrinkled her brows.

'I loathe letting that Yank put his failure on to you. You owe it to the British Army, Hubert.'

'Bad as that? I went as a civilian.'

'Why not publish your diary as it is?'

'That'd be worse. You haven't seen it.'

‘We could expurgate, and embroider, and all that. You see, the Dad feels this.’

‘Perhaps you’d better read the thing. It’s full of “miserable Starkey”. When one’s alone like that, one lets oneself go.’

‘You can cut out what you like.’

‘It’s no end good of you, Dinny.’

Dinny stroked his sleeve.

‘What sort of man is this Hallorsen?’

‘To be just, he has lots of qualities: hard as nails, plenty of pluck, and no nerves; but it’s Hallorsen first with him all the

time. It's not in him to fail, and when he does, someone else has to stand the racket. According to him, he failed for want of transport: and I was his transport officer. But if he'd left the Angel Gabriel as he left me, he'd have done no better. He just miscalculated, and won't admit it. You'll find it all in my diary.'

'Have you seen this?' She held up a newspaper cutting, and read:

' "We understand that action will be taken by Captain Charwell, D.S.O., to vindicate his honour in face of the statements made in Professor Hallorsen's book on his

Bolivian Expedition, the failure of which he attributed to Captain Charwell's failure to support him at the critical moment." Someone's trying to get a dog-fight out of it, you see.'

'Where was that?'

'In the *Evening Sun*.'

'Steps!' said Hubert bitterly; 'what steps? I've nothing but my word, he took care of that when he left me alone with all those dagoes.'

'It's the diary then, or nothing.'

'I'll get you the damned thing....'

That night Dinny sat at her

window reading ‘the damned thing’. A full moon rode between the elm trees and there was silence as of the grave. Just one sheep-bell tinkled from a fold on the rise; just one magnolia flower bloomed close to her window. All seemed unearthly, and now and then she stopped reading to gaze at the unreality. So had some ten thousand full moons ridden since her forebears received this patch of ground; the changeless security of so old a home heightened the lonely discomfort, the tribulation in the pages she was reading. Stark notes about stark things – one

white man among a crew of half-caste savages, one animal-lover among half-starved animals and such men as knew not compassion. And with that cold and settled loveliness out there to look upon, she read and grew hot and miserable.

‘That lousy brute Castro has been digging his infernal knife into the mules again. The poor brutes are thin as rails, and haven’t half their strength. Warned him for the last time. If he does it again, he’ll get the lash.... Had fever.’

‘Castro got it good and strong this morning – a dozen; we’ll see if

that will stop him. Can't get on with these brutes; they don't seem human. Oh! for a day on a horse at Condaford and forget these swamps and poor ghastly skeletons of mules...'

'Had to flog another of these brutes – their treatment of the mules is simply devilish, blast them!... Fever again...'

'Hell and Tommy to pay – had mutiny this morning. They laid for me. Luckily Manuel had warned me – he's a good boy. As it was, Castro nearly had his knife through my gizzard. Got my left arm badly. Shot him with my own hand. Now

perhaps they'll toe the mark.
Nothing from Hallorsen. How much longer does he expect me to hold on in this dump of hell? My arm is giving me proper gee-up....'

'The lid is on at last, those devils stampeded the mules in the dark while I was asleep, and cleared out. Manuel and two other boys are all that's left. We trailed them a long way – came on the carcasses of two mules, that's all; the beggars have dispersed and you might as well look for a star in the Milky Way. Got back to camp dead beat. ... Whether we shall ever get out of this alive, goodness knows. My arm

very painful, hope it doesn't mean blood-poisoning...'

'Meant to trek today as best we could. Set up a pile of stones and left despatch for Hallorsen, telling him the whole story in case he ever does send back for me; then changed my mind. I shall stick it out here till he comes or till we're dead, which is on the whole more likely...'

And so on through a tale of struggle to the end. Dinny laid down the dim and yellowed record and leaned her elbow on the sill. The silence and the coldness of the light out there had chilled her

spirit. She no longer felt in fighting mood. Hubert was right. Why show one's naked soul, one's sore finger, to the public? No! Better anything than that. Private strings – yes, they should be pulled; and she would pull them for all she was worth.

Chapter Four



ADRIAN CHERRELL was one of those confirmed countrymen who live in towns. His job confined him to London, where he presided over a collection of anthropological remains. He was poring over a maxilla from New Guinea, which had been accorded a very fine reception in the Press, and had just said to himself: ‘The thing’s a phlizz. Just a low type of Homo Sapiens,’ when his janitor announced:

‘Young lady to see you, sir –

Miss Cherrell, I think.'

'Ask her in, James'; and he thought: 'If that's Dinny, where did I put my wits?'

'Oh! Dinny! Canrobert says that this maxilla is pre-Trinil. Mokley says Paulo-post-Piltdown; and Eldon P. Burbank says propter Rhodesian. I say Sapiens; observe that molar.'

'I do, Uncle Adrian.'

'Too human altogether. That man had toothache. Toothache was probably the result of artistic development. Altamiran art and Cromagnon cavities are found

together. Homo Sapiens, this chap.'

'No toothache without wisdom – how cheery! I've come up to see Uncle Hilary and Uncle Lawrence, but I thought if I had lunch with you first, I should feel stronger.'

'We shall,' said Adrian,
'therefore go to the Bulgarian café.'

'Why?'

'Because for the moment we shall get good food there. It's the latest propaganda restaurant, my dear, so we are probably safe at a moderate price. Do you want to powder your nose?'

'Yes.'

‘In here, then.’

While she was gone Adrian stood and stroked his goatee and wondered exactly what he could order for eighteen and sixpence; for, being a public servant without private means, he rarely had more than a pound in his pocket.

‘What,’ said Dinny, when they were seated before an omelette Bulgarienne, ‘do you know about Professor Hallorsen, Uncle Adrian?’

‘The man who set out to discover the sources of civilization in Bolivia?’

‘Yes; and took Hubert with him.’

‘Ah! But left him behind, I gather?’

‘Did you ever meet him?’

‘I did. I met him in 1920, climbing the “Little Sinner” in the Dolomites.’

‘Did you like him?’

‘No.’

‘Why?’

‘Well, he was so aggressively young, he beat me to the top, and – he reminded me of baseball. Did you ever see baseball played?’

‘No.’

‘I saw it once in Washington. You insult your opponent so as to

shake his nerve. You call him doughboy and attaboy, and President Wilson and Old Man Ribber, and things like that, just when he's going to hit the ball. It's ritual. The point is to win at any cost.'

'Don't you believe in winning at any cost?'

'Nobody says they do, Dinny.'

'And we all try to when it comes to the point?'

'I have known it occur, even with politicians, Dinny.'

'Would you try to win at any cost, Uncle?'

‘Probably.’

‘You wouldn’t. I should.’

‘You are very kind, my dear; but why this local disparagement?’

‘Because I feel as bloodthirsty as a mosquito about Hubert’s case. I spent last night reading his diary.’

‘Woman,’ said Adrian, slowly, ‘has not yet lost her divine irresponsibility.’

‘Do you think we’re in danger of losing it?’

‘No, because whatever your sex may say, you never will annihilate man’s innate sense of leading you about.’

‘What is the best way to annihilate a man like Hallorsen, Uncle Adrian?’

‘Apart from a club, ridicule.’

‘His notion about Bolivian civilization was absurd, I suppose?’

‘Wholly. There are, we know, some curious and unexplained stone monsters up there, but his theory, if I understand it, won’t wash at all. Only, my dear, Hubert would appear to be involved in it.’

‘Not scientifically; he just went as transport officer.’ And Dinny levelled a smile at her Uncle’s eyes. ‘It wouldn’t do any harm, would it,

to hold up a stunt like that to ridicule? You could do it so beautifully, Uncle.'

'Serpent!'

'But isn't it the duty of serious scientists to ridicule stunts?'

'If Hallorsen were an Englishman – perhaps; but his being an American brings in other considerations.'

'Why? I thought Science paid no regard to frontiers.'

'In theory. In practice we close the other eye. Americans are very touchy. You remember a certain recent attitude towards Evolution;

if we had let out our shout of laughter over that, there might almost have been a war.'

'But most Americans laughed at it too.'

'Yes; but they won't stand for outsiders laughing at their kith and kin. Have some of this soufflé Sofia?'

They ate in silence, each studying sympathetically the other's face. Dinny was thinking: 'I love his wrinkles, and it's a nice little beard for a beard.' Adrian was thinking: 'I'm glad her nose turns up a little. I have very engaging nieces and nephews.' At

last she said:

‘Well, Uncle Adrian, will you try and think of any way of strafing that man for the scurvy way he’s treated Hubert?’

‘Where is he?’

‘Hubert says in the States.’

‘Have you considered, my dear, that nepotism is undesirable?’

‘So is injustice, Uncle; and blood is thicker than water.’

‘And this wine,’ said Adrian, with a grimace, ‘is thicker than either. What are you going to see Hilary about?’

‘I want to scrounge an

introduction to Lord Saxenden.'

'Why?'

'Father says he's important.'

'So you are out to "pull strings", as they say?'

Dinny nodded.

'No sensitive and honest person can pull strings successfully, Dinny.'

Her eyebrows twitched and her teeth, very white and even, appeared in a broad smile.

'But I'm neither, dear.'

'We shall see. In the meantime these cigarettes are really tip-top propaganda. Have one?'

Dinny took a cigarette, and, with a long puff, said:

‘You saw great-Uncle “Cuffs”, didn’t you, Uncle Adrian?’

‘Yes. A dignified departure. He died in amber, as you might say. Wasted on the Church; he was the perfect diplomat, was Uncle “Cuffs”.’

‘I only saw him twice. But do you mean to say that *he* couldn’t get what he wanted, without loss of dignity, by pulling strings?’

‘It wasn’t exactly pulling strings with him, my dear; it was suavity and power of personality.’

‘Manners?’

‘Manner – the Grand; it about died with him.’

‘Well, Uncle, I must be going; wish me dishonesty and a thick skin.’

‘And I,’ said Adrian, ‘will return to the jawbone of the New Guinean with which I hope to smite my learned brethren. If I can help Hubert in any decent way, I will. At all events I’ll think about it. Give him my love, and good-bye, my dear!’

They parted, and Adrian went back to his museum. Regaining his

position above the maxilla, he thought of a very different jawbone. Having reached an age when the blood of spare men with moderate habits has an even-tempered flow, his 'infatuation' with Diana Ferse, dating back to years before her

fatal marriage, had a certain quality of altruism. He desired her happiness before his own. In his almost continual thoughts about her the consideration 'What's best for her?' was ever foremost. He had done without her for so long that importunity (never in his character) was out of the question

where she was concerned. But her face, oval and dark-eyed, delicious in lip and nose, and a little sad in repose, constantly blurred the outlines of maxillae, thighbones, and the other interesting phenomena of his job. She and her two children lived in a small Chelsea house on the income of a husband who for four years had been a patient in a private Mental Home, and was never expected to recover his equilibrium. She was nearly forty, and had been through dreadful times before Ferse had definitely toppled over the edge. Of the old school in thought and

manner, and trained to a coherent view of human history, Adrian accepted life with half-humorous fatalism. He was not of the reforming type, and the position of his lady love did not inspire him with a desire for the scalp of marriage. He wanted her to be happy, but did not see how in the existing circumstances he could make her so. She had at least peace and the sufficient income of him who had been smitten by Fate. Moreover, Adrian had something of the superstitious regard felt by primitive men for those afflicted with this particular form of

misfortune. Ferse had been a decent fellow till the taint began to wear through the coatings of health and education, and his conduct for the two years before his eclipse was only too liberally explained by that eclipse. He was one of God's afflicted; and his helplessness demanded of one the utmost scrupulosity. Adrian turned from the maxilla and took down a built-up cast of Pithecanthropus, that curious being from Trinil, Java, who for so long has divided opinion as to whether he shall be called man-ape or ape-man. What a distance from him to that modern

English skull over the mantelpiece! Ransack the authorities as one might, one never received an answer to the question: Where was the cradle of Homo Sapiens, the nest where he had developed from Trinil, Piltdown, Neanderthal man, or from some other undiscovered collateral of those creatures? If Adrian had a passion, indeed, except for Diana Ferse, it was a burning desire to fix that breeding spot. They were toying now with the idea of descent from Neanderthal man, but he felt it wouldn't do. When specialization had reached a stage so definite as

that disclosed by those brutish specimens, it did not swerve to type so different. As well expect development of red-deer from elk! He turned to that huge globe whereon were marked all discoveries of moment concerning the origin of modern Man, annotated in his own neat handwriting with notes on geological changes, time and climate. Where – where to look? It was a detective problem, soluble only in the French fashion by instinctive appreciation of the inherently probable locality, ratified by research at the selected

spot – the greatest detective problem in the world. The foothills of the Himalayas, the Fayoum, or somewhere now submerged beneath the sea? If, indeed, it were under the sea, then it would never be established to certainty.

Academic – the whole thing? Not quite, for with it was conjoined the question of man's essence, the real primitive nature of the human being, on which social philosophy might and should be founded – a question nicely revived of late: Whether, indeed, man was fundamentally decent and peaceful, as examination into the

lives of animals and some so-called savage peoples seemed to suggest, or fundamentally aggressive and restless, as that lugubrious record, History, seemed to assert? Find the breeding nest of Homo Sapiens, and there would emerge perhaps some evidence to decide whether he was devil-angel or angel-devil. To one with Adrian's instincts there was great attraction in this revived thesis of the inherent gentleness of man, but his habit of mind refused to subscribe easily or wholesale to any kind of thesis. Even gentle beasts and birds lived by the law of self-preservation; so did primitive

man; the devilries of sophisticated man began naturally with the extension of his activities and the increase of his competitions – in other words, with the ramifications of self-preservation induced by so-called civilized life. The uncomplicated existence of uncivilized man might well afford less chance to the instinct of self-preservation to be sinister in its manifestations, but you could hardly argue anything from that. Better to accept modern man as he was and try to

curb his opportunities for mischief. Nor would it do to bank

too much on the natural gentleness of primitive peoples. Only last night he had read of an elephant hunt in Central Africa, wherein the primitive negroes, men and women, who were beating for the white hunters, had fallen upon the carcasses of the slain elephants, torn them limb from limb, flesh from flesh, eaten it all dripping and raw, then vanished into the woods, couple by couple, to complete their orgy. After all, there was something in civilization! But at this moment his janitor announced:

‘A Professor’ Allorsen to see you,

sir. He wants to look at the Peruvian skulls.'

'Hallorsen!' said Adrian, startled. 'Are you sure? I thought he was in America, James.'

'Allorsen was the name, sir; tall gentleman, speaks like an American. Here's his card.'

'H'm! I'll see him, James.' And he thought: 'Shade of Dinny! What am I going to say?'

The very tall and very good-looking man who entered seemed about thirty-eight years old. His clean-shaven face was full of health, his eyes full of light, his

dark hair had a fleck or two of premature grey in it. A breeze seemed to come in with him. He spoke at once:

‘Mr Curator?’

Adrian bowed.

‘Why! Surely we’ve met; up a mountain, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ said Adrian.

‘Well, well! My name’s Hallorsen – Bolivian expedition. I’m told your Peruvian skulls are bully. I brought my little Bolivian lot along; thought I’d like to compare them with your Peruvians right here. There’s such a lot of

bunk written about skulls by people who haven't seen the originals.'

'Very true, Professor. I shall be delighted to see your Bolivians. By the way, you never knew my name, I think. This is it.'

Adrian handed him a card. Hallorsen took it.

'Gee! Are you related to the Captain Charwell who's got his knife into me?'

'His uncle. But I was under the impression that it was your knife that was into him.'

'Well, he let me down.'

‘I understand he thinks you let him down.’

‘See here, Mr Charwell – ’

‘We pronounce the name, Cherrell, if you don’t mind.’

‘Cherrell – yes, I remember now. But if you hire a man to do a job, Mr Curator, and that job’s too much for him, and because it’s too much for him you get left, what do you do – pass him a gold medal?’

‘You find out, I think, whether the job you hired him to do was humanly possible, before you take out your knife, anyway.’

‘That’s up to the man who takes

the job. And what was it? Just to keep a tight rein on a few dagoes.'

'I don't know very much about it, but I understand he had charge of the transport animals as well.'

'He surely did; and let the whole thing slip out of his hand. Well, I don't expect you to side against your nephew. But can I see your Peruvians?'

'Certainly.'

'That's nice of you.'

During the mutual inspection which followed Adrian frequently glanced at the magnificent specimen of Homo Sapiens who

stood beside him. A man so overflowing with health and life he had seldom seen. Natural enough that any check should gall him. Sheer vitality would prevent him from seeing the other side of things. Like his nation, matters must move his way, because there was no other way that seemed possible to his superabundance.

‘After all,’ he thought, ‘he can’t help being God’s own specimen – *Homo transatlanticus superbus*’; and he said slyly: ‘So the sun is going to travel West to East in future, Professor?’

Hallorsen smiled, and his smile

had an exuberant sweetness.

‘Well, Mr Curator, we’re agreed, I guess, that civilization started with agriculture. If we can show that we raised Indian corn on the American continent way back, maybe thousands of years before the old Nile civilization of barley and wheat, why shouldn’t the stream be the other way?’

‘And can you?’

‘Why, we have twenty to twenty-five types of Indian corn. Hrwldlicka claims that some twenty thousand years was necessary to differentiate them. That puts us way ahead as the parents of

agriculture, anyway.’

‘But alas! no type of Indian corn existed in the old world till after the discovery of America.’

‘No, sir; nor did any old-world type cereal exist in America till after that. Now, if the old-world culture seeped its way across the Pacific, why didn’t it bring along its cereals?’

‘But that doesn’t make America the light-bringer to the rest of the world, does it?’

‘Maybe not; but if not, she just developed her own old civilizations out of her own discovery of cereals;

and they were the first.’

‘Are you an Atlantean,
Professor?’

‘I sometimes toy with the idea,
Mr Curator.’

‘Well, well! May I ask if you are
quite happy about your attack on
my nephew?’

‘Why, I certainly had a sore head
when I wrote it. Your nephew and
I didn’t click.’

‘That, I should think, might
make you all the more doubtful as
to whether you were just.’

‘If I withdrew my criticism, I
wouldn’t be saying what I really

thought.'

'You are convinced that you had no hand in your failure to reach your objective?'

The frown on the giant's brow had a puzzled quality, and Adrian thought: 'An honest man, anyway.'

'I don't see what you're getting at,' said Hallorsen, slowly.

'You chose my nephew, I believe?'

'Yes, out of twenty others.'

'Precisely. You chose the wrong man, then?'

'I surely did.'

'Bad judgement?'

Hallorsen laughed.

‘That’s very acute, Mr Curator. But I’m not the man to advertise my own failings.’

‘What you wanted,’ said Adrian, dryly, ‘was a man without the bowels of compassion: well, I admit, you didn’t get him.’

Hallorsen flushed.

‘We shan’t agree about this, sir. I’ll just take my little lot of skulls away. And I thank you for your courtesy.’

A few minutes later he was gone.

Adrian was left to tangled

meditation. The fellow was better than he had remembered.

Physically a splendid specimen, mentally not to be despised, spiritually – well, typical of a new world where each immediate objective was the most important thing on earth till it was attained, and attainment more important than the methods of attainment employed. ‘Pity,’ he thought, ‘if there’s going to be a dog-fight. Still, the fellow’s in the wrong; one ought to be more charitable than to attack like that in public print. Too much ego in friend Hallorsen.’ So thinking, he put the maxilla into a

drawer.

Chapter Five



DINNY pursued her way towards St Augustine's-in-the-Meads. On that fine day the poverty of the district she was entering seemed to her country-nurtured eyes intensely cheerless. She was the more surprised by the hilarity of the children playing in the streets. Asking one of them the way to the Vicarage, she was escorted by five. They did not leave her when she rang the bell, and she was forced to conclude that they were actuated by motives not entirely connected

with altruism. They attempted, indeed, to go in with her, and only left when she gave them each a penny. She was ushered into a pleasant room which looked as though it would be glad if someone had the time to enter it some day, and was contemplating a reproduction of the Castelfranco Francesca, when a voice said:

‘Dinny!’ and she saw her Aunt May. Mrs Hilary Cherrell had her usual air of surmounting the need for being in three places at once; she looked leisurely, detached, and pleased – not unnaturally, for she liked her niece.

‘Up for the shopping, dear?’

‘No, Aunt May, I’ve come to win an introduction off Uncle Hilary.’

‘Your Uncle’s in the Police Court.’

A bubble rose to Dinny’s surface.

‘Why, what’s he done, Aunt May?’

Mrs Hilary smiled.

‘Nothing at present, but I won’t answer for him if the magistrate isn’t sensible. One of our young women has been charged with accosting.’

‘Not Uncle Hilary?’

‘No, dear, hardly that. Your

uncle is a witness to her character.'

'And is there really a character to witness to, Aunt May?'

'Well, that's the point. Hilary says so; but I'm not so sure.'

'Men are very trustful. I've never been in a Police Court. I should love to go and catch Uncle there.'

'Well, I'm going in that direction. We might go together as far as the Court.'

Five minutes later they issued, and proceeded by way of streets ever more arresting to the eyes of Dinny, accustomed only to the picturesque poverty of the

countryside.

‘I never quite realized before,’ she said, suddenly, ‘that London was such a bad dream.’

‘From which there is no awakening. That’s the chilling part of it. Why on earth, with all this unemployment, don’t they organize a national Slum Clearance Scheme? It would pay for itself within twenty years. Politicians are marvels of energy and principle when they’re out of office, but when they get in, they simply run behind the machine.’

‘They’re not women, you see, Auntie.’

‘Are you chaffing, Dinny?’

‘Oh! no. Women haven’t the sense of difficulty that men have; women’s difficulties are physical and real, men’s difficulties are mental and formal, they always say: “It’ll never do!” Women never say that. They act, and find out whether it will do or not.’

Mrs Hilary was silent a moment.

‘I suppose women *are* more actual; they have a fresher eye, and less sense of responsibility.’

‘I wouldn’t be a man for anything.’

‘That’s refreshing; but on the

whole they get a better time, my dear, even now.'

'They think so, but I doubt it. Men are awfully like ostriches, it seems to me. They can refuse to see what they don't want to, better than we can; but I don't think that's an advantage.'

'If you lived in the Meads, Dinny, you might.'

'If I lived in the Meads, dear, I should die.'

Mrs Hilary contemplated her niece by marriage. Certainly she looked a little transparent and as if she could be snapped off, but she

also had a look of ‘breeding’, as if her flesh were dominated by her spirit. She might be unexpectedly durable, and impermeable by outside things.

‘I’m not so sure, Dinny; yours is a toughened breed. But for that your uncle would have been dead long ago. Well! Here’s the Police Court, I’m sorry I can’t spare time to come in. But everybody will be nice to you. It’s a very human place, if somewhat indelicate. Be a little careful about your next-door neighbours.’

Dinny raised an eyebrow: ‘Lousy, Aunt May?’

‘Well, I wouldn’t go so far as to say not. Come back to tea, if you can.’

She was gone.

The exchange and mart of human indelicacy was crowded, for with the infallible flair of the Public for anything dramatic, the case in which Hilary was a witness to character had caught on, since it involved the integrity of the Police. Its second remand was in progress when Dinny took the last remaining fifteen square inches of standing room. Her neighbours on the right reminded her of the nursery rhyme: ‘The butcher, the

baker, the candlestick-maker.' Her neighbour on the left was a tall policeman. Many women were among the throng at the back of the Court. The air was close and smelled of clothes. Dinny looked at the magistrate, ascetic and as if pickled, and wondered why he did not have incense fuming on his desk. Her eyes passed on to the figure in the dock, a girl of about her own age and height, neatly dressed, with good features except that her mouth was perhaps more sensuous than was fortunate for one in her position. Dinny estimated that her hair was

probably fair. She stood very still, with a slight fixed flush on her pale cheeks, and a frightened restlessness in her eyes. Her name appeared to be Millicent Pole. Dinny gathered that she was alleged by a police constable to have accosted two men in the Euston Road, neither of whom had appeared to give evidence. In the witness-box a young man who resembled a tobacconist was testifying that he had seen the girl pass twice or three times – had noticed her specially as a ‘nice bit’; she had seemed worried, as if looking for something.

For somebody, did he mean?

That or the other, how should he know? No, she wasn't looking on the pavement; no, she didn't stop, she passed *him*, anyway, without a look. Had he spoken to her? No fear! Doing? Oh, he was just outside his shop for a breath of air after closing. Did he see her speak to anyone? No, he didn't, but he wasn't there long.

'The Reverend Hilary Charwell.'

Dinny saw her uncle rise from a bench and step up under the canopy of the witness box. He looked active and unclerical, and her eyes rested with pleasure on his

long firm face, so wrinkled and humorous.

‘Your name is Hilary Charwell?’

‘Cherrell, if you don’t mind.’

‘Quite. And you are the incumbent of St Augustine’s-in-the-Meads?’

Hilary bowed.

‘For how long?’

‘Thirteen years.’

‘You are acquainted with the defendant?’

‘Since she was a child.’

‘Tell us, please, Mr Cherrell, what you know of her?’

Dinny saw her uncle turn more definitely to the magistrate.

‘Her father and mother, sir, were people for whom I had every respect; they brought up their children well. He was a shoemaker – poor, of course; we’re all poor in my parish. I might almost say they died of poverty five and six years ago, and their two daughters have been more or less under my eye since. They work at Petter and Poplin’s. I’ve never heard anything against Millicent here. So far as I know, she’s a good honest girl.’

‘I take it, Mr Cherrell, your opportunities of judging of her are

not very great?’

‘Well, I visit the house in which she lodges with her sister. If you saw it, sir, you would agree that it requires some self-respect to deal as well as they do with the conditions there.’

‘Is she a member of your congregation?’

A smile came on her uncle’s lips, and was reflected on the magistrate’s.

‘Hardly, sir. Their Sundays are too precious to young people nowadays. But Millicent is one of the girls who goes for her holidays

to our Rest House near Dorking. They are always very good girls down there. My niece by marriage, Mrs Michael Mont, who runs the house, has reported well of her. Shall I read what she says?

DEAR UNCLE HILARY,

You ask about Millicent Pole. She has been down three times, and the matron reports that she is a nice girl and not at all flighty. My own impression of her is the same.'

'Then it comes to this, Mr Cherrell: in your view a mistake has been made in this case?'

'Yes, sir; I am convinced of it.'

The girl in the dock put her handkerchief to her eyes. And

Dinny felt, suddenly, indignant at the extreme wretchedness of her position. To stand there before all those people, even if she had done as they said! And why shouldn't a girl ask a man for his companionship? He wasn't obliged to give it.

The tall policeman stirred, looked down at her, as if scenting unorthodoxy, and cleared his throat.

‘Thank you, Mr Cherrell.’

Hilary stepped out of the witness box and in doing so caught sight of his niece and waved a finger. Dinny became aware that the case

was over, the magistrate making up his mind. He sat perfectly silent, pressing his finger-tips together and staring at the girl, who had finished mopping her eyes and was staring back at him. Dinny held her breath. On the next minute – a life, perhaps, hung in the balance! The tall policeman changed his feet. Was his sympathy with his fellow in the force, or with that girl? All the little noises in the Court had ceased, the only sound was the scratching of a pen. The magistrate held his finger-tips apart and spoke:

‘I am not satisfied that this case

has been made out. The defendant will be dismissed. You may go.'

The girl made a little choking sound. To her right the candlestick-maker uttered a hoarse: "Ear! 'ear!"

' 'Ush!' said the tall policeman. Dinny saw her uncle walking out beside the girl; he smiled as he passed.

'Wait for me, Dinny – shan't be two minutes!'

Slipping out behind the tall policeman, Dinny waited in the lobby. The nature of things around gave her the shuddery feeling one had turning up the light in a

kitchen at night; the scent of
Condy's Fluid assailed her nostrils;
she moved nearer to the outer
door. A police sergeant said:

‘Anything I can do for you,
Miss?’

‘Thank you, I'm waiting for my
uncle; he's just coming.’

‘The reverend gentleman?’

Dinny nodded.

‘Ah! He's a good man, is the
Vicar. That girl got off?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well! Mistakes will 'appen.
Here he is Miss.’

Hilary came up and put his arm

through Dinny's.

‘Ah! Sergeant,’ he said, ‘how’s the Missis?’

‘Prime, Sir. So you pulled her out of it?’

‘Yes,’ said Hilary; ‘and I want a pipe. Come along, Dinny.’ And, nodding to the sergeant, he led her into the air.

‘What brought *you* into this galley, Dinny?’

‘I came after you, Uncle. Aunt May brought me. Did that girl really not do it?’

‘Ask me another. But to convict her was the surest way to send her

to hell. She's behind with her rent, and her sister's ill. Hold on a minute while I light up.' He emitted a cloud of smoke and resumed her arm. 'What do you want of me, my dear?'

'An introduction to Lord Saxenden.'

'Snubby Bantham? Why?'

'Because of Hubert.'

'Oh! Going to vamp him?'

'If you'll bring us together.'

'I was at Harrow with Snubby, he was only a baronet then – I haven't seen him since.'

'But you've got Wilfred

Bentworth in your pocket, Uncle, and their estates march.'

'Well, I daresay Bentworth will give me a note to him for you.'

'That's not what I want. I want to meet him socially.'

'Um! Yes, you can hardly vamp him without. What's the point, exactly?'

'Hubert's future. We want to get at the fountain-head before worse befalls.'

'I see. But look here, Dinny, Lawrence is your man. He has Bentworth going to them at Lippinghall on Tuesday next week,

for partridge driving. You could go too.'

'I thought of Uncle Lawrence, but I couldn't miss the chance of seeing you, Uncle.'

'My dear,' said Hilary, 'attractive nymphs mustn't say things like that. They go to the head. Well, here we are! Come in and have tea.'

In the drawing room of the Vicarage Dinny was startled to see again her Uncle Adrian. He was sitting in a corner with his long legs drawn in, surrounded by two young women who looked like teachers. He waved his spoon, and

presently came over to her.

‘After we parted, Dinny, who should appear but the man of wrath himself, to see my Peruvians.’

‘Not Hallorsen?’

Adrian held out a card:

‘Professor Edward Hallorsen’, and in pencil, ‘Piedmont Hotel’.

‘He’s a much more personable bloke than I thought when I met him husky and bearded in the Dolomites; and I should say he’s no bad chap if taken the right way. And what I was going to say to you was: Why not take him the right

way?’

‘You haven’t read Hubert’s diary, Uncle.’

‘I should like to.’

‘You probably will. It may be published.’

Adrian whistled faintly.

‘Perpend, my dear. Dog-fighting is excellent for all except the dogs.’

‘Hallorsen’s had his innings. It’s Hubert’s turn to bat.’

‘Well, Dinny – no harm in having a look at the bowling before he goes in. Let me arrange a little dinner. Diana Ferse will have us at her house, and you can stay

the night with her for it. So what about Monday?’

Dinny wrinkled her rather tip-tilted nose. If, as she intended, she went to Lippinghall next week, Monday *would* be handy. It might, after all, be as well to see this American before declaring war on him.

‘All right, Uncle, and thank you very much. If you’re going West may I come with you? I want to see Aunt Emily and Uncle Lawrence. Mount Street’s on your way home.’

‘Right! When you’ve had your fill, we’ll start.’

‘I’m quite full,’ said Dinny, and got up.

Chapter Six



HER luck held, and she flushed her third Uncle contemplating his own house in Mount Street, as if he were about to make an offer for it.

‘Ah! Dinny, come along; your Aunt’s moulting, and she’ll be glad to see you. I miss old Forsyte,’ he added in the hall. ‘I was just considering what I ought to ask for this house if we let it next season. You didn’t know old Forsyte – Fleur’s father: he was a character.’

‘What is the matter with Aunt Em, Uncle Lawrence?’

‘Nothing, my dear. I think the sight of poor Old Uncle “Cuffs” has made her dwell on the future. Ever dwell on the future, Dinny? It’s a dismal period, after a certain age.’

He opened a door.

‘My dear, here’s Dinny.’

Emily, Lady Mont, was standing in her panelled drawing-room flicking a feather brush over a bit of Famille Verte, with her parakeet perched on her shoulder. She lowered the brush, advanced with a far-away look in her eyes, said ‘Mind, Polly,’ and kissed her niece. The parakeet transferred itself to Dinny’s shoulder and bent its head

round inquiringly to look in her face.

‘He’s such a dear,’ said Lady Mont; ‘you won’t mind if he tweaks your ear? I’m so glad you came, Dinny; I’ve been so thinking of funerals. Do tell me your idea about the hereafter.’

‘Is there one, Auntie?’

‘Dinny! That’s so depressing.’

‘Perhaps those who want one have it.’

‘You’re like Michael. He’s so mental. Where did you pick Dinny up, Lawrence?’

‘In the street.’

‘That sounds improper. How is your father, Dinny? I hope he isn’t any the worse for that dreadful house at Porthminster. It did so smell of preserved mice.’

‘We’re all very worried about Hubert, Aunt Em.’

‘Ah! Hubert, yes. You know, I think he made a mistake to flog those men. Shootin’ them one can quite understand, but floggin’ is so physical and like the old Duke.’

‘Don’t you feel inclined to flog carters when they lash overloaded horses up-hill, Auntie?’

‘Yes, I do. Was that what they

were doin’?’

‘Practically, only worse. They used to twist the mules’ tails and stick their knives into them, and generally play hell with the poor brutes.’

‘Did they? I’m so glad he flogged them; though I’ve never liked mules ever since we went up the Gemmi. Do you remember, Lawrence?’

Sir Lawrence nodded. On his face was the look, affectionate but quizzical, which Dinny always connected with Aunt Em.

‘Why, Auntie?’

‘They rolled on me; not they

exactly, but the one I was ridin'. They tell me it's the only time a mule has ever rolled on anybody – surefooted.'

'Dreadful taste, Auntie!'

'Yes; and most unpleasant – so internal. Do you think Hubert would like to come and shoot partridges at Lippinghall next week?'

'I don't think you could get Hubert to go anywhere just now. He's got a terrible hump. But if you have a cubby-hole left for me, could *I* come?'

'Of course. There'll be plenty of

room. Let's see: just Charlie Muskham and his new wife, Mr Bentworth and Hen, Michael and Fleur, and Diana Ferse, and perhaps Adrian because he doesn't shoot, and your Aunt Wilmet. Oh! ah! And Lord Saxenden.'

'What!' cried Dinny.

'Why? Isn't he respectable?'

'But, Auntie – that's perfect! He's my objective.'

'What a dreadful word; I never heard it called that before. Besides, there's a Lady Saxenden, on her back somewhere.'

'No, no, Aunt Em. I want to get

at him about Hubert. Father says he's the nod.'

'Dinny, you and Michael use the oddest expressions. What nod?'

Sir Lawrence broke the petrified silence he usually observed in the presence of his wife.

'Dinny means, my dear, that Saxenden is a big noise behind the scenes in military matters.'

'What is he like, Uncle Lawrence?'

'Snubby? I've known him many years – quite a lad.'

'This is very agitatin', said Lady Mont, resuming the parakeet.

‘Dear Auntie, I’m quite safe.’

‘But is Lord – er – Snubby? I’ve always tried to keep Lippin’-hall respectable. I’m very doubtful about Adrian as it is, but’ – she placed the parakeet on the mantelpiece – ‘he’s my favourite brother. For a favourite brother one does things.’

‘One does,’ said Dinny.

‘That’ll be all right, Em,’ put in Sir Lawrence. ‘I’ll watch over Dinny and Diana, and you can watch over Adrian and Snubby.’

‘Your uncle gets more frivolous every year, Dinny; he tells me the

most dreadful stories.’ She stood still alongside Sir Lawrence and he put his hand through her arm.

Dinny thought: ‘The Red King and the White Queen.’

‘Well, good-bye, Dinny,’ said her Aunt, suddenly; ‘I have to go to bed. My Swedish masseuse is takin’ me off three times a week. I really am reducin’.’ Her eyes roved over Dinny: ‘I wonder if she could put you on a bit!’

‘I’m fatter than I look, Auntie.’

‘So am I – it’s distressin’. If your uncle wasn’t a hop-pole I shouldn’t mind so much.’ She inclined her

cheek, and Dinny gave it a smacking kiss.

‘What a nice kiss!’ said Lady Mont. ‘I haven’t had a kiss like that for years. People do peck so! Come, Polly!’ and, with the parakeet upon her shoulder, she swayed away.

‘Aunt Em looks awfully well.’

‘She is, my dear. It’s her mania – getting stout; she fights it tooth and nail. We live on the most variegated cookery. It’s better at Lippinghall, because Augustine leads us by the nose, and she’s as French as she was thirty-five years ago when we brought her back

from our honeymoon. Cooks like a bird, still. Fortunately nothing makes me fat.'

'Aunt Em isn't fat.'

'M-no.'

'And she carries herself beautifully. We don't carry ourselves like that.'

'Carriage went out with Edward,' said Sir Lawrence; 'it was succeeded by the lope. All you young women lope as if you were about to spring on to something and make a get-away. I've been trying to foresee what will come next. Logically it should be the

bound, but it may quite well revert and be the languish.'

'What sort of man is Lord Saxenden, really, Uncle Lawrence?'

'One of those who won the war by never having his opinion taken. You know the sort of thing: "Went down for week-end to Cooquers. The Capers were there, and Gwen Blandish; she was in force and had much to say about the Polish front. I had more. Talked with Capers; he thinks the Boches have had enough. I disagreed with him; he is very down on Lord T. Arthur Prose came over on Sunday; he estimates that the Russians now have two million

rifles but no bullets. The war, he says, will be over by January. He is appalled by our losses. If he only knew what I know! Lady Thripp was there with her son, who has lost his left foot. She is most engaging; promised to go and see her hospital and tell her how to run it. Very pleasant dinner on Sunday – everybody in great form; we played at comfits. Alick came in after; he says we lost forty thousand men in the last attack, but the French lost more. I expressed the opinion that it was very serious. No one took it.” ’

Dinny laughed. ‘Were there such

people?’

‘Were there not, my dear! Most valuable fellows; what we should have done without them – the way they kept their ends up and their courage and their conversation – the thing had to be seen to be believed. And almost all of them won the war. Saxenden was especially responsible. He had an active job all the time.’

‘What job?’

‘Being in the know. He was probably more in the know than anybody else on earth, judging by what he says. Remarkable constitution, too, and lets you see

it: great yachtsman.'

'I shall look forward to him.'

'Snubby,' sighed her uncle, 'is one of those persons at whom it is better to look back. Would you like to stay the night, Dinny, or are you going home?'

'Oh, I must go back tonight. My train's at eight from Paddington.'

'In that case I'll lope you across the Park, give you a snack at Paddington, and put you into the train.'

'Oh! don't bother about me, Uncle Lawrence.'

'Let you cross the Park without

me, and miss the chance of being arrested for walking with a young female! Never! We might even sit, and try our luck. You're just the type that gets the aged into trouble. There's something Botticellian about you, Dinny. Come along.'

It was seven o'clock of the September evening when they debouched into Hyde Park, and, passing under the plane trees, walked on its withered grass.

'Too early,' said Sir Lawrence, 'owing to Daylight Saving. Indecorum isn't billed till eight. I doubt if it will be any use to sit,

Dinny. Can you tell a disguised copper when you see him? It's very necessary. The bowler hat – for fear of being hit on the head too suddenly; they always fall off in books; tendency to look as if he weren't a copper; touch of efficiency about the mouth – they complete their teeth in the force; eyes a trifle on the ground when they're not on you; the main man dwelling a little on both feet, and looking as if he had been measured for something. Boots of course – proverbial.'

Dinny gurgled.

'I tell you what we might do,

Uncle Lawrence. Stage an accost. There'll be a policeman at the Paddington Gate. I'll loiter a little, and accost you as you come up. What ought I to say?'

Sir Lawrence wrinkled up an eyebrow.

'So far as I can recollect, something like: "How do, ducky? Your night out?" '

'I'll go on, then, and let that off on you under the police-man's nose.'

'He'd see through it, Dinny.'

'You're trying to back out.'

'Well, no one has taken a

proposition of mine seriously for so long. Besides, "Life is real, life is earnest, and the end is not the gaol"!'

‘I’m disappointed in you, Uncle.’

‘I’m used to that, my dear. Wait till you’re grave and reverend, and see how continually you will disappoint youth.’

‘But think: we could have whole columns of the newspapers devoted to us for days. “Paddington Gate accosting incident: Alleged Uncle.” Don’t you hanker to be an alleged uncle and supersede the affairs of Europe? Don’t you even want to get the Police into trouble? Uncle,

it's pusillanimous.'

'*Soit!*' said Sir Lawrence: 'One uncle in the Police Court per day is enough. You're more dangerous than I thought, Dinny.'

'But, really, why should those girls be arrested? That all belongs to the past, when women *were* under-dogs.'

'I am entirely of your way of thinking, Dinny, but the Nonconformist conscience is still with us, and the Police must have something to do. Without adding to unemployment it's impossible to reduce their numbers. And an idle police force is dangerous to cooks.'

‘Do be serious, Uncle!’

‘Not that, my dear! Whatever else life holds for us – not that! But I do foresee the age when we shall all be free to accost each other, limited only by common civility. Instead of the present Vulgate, there will be revised versions for men and women. “Madam, will you walk?” “Sir, do you desire my company?” It will be an age not perhaps of gold, but at least of glitter. This is Paddington Gate. Could you have had the heart to spoof that noble-looking copper? Come along, let’s cross.’

‘Your Aunt,’ he resumed, as they

entered Paddington Station, ‘won’t rise again, so I’ll dine with you in the buffet. We’ll have a spot of the “boy”, and for the rest, if I know our railway stations, oxtail soup, white fish, roast beef, greens, browned potatoes, and plum tart – all good, if somewhat English.’

‘Uncle Lawrence,’ said Dinny, when they had reached the roast beef, ‘what *do you* think of Americans?’

‘No patriotic man, Dinny, speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on that subject. Americans, however, like Englishmen, may be divided into

two classes – Americans and Americans. In other words, some are nice and some are nasty.’

‘Why don’t we get on better with them?’

‘That’s an easy one. The nasty English don’t get on better with them because they have more money than we have. The nice English don’t get on as well as they ought with them, because Americans are so responsive and the tone of the American voice is not pleasing to the English ear. Or take it the other way round. The nasty Americans don’t get on well with the English because the tone

of the English voice is unpleasing to them. The nice Americans don't get on as well with us as they should, because we're so unresponsive and sniffy.'

'Don't you think they want to have things their own way too much?'

'So do we. It isn't that. It's manner, my dear, that divides us, manner and language.'

'How?'

'Having what used to be the same language is undoubtedly a snare. We must hope for such a development of the American lingo

as will necessitate our both learning each other's.'

'But we always talk about the link of a common tongue.'

'Why this curiosity about Americans?'

'I'm to meet Professor Hallorsen on Monday.'

'The Bolivian bloke. A word of advice then, Dinny: Let him be in the right, and he'll feed out of your hand. Put him in the wrong, and you'll not feed out of his.'

'Oh! I mean to keep my temper.'

'Keep your left up, and don't rush in. Now, if you've finished, my

dear, we ought to go; it's five minutes to eight.'

He put her into her carriage and supplied her with an evening paper. As the train moved out, he added:

'Give him the Botticellian eye, Dinny. Give him the Botticellian eye!'

Chapter Seven



ADRIAN brooded over Chelsea as he approached it on Monday evening. It was not what it used to be. Even in late Victorian days he remembered its inhabitants as somewhat troglodytic – persons inclined to duck their heads, with here and there a high light or historian. Charwomen, artists hoping to pay their rent, writers living on four-and-sevenpence a day, ladies prepared to shed their clothes at a shilling an hour, couples maturing for the Divorce

Court, people who liked a draught, together with the worshippers of Turner, Carlyle, Rossetti, and Whistler; some publicans, not a few sinners, and the usual sprinkling of those who eat mutton four times a week. Behind a river façade hardening into the palatial, respectability had gradually thickened, till it was now lapping the incurable King's Road and emerging even there in bastions of Art and Fashion.

Diana's house was in Oakley Street. He could remember it as having no individuality whatever, and inhabited by a family of strict

mutton-eaters; but in the six years of Diana's residence it had become one of the charming nests of London. He had known all the pretty Montjoy sisters scattered over Society, but of them all Diana was the youngest, the prettiest, most tasteful, and wittiest – one of those women who, without money to speak of or impeachment of virtue, contrive that all about them shall be elegant to the point of exciting jealousy. From her two children and her Collie dog (almost the only one left in London), from her harpsichord, four-poster, Bristol glass, and the stuff on her chairs

and floors, taste always seemed to him to radiate and give comfort to the beholder. She, too, gave comfort, with her still perfect figure, dark eyes clear and quick, oval face, ivory complexion, and little crisp trick of speech. All the Montjoy sisters had that trick, it came from their mother, of Highland stock, and had undoubtedly in the course of thirty years made a considerable effect on the accent of Society, converting it from the g-dropping yaw-yaw of the 'nineties into a rather charming r- and l-pinching dialect. When he considered why

Diana, with her scant income and her husband in a Mental Home, was received everywhere in Society, Adrian was accustomed to take the image of a Bactrian camel. That animal's two humps were like the two sections of Society (with the big S) joined by a bridge, seldom used after the first crossing. The Montjoys, a very old landed family in Dumfriesshire innumerably allied in the past with the nobility, had something of an hereditary perch on the foremost hump – a somewhat dull position from which there was very little view, because of the camel's head –

and Diana was often invited to great houses where the chief works were hunting, shooting, hospitals, Court functions, and giving débutantes a chance. As Adrian well knew, she seldom went. She was far more constantly seated on the second hump, with its wide and stimulating view over the camel's tail. Ah! They were a queer collection on that back hump! Many, like Diana herself, crossed from the first hump by the bridge, others came up the camel's tail, a few were dropped from Heaven, or – as people sometimes called it – America. To qualify for that back

hump Adrian, who had never qualified, knew that you needed a certain liveliness on several fronts; either a first-rate memory so that anything you read or listened to could be retailed with ready accuracy; or a natural spring of wit. If you had neither of these you might appear on the hump once, but never again. Personality, of course, you must have, though without real eccentricity; but it must not be personality which hid its light under a bushel. Eminence in some branch of activity was desirable, but not a *sine qua non*. Breeding again was welcome, but

not if it made you dull. Beauty was a passport, but it had to be allied with animation. Money was desirable, but money alone wouldn't get you a seat. Adrian had noted that knowledge of Art, if vocal, was of greater value than the power to produce it; and directive ability acceptable if it were not too silent or too dry. Then, again, some people seemed to get there out of an aptitude for the 'coulisses', and for having a finger in every pie. But first and last the great thing was to be able to talk. Innumerable strings were pulled from this back hump, but

whether they guided the camel's progress at all he was never sure, however much those who pulled them thought so. Diana, he knew, had so safe a seat among this heterogeneous group, given to constant meals, that she might have fed without expense from Christmas to Christmas, nor need ever have passed a weekend in Oakley Street. And he was the more grateful in that she so constantly sacrificed all that to be with her children and himself. The war had broken out just after her marriage with Ronald Ferse, and Sheila and Ronald had not been

born till after his return from it. They were now seven and six, and, as Adrian was always careful to tell her, 'regular little Montjoys'. They certainly had her looks and animation. But he alone knew that the shadow on her face in repose was due more to the fear that she ought not to have had them than to anything else in her situation. He, too, alone knew that the strain of living with one unbalanced as Ferse had become had so killed sex impulse in her that she had lived these four years of practical widowhood without any urge towards love. He believed she had

for himself a real affection, but he knew that so far it stopped short of passion.

He arrived half an hour before dinner time, and went up to the schoolroom at the top of the house, to see the children. They were receiving bed-time rusks and milk from their French governess, welcomed him with acclamation and clamoured for him to go on with the story he was telling them. The French governess, who knew what to expect, withdrew. Adrian sat down opposite the two small sparkling faces, and began where he had left off: 'So the man who

had charge of the canoes was a tremendous fellow, brown all over, who had been selected for his strength, because of the white unicorns which infested that coast.'

'Boo! Uncle Adrian – unicorns are imaginative.'

'Not in those days, Sheila.'

'Then what's become of them?'

'There is only about one left, and he lives where white men cannot go, because of the "Bu-bu" fly.'

'What is the "Bu-bu" fly?'

'The "Bu-bu" fly, Ronald, is remarkable for settling in the calf

of the leg and founding a family there.’

‘Oh!’

‘Unicorns – as I said before I was interrupted – which infested that coast. His name was Mattagor, and this was his way with unicorns. After luring them down to the beach with crinibobs – ’

‘What are crinibobs?’

‘They look like strawberries and taste like carrots – crinibobs – he would steal up behind them – ’

‘If he was in front of them with the crinibobs, how could he steal up behind them?’

‘He used to thread the crinibobs through a string made out of fibre, and hang them in a row between two charm trees. As soon as the unicorns were nibbling, he would emerge from the bush where he would be hiding, and, making no noise with his bare feet, tie their tails together two by two.’

‘But they would feel their tails being tied!’

‘No, Sheila; white unicorns don’t feel with their tails. Then he would retire to the bush, and click his tongue against his teeth, and the unicorns would dash forward in wild confusion.’

‘Did their tails ever come out?’

‘Never. That was the great thing, because he was very fond of animals.’

‘I expect the unicorns never came again?’

‘Wrong, Ronny. Their love of crinibobs was too great.’

‘Did he ever ride on them?’

‘Yes; sometimes he would leap lightly on to two of their backs and ride off into the jungle with one foot on each back, laughing drily to himself. So under his charge, as you may imagine, the canoes were safe. It was not the wet season, so that

the landsharks would not be so numerous, and the expedition was about to start when – ’

‘When what, Uncle Adrian? It’s only Mummy.’

‘Go on, Adrian.’

But Adrian remained silent, with his eyes fixed on the advancing vision. Then, averting from it his eyes and fixing them on Sheila, he proceeded:

‘I must now pause to tell you why the moon was so important. They could not start the expedition till the half-moon was seen advancing towards them through

the charm trees.'

'Why not?'

'That is what I am going to tell you. In those days people, and especially this tribe of Phwatabhoys, paid a great deal of attention to what was beautiful – things like Mummy, or Christmas carols, or little new potatoes, had a great effect on them. And before they did anything they had to have an omen.'

'What is an omen?'

'You know what an amen is – it comes at the end: well, an omen comes at the beginning, to bring

luck. And the omen had to be beautiful. Now the half-moon was considered to be the most beautiful thing in the dry season, so they had to wait till it came advancing to them through the charm trees, as you saw Mummy just now walking towards us through the door.'

'But the moon hasn't got feet.'

'No; she floats. And one fine evening she came floating, like nothing else on earth, so lovely and so slim, and with such an expression in her eyes that they all knew their expedition was bound to be successful; and they abased themselves before her, saying:

“Omen! if thou wilt be with us, then shall we pass over the wilderness of the waters and the sands with thee in our eyes, and be happy in the happiness that comes with thee for ever and ever.

Amen!” And when they had put it like that, they got into the canoes, Phwatabhoy by Phwatabhoy and Phwatanymp by Phwatanymp, till they were all in. And the half-moon stayed there at the edge of the charm trees and blessed them with her eyes. But one man stopped behind. He was an old Phwatabhoy who wished for the half-moon so much that he forgot

everything, and started crawling towards her, hoping to touch her feet.'

'But she hadn't feet!'

'He thought she had, for to him she was like a woman made of silver and ivory. And he crawled in and out of the charm trees, but never could he quite reach her, because she was the half-moon.'

Adrian paused, and there was for a moment no sound; then he said: 'To be continued in our next,' and went out. Diana joined him in the hall.

'Adrian, you are corrupting the

children. Don't you know that fables and fairy-tales are no longer to be allowed to interfere with their interest in machines? After you'd gone Ronald said: "Does Uncle Adrian really believe you are the half-moon, Mummy?" '

‘And you answered?’

‘Diplomatically. But they're as sharp as squirrels.’

‘Well! Sing me “Waterboy” before Dinny and her swain come.’

And while she sat and sang, Adrian gazed and worshipped. Her voice was good and she sang well that strange and haunting song.

The last 'Waterboy' had barely died away when the maid announced:

'Miss Cherrell. Professor Hallorsen.'

Dinny came in with her head held high, and Adrian augured but poorly from the expression of her eyes. He had seen school-boys look like that when they were going to 'roast' a newcomer. After her came Hallorsen, immensely tall in that small drawing-room, his eyes swimming with health. He bowed low when presented to Dinny. 'Your daughter, I presume, Mr Curator?'

'No, my niece; a sister of

Captain Hubert Cherrell.'

'Is that so? I am honoured to make your acquaintance, Ma'am.'

Adrian, noting that their eyes, having crossed, seemed to find it difficult to disengage, said:

'How are you liking the Piedmont, Professor?'

'The cooking's fine, but there are too many of us Americans.'

'Perching just now like the swallows?'

'Ah! In a fortnight we'll all have flitted.'

Dinny had come brimful of Anglo-femininity, and the contrast

between Hallorsen's overpowering health and Hubert's haggard looks had at once sharpened the edge of her temper. She sat down beside that embodiment of the conquering male with the full intention of planting every dart she could in his epidermis. He was, however, at once engaged in conversation by Diana, and she had not finished her soup (clear, with a prune in it) before, stealing a look around at him, she revised her plan. After all, he was a stranger and a guest, and she was supposed to be a lady; there were other ways of killing a cat beside hanging it. She would

not plant darts, she would ‘charm him with smiles and soap’; that would be more considerate towards Diana and her uncle, and more effective warfare in the long run. With a cunning worthy of her cause, she waited till he was in deep water over British politics, which he seemed to regard as serious manifestations of human activity; then, turning on him the Botticellian eye, she said:

‘We should treat American politics just as seriously, Professor. But surely they’re not serious, are they?’

‘I believe you are right, Miss

Cherrell. There's just one rule for politicians all over the world: Don't say in Power what you say in Opposition; if you do, you only have to carry out what the other fellows have found impossible. The only real difference, I judge, between Parties is that one Party sits in the National 'Bus, and the other Party strap-hangs.'

'In Russia, what's left of the other Party lies under the seat, doesn't it?'

'So it does in Italy,' said Diana.

'And what about Spain?' added Adrian.

Hallorsen uttered his infectious laugh. ‘Dictatorships aren’t politics. They’re jokes.’

‘No jokes, Professor.’

‘Bad jokes, Professor.’

‘How do you *mean* – jokes, Professor?’

‘Bluff. Just one long assumption that human nature’s on the mark the Dictator makes for it. The moment his bluff’s called – Why! Wump!’

‘But,’ said Diana, ‘suppose a majority of the people approve of their dictator, isn’t that democracy, or government by consent of the

governed?’

‘I would say no, Mrs Ferse, unless he was confirmed by majority every year.’

‘Dictators get things done,’ said Adrian.

‘At a price, Mr Curator. But look at Diaz in Mexico. For twenty years he made it the Garden of Eden, but see what it’s been ever since he went. You can’t get out of a people for keeps what isn’t yet in them.’

‘The fault,’ replied Adrian, ‘in our political system and in yours, Professor, is that a whole lot of reforms latent in the common-sense

of the people don't get a chance of being carried out because our short-term politicians won't give a lead, for fear of losing the power they haven't got.'

'Aunt May,' Dinny murmured, 'was saying: Why not cure Unemployment by a National Slum Clearance effort, and kill the two birds with one stone?'

'My! But that's a mighty fine idea!' said Hallorsen, turning on her the full of his brimming face.

'Vested interests,' said Diana, 'slum landlordism and the building trades are too strong for that.'

Adrian added: ‘And there’s the cash required.’

‘Why! that’s all easy. Your Parliament could take what powers they need for a big national thing like that; and what’s wrong with a Loan, anyway? – the money would come back; it’s not like a Loan for war, all shot away in powder. What do you pay in doles?’

No one could answer him.

‘I judge the saving would pay the interest on a pretty big Loan.’

‘It just, in fact,’ said Dinny, sweetly, ‘needs simple faith. That’s where you Americans beat us,

Professor Hallorsen.'

A look slid over the American's face as though he were saying: 'Cats!'

'Well, we certainly had a pieful of simple faith when we came over to fight in France. But we ate the lot. It'll be the home fires we keep burning next time.'

'Was your faith so simple even last time?'

'I fear it was, Miss Cherrell. Not one in twenty of us ever believed the Germans could get a cinch on us away over there.'

'I sit rebuked, Professor.'

‘Why! Not at all! You judge America by Europe.’

‘There was Belgium, Professor,’ said Diana; ‘even we had some simple faith at the start.’

‘Pardon me, but did the case of Belgium really move you, Ma’am?’

Adrian was drawing circles with a fork; he looked up.

‘Speaking for oneself, yes. I don’t suppose it made any difference to the Army people, Navy people, big business people, or even to a large section of Society, political and otherwise. They all knew that if war came we

were practically committed to France. But to simple folk like myself and some two-thirds of the population not in the know, to the working classes, in fact, generally, it made all the difference. It was like seeing What's-his-name – the Man Mountain – advancing on the smallest Flyweight in the ring, who was standing firm and squaring up like a man.'

'Mighty well put, Mr Curator.'

Dinny flushed. Was there generosity in this man? Then, as if conscious of treachery to Hubert, she said acidly:

'I've read that the sight even

ruffled Roosevelt.’

‘It ruffled quite a few of us, Miss Cherrell; but we’re a long way off over there, and things have to be near before they stir the imagination.’

‘Yes, and after all, as you said just now, you did come in at the end.’

Hallorsen looked fixedly at her ingenuous face, bowed and was silent.

But when, at the end of that peculiar evening, he was saying good night, he added:

‘I fear you’ve gotten a grouch

against me, Miss Cherrell.'

Dinny smiled, without reply.

'All the same, I hope I may meet you again.'

'Oh! But why?'

'Well, I kind of have the feeling that I might change the view you have of me.'

'I am very fond of my brother, Professor Hallorsen.'

'I still think I've more against your brother than he has against me.'

'I hope you may be right before long.'

'That sounds like trouble.'

Dinny tilted her head.

She went up to bed, biting her lip with vexation. She had neither charmed nor assailed the enemy; and instead of clean-cut animosity, she had confused feelings about him.

His inches gave him a disconcerting domination. 'He's like those creatures in hairy trousers on the films,' she thought, 'carrying off the semi-distressed cow-girls – looks at one as if he thought one was on his pillion.' Primitive Force in swallowtails and a white waistcoat! A strong but not a silent man.

Her room looked over the street, and from her window she could see the plane trees on the Embankment, the river, and the wide expanse of starry night.

‘Perhaps,’ she said to herself, aloud, ‘you won’t leave England so soon as you thought.’

‘Can I come in?’

She turned to see Diana in the doorway.

‘Well, Dinny, what think you of our friend the enemy?’

‘Tom Mix, mixed with the Giant that Jack killed.’

‘Adrian likes him.’

‘Uncle Adrian lives too much with bones. The sight of red blood goes to his head.’

‘Yes; this is the sort of “he-man” women are supposed to fall for. But you behaved well, Dinny, though your eyes looked very green at first.’

‘They feel greener now I’ve let him go without a scratch.’

‘Never mind! You’ll have other chances. Adrian’s got him asked to Lippinghall tomorrow.’

‘What!’

‘You’ve only to embroil him with Saxenden there, and Hubert’s trick

is done. Adrian didn't tell you, for fear your joy might show itself. The Professor wants to sample British "hunting". The poor man doesn't in the least realize that he's walking into a lioness's den. Your Aunt Em will be delicious with him.'

'Hallorsen!' murmured Dinny: 'He must have Scandinavian blood.'

'He says his mother was old New England, but married out of the direct succession. Wyoming's his State. Delightful word, Wyoming.'

' "The great open spaces." What is there about the expression "he-man" which infuriates me, Diana?'

‘Well, it’s like being in a room with a burst of sunflowers. But “he-men” aren’t confined to the great open spaces; you’ll find Saxenden one.’

‘Really!’

‘Yes. Good night, my dear. And may no “he-men” come to you in dreams!’

When Dinny had disrobed, she again took out the diary and re-read a passage she had turned down. It ran thus: ‘Feel very low tonight – as if all my sap had run out. Can only keep my pecker up by thinking of Condaford. Wonder what old Fox-ham would say if he

could see me doctoring the mules!
The stuff I've invented for their
colic would raise hair on a billiard
ball, but it stops the thing all right.
God was in luck when He planned
the inside of a mule. Dreamed last
night I was standing at the end of
the home spinney with pheasants
coming over in a stream, and for
the life of me I couldn't pull my
trigger; ghastly sort of paralysis.
Keep thinking of old Haddon and
his: "Go it, Master Bertie. Stick
your 'eels in and take 'old of 'is
'ead!" Good old Haddon! He was a
character. The rain's stopped. Dry –
first time for ten days. And the

stars are out.

A ship, an isle, a sickle moon,
With few but with how splendid
stars.

If only I could sleep!...'

Chapter Eight



THAT essential private irregularity, room by room, which differentiates the old English from every other variety of country house, was patent at Lippinghall Manor. People went into rooms as if they meant to stay there, and while there inhaled an atmosphere and fitted into garniture different from those in any of the other rooms; nor did they feel that they must leave the room as they found it, if indeed they knew how that was. Fine old furniture stood in careless

partnership with fill-up stuff acquired for the purposes of use or ease. Portraits of ancestors, dark or yellow, confronted Dutch or French landscapes still more yellow or dark, with here and there delightful old prints, and miniatures not without charm. In two rooms at least were beautiful old fireplaces, defiled by the comfort of a fender which could be sat on. Staircases appeared unexpectedly in the dark. The position of a bedroom was learned with difficulty and soon forgotten. In it would be, perhaps, a priceless old chestnut wood wardrobe and a four-poster bed of

an excellent period; a window-seat with cushions, and some French prints. To it would be conjoined a small room with narrow bed; and bathroom that might or might not need a stroll, but would have salts in it. One of the Monts had been an Admiral; queer old charts, therefore, with dragons lashing the seas, lurked in odd corners of the corridors; one of the Monts, Sir Lawrence's grandfather, seventh baronet, had been a racing man, and the anatomy of the thoroughbred horse, and jockety of his period (1860–83) could be studied on the walls. The sixth

baronet, who, being in politics, had lived longer than the rest, had left imprints of the earlier Victorian period, his wife and daughters in crinolines, himself in whiskers. The outside of the house was Carolean, tempered here and there by Georgian, and even Victorian fragments where the sixth baronet had given way to his feeling for improvement. The only thing definitely modern was the plumbing.

When Dinny came down to breakfast on the Wednesday morning – the shoot being timed to start at ten – three of the ladies

and all the men except Hallorsen were already sitting or wandering to the side-tables. She slipped into a chair next to Lord Saxenden, who rose slightly with the word:

‘Morning!’

‘Dinny,’ called Michael from a sideboard, ‘coffee, cocoatina or ginger beer?’

‘Coffee and a kipper, Michael.’

‘There are no kippers.’

Lord Saxenden looked up: ‘No kippers?’ he muttered, and resumed his sausage.

‘Haddock?’ said Michael.

‘No, thank you.’

‘Anything for you, Aunt Wilmet?’

‘Kedgeriee.’

‘There is no kedgeriee. Kidneys, bacon, scrambled eggs, haddock, ham, cold partridge pie.’

Lord Saxenden rose. ‘Ah! Ham!’ and went over to the side table.

‘Well, Dinny?’

‘Just some jam, please, Michael.’

‘Goose-gog, strawberry, blackcurrant, marmalade.’

‘Gooseberry.’

Lord Saxenden resumed his seat with a plate of ham, and began reading a letter as he ate. She did

not quite know what to make of his face, because she could not see his eyes, and his mouth was so full. But she seemed to gather why he had been nicknamed 'Snubby'. He was red, had a light moustache and hair, both going grey, and a square seat at table. Suddenly he turned to her and said:

‘Excuse my reading this. It’s from my wife. She’s on her back, you know.’

‘I’m so sorry.’

‘Horrible business! Poor thing!’

He put the letter in his pocket, filled his mouth with ham, and

looked at Dinny. She saw that his eyes were blue, and that his eyebrows, darker than his hair, looked like clumps of fishhooks. His eyes goggled a little, as though he were saying: 'I'm a lad – I'm a lad.' But at this moment she noticed Hallorsen coming in. He stood uncertain, then, seeing her, came to the empty seat on her other side.

'Miss Cherrell,' he said, with a bow, 'can I sit right here?'

'Of course: the food is all over there, if you're thinking of any.'

'Who's that fellow?' said Lord Saxenden, as Hallorsen went foraging: 'He's an American.'

‘Professor Hallorsen.’

‘Oh! Ah! Wrote a book on Bolivia? What!’

‘Yes.’

‘Good-looking chap.’

‘A he-man.’

He looked round at her with surprise.

‘Try this ham. I used to know an uncle of yours at Harrow, I think.’

‘Uncle Hilary!’ said Dinny. ‘He told me.’

‘I once laid him three strawberry mashes to two on myself in a race down the Hill steps to the Gym.’

‘Did you win, Lord Saxenden?’

‘No; and I never paid your uncle.’

‘Why not?’

‘He sprained his ankle and I put my knee out. He hopped to the Gym door; but I couldn’t move. We were both laid up till the end of term, and then I left.’ Lord Saxenden chuckled. ‘So I still owe him three strawberry mashes.’

‘I thought we had “some” breakfast in America, but it’s nil to this,’ said Hallorsen, sitting down.

‘Do you know Lord Saxenden?’

‘Lord Saxenden,’ repeated Hallorsen with a bow.

‘How de do? You haven’t got our partridge in America, have you?’

‘Why, no, I believe not. I am looking forward to hunting that bird. This is mighty fine coffee, Miss Cherrell.’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, ‘Aunt Em prides herself on her coffee.’

Lord Saxenden squared his seat. ‘Try this ham. I haven’t read your book.’

‘Let me send it you; I’ll be proud to have you read it.’

Lord Saxenden ate on.

‘Yes, you ought to read it, Lord Saxenden,’ said Dinny; ‘and I’ll

send you another book that bears on the same subject.'

Lord Saxenden glared.

'Charming of you both,' he said. 'Is that strawberry jam?' and he reached for it.

'Miss Cherrell,' said Hallorsen, in a low voice, 'I'd like to have you go through my book and mark the passages you think are prejudicial to your brother. I wrote that book when I had a pretty sore head.'

'I'm afraid that I don't see what good that would do now.'

'So I could get them cut out, if you wish, for the second edition.'

‘That’s very good of you,’ said Dinny, icily, ‘but the harm is done, Professor.’

Hallorsen said, still lower: ‘I’m just terribly sorry to have hurt you.’

A sensation, perhaps only to be summed up in the words: ‘You are – are you!’ flushed Dinny from top to toe with anger, triumph, calculation, humour.

‘It’s my brother you’ve hurt.’

‘Maybe that could be mended if we could get together about it.’

‘I wonder.’ And Dinny rose.

Hallorsen stood up too, and bowed as she passed.

‘Terribly polite,’ she thought.

She spent her morning with the diary in a part of the garden so sunk within yew hedges that it formed a perfect refuge. The sun was warm there, and the humming of the bees over zinnias, pentstemons, hollyhocks, asters, Michaelmas daisies, was very soothing. In that so sheltered garden the dislike of casting Hubert’s intimate feelings to the world’s opinion came on her again. Not that the diary whined; but it revealed the hurts of mind and body with the sharpness of a record meant for no eye but the

recorder's. The sound of shots kept floating to her; and presently, leaning her elbows on the top of the yew hedge, she looked out over the fields towards where they were shooting.

A voice said:

‘There you are!’

Her aunt, in a straw hat so broad that it covered her to the very edges of her shoulders, was standing below with two gardeners behind her.

‘I’m coming round to you, Dinny; Boswell, you and Johnson can go now. We’ll look at the

portulaca this afternoon.’ And she gazed up from under the tilted and enormous halo of her hat. ‘It’s Majorcan,’ she said, ‘so shelterin’.

‘Boswell and Johnson, Auntie!’

‘We had Boswell, and your uncle would look till we found Johnson. He makes them go about together. Do you believe in Doctor Johnson, Dinny?’

‘I think he used the word “Sir” too much.’

‘Fleur’s got my gardenin’ scissors. What’s that, Dinny?’

‘Hubert’s diary.’

‘Depressin’?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ve been lookin’ at Professor Hallorsen – he wants takin’ in.’

‘Begin with his cheek, Aunt Em.’

‘I hope they’ll shoot some hares,’ said Lady Mont; ‘hare soup is such a stand-by. Wilmet and Henrietta Bentworth have agreed to differ already.’

‘What about?’

‘Well, I couldn’t be bothered, but I think it was about the P.M., or was it Portulaca? – they differ about everything. Hen’s always been about Court, you know.’

‘Is that fatal?’

‘She’s a nice woman. I’m fond of Hen, but she does cluck. What are you doin’ with that diary?’

‘I’m going to show it to Michael and ask his advice.’

‘Don’t take it,’ said Lady Mont; ‘he’s a dear boy, but don’t take it; he knows a lot of funny people – publishers and that.’

‘That’s why I’m asking him.’

‘Ask Fleur, she has a head. Have you got this zinnia at Condaford? D’you know, Dinny, I think Adrian’s goin’ potty.’

‘Aunt Em!’

‘He moons so; and I don’t

believe there's anywhere you could stick a pin into him. Of course I mustn't say it to you, but I think he ought to have her.'

'So do I, Auntie.'

'Well, he won't.'

'Or she won't.'

'They neither of them will; so how it's to be managed I don't know. She's forty.'

'How old is Uncle Adrian?'

'He's the baby, all but Lionel. I'm fifty-nine,' said Lady Mont decisively. 'I know I'm fifty-nine, and your father is sixty; your grandmother must have been in a

great tear at that time, she kept on havin' us. What do *you* think about this question of havin' children?'

Dinny swallowed a bubble and said:

'Well, for married people, perhaps, in moderation.'

'Fleur's going to have another in March; it's a bad month – careless! When are you goin' to get married, Dinny?'

'When my young affections are engaged, not before.'

'That's very prudent. But not an American.'

Dinny flushed, smiled

dangerously and said:

‘Why on earth should I marry an American?’

‘You never know,’ said Lady Mont, twisting off a faded aster; ‘it depends on what there is about. When I married Lawrence, he was so about!’

‘And still is, Aunt Em; wonderful, isn’t it?’

‘Don’t be sharp!’

And Lady Mont seemed to go into a dream, so that her hat looked more enormous than ever.

‘Talking of marriage, Aunt Em, I wish I knew of a girl for Hubert.

He does so want distracting.'

'Your uncle,' said Lady Mont, 'would say distract him with a dancer.'

'Perhaps Uncle Hilary knows one that he could highly recommend.'

'You're naughty, Dinny. I always thought you were naughty. But let me think: there *was* a girl; no, she married.'

'Perhaps she's divorced by now.'

'No. I think she's divorcin' him, but it takes time. Charmin' little creature.'

'I'm sure. Do think again,

Auntie.'

'These bees,' replied her aunt, 'belong to Boswell. They're Italian. Lawrence says they're Fascists.'

'Black shirts and no after-thoughts. They certainly seem very active bees.'

'Yes; they fly a lot and sting you at once if you annoy them. Bees are nice to me.'

'You've got one on your hat, dear. Shall I take it off?'

'Stop!' said Lady Mont, tilting her hat back, with her mouth slightly open: 'I've thought of one.'

'One what?'

‘Jean Tasburgh, the daughter of our Rector here – very good family. No money, of course.’

‘None at all?’

Lady Mont shook her head, and the hat wobbled. ‘No Jean ever has money. She’s pretty. Rather like a leopardess.’

‘Could I look her over, Auntie? I know fairly well what Hubert wouldn’t like.’

‘I’ll ask her to dinner. They feed badly. We married a Tasburgh once. I think it was under James, so she’ll be a cousin, but terribly removed. There’s a son, too; in the

Navy, all there, you know, and no moustache. I believe he's stayin' at the Rectory on furlong.'

'Furlough, Aunt Em.'

'I knew that word was wrong. Take that bee off my hat, there's a dear.'

Dinny took the small bee off the large hat with her handkerchief, and put it to her ear.

'I still like to hear them buzz,' she said.

'I'll ask him too,' answered her aunt; 'his name's Alan, a nice fellow.' And she looked at Dinny's hair. 'Medlar-coloured, I call it. I

think he's got prospects, but I don't know what they are. Blown up in the war.'

'He came down again whole, I hope, Auntie?'

'Yes; they gave him something or other for it. He says it's very stuffy in the Navy now. All angles, you know, and wheels, and smells. You must ask him.'

'About the girl, Aunt Em, how do you mean, a leopardess?'

'Well, she looks at you, and you expect to see a cub comin' round the corner. Her mother's dead. She runs the parish.'

‘Would she run Hubert?’

‘No; she’d run anybody who tried to run him.’

‘That might do. Can I take a note for you to the Rectory?’

‘I’ll send Boswell and Johnson,’ Lady Mont looked at her wrist. ‘No, they’ll have gone to dinner. I always set my watch by them. We’ll go ourselves, Dinny; it’s only quarter of a mile. Does my hat matter?’

‘On the contrary, dear.’

‘Very well, then; we can get out this way,’ and moving to the far end of the yew-treed garden, they

descended some steps into a long grassy avenue, and, passing through a wicket gate, had soon arrived at the Rectory. Dinny stood in its creepered porch, behind her aunt's hat. The door stood open, and a dim panelled hallway with a scent of pot-pourri and old wood, conveyed a kind of invitation. A female voice from within called:

‘A—lan!’

A male voice answered: ‘Hal—lo!’

‘D’you mind cold lunch?’

‘There’s no bell,’ said Lady Mont; ‘we’d better clap.’ They

clapped in unison.

‘What the deuce?’ A young man in grey flannels had appeared in a doorway. He had a broad brown face, dark hair, and grey eyes, deep and direct.

‘Oh!’ he said. ‘Lady Mont... Hi! Jean!’ Then, meeting Dinny’s eyes round the edge of the hat, he smiled as they do in the Navy.

‘Alan, can you and Jean dine tonight? Dinny, this is Alan Tasburgh. D’you like my hat?’

‘It’s a topper, Lady Mont.’

A girl, made all of a piece and moving as if on steel springs, was

coming towards them. She wore a fawn-coloured sleeveless jumper and skirt, and her arms and cheeks were fully as brown. Dinny saw what her aunt meant. The face, broad across the cheek-bones, tapered to the chin, the eyes were greenish grey and sunk right in under long black lashes; they looked straight out with a light in them; the nose was fine, the brow low and broad, the shingled hair dark brown. 'I wonder!' thought Dinny. Then, as the girl smiled, a little thrill went through her.

'This is Jean,' said her aunt: 'my niece, Dinny Cherrell.'

A slim brown hand clasped Dinny's firmly.

'Where's your father?' continued Lady Mont.

'Dad's away at some parsonical Conference. I wanted him to take me, but he wouldn't.'

'Then I expect he's in London really, doin' theatres.'

Dinny saw the girl flash a look at her aunt, decide that it was Lady Mont, and smiled. The young man laughed.

'So you'll both come to dinner? Eight-fifteen. Dinny, we must go back to lunch. Swallows!' added

Lady Mont round the brim of her hat, and passed out through the porch.

‘There’s a house-party,’ said Dinny to the young man’s elevated eyebrows. ‘She means tails and white tie.’

‘Oh! Ah! Best bib and tucker, Jean.’

The two stood in the porchway arm in arm. ‘Very attractive!’ Dinny thought.

‘Well?’ said her aunt, in the grass avenue again.

‘Yes, I quite saw the cub. She’s beautiful, I think. But I should keep

her on a lead.'

'There's Boswell and Johnson!' exclaimed Lady Mont, as if they were in the singular. 'Gracious! It must be past two, then!'

Chapter Nine



SOME time after lunch, for which Dinny and her aunt were late, Adrian and the four younger ladies, armed with such shooting sticks as had been left by the 'guns', proceeded down a farm lane towards where the main 'drive' of the afternoon would debouch. Adrian walked with Diana and Cicely Muskham, and ahead of them Dinny walked with Fleur. These cousins by marriage had not met for nearly a year, and had in any case but slender knowledge of

each other. Dinny studied the head which her aunt had recommended to her. It was round and firm and well carried under a small hat. The pretty face wore a rather hard but, she decided, very capable expression. The trim figure was as beautifully tailored as if it had belonged to an American.

Dinny felt that she would at least get common-sense from a source so neat.

‘I heard your testimonial read in the Police Court, Fleur.’

‘Oh! that. It was what Hilary wanted, of course. I really don’t know anything about those girls.’

They simply don't let one. Some people, of course, can worm themselves into anybody's confidence. I can't; and I certainly don't want to. Do you find the country girls about you any easier?'

'Round us they've all had to do with our family so long that one knows pretty well all there is to know before they do themselves.'

Fleur scrutinized her.

'Yes, I daresay you've got the knack, Dinny. You'll make a wonderful ancestress; but I don't quite know who ought to paint you. It's time someone came along

with the Early Italian touch. The pre-Raphaelites hadn't got it a bit; their pictures lacked music and humour. *You'll* have to be done with both.'

'Do tell me,' said Dinny, disconcerted, 'was Michael in the House when those questions were asked about Hubert?'

'Yes; he came home very angry.'

'Good!'

'He thought of bringing the thing up again, but it was the day but one before they rose. Besides, what does the House matter? It's about the last thing people pay attention

to nowadays.'

'My father, I'm afraid, paid terrific attention to those questions.'

'Yes, the last generation. But the only thing Parliament does that really gets the Public now, is the Budget. And no wonder; it all comes back to money.'

'Do you say that to Michael?'

'I don't have to. Parliament now is just a taxing machine.'

'Surely it still makes laws?'

'Yes, my dear; but always after the event; it consolidates what has become public practice, or at least

public feeling. It never initiates. How can it? That's not a democratic function. If you want proof, look at the state of the country! It's the last thing Parliament bothers about.'

'Who does initiate, then?'

'Whence doth the wind blow? Well, the draughts begin in the coulisses. Great places, the coulisses! Whom do you want to stand with when we get to the guns?'

'Lord Saxenden.'

Fleur gazed at her: 'Not for his *beaux yeux*, and not for his *beau*

titre. Why, then?’

‘Because I’ve got to get at him about Hubert, and I haven’t much time.’

‘I see. Well, I’ll give you a warning, my dear. Don’t take Saxenden at his face value. He’s an astute old fox, and not so old either. And if there is one thing he enjoys more than another, it’s his quid pro quo. Have you got a quid for him? He’ll want cash down.’

Dinny grimaced.

‘I shall do what I can. Uncle Lawrence has already given me some pointers.’

‘ “Have a care; she’s fooling thee,” ’ hummed Fleur. ‘Well, I shall go to Michael; it makes him shoot better, and he wants it, poor dear. The Squire and Bart will be glad to do without us. Cicely, of course, will go to Charles; she’s still honey-moonish. That leaves Diana for the American.’

‘And I hope,’ said Dinny, ‘she’ll put him off his shots.’

‘I should say nothing would. I forgot Adrian; he’ll have to sit on his stick and think about bones and Diana. Here we are. See? Through this gate. There’s Saxenden, they’ve given him the warm corner. Go

round by that stile and come on him from behind. Michael will be jammed away at the end, he always gets the worst stand.'

She parted from Dinny and went on down the lane. Conscious that she had not asked Fleur what she had wanted to, Dinny crossed to the stile, and climbing over, stalked Lord Saxenden warily from the other side. The peer was moving from one hedge to the other in the corner of the field to which he had been assigned. Beside a tall stick, to a cleft in which was attached a white card with a number on it, stood a young keeper holding two

guns, and at his feet a retriever dog was lying with his tongue out. The fields of roots and stubble on the far side of the lane rose rather steeply, and it was evident to Dinny – something of an expert – that birds driven off them would come high and fast. ‘Unless,’ she thought, ‘there’s fresh cover just behind,’ and she turned to look. There was not. She was in a very large grass field and the nearest roots were three hundred yards away at least. ‘I wonder,’ she thought, ‘if he shoots better or worse with a woman watching. Shouldn’t think he had any nerves.’

Turning again, she saw that he had noticed her.

‘Do you mind me, Lord Saxenden? I’ll be very quiet.’

The peer plucked at his cap, which had special peaks before and behind.

‘Well, well!’ he said. ‘H’m!’

‘That sounds as if you did. Shall I go?’

‘No, no! That’s all right. Can’t touch a feather today, anyway. You’ll bring me luck.’

Dinny seated herself on her stick alongside the retriever, and began playing with its ears.

‘That American chap has wiped my eye three times.’

‘What bad taste!’

‘He shoots at the most impossible birds, but, dash it, he hits ’em. All the birds I miss he gets on the horizon. Got the style of a poacher; lets everything go by, then gets a right and left about seventy yards behind him. Says he can’t see them when they sit on his foresight.’

‘That’s funny,’ said Dinny, with a little burst of justice.

‘Don’t believe he’s missed today,’ added Lord Saxenden, resentfully.

‘I asked him why he shot so damned well, and he said: “Why! I’m used to shoot for the pot, where I can’t afford to miss.” ’

‘The “beat’s” beginning, my lord,’ said the young keeper’s voice.

The retriever began to pant slightly. Lord Saxenden grasped a gun; the keeper held the other ready.

‘Covey to the left, my lord,’ Dinny heard a creaky whirring, and saw eight birds stringing towards the lane. Bang-bang... bang-bang!

‘God bless my soul!’ said Lord Saxenden: ‘What the deuce –!’

Dinny saw the same eight birds swoop over the hedge at the other end of the grass field.

The retriever uttered a little choked sound, panting horribly.

‘The light,’ she said, ‘must be terribly puzzling!’

‘It’s not the light,’ said Lord Saxenden, ‘it’s the liver!’

‘Three birds coming straight, my lord.’

Bang!... Bang-bang! A bird jerked, crumpled, turned over and pitched four yards behind her.

Something caught Dinny by the throat. That anything so alive should be so dead! Often as she had seen birds shot, she had never before had that feeling. The other two birds were crossing the far hedge; she watched them vanish, with a faint sigh. The retriever, with the dead bird in his mouth, came up to the keeper, who took it from him. Sitting on his haunches, the dog continued to gaze at the bird, with his tongue out. Dinny saw the tongue drip, and closed her eyes.

Lord Saxenden said something inaudibly.

Lord Saxenden said the same word more inaudibly, and, opening her eyes, Dinny saw him put up his gun.

‘Hen pheasant, my lord!’ warned the young keeper.

A hen pheasant passed over at a most reasonable height, as if aware that her time was not yet.

‘H’m!’ said Lord Saxenden, resting the butt on his bent knee.

‘Covey to the right; too far, my lord!’

Several shots rang out, and beyond the hedge Dinny saw two birds only flying on, one of which

was dropping feathers.

‘That’s a dead bird,’ said the keeper, and Dinny saw him shade his eyes, watching its flight.

‘Down!’ he said; the dog panted, and looked up at him.

Shots rang out to the left.

‘Damn!’ said Lord Saxenden, ‘nothing comes my way.’

‘Hare, my lord!’ said the keeper, sharply. ‘Along the hedge.’

Lord Saxenden wheeled and raised his gun.

‘Oh, no!’ said Dinny, but her words were drowned by the report. The hare, struck behind, stopped

short, then wriggled forward, crying pitifully.

‘Fetch it, boy!’ said the keeper.

Dinny put her hands over her ears and shut her eyes.

‘Blast!’ muttered Lord Saxenden. ‘Tailored!’ Through her eyelids Dinny felt his frosty stare. When she opened her eyes the hare was lying dead beside the bird. It looked incredibly soft. Suddenly she rose, meaning to go, but sat down again. Until the beat was over she could go nowhere without interfering with the range of the shots. She closed her eyes again; and the shooting went on.

‘That’s the lot, my lord.’

Lord Saxenden was handing over his gun, and three more birds lay beside the hare.

Rather ashamed of her new sensations, she rose, closed her shooting stick, and moved towards the stile. Regardless of the old convention, she crossed it and waited for him.

‘Sorry I tailored that hare,’ he said. ‘But I’ve been seeing spots all day. Do you ever see spots?’

‘No. Stars once in a way. A hare’s crying is dreadful, isn’t it?’

‘I agree – never liked it.’

‘Once when we were having a picnic I saw a hare sitting up behind us like a dog – and the sun through its ears all pink. I’ve always liked hares since.’

‘They’re not a sporting shot,’ admitted Lord Saxenden; ‘personally I prefer ’em roast to juggled.’

Dinny stole a glance at him. He looked red and fairly satisfied.

‘Now’s my chance,’ she thought.

‘Do you ever tell Americans that they won the war, Lord Saxenden?’

He stared frostily.

‘Why should I?’

‘But they did, didn’t they?’

‘Does that Professor chap say so?’

‘I’ve never heard him, but I feel sure he thinks so.’

Again Dinny saw that sharp look come on his face. ‘What do you know about him?’

‘My brother went on his expedition.’

‘Your brother? Ah!’ It was just as if he had said to himself out loud: ‘This young woman wants something out of me.’

Dinny felt suddenly that she was on very thin ice.

‘If you read Professor Hallorsen’s book,’ she said, ‘I hope you will also read my brother’s diary.’

‘I never read anything,’ said Lord Saxenden; ‘haven’t time. But I remember now. Bolivia – he shot a man, didn’t he, and lost the transport?’

‘He had to shoot the man to save his own life, and he had to flog two for continual cruelty to the mules; then all but three men deserted, stampeding the mules. He was the only white man there, with a lot of Indian half-castes.’

And to his frosty shrewd eyes she raised her own suddenly,

remembering Sir Lawrence's: 'Give him the Botticellian eye, Dinny!'

'Might I read you a little of his diary?'

'Well, if there's time.'

'When?'

'Tonight? I have to go up after shooting tomorrow.'

'Any time that suits you,' she said, hardily.

'There won't be a chance before dinner. I've got some letters that must go.'

'I can stay up till any hour.' She saw him give her a quick, all-over glance.

‘We’ll see,’ he said, abruptly. And at this minute they were joined by the others.

Escaping the last drive, Dinny walked home by herself. Her sense of humour was tickled, but she was in a quandary. She judged shrewdly that the diary would not produce the desired effect unless Lord Saxenden felt that he was going to get something out of listening to it; and she was perceiving more clearly than ever before how difficult it was to give anything without parting from it. A flutter of wood-pigeons rose from some stooks on her left and crossed over

to the wood by the river; the light was growing level, and evening sounds fluttered in the crisper air. The gold of sinking sunlight lay on the stubbles; the leaves, hardly turned as yet, were just promising colour, and away down there the blue line of the river glinted through its bordering trees. In the air was the damp, slightly pungent scent of early autumn with wood smoke drifting already from cottage chimneys. A lovely hour, a lovely evening!

What passages from the diary should she read? Her mind faltered. She could see Saxenden's face

again when he said: 'Your brother? Ah!' Could see the hard direct calculating insensitive character behind it. She remembered Sir Lawrence's words: 'Were there not, my dear?... Most valuable fellows!' She had just been reading the memoirs of a man, who, all through the war, had thought in moves and numbers, and, after one preliminary gasp, had given up thinking of the sufferings behind those movements and those numbers: in his will to win the war, he seemed to have made it his business never to think of its human side, and, she was sure,

could never have visualized that side if he *had* thought of it. Valuable fellow! She had heard Hubert talk, with a curling lip, of ‘armchair strategists’ – who had enjoyed the war, excited by the interest of combining movements and numbers and of knowing this and that before someone else did, and by the importance they had gained therefrom. Valuable fellows! In another book she had lately read, she remembered a passage about the kind of men who directed what was called progress: sat in Banks, City offices, Governmental departments,

combining movements and numbers, not bothered by flesh and blood, except their own; men who started this enterprise and that, drawing them up on sheets of paper, and saying to these and those: 'Do this, and see you dam' well do it properly.' Men, silk-hatted or plus-foured, who guided the machine of tropic enterprise, of mineral getting, of great shops, of railway building, of concessions here and there and everywhere. Valuable fellows! Cheery, healthy, well-fed, indomitable fellows with frosty eyes. Always dining, always in the know, careless of the cost in

human feelings and human life. 'And yet,' she thought, 'they really must be valuable, or how should we have rubber or coal, or pearls or railways or the Stock Exchange, or wars and win them!' She thought of Hallorsen; he at least worked and suffered for his ideas, led his own charges; did not sit at home, knowing things, eating ham, tailoring hares, and ordering the movements of others. She turned into the Manor grounds and paused on the croquet lawn. Aunt Wilmet and Lady Henrietta appeared to be agreeing to differ. They appealed to her:

‘Is that right, Dinny?’

‘No. When the balls touch you just go on playing, but you mustn’t move Lady Henrietta’s ball, Auntie, in hitting your own.’

‘I said so,’ said Lady Henrietta.

‘Of course you said so, Hen. Nice position I’m in. Well, I shall just agree to differ and go on,’ and Aunt Wilmet hit her ball through a hoop, moving her opponent’s several inches in so doing.

‘Isn’t she an unscrupulous woman?’ murmured Lady Henrietta, plaintively, and Dinny saw at once the great practical

advantages inherent in ‘agreeing to differ’.

‘You’re like the Iron Duke, Auntie,’ she said, ‘except that you don’t use the word “damn” quite so often.’

‘She does,’ said Lady Henrietta; ‘her language is appalling.’

‘Go on, Hen!’ said Aunt Wilmet in a flattered voice.

Dinny left them and retired towards the house.

When she was dressed she went to Fleur’s room.

Her aunt’s maid was passing a minute mowing-machine over the

back of Fleur's neck, while Michael, in the doorway of his dressing-room, had his fingers on the tips of his white tie.

Fleur turned.

‘Hallo, Dinny! Come in, and sit down. That’ll do, thank you, Powers. Now, Michael.’

The maid faded out and Michael advanced to have a twist given to the ends of his tie.

‘There!’ said Fleur; and, looking at Dinny, added: ‘Have you come about Saxenden?’

‘Yes. I’m to read him bits of Hubert’s diary tonight. The

question is: Where will be suitable to my youth and – ’

‘Not innocence, Dinny; you’ll never be innocent, will she, Michael?’

Michael grinned. ‘Never innocent but always virtuous. You were a most sophisticated little angel as a kid, Dinny; looked as if you were wondering why you hadn’t wings. Wistful is the word.’

‘I expect I was wondering why you’d pulled them off.’

‘You ought to have worn trouserettes and chased butterflies, like the two little Gainsborough

girls in the National Gallery.'

'Cease these amenities,' said Fleur; 'the gong's gone. You can have my little sitting-room next door, and, if you knock, Michael can come round with a boot, as if it were rats.'

'Perfect,' said Dinny; 'but I expect he'll behave like a lamb, really.'

'You never can tell,' said Michael; 'he's a bit of a goat.'

'That's the room,' said Fleur, as they passed out. '*Cabinet particulier*. Good luck!...'

Chapter Ten



SEATED between Hallorsen and young Tasburgh, Dinny had a slanting view of her Aunt and Lord Saxenden at the head of the table, with Jean Tasburgh round the corner on his right. ‘She was a “leopardess” oh! so fair!’ The tawnied skin, oblique face, and wonderful eyes of the young woman fascinated her. They appeared also to fascinate Lord Saxenden, whose visage was redder and more genial than Dinny had seen it yet. His attentions to Jean,

indeed, were throwing Lady Mont to the clipped tongue of Wilfred Bentworth. For 'the Squire', though a far more distinguished personality, too distinguished to accept a peerage, was, in accordance with the table of precedence, seated on her left. Next to him again Fleur was engaging Hallorsen; so that Dinny herself was exposed to the broadside of young Tasburgh. He talked easily, directly, frankly, like a man not yet calloused by female society, and manifested what Dinny described to herself as 'transparent admiration'; yet twice at least she

went into what he described as a ‘near-dream’, her head turned high, and motionless, towards his sister.

‘Ah!’ he said. ‘What do you think of her?’

‘Fascinating.’

‘I’ll tell her that, she won’t turn a hair. The earth’s most matter-of-fact young woman. She seems to be vamping her neighbour all right. Who is he?’

‘Lord Saxenden.’

‘Oh! And who’s the John Bull at the corner on our side?’

‘Wilfred Bentworth, “the Squire”, they call him.’

‘And next to you – talking to Mrs Michael?’

‘That’s Professor Hallorsen from America.’

‘He’s a fine-looking chap.’

‘So everybody says,’ said Dinny, drily.

‘Don’t you think so?’

‘Men oughtn’t to be so good-looking.’

‘Delighted to hear you say that.’

‘Why?’

‘It means that the ugly have a look in.’

‘Oh! Do you often go trawling?’

‘You know, I’m terribly glad I’ve met you at last.’

‘At last? You’d never even heard of me this morning.’

‘No. But that doesn’t prevent you from being my ideal.’

‘Goodness! Is this the way they have in the Navy?’

‘Yes. The first thing they teach us is to make up our minds quickly.’

‘Mr Tasburgh – ’

‘Alan.’

‘I begin to understand the wife in every port.’

‘I,’ said young Tasburgh,

seriously, 'haven't a single one. And you're the first I've ever wanted.'

'Oo! Or is it: Coo!'

'Fact! You see, the Navy is very strenuous. When we see what we want, we have to go for it at once. We get so few chances.'

Dinny laughed. 'How old are you?'

'Twenty-eight.'

'Then you weren't at Zeebrugge?'

'I was.'

'I see. It's become a habit to lay yourself alongside.'

‘And get blown up for it.’

Her eyes rested on him kindly.

‘I am now going to talk to my enemy.’

‘Enemy? Can I do anything about that?’

‘His demise would be of no service to me, till he’s done what I want.’

‘Sorry for that; he looks to me dangerous.’

‘Mrs Charles is lying in wait for you,’ murmured Dinny, and she turned to Hallorsen, who said deferentially: ‘Miss Cherrell,’ as if she had arrived from the moon.

‘I hear you shot amazingly, Professor.’

‘Why! I’m not accustomed to birds asking for it as they do here. I’ll maybe get used to that in time. But all this is quite an experience for me.’

‘Everything in the garden lovely?’

‘It certainly is. To be in the same house with you is a privilege I feel very deeply, Miss Cherrell.’

‘ “Cannon to right of me, cannon to left of me!” ’ thought Dinny.

‘And have you,’ she asked,

suddenly, ‘been thinking what amend you can make to my brother?’

Hallorsen lowered his voice.

‘I have a great admiration for you, Miss Cherrell, and I will do what you tell me. If you wish, I will write to your papers and withdraw the remarks in my book.’

‘And what would you want for that, Professor Hallorsen?’

‘Why, surely, nothing but your goodwill.’

‘My brother has given me his diary to publish.’

‘If that will be a relief to you –

go to it.'

'I wonder if you two ever began to understand each other.'

'I judge we never did.'

'And yet you were only four white men, weren't you? May I ask exactly what annoyed you in my brother?'

'You'd have it up against me if I were to tell you.'

'Oh! no, I *can* be fair.'

'Well, first of all, I found he'd made up his mind about too many things, and he wouldn't change it. There we were in a country none of us knew anything about,

amongst Indians and people that were only half civilized; but the captain wanted everything done as you might in England: he wanted rules, and he wanted 'em kept. Why, I judge he would have dressed for dinner if we'd have let him.'

'I think you should remember,' said Dinny, taken aback, 'that we English have found formality pay all over the world. We succeed in all sorts of wild out of the world places because we stay English. Reading his diary, *I* think my brother failed from not being stolid enough.'

‘Well, he is not your John Bull type,’ he nodded towards the end of the table, ‘like Lord Saxenden and Mr Bentworth there; maybe I’d have understood him better if he were. No, he’s mighty high-strung and very tight held-in; his emotions kind of eat him up from within. He’s like a racehorse in a hansom cab. Yours is an old family, I should judge, Miss Cherrell.’

‘Not yet in its dotage.’

She saw his eyes leave her, rest on Adrian across the table, move on to her Aunt Wilmet, and thence to Lady Mont.

‘I would like to talk to your

uncle the Curator about old families,' he said.

'What else was there in my brother that you didn't like?'

'Well, he gave me the feeling that I was a great husky.'

Dinny raised her brows a little.

'There we were,' went on Hallorsen, 'in the hell of a country – pardon me! – a country of raw metal. Well, I was raw metal myself, out to meet and beat raw metal; and he just wouldn't be.'

'Perhaps couldn't be. Don't you think what was really wrong was your being American and his being

English? Confess, Professor, that you don't like us English.'

Hallorsen laughed.

'I like *you* terribly.'

'Thank you, but every rule –'

'Well,' his face hardened, 'I just don't like the assumption of a superiority that I don't believe in.'

'Have we a monopoly of that? What about the French?'

'If I were an orang-outang, Miss Cherrell, I wouldn't care a hoot whether a chimpanzee thought himself superior.'

'I see; too far removed. But, forgive me, Professor, what about

yourselves? Are you not the chosen people? And don't you frequently say so? Would you exchange with any other people in the world?'

‘I certainly would not.’

‘But isn't that an assumption of a superiority that we don't believe in?’

He laughed. ‘You have me there; but we haven't touched rock-bottom in this matter. There's a snob in every man. We're a new people; we haven't gotten your roots and your old things; we haven't gotten your habit of taking ourselves for granted; we're too multiple and various and too much

in the making. We have a lot of things that you could envy us besides our dollars and our bathrooms.'

'What ought we to envy you? I should very much like it made clear to me.'

'Well, Miss Cherrell, we know that we have qualities and energy and faith and opportunities that you just ought to envy; and when you don't do it, we feel we've no use for that kind of gone-dead, bone-superior attitude. It's like a man of sixty looking down his nose at a youth of thirty; and there's no such God-darned – pardon me! –

mistake as that.'

Dinny sat looking at him, silent and impressed.

'Where,' Hallorsen went on, 'you British irritate us is that you've lost the spirit of inquiry; or if you've still gotten it, you have a dandy way of hiding it up. I judge there are many ways in which we irritate you. But we irritate your epidermis and you irritate our nerve centres. That's about all there is to it, Miss Cherrell.'

'I see,' said Dinny; 'that's terribly interesting and I daresay quite true. My aunt's getting up, so I must remove my epidermis and

leave your nerve centres to quiet down.' She rose, and over her shoulder smiled back at him.

Young Tasburgh was at the door. At him too she smiled, and murmured: 'Talk to my friend the enemy; he's worth it.'

In the drawing-room she sought out the 'leopardess', but converse between them suffered from the inhibition of a mutual admiration which neither wished to show. Jean Tasburgh was just twenty-one, but she impressed Dinny as older than herself. Her knowledge of things and people seemed precise and decided, if not profound; her mind

was made up on all the subjects they touched on; she would be a marvellous person – Dinny thought – in a crisis, or if driven to the wall; would be loyal to her own side, but want to rule whatever roost she was in. But alongside her hard efficiency Dinny could well perceive a strange, almost feline fascination that would go to any man's head, if she chose that it should. Hubert would succumb to her at once! And at that conclusion his sister was the more doubtful whether she wished him to. Here was the very girl to afford the swift distraction she was seeking for her

brother. But was he strong enough and alive enough for the distractor? Suppose he fell in love with her and she would have none of him? Or suppose he fell in love with her and she had all of him! And then – money! If Hubert received no appointment or lost his commission what would they live on? He had only three hundred a year without his pay, and the girl presumably nothing. The situation was perverse. If Hubert could plunge again into soldiering, he would not need distraction. If he continued to be shelved, he would need distraction but could not

afford it. And yet – was not this exactly the sort of girl who would carve out a career somehow for the man she married? So they talked of Italian pictures.

‘By the way,’ said Jean, suddenly, ‘Lord Saxenden says you want him to do something for you.’

‘Oh!’

‘What is it? Because I’ll make him.’

Dinny smiled.

‘How?’

Jean gave her a look from under her lashes.

‘It’ll be quite easy. What is it you

want from him?’

‘I want my brother back in his regiment, or, better – some post for him. He’s under a cloud owing to that Bolivian expedition with Professor Hallorsen.’

‘The big man? Is that why you had him down here?’

Dinny had a feeling that she would soon have no clothes on.

‘If you want frankness, yes.’

‘He’s rather fine to look at.’

‘So your brother said.’

‘Alan’s the most generous person in the world. He’s taken a toss over you.’

‘So he was telling me.’

‘He’s an ingenuous child. But, seriously, shall I go for Lord Saxenden?’

‘Why should you worry?’

‘I like to put my fingers into pies. Give me a free hand, and I’ll bring you that appointment on a charger.’

‘I am credibly informed,’ said Dinny, ‘that Lord Saxenden is a tough proposition.’

Jean stretched herself.

‘Is your brother Hubert like you?’

‘Not a scrap; he’s dark, and

brown-eyed.'

'You know our families intermarried a long way back. Are you interested in breeding? I breed Airedales, and I don't believe much in either the tail male or the tail female theories. Prepotency can be handed down through either male or female, and at any point of the pedigree.'

'Perhaps, but except for not being covered with yellow varnish, my father and my brother are both very like the earliest portrait we have of a male ancestor.'

'Well, we've got a Fitzherbert woman who married a Tasburgh in

1547, and she's the spit of me except for the ruff; she's even got my hands.' And the girl spread out to Dinny two long brown hands, crisping them slightly as she did so.

'A strain,' she went on, 'may crop out after generations that have seemed free from it. It's awfully interesting. I should like to see your brother, if he's so unlike you.'

Dinny smiled.

'I'll get him to drive over from Condaford and fetch me. You may not think him worth your wiles.'

And at this moment the men

came in.

‘They do so look’ murmured Dinny, ‘as if they were saying: “Do I want to sit next to a female, and if so, why?” Men are funny after dinner.’

Sir Lawrence’s voice broke the hush:

‘Saxenden, you and the Squire for Bridge?’

At these words Aunt Wilmet and Lady Henrietta rose automatically from the sofa where they had been having a quiet difference, and passed towards where they would continue the motion for the rest of

the evening; they were followed closely by Lord Saxenden and the Squire.

Jean Tasburgh grimaced: 'Can't you just see Bridge growing on people like a fungus?'

'Another table?' said Sir Lawrence: 'Adrian? No. Professor?'

'Why, I think not, Sir Lawrence.'

'Fleur, you and I then against Em and Charles. Come along, let's get it over.'

'You can't see it growing on Uncle Lawrence,' murmured Dinny. 'Oh! Professor! Do you know Miss Tasburgh?'

Hallorsen bowed.

‘It’s an amazing night,’ said young Tasburgh on her other side: ‘Couldn’t we go out?’

‘Michael,’ said Jean, rising, ‘we’re going out.’

The night had been justly described. The foliage of holmoaks and elms clung on the dark air unstirring; stars were diamond bright, and there was no dew; the flowers had colour only when peered into; and sounds were lonely – the hooting of an owl from away towards the river, the passing drone of a chafer’s flight. The air was quite warm, and

through the cut cypresses the lighted house stared vaguely. Dinny and the sailor strolled in front.

‘This is the sort of night,’ he said, ‘when you can see the Scheme a bit. My old Governor is a dear old boy, but his Services are enough to kill all belief. Have you any left?’

‘In God, do you mean?’ said Dinny: ‘Ye-es, without knowing anything about it.’

‘Don’t *you* find it impossible to think of God except in the open and alone?’

‘I *have* been emotionalized in

church.'

'You want something beyond emotion, I think; you want to grasp infinite invention going on in infinite stillness. Perpetual motion and perpetual quiet at the same time. That American seems a decent chap.'

'Did you talk about cousinly love?'

'I kept that for you. One of our great-great-great-great-grandfathers was the same, under Anne; we've got his portrait, terrible, in a wig. So we're cousins – the love follows.'

‘Does it? Blood cuts both ways. It certainly makes every difference glare out.’

‘Thinking of Americans?’

Dinny nodded.

‘All the same,’ said the sailor, ‘there isn’t a question in my mind that in a scrap I’d rather have an American with me than any other kind of foreigner. I should say we all felt like that in the Fleet.’

‘Isn’t that just because of language being the same?’

‘No. It’s some sort of grain and view of things in common.’

‘But surely that can only apply

to British-stock Americans?’

‘That’s still the American who counts, especially if you lump in the Dutch and Scandinavian-stock Americans, like this fellow Hallorsen. We’re very much that stock ourselves.’

‘Why not German-Americans, then?’

‘To some extent. But look at the shape of the German head. By and large, the Germans are Central or Eastern Europeans.’

‘You ought to be talking to my Uncle Adrian.’

‘Is that the tall man with the

goatee? I like his face.'

'He's a dear,' said Dinny. 'We've lost the others and I can feel dew.'

'Just one moment. I was perfectly serious in what I said at dinner. You *are* my ideal, and I hope you'll let me pursue it.'

Dinny curtsied.

'Young Sir, you are very flattering. "But – " she went on with a slight blush – "I would point out that you have a noble profession – " '

'Are you never serious?'

'Seldom, when the dew is falling.'

He seized her hand.

‘Well, you will be one day; and I shall be the cause of it.’

Slightly returning the pressure of his hand, Dinny disengaged hers, and walked on.

‘Pleached alley – can you stand that expression? It seems to give joy to so many people.’

‘Fair cousin,’ said young Tasburgh, ‘I shall be thinking of you day and night. Don’t trouble to answer.’

And he held open a French window.

Cicely Muskham was at the

piano, and Michael standing behind her.

Dinny went up to him.

‘If I go to Fleur’s sitting-room now, could you show Lord Saxenden where it is, Michael? If he doesn’t come by twelve, I shall go to bed. I must sort out the bits I want to read to him.’

‘All right, Dinny. I’ll leave him on the door-mat. Good luck!’

Fetching the diary, Dinny threw open the window of the little sitting-room and sat down to make her selections. It was half-past-ten, and not a sound disturbed her. She

selected six fairly long passages which seemed to illustrate the impossible nature of her brother's task. Then, lighting a cigarette, she waited, leaning out. The night was neither more nor less 'amazing' than it had been, but her own mood was deeper. Perpetual motion in perpetual quiet? If that, indeed, were God, He was not of much immediate use to mortals but why should He be? When Saxenden tailored the hare and it had cried, had God heard and quivered? When her hand was pressed, had He seen and smiled? When Hubert in the Bolivian wilds had lain

fever-stricken, listening to the cry of the loon, had He sent an angel with quinine? When that star up there went out billions of years hence, and hung cold and lightless, would He note it on his shirt-cuff? The million million leaves and blades of grass down there that made the texture of the deeper darkness, the million million stars that gave the light by which she saw that darkness, all – all the result of perpetual motion in endless quiet, all part of God. And she herself, and the smoke of her cigarette; the jasmine under her nose, whose colour was invisible,

and the movement of her brain, deciding that it was not yellow; that dog barking so far away that the sound was as a thread by which the woof of silence could be grasped; all – all endowed with the purpose remote, endless, pervading, incomprehensible, of God!

She shivered and withdrew her head. Sitting down in an armchair, with the diary in her lap, she gazed round the room. Fleur's taste had remodelled it; there was fine colour in the carpet, the light was softly shaded and fell pleasantly on her sea-green frock and hands resting

on the diary. The long day had tired her. She lay back tilting up her face, looking drowsily at the frieze of baked China Cupids with which some former Lady Mont had caused the room to be encircled. Fat funny little creatures they seemed to her – thus tied by rosy chains to the perpetual examination of each other's behinds from stated distances. Chase of the rosy hours, of the rosy – ! Dinny's eyelids drooped, her lips opened, she slept. And the discreet light visiting her face and hair and neck revealed their negligence in slumber, their

impudent daintiness, as of the fair Italians, so very English, whom Botticelli painted. A tendril of short ripe hair had come apart, a smile strayed off and on to the parted lips; eyelashes, a little darker than the hair, winked flutteringly on cheeks which seemed to have a sort of transparency; and in the passing of her dreams, the nose twitched and quivered as if mocking at its slight tiptilt. Uplifted thus, the face looked as if but a twist were needed to pluck it from its white stalk of neck....

With a start her head came to the erect. He who had been

‘Snubby Bantham’ was standing in the middle of the room, regarding her with a hard blue unwinking stare.

‘Sorry,’ he said; ‘sorry! You were having a nice snooze.’

‘I was dreaming of mince pies,’ said Dinny. ‘It’s terribly good of you to come at whatever time of night it is.’

‘Seven bells. You won’t be long, I suppose. D’you mind if I smoke a pipe?’

He sat down on a sofa opposite to her and began to fill his pipe. He had the look of a man who meant

her to get it over, and was going to reserve judgement when she had. She better understood at that moment the conduct of public affairs. 'Of course,' she thought, 'he's giving his quo and he doesn't see his quid. That's the result of Jean!' And whether she felt gratitude to the 'leopardess' for having deflected his interest, or whether a sort of jealousy, neither she nor any other woman would have told. Her heart was beating, however, and in a quick, matter-of-fact voice she began. She read through three of the passages before she looked at him again. His

face, but for the lips sucking at his pipe, might have been made of a well-coloured wood. His eyes still regarded her in a curious and now slightly hostile way, as if he were thinking: 'This young woman is trying to make me feel something. It's very late.'

With an increasing hatred of her task Dinny hurried on. The fourth passage was – except for the last – the most harrowing, at least to herself; and her voice quivered a little as she finished it.

'Bit thick that,' said Lord Saxenden; 'mules have no feelings, you know – most extraordinary

brutes.'

Dinny's temper rose; she would not look at him again. And she read on. This time she lost herself in that tortured recital, thus put into sound for the first time. She finished, breathless, quivering all over with the effort of keeping her voice controlled. Lord Saxenden's chin was resting on his hand. He was asleep.

She stood looking at him, as he not long before had looked at her. For the moment she was on the point of jerking his hand from under his chin. Her sense of humour saved her, and gazing at

him rather as Venus gazes at Mars in Botticelli's picture, she took a sheet of notepaper from Fleur's bureau, wrote the words: 'So sorry I exhausted you. Good night,' and laid it with infinite precaution on his knee. Rolling up the diary, she stole to the door, opened it and looked back, faint sounds, that would soon be snoring, were coming from him. 'Appeal to his feelings and he sleeps,' she thought: 'That's exactly how he must have won the war.' And, turning, she found herself staring up at Professor Hallorsen.

Chapter Eleven



WHEN Dinny saw Hallorsen's eyes fixed, over her head, on the sleeping peer, she swallowed a gasp. What was he imagining of her, stealing thus at midnight away from a man of title in a little private room? His eyes, now looking into hers, were extremely grave. And, terrified lest he should say: 'Pardon me!' and rouse the sleeper, she clutched the diary, put her finger to her lips, murmured: 'Don't wake the baby!' and glided down the passage.

In her room she laughed her fill, then sat up and reviewed her sensations. Given the reputation of the titled in democratic countries, Hallorsen probably thought the worst. But she did him some rather remarkable justice. Whatever he thought of her would not go beyond him. Whatever he was – he was a *big* dog. She could imagine him at breakfast tomorrow, saying gravely: ‘Miss Cherrell, I am delighted to see you looking so well.’ And, saddened by her conduct of Hubert’s affairs, she got into bed. She slept badly, awoke tired and pale, and had her

breakfast upstairs.

During country house parties one day is very like another. The men put on the same kind of variegated tie and the same plus fours, eat the same breakfast, tap the same barometer, smoke the same pipes and kill the same birds. The dogs wag the same tails, lurk in the same unexpected spots, utter the same agonized yelps, and chase the same pigeons on the same lawns. The ladies have the same breakfast in bed or not, put the same salts in the same bath, straggle in the same garden, say of the same friends with the same

spice of animosity, 'I'm frightfully fond of them, of course'; pore over the same rock borders with the same passion for portulaca; play the same croquet or tennis with the same squeaks; write the same letters to contradict the same rumours, or match the same antiques; differ with the same agreement, and agree with the same difference. The servants have the same way of not being visible, except at the same stated moments. And the house has the same smell of pot-pourri, flowers, tobacco, books, and sofa cushions.

Dinny wrote a letter to her

brother in which she said nothing of Hallorsen, Saxenden, or the Tasburghs, but discoursed in lively fashion of Aunt Em, Boswell and Johnson, Uncle Adrian, Lady Henrietta, and asked him to come over for her in the car. In the afternoon the Tasburghs came in for tennis, and not until the shooting was over did she see either Lord Saxenden or the American. But he who had been 'Snubby Bantham' gave her so long and so peculiar a stare from the corner where he was having tea, that she knew he had not forgiven her. Careful not to notice, she was

at heart dismayed. So far she seemed to have done Hubert nothing but harm. 'I'll let Jean loose on him,' she thought, and went out to find 'the leopardess'. On her way she came on Hallorsen, and hastily deciding to regain her ground with him, said:

'If you had come up a little earlier last night, Professor Hallorsen, you could have heard me read some of my brother's diary to Lord Saxenden. It might have done you more good than it did him.'

Hallorsen's face cleared.

'Why,' he said, 'I've been

wondering what soporific you had administered to that poor lord.'

'I was preparing him for your book. You *are* giving him a copy?'

'I judge not, Miss Cherrell; I am not that interested in his health. He may lie awake for me. I have very little use for any man that could listen to you and go to sleep on it. What does he do in life, this lord?'

'What does he do? Well, he is what I think you call a Big Noise. I don't quite know where he makes it, but my father says he is a man who counts. I hope you have been wiping his eye again today, Professor, because the more you

wipe his eye the better chance my brother has of recovering the position he lost by going on your expedition.'

'Is that so? Do personal feelings decide these things over here?'

'Don't they over there?'

'Why – yes! But I thought the old countries had too much tradition for that.'

'Oh! we wouldn't *admit* the influence of personal feelings, of course.'

Hallorsen smiled.

'Isn't that just wonderful? All the world is kin. You would enjoy

America, Miss Cherrell; I would like the chance to show it you some day.'

He had spoken as if America were an antique that he had in his trunk; and she did not quite know how to take a remark which might have no significance or an absurdly great one. Then by his face she saw that he meant it to have the absurdly great one; and, revealing her teeth, answered:

'Thank you, but you are still my enemy.'

Hallorsen put out his hand, but she had drawn back.

‘Miss Cherrell, I am going to do all I can to remove the unpleasant impression you have of me. I am your very humble servant, and I hope some day to have a chance to be something else to you.’

He looked terribly tall, handsome, and healthy, and she resented it.

‘Let us not take anything too seriously, Professor; it leads to trouble. Forgive me now, I have to find Miss Tasburgh.’

With that she skimmed away. Ridiculous! Touching! Flattering! Odious! It was all crazy! Whatever one did would be all criss-crossed

and tangled, to trust to luck was best, after all!

Jean Tasburgh, who had just finished a single with Cicely Muskham, was removing a fillet from her hair.

‘Come along to tea,’ said Dinny; ‘Lord Saxenden is pining for you.’

At the door of the room where tea was being served, however, she herself was detached by Sir Lawrence, who, saying he had seen nothing of her yet, invited her to his study to look at his miniatures.

‘My record of national characteristics, Dinny; all women,

you see: French, German, Italian, Dutch, American, Spanish, Russian; and I should immensely like one of you, Dinny. Would you sit to a young man?’

‘I?’

‘You.’

‘But why?’

‘Because,’ said Sir Lawrence, scrutinizing her through his monocle, ‘you contain the answer to the riddle of the English lady, and I collect the essential difference between national cultures.’

‘That sounds terribly exciting.’

‘Look at this one. Here’s French culture in excelsis; quick intelligence, wit, industry, decision, intellectual but not emotional aestheticism, no humour, conventional sentiment but no other, a having tendency – mark the eye; a sense of form, no originality, very clear but limited mental vision – nothing dreamy about her; quick but controlled blood. All of a piece, with very distinct edges. Now here’s an American of rare type, tip-top cultured variety. Notice chiefly a look as if she had an invisible bit in her mouth and knew it; in her eyes

is a battery she'll make use of but only with propriety. She'll be very well preserved to the end of her days. Good taste, a lot of knowledge, not much learning. See this German! Emotionally more uncontrolled, and less sense of form than either of those others, but has a conscience, is a hard worker, great sense of duty, not much taste, some rather unhandy humour. If she doesn't take care she'll get fat. Plenty of sentiment, plenty of good sound sense too. More capacious in every way. She isn't perhaps a very good specimen. I can't get one. Here's

my prize Italian. She's interesting. Beautifully varnished, with something feral, or let's say – natural, behind. Has a mask on, prettily shaped, prettily worn, liable to fall off. Knows her own mind, perhaps too well, gets her own way if she can, and if she can't, gets somebody else's. Poetic only in connection with her senses. Strong feelings, domestic and otherwise. Clear-eyed towards danger, plenty of courage but easily unnerved. Fine taste, subject to bad lapses. No liking for Nature, here. Intellectually decisive, but not industrious or inquiring. And

here,' said Sir Lawrence, suddenly confronting Dinny, 'I shall have my prize English specimen. Do you want to hear about her?'

'Help!'

'Oh! I'll be quite impersonal. Here we have a self-consciousness, developed and controlled to the point when it becomes unselfconsciousness. To this lady Self is the unforgivable intruder. We observe a sense of humour, not devoid of wit, which informs and somewhat sterilizes all else. We are impressed by what I may call a look not so much of domestic as of public or social service, not to be

found in our other types. We discover a sort of transparency, as if air and dew had got into the system. We decide that *precision* is lacking, precision of learning, action, thought, judgement, but that *decision* is very present. The senses are not highly developed; the aesthetic emotions are excited more readily by natural than by artificial objects. There is not the capacity of the German; the clarity of the French woman; the duality or colour of the Italian; the disciplined neatness of the American; but there is a peculiar something – for which, my dear, I

will leave you to discover the word – that makes me very anxious to have you in my collection of cultures.’

‘But I am not in the least cultured, Uncle Lawrence.’

‘I use the infernal word for want of a better, and by it I don’t mean learning. I mean the stamp left by blood plus bringing-up, the two taken strictly together. If that French woman had had your bringing-up, she yet wouldn’t have had your stamp, Dinny; nor would you with her bringing-up have had her stamp. Now look at this pre-war Russian; more fluid and more

fluent than any of the others. I found her in the Caledonian Market. That woman must have wanted to go deep into everything, and never wanted to stay there long. I'll wager she ran through life at a great pace, and, if alive, is still running; and it's taking much less out of her than it would take out of you. The face gives you the feeling that she's experienced more emotions, and been less exhausted by them than any of the others. Here's my Spaniard; perhaps the most interesting of the lot. That's woman brought up apart from man; I suspect she's getting rare.

There's a sweetness here, a touch of the convent; not much curiosity, not much energy, a lot of pride, very little conceit; might be devastating in her affections, don't you think, and rather difficult to talk to? Well, Dinny, will you sit to my young man?

'If you really want me to, of course.'

'I do. This is my hobby. I'll arrange it. He can come down to you at Condaford. I must get back now and see 'Snubby' off. Have you proposed to him yet?'

'I read him to sleep last night with Hubert's diary. He dislikes me

intensely. I daren't ask him anything. Is he really "a big noise", Uncle Lawrence?'

Sir Lawrence nodded mysteriously. 'Snubby,' he said, 'is the ideal public man. He has practically no feelers, and his feelings are always connected with Snubby. You can't keep a man like him down; he will always be there or thereabouts. India-rubber. Well, well, the State needs him. If we were all thin-skinned, who would sit in the seats of the mighty? They are hard, Dinny, and full of brass tacks. So you've wasted your time?'

'I think I've tied a second string

to my bow.'

'Excellent. Hallorsen's off too. I like that chap. Very American, but sound wood.'

He left her, and, unwilling to encounter again either the india-rubber or the sound wood, Dinny went up to her room.

Next morning by ten o'clock, with the rapidity peculiar to the break-up of house-parties, Fleur and Michael were bearing Adrian and Diana off to Town in their car; the Muskhams had departed by train, and the Squire and Lady Henrietta were motoring across country to their Northamptonshire

abode; Aunt Wilmet and Dinny alone were left, but the Tasburghs were coming to lunch and bringing their father.

‘He’s amiable, Dinny,’ said Lady Mont: ‘Old School, very courtly, says “Nevah,” “Evah,” like that. It’s a pity they’ve no money. Jean is strikin’, don’t you think?’

‘She scares me a little, Aunt Em; knows her own mind so completely.’

‘Match-makin’,’ replied her aunt, ‘is rather amusin’. I haven’t done any for a long time. I wonder what Con and your mother will say to me. I shall wake up o’ nights.’

‘First catch your Hubert, Auntie.’

‘I was always fond of Hubert; he has the family face – you haven’t, Dinny, I don’t know where you get your colourin’ – and he looks so well on a horse. Where does he get his breeches?’

‘I don’t believe he’s had a new pair since the war, Auntie.’

‘And he wears nice long waistcoats. Those short waistcoats straight across are so abbreviatin’. I shall send him out with Jean to see the rock borders. There’s nothin’ like portulaca for bringin’ people together. Ah! There’s Boswell and Johnson – I must catch

him.'

Hubert arrived soon after noon, and almost the first thing he said was:

'I've changed my mind about having my diary published, Dinny. Exhibiting one's sore finger is too revolting.'

Thankful that as yet she had taken no steps, she answered meekly:

'Very well, dear.'

'I've been thinking: If they're not going to employ me here I might get attached to a Soudan regiment; or I believe they're short of men for

the Indian Police. I shall be jolly glad to get out of the country again. Who's here?'

'Only Uncle Lawrence, Aunt Em, and Aunt Wilmet. The Rector and his family are coming to lunch – the Tasburghs, they're distant cousins.'

'Oh!' said Hubert, glumly.

She watched the advent of the Tasburghs almost maliciously. Hubert and young Tasburgh at once discovered mutual service in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. They were talking about it when Hubert became conscious of Jean. Dinny saw him give her a long

look, inquiring and detached, as of a man watching a new kind of bird; saw him avert his eyes, speak and laugh, then gaze back at her.

Her aunt's voice said: 'Hubert looks thin.'

The Rector spread his hands, as if to draw attention to his present courtly bulk. 'Dear Lady, at his age I was thinnah.'

'So was I,' said Lady Mont; 'thin as you, Dinny.'

'We gathah unearned increment, ah-ha! Look at Jean – lithe is the word; in forty years – but perhaps the young of today will nevah

grow fat. They do slimming – ah-ha!’

At lunch the Rector faced Sir Lawrence across the shortened table, and the two elder ladies sat one on each side of him. Alan faced Hubert and Dinny faced Jean.

‘For what we are about to receive the Lord make us truly thankful.’

‘Rum thing – grace!’ said young Tasburgh in Dinny’s ear.

‘Benediction on murder, um?’

‘There’ll be hare,’ said Dinny, ‘and I saw it killed. It cried.’

‘I’d as soon eat dog as hare.’

Dinny gave him a grateful look.

‘Will you and your sister come and see us at Condaford?’

‘Give me a chance!’

‘When do you go back to your ship?’

‘I’ve got a month.’

‘I suppose you are devoted to your profession?’

‘Yes,’ he said, simply. ‘It’s bred in the bone, we’ve always had a sailor in the family.’

‘And we’ve always had a soldier.’

‘Your brother’s deathly keen. I’m awfully glad to have met him.’

‘No, Blore,’ said Dinny to the butler, ‘cold partridge, please. Mr Tasburgh too will eat something cold.’

‘Beef, Sir; lamb, partridge.’

‘Partridge, thank you.’

‘I’ve seen a hare wash its ears,’ added Dinny.

‘When you look like that,’ said young Tasburgh, ‘I simply –’

‘Like what?’

‘As if you weren’t there, you know.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Dinny,’ said Sir Lawrence, who was it said the world was an

oyster? I say it's a clam. What's your view?'

'I don't know the clam, Uncle Lawrence.'

'You're fortunate. That travesty of the self-respecting bivalve is the only tangible proof of American idealism. They've put it on a pedestal, and go so far as to eat it. When the Americans renounce the clam, they will have become realists and joined the League of Nations. We shall be dead.'

But Dinny was watching Hubert's face. The brooding look was gone: his eyes seemed glued to Jean's deep luring eyes. She uttered

a sigh.

‘Quite right,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘it will be a pity not to live to see the Americans abandon the clam, and embrace the League of Nations. For, after all,’ he continued, pursing up his left eye, ‘it *was* founded by an American and is about the only sensible product of our time. It remains, however, the pet aversion of another American called Munroe who died in 1831, and is never alluded to without a scoff by people like “Snubby”.

A scoff, a sneer, a kick or two,
With few, but with how splendid

jeers—

D'you know that thing by Elroy Flecker?’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, startled, ‘it’s in Hubert’s diary; I read it out to Lord Saxenden. It was just then he went to sleep.’

‘He would. But don’t forget, Dinny, that Snubby’s a deuced clever fellow, and knows his world to a T. It may be a world you wouldn’t be seen dead in, but it’s the world where ten million more-or-less-young men were recently seen dead. I wonder,’ concluded Sir Lawrence, more thoughtfully,

‘when I have been so well fed at my own table as these last days; something has come over your aunt.’

Organizing after lunch a game of croquet between herself and Alan Tasburgh against his father and Aunt Wilmet, Dinny watched the departure of Jean and her brother towards the rock borders. They stretched from the sunken garden down to an old orchard, beyond which rose a swell of meadow-land.

‘*They* won’t stop at the portulaca,’ she thought.

Two games, indeed, were over

before she saw them again coming from a different direction, deep in talk. ‘This,’ she thought, hitting the Rector’s ball with all her force, is about the quickest thing ever known.’

‘God bless me!’ murmured the smitten clergyman, and Aunt Wilmet, straight as a grenadier, uttered a loud: ‘Damn it, Dinny, you’re impossible!...’

Later, beside her brother in the open car, she was silent, making up her mind, as it were, to second place. Though what she had hoped for had come to pass, she was depressed. She had been first with

Hubert until now. She needed all her philosophy watching the smile coming and going on his lips.

‘Well, what do you think of our cousins?’

‘He’s a good chap. I thought he seemed rather gone on you.’

‘Did you now? When would you like them to come over?’

‘Any time.’

‘Next week?’

‘Yes.’

Seeing that he did not mean to be drawn, she lapsed into savouring the day’s slowly sinking light and beauty. The high land,

Wantage, and Faringdon way, was glamoured by level sunlight; and Wittenham Clumps bastioned-up the rise ahead. Rounding to the right, they came on the bridge. In the middle of it she touched his arm:

‘That stretch up there is where we saw the kingfishers, Hubert; d’you remember?’

Halted, they gazed up the quiet river, deserted and fit for the bright birds. Falling light sprinkled it through willows on the southern bank. The quietest river, it seemed, in the world, most subdued to the moods of men, flowing with an

even clear stream among bright fields and those drooping shapely trees; having, as it were, a bland intensity of being, a presence of its own, gracious and apart.

‘Three thousand years ago,’ said Hubert suddenly, ‘this old river used to be like those I’ve seen in the wilds, an unshaped flow of water in matted jungle.’

He drove on. They had their backs to the sunlight now, and it was like driving into what had been painted for them.

And so they sped on, while into the sky crept the sunset glow, and the cleaned-up fields darkened a

little, and gathered loneliness under the evening flight of birds.

At the door of Condaford Grange Dinny got out, humming: ‘ “She was a shepherdess oh! so fair,” ’ and looking into her brother’s face. He was, however, busy with the car and did not appear to see the connection.

Chapter Twelve



THE outline of a young Englishman of the inarticulate variety is difficult to grasp. The vocal variety is easily enough apprehended. Its manners and habits bulk large to the eye and have but little importance in the national life. Vociferous, critical, ingenious, knowing and advertising only its own kind, it forms an iridescence shimmering over the surface of the bog, and disguising the peat below. It constantly and brilliantly expresses almost nothing; while

those whose lives are spent in the application of trained energy remain invisible, but none the less solid; for feelings continually voiced cease to be feelings, and feelings never voiced deepen with their dumbness. Hubert did not look solid, nor was he stolid; even those normal aids to the outline of the inarticulate were absent. Trained, sensitive, and no fool, he was capable of passing quiet judgement on people and events that would have surprised the vocal, but, except to himself, he never passed it. Till quite recently, indeed, he had lacked time and

opportunity; but seeing him in a smoking-room, at a dinner-table, or wherever the expressive scintillate, you would know at once that neither time nor opportunity was going to make him vociferous. Going into the war, so early, as a professional, he had missed the expanding influences of the 'Varsity and London. Eight years in Mesopotamia, Egypt and India, a year of illness and the Hallorsen expedition, had given him a remote, drawn, rather embittered look. He was of the temperament that, in idleness, eats its heart out. With dog and gun or on a horse, he

found it bearable, but only just; and without those adventitious aids he wilted. Three days after the return to Condaford he came to Dinny on the terrace, with *The Times* in his hand.

‘Look at this!’

Dinny read:

SIR,—

You will pardon me, I trust, this intrusion on your space. It has come to my knowledge that certain passages in my book, ‘Bolivia and Its Secrets’, published last July, have grievously annoyed my second-in-command, Captain Hubert Charwell, DSO, who had charge of the transport of the expedition. On re-reading these passages I certainly believe that in the vexation caused me by the partial failure of the expedition, and owing to the over-strained state in which I

returned from the adventure, I have passed undue criticism on Captain Charwell's conduct; and I wish, pending the issue of the second and amended edition which I trust will not be long delayed, to take this opportunity of publicly withdrawing in your great journal the gravamen of my written words. It is my duty and pleasure to express to Captain Charwell and the British Army of which he is a member, my sincere apology, and my regret for any pain I may have caused him.

Sir, Your obedient servant,

EDWARD HALLORSEN (Professor).

Piedmont Hotel,
London.

‘Very handsome!’ said Dinny, trembling a little.

‘Hallorsen in London! What the devil does he mean by this all of a

sudden?’

She began pulling yellowed leaves out of an Agapanthus. The danger of doing things for other people was being disclosed to her.

‘It almost looks like repentance, dear.’

‘That fellow repent! Not he! There’s something behind it.’

‘Yes, I am.’

‘You!’

Dinny quailed behind her smile.

‘I met Hallorsen at Diana’s in London; he was at Lippinghall, too. So I – er – got at him.’

‘You asked – you begged –?’

‘Oh! no!’

‘What then?’

‘He seemed to take rather a fancy to me. It’s odd, but I couldn’t help it, Hubert.’

‘He’s done this to curry favour with you?’

‘You put it like a man and a brother.’

‘Dinny!’

Dinny flushed too, angry now behind her smile.

‘I didn’t lead him on. He took this highly unreasonable fancy in spite of plenty of cold water. But, if you ask me, Hubert, he has quite a

decent side to him.'

'You would naturally think so,' said Hubert, coldly. His face had resumed its sallow hue and was even a little ashened.

Dinny caught impulsively at his sleeve.

'Don't be silly dear! If he chooses to make a public apology for any reason, even such a bad one, isn't it all to the good?'

'Not when my own sister comes into it. In this thing I'm like – I'm like a – ' he put his hands to his head: 'I'm in Chancery. Anyone can punch my head, and I can't move.'

Dinny's coolness had come back to her.

‘You needn't be afraid that I shall compromise you. This letter is very good news; it takes the wind out of the whole thing. In face of this apology, who can say anything?’

But Hubert, leaving the paper in her hand, went back into the house.

Dinny had practically no ‘small’ pride. Her sense of humour prevented her from attaching value to her own performances. She felt that she ought to have provided against this contingency, though

she did not see how.

Hubert's resentment was natural enough. If Hallorsen's apology had been dictated by conviction, it would have soothed him; arising from a desire to please his sister, it was only the more galling; and he clearly abhorred the Professor's fancy for her. Still, there was the letter – an open and direct admission of false criticism, which changed the whole position! At once she began to consider what use could be made of it. Should she send it to Lord Saxenden? Having meddled so far, she decided that she would, and went in to write the

covering letter.

Condaford Grange.

Sept. 21.

DEAR LORD SAXENDEN,—

I am venturing to send you the enclosed cutting from today's 'Times', for I feel it excuses me to some extent for my effrontery the other evening. I really ought not to have bored you at the end of a long day with those passages of my brother's diary. It was unpardonable, and I don't wonder that you sought refuge. But the enclosed will show you the injustice from which my brother has suffered; and I hope you will forgive me.

Sincerely yours,

ELIZABETH CHARWELL.

Enclosing the cutting, she looked up Lord Saxenden in *Who's Who*,

and addressed the envelope to his London abode, marking it 'Personal'.

A little later, trying to find Hubert, she was told that he had taken the car and gone up to London....

Hubert drove fast. Dinny's explanation of the letter had disturbed him greatly. He covered the fifty odd miles in a little under two hours and reached the Piedmont Hotel at one o'clock. Since he had parted from Hallorsen nearly six months ago, no word had passed between them. He sent his card in and waited in the hall

with no precise knowledge of what he wanted to say. When the American's tall figure approached behind the buttoned boy, a cold stillness possessed his every limb.

‘Captain Cherrell,’ said Hallorsen, and held out his hand.

With a horror of ‘scenes’ deeper than his more natural self, Hubert took it, but without pressure in his fingers.

‘I saw you were here, from *The Times*. Is there anywhere we could go and talk for a few minutes?’

Hallorsen led towards an alcove. ‘Bring some cocktails,’ he said to a

waiter.

‘Not for me, thank you. But may I smoke?’

‘I trust this is the pipe of peace, Captain.’

‘I don’t know. An apology that does not come from conviction means less than nothing to me.’

‘Who says it doesn’t come from conviction?’

‘My sister.’

‘Your sister, Captain Cherrell, is a very rare and charming young lady, and I would not wish to contradict her.’

‘Do you mind my speaking

plainly?’

‘Why, surely no!’

‘Then I would much rather have had no apology from you than know I owed it to any feeling of yours for one of my family.’

‘Well,’ said Hallorsen, after a pause, ‘I can’t write to *The Times* and say I was in error when I made that apology. I judge they wouldn’t stand for that. I had a sore head when I wrote that book. I told your sister so, and I tell you so now. I lost all sense of charity, and I have come to regret it.’

‘I don’t want charity. I want

justice. Did I or did I not let you down?’

‘Why, there’s no question but that your failure to hold that pack together did in fact finish my chance.’

‘I admit that. Did I fail you from my fault, or from yours in giving me an impossible job?’

For a full minute the two men stood with their eyes on each other, and without a word. Then Hallorsen again held out his hand.

‘Put it there,’ he said; ‘my fault.’

Hubert’s hand went out impulsively, but stopped halfway.

‘One moment. Do you say that because it would please my sister?’

‘No, Sir; I mean it.’

Hubert took his hand.

‘That’s great,’ said Hallorsen.

‘We didn’t get on, Captain; but since I’ve stayed in one of your old homes here, I think I’ve grasped the reason why. I expected from you what you class Englishmen seemingly will never give – that’s the frank expression of your feelings. I judge one has to translate you, and I just couldn’t do it, so we went on in the dark about each other. And that’s the way to get raw.’

‘I don’t know why, but we got raw all right.’

‘Well, I wish it could come all over again.’

Hubert shivered. ‘I don’t.’

‘Now, Captain, will you lunch with me, and tell me how I can serve you? I will do anything you say to wipe out my mistake.’

For a moment Hubert did not speak, his face was unmoved, but his hands shook a little.

‘That’s all right,’ he said. ‘It’s nothing.’

And they moved towards the grill-room.

Chapter Thirteen



IF one thing is more certain than another – which is extremely doubtful – it is that nothing connected with a Public Department will run as a private individual expects.

A more experienced and less simply faithful sister than Dinny would have let sleeping dogs lie. But she had as yet no experience of the fact that the usual effect of letters to those in high places is the precise opposite of what was intended by the sender. Arousing

his *amour-propre*, which in the case of public men should be avoided, it caused Lord Saxenden to look no further into the matter. Did that young woman suppose for a moment that he didn't see how this American chap was feeding out of her hand? In accordance, indeed, with the irony latent in human affairs, Hallorsen's withdrawal of the charge had promoted in the authorities a more suspicious and judgemantic attitude, and Hubert received, two days before his year of leave was up, an intimation to the effect that it was extended indefinitely and he was to go on

half-pay, pending an inquiry into the matter raised in the House of Commons by Major Motley, M.P. A letter from that military civilian had appeared in reply to Hallorsen's asking whether he was to assume that the shooting and flogging mentioned in his book had not really taken place, and if so, what explanation could this American gentleman afford of such an amazing discrepancy? This, in turn, had elicited from Hallorsen the answer that the facts were as stated in his book, but that his deductions from them had been erroneous, and that Captain

Charwell had been perfectly justified in his actions.

On receiving intimation that his leave was extended, Hubert went up to the War Office. He obtained no comfort, beyond the non-official saying of an acquaintance that the Bolivian Authorities were 'butting in.' This news created little less than consternation at Condaford. None of the four young people, indeed, for the Tasburghs were still there, and Clare away in Scotland, appreciated the report at its full value, for none of them had as yet much knowledge of the extent to which officialdom can go when it

starts out to do its duty; but to the General it had so sinister a significance that he went up to stay at his Club.

After tea that day in the billiard room, Jean Tasburgh, chalking her cue, said quietly:

‘What does that Bolivian news mean, Hubert?’

‘It may mean anything. I shot a Bolivian, you know.’

‘But he tried to kill you first.’

‘He did.’

She leaned her cue against the table; her hands brown, slim, and strong, gripped the cushion;

suddenly she went up to him and put her hand through his arm. 'Kiss me,' she said; 'I am going to belong to you.'

'Jean!'

'No, Hubert; no chivalry and that sort of nonsense. You shan't have all this beastliness alone. I'm going to share it. Kiss me.'

The kiss was given. It was long, and soothing to them both; but, when it was over, he said:

'Jean, it's quite impossible, until things dry straight.'

'Of course they'll dry straight, but I want to help dry them. Let's

be married quickly, Hubert. Father can spare me a hundred a year; what can you manage?’

‘I’ve three hundred a year of my own, and half pay, which may be cut off.’

‘That’s four hundred a year certain; people have married on lots less, and that’s only for the moment. Of course we can be married. Where?’

Hubert stood breathless.

‘When the war was on,’ said Jean, ‘people married at once; they didn’t wait because the man was going to be killed. Kiss me again.’

And Hubert stood more breathless than ever, with her arms round his neck. It was so that Dinny found them.

Without moving her arms, Jean said:

‘We’re going to be married, Dinny. Where do you think best? A Registry Office? Banns take so much time.’

Dinny gasped.

‘I didn’t think you’d propose quite so soon, Jean.’

‘I had to. Hubert is full of stuffy chivalry. Dad won’t like a Registry Office; why not a special licence?’

Hubert's hands on her shoulders held her away from him.

‘Be serious, Jean.’

‘I am. With a special licence, nobody need know till it's over. So nobody will mind.’

‘Well,’ said Dinny, quietly, ‘I believe you're right. When a thing has to be, it had better be quickly. I daresay Uncle Hilary would tie you up.’

Hubert dropped his hands.
‘You're both cracked.’

‘Polite!’ said Jean. ‘Men are absurd. They want a thing, and when it's offered they carry on like

old women. Who is Uncle Hilary?’

‘Vicar of St. Augustine’s-in-the-Meads; he has no sense of propriety to speak of.’

‘Good! You go up tomorrow, Hubert, and get the licence. We’ll come after you. Where can we stay, Dinny?’

‘Diana would have us, I think.’

‘That settles it. We’ll have to go round by Lippinghall, for me to get some clothes, and see Dad. I can cut his hair while I’m talking to him; there won’t be any trouble. Alan can come too; we shall want a best man. Dinny, you talk to

Hubert.' Left alone with her brother, Dinny said:

'She's a wonderful girl, Hubert, and far from cracked, really. It's breathless, but terribly good sense. She's always been poor, so it won't make any difference to her in that way.'

'It isn't that. It's the feeling of something hanging over me, that'll hang over her too.'

'It'll hang over her worse, if you don't. I really should, dear boy. Father won't mind. He likes her, and he'd rather you married a girl of breeding and spirit than any amount of money.'

‘It doesn’t seem decent – a special licence,’ muttered Hubert.

‘It’s romantic, and people won’t have a chance to discuss whether you ought to or not; when it’s done they’ll accept it, as they always do.’

‘What about Mother?’

‘I’ll tell Mother, if you like. I’m sure she won’t really mind – you’re not being fashionable, marrying a chorus girl or anything of that sort. She admires Jean. So do Aunt Em and Uncle Lawrence.’

Hubert’s face cleared.

‘I’ll do it. It’s too wonderful. After all, I’ve nothing to be

ashamed of.'

He walked up to Dinny, kissed her almost violently, and hurried out. Dinny stayed in the billiard room practising the spot stroke. Behind her matter-of-fact attitude, she was extremely stirred. The embrace she had surprised had been so passionate; the girl was so strange a mixture of feeling and control, of lava and of steel, so masterful and yet so amusingly young. It might be a risk; but Hubert was already a different man because of it. All the same she was fully conscious of inconsistency; for to herself such a

sensational departure would not be possible. The giving of her heart would be no rushing affair. As her old Scotch nurse used to say: 'Miss Dinny aye knows on hoo many toes a pussy-cat goes.' She was not proud of that 'sense of humour not devoid of wit which informed and somewhat sterilized all else'. Indeed, she envied Jean her colourful decision, Alan his direct conviction, Hallorsen's robust adventurousness. But she had her compensations, and, with a smile breaking her lips apart, went to find her mother.

Lady Cherrell was in her

sanctum next to her bedroom making muslin bags for the leaves of the scented verbena which grew against the house.

‘Darling,’ said Dinny, ‘prepare for slight concussion. You remember my saying I wished we could find the perfect girl for Hubert. Well, she’s found; Jean has just proposed to him.’

‘Dinny!’

‘They’re going to be married offhand by special licence.’

‘But – ’

‘Exactly, darling. So we go up tomorrow, and Jean and I stay

with Diana till it's over. Hubert will tell Father.'

'But, Dinny, really – !'

Dinny came through the barrage of muslin, knelt down and put her arm round her mother.

'I feel exactly like you,' she said, 'only different, because after all I didn't produce him; but, Mother darling, it is all right. Jean is a marvellous creature, and Hubert's head over ears. It's done him a lot of good already, and she'll see to it that he goes ahead, you know.'

'But, Dinny – money?'

'They're not expecting Dad to do

anything. They'll just be able to manage, and they needn't have children, you know, till later.'

'I suppose not. It's terribly sudden. Why a special licence?'

'Intuition,' and, with a squeeze of her mother's slender body, she added: 'Jean has them. Hubert's position is awkward, Mother.'

'Yes; I'm scared about it, and I know your father is, though he's not said much.'

This was as far as either of them would go in disclosure of their uneasiness, and they went into committee on the question of a

perch for the adventuring couple.

‘But why shouldn’t they live here until things are settled?’ said Lady Cherrell.

‘They’ll find it more exciting if they have to do their own washing up. The great thing is to keep Hubert’s mind active just now.’

Lady Cherrell sighed. Correspondence, gardening, giving household orders, and sitting on village committees were certainly not exciting, and Condaford would be even less exciting if, like the young, one had none of these distractions.

‘Things *are* quiet here,’ she admitted.

‘And thank God for it,’ murmured Dinny; ‘but I feel Hubert wants the strenuous life just now, and he’ll get it with Jean in London. They might take a workman’s flat. It can’t be for long, you know. So, Mother dear, you’ll not seem to know anything about it this evening, and we shall all know you do. That’ll be so restful for everybody.’ And, kissing the rueful smile on her mother’s face, she went away.

Next morning the conspirators were early afoot, Hubert looking,

so Jean put it, as though he were 'riding at a bullfinch'; Dinny resolutely whimsical. Alan had the handy air of a best man in embryo; Jean alone appeared unmoved. They set forth in the Tasburghs' brown roadster, dropping Hubert at the station and proceeding towards Lippinghall. Jean drove. The other two sat behind.

'Dinny,' said young Tasburgh, 'couldn't we have a special licence, too?'

'Reduction on taking a quantity. Behave yourself. You will go to sea and forget all about me in a month.'

‘Do I look like that?’

Dinny regarded his brown face.

‘Well, in spots.’

‘Do be serious!’

‘I can’t; I keep seeing Jean snipping a lock and saying: “Now Dad, bless me or I’ll tonsure you!” and the Rector answering “I – er – nevah –!” and Jean snipping another lock and saying: “That’s all right then, and I must have a hundred a year or off go your eyebrows!” ’

‘Jean’s a holy terror. Promise me anyway, Dinny, not to marry anyone else?’

‘But suppose I met someone I liked terribly, would you wish to blight my young life?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not so do they answer on the “screen”.’

‘You’d make a saint swear.’

‘But not a naval lieutenant. Which reminds me: Those texts at the head of the fourth column of *The Times*. It struck me this morning what a splendid secret code could be made out of “The Song of Solomon”, or that Psalm about the Leviathan. “My beloved is like a young roe” might mean

“Eight German battleships in Dover harbour. Come quickly.” “And there is that Leviathan that takes his pastime therein” could be “Tirpitz in command”, and so on. No one could possibly decipher it unless they had a copy of the code.’

‘I’m going to speed,’ said Jean, looking back. The speedometer rose rapidly: Forty – forty-five – fifty – fifty-five –! The sailor’s hand slipped under Dinny’s arm.

‘This can’t last, the car will bust. But it’s a tempting bit of road.’

Dinny sat with a fixed smile; she hated being driven really fast, and, when Jean had dropped again to

her normal thirty-five, said plaintively:

‘Jean, I have a nineteenth century inside.’

At Folwell she leaned forward again: ‘I don’t want them to see me at Lippinghall. Please go straight to the Rectory and hide me somewhere while you deal with your parent.’

Refuged in the dining-room opposite the portrait of which Jean had spoken, Dinny studied it curiously. Underneath were the words: ‘1553, Catherine Tastburgh, née Fitzherbert, aetate 35; wife of Sir Walter Tastburgh.’

Above the ruff encircling the long neck, that time-yellowed face might truly have been Jean fifteen years hence, the same tapering from the broad cheek-bones to the chin, the same long dark-lashed luring eyes; even the hands, crossed on the stomacher, were the very spit of Jean's. What had been the history of that strange prototype; did they know it, and would it be repeated by her descendant?

‘Awfully like Jean, isn't she?’ said young Tasburgh: ‘She was a corker, from all accounts; they say she staged her own funeral, and

got out of the country when Elizabeth set about the Catholics in the fifteen-sixties. D'you know what was the fate of anyone who celebrated Mass just then? Ripping up was a mere incident in it. The Christian religion! What oh! That lady had a hand in most pies, I fancy. I bet she speeded when she could.'

'Any news from the front?'

'Jean went into the study with an old *Times*, a towel, and a pair of scissors. The rest is silence.'

'Isn't there anywhere from which we can see them when they come out?'

‘We could sit on the stairs. They wouldn’t notice us, there, unless they happen to go up.’

They went out and sat in a dark corner of the stairway, whence through the bannisters they could see the study door. With some of the thrill of childhood Dinny watched for it to open. Suddenly Jean came forth, with a sheet of newspaper folded as a receptacle in one hand, and in the other a pair of scissors. They heard her say:

‘Remember, dear, you’re not to go out without a hat today.’

An inarticulate answer was shut off by the closing of the door.

Dinny rose above the bannisters:
‘Well?’

‘It’s all right. He’s a bit grumpy – doesn’t know who’ll cut his hair and that; thinks a special licence a waste of money; but he’s going to give me the hundred a year. I left him filling his pipe.’ She stood still, looking into the sheet of newspaper; ‘There was an awful lot to come away. We’ll have lunch in a minute, Dinny, and then be off again.’

The Rector’s manner at lunch was still courtly, and Dinny observed him with admiring attention. Here was a widower

well on in years, about to be deprived of his only daughter, who did everything about the house and parish, even to the cutting of his hair, yet he was apparently unmoved. Not a murmur escaped his lips. Was it breeding, benevolence, or unholy relief? She could not be sure; and her heart quailed a little. Hubert would soon be in his shoes. She stared at Jean. Little doubt but that she could stage her own funeral, if not other people's; still, there would be nothing ungraceful or raucous about her dominations; no vulgar domesticity in the way she stirred

her pies. If only she and Hubert had enough sense of humour!

After lunch the Rector took her apart.

‘My deah Dinny – if I may call you that – how do you feel about it? And how does your Mothah feel?’

‘We both feel it’s a little bit like “The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea!” ’

‘ “In a beautiful pea-green boat.” Yes, indeed, but not “with plenty of money” I feah. Still,’ he added, dreamily, ‘Jean is a good girl; very – ah – capable. I am glad oui

families are to be – er – reunited. I shall miss her, but one must not be – ah – selfish.’

‘ “What we lose on the swings we gain on the roundabouts,” ’ murmured Dinny.

The Rector’s blue eyes twinkled.

‘Ah!’ he said, ‘yes, indeed; the rough with the smooth. Jean refuses to let me give her away. Here is her birth certificate in case of – ah – questions. She is of age.’

He produced a long yellowed slip. ‘Deah me!’ he added, sincerely: ‘Deah me!’

Dinny continued to feel doubtful

whether she was sorry for him:
and, directly after, they resumed
their journey.

Chapter Fourteen



DROPPING Alan Tasburgh at his Club, the two girls headed the car for Chelsea. Dinny had sent no telegram, trusting to luck. On reaching the house in Oakley Street she got out and rang the bell. An elderly maid, with a frightened expression on her face, opened the door.

‘Mrs Ferse in?’

‘No, Miss; Captain Ferse.’

‘Captain Ferse?’

The maid, looking to right and

left, spoke in a low and hurried voice.

‘Yes, Miss; we’re dreadfully put about, we don’t know what to do. Captain Ferse came in sudden at lunch time, and we never knew nothing of it, beforehand. The Mistress was out. There’s been a telegram for her, but Captain Ferse took it; and someone’s been on the ’phone for her twice but wouldn’t give a message.’ Dinny sought for words in which to discover the worst.

‘How – how does he seem?’

‘Well, Miss, I couldn’t say. He never said nothing but “Where’s

your mistress?" He *looks* all right, but not having heard anything, we're afraid; the children are in and we don't know where the Mistress is.'

'Wait a minute,' and Dinny went back to the car.

'What's the matter?' asked Jean, getting out.

The two girls stood consulting on the pavement, while from the doorway the maid watched them.

'I ought to get hold of Uncle Adrian,' said Dinny. 'There are the children.'

'You do that, and I'll go in and

wait for you. That maid looks scared.'

'I believe he used to be violent, Jean; he may have escaped, you know.'

'Take the car. I shall be all right.' Dinny squeezed her hand.

'I'll take a taxi; then you'll have the car if you want to get away.'

'Right! Tell the maid who I am, and then buzz off. It's four o'clock.'

Dinny looked up at the house; and, suddenly, saw a face in the window of the dining-room. Though she had only twice seen Ferse, she recognized him at once.

His face was not to be forgotten, it gave the impression of fire behind bars: a cut, hard face with a tooth-brush moustache, broad cheek-bones, strong-growing dark slightly-grizzled hair, and those steel-bright flickering eyes. They stared out at her now with a kind of dancing intensity that was painful, and she looked away.

‘Don’t look up! He’s in there!’ she said to Jean: ‘But for his eyes he looks quite normal – well-dressed and that. Let’s both go, Jean, or both stay.’

‘No; I shall be quite all right; you go,’ and she went into the house.

Dinny hurried away. This sudden reappearance of one whom all had assumed to be hopelessly unhinged was staggering. Ignorant of the circumstances of Ferse's incarceration, ignorant of everything except that he had given Diana a terrible time before his break-down, she thought of Adrian as the only person likely to know enough. It was a long anxious drive. She found her uncle on the point of leaving the Museum, and told him hurriedly, while he stood looking at her with horror.

‘Do you know where Diana is?’

she finished.

‘She was dining tonight with Fleur and Michael. I was going too, but till then I don’t know. Let’s get on back to Oakley Street. This is a thunderbolt.’

They got into the cab.

‘Couldn’t you telephone to that Mental Home, Uncle?’

‘Without seeing Diana, I daren’t. You say he looked normal?’

‘Yes. Only his eyes – but they always were like that, I remember.’

Adrian put his hands up to his head. ‘It’s too horrible! My poor girl!’

Dinny's heart began to ache – as much for him as for Diana.

‘Horrible too,’ said Adrian, ‘to be feeling like this because that poor devil has come back. Ah, me! This is a bad business, Dinny; a bad business.’ Dinny squeezed his arm.

‘What is the law about it, Uncle?’

‘God knows! He never was certified. Diana wouldn’t have that. They took him as a private patient.’

‘But surely he couldn’t come away just when he liked, without any notice being given?’

‘Who knows what’s happened? He may be as crazy as ever and have got away in a flash of sanity. But whatever we do,’ and Dinny felt moved by the expression on his face, ‘we must think of him as well as of ourselves. We mustn’t make it harder for him. Poor Ferse! Talk about trouble, Dinny – illness, poverty, vice, crime – none of them can touch mental derangement for sheer tragedy to all concerned.’

‘Uncle,’ said Dinny, ‘the night?’

Adrian groaned. ‘That we must save her from somehow.’

At the end of Oakley Street they dismissed the cab and walked to

the door....

On going in Jean had said to the maid: 'I'm Miss Tasburgh. Miss Dinny has gone for Mr Cherrell. Drawing-room upstairs? I'll wait there. Has he seen the children?'

'No, Miss. He's only been here half an hour. The children are up in the schoolroom with Mam'selle.'

'Then I shall be between them,' said Jean. 'Take me up.'

'Shall I wait with you, Miss?'

'No. Keep a look-out for Mrs Ferse and tell her at once.'

The maid gazed at her admiringly and left her in the

drawing-room. Setting the door ajar Jean stood listening. There was no sound. And she began to move silently up and down from door to window. If she saw Diana approaching she meant to run down to her; if Ferse came up she meant to go out to him. Her heart beat a little faster than usual, but she felt no real nervousness. She had been patrolling thus for a quarter of an hour when she heard a sound behind her, and, turning, saw Ferse just within the room.

‘Oh!’ she said: ‘I’m waiting for Mrs Ferse; are you Captain Ferse?’

The figure bowed. ‘And you?’

‘Jean Tasburgh. I’m afraid you wouldn’t know me.’

‘Who was that with you?’

‘Dinny Cherrell.’

‘Where has she gone?’

‘To see one of her uncles, I believe.’

Ferse uttered a queer sound – not quite a laugh.

‘Adrian?’

‘I think so.’

He stood turning those bright flickering eyes on the pretty room.

‘Prettier than ever,’ he said, ‘I’ve been away some time. Do you know my wife?’

‘I met her staying at Lady Mont’s.’

‘Lippinghall? Is Diana well?’

The words came out with a sort of hungry harshness.

‘Yes. Quite.’

‘And beautiful?’

‘Very.’

‘Thank you.’

Looking at him from under her long lashes Jean could see nothing in him from top to toe that gave the impression of derangement. He looked what he was – a soldier in mufti, very neat and self-contained, all – all but those eyes.

‘I haven’t seen my wife for four years,’ he said, ‘I shall want to see her alone.’

Jean moved towards the door.

‘I’ll go,’ she said.

‘No!’ The word came out with startling suddenness; ‘Stay there!’ And he blocked the doorway.

‘Why?’

‘I wish to be the first to tell her that I’m back.’

‘Naturally.’

‘Stay there, then!’

Jean moved back to the window. ‘Just as you like,’ she said. There was a silence.

‘Have you heard about me?’ he asked, suddenly.

‘Very little. I know you haven’t been well.’

He came from the door. ‘Do you see anything the matter with me?’

Jean looked up, her eyes held his till they went flickering away.

‘Nothing. You look very fit.’

‘I am. Sit down, won’t you?’

‘Thank you.’ Jean sat down.

‘That’s right,’ he said. ‘Keep your eyes on me.’

Jean looked at her feet. Again Ferse uttered that travesty of a laugh.

‘You’ve never been mentally sick, I take it. If you had you’d know that everybody keeps their eyes on you; and you keep your eyes on everybody. I must go down now. *Au revoir!*’

He turned quickly and went out, shutting the door. Jean continued to sit quite still, expecting him to open it again. She had a feeling of having been worsted, and a curious tingling all over, as if she had been too close to a fire. He did not open the door again, and she got up to do so herself. It was locked. She stood looking at it. Ring the bell? Hammer on it and attract the

maid? She decided to do neither, but went to the window and stood watching the street. Dinny would be back soon and she could call to her. Very coolly she reviewed the scene she had been through. He had locked her in because he meant no one to interfere before he saw his wife – suspicious of everyone – very natural! A dim sense of what it meant to be looked on as deranged penetrated her young hard intelligence. Poor man! She wondered if she could get out of the window without being noticed, and, deciding that she couldn't, continued to stand watching the

end of the street for the appearance of relief. And, suddenly, without anything to cause it, a shiver ran through her, the aftermath of that encounter. His eyes! It must be terrible to be his wife. She threw the window wider, and leaned out....

Chapter Fifteen



THE sight of Jean at the window stayed Dinny and her uncle on the doorstep.

‘I’m locked in the drawing-room,’ said Jean, quietly; ‘you might let me out.’

Adrian took his niece to the car.

‘Stay here, Dinny. I’ll send her out to you. We mustn’t make a show of this.’

‘Take care, Uncle! I feel as if you were Daniel going into – ’

With a wan smile Adrian rang

the bell. Ferse himself opened the door.

‘Ah! Cherrell? Come in.’

Adrian held out his hand; but it was not taken.

‘I can hardly expect a welcome,’ said Ferse.

‘My dear fellow!’

‘No, I can hardly expect a welcome, but I’m going to see Diana. Don’t try and prevent me, Cherrell – you or anyone.’

‘Of course not! Do you mind if I fetch young Jean Tasburgh? Dinny is waiting for her in the car.’

‘I locked her in,’ said Ferse,

sombrely. 'Here's the key. Send her away.'

He went into the dining-room.

Jean was standing just inside the door.

'Go out to Dinny,' said Adrian, 'and take her away. I'll manage. No trouble, I hope?'

'Only being locked in.'

'Tell Dinny,' said Adrian, 'that Hilary is almost sure to be able to put you both up; if you go on there now I shall know where you are if I want you. You have pluck, young lady.'

'Oh, not specially!' said Jean:

‘Good-bye!’ and ran downstairs. Adrian heard the front door close and went slowly down to the dining-room. Ferse was at the window watching the girls start the car. He turned round sharply. The movement was that of a man used to being spied on. There was little change in him, less thin, less haggard, and his hair greyer – that was all. His dress as neat as ever, his manner composed; his eyes – but then – his eyes!

‘Yes,’ said Ferse, uncannily, ‘you can’t help pitying me, but you’d like to see me dead. Who wouldn’t? A fellow has no business to go off

his chump. But I'm sane enough now, Cherrell, don't make any mistake.'

Sane? Yes, he seemed sane. But what strain could he stand?

Ferse spoke again: 'You all thought I was gone for good. About three months ago I began to mend. As soon as I realized that – I kept dark. Those who look after us' – he spoke with concentrated bitterness – 'must be so certain of our sanity that if it were left to them we should never be sane again. It's to their interest, you see.' And his eyes, burning into Adrian's seemed to add: 'And to yours, and to hers?'

‘So I kept dark. I had the will-power to keep dark in that place for three months, in my right mind. It’s only this last week or so that I’ve shown them I’m responsible. They want much more than a week before they’ll write home about it. I didn’t want them writing home. I wanted to come straight here and show myself as I am. I didn’t want Diana or anybody warned. And I wanted to make sure of myself, and I have.’

‘Terrible!’ said Adrian below his breath.

Ferse’s eyes seemed to burn into him again.

‘You used to be in love with my wife, Cherrell; you still are. Well?’

‘We are just as we were,’ said Adrian, ‘friends.’

‘You’d say that anyway.’

‘Perhaps. But there is no more to say, except that I’m bound to think of her first, as I always have.’

‘That’s why you’re here, then?’

‘Gracious, man! Haven’t you realized the shock it will be to her? Perhaps you can’t remember the life you led her before you went in there? But do you think she’s forgotten? Wouldn’t it be fairer to her and to yourself if you came to

my room, say, at the Museum, and saw her there for the first time?’

‘No; I’ll see her here in my own house.’

‘This is where she went through hell, Ferse. You may have been right to keep dark, as you call it, so far as the doctors are concerned, but you’re certainly not right to spring your recovery on her like this.’

Ferse made a violent gesture.

‘You want her kept from me.’

Adrian bowed his head.

‘That may be,’ he said, gently.

‘But look here, Ferse, you’re just as

well able to gauge this situation as myself. Put yourself in her place. Imagine her coming in, as she may at any minute, seeing you without warning, knowing nothing of your recovery, needing time to believe in it – with all her memories of you as you were. What chance are you giving yourself?’

Ferse groaned. ‘What chance shall I be given, if I don’t take any chance I can? Do you think I trust anyone now? Try it – try four years of it, and see!’ and his eyes went swiftly round: ‘Try being watched, try being treated like a dangerous child. I’ve looked on at my own

treatment, as a perfectly sane man, for the last three months. If my own wife can't take me for what I am – clothed and in my right mind, who will or can?’

Adrian went up to him.

‘Gently!’ he said: ‘That’s where you’re wrong. Only *she* knew you at the worst. It should be more difficult for her than for anyone.’

Ferse covered his face.

Adrian waited, grey with anxiety; but when Ferse uncovered his face again he could not bear the look on it, and turned his eyes away.

‘Talk of loneliness!’ said Ferse.
‘Go off your chump, Cherrell, then you’ll know what it means to be lonely for the rest of your days.’

Adrian put a hand on his shoulder.

‘Look here, my dear fellow, I’ve got a spare room at my digs, come and put up with me till we get things straightened out.’ Sudden suspicion grinned from Ferse’s face, an intense searching look came into his eyes; it softened as if with gratitude, grew bitter, softened again.

‘You were always a white man, Cherrell; but no, thanks – I

couldn't. I must be here. Foxes have holes, and I've still got this.'

Adrian sighed.

'Very well; then we must wait for her. Have you seen the children?'

'No. Do they remember me?'

'I don't think so.'

'Do they know I'm alive?'

'Yes. They know that you're away, ill.'

'Not -?' Ferse touched his forehead.

'No. Shall we go up to them?'

Ferse shook his head, and at that moment through the window

Adrian saw Diana coming. He moved quietly towards the door. What was he to do or say? His hand was on the knob when Ferse pushed by him into the hall. Diana had come in with her latchkey. Adrian could see her face grow deadly pale below the casque of her close hat. She recoiled against the wall.

‘It’s all right, Diana,’ he said quickly, and held open the dining-room door. She came from the wall, passed them both into the room, and Ferse followed.

‘If you want to consult me I shall be here,’ said Adrian, and closed

the door....

Husband and wife stood breathing as if they had run a hundred yards instead of walking three.

‘Diana!’ said Ferse: ‘Diana!’

It seemed as if she couldn’t speak, and his voice rose:

‘I’m all right. Don’t you believe me?’

She bent her head, and still didn’t speak.

‘Not a word to throw to a dog?’

‘It’s – it’s the shock.’

‘I have come back sane, I have been sane for three months now.’

‘I am so glad, so glad.’

‘My God! You’re as beautiful as ever.’

And suddenly he gripped her, pressed her hard against him, and began kissing her hungrily. When he let her go, she sank breathless into a chair, gazing at him with an expression of such terror that he put his hands over his face.

‘Ronald – I couldn’t – I couldn’t let it be as it was before. I couldn’t – I couldn’t!’

He dropped on his knees at her feet. ‘I didn’t mean to be violent. Forgive me!’

And then, from sheer exhaustion of the power of feeling, both rose and moved apart.

‘We had better talk it over quietly,’ said Ferse.

‘Yes.’

‘Am I not to live here?’

‘It’s your house. You must do whatever’s best for you.’

He uttered the sound that was so like a laugh.

‘It would be best for me if you and everyone would treat me exactly as if nothing had happened to me.’

Diana was silent. She was silent

so long that again he made that sound.

‘Don’t!’ she said. ‘I will try. But I must – I must have a separate room.’

Ferse bowed. Suddenly his eyes darted at her. ‘Are you in love with Cherrell?’

‘No.’

‘With anyone?’

‘No.’

‘Scared then?’

‘Yes.’

‘I see. Naturally. Well, it’s not for God’s playthings to make terms. We take what we can get. Will you

wire for them to send my things from that place? That will save any fuss they might want to make. I came away without saying good-bye. There is probably something owing too.'

'Of course. I will see to all that.'

'Can we let Cherrell go now?'

'I will tell him.'

'Let me!'

'No, Ronald, I will,' and she moved resolutely past him.

Adrian was leaning against the wall opposite the door. He looked up at her and tried to smile, he had divined the upshot.

‘He is to stay here, but apart. My dear, thank you so much for all. Will you see to that Home for me? I will let you know everything. I’ll take him up to the children now. Good-bye!’ He kissed her hand and went out.

Chapter Sixteen



HUBERT CHERRELL stood outside his father's club in Pall Mall, a senior affair of which he was not yet a member. He was feeling concerned, for he had a respect for his father somewhat odd in days when fathers were commonly treated as younger brethren, or alluded to as 'that old man'. Nervously therefore he entered an edifice wherein more people had held more firmly to the prides and prejudices of a lifetime than possibly anywhere else on earth. There was little however,

either of pride or prejudice, about the denizens of the room into which he was now shown. A short alert man with a pale face and a tooth-brush moustache was biting the end of a pen, and trying to compose a letter to *The Times* on the condition of Iraq; a modest-looking little Brigadier General with a bald forehead and grey moustache was discussing with a tall modest-looking Lieutenant Colonel the flora of the island of Cyprus; a man of square build, square cheek-bones and lion-like eyes, was sitting in the window as still as if he had just buried an aunt

and were thinking whether or not he would try and swim the Channel next year; and Sir Conway himself was reading *Whitaker's Almanack*.

‘Hallo, Hubert! This room’s too small. Come into the hall.’ Hubert had the instant feeling not only that he wanted to say something to his father, but that his father wanted to say something to him. They sat down in a recess.

‘What’s brought you up?’

‘I want to get married, Sir.’

‘Married?’

‘To Jean Tasburgh.’

‘Oh!’

‘We thought of getting a special licence and having no fuss.’

The General shook his head.

‘She’s a fine girl, and I’m glad you feel like that, but the fact is your position’s queer, Hubert. I’ve just been hearing.’

Hubert noticed suddenly how worn-looking was his father’s face. ‘That fellow you shot. They’re pressing for your extradition on a charge of murder.’

‘What?’

‘It’s a monstrous business, and I can’t believe they’ll go on with it in the face of what you say about his

going for you – luckily you’ve still got his scar on your arm; but it seems there’s the deuce of a fuss in the Bolivian papers; and those half-castes are sticking together about it.’

‘I must see Hallorsen at once.’

‘The authorities won’t be in a hurry, I expect.’

After this, the two sat silent in the big hall, staring in front of them with very much the same expression on their faces. At the back of both their minds the fear of this development had lurked, but neither had ever permitted it to take definite shape; and its

wretchedness was therefore the more potent. To the General it was even more searing than to Hubert. The idea that his only son could be haled half across the world on a charge of murder was as horrible as a nightmare.

‘No good to let it prey on our minds, Hubert,’ he said at last; ‘if there’s any sense in the country at all we’ll get this stopped. I was trying to think of someone who knows how to get at people. I’m helpless in these matters – some fellows seem to know everybody and exactly how to work them. I think we’d better go to Lawrence

Mont; he knows Saxenden anyway, and probably the people at the Foreign Office. It was Topsham who told me, but he can do nothing. Let's walk, shall we? Do us good.'

Much touched by the way his father was identifying himself with his trouble, Hubert squeezed his arm, and they left the Club. In Piccadilly the General said, with a transparent effort: 'I don't much like all these changes.'

'Well, Sir, except for Devonshire House, I don't believe I notice them.'

'No, it's queer; the spirit of

Piccadilly is stronger than the street itself, you can't destroy its atmosphere. You never see a top hat now, and yet it doesn't seem to make any difference. I felt the same walking down Piccadilly after the war as I did as a youngster back from India. One just had the feeling of having got there at last.'

'Yes; you get a queer sort of homesickness for it. I did in Mesopotamia and Bolivia. If one closed one's eyes the whole thing would start up.'

'Core of English life,' began the General, and stopped, as if surprised at having delivered a

summary.

‘Even the Americans feel it,’ remarked Hubert, as they turned into Half-Moon Street. ‘Hallorsen was saying to me they had nothing like it over there; “no focus for their national influence” was the way he put it.’

‘And yet they *have* influence,’ said the General.

‘No doubt about that, Sir, but can you define it? Is it their speed that gives it them?’

‘Where does their speed get them? Everywhere in general; nowhere in particular. No, it’s their

money, I think.’

‘Well, I’ve noticed about Americans, and it’s where most people go wrong, that they care very little for money as money. They like to get it fast; but they’d rather lose it fast than get it slow.’

‘Queer thing having no core,’ said the General.

‘The country’s too big, Sir. But they have a sort of core, all the same – pride of country.’

The General nodded.

‘Queer little old streets these. I remember walking with my Dad from Curzon Street to the St.

James' Club in '82 – day I first went to Harrow – hardly a stick changed.' And so, concerned in talk that touched not on the feelings within them, they reached Mount Street.

‘There’s your Aunt Em, don’t tell her.’

A few paces in front of them Lady Mont was, as it were, swimming home. They overtook her some hundred yards from the door.

‘Con,’ she said, ‘you’re lookin’ thin.’

‘My dear girl, I never was

anything else.'

'No. Hubert, there was somethin' I wanted to ask you. Oh! I know! But Dinny said you hadn't had any breeches since the war. How do you like Jean? Rather attractive?'

'Yes, Aunt Em.'

'She wasn't expelled.'

'Why should she have been?'

'Oh! well, you never know. She's never terrorized me. D'you want Lawrence? It's Voltaire now and Dean Swift. So unnecessary – they've been awfully done; but he likes doin' them because they bite. About those mules, Hubert?'

‘What about them?’

‘I never can remember if the donkey is the sire or the dam.’

‘The donkey is the sire and the dam a mare, Aunt Em.’

‘Yes, and they don’t have children – such a blessin’. Where’s Dinny?’

‘She’s in town, somewhere.’

‘She ought to marry.’

‘Why?’ said the General.

‘Well, there she is! Hen was saying she’d make a good lady-in-waitin’ – unselfish. That’s the danger.’ And, taking a latch-key out of her bag, Lady Mont applied

it to the door.

‘I can’t get Lawrence to drink tea – would you like some?’

‘No thank you, Em.’

‘You’ll find him stewin’ in the library.’ She kissed her brother and her nephew, and swam towards the stairs. ‘Puzzlin’,’ they heard her say as they entered the library. They found Sir Lawrence surrounded by the works of Voltaire and Swift, for he was engaged on an imaginary dialogue between those two serious men. He listened gravely to the General’s tale.

‘I saw,’ he said, when his

brother-in-law had finished, ‘that Hallorsen had repented him of the evil – that will be Dinny. I think we’d better see him – not here, there’s no cook, Em’s still slimming – but we can all dine at the Coffee House.’ And he took up the telephone.

Professor Hallorsen was expected in at five and should at once be given the message.

‘This seems to be more of an F.O. business than a Police matter,’ went on Sir Lawrence. ‘Let’s go over and see old Shropshire. He must have known your father well, Con; and his nephew, Bobbie

Ferrar, is about as fixed a star as there is at the F.O. Old Shropshire's always in!'

Arrived at Shropshire House Sir Lawrence said:

'Can we see the Marquess, Pommatt?'

'I rather think he's having his lesson, Sir Lawrence.'

'Lesson – in what?'

'Heinstein, is it, Sir Lawrence?'

'Then the blind is leading the blind, and it will be well to save him. The moment there's a chance, Pommatt, let us in.'

'Yes, Sir Lawrence.'

‘Eighty-four and learning Einstein. Who said the aristocracy was decadent? I should like to see the bloke who’s teaching it, though; he must have singular powers of persuasion – there are no flies on old Shropshire.’

At this moment a man of ascetic aspect, with a cold deep eye and not much hair, entered, took hat and umbrella from a chair, and went out.

‘Behold the man!’ said Sir Lawrence. ‘I wonder what he charges? Einstein is like the electron or the vitamin – inapprehensible; it’s as clear a case

of money under false pretences as I've ever come across. Come along.'

The Marquess of Shropshire was walking up and down his study, nodding his quick and sanguine grey-bearded head as if to himself.

'Ah! young Mont,' he said, 'did you meet that man – if he offers to teach you Einstein, don't let him. He can no more explain space bounded yet infinite, than I can.'

'But even Einstein can't, Marquess.'

'I am not old enough,' said the Marquess, 'for anything but the exact sciences. I told him not to

come again. Whom have I the pleasure of seeing?’

‘My brother-in-law General Sir Conway Cherrell, and his son Captain Hubert Cherrell, D.S.O. You’ll remember Conway’s father, Marquess – he was Ambassador at Madrid.’

‘Yes, yes, dear me, yes! I know your brother Hilary, too; a live wire. Sit down! Sit down, young man! Is it anything to do with electricity?’

‘Not wholly, Marquess; more a matter of extradition.’

‘Indeed!’ The Marquess, raising

his foot to the seat of a chair, leaned his elbow on his knee and his bearded chin on his hand. And, while the General was explaining he continued to stand in this attitude, gazing at Hubert, who was sitting with compressed lips, and lowered eyes. When the General had finished the Marquess said:

‘D.S.O., I think your uncle said. In the war?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘I shall do what I can. Could I see that scar?’

Hubert drew up his left sleeve,

unlinked his shirt cuff and exposed an arm up which a long glancing scar stretched almost from wrist to elbow.

The Marquess whistled softly through teeth still his own. 'Narrow escape that, young man.'

'Yes, Sir. I put up my arm just as he struck.'

'And then?'

'Jumped back and shot him as he came on again. Then I fainted.'

'This man was flogged for ill-treating his mules, you say?'

'Continually ill-treating them.'

'Continually?' repeated the

Marquess. ‘Some think the meat-trade and Zoological Society continually ill-treat animals, but I never heard of their being flogged. Tastes differ. Now, let me see, what can I do? Is Bobbie in town, young Mont?’

‘Yes, Marquess. I saw him at the Coffee House yesterday.’

‘I will get him to breakfast. If I remember he does not allow his children to keep rabbits, and has a dog that bites everybody. That should be to the good. A man who is fond of animals would always like to flog a man who isn’t. Before you go, young Mont, will you tell

me what you think of this?’ And replacing his foot on the ground, the Marquess went to the corner, took up a canvas that was leaning against the wall, and brought it to the light. It represented with a moderate degree of certainty a young woman without clothes.

‘By Steinvitch,’ said the Marquess; ‘she could corrupt no morals, could she – if hung?’

Sir Lawrence screwed in his monocle: ‘The oblong school. This comes of living with women of a certain shape, Marquess. No, she couldn’t corrupt morals, but she might spoil digestions – flesh sea-

green, hair tomato, style blobby.
Did you buy her?’

‘Hardly,’ said the Marquess; ‘she is worth a good deal of money, I am told. You – you wouldn’t take her away, I suppose?’

‘For you, Sir, I would do most things, but not that; no,’ repeated Sir Lawrence, moving backwards, ‘not that.’

‘I was afraid of it,’ said the Marquess, ‘and yet I am told that she has a certain dynamic force. Well, that is that! I liked your father, General,’ he said, more earnestly, ‘and if the word of his grandson is not to be taken against

that of half-caste muleteers, we shall have reached a stage of altruism in this country so complete that I do not think we can survive. I will let you know what my nephew says. Good-bye, General; good-bye, my dear young man – that is a very nasty scar. Good-bye, young Mont – you are incorrigible.’

On the stairs Sir Lawrence looked at his watch. ‘So far,’ he said, ‘the matter has taken twenty minutes – say twenty-five from door to door. They can’t do it at that pace in America – and we very nearly had an oblong young

woman thrown in. Now for the Coffee House, and Hallorsen.' And they turned their faces towards St James's Street. 'This street,' he said, 'is the Mecca of Western man, as the Rue de la Paix is the Mecca of Western woman.' And he regarded his companions whimsically. What good specimens they were of a product at once the envy and mock of every other country! All over the British Empire men made more or less in their image were doing the work and playing the games of the British world. The sun never set on the type; history had looked on it and decided that it would survive.

Satire darted at its joints, and rebounded from an unseen armour. 'It walks quietly down the days of Time,' he thought, 'the streets and places of the world, without manner to speak of, without parade of learning, strength, or anything, endowed with the conviction, invisible, impermeable, of being IT.'

'Yes,' he said on the doorstep of 'The Coffee House', 'I look on this as the plumb centre of the universe. Others may claim the North Pole, Rome, Montmartre – I claim the Coffee House, oldest Club in the world, and I suppose, by

plumbing standards, the worst. Shall we wash, or postpone it to a more joyful opportunity? Agreed. Let's sit down here, then, and await the apostle of plumbing. I take him for a hustler. Pity we can't arrange a match between him and the Marquess. I'd back the old boy.'

The American looked very big coming into the low hall of the oldest Club in the world.

'Sir Lawrence Mont,' he said; 'Ah! Captain! General Sir Conway Cherrell? Proud to meet you, General. And what can I do for you, gentlemen?'

He listened to Sir Lawrence's recital with a deepening gravity. 'Isn't that too bad? I can't take this sitting. I'm going right along now to see the Bolivian Minister. And, Captain, I've kept the address of your boy Manuel, I'll cable our Consul at La Paz to get a statement from him right away, confirming your story. Who ever heard of such darned foolishness? Forgive me, gentlemen, but I'll have no peace till I've set the wires going.' And with a circular movement of his head he was gone. The three Englishmen sat down again.

‘Old Shropshire must look to his

heels,' Sir Lawrence said.

'So that's Hallorsen,' said the General. 'Fine-looking chap.'

Hubert said nothing. He was moved.

Chapter Seventeen



UNEASY and silent, the two girls drove towards St. Augustine's-in-the-Meads.

‘I don’t know which I’m most sorry for,’ said Dinny, suddenly: ‘I never thought about insanity before. People either make a joke of it or hide it away. But it seems to me more pitiful than anything in the world; especially when it’s partial like this.’

Jean turned on her a surprised look – Dinny with the mask of humour off was new.

‘Which way now?’

‘Up here; we have to cross the Euston Road. Personally, I don’t believe Aunt May can put us up. She’s sure to have people learning to slum. Well, if she can’t, we’ll telephone to Fleur. I wish I’d thought of that before.’

Her prediction was verified – the Vicarage was full, her aunt out, her uncle at home.

‘While we’re here, we’d better find out whether Uncle Hilary will do you in,’ whispered Dinny.

Hilary was spending the first free hour of three days in his shirt

sleeves, carving the model of a Viking ship. For the production of obsolete ships in miniature was the favourite recreation now of one who had no longer leisure or muscle for mountain climbing. The fact that they took more time to complete than anything else, and that he had perhaps less time than anybody else to give to their completion, had not yet weighed with him. After shaking hands with Jean, he excused himself for proceeding with his job.

‘Uncle Hilary,’ began Dinny, abruptly, ‘Jean is going to marry Hubert, and they want it to be by

special licence; so we've come to ask if you would marry them.'

Hilary halted his gouging instrument, narrowed his eyes till they were just shrewd slits, and said:

'Afraid of changing your minds?'

'Not at all,' said Jean.

Hilary regarded her attentively. In three words and one look she had made it clear to him that she was a young woman of character.

'I've met your father,' he said, 'he always takes plenty of time.'

'Dad is perfectly docile about this.'

‘That’s true,’ said Dinny; ‘I’ve seen him.’

‘And *your* father, my dear?’

‘He *will* be.’

‘If he is,’ said Hilary, again gouging at the stern of his ship, ‘I’ll do it. No point in delay if you really know your minds.’ He turned to Jean, ‘You ought to be good at mountains; the season’s over, or I’d recommend that to you for your honeymoon. But why not a trawler in the North Sea?’

‘Uncle Hilary,’ said Dinny, ‘refused a Deanship. He is noted for his asceticism.’

‘The hat ropes did it, Dinny, and let me tell you that the grapes have been sour ever since. I cannot think why I declined a life of some ease with time to model all the ships in the world, the run of the newspapers, and the charms of an increasing stomach. Your Aunt never ceases to throw them in my teeth. When I think of what Uncle Cuffs did with his dignity, and how he looked when he came to the end, I see my wasted life roll out behind me, and visions of falling down when they take me out of the shafts. How strenuous is your father, Miss Tasburgh?’

‘Oh, he just marks time,’ said Jean; ‘but that’s the country.’

‘Not entirely! To mark time and to think you’re not – there never was a more universal title than “The Man who was”.’

‘Unless,’ said Dinny, ‘it’s “The Man who never was”. Oh! Uncle, Captain Ferse suddenly turned up today at Diana’s.’

Hilary’s face became very grave.

‘Ferse! That’s either most terrible, or most merciful. Does your Uncle Adrian know?’

‘Yes; I fetched him. He’s there now with Captain Ferse. Diana

wasn't in.'

'Did you see Ferse?'

'I went in and had a talk with him,' said Jean; 'he seemed perfectly sane except that he locked me in.'

Hilary continued to stand very still.

'We'll say good-bye now, Uncle; we're going to Michael's.'

'Good-bye; and thank you very much, Mr Cherrell.'

'Yes,' said Hilary, absently, 'we must hope for the best.'

The two girls, mounting the car, set out for Westminster.

‘He evidently expects the worst,’ said Jean.

‘Not difficult, when both alternatives are so horrible.’

‘Thank you!’

‘No, no!’ murmured Dinny: ‘I wasn’t thinking of you.’ And she thought how remarkably Jean could keep to a track when she was on it!

Outside Michael’s house in Westminster they encountered Adrian, who had telephoned to Hilary and been informed of their changed destination. Having ascertained that Fleur could put the

girls up, he left them; but Dinny, smitten by the look on his face, ran after him. He was walking towards the river, and she joined him at the corner of the Square.

‘Would you rather be alone, Uncle?’

‘I’m glad of *you*, Dinny. Come along.’

They went at a good pace westward along the Embankment, Dinny slipping her hand within his arm. She did not talk, however, leaving him to begin if he wished.

‘You know I’ve been down to that Home several times,’ he said,

presently, 'to see how things were with Ferse, and make sure they were treating him properly. It serves me right for not having been these last months. But I always dreaded it. I've been talking to them now on the 'phone. They wanted to come up, but I've told them not to. What good can it do? They admit he's been quite normal for the last two weeks. In such cases it seems they wait a month at least before reporting. Ferse himself says he's been normal for three months.'

'What sort of place is it?'

'A largish country house – only

about ten patients; each has his own rooms and his own attendant. It's as good a place, I suppose, as you could find. But it always gave me the horrors with its spiky wall round the grounds and general air of something hidden away. Either I'm over-sensitive, Dinny, or this particular affliction does seem to me too dreadful.'

Dinny squeezed his arm. 'So it does to me. How did he get away?'

'He'd been so normal that they weren't at all on their guard – he seems to have said he was going to lie down, and slipped out during lunch time. He must have noticed

that some tradesman came at a certain time every day, for he slid out when the lodge-keeper was taking in parcels; he walked to the station and took the first train. It's only twenty miles. He'll have been in town before they found out he was gone. I'm going down there tomorrow.'

'Poor Uncle!' said Dinny, softly.

'Well, my dear, so things go in this life. But to be torn between two horrors is not my dream.'

'Was it in his family?'

Adrian nodded. 'His grandfather died raving. But for the war it

might never have developed in Ferse, but you can't tell. Hereditary madness? Is it fair? No, Dinny, I'm not a believer in divine mercy in any form that we humans can understand, or in any way that we would exercise it ourselves. An all-embracing creativity and power of design without beginning and without end – obviously. But – tie it to our apron strings we can't. Think of a mad-house! One simply daren't. And see what the fact that one daren't means for those poor creatures. The sensitive recoil and that leaves them mainly to the insensitive, and God help them!'

‘According to you, God won’t.’

‘God is the helping of man by man, somebody once said; at all events that’s all the working version we can make of Him.’

‘And the Devil?’

‘The harming of man by man, only I’d throw in animals.’

‘Pure Shelley, Uncle.’

‘Might be a lot worse. But I become a wicked Uncle, corrupting the orthodoxy of Youth.’

‘You can’t corrupt what is not, dear. Here’s Oakley Street. Would you like me to go and ask Diana if she wants anything?’

‘Wouldn’t I? I’ll wait for you at this corner, Dinny; and thank you ever so.’

Dinny walked swiftly, looking neither to right nor left, and rang the bell. The same maid answered it.

‘I don’t want to come in, but could you find out for me quietly from Mrs Ferse whether she’s all right, or whether she wants anything. And will you tell her that I’m at Mrs Michael Mont’s, and am ready to come at any moment, and to stay if she’d like me.’

While the maid was gone upstairs she strained her ears, but

no sound reached them till the maid came back.

‘Mrs Ferse says, Miss, to thank you very heartily, and to say she won’t fail to send for you if she needs you. She’s all right at present, Miss; but, oh dear! we *are* put about, hoping for the best. And she sends her love, Miss; and Mr Cherrell’s not to worry.’

‘Thank you,’ said Dinny: ‘Give her our love and say there we are – all ready.’

Then, swiftly, looking neither to left nor right, she returned to Adrian. The message repeated, they walked on.

‘Hanging in the wind,’ said Adrian, ‘is there anything more dreadful? And how long – oh, Lord! How long? But as she says, we mustn’t worry,’ and he uttered an unhappy little laugh. It began to grow dusk, and in that comfortless light, neither day nor night, the ragged ends of the streets and bridges seemed bleak and unmeaning. Twilight passed, and with the lamps form began again and contours softened.

‘Dinny, my dear,’ said Adrian, ‘I’m not fit to walk with; we’d better get back.’

‘Come and dine at Michael’s

then, Uncle – do!’

Adrian shook his head.

‘Skeletons should not be at feasts. I don’t know how to abide myself as your Nurse used to sa I’m sure.’

‘She did not; she was Scotch. Is Ferse a Scottish name?’

‘May have been originally. But Ferse came from West Sussex, somewhere in the Downs – an old family.’

‘Do you think old families are queer?’

‘I don’t see why. When there’s a case of queerness in an old family,

it's conspicuous of course, instead of just passing without notice. Old families are not inbred like village folk.' By instinct for what might distract him, Dinny went on:

‘Do you think age in families has any points to it at all, Uncle?’

‘What is age? All families are equally old, in one sense. But if you're thinking of quality due to mating for generations within a certain caste, well, I don't know – there's certainly “good breeding” in the sense that you'd apply it to dogs or horses, but you can get that in any favourable physical circumstances – in the dales, by the

sea; wherever conditions are good. Sound stock breeds sound stock – that's obvious. I know villages in the very North of Italy where there isn't a person of rank, and yet not one without beauty and a look of breeding. But when you come to breeding from people with genius or those exceptional qualities which bring men to the front, I'm very doubtful whether you don't get distortion rather than symmetry. Families with military or naval origin and tradition have the best chance, perhaps – good physique and not too much brain; but Science and the Law and Business

are very distorting. No! where I think “old” families may have a pull is in the more definite sense of direction their children get in growing up, a set tradition, a set objective; also perhaps to a better chance in the marriage market; and in most cases to more country life, and more encouragement to taking their own line and more practice in taking it. What’s talked of as “breeding” in humans is an attribute of mind rather than of body. What one thinks and feels is mainly due to tradition, habit and education. But I’m boring you, my dear.’

‘No, no, Uncle; I’m terribly interested. You believe then in the passing on of an attitude to life rather than in blood.’

‘Yes, but the two are very mixed.’

‘And do you think “oldness” is going out and soon nothing will be handed on?’

‘I wonder. Tradition is extraordinarily strong, and in this country there’s a lot of machinery to keep it alive. You see, there are such a tremendous lot of directive jobs to be done; and the people most fit for such jobs are those who, as children, have had most

practice in taking their own line, been taught not to gas about themselves, and to do things because it's their duty. It's they, for instance, who run the Services, and they'll go on running them, I expect. But privilege is only justified nowadays by running till you drop.'

'A good many,' said Dinny, 'seem to drop first, and then do the running. Well, here we are again, at Fleur's. Now do come in, Uncle! If Diana did want anything you'd be on the spot.'

'Very well, my dear, and bless you – you got me on a subject I

often think about. Serpent!’

Chapter Eighteen



BY pertinacious use of the telephone, Jean had discovered Hubert at 'The Coffee House' and learned his news. She passed Dinny and Adrian as they were coming in.

'Whither away?'

'Shan't be long,' said Jean, and walked round the corner.

Her knowledge of London was small, and she hailed the first cab. Arriving in Eaton Square before a mansion of large and dreary appearance, she dismissed the cab and rang the bell.

‘Lord Saxenden in Town?’

‘Yes, my lady, but he’s not in.’

‘When will he be in?’

‘His lordship will be in to dinner, but – ’

‘Then I’ll wait.’

‘Excuse me – my lady –’

‘Not my lady,’ said Jean, handing him a card; ‘but he’ll see me, all the same.’

The man struggled a moment, received a look straight between the eyes, and said:

‘Will you come in here, my – Miss?’

Jean went. The little room was

barren except for gilt-edged chairs of the Empire period, a chandelier, and two marble-topped console tables.

‘Please give him my card the moment he comes in.’

The man seemed to rally.

‘His Lordship will be pressed for time, Miss.’

‘Not more than I am, don’t worry about that.’ And on a gilt-edged chair she sat down. The man withdrew. With her eyes now on the darkening Square, now on a marble and gilt clock, she sat slim, trim, vigorous, interlacing the long

fingers of browned hands from which she had removed her gloves. The man came in again and drew the curtains.

‘You wouldn’t,’ he said, ‘like to leave a message, Miss, or write a note?’

‘Thank you, no.’

He stood a moment, looking at her as if debating whether she was armed.

‘Miss *Tasburgh*?’ he said.

‘*Tasborough*,’ answered Jean. ‘Lord Saxenden knows me,’ and raised her eyes.

‘Quite so, Miss,’ said the man,

hastily, and again withdrew.

The clock's hands crept on to seven before she heard voices in the hall. A moment later the door was opened and Lord Saxenden came in with her card in his hand, and a face on which his past, present, and future seemed to agree.

‘Pleasure!’ he said: ‘A pleasure.’

Jean raised her eyes, and the thought went through her: ‘Purring stockfish.’ She extended her hand.

‘It’s terribly nice of you to see me.’

‘Not at all.’

‘I wanted to tell you of my engagement to Hubert Cherrell – you remember his sister at the Monts’. Have you heard of this absurd request for his extradition? It’s too silly for words – the shooting was in pure self-defence – he’s got a most terrible scar he could show you at any time.’

Lord Saxenden murmured something inaudible. His eyes had become somewhat frosted.

‘So you see, I wanted to ask you to put a stop to it. I know you have the power.’

‘Power? Not a bit – none at all.’

Jean smiled.

‘Of course you have the power. Everybody knows that. This means such a lot to me.’

‘But you weren’t engaged, were you, the other night?’

‘No.’

‘Very sudden!’

‘Aren’t all engagements sudden?’ She could not perhaps realize the impact of her news on a man over fifty who had entered the room with at all events vague hopes of having made an impression on Youth; but she did realize that she was not all that he had thought

her, and that he was not all that she had thought him. A wary and polite look had come over his face.

‘More hard-boiled than I imagined,’ was her reflection. And changing her tone, she said coldly: ‘After all, Captain Cherrell is a D.S.O. and one of you. Englishmen don’t let each other down, do they? Especially when they’ve been to the same school.’

This remarkably astute utterance, at that disillusioned moment, impressed him who had been ‘Snubby Bantham’.

‘Oh!’ he said: ‘Was he there, too?’

‘Yes. And you know what a time he had on that expedition. Dinny read you some of his diary.’

The colour deepened in his face, and he said with sudden exasperation: ‘You young ladies seem to think I’ve nothing to do but meddle in things that don’t concern me. Extradition is a legal job.’

Jean looked up through her lashes, and the unhappy peer moved as if to duck his head.

‘What can I do?’ he said, gruffly. ‘They wouldn’t listen to me.’

‘Try,’ said Jean. ‘Some men are

always listened to.'

Lord Saxenden's eyes bulged slightly.

'You say he's got a scar. Where?'

Jean pushed up the sleeve on her left arm.

'From here to here. He shot as the man came on again.'

'H'm!'

Looking intently at the arm, he repeated that profound remark, and there was silence, till Jean said suddenly: 'Would *you* like to be extradited, Lord Saxenden?'

He made an impatient movement.

‘But this is an official matter, young lady.’

Jean looked at him again.

‘Is it really true that no influence is ever brought to bear on anybody about anything?’

He laughed.

‘Come and lunch with me at the Piedmont Grill the day after tomorrow – no, the day after that, and I’ll let you know if I’ve been able to do anything.’

Jean knew well when to stop; never in parish meetings did she talk on. She held out her hand: ‘Thank you ever so. One-thirty?’

Lord Saxenden gave her an astonished nod. This young woman had a directness which appealed to one whose life was passed among public matters conspicuous for the lack of it.

‘Good-bye!’ she said.

‘Good-bye, Miss Tasburgh; congratulations.’

‘Thank you. That will depend on you, won’t it?’ And before he could answer she was through the door. She walked back, her mind not in a whirl. She thought clearly and quickly, with a natural distrust of leaving things to others. She must see Hubert that very night; and, on

getting in, she went at once to the telephone again and rang up 'The Coffee House'.

'Is that you, Hubert? Jean speaking.'

'Yes, darling.'

'Come here after dinner. I must see you.'

'About nine?'

'Yes. My love to you. That's all.' And she cut off.

She stood for a moment before going up to dress, as if to endorse that simile of 'leopardess'. She looked, indeed, like Youth stalking its own future – lithe, intent, not to

be deviated, in Fleur's finished and stylistic drawing-room as much at home and yet as foreign to its atmosphere as a cat might be.

Dinner, when any of the diners have cause for really serious anxiety and the others know of it, is conspicuous for avoidance of all but quick-fire conversation. Nobody touched on the Ferse topic, and Adrian left as soon as he had drunk his coffee. Dinny saw him out.

‘Good night, Uncle dear. I shall sleep with my emergency suit-case; one can always get a taxi here at a moment's notice. Promise me not to worry.’

Adrian smiled, but he looked haggard. Jean met her coming from the door and told her the fresh news of Hubert. Her first feeling, of complete dismay, was succeeded by burning indignation.

‘What utter ruffianism!’

‘Yes,’ said Jean. ‘Hubert’s coming in a minute or two and I want him to myself.’

‘Take him up to Michael’s study, then. I’ll go and tell Michael. Parliament ought to know; only,’ she added, ‘it’s not sitting. It only seems to sit when it oughtn’t to.’

Jean waited in the hall to let

Hubert in. When he had gone up with her to that room whose walls were covered with the graven witticisms of the last three generations, she put him into Michael's most comfortable chair, and sat down on his knee. Thus, with her arm round his neck, and her lips more or less to his, she stayed for some minutes.

‘That'll do,’ she said, rising, and lighting cigarettes. ‘This extradition business isn't going to come to anything, Hubert.’

‘But suppose it does.’

‘It won't. But if it does – all the more reason for our being married

at once.’

‘My darling girl, I can’t possibly.’

‘You must. You don’t suppose that if you *were* extradited – which is absurd – I shouldn’t go too. Of course I should, and by the same boat – married or not.’

Hubert looked at her.

‘You’re a marvel,’ he said, ‘but –’

‘Oh! yes, I know. Your father, and your chivalry, and your desire to make me unhappy for my own good, and all that. I’ve seen your uncle Hilary. He’s ready to do it; he’s a padre and a man of real

experience. Now, look here – we'll tell him of this development, and if he'll still do it, we'll be done. We'll go to him together tomorrow morning.'

'But –'

'But! Surely you can trust him; he strikes me as a real person.'

'He is,' said Hubert; 'no one more so.'

'Very well then; that's settled. Now you can kiss me again.' And she resumed her position on his knee. So, but for her acute sense of hearing, they would have been surprised. She was, however,

examining the White Monkey on the wall, and Hubert was taking out his cigarette case, when Dinny opened the door.

‘This monkey is frightfully good,’ said Jean. ‘We’re going to be married, Dinny, in spite of this new nonsense – that is, if your Uncle Hilary still will. You can come with us to him again tomorrow morning, if you like.’

Dinny looked at Hubert, who had risen.

‘She’s hopeless,’ he said: ‘I can’t do anything with her.’

‘And you can’t do anything

without her. Imagine! He thought, if the worst came to the worst and he was sent out to be tried, that I shouldn't be going too. Men really are terribly like babies. Well, Dinny?’

‘I'm glad.’

‘It depends on Uncle Hilary,’ said Hubert; ‘you understand that, Jean.’

‘Yes. He's in touch with real life, and what he says shall go. Come for us at ten tomorrow. Turn your back, Dinny. I'll give him one kiss, and then he must be off.’

Dinny turned her back.

‘Now,’ said Jean. They went down; and soon after, the girls went up to bed. Their rooms were next each other, and furnished with all Fleur’s taste. They talked a little, embraced and parted. Dinny dawdled over her undressing.

The quiet Square, inhabited for the most part by Members of Parliament away on holiday, had few lights in the windows of its houses; no wind stirred the dark branches of the trees; through her open window came air that had no night sweetness; and rumbling noises of the Town kept alive in her the tingling sensations of that

long day.

‘I couldn’t live with Jean,’ she thought, ‘but,’ she added with the greater justice, ‘Hubert could. He needs that sort of thing.’ And she smiled wryly, mocking her sense of having been supplanted. Once in bed she lay, thinking of Adrian’s fear and dismay, of Diana, and that poor wretch, her husband – longing for her – shut off from her – shut off from everyone. In the darkness she seemed to see his eyes flickering, burning and intense; the eyes of a being that yearned to be at home, at rest, and could not be. She drew the bedclothes up to her

own eyes, and over and over, for comfort, repeated to herself the nursery rhyme:

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
Silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty girls all of a row!

Chapter Nineteen



IF you had examined Hilary Cherrell, Vicar of St Augustine's-in-the-Meads, in the privacy that lies behind all appearance, all spoken words, even all human gesture, you would have found that he did not really believe his faithful activity was leading anywhere. But to 'serve' was bred into his blood and bone, as they serve, that is, who lead and direct. As a setter dog, untrained, taken for a walk, will instantly begin to range, as a Dalmatian dog, taken out riding,

will follow from the first under the heels of the horse, so was it bred into Hilary, coming of families who for generations had manned the Services, to wear himself out, leading, directing and doing things for the people round him, without conviction that in his leadership or ministrations he was more than marking the time of his own duty. In an age when doubt obscured everything and the temptation to sneer at caste and tradition was irresistible, he illustrated an 'order' bred to go on doing its job, not because it saw benefit to others, not because it sighted advantage to

self, but because to turn tail on the job was equivalent to desertion. Hilary never dreamed of justifying his 'order' or explaining the servitude to which his father the diplomat, his uncle the Bishop, his brothers the soldier, the 'curator', and the judge (for Lionel had just been appointed) were, in their different ways, committed. He thought of them and himself as just 'plugging along'. Besides, each of his activities had some specious advantage which he could point to, but which, in his heart, he suspected of being graven on paper rather than on stone.

He had dealt with a manifold correspondence when, at nine-thirty on the morning after the reappearance of Ferse, Adrian entered his somewhat threadbare study. Among Adrian's numerous male friends Hilary alone understood and appreciated his brother's feelings and position. There were but two years between them in age, they had been fast chums as boys; were both mountaineers, accustomed in pre-war days to each other's company in awkward ascents and descents still more awkward; had both been to the war, Hilary as Padre in

France, Adrian, who spoke Arabic, on liaison work in the East; and they had very different temperaments, always an advantage to abiding comradeship. There was no need of spiritual discovery between them, and they went at once into Committee of Ways and Means.

‘Any news this morning?’ asked Hilary.

‘Dinny reports all quiet; but sooner or later the strain of being in the same house is bound to break down his control. For the moment the feeling of being home and free may be enough; but I

don't give that more than a week. I'm going down to the Home, but they'll know no more than we.'

'Forgive me, old man, but normal life with her would be best.'

Adrian's face quivered.

'It's beyond human power, Hilary. There's something about such a relationship too cruel for words. It shouldn't be asked of a woman.'

'Unless the poor fellow's going to stay sane.'

'The decision's not for you, or me, or him – it's for her; it's more than anyone ought to have to bear.'

Don't forget what she went through before he went into the Home. He ought to be got out of the house, Hilary.'

'It would be simpler if she took asylum.'

'Who would give it her, except myself, and that would send him over the edge again for a certainty.'

'If she could put up with the conditions here, we could take her,' said Hilary.

'But the children?'

'We could squeeze them in. But to leave him alone and idle

wouldn't help him to stay sane.
Could he do any work?'

'I don't suppose he could. Four years of that would rot any man. And who'd give him a job? If I could get him to come to me!'

'Dinny and that other young woman said that he looks and talks all right.'

'In a way he does. Those people down there may have some suggestion.'

Hilary took his brother's arm.

'Old boy, it's ghastly for you. But ten to one it won't be so bad as we think. I'll talk to May, and if, after

you've seen those people, you think asylum here is the best thing for Diana – offer it.'

Adrian pressed the hand within his arm.

'I'll get off now and catch my train.'

Left to himself Hilary stood frowning. He had seen in his time so much of the inscrutability of Providence that he had given up classing it as benevolent even in his sermons. On the other hand he had seen many people by sheer tenacity defeat many misfortunes, and many other people, defeated by their misfortunes, live well

enough on them afterwards; he was convinced, therefore, that misery was over rated, and that what was lost was usually won. The thing was to keep going and not worry. At this moment he received his second visitor, the girl Millicent Pole, who, though acquitted, had lost her job at Petter and Poplin's; notoriety not being dispelled by legal innocence.

She came, by appointment, in a neat blue dress, and all her money, as it were, in her stockings, and stood waiting to be catechized.

‘Well, Millie, how’s your sister?’

‘She went back yesterday, Mr

Cherrell.’

‘Was she fit to go?’

‘I don’t think so, but she said if she didn’t, she’d likely lose her job, too.’

‘I don’t see that.’

‘She said if she stayed away any longer they’d think we was in *that* together.’

‘Well, and what about *you*? Would you like to go into the country?’

‘Oh, no.’

Hilary contemplated her. A pretty girl, with a pretty figure and ankles, and an easy-going mouth;

it looked to him, frankly, as if she ought to be married.

‘Got a young man, Millie?’

The girl smiled.

‘Not very special, Sir.’

‘Not special enough to get married?’

‘He don’t want to, so far as I can see.’

‘Do you?’

‘I’m not in a hurry.’

‘Well, have you any views?’

‘I’d like – well, I’d like to be a mannykin.’

‘I daresay. Have Petters given

you a reference?’

‘Yes, and they said they were sorry I had to go; but being so much in the papers the other girls —’

‘Yes. Millie, you got yourself into that scrape, you know. I stood up for you because you were hard pressed, but I’m not blind. You’ve got to promise me that you won’t do that again; it’s the first step to blue ruin.’

The girl made just the answer he expected – none.

‘I’m going to turn you over to my wife now. Consult with her,

and if you can't get a job like your old one, we might give you some quick training, and get you a post as a waitress. How would that suit you?’

‘I wouldn't mind that.’

She gave him a look half-shy, half-smiling; and Hilary thought: ‘Faces like that ought to be endowed by the State; there's no other way to keep them safe.’

‘Shake hands, Millie, and remember what I said. Your mother and father were friends of mine, and you're going to remain a credit to them.’

‘Yes, Mr Cherrell.’

‘You bet!’ thought Hilary, and led her into the dining-room opposite, where his wife was working a typing machine. Back in his study he pulled out a drawer of his bureau and prepared to wrestle with accounts, for if there were a place where money was of more importance than in this slum centre of a Christendom whose religion scorns money, Hilary had yet to meet with it.

‘The lilies of the field,’ he thought, ‘toil not, neither do they spin, but they beg all right. How the deuce am I going to get enough

to keep the Institute going over the year?' The problem had not been solved when the maid said:

‘Captain and Miss Cherrell, and Miss Tasburgh.’

‘Phew!’ he thought: ‘*They* don’t let grass grow.’

He had not seen his nephew since his return from the Hallorsen Expedition, and was struck by the darkened and aged look of his face.

‘Congratulations, old man,’ he said. ‘I heard something of your aspiration, yesterday.’

‘Uncle,’ said Dinny, ‘prepare for the role of Solomon.’

‘Solomon’s reputation for wisdom, my irreverent niece, is perhaps the thinnest in history. Consider the number of his wives. Well?’

‘Uncle Hilary,’ said Hubert: ‘I’ve had news that a warrant may be issued for my extradition, over that muleteer I shot. Jean wants the marriage at once in spite of that –’

‘Because of that,’ put in Jean.

‘I say it’s too chancey altogether; and not fair to her. But we agreed to put it to you, and abide by your judgement.’

‘Thank you,’ murmured Hilary;

‘and why to me?’

‘Because,’ said Dinny, ‘you have to make more decisions-while-they-wait than anybody, except police magistrates.’

Hilary grimaced. ‘With your knowledge of Scripture, Dinny, you might have remembered the camel and the last straw. However –!’ And he looked from Jean to Hubert and back again.

‘Nothing can possibly be gained by waiting,’ said Jean; ‘because if they took him I should go out too, anyway.’

‘You would?’

‘Of course.’

‘Could you prevent that, Hubert?’

‘No, I don’t suppose I could.’

‘Am I dealing, young people, with a case of love at first sight?’

Neither of them answered, but Dinny said:

‘Very much so; I could see it from the croquet lawn at Lippinghall.’

Hilary nodded. ‘Well, that’s not against you; it happened to me and I’ve never regretted it. Is your extradition really likely, Hubert?’

‘No,’ said Jean.

‘Hubert?’

‘I don’t know; Father’s worried, but various people are doing their best. I’ve got this scar, you know,’ and he drew up his sleeve.

Hilary nodded. ‘That’s a mercy.’

Hubert grinned. ‘It wasn’t at the time, in that climate, I can tell you.’

‘Have you got the licence?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Get it then. I’ll turn you off.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes, I may be wrong, but I don’t think so.’

‘You aren’t.’ And Jean seized his

hand. 'Will tomorrow at two o'clock be all right for you, Mr Cherrell?'

'Let me look at my book.' He looked at it and nodded.

'Splendid!' cried Jean. 'Now Hubert, you and I will go and get it.'

'I'm frightfully obliged to you, Uncle,' said Hubert; 'if you really think it's not rotten of me.'

'My dear boy,' said Hilary, 'when you take up with a young woman like Jean here, you must expect this sort of thing. *Au revoir*, and God bless you both!'

When they had gone out, he turned to Dinny: 'I'm much touched, Dinny. That was a charming compliment. Who thought of it?'

'Jean.'

'Then she's either a very good or a very bad judge of character. I wonder which. That was quick work. It was ten five when you came in, it's now ten fourteen; I don't know when I've disposed of two lives in a shorter time. There's nothing wrong about the Tasburghs, is there?'

'No, they seem rather sudden, that's all.'

‘On the whole,’ said Hilary, ‘I like them sudden. It generally means sand.’

‘The Zeebrugge touch.’

‘Ah! Yes, there’s a sailor brother, isn’t there?’

Dinny’s eyelids fluttered.

‘Has he laid himself alongside yet?’

‘Several times.’

‘And?’

‘*I’m* not sudden, Uncle.’

‘Backer and filler?’

‘Especially backer.’

Hilary smiled affectionately at

his favourite niece: 'Blue eye true eye. I'll marry you off yet, Dinny. Excuse me now, I have to see a man who's in trouble with the hire-purchase system. He's got in and he can't get out – goes swimming about like a dog in a pond with a high bank. By the way, the girl you saw in Court the other day is in there with your Aunt. Like another look at her? She is, I fear, what we call an insoluble problem, which being interpreted means a bit of human nature. Have a shot at solving her.'

'I should love to, but she wouldn't.'

‘I don’t know that. As young woman to young woman you might get quite a lot of change out of her, and most of it bad, I shouldn’t wonder. That,’ he added, ‘is cynical. Cynicism’s a relief.’

‘It must be, Uncle.’

‘It’s where the Roman Catholics have a pull over us. Well, good-bye, my dear. See you tomorrow at the execution.’

Locking up his accounts, Hilary followed her into the hall; opening the door of the dining-room, he said: ‘My Love, here’s Dinny! I’ll be back to lunch,’ and went out, hatless.

Chapter Twenty



TOWARDS South Square, where Fleur was to be asked to give another reference, the girls left the Vicarage together.

‘I’m afraid,’ said Dinny, overcoming her shyness, ‘that I should want to take it out of somebody, if I were you. I can’t see why you should have lost your place.’ She could see the girl scrutinizing her askance, as if trying to make up her mind whether or no to say what was in it.

‘I got meself talked about,’ she said, at last.

‘Yes, I happened to come into the Court the day you were acquitted. I thought it brutal to make you stand there.’

‘I reely did speak to a man,’ said the girl, surprisingly, ‘I wouldn’t tell Mr Cherrell, but I did. I was just fed-up with wanting money. D’you think it was bad of me?’

‘Well, personally, I should have to want more than money before I did it.’

‘You never have wanted money – not reely.’

‘I suppose you’re right, although I’ve never had much.’

‘It’s better than stealin’,’ said the girl, grimly: ‘after all, what is it? You can forget about it. At least, that’s what I thought. Nobody thinks the worse of a man or does anything to him for it. But you won’t tell Mrs Mont what I’m telling you?’

‘Of course not. Had things been going very badly?’

‘Shockin’. Me and my sister make just enough when we’re in full work. But she was ill five weeks, and on the top of that I lost my purse one day, with thirty bob

in it. That wasn't my fault, anyway.'

'Wretched luck.'

'Rotten! If I'd been a reel one d'you think they'd have spotted me – it was just my being green. I bet girls in high life have no trouble that way when they're hard up.'

'Well,' said Dinny, 'I suppose there are girls not above helping out their incomes in all sorts of ways. All the same, I think that kind of thing ought only to go with affection; but I expect I'm old-fashioned.'

The girl turned another long and

this time almost admiring look on her.

‘You’re a lady, Miss. I must say I should like to be one meself, but what you’re born you stay.’

Dinny wriggled. ‘Oh! Bother that word! The best ladies I’ve known are old cottage women in the country.’

‘Reely?’

‘Yes. And I think some of the girls in London shops are the equal of anyone.’

‘Well, there is some awful nice girls, I must say. My sister is much better than me. She’d never ’ave

done a thing like that. Your uncle said something I shall remember, but I can't never depend on meself. I'm one to like pleasure if I can get it; and why not?'

'The point is rather: What is pleasure? A casual man can't possibly be pleasure. He'd be the very opposite.'

The girl nodded.

'That's true enough. But when you're bein' chivied about for want of money you're willin' to put up with things you wouldn't otherwise. You take my word for that.'

It was Dinny's turn to nod.

'My uncle's a nice man, don't you think?'

'He's a gentleman – never comes religion over you. And he'll always put his hand in his pocket, if there's anything there.'

'That's not often, I should think,' said Dinny; 'my family is pretty poor.'

'It isn't money makes the gentleman.'

Dinny heard the remark without enthusiasm; she seemed, indeed, to have heard it before. 'We'd better take a 'bus now,' she said.

The day was sunny, and they got on the top. ‘D’you like this new Regent Street?’ asked Dinny.

‘Oh yes! I think it’s fine.’

‘Didn’t you like the old street better?’

‘No. It was so dull and yellow, and all the same.’

‘But unlike any other street, and the regularity suited the curve.’

The girl seemed to perceive that a question of taste was concerned; she hesitated, then said assertively:

‘It’s much brighter now, I think. Things seem to move more – not so formal-like.’

‘Ah!’

‘I do like the top of a ’bus,’ continued the girl; ‘you can see such a lot. Life does go on, don’t it?’

In the girl’s cockney-fied voice, those words hit Dinny a sort of blow. What was her own life but a cut-and-dried affair? What risks or adventure did it contain? Life for people who depended on their jobs was vastly more adventurous. Her own job so far had been to have no job. And, thinking of Jean, she said: ‘I’m afraid I live a very humdrum life. I always seem to be waiting for things.’

The girl again stole a sideways look.

‘Why, you must have lots of fun, pretty like you are!’

‘Pretty? My nose turns up.’

‘Ah! but you’ve got style. Style’s everything. I always think you may have looks, but it’s style that gets you there.’

‘I’d rather have looks.’

‘Oh! no. Anyone can be a good-looker.’

‘But not many are,’ and with a glance at the girl’s profile Dinny added: ‘You’re lucky, yourself.’

The girl bridled.

‘I told Mr Cherrell I’d like to be a mannykin, but he didn’t seem to fall for it.’

‘I’m afraid I think that of all inane pursuits that’s the worst. Dressing up for a lot of disgruntled women!’

‘Someone’s got to do it,’ said the girl, defiantly; ‘I like wearing clothes meself. But you need interest to get a thing like that. Perhaps Mrs Mont’ll speak for me. My! Wouldn’t you make a mannykin, with your style, Miss, and slim.’

Dinny laughed. The ’bus had halted at the Westminster end of

Whitehall.

‘We get off here. Ever been in Westminster Abbey?’

‘No.’

‘Perhaps you’d like a look before they pull it down and put up flats or a Cinema.’

‘Are they reely goin’ to?’

‘I fancy it’s only in the back of their minds so far. At present they talk about restoring it.’

‘It’s a big place,’ said the girl, but under the walls a silence fell on her, which remained unbroken when they passed within. Dinny watched her, as with chin uplifted

she contemplated the statue to Chatham and its neighbour.

‘Who’s the old beaver with no clothes on?’

‘Neptune. He’s a symbol. Britannia rules the waves, you know.’

‘Oh!’ And they moved on till the full proportions of the old Museum were better disclosed.

‘My! Isn’t it full of things?’

‘It *is* rather an Old Curiosity Shop. They’ve got all English history here, you know.’

‘It’s awful dark. The pillars look dirty, don’t they?’

‘Shall we just have a look at the Poets’ Corner?’ said Dinny.

‘What’s that?’

‘Where they bury great writers.’

‘Because they wrote rhymes?’
said the girl. ‘Isn’t that funny?’

Dinny did not answer. She knew some of the rhymes and was uncertain. Having scrutinized a number of effigies and names which had for her a certain limited interest, and for the girl apparently none, they moved slowly down the aisle to where between two red wreaths lay the black and gold tablet to the Unknown Warrior.

‘I wonder whether ’e knows,’ said the girl, ‘but I shouldn’t think ’e cares, anyway; nobody knows ’is name, so ’e gets nothin’ out of it.’

‘No. It’s we who get something out of it,’ said Dinny, feeling the sensation in her throat with which the world rewards the Unknown Warrior.

Out in the street again the girl asked suddenly:

‘Are you religious, Miss?’

‘In a sort of way, I think,’ said Dinny, doubtingly.

‘I never was taught any – Dad and Mother liked Mr Cherrell, but

they thought it was a mistake; my Dad was a Socialist, you see, and he used to say religion was part of the capitalist system. Of course we don't go to Church, in our class. We haven't time, for one thing. You've got to keep so still in Church, too. I must say I like more movement. And then, if there's a God, why is he called He? It puts me against Him, I know. Callin' God He gets girls treated as they are, I think. Since my case I've thought about that a good deal after what the Court missionary said. A he can't get on with creation without a she, anyway.'

Dinny stared.

‘You should have said that to my uncle. It’s quite a thought.’

‘They say women are the equal of men now,’ the girl went on, ‘but they aren’t, you know. There wasn’t a girl at my place that wasn’t scared of the boss. Where the money is, there’s the power. And all the magistrates and judges and clergy are he’s, and all the generals. They’ve got the whip, you see, and yet they can’t do nothin’ without us; and if I was Woman as a whole, I’d show ’em.’

Dinny was silent. This girl was bitter from her experience, no

doubt, but there was truth behind what she was saying. The Creator was bi-sexual, or the whole process would have ended at the start. In that was a primal equality, which she had never before quite realized. If the girl had been of her own order she would have answered, but it was impossible to be unreserved with her; and feeling herself snobbish, she fell back on irony.

‘Some rebel! – as the Americans would say!’

‘Of course I’m a rebel,’ said the girl, ‘after that.’

‘Well, here we are at Mrs

Mont's. I've got one or two things to see to, so I'll leave you with her. I hope we shall meet again.' She held out her hand, the girl took it and said simply: 'I've enjoyed it.'

'So have I. Good luck!'

Leaving her in the hall, Dinny walked towards Oakley Street, and her mood was that of one who has failed to go as far as she has wished. She had touched on the uncharted, and recoiled. Her thoughts and feelings were like the twittering of Spring birds who have not yet shaped out their songs. That girl had roused in her some queer desire to be at grips with

Life, without supplying the slightest notion of how to do it. It would be a relief even to be in love. How nice to know one's mind, as Jean and Hubert seemed at once to have known it; as Hallorsen and Alan Tasburgh had declared they knew it. Existence seemed like a Shadow Show rather than Reality. And, greatly dissatisfied, she leaned her elbows on the river parapet, above the tide that was flowing up. Religious? In a sort of way. But what way? A passage in Hubert's diary came back to her. 'Anyone who believes he's going to Heaven has a pull on

chaps like me. He's got a pension dangled.' Was religion belief in reward? If so, it seemed vulgar. Belief in goodness for the sake of goodness, because goodness was beautiful, like a perfect flower, a starry night, a lovely tune! Uncle Hilary did a difficult job well for the sake of doing it well. Was he religious? She must ask him. A voice at her side said:

'Dinny!'

She turned with a start, to see Alan Tasburgh standing there with a broad grin on his face.

'I went to Oakley Street to ask for you and Jean; they told me you

were at the Monts'. I was on my way there, and here you are, stupendous luck!

'I was wondering,' said Dinny, 'whether I'm religious.'

'How queer! So was I!'

'D'you mean whether *you* were or whether *I* was?'

'As a matter of fact I look on us as one person.'

'Do you? Well is one religious?'

'At a pinch.'

'Did you hear the news at Oakley Street?'

'No.'

'Captain Ferse is back there.'

‘Cripes!’

‘Precisely what everybody is saying! Did you see Diana?’

‘No; only the maid – seemed a bit flustered. Is the poor chap still cracked?’

‘No; but it’s awful for Diana.’

‘She ought to be got away.’

‘I’m going to stay there,’ said Dinny, suddenly, ‘if she’ll have me.’

‘I don’t like the idea of that.’

‘I daresay not; but I’m going to.’

‘Why? You don’t know her so very well.’

‘I’m sick of scrimshanking.’

Young Tasburgh stared.

‘I don’t understand.’

‘The sheltered life has not come your way. I want to begin to earn my corn.’

‘Then marry me.’

‘Really, Alan, I never met anyone with so few ideas.’

‘Better to have good ideas than many.’

Dinny walked on. ‘I’m going to Oakley Street now.’

They went along in silence till young Tasburgh said gravely:

‘What’s biting you, my very dear?’

‘My own nature; it doesn’t seem able to make trouble enough for me.’

‘I could do that for you perfectly.’

‘I am serious, Alan.’

‘That’s good. Until you are serious you will never marry me. But why do you want to be bitten?’

Dinny shrugged. ‘I seem to have an attack of Longfellow: “Life is real, life is earnest”; I suppose you can’t realize that being a daughter in the country doesn’t amount to very much.’

‘I won’t say what I was going to

say.'

'Oh, do!'

'That's easily cured. Become a mother in a town.'

'This is where they used to blush,' sighed Dinny. 'I don't want to turn everything into a joke, but it seems I do.'

Young Tasburgh slipped his hand through her arm.

'If you can turn being the wife of a sailor into a joke, you will be the first.'

Dinny smiled. 'I'm not going to marry anyone till it hurts not to. I know myself well enough for that.'

‘All right, Dinny; I won’t worry you.’

They moved on in silence; at the corner of Oakley Street she stopped.

‘Now, Alan, don’t come any further.’

‘I shall turn up at the Monts’ this evening and discover what’s happened to you. And if you want anything done – mind, anything – about Ferse, you’ve only to ‘phone me at the Club. Here’s the number.’ He pencilled it on a card and handed it to her.

‘Shall you be at Jean’s wedding

tomorrow?’

‘Sure thing! I give her away. I only wish –’

‘Good-bye!’ said Dinny.

Chapter Twenty-one



SHE had parted from the young man lightly, but she stood on the doorstep with nerves taut as fiddlestrings. Never having come into contact with mental trouble, her thought of it was the more scaring. The same elderly maid admitted her. Mrs Ferse was with Captain Ferse, and would Miss Cherrell come up to the drawing-room? Where Jean had been locked in Dinny waited some time. Sheila came in, said: 'Hallo! Are you waiting for Muvver?' and went out

again. When Diana did appear her face wore an expression as if she were trying to collect the evidence of her own feelings.

‘Forgive me, my dear, I was going through papers. I’m trying my best to treat him as if nothing had happened.’ Dinny went up to her and stood stroking her arm.

‘But it can’t last, Dinny; It won’t last. I can see it won’t last.’

‘Let me come and stay. You can put it that it was arranged before.’

‘But, Dinny, it may be rather horrible. I don’t know what to do with him. He dreads going out, or

meeting people. And yet he won't hear of going away where nobody knows; and he won't see a doctor, or take any advice. He won't see anyone.'

'He'll see me, and that'll accustom him. I expect it's only the first few days. Shall I go off now and get my things?'

'If you *are* going to be an angel, do!'

'I'll let Uncle Adrian know before I come back; he went down to the Home this morning.'

Diana crossed to the window and stood there with her back to

Dinny. Suddenly she turned:

‘I’ve made up my mind, Dinny: I won’t let him down in any way. If there’s anything I can do to give him a chance, I’m going to do it.’

‘Bless you!’ said Dinny. ‘I’ll help!’ And not trusting either Diana or herself further, she went out and down the stairs. Outside, in passing the dining-room window, she was again conscious of a face with eyes, burningly alive, watching her go by. A feeling of tragic unfairness was with her all the way back to South Square.

Fleur said at lunch:

‘It’s no good fashing yourself till something happens, Dinny. It’s lucky that Adrian’s been such a saint. But this is a very good instance of how little the Law can help. Suppose Diana could have got free, it wouldn’t have prevented Ferse coming straight back to her, or her feeling about him as she does. The Law can’t touch the human side of anything. Is Diana in love with Adrian?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘No, I’m not. I find it difficult enough to know what goes on inside myself.’

‘Which reminds me that your American rang up. He wants to call.’

‘Well, he can. But I shall be at Oakley Street.’

Fleur gave her a shrewd look.

‘Am I to back the sailor then?’

‘No. Put your money on Old Maid.’

‘My dear! Unthinkable!’

‘I don’t see what one gains by marriage.’

Fleur answered with a little hard smile:

‘We can’t stand still, you know, Dinny. At least, we don’t; it’s too

dull.'

'You're modern, Fleur; I'm medieval.'

'Well, you *are* rather early Italian in face. But the early Italians never escaped. Entertain no flattering hopes. Sooner or later you'll be fed up with yourself, and then!'

Dinny looked at her, startled by this flash of discernment in her disillusioned cousin-in-law.

'What have *you* gained, Fleur?'

'I at least am the complete woman, my dear,' Fleur answered, drily.

‘Children, you mean?’

‘They are possible without marriage, or so I am told, but improbable. For you, Dinny, impossible; you’re controlled by an ancestral complex, really old families have an inherited tendency towards legitimacy. Without it they can’t be really old, you see.’

Dinny wrinkled her forehead.

‘I never thought of it before, but I *should* strongly object to having an illegitimate child. By the way, did you give that girl a reference?’

‘Yes. I don’t see at all why she

shouldn't be a mannequin. She's narrow enough. I give the boyish figure another year, at least. After that, mark my words, skirts will lengthen and we shall go in for curves again.'

'Rather degrading, isn't it?'

'How?'

'Chopping and changing shape and hair and all that.'

'Good for trade. We consent to be in the hands of men in order that they may be in ours. Philosophy of vamping.'

'That girl won't have much chance of keeping straight as a

mannequin, will she?’

‘More, I should say. She might even marry. But I always refuse to worry about my neighbour’s morals. I suppose you have to keep up the pretence at Condaford, having been there since the Conquest. By the way, has your father made provision against Death Duties?’

‘He’s not old, Fleur.’

‘No, but people do die. Has he got anything besides the estate?’

‘Only his pension.’

‘Is there plenty of timber?’

‘I loathe the idea of cutting

down trees. Two hundred years of shape and energy all gone in half an hour. It's revolting.'

'My dear, there's generally nothing else for it, except selling, and clearing out.'

'We shall manage somehow,' said Dinny shortly; 'we'd never let Condaford go.'

'Don't forget Jean.'

Dinny sat up very straight.

'She'd never either. The Tasburghs are just as old as we are.'

'Admitted; but that's a young woman of infinite variety and go.'

She'll never vegetate.'

'Condaford is not vegetation.'

'Don't get ruffled, Dinny; I'm only thinking for the best. I don't want to see you outed, any more than I want Kit to lose Lippinghall. Michael is thoroughly unsound. He says that if he's one of the country's roots he's sorry for the country, which is silly of course. No one,' added Fleur, with a sudden queer depth, 'will ever know from me what pure gold Michael is.' Then, seeming to notice Dinny's surprised eyes, she added: 'So, I can wash out the American?'

'You can. Three thousand miles

between me and Condaford – no, Ma'am!’

‘Then I think you should put the poor brute out of his misery, for he confided to me that you were what he called his “ideal”.’

‘Not that again!’ cried Dinny.

‘Yes, indeed; and he further said that he was crazy about you.’

‘That means nothing.’

‘From a man who goes to the ends of the earth to discover the roots of civilization it probably does. Most people would go to the ends of the earth to avoid discovering them.’

‘The moment this thing of Hubert’s is over,’ said Dinny, ‘I will put an end to him.’

‘I think you’ll have to take the veil to do it. You’ll look very nice in the veil, Dinny, walking down the village aisle with the sailor, in a feudal atmosphere, to a German tune. May I be there to see!’

‘I’m not going to marry anyone.’

‘Well, in the meantime shall we ring up Adrian?’

From Adrian’s rooms came the message that he was expected back at four o’clock. He was asked to come on to South Square, and

Dinny went up to put her things together. Coming down again at half past three, she saw on the coat 'sarcophagus' a hat whose brim she seemed to recognize. She was slinking back towards the stairs when a voice said:

‘Why! This is fine! I was scared I’d missed you.’

Dinny gave him her hand, and together they entered Fleur’s ‘parlour’; where, among the Louis Quinze furniture, he seemed absurdly male.

‘I wanted to tell you, Miss Cherrell, what I’ve done about your brother. I’ve fixed it for our Consul

in La Paz to get that boy Manuel to cable his sworn testimony that the Captain was attacked with a knife. If your folk here are anyway sensible, that should clear him. This fool game's got to stop if I have to go back to Bolivia myself.'

'Thank you ever so, Professor.'

'Why! There's nothing I wouldn't do for your brother, now. I've come to like him as if he were my own.'

Those ominous words had a large simplicity, a generous warmth, which caused her to feel small and thin.

'You aren't looking all that well,'

he said, suddenly. 'If there's anything worrying you, tell me and I'll fix it.'

Dinny told him of Ferse's return.

'That lovely lady! Too bad! But maybe she's fond of him, so it'll be a relief to her mind after a time.'

'I am going to stay with her.'

'That's bully of you! Is this Captain Ferse dangerous?'

'We don't know yet.'

He put his hand into a hip pocket and brought out a tiny automatic.

'Put that in your bag. It's the smallest made. I bought it for this

country, seeing you don't go about with guns here.'

Dinny laughed.

'Thank you, Professor, but it would only go off in the wrong place. And, even if there were danger, it wouldn't be fair.'

'That's so! It didn't occur to me, but that's so. A man afflicted that way has every consideration due to him. But I don't like to think of you going into danger.'

Remembering Fleur's exhortation, Dinny said hardily:

'Why not?'

'Because you are very precious

to me.'

'That's frightfully nice of you; but I think you ought to know, Professor, that I'm not in the market.'

'Surely every woman's in the market till she marries.'

'Some think that's when she begins to be.'

'Well,' said Hallorsen gravely, 'I've no use for adultery myself. I want a straight deal in sex as in everything else.'

'I hope you will get it.'

He drew himself up. 'And I want it from you. I have the honour to

ask you to become Mrs Hallorsen, and please don't say "No" right away.'

'If you want a straight deal, Professor, I must.'

She saw his blue eyes film as if with pain, and felt sorry. He came a little closer, looking, as it seemed to her enormous, and she gave a shiver.

'Is it my nationality?'

'I don't know what it is.'

'Or the grouch you had against me over your brother?'

'I don't know.'

'Can't I hope?'

‘No. I am flattered, and grateful, believe me. But no.’

‘Pardon me! Is there another man?’

Dinny shook her head.

Hallorsen stood very still; his face wore a puzzled expression, then cleared suddenly.

‘I judge,’ he said, ‘I haven’t done enough for you. I’ll have to serve a bit.’

‘I’m not worth service. It’s simply that I don’t feel like that towards you.’

‘I have clean hands and a clean heart.’

‘I’m sure you have; I admire you, Professor, but I should never love you.’

Hallorsen drew back again to his original distance, as if distrusting his impulses. He gave her a grave bow. He looked really splendid standing there, full of simple dignity. There was a long silence, then he said:

‘Well, I judge there’s no use crying over spilt milk. Command me in any way. I am your very faithful servant.’ And, turning round, he went out.

Dinny heard the front door close with a slight choke in her throat.

She felt pain at having caused him pain, but relief, too, the relief one feels when something very large, simple, primitive – the sea, a thunderstorm, a bull – is no longer imminent. In front of one of Fleur's mirrors she stood despitefully, as though she had just discovered the over-refinement of her nerves. How could that great handsome, healthy creature care for one so spindly and rarefied as she looked reflected there? He could snap her off with his hands. Was that why she recoiled? The great open spaces of which he seemed a part, with his height, strength, colour, and the

boom of his voice! Funny, silly perhaps – but very real recoil! She belonged where she belonged – not to such as them, to such as him. About such juxtapositions there was even something comic. She was still standing there with a wry smile when Adrian was ushered in.

She turned to him impulsively. Sallow and worn and lined, subtle, gentle, harassed, no greater contrast could have appeared, not any that could have better soothed her jangled nerves. Kissing him, she said:

‘I waited to see you before going to stay at Diana’s!’

‘You *are* going, Dinny?’

‘Yes. I don’t believe you’ve had lunch or tea or anything,’ and she rang the bell. ‘Coaker, Mr Adrian would like – ’

‘A brandy and soda, Coaker, thank you!’

‘Now, Uncle?’ she said, when he had drunk it.

‘I’m afraid, Dinny, one can’t set much store by what they say down there. According to them Ferse ought to go back. But why he should, so long as he acts sanely, I don’t know. They query the idea of his recovery, but they can bring

nothing abnormal against him for some weeks past. I got hold of his personal attendant and questioned him. He seems a decent chap, and he thinks Ferse at the moment is as sane as himself. But – and the whole trouble lies there – he says he was like this once before for three weeks, and suddenly lapsed again. If anything really upsets him – opposition or what not – he thinks Ferse will be just as bad again as ever, perhaps worse. It's a really terrible position.'

'When he's in mania is he violent?'

'Yes; a kind of gloomy violence,

more against himself than anyone else.'

'They're not going to do anything to get him back?'

'They can't. He went there voluntarily; I told you he hasn't been certified. How is Diana?'

'She looks tired, but lovely. She says she is going to do everything she can to give him a chance.'

Adrian nodded.

'That's like her; she has wonderful pluck. And so have you, my dear. It's a great comfort to know you'll be with her. Hilary is ready to take Diana and the

children if she'd go, but she won't, you say.'

'Not at present, I'm sure.'

Adrian sighed.

'Well, we must chance it.'

'Oh! Uncle,' said Dinny. 'I *am* so sorry for you.'

'My dear, what happens to the fifth wheel doesn't matter so long as the car runs. Don't let me keep you. You can get at me any time either at the Museum or my rooms. Good-bye and bless you! My love to her, and tell her all I've told you.'

Dinny kissed him again, and soon after in a cab set forth with

her things to Oakley Street.

Chapter Twenty-two



BOBBIE FERRAR had one of those faces which look on tempests and are never shaken; in other words, he was an ideal permanent official – so permanent that one could not conceive of the Foreign Office functioning without him.

Secretaries of State might come, might go, Bobbie Ferrar remained, bland, inscrutable, and with lovely teeth. Nobody knew whether there was anything in him except an incalculable number of secrets. Of an age which refused to declare

itself, short and square, with a deep soft voice, he had an appearance of complete detachment. In a dark suit with a little light line, and wearing a flower, he existed in a large ante-room wherein was almost nothing except those who came to see the Foreign Minister and instead saw Bobbie Ferrar. In fact the perfect buffer. His weakness was criminology. No murder trial of importance ever took place without the appearance, if only for half-an-hour, of Bobbie Ferrar in a seat more or less kept for him. And he preserved the records of all those

trials in a specially bound edition. Perhaps the greatest testimony to his character, whatever that might be, lay in the fact that no one ever threw his acquaintanceship with nearly everybody up against him. People came to Bobbie Ferrar, not he to them. Yet why? What had he ever done that he should be 'Bobbie' Ferrar to all and sundry? Not even 'the honourable', merely the son of a courtesy lord, affable, unfathomable, always about, he was unquestionably a last word. Without him, his flower, and his faint grin, Whitehall would have been shorn of something that made

it almost human. He had been there since before the war, from which he had been retrieved just in time, some said, to prevent the whole place from losing its character, just in time, too, to stand, as it were, between England and herself. She could not become the shrill edgy hurried harridan the war had tried to make her while his square, leisurely, be-flowered, inscrutable figure passed daily up and down between those pale considerable buildings.

He was turning over a Bulb Catalogue, on the morning of Hubert's wedding day, when the

card of Sir Lawrence Mont was brought to him, followed by its owner, who said at once:

‘You know what I’ve come about, Bobbie?’

‘Completely,’ said Bobbie Ferrar, his eyes round, his head thrown back, his voice deep.

‘Has the Marquess seen you?’

‘I had breakfast with him yesterday. Isn’t he amazing?’

‘Our finest old boy,’ said Sir Lawrence. ‘What are you going to do about it? Old Sir Conway Cherrell was the best Ambassador to Spain you ever turned out of the

shop, and this is his grandson.'

'Has he really got a scar?' asked Bobbie Ferrar, through a faint grin.

'Of course he has.'

'Did he really get it over that?'

'Sceptical image! Of course he did.'

'Amazing!'

'Why?'

Bobbie Ferrar showed his teeth.

'Who can prove it?'

'Hallorsen is getting evidence.'

'It's not in our department, you know.'

'No? But you can get at the

Home Secretary.'

'Um!' said Bobbie Ferrar, deeply.

'You can see the Bolivians about it, anyway.'

'Um!' said Bobbie Ferrar still more deeply, and handed him the catalogue. 'Do you know this new tulip? Complete, isn't it?'

'Now, look you, Bobbie,' said Sir Lawrence, 'this is my nephew; emphatically a "good egg", as you say, and it won't do! See!'

'The age is democratic,' said Bobbie Ferrar cryptically; 'it came up in the House, didn't it – flogging?'

‘We can pull out the national stop if there’s any more fuss there. Hallorsen has taken back his criticism. Well, I’ll leave it to you; you won’t commit yourself if I stay here all the morning. But you’ll do your best because it really is a scandalous charge.’

‘Completely,’ said Bobbie Ferrar. ‘Would you like to see the Croydon murder trial? It’s amazing. I’ve got two seats; I offered one to my Uncle. But he won’t go to any trial until they bring in electrocution.’

‘Did the fellow do it?’

Bobbie Ferrar nodded.

‘The evidence is very shaky,’ he added.

‘Well, good-bye, Bobbie; I rely on you.’

Bobbie Ferrar grinned faintly, and held out his hand.

‘Good-bye,’ he said, through his teeth.

Sir Lawrence went westward to the Coffee House where the porter handed him a telegram: ‘Am marrying Jean Tasburgh two o’clock today St Augustine’s-in-the-Meads delighted to see you and Aunt Em Hubert.’

Passing into the coffee-room, Sir

Lawrence said to the Chief Steward: ‘Butts, I am about to see a nephew turned off. Fortify me quickly.’

Twenty minutes later he was on his way to St Augustine’s, in a cab. He arrived a few minutes before two o’clock and met Dinny going up the steps.

‘You look pale and interesting, Dinny.’

‘I *am* pale and interesting, Uncle Lawrence.’

‘This proceeding appears to be somewhat sudden.’

‘That’s Jean. I’m feeling terribly

responsible. I found her for him, you see.'

They entered the church and moved up to the front pews. Apart from the General, Lady Cherrell, Mrs Hilary and Hubert there was no one except two sightseers and a vergier. Someone's fingers were wandering on the organ. Sir Lawrence and Dinny took a pew to themselves.

'I'm not sorry Em isn't here,' he whispered; 'she still gives way. When you marry, Dinny, have "No tears by request" on your invitation cards. What is it produces moisture at weddings? Even bailiffs weep.'

‘It’s the veil,’ said Dinny;
‘nobody will cry today because
there is none. Look! Fleur and
Michael!’

Sir Lawrence turned his monocle
on them as they came up the aisle.

‘Eight years since we saw them
married. Take it all round, they
haven’t done so badly.’

‘No,’ whispered Dinny; ‘Fleur
told me yesterday that Michael was
pure gold.’

‘Did she? That’s good. There
have been times, Dinny, when I’ve
had my doubts.’

‘Not about Michael.’

‘No, no; he’s a first-rate fellow. But Fleur has fluttered their dovecote once or twice; since her father’s death, however, she’s been exemplary. Here they come!’

The organ had broken into annunciation. Alan Tasburgh with Jean on his arm was coming up the aisle. Dinny admired his square and steady look. As for Jean, she seemed the very image of colour and vitality. Hubert, standing, hands behind him, as if at ease, turned as she came up, and Dinny saw his face, lined and dark, brighten as if the sun had shone on it. A choky feeling gripped her

throat. Then she saw that Hilary in his surplice had come quietly and was standing on the step.

‘I do like Uncle Hilary,’ she thought.

Hilary had begun to speak.

Contrary to her habit in church, Dinny listened. She waited for the word ‘obey’ – it did not come; she waited for the sexual allusions—they were omitted. Now Hilary was asking for the ring. Now it was on. Now he was praying. Now it was the Lord’s Prayer, and they were going to the vestry. How strangely short!

She rose from her knees.

‘Amazingly complete,’ whispered Sir Lawrence, ‘as Bobbie Ferrar would say. Where are they going after?’

‘To the theatre. Jean wants to stay in Town. She’s found a workman’s flat.’

‘Calm before the storm. I wish that affair of Hubert’s were over, Dinny.’

They were coming back from the vestry now, and the organ had begun to play the Mendelssohn march. Looking at those two passing down the aisle Dinny had

feelings of elation and of loss, of jealousy and of satisfaction. Then, seeing that Alan looked as if he, too, had feelings, she moved out of her pew to join Fleur and Michael; but, catching sight of Adrian near the entrance, went to him instead.

‘What news, Dinny?’

‘All right so far, Uncle. I am going straight back now.’

With the popular instinct for experiencing emotion at secondhand a little crowd of Hilary’s parishioners had gathered outside, and a squeaky cheer rose from them as Jean and Hubert got into the brown roadster, and drove

away.

‘Come in this cab with me, Uncle,’ said Dinny.

‘Does Ferse seem to mind your being there?’ asked Adrian, in the cab.

‘He’s quite polite, just silent; his eyes are always on Diana. I’m terribly sorry for him.’

Adrian nodded. ‘And she?’

‘Wonderful; as if nothing were out of the ordinary. He won’t go out, though; just stays in the dining-room – watches from there all the time.’

‘The world must seem to him a

conspiracy. If he remains sane long enough he'll lose that feeling.'

'Need he ever become insane again? Surely there are cases of complete recovery?'

'So far as I can gather, my dear, his case is not likely to be one of them. Heredity is against him, and temperament.'

'I could have liked him, it's such a daring face; but his eyes *are* frightening.'

'Have you seen him with the children?'

'Not yet; but they speak quite nicely and naturally about him; so

he hasn't scared them, you see.'

'At the Home they talked jargon to me about complexes, obsessions, repressions, dissociation – all that sort of thing, but I gathered that his case is one where fits of great gloom alternate with fits of great excitement. Lately, both have grown so much milder that he has become practically normal. What has to be watched for is the recrudescence of one or of the other. He always had a streak of revolt in him; he was up against the leadership in the war, up against democracy after the war. He'll almost certainly get up

against something now he's back. If he does it will ungear him again in no time. If there's any weapon in the house, Dinny, it ought to be removed.'

'I'll tell Diana.'

The cab turned into the King's Road.

'I suppose I'd better not come to the house,' said Adrian, sadly.

Dinny got out, too. She stood a moment watching him, tall and rather stooping, walk away, then turned down Oakley Street, and let herself in. Ferse was in the dining-room doorway.

‘Come in here,’ he said; ‘I want a talk.’

In that panelled room, painted a greenish-gold, lunch had been cleared away, and on the narrow refectory table were a newspaper, a tobacco jar, and several books. Ferse drew up a chair for her and stood with his back to a fire which simulated flames. He was not looking at her, so she was able to study him as she had not yet had the chance of doing. His handsome face was uncomfortable to look on. The high cheek-bones, stiff jaw, and crisp grizzled hair set off those thirsty burning steel-blue eyes.

Even his attitude, square and a-kimbo, with head thrust forward, set off those eyes. Dinny leaned back, scared and faintly smiling. He turned to her and said:

‘What are people saying about me?’

‘I’ve not heard anything; I’ve only been to my brother’s wedding.’

‘Your brother Hubert? Whom has he married?’

‘A girl called Jean Tasburgh. You saw her the day before yesterday.’

‘Oh! Ah! I locked her in.’

‘Yes, why?’

‘She looked dangerous to me. I consented to go into that place, you know. I wasn’t put there.’

‘Oh! I know; I knew you were there of your own accord.’

‘It wasn’t such a bad place, but – well! How do I look?’

Dinny said softly: ‘You see, I never saw you before, except at a distance, but I think you look very well.’

‘I am well. I kept my muscles up. The fellow that looked after me saw to that.’

‘Did you read much?’

‘Lately – yes. What do they think

about me?’

At the repetition of this question Dinny looked up into his face.

‘How can they think about you without having seen you?’

‘You mean I ought to see people?’

‘I don’t know anything about it, Captain Ferse. But I don’t see why not. You’re seeing me.’

‘I like *you*.’

Dinny put out her hand.

‘Don’t say you’re sorry for me,’ Ferse said, quickly.

‘Why should I? You’re perfectly all right, I’m sure.’

He covered his eyes with his hand.

‘I am, but how long shall I be?’

‘Why not always?’

Ferse turned to the fire.

Dinny said, timidly: ‘If you don’t worry, nothing will happen again.’

Ferse spun round to her. ‘Have you seen much of my children?’

‘Not very much.’

‘Any likeness to me in them?’

‘No; they take after Diana.’

‘Thank God for that! What does Diana think about me?’ This time his eyes searched hers, and Dinny realized that on her answer

everything might depend.

‘Diana is just glad.’

He shook his head violently. ‘Not possible.’

‘The truth is often not possible.’

‘She doesn’t hate me?’

‘Why should she?’

‘Your Uncle Adrian – what’s between them? Don’t just say: Nothing.’

‘My uncle worships her,’ said Dinny, quietly, ‘that’s why they are just friends.’

‘Just friends?’

‘Just friends.’

‘That’s all you know, I suppose.’

‘I know for certain.’

Ferse sighed. ‘You’re a good sort. What would you do if you were me?’

Again Dinny felt her ruthless responsibility.

‘I think I should do what Diana wanted.’

‘What is that?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t think she does yet.’

Ferse strode to the window and back.

‘I’ve got to do something for poor devils like myself.’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny, dismayed.

‘I’ve had luck. Most people like me would have been certified, and stuck away against their will. If I’d been poor we couldn’t have afforded that place. To be there was bad enough, but it was miles better than the usual run of places. I used to make my man talk. He’d seen two or three of them.’

He stood silent, and Dinny thought of her uncle’s words: ‘He’ll get up against something, and that will ungear him again in no time.’

Ferse went on suddenly: ‘If you had any other kind of job possible, would *you* take on the care of the

insane? Not you, nor anyone with nerves or sensibility. A saint might, here and there, but there aren't saints enough to go round by a long chalk. No! To look after us you've got to shed the bowels of compassion, you must be made of iron, you must have a hide like leather; and no nerves. With nerves you'd be worse than the thick-skinned because you'd be jumpy, and that falls on us. It's an impasse. My God! Haven't I thought about it? And – money. No one with money ought to be sent to one of those places. Never, never! Give him his prison at home

somehow – somewhere. If I hadn't known that I could come away at any time – if I hadn't hung on to that knowledge even at my worst, I wouldn't be here now – I'd be raving. God! I'd be raving! Money! And how many have money? Perhaps five in a hundred! And the other ninety-five poor devils are stuck away, willy-nilly, stuck away! I don't care how scientific, how good those places may be, as asylums go – they mean death in life. They must. People outside think we're as good as dead already – so who cares? Behind all the pretence of scientific treatment

that's what they really feel. We're obscene – no longer human – the old idea of madness clings, Miss Cherrell; we're a disgrace, we've failed. Hide us away, put us underground. Do it humanely – twentieth century! Humanely! Try! You can't! Cover it all up with varnish then – varnish – that's all it is. What else can it be? Take my word for that. Take my man's word for it. He knew.'

Dinny was listening, without movement. Suddenly Ferse laughed. 'But we're not dead; that's the misfortune, we're not dead. If only we were! All those poor brutes

– not dead – as capable of suffering in their own way as anyone else – more capable. Don't I know? And what's the remedy?' He put his hands to his head.

'To find a remedy,' said Dinny, softly, 'wouldn't it be wonderful?'

He stared at her.

'Thicken the varnish – that's all we do, all we shall do.'

'Then why worry yourself?' sprang to Dinny's lips, but she held the words back.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'you will find the remedy, only that will need patience and calm.'

Ferse laughed.

‘You must be bored to death.’
And he turned away to the
window.

Dinny slipped quietly out.

Chapter Twenty-three



IN that resort of those who know – the Piedmont Grill – the knowing were in various stages of repletion, bending towards each other as if in food they had found the link between their souls. They sat, two by two, and here and there four by five, and here and there a hermit, moody or observant over a cigar, and between the tables moved trippingly the lean and nimble waiters with faces unlike their own, because they were harassed by their memories. Lord Saxenden

and Jean, in a corner at the near end, had already consumed a lobster, drunk half a bottle of hock, and talked of nothing in particular, before she raised her eyes slowly from an empty claw and said:

‘Well, Lord Saxenden?’

His blue stare goggled slightly at that thick-lashed glance.

‘Good lobster?’ he said.

‘Amazing.’

‘I always come here when I want to be well fed. Is that partridge coming, waiter?’

‘Yes, milord.’

‘Well, hurry with it. Try this

hock, Miss Tasburgh; you're not drinking.'

Jean raised her greenish glass. 'I became Mrs Hubert Cherrell yesterday. It's in the paper.'

Lord Saxenden's cheeks expanded slightly with the thought: 'Now, how does that affect me? Is this young lady more amusing single or more amusing married?'

'You don't waste time,' he said, his eyes exploring her, as though seeking confirmation of her changed condition. 'If I'd known, I shouldn't have had the cheek to ask you to lunch without him.'

‘Thank you,’ said Jean; ‘he’s coming along presently.’ And, through her lashes, she looked at him draining his glass thoughtfully.

‘Have you any news for me?’

‘I’ve seen Walter.’

‘Walter?’

‘The Home Secretary.’

‘How terribly nice of you!’

‘It was. Can’t bear the fellow. Got a head like an egg, except for his hair.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Young lady, nobody in any official department ever *says* anything. He always “thinks it

over”. Administration has to be like that.’

‘But of course he’ll pay attention to what *you* said. What *did* you say?’

Lord Saxenden’s iced eyes seemed to answer: ‘Really, you know, really!’

But Jean smiled; and the eyes thawed gradually.

‘You’re the most direct young woman I’ve ever come across. As a matter of fact I said: “Stop it, Walter.” ’

‘How splendid!’

‘He didn’t like it. He’s a “just

beast”.’

‘Could I see him?’

Lord Saxenden began to laugh. He laughed like a man who has come across the priceless.

Jean waited for him to finish, and said:

‘Then I shall.’

The partridge filled the ensuing gap.

‘Look here!’ said Lord Saxenden, suddenly: ‘If you really mean that, there’s one man who might wangle you an interview – Bobbie Ferrar. He used to be with Walter when he was Foreign Secretary. I’ll give you

a chit to Bobbie. Have a sweet?’

‘No, thank you. But I *should* like some coffee, please. There’s Hubert!’

Just free of the revolving cage, which formed the door, was Hubert, evidently in search of his wife.

‘Bring him over here!’

Jean looked intently at her husband. His face cleared, and he came towards them.

‘You’ve got the eye all right,’ murmured Lord Saxenden, rising. ‘How de do? You’ve married a remarkable wife. Have some

coffee? The brandy's good here.' And taking out a card he wrote on it in a hand both neat and clear:

'Robert Ferrar, Esq., F.O.,
Whitehall. Dear Bobbie, do see my
young friend Mrs Hubert Charwell
and get her an interview with
Walter if at all possible. Saxenden.'

Then, handing it to Jean, he asked the waiter for his bill.

'Hubert,' said Jean, 'show Lord Saxenden your scar,' and, undoing the link of his cuff, she pushed up his sleeve. That livid streak stared queer and sinister above the tablecloth.

‘H’m!’ said Lord Saxenden:
‘useful wipe, that.’

Hubert wriggled his arm back under cover. ‘She still takes liberties,’ he said.

Lord Saxenden paid his bill and handed Hubert a cigar.

‘Forgive me if I run off now. Stay and finish your coffee. Good-bye and good luck to you both!’ And, shaking their hands, he threaded his way out among the tables. The two young people gazed after him.

‘Such delicacy,’ said Hubert, ‘is not his known weakness, I believe.

Well, Jean?’

Jean looked up.

‘What does F.O. mean?’

‘Foreign Office, my country girl.’

‘Finish your brandy, and we’ll go and see this man.’

But in the courtyard a voice behind them said:

‘Why! Captain! Miss Tasburgh!’

‘My wife, Professor.’

Hallorsen seized their hands.

‘Isn’t that just wonderful? I’ve a cablegram in my pocket, Captain, that’s as good as a wedding present.’

Over Hubert's shoulder, Jean read out: ‘ “Exonerating statement sworn by Manuel mailed stop American Consulate La Paz.” That's splendid, Professor. Will you come with us and see a man at the Foreign Office about this?’

‘Surely. I don't want any grass to grow. Let's take an automobile.’

Opposite to them in the cab he radiated surprised benevolence.

‘You were mighty quick off the mark, Captain.’

‘That was Jean.’

‘Yes,’ said Hallorsen, as if she were not present, ‘when I met her

at Lippinghall I thought she could move. Is your sister pleased?’

‘Is she, Jean?’

‘Rather!’

‘A wonderful young lady. There’s something good in low buildings. This Whitehall of yours makes me feel fine. The more sun and stars you can see from a street the more moral sense there is to the people. Were you married in a stovepipe hat, Captain?’

‘No; just as I am now.’

‘I’m sorry about that. They seem to me so cunning; like carrying a lost cause about on your head. I

believe you are of an old family, too, Mrs Cherrell. Your habit over here of families that serve their country from father to son is inspiring, Captain.'

'I hadn't thought about that.'

'I had a talk with your brother, Ma'am, at Lippinghah, he informed me you'd had a sailor in your family for centuries. And I'm told that in yours, Captain, there's always been a soldier. I believe in heredity. Is this the Foreign Office?' He looked at his watch. 'I'm just wondering whether that guy will be in? I've a kind of impression they do most of their business over

food. We should do well to go and look at the ducks in the Park till three o'clock.'

'I'll leave this card for him,' said Jean.

She rejoined them quickly. 'He's expected in at any minute.'

'That'll be half an hour,' said Hallorsen. 'There's one duck here I'd like your opinion of, Captain.'

Crossing the wide road to the water they were nearly run down by the sudden convergence of two cars embarrassed by unwonted space. Hubert clutched Jean convulsively. He had gone livid

under his tan. The cars cleared away to right and left. Hallorsen, who had taken Jean's other arm, said with an exaggeration of his drawl:

‘That just about took our paint off.’

Jean said nothing.

‘I sometimes wonder,’ continued Hallorsen, as they reached the ducks, ‘whether we get our money’s worth out of speed. What do you say, Captain?’

Hubert shrugged. ‘The hours lost in going by car instead of by train are just about as many as the hours

saved, anyway.'

'That is so,' said Hallorsen. 'But flying's a real saver of time.'

'Better wait for the full bill before we boast about flying.'

'You're right, Captain. We're surely headed for hell. The next war will mean a pretty thin time for those who take part in it. Suppose France and Italy came to blows, there'd be no Rome, no Paris, no Florence, no Venice, no Lyons, no Milan, no Marseilles within a fortnight. They'd just be poisoned deserts. And the ships and armies maybe wouldn't have fired a shot.'

‘Yes. And all governments know it. I’m a soldier, but I can’t see why they go on spending hundreds of millions on soldiers and sailors who’ll probably never be used. You can’t run armies and navies when the nerve centres have been destroyed. How long could France and Italy function if their big towns were gassed? England or Germany certainly couldn’t function a week.’

‘Your Uncle the Curator was saying to me that at the rate Man was going he would soon be back in the fish state.’

‘How?’

‘Why! Surely! Reversing the process of evolution – fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals. We’re becoming birds again, and the result of that will soon be that we shall creep and crawl, and end up in the sea when land’s uninhabitable.’

‘Why can’t we all bar the air for war?’

‘How can we bar the air?’ said Jean. ‘Countries never trust each other. Besides, America and Russia are outside the League of Nations.’

‘We Americans would agree. But maybe not our Senate.’

‘That Senate of yours,’ muttered Hubert, ‘seems to be a pretty hard proposition.’

‘Why! It’s like your House of Lords before a whip was taken to it in 1910. That’s the duck,’ and Hallorsen pointed to a peculiar bird. Hubert stared at it.

‘I’ve shot that chap in India. It’s a – I’ve forgotten the name. We can get it from one of these boards – I shall remember if I see.’

‘No!’ said Jean; ‘it’s a quarter past three. He must be in by now.’ And, without allocating the duck, they returned to the Foreign Office.

Bobbie Ferrar's handshake was renowned. It pulled his adversary's hand up and left it there. When Jean had restored her hand, she came at once to the point. 'You know about this extradition business, Mr Ferrar?'

Bobbie Ferrar nodded.

'This is Professor Hallorsen, who was head of the expedition. Would you like to see the scar my husband has?'

'Very much,' murmured Bobbie Ferrar, through his teeth.

'Show him, Hubert.'

Unhappily Hubert bared his arm

again.

‘Amazing!’ said Bobbie Ferrar: ‘I told Walter.’

‘You’ve seen him?’

‘Sir Lawrence asked me to.’

‘What did Wal – the Home Secretary say?’

‘Nothing. He’d seen Snubby; he doesn’t like Snubby, so he’s issued the order to Bow Street.’

‘Oh! Does that mean there will be a warrant?’

Bobbie Ferrar nodded, examining his nails.

The two young people stared at each other.

Hallorsen said, gravely:

‘Can no one stop this gang?’

Bobbie Ferrar shook his head, his eyes looked very round.

Hubert rose.

‘I’m sorry that I let anyone bother himself in the matter. Come along, Jean!’ and with a slight bow he turned and went out. Jean followed him.

Hallorsen and Bobbie Ferrar were left confronted.

‘I don’t understand this country,’ said Hallorsen. ‘What ought to have been done?’

‘Nothing,’ answered Bobbie

Ferrar. ‘When it comes before the magistrate, bring all the evidence you can.’

‘We surely will. Mr Ferrar, I am glad to have met you!’

Bobbie Ferrar grinned. His eyes looked even rounder.

Chapter Twenty-four



IN the due course of justice, Hubert was brought up at Bow Street on a warrant issued by one of its magistrates. Attending, in common with other members of the family, Dinny sat through the proceedings in a state of passive protest. The sworn evidence of six Bolivian muleteers, testifying to the shooting and to its being unprovoked; Hubert's countering statement, the exhibition of his scar, his record, and the evidence of Hallorsen, formed the material

on which the magistrate was invited to come to his decision. He came to it. 'Remanded' till the arrival of the defendant's supporting evidence. That principle of British law, 'A prisoner is presumed innocent till he is proved guilty,' so constantly refuted by its practice, was then debated in regard to bail, and Dinny held her breath. The idea of Hubert, just married, being presumed innocent in a cell, while his evidence crossed the Atlantic, was unbearable. The considerable bail offered by Sir Conway and Sir Lawrence, however, was finally accepted, and

with a sigh of relief she walked out, her head held high. Sir Lawrence joined her outside.

‘It’s lucky,’ he said, ‘that Hubert looks so unaccustomed to lying.’

‘I suppose,’ murmured Dinny, ‘this will be in the papers.’

‘On that, my nymph, you may bet the buttoned boots you haven’t got.’

‘How will it affect Hubert’s career?’

‘I think it will be good for him. The House of Commons questions were damaging. But “British Officer *versus* Bolivian Half-Castes,” will

rally the prejudice we all have for our kith and kin.'

'I'm more sorry for Dad than for anybody. His hair is distinctly greyer since this began.'

'There's nothing dishonourable about it, Dinny.'

Dinny's head tilted up.

'No, indeed!'

'You remind me of a two-year-old, Dinny – one of those whipcordy chestnuts that kick up their heels in the paddock, get left at the post, and come in first after all. Here's your American bearing down on us. Shall we wait for him?

He gave very useful evidence.'

Dinny shrugged her shoulders, and almost instantly Hallorsen's voice said:

'Miss Cherrell!'

Dinny turned.

'Thank you very much, Professor, for what you said.'

'I wish I could have lied for you, but I had no occasion. How is that sick gentleman?'

'All right so far.'

'I am glad to hear that. I have been worried thinking of you.'

'What you said, Professor,' put in Sir Lawrence, 'about not being

seen dead with any of those muleteers hit the magistrate plumb centre.'

'To be seen alive with them was bad enough. I've an automobile here, can I take you and Miss Cherrell anywhere?'

'You might take us to the borders of civilization, if you're going West.'

'Well, Professor,' continued Sir Lawrence, when they were seated, 'what do you think of London? Is it the most barbarous or the most civilized town on earth?'

'I just love it,' said Hallorsen,

without ever taking his eyes off Dinny.

‘I don’t,’ murmured Dinny; ‘I hate the contrasts and the smell of petrol.’

‘Well, a stranger can’t tell why he loves London, unless it’s the variety and the way you’ve gotten freedom and order all mixed up; or maybe it’s because it’s so different from our towns over there. New York is more wonderful and more exciting, but not so homey.’

‘New York,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘is like strychnine. It perks you up until it lays you out.’

‘I certainly couldn’t live in New York. The West for me.’

‘The great open spaces,’ murmured Dinny.

‘Why yes, Miss Cherrell; you would love them.’

Dinny smiled wanly. ‘No one can be pulled up by the roots, Professor.’

‘Ah!’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘my son once took up the question of Emigration in Parliament. He found that people’s roots were so strong that he had to drop it like a hot potato.’

‘Is that so?’ said Hallorsen.

‘When I look at your town folk, undersized and pale and kind of disillusioned, I can’t help wondering what roots they can have.’

‘The townier the type, the more stubborn its roots – no open spaces for them; the streets, fried fish, and the pictures. Would you put me down here, Professor? Dinny, where are you bound for?’

‘Oakley Street.’

Hallorsen stopped the car and Sir Lawrence got out.

‘Miss Cherrell, may I have the great pleasure of taking you as far

as Oakley Street?’

Dinny bowed.

Seated thus side by side with him in the closed car, she wondered uneasily what use he would make of his opportunity. Presently, without looking at her, he said:

‘As soon as your brother is fixed up I shall be sailing. I’m going to take an expedition to New Mexico. I shall always count it a privilege to have known you, Miss Cherrell.’

His ungloved hands were gripping each other between his knees; and the sight moved her.

‘I am very sorry for misjudging

you at first, Professor, just as my brother did.’

‘It was natural. I shall be glad to think I have your good will when all’s been said and done.’

Dinny put out her hand impulsively.

‘You have.’

He took the hand with gravity, raised it to his lips, and returned it to her gently. Dinny felt extremely unhappy. She said, timidly: ‘You’ve made me think quite differently about Americans, Professor.’

Hallorsen smiled.

‘That is something, anyway.’

‘I’m afraid I was very crude in my ideas. You see, I haven’t really known any.’

‘That is the little trouble between us; we don’t really know each other. We get on each other’s nerves, with little things, and there it ends. But I shall always remember you as the smile on the face of this country.’

‘That,’ said Dinny, ‘is very pretty, and I wish it were true.’

‘If I could have a picture of you, I should treasure it.’

‘Of course you shall! I don’t know if I have a decent one, but I’ll

send you the best.'

'I thank you. I think if you will allow me I will get out here; I am just not too sure of myself. The car will take you on.' He tapped on the glass and spoke to the chauffeur.

'Good-bye!' he said, and took her hand again, looked at it rather long, pressed it hard, and slid his long frame through the doorway.

'Good-bye!' murmured Dinny, sitting back, with rather a choky feeling in her throat.

Five minutes later the car pulled up before Diana's house, and, very subdued, she went in.

Diana, whom she had not seen that morning, opened the door of her room as she was passing.

‘Come in here, Dinny.’ Her voice was stealthy, and a little shudder went through Dinny. They sat down side by side on the four-poster bed, and Diana spoke low and hurriedly:

‘He came in here last night and insisted on staying. I didn’t dare refuse. There’s a change; I have a feeling that it’s the beginning of the end, again. His self-control is weakening, all round. I think I ought to send the children somewhere. Would Hilary take

them?’

‘I’m sure he would; or Mother would certainly.’

‘Perhaps that would be better.’

‘Don’t you think you ought to go, yourself?’

Diana sighed and shook her head.

‘That would only precipitate things. Could you take the children down for me?’

‘Of course. But do you really think he –?’

‘Yes. I’m sure he’s working up again. I know the signs so well. Haven’t you noticed, Dinny, he’s

been drinking more each evening?
It's all of a piece.'

'If he'd get over his horror of
going out.'

'I don't believe that would help.
Here at all events we know what
there is to know, and the worst at
once if it comes. I dread something
happening with strangers, and our
hands being forced.'

Dinny squeezed her arm.

'When would you like the
children taken down?'

'As soon as possible. I can't say
anything to him. You must just go
off as quietly as you can.'

Mademoiselle can go down separately, if your mother will have her too.'

'I shall come back at once, of course.'

'Dinny, it isn't fair on you. I've got the maids. It's really too bad to bother you with my troubles.'

'But of course I shall come back. I'll borrow Fleur's car. Will he mind the children going?'

'Only if he connects it with our feeling about his state. I can say it's an old invitation.'

'Diana,' said Dinny, suddenly, 'have you any love for him left?'

‘Love? No!’

‘Just pity?’

Diana shook her head.

‘I can’t explain; it’s the past and a feeling that if I desert him I help the fates against him. That’s a horrible thought!’

‘I understand. I’m so sorry for you both, and for Uncle Adrian.’

Diana smoothed her face with her hands, as if wiping off the marks of trouble.

‘I don’t know what’s coming, but it’s no good going to meet it. As to you, my dear, don’t for God’s sake let me spoil your time.’

‘That’s all right. I’m wanting something to take me out of myself. Spinsters, you know, should be well shaken before being taken.’

‘Ah! When *are* you going to be taken, Dinny?’

‘I have just rejected the great open spaces, and I feel a beast.’

‘Between the great open spaces and the deep sea – are you?’

‘And likely to remain so. The love of a good man – and all that, seems to leave me frost-bitten.’

‘Wait! Your hair is the wrong colour for the cloister.’

‘I’ll have it dyed and sail in my

true colours. Icebergs are sea-green.'

'As I said before – wait!'

'I will,' said Dinny....

Fleur herself drove the South Square car to the door two days later. The children and some luggage were placed in it without incident, and they started.

That somewhat hectic drive, for the children were little used to cars, to Dinny was pure relief. She had not realized how much the tragic atmosphere of Oakley Street was on her nerves; and yet it was but ten days since she had come up

from Condaford. The colours of 'the fall' were deepening already on the trees. The day had the soft and sober glow of fine October; the air, as the country deepened and grew remote, had again its beloved tang; wood smoke rose from cottage chimneys, and rooks from the bared fields.

They arrived in time for lunch, and, leaving the children with Mademoiselle, who had come down by train, Dinny went forth with the dogs alone. She stopped at an old cottage high above the sunken road. The door opened straight into the living-room, where an old

woman was sitting by a thin fire of wood.

‘Oh! Miss Dinny,’ she said, ‘I am that glad. I haven’t seen you not all this month.’

‘No, Betty; I’ve been away. How are you?’

The little old woman, for she was of pocket size, crossed her hands solemnly on her middle.

‘My stummick’s bad again. I’ve’n’t nothin’ else the matter – the doctor says I’m wonderful. Just my stummick. ’E says I ought to eat more; and I’ve such an appetite, Miss Dinny. But I can’t eat ’ardly

nothin' without I'm sick, and that's the truth.'

'Dear Betty, I'm so sorry.

Tummies are a dreadful nuisance. Tummies and teeth. I can't think why we have them. If you haven't teeth you can't digest; and if you have teeth you can't digest either.'

The old lady cackled thinly.

' 'E du say I ought to 'ave the rest of my teeth out, but I don't like to part with 'em, Miss Dinny. Father 'e's got none, and 'e can bite an apple, 'e can. But at my age I can't expect to live to 'arden up like that.'

‘But you could have some lovely false ones, Betty.’

‘Oh! I don’t want to ’ave no false teeth – so pretenshus. You wouldn’t never wear false teeth, would you, Miss Dinny?’

‘Of course I would, Betty. Nearly all the best people have them nowadays.’

‘You will ’ave your joke. No, I shouldn’t like it. I’d as soon wear a wig. But my ’air’s as thick as ever. I’m wonderful for my age. I’ve got a lot to be thankful for; it’s only my stummick, an’ that’s like as if there was somethin’ there.’

Dinny saw the pain and darkness in her eyes.

‘How is Benjamin, Betty?’

The eyes changed, became amused and yet judgematic, as if she were considering a child.

‘Oh! Father’s all right, Miss; ’e never ’as anything the matter except ’is rheumatiz; ’e’s out now doin’ a bit o’ diggin’.’

‘And how’s Goldie?’ said Dinny, looking lugubriously at a goldfinch in a cage. She hated to see birds in cages, but had never been able to bring herself to say so to these old people with their small bright

imprisoned pet. Besides, didn't they say that if you released a tame goldfinch, it would soon be pecked to death?

‘Oh! ’ said the old lady, ‘ ’e thinks ’e’s someone since you give him that bigger cage.’ Her eyes brightened. ‘Fancy the Captain married, Miss Dinny, and that dreadful case against him an’ all – whatever are they thinkin’ about? I never ’eard of such a thing in all my life. One of the Cherrell’s to be put in Court like that. It’s out of all knowledge.’

‘It is, Betty.’

‘I’m told she’s a fine young lady.

And where'll they be goin' to live?'

'Nobody knows yet; we have to wait for this case to be over.

Perhaps down here, or perhaps he'll get a post abroad. They'll be very poor, of course.'

'Dreadful; it never was like that in old days. The way they put upon the gentry now – oh, dear! I remember your great-grandfather, Miss Dinny, drivin' four-in-hand when I was a little bit of a thing. Such a nice old gentleman – curtly, as you might say.'

Such references to the gentry never ceased to make Dinny feel uneasy, only too well aware that

this old lady had been one of eight children brought up by a farm worker whose wages had been eleven shillings a week, and that she and her husband now existed on their Old Age pensions, after bringing up a family of seven.

‘Well, Betty dear, what *can* you digest, so that I can tell cook?’

‘Thank you kindly, Miss Dinny; a nice bit of lean pork do seem to lie quiet sometimes.’ Again her eyes grew dark and troubled. ‘I ’ave such dreadful pain; really sometimes I feel I’d be glad to go ’ome.’

‘Oh! no, Betty dear. With a little

proper feeding I know you're going to feel better.'

The old lady smiled below her eyes.

'I'm wonderful for my age, so it'd never do to complain. And when are the bells goin' to ring for you, Miss Dinny?'

'Don't mention them, Betty. They won't ring of their own accord – that's certain.'

'Ah! People don't marry young, and 'ave the families they did in my young days. My old Aunt 'ad eighteen an' reared eleven.'

'There doesn't seem room or

work for them now, does there?’

‘Aye! The country’s changed.’

‘Less down here than in most places, thank goodness.’ And Dinny’s eyes wandered over the room where these two old people had spent some fifty years of life; from brick floor to raftered ceiling it was scrupulously clean and had a look of homely habit.

‘Well, Betty, I must go. I’m staying in London just now with a friend, and have to get back there this evening. I’ll tell cook to send some little things that’ll be better for you than pork even. Don’t get up!’

But the little old woman was on her feet, her eyes looking out from her very soul.

‘I am that glad to ’ave seen you, Miss Dinny. God bless you! And I do ’ope the Captain won’t ’ave any trouble with those dreadful people.’

‘Good-bye, Betty dear, and remember me to Benjamin,’ and pressing the old lady’s hand Dinny went out to where the dogs were waiting for her on the flagged pathway. As always after such visits she felt humble and inclined to cry. Roots! That was what she missed in London, what she would miss in the ‘great open spaces’. She

walked to the bottom of a narrow straggling beechwood, and entered it through a tattered gate that she did not even have to open. She mounted over the damp beech mast which smelled sweetly as of husks; to the left a grey-blue sky was rifted by the turning beeches, and to her right stretched fallow ground where a squatting hare turned and raced for the hedgerow; a pheasant rose squawking before one of the dogs and rocketed over the wood. She emerged from the trees at the top, and stood looking down at the house, long and stone-coloured, broken by magnolias and the trees

on the lawn; smoke was rising from two chimneys, and the fantails speckled with white one gable. She breathed deeply, and for full ten minutes stood there, like a watered plant drawing up the food of its vitality. The scent was of leaves and turned earth and of rain not far away; the last time she had stood there had been at the end of May, and she had inhaled that scent of summer which is at once a memory and a promise, an aching and a draught of delight....

After an early tea she started back, in the now closed car, sitting beside Fleur.

‘I must say,’ said that shrewd young woman, ‘Condaford is the most peaceful place I was ever in. I should die of it, Dinny. The rurality of Lippinghall is nothing thereto.’

‘Old and mouldering, um?’

‘Well, I always tell Michael that your side of his family is one of the least expressed and most interesting phenomena left in England. You’re wholly unvocal, utterly out of the limelight. Too unsensational for the novelists, and yet you’re there, and go on being there, and I don’t quite know how. Every mortal thing’s against you, from Death Duties down to

gramophones. But you persist generally at the ends of the earth, doing things that nobody knows or cares anything about. Most of your sort haven't even got Condaforde now to come home and die in; and yet you still have roots, and a sense of duty. I've got neither, you know, I suppose that comes of being half French. My father's family – the Forsytes – may have roots, but they haven't a sense of duty – not in the same way; or perhaps it's a sense of service that I mean. I admire it, you know, Dinny, but it bores me stiff. It's making you go and blight your young life over this Ferse

business. Duty's a disease, Dinny; an admirable disease.'

'What do you think I ought to do about it?'

'Have your instincts out. I can't imagine anything more ageing than what you're doing now. As for Diana, she's of the same sort – the Montjoys have a kind of Condaford up in Dumfriesshire – I admire her for sticking to Ferse, but I think it's quite crazy of her. It can only end one way, and that'll be the more unpleasant the longer it's put off.'

'Yes; I feel she's riding for a bad fall, but I hope I should do the same.'

‘I know I shouldn’t,’ said Fleur, cheerfully.

‘I don’t believe that anybody knows what they’ll do about anything until it comes to the point.’

‘The thing is never to let anything come to a point.’

Fleur spoke with a tang in her voice, and Dinny saw her lips harden. She always found Fleur attractive, because mystifying.

‘You haven’t seen Ferse,’ she said, ‘and without seeing him you can’t appreciate how pathetic he is.’

‘That’s sentiment, my dear. I’m not sentimental.’

‘I’m sure you’ve had a past, Fleur; and you can’t have had that without being sentimental.’

Fleur gave her a quick look, and trod on the accelerator.

‘Time I turned on my lights,’ she said.

For the rest of the journey she talked on Art, Letters, and other unimportant themes. It was nearly eight o’clock when she dropped Dinny at Oakley Street.

Diana was in, already dressed for dinner.

‘Dinny,’ she said, ‘he’s out.’

Chapter Twenty-five



PORTENTOUS – those simple words!

‘After you’d gone this morning he was in a great state – seemed to think we were all in a conspiracy to keep things from him.’

‘As we were,’ murmured Dinny.

‘Mademoiselle’s going upset him again. Soon after, I heard the front door bang – he hasn’t been back since. I didn’t tell you, but last night was dreadful. Suppose he doesn’t come back?’

‘Oh! Diana, I wish he wouldn’t.’

‘But where has he gone? What can he do? Whom can he go to? O God! It’s awful!’

Dinny looked at her in silent distress.

‘Sorry, Dinny! You must be tired and hungry. We won’t wait dinner.’

In Ferse’s ‘lair’, that charming room panelled in green shot with a golden look, they sat through an anxious meal. The shaded light fell pleasantly on their bare necks and arms, on the fruit, the flowers, the silver; and until the maid was gone they spoke of indifferent things.

‘Has he a key?’ asked Dinny.

‘Yes.’

‘Shall I ring up Uncle Adrian?’

‘What can he do? If Ronald does come in, it will be more dangerous if Adrian is here.’

‘Alan Tasburgh told me he would come any time if anyone was wanted.’

‘No, let’s keep it to ourselves tonight. Tomorrow we can see.’

Dinny nodded. She was scared, and more scared of showing it, for she was there to strengthen Diana by keeping cool and steady.

‘Come upstairs and sing to me,’

she said, at last.

Up in the drawing-room Diana sang ‘The Sprig of Thyme’, ‘Waley, Waley’, ‘The Bens of Jura’, ‘Mowing the Barley’, ‘The Castle of Dromore’, and the beauty of the room, of the songs, of the singer, brought to Dinny a sense of unreality. She had gone into a drowsy dream, when, suddenly, Diana stopped.

‘I heard the front door.’

Dinny got up and stood beside the piano.

‘Go on, don’t say anything, don’t show anything.’

Diana began again to play, and sing the Irish song ‘Must I go bound and you go free.’ Then the door was opened, and, in a mirror at the end of the room, Dinny saw Ferse come in and stand listening.

‘Sing on,’ she whispered.

‘Must I go bound, and you go free?
Must I love a lass that couldn’t love
me?

Oh! was I taught so poor a wit
As love a lass would break my
heart.’

And Ferse stood there listening. He looked like a man excessively tired or overcome with drink; his hair was disordered and his lips

drawn back so that his teeth showed. Then he moved. He seemed trying to make no noise. He passed round to a sofa on the far side and sank down on it. Diana stopped singing. Dinny, whose hand was on her shoulder, felt her trembling with the effort to control her voice.

‘Have you had dinner, Ronald?’

Ferse did not answer, staring across the room with that queer and ghostly grin.

‘Play on,’ whispered Dinny.

Diana played the Red Sarafan; she played the fine simple tune

over and over, as if making hypnotic passes towards that mute figure. When, at last, she stopped, there followed the strangest silence. Then Dinny's nerve snapped and she said, almost sharply:

‘Is it raining, Captain Ferse?’

Ferse passed his hand down his trouser, and nodded.

‘Hadn't you better go up and change them, Ronald?’

He put his elbows on his knees, and rested his head on his hands.

‘You must be tired, dear; won't you go to bed? Shall I bring you

something up?’

And still he did not move. The grin had faded off his lips; his eyes were closed. He looked like a man suddenly asleep, as some overdriven beast of burden might drop off between the shafts.

‘Shut the piano,’ whispered Dinny; ‘let’s go up.’

Diana closed the piano without noise and rose. With their arms linked they waited, but he did not stir.

‘Is he really asleep?’ whispered Dinny.

Ferse started up. ‘Sleep! I’m for

it. I'm for it again. And I won't stand it. By God! I won't stand it!'

He stood a moment transfigured with a sort of fury; then, seeing them shrink, sank back on the sofa and buried his face in his hands. Impulsively Diana moved towards him.

Ferse looked up. His eyes were wild.

'Don't!' he growled out. 'Leave me alone! Go away!'

At the door Diana turned and said:

'Ronald, won't you see someone? Just to make you sleep –

just for that.'

Ferse sprang up again. 'I'll see no one. Go away!'

They shrank out of the room, and up in Dinny's bedroom stood with their arms round each other, quivering.

'Have the maids gone to bed?'

'They always go early, unless one of them is out.'

'I think I ought to go down and telephone, Diana.'

'No, Dinny, I will. Only to whom?'

That was, indeed, the question. They debated it in whispers. Diana

thought her doctor; Dinny thought Adrian or Michael should be asked to go round to the doctor and bring him.

‘Was it like this before the last attack?’

‘No. He didn’t know then what was before him. I feel he might kill himself, Dinny.’

‘Has he a weapon?’

‘I gave his Service revolver to Adrian to keep for me.’

‘Razors?’

‘Only safety ones; and there’s nothing poisonous in the house.’

Dinny moved to the door.

‘I *must* go and telephone.’

‘Dinny, I can’t have you – ’

‘He wouldn’t touch *me*. It’s you that are in danger. Lock the door while I’m gone.’

And before Diana could stop her, she slid out. The lights still burned, and she stood a moment. Her room was on the second floor, facing the street. Diana’s bedroom and that of Ferse were on the drawing-room floor below. She must pass them to reach the hall and the little study where the telephone was kept. No sound came up. Diana had opened the door again and was standing there; and, conscious that at any

moment she might slip past her and go down, Dinny ran forward and began descending the stairs. They creaked and she stopped to take off her shoes. Holding them in her hand she crept on past the drawing-room door. No sound came thence; and she sped down to the hall. She noticed Ferse's hat and coat thrown across a chair, and, passing into the study, closed the door behind her. She stood a moment to recover breath, then, turning on the light, took up the directory. She found Adrian's number and was stretching out her hand for the receiver when her

wrist was seized, and with a gasp she turned to face Ferse. He twisted her round and stood pointing to the shoes still in her hand.

‘Going to give me away,’ he said, and, still holding her, took a knife out of his side pocket. Back, at the full length of her arm, Dinny looked him in the face. Somehow she was not so scared as she had been; her chief feeling was a sort of shame at having her shoes in her hand.

‘That’s silly, Captain Ferse,’ she said, icily. ‘You know we’d neither of us do you any harm.’

Ferse flung her hand from him,

opened the knife, and with a violent effort severed the telephone wire. The receiver dropped on the floor. He closed the knife and put it back into his pocket. Dinny had the impression that with action he had become less unbalanced.

‘Put on your shoes,’ he said.

She did so.

‘Understand me, I’m not going to be interfered with, or messed about. I shall do what I like with myself.’

Dinny remained silent. Her heart was beating furiously, and she did not want her voice to betray it.

‘Did you hear?’

‘Yes. No one wants to interfere with you, or do anything you don’t like. We only want your good.’

‘I know that good,’ said Ferse. ‘No more of that for me.’ He went across to the window, tore a curtain aside, and looked out. ‘It’s raining like hell,’ he said, then turned and stood looking at her. His face began to twitch, his hands to clench. He moved his head from side to side. Suddenly he shouted: ‘Get out of this room, quick! Get out, get out!’

As swiftly as she could without running Dinny slid to the door,

closed it behind her and flew upstairs. Diana was still standing in the bedroom doorway. Dinny pushed her in, locked the door, and sank down breathless.

‘He came out after me,’ she gasped, ‘and cut the wire. He’s got a knife; I’m afraid there’s mania coming on. Will that door hold if he tries to break it down? Shall we put the bed against it?’

‘If we do we should never sleep.’

‘We shall never sleep, anyway,’ and she began dragging at the bed. They moved it square against the door.

‘Do the maids lock their doors?’

‘They have, since he’s been back.’

Dinny sighed with relief. The idea of going out again to warn them made her shudder. She sat on the bed looking at Diana, who was standing by the window.

‘What are you thinking of, Diana?’

‘I was thinking what I should be feeling if the children were still here.’

‘Yes, thank heaven, they’re not.’

Diana came back to the bed and took Dinny’s hand. Grip and

answering grip tightened till they were almost painful.

‘Is there nothing we can do, Dinny?’

‘Perhaps he’ll sleep, and be much better in the morning. Now there’s danger I don’t feel half so sorry for him.’

Diana said stonily: ‘I’m past feeling. I wonder if he knows yet that I’m not in my own room? Perhaps I ought to go down and face it.’

‘You shan’t!’ And taking the key from the lock Dinny thrust it into the top of her stocking: its cold

hardness rallied her nerves.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘we’ll lie down with our feet to the door. It’s no good getting worn out for nothing.’

A sort of apathy had come over both of them, and they lay a long time thus, close together under the eiderdown, neither of them sleeping, neither of them quite awake. Dinny had dozed off at last when a stealthy sound awakened her. She looked at Diana. She was asleep, really asleep, dead asleep. A streak of light from outside showed at the top of the door, which fitted loosely. Leaning on her elbow she strained her ears.

The handle of the door was turned, and softly shaken. There was a gentle knocking.

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, very low, ‘what is it?’

‘Diana,’ said Ferse’s voice, but quite subdued: ‘I want her.’

Dinny crouched forward close to the keyhole.

‘Diana’s not well,’ she said. ‘She’s asleep now, don’t disturb her.’

There was silence. And then to her horror she heard a long moaning sigh; a sound so miserable, and as it were so final

that she was on the point of taking out the key. The sight of Diana's face, white and worn, stopped her. No good! Whatever that sound meant – no good! And crouching back on the bed, she listened. No more sound! Diana slept on, but Dinny could not get to sleep again. 'If he kills himself,' she thought, 'shall I be to blame?' Would that not be best for everyone, for Diana and his children, for himself? But that long sighing moan went on echoing through her nerves. Poor man, poor man! She felt nothing now but a dreadful sore pity, a sort of resentment at the inexorability

of Nature that did such things to human creatures. Accept the mysterious ways of Providence? Who could? Insensate and cruel! Beside the worn-out sleeper she lay, quivering. What had they done that they ought not to have done? Could they have helped him more than they had tried to? What could they do when morning came? Diana stirred. Was she going to wake? But she just turned and sank back into her heavy slumber. And slowly a drowsy feeling stole on Dinny herself and she slept.

A knocking on the door awakened her. It was daylight.

Diana was still sleeping. She looked at her wrist watch. Eight o'clock. She was being called.

‘All right, Mary!’ she answered, softly: ‘Mrs Ferse is here.’

Diana sat up, her eyes on Dinny’s half-clothed figure.

‘What is it?’

‘It’s all right, Diana. Eight o’clock! We’d better get up and put the bed back. You’ve had a real good sleep. The maids are up.’

They put on wrappers, and pulled the bed into place. Dinny took the key from its queer hiding nook, and unlocked the door.

‘No good craning at it. Let’s go down!’

They stood a moment at the top of the stairs listening, and then descended. Diana’s room was untouched. The maid had evidently been in and pulled aside the curtains. They stood at the door that led from it to Ferse’s room. No sound came from there. They went out to the other door. Still no sound!

‘We’d better go down,’ whispered Dinny. ‘What shall you say to Mary?’

‘Nothing. She’ll understand.’

The dining-room and study doors were open. The telephone receiver still lay severed on the floor; there was no other sign of last night's terrors.

Suddenly, Dinny said: 'Diana, his hat and coat are gone. They were on that chair.'

Diana went into the dining-room and rang the bell. The elderly maid, coming from the basement stairs, had a scared and anxious look.

'Have you seen Captain Ferse's hat and coat this morning Mary?'

'No, Ma'am.'

‘What time did you come down?’

‘Seven o’clock.’

‘You haven’t been to his room?’

‘Not yet, Ma’am.’

‘I was not well last night; I slept upstairs with Miss Dinny.’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

They all three went upstairs.

‘Knock on his door.’

The maid knocked. Dinny and Diana stood close by. There was no answer.

‘Knock again, Mary, louder.’

Again and again the maid knocked. No answer. Diana put her

aside and turned the handle. The door came open. Ferse was not there. The room was in disorder, as if someone had tramped and wrestled in it. The water bottle was empty, and tobacco ash was strewn about. The bed had been lain on, but not slept in. There was no sign of packing or of anything having been taken from the drawers. The three women looked at each other. Then Diana said:

‘Get breakfast quick, Mary. We must go out.’

‘Yes, Ma’am – I saw the telephone.’

‘Hide that up, and get it

mended; and don't tell the others anything. Just say: "He's away for a night or two." Make things here look like that. We'll dress quickly, Dinny.'

The maid went downstairs again.

Dinny said: 'Has he any money?'

'I don't know. I can see if his cheque book has gone.'

She ran down again, and Dinny waited. Diana came back into the hall.

'No; it's on the bureau in the dining-room. Quick, Dinny, dress!'

That meant... What did it mean?

A strange conflict of hopes and fears raged within Dinny. She flew upstairs.

Chapter Twenty-six



OVER a hasty breakfast they consulted. To whom should they go?

‘Not to the police,’ said Dinny.

‘No, indeed.’

‘I think we should go to Uncle Adrian first.’

They sent the maid for a taxi, and set out for Adrian’s rooms. It was not quite nine o’clock. They found him over tea and one of those fishes which cover the more ground when eaten, and explain

the miracle of the seven baskets full.

Seeming to have grown greyer in these few days he listened to them, filling his pipe, and at last said:

‘You must leave it to me now. Dinny, can you take Diana down to Condaford?’

‘Of course.’

‘Before you go, could you get young Alan Tasburgh to go down to that Home and ask if Ferse is there, without letting them know that he’s gone off on his own? Here’s the address.’

Dinny nodded.

Adrian raised Diana's hand to his lips.

'My dear, you look worn out. Don't worry; just rest down there with the children. We'll keep in touch with you.'

'Will there be publicity, Adrian?'

'Not if we can prevent it. I shall consult Hilary; we'll try everything first. Do you know how much money he had?'

'The last cheque cashed was for five pounds two days ago, but all yesterday he was out.'

'How was he dressed?'

‘Blue overcoat, blue suit, bowler hat.’

‘And you don’t know where he went yesterday?’

‘No. Until yesterday he was never out at all.’

‘Does he still belong to any Club?’

‘No.’

‘Has any old friend been told of his return?’

‘No.’

‘And he took no cheque book? How soon can you get hold of that young man, Dinny?’

‘Now, if I could telephone,

Uncle; he's sleeping at his Club.'

'Try, then.'

Dinny went out to the telephone. She soon reported that Alan would go down at once, and let Adrian know. He would ask as an old friend, with no knowledge that Ferse had ever left. He would beg them to let him know if Ferse came back, so that he might come and see him.

'Good,' said Adrian; 'you have a head, my child. And now go off and look after Diana. Give me your number at Condaford.'

Having jotted it down, he saw

them back into their cab.

‘Uncle Adrian is the best man in the world,’ said Dinny.

‘No one should know that better than I, Dinny.’

Back in Oakley Street, they went upstairs to pack. Dinny was afraid that at the last minute Diana might refuse to go. But she had given her word to Adrian, and they were soon on the way to the station. They spent a very silent hour and a half on the journey, leaning back in their corners, tired out. Dinny, indeed, was only now realizing the strain she had been through. And yet, what had it amounted to? No

violence, no attack, not even a great scene. How uncannily disturbing was insanity! What fear it inspired; what nerve-racking emotions! Now that she was free from chance of contact with Ferse he again seemed to her just pitiful. She pictured him wandering and distraught, with nowhere to lay his head and no one to take him by the hand; on the edge, perhaps already over that edge! The worst tragedies were always connected with fear. Criminality, leprosy, insanity, anything that inspired fear in other people – the victims of such were hopelessly alone in a frightened

world. Since last night she understood far better Ferse's outburst about the vicious circle in which insanity moved. She knew now that her own nerves were not strong enough, her own skin not thick enough, to bear contact with the insane; she understood the terrible treatment of the insane in old days. It was like the way dogs had, of setting on an hysterical dog, their own nerves jolted beyond bearing. The contempt lavished on the imbecile, the cruelty and contempt had been defensive – defensive revenge on something which outraged the

nerves. All the more pitiable, all the more horrible to think about. And, while the train bore her nearer to her peaceful home, she was more and more torn between the wish to shut away all thought of the unhappy outcast and feelings of pity for him. She looked across at Diana lying back in the corner opposite with closed eyes. What must she be feeling, bound to Ferse by memory, by law, by children of whom he was the father? The face under the close casque hat had the chiselling of prolonged trial – fine-lined and rather hard. By the faint movement

of the lips she was not asleep. 'What keeps her going?' thought Dinny. 'She's not religious; she doesn't believe much in anything. If I were she I should throw everything up and rush to the ends of the earth – or should I?' Was there perhaps something inside one, some sense of what was due to oneself, that kept one unyielding and unbroken?

There was nothing to meet them at the station, so, leaving their things, they set forth for the Grange on foot, taking a path across the fields.

'I wonder,' said Dinny, suddenly,

‘how little excitement one could do with in these days? Should I be happy if I lived down here all my time, like the old cottage folk? Clare is never happy here. She has to be on the go all the time. There is a kind of jack-in-the-box inside one.’

‘I’ve never seen it popping out of you, Dinny.’

‘I wish I’d been older during the war. I was only fourteen when it stopped.’

‘You were lucky.’

‘I don’t know. You must have had a terribly exciting time, Diana.’

‘I was your present age when the war began.’

‘Married?’

‘Just.’

‘I suppose he was right through it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was that the cause?’

‘An aggravation, perhaps.’

‘Uncle Adrian spoke of heredity.’

‘Yes.’

Dinny pointed to a thatched cottage.

‘In that cottage an old pet couple of mine have lived fifty

years. Could you do that, Diana?’

‘I could now; I want peace, Dinny.’

They reached the house in silence. A message had come through from Adrian: Ferse was not back at the Home: but he and Hilary believed they were on the right track.

After seeing the children Diana went to her bedroom to lie down, and Dinny to her Mother’s sitting-room.

‘Mother, I must say it to someone – I am praying for his death.’

‘Dinny!’

‘For his own sake, for Diana’s, for the children’s, for everybody’s; even my own.’

‘Of course, if it’s hopeless –’

‘Hopeless or not, I don’t care. It’s too dreadful. Providence is a wash-out, Mother.’

‘My dear! ’

‘It’s too remote. I suppose there is an eternal Plan – but we’re like gnats for all the care it has for us as individuals.’

‘You want a good sleep, darling.’

‘Yes. But that won’t make any difference.’

‘Don’t encourage such feelings, Dinny; they affect one’s character.’

‘I don’t see the connexion between beliefs and character. I’m not going to behave any worse because I cease to believe in Providence or an after life.’

‘Surely, Dinny – ’

‘No; I’m going to behave *better*; if I’m decent it’s because decency’s the decent thing; and not because I’m going to get anything by it.’

‘But why is decency the decent thing, Dinny, if there’s no God?’

‘O subtle and dear mother, I didn’t say there wasn’t God. I only

said his Plan was too remote. Can't you hear God saying: "By the way, is that ball the Earth still rolling?" And an angel answering: "Oh! Yes, Sir, quite nicely." "Let's see, it must be fungused over by now. Wasn't there some particularly busy little parasite – " '

'Dinny!'

' "Oh! Yes, Sir, you mean man!" "Quite! I remember we called it that." '

'Dinny, how dreadful!'

'No, mother, if I'm decent, it will be because decency is devised by humans for the benefit of humans;

just as beauty is devised by humans for the delight of humans. Am I looking awful, darling? I feel as if I had no eyes. I think I'll go and lie down. I don't know why I've got so worked up about this, Mother. I think it must be looking at his face.' And with suspicious swiftness Dinny turned and went away.

Chapter Twenty-seven



FERSE's disappearance was a holiday to the feelings of one who had suffered greatly since his return. That he had engaged to end that holiday by finding him was not enough to spoil Adrian's relief. Almost with zest he set out for Hilary's in a taxi, applying his wits to the problem. Fear of publicity cut him off from those normal and direct resorts – Police, Radio, and Press. Such agencies would bring on Ferse too fierce a light. And in considering what means were left

he felt as when confronted with a crossword puzzle, many of which he had solved in his time, like other men of noted intellect. From Dinny's account he could not tell within several hours at what time Ferse had gone out, and the longer he left inquiry in the neighbourhood of the house, the less chance one would have of stumbling on anyone who had seen him. Should he, then, stop the cab and go back to Chelsea? In holding on towards the Meads, he yielded to instinct rather than to reason. To turn to Hilary was second nature with him – and, surely, in

such a task two heads were better than one! He reached the Vicarage without forming any plan save that of inquiring vaguely along the Embankment and the King's Road. It was not yet half past nine, and Hilary was still at his correspondence. On hearing the news, he called his wife into the study.

‘Let's think for three minutes,’ he said, ‘and pool the result.’

The three stood in a triangle before the fire, the two men smoking, and the woman sniffing at an October rose.

‘Well?’ said Hilary at last: ‘Any

light, May?’

‘Only,’ said Mrs Hilary, wrinkling her forehead, ‘if the poor man was as Dinny describes, you can’t leave out the hospitals. I could telephone to the three or four where there was most chance of his having been taken in, if he’s made an accident for himself. It’s so early still, they can hardly have had anybody in.’

‘Very sweet of you, my dear; and we can trust your wits to keep his name out of it.’

Mrs Hilary went out.

‘Adrian?’

‘I’ve got a hunch, but I’d rather hear you first.’

‘Well,’ said Hilary, ‘two things occur to me: It’s obvious we must find out from the Police if anyone’s been taken from the river. The other contingency, and I think it’s the more likely, is drink.’

‘But he couldn’t get drink so early.’

‘Hotels. He had money.’

‘I agree, we must try them, unless you think my idea any good.’

‘Well?’

‘I’ve been trying to put myself in

poor Ferse's shoes. I think, Hilary, if I had a doom over me, I might run for Condaford; not the place itself, perhaps, but round about, where we haunted as boys; where I'd been, in fact, before Fate got hold of me at all. A wounded animal goes home.'

Hilary nodded.

'Where *was* his home?'

'West Sussex – just under the Downs to the north. Petworth was the station.'

'Oh! I know that country. Before the war May and I used to stay a lot at Bignor and walk. We could

have a shot at Victoria station, and see if anyone like him has taken train. But I think I'll try the Police about the river first. I can say a parishioner is missing. What height is Ferse?'

'About five feet ten, square, broad head and cheek-bones, strong jaw, darkish hair, steel-blue eyes, a blue suit and overcoat.'

'Right!' said Hilary: 'I'll get on to them as soon as May is through.'

Left to himself before the fire, Adrian brooded. A reader of detective novels, he knew that he was following the French, inductive method of a psychological shot in

the blue, Hilary and May following the English model of narrowing the issue by elimination – excellent, but was there time for excellence? One vanished in London as a needle vanishes in hay; and they were so handicapped by the need for avoiding publicity. He waited in anxiety for Hilary's report. Curiously ironical that he – *he* – should dread to hear of poor Ferse being found drowned or run over, and Diana free!

From Hilary's table he took up an A.B.C. There had been a train to Petworth at 8.50, another went at 9.56. A near thing! And he waited

again, his eyes on the door. Useless to hurry Hilary, a past-master in saving time.

‘Well?’ he said when the door was opened.

Hilary shook his head.

‘No go! Neither hospitals nor Police. No one received or heard of anywhere.’

‘Then,’ said Adrian, ‘let’s try Victoria – there’s a train in twenty minutes. Can you come rightaway?’

Hilary glanced at his table. ‘I oughtn’t to, but I will. There’s something unholy in the way a

search gets hold of you. Hold on, old man, I'll tell May and nick my hat. You might look for a taxi. Go St Pancras way and wait for me.'

Adrian strode along looking for a taxi. He found one issuing from the Euston Road, turned it round, and stood waiting. Soon Hilary's thin dark figure came hurrying into view.

'Not in the training I was,' he said, and got in.

Adrian leaned through the window.

'Victoria, quick as you can!'

Hilary's hand slipped through his

arm.

‘I haven’t had a jaunt with you, old man, since we went up the Carmarthen Van in that fog the year after the war. Remember?’

Adrian had taken out his watch.

‘We just shan’t do it, I’m afraid. The traffic’s awful.’ And they sat, silent, jerked back and forth by the spasmodic efforts of the taxi.

‘I’ll never forget,’ said Adrian, suddenly, ‘in France once, passing a *‘maison d’aliénés’*, as they call it – a great place back from the railway with a long iron grille in front. There was a poor devil

standing upright with his arms raised and his legs apart, clutching at the grille, like an orang-outang. What's death compared with that? Good clean earth, and the sky over you. I wish now they'd found him in the river.'

'They may still; this is a bit of a wild-goose chase.'

'Three minutes more,' muttered Adrian; 'we shan't do it.'

But as if animated by its national character the taxi gathered unnatural speed, and the traffic seemed to melt before it. They pulled up at the station with a jerk.

‘You ask at the first class, I’ll go for the third,’ said Hilary as they ran. ‘A parson gets more show.’

‘No,’ said Adrian; ‘if he’s gone, he’ll have gone first class; *you* ask there. If there’s any doubt – *his* eyes.’

He watched Hilary’s lean face thrust into the opening and quickly drawn back.

‘He *has*!’ he said; ‘this train. Petworth! Rush!’

The brothers ran, but as they reached the barrier the train began to move. Adrian would have run on, but Hilary grabbed his arm.

‘Steady, old man, we shall never get in; he’ll only see us, and that’ll spill it.’

They walked back to the entrance with their heads down.

‘That was an amazing shot of yours, old boy,’ said Hilary: ‘What time does that train get down?’

‘Twelve twenty-three.’

‘Then we can do it in a car. Have you any money?’

Adrian felt in his pockets. ‘Only eight and six,’ he said ruefully.

‘I’ve got just eleven bob. Awkward! I know! We’ll take a cab to young Fleur’s: if her car’s not

out, she'd let us have it, and she or Michael would drive us. We must both be free of the car at the other end.'

Adrian nodded, rather dazed at the success of his induction.

At South Square Michael was out, but Fleur in. Adrian, who did not know her so well as Hilary, was surprised by the quickness with which she grasped the situation and produced the car. Within ten minutes, indeed, they were on the road with Fleur at the wheel.

'I shall go through Dorking and Pulborough,' she said, leaning back. 'I can speed all the way after

Dorking on that road. But, Uncle Hilary, what are you going to do if you get him?’

At that simple but necessary question the brothers looked at each other. Fleur seemed to feel their indecision through the back of her head, for she stopped with a jerk in front of an imperilled dog, and, turning, said:

‘Would you like to think it over before we start?’

Gazing from her short clear-cut face, the very spit of hard, calm, confident youth, to his brother’s long, shrewd face, wrinkled, and worn by the experiences of others

and yet not hard, Adrian left it to Hilary to answer.

‘Let’s get on,’ said Hilary; ‘it’s a case of making the best of what turns up.’

‘When we pass a post-office,’ added Adrian, ‘please stop. I want to send a wire to Dinny.’

Fleur nodded. ‘There’s one in the King’s Road, I must fill up, too, somewhere.’

And the car slid on among the traffic.

‘What shall I say in the wire?’ asked Adrian. ‘Anything about Petworth?’

Hilary shook his head.

‘Just that we think we’re on the right track.’

When they had sent the wire there were only two hours left before the train arrived.

‘It’s fifty miles to Pulborough,’ said Fleur, ‘and I suppose about five on. I wonder if I can risk my petrol. I’ll see at Dorking.’ From that moment on she was lost to them, though the car was a closed saloon, giving all her attention to her driving.

The two brothers sat silent with their eyes on the clock and

speedometer.

‘I don’t often go joy-riding,’ said Hilary, softly: ‘What are you thinking of, old man?’

‘Of what on earth we’re going to do.’

‘If I were to think of that beforehand, in my job, I should be dead in a month. In a slum parish one lives, as in a jungle, surrounded by wild cats; one grows a sort of instinct and has to trust to it.’

‘Oh!’ said Adrian, ‘I live among the dead, and get no practice.’

‘Our niece drives well,’ said

Hilary in a low voice. ‘Look at her neck. Isn’t that capability personified?’

The neck, white, round and shingled, was held beautifully erect and gave a remarkable impression of quick close control of the body by the brain.

For several miles after that they drove in silence.

‘Box Hill,’ said Hilary: ‘a thing once happened to me hereabouts I’ve never told you and never forgotten, it shows how awfully near the edge of mania we live.’ He sunk his voice and went on: ‘Remember that jolly parson

Durcott we used to know? When I was at Beaker's before I went to Harrow, he was a master there; he took me a walk one Sunday over Box Hill. Coming back in the train we were alone. We were ragging a little, when all of a sudden he seemed to go into a sort of frenzy, his eyes all greedy and wild. I hadn't the least notion what he was after and was awfully scared. Then, suddenly, he seemed to get hold of himself again. Right out of the blue! Repressed sex, of course – regular mania for the moment – pretty horrible. A very nice fellow, too. There are forces, Adrian.'

‘Daemonic. And when they break the shell for good... Poor Ferse!’

Fleur’s voice came back to them.

‘She’s beginning to go a bit wonky; I must fill up, Uncle Hilary. There’s a station close here.’

‘Right-o! ’

The car drew up before the filling station.

‘It’s always slow work to Dorking,’ said Fleur, stretching: ‘we can get along now. Only thirty-two miles, and a good hour still. Have you thought?’

‘No,’ said Hilary, ‘we’ve avoided

it like poison.'

Fleur's eyes, whose whites were so clear, flashed on him one of those direct glances which so convinced people of her intelligence.

'Are you going to take him back in this? I wouldn't, if I were you.' And, taking out her case, she repaired her lips slightly, and powdered her short straight nose.

Adrian watched her with a sort of awe. Youth, up to date, did not come very much his way. Not her few words, but the implications in them impressed him. What she meant was crudely this: Let him

dree his weird – you can do nothing. Was she right? Were he and Hilary just pandering to the human instinct for interference; attempting to lay a blasphemous hand on Nature? And yet for Diana's sake they must know what Ferse did, what he was going to do. For Ferse's sake they must see, at least, that he did not fall into the wrong hands. On his brother's face was a faint smile. He at least, thought Adrian, knew youth, had a brood of his own, and could tell how far the clear hard philosophy of youth would carry.

They started again, trailing

through the traffic of Dorking's long and busy street.

‘Clear at last,’ said Fleur, turning her head, ‘if you really want to catch him, you shall;’ and she opened out to full speed. For the next quarter of an hour they flew along, past yellowing spinneys, fields and bits of furzy common dotted with geese and old horses, past village greens and village streets, and all the other evidences of a country life trying to retain its soul. And then the car, which had been travelling very smoothly, began to grate and bump.

‘Tyre gone!’ said Fleur, turning

her head: 'That's torn it.' She brought the car to a standstill, and they all got out. The off hind tyre was right down.

'Pipe to!' said Hilary, taking his coat off. 'Jack her up, Adrian. I'll get the spare wheel off.'

Fleur's head was lost in the toolbox, but her voice was heard saying: 'Too many cooks, better let me!'

Adrian's knowledge of cars was nil, his attitude to machinery helpless; he stood willingly aside, and watched them with admiration. They were cool, quick, efficient, but something was wrong

with the jack.

‘Always like that,’ said Fleur
‘when you’re in a hurry.’

Twenty minutes was lost before
they were again in motion.

‘I can’t possibly do it now,’ she
said, ‘but you’ll be able to pick up
his tracks easily, if you really want
to. The station’s right out beyond
the town.’

Through Billingshurst and
Pulborough and over Stopham
bridge, they travelled at full speed.

‘Better go for Petworth itself,’
said Hilary, ‘if he’s heading back
for the town, we shall meet him.’

‘Am I to stop if we meet him?’

‘No, carry straight on past and then turn.’

But they passed through Petworth and on for the mile and a half to the station without meeting him.

‘The train’s been in a good twenty minutes,’ said Adrian, ‘let’s ask.’

A porter had taken the ticket of a gentleman in a blue overcoat and black hat. No! He had no luggage. He had gone off, towards the Downs. How long ago? Half an hour, maybe.

Regaining the car hastily they made towards the Downs.

‘I remember,’ said Hilary, ‘a little further on there’s a turn to Sutton. The point will be whether he’s taken that or gone on up. There are some houses there somewhere. We’ll ask, they may have seen him.’

Just beyond the turning was a little post-office, and a postman was cycling towards it from the Sutton road.

Fleur pulled the car to a walk alongside.

‘Have you seen a gentleman in a

blue coat and bowler hat making towards Sutton?’

‘No, Miss, ’aven’t passed a soul.’

‘Thank you. Shall I carry on for the Downs, Uncle Hilary?’

Hilary consulted his watch.

‘If I remember, it’s a mile about to the top of the Down close to Duncton Beacon. We’ve come a mile and a half from the station; and he had, say, twenty-five minutes’ start, so by the time we get to the top we should have about caught him. From the top we shall see the road ahead and be able to make sure. If we don’t come

on him, it'll mean he's taken to the Down – but which way?’

Adrian said under his breath: ‘Homewards.’

‘To the East?’ said Hilary. ‘On then, Fleur, not too fast.’

Fleur headed the car up the Downs road.

‘Feel in my coat, you’ll find three apples,’ she said, ‘I caught them up.’

‘What a head!’ said Hilary. ‘But you’ll want them yourself.’

‘No. I’m slimming. You can leave me one.’

The brothers, munching each an

apple, kept their eyes fixed on the woods on either side of the car.

‘Too thick,’ said Hilary; ‘he’ll be carrying on to the open. If you sight him, Fleur, stop dead.’

But they did not sight him, and, mounting slower and slower, reached the top. To their right was the round beech tree clump of Duncton, to the left the open Down; no figure was on the road in front.

‘Not ahead,’ said Hilary. ‘We’ve got to decide, old man.’

‘Take my advice, and let me drive you home, Uncle Hilary.’

‘Shall we, Adrian?’

Adrian shook his head.

‘I shall go on.’

‘All right, I’m with you.’

‘Look!’ said Fleur suddenly, and pointed.

Some fifty yards in, along a rough track leaving the road to the left, lay a dark object.

‘It’s a coat, I think.’

Adrian jumped out and ran towards it. He returned with a blue overcoat over his arm.

‘No doubt now,’ he said. ‘Either he was sitting there and left it by mistake, or he tired of carrying it.’

It's a bad sign, whichever it was.
Come along, Hilary! '

He dropped the coat in the car.

'What orders for me, Uncle Hilary?'

'You've been a brick, my dear. Would you be still more of a brick and wait here another hour? If we're not back by then, go down and keep close along under the Downs slowly by way of Sutton Bignor and West Burton, then if there's no sign of us anywhere along that way, take the main road through Pulborough back to London. If you've any money to spare, you might lend us some.'

Fleur took out her bag.

‘Three pounds. Shall I give you two?’

‘Gratefully received,’ said Hilary. ‘Adrian and I never have any money. We’re the poorest family in England, I do believe. Good-bye, my dear, and thank you! Now, old man!’

Chapter Twenty-eight



WAVING their hands to where Fleur stood by her car with the remaining apple raised to her lips, the two brothers took the track on to the Down.

‘You lead,’ said Hilary; ‘you’ve got the best eyes, and your clothes are less conspicuous. If you sight him, we’ll consult.’

They came almost at once on a long stretch of high wire fence running across the Down.

‘It ends there to the left,’ said

Adrian; 'we'll go round it above the woods; the lower we keep the better.'

They kept round it on the hillside over grass rougher and more uneven, falling into a climber's loping stride as if once more they were off on some long and difficult ascent. The doubt whether they would catch up with Ferse, what they could do if they did, and the knowledge that it might be a maniac with whom they had to deal, brought to both their faces a look that soldiers have, and sailors, and men climbing mountains, of out-staring what was

before them.

They had crossed an old and shallow chalk working and were mounting the few feet to the level on its far side, when Adrian dropped back and pulled Hilary down.

‘He’s there,’ he whispered; ‘about seventy yards ahead!’

‘See you?’

‘No. He looks wild. His hat’s gone, and he’s gesticulating. What shall we do?’

‘Put your head up through that bush.’

Adrian knelt, watching. Ferse

had ceased to gesticulate, he was standing with arms crossed and his bare head bent. His back was to Adrian, and, but for that still, square, wrapped-in attitude, there was nothing to judge from. He suddenly uncrossed his arms, shook his head from side to side and began to walk rapidly on. Adrian waited till he had disappeared among the bushes on the slope, and beckoned Hilary to follow.

‘We mustn’t let him get too far ahead,’ muttered Hilary, ‘or we shan’t know whether he’s taken to the wood.’

‘He’ll keep to the open, he wants

air, poor devil. Look out!’ He pulled Hilary down again. The ground had suddenly begun to dip. It sloped right down to a grassy hollow, and halfway down the slope they could see Ferse plainly. He was walking slowly, clearly unconscious of pursuit. Every now and then his hands would go up to his bare head, as if to clear away something that entangled it.

‘God!’ murmured Adrian: ‘I hate to see him.’

Hilary nodded.

They lay watching. Part of the weald was visible, rich with colour on that sunny autumn day. The

grass, after heavy morning dew, was scented still; the sky of the dim spiritual blue that runs almost to white above the chalky downs. And the day was silent well-nigh to breathlessness. The brothers waited without speaking.

Ferse had reached the level at the bottom; they could see him dejectedly moving across a rough field towards a spinney. A pheasant rose just in front of him; they saw him start, as if wakened from a dream, and stand watching its rising flight.

‘I expect he knows every foot round here,’ said Adrian: ‘he was a

keen sportsman.’ And just then Ferse threw up his hands as if they held a gun. There was something oddly reassuring in that action.

‘Now,’ said Hilary, as Ferse disappeared in the spinney, ‘run!’ They dashed down the hill, and hurried along over rough ground.

‘Suppose,’ gasped Adrian, ‘that he’s stopped in the spinney.’

‘Risk it! Gently now, till we can see the rise.’

About a hundred yards beyond the spinney, Ferse was plodding slowly up the hill.

‘All right so far,’ murmured

Hilary, ‘we must wait till that rise flattens out and we lose sight of him. This is a queer business, old boy, for you and me. And at the end of it, as Fleur said: What?’

‘We *must know*,’ said Adrian.

‘We’re just losing him now. Let’s give him five minutes. I’ll time it.’

That five minutes seemed interminable. A jay squawked from the wooded hillside, a rabbit stole out and squatted in front of them; faint shiverings of air passed through the spinney.

‘Now!’ said Hilary. They rose, and breasted the grass rise at a

good pace. ‘If he comes back on his tracks, here –’

‘The sooner it’s face to face the better,’ said Adrian, ‘but if he sees us following he’ll run, and we shall lose him.’

‘Go slow, old man. It’s beginning to flatten.’

Cautiously they topped the rise. The Down now dipped a little to where a chalky track ran above a beech wood to their left. There was no sign of Ferse.

‘Either he’s gone into the wood or he’s through that next thicket, and on the rise again. We’d better

hurry and make sure.'

They ran along the track between deep banks, and were turning into the brush, when the sound of a voice not twenty yards ahead jerked them to a standstill. They dropped back behind the bank and lay breathless.

Somewhere in the thicket Ferse was muttering to himself. They could hear no words, but the voice gave them both a miserable feeling.

'Poor chap!' whispered Hilary: 'shall we go on, and try to comfort him?'

'Listen!'

There was the sound as of a branch cracking underfoot, a muttered oath, and then with appalling suddenness a huntsman's scream. It had a quality that froze the blood. Adrian said:

‘Pretty ghastly! But he's broken covert.’

Cautiously they moved into the thicket; Ferse was running for the Down that rose from the end of it.

‘He didn't see us, did he?’

‘No, or he'd be looking back. Wait till we lose sight of him again.’

‘This is poor work,’ said Hilary,

suddenly, ‘but I agree with you it’s got to be done. That was a horrible sound! But we must know exactly what we’re going to do, old man.’

‘I was thinking,’ said Adrian, ‘if we could induce him to come back to Chelsea, we’d keep Diana and the children away, dismiss the maids, and get him special attendants. I’d stay there with him till it was properly fixed. It seems to me that his own house is the only chance.’

‘I don’t believe he’ll come of his free will.’

‘In that case, God knows! I won’t have a hand in caging him.’

‘What if he tries to kill himself?’

‘That’s up to you, Hilary.’

Hilary was silent.

‘Don’t bet on my cloth,’ he said, suddenly; ‘a slum parson is pretty hard-boiled.’

Adrian gripped his hand. ‘He’s out of sight now.’

‘Come on, then!’

They crossed the level at a sharp pace and began mounting the rise. Up there the character of the ground changed, the hill was covered sparsely by hawthorn bushes, and yew trees, and bramble, with here and there a

young beech. It gave good cover and they moved more freely.

‘We’re coming to the cross-roads above Bignor,’ murmured Hilary. ‘He might take the track down from there. We could easily lose him!’

They ran, but suddenly stood still behind a yew tree.

‘He’s not going down,’ said Hilary: ‘Look!’

On the grassy open rise beyond the cross tracks, where a signpost stood, Ferse was running towards the north side of the hill.

‘A second track goes down there,

I remember.'

'It's all chance, but we can't stop now.'

Ferse had ceased to run, he was walking slowly with stooped head up the rise. They watched him from behind their yew tree till he vanished over the hill's shoulder.

'Now!' said Hilary.

It was a full half mile, and both of them were over fifty.

'Not too fast, old man,' panted Hilary; 'we mustn't bust our bellows.'

They kept to a dogged jog, reached the shoulder, over which

Ferse had vanished, and found a grass track trailing down.

‘Slowly does it now,’ gasped Hilary.

Here too the hillside was dotted with bushes and young trees, and they made good use of them till they came to a shallow chalk pit.

‘Let’s lie up here a minute, and get our wind. He’s not going off the Down or we’d have seen him. Listen!’

From below them came a chanting sound. Adrian raised his head above the pit side and looked over. A little way down by the side

of the track lay Ferse on his back. The words of the song he was droning out came up quite clearly:

‘Must I go bound, and you go free?
Must I love a lass that couldn’t love
me?
Was e’er I taught so poor a wit
As love a lass, would break my
heart.’

He ceased and lay perfectly still; then, to Adrian’s horror, his face became distorted; he flung his fists up in the air, cried out: ‘I won’t – I won’t be mad!’ and rolled over on his face.

Adrian dropped back.

‘It’s terrible! I must go down and

‘speak to him.’

‘We’ll both go – round by the track – slow – don’t startle him.’

They took the track which wound round the chalk pit. Ferse was no longer there.

‘Quietly on, old son,’ said Hilary.

They walked on in a curious calm, as if they had abandoned the chase.

‘Who can believe in God?’ said Adrian.

A wry smile contorted Hilary’s long face.

‘In God I believe, but not a merciful one as we understand the

word. On this hillside, I remember, they trap. Hundreds of rabbits suffer the tortures of the damned. We used to let them out and knock them on the head. If my beliefs were known, I should be unfrocked. That wouldn't help. My job's a concrete one. Look! A fox!'

They stood a moment watching his low fulvous body steal across the track.

'Marvellous beast, a fox! Great places for wild life, these wooded chines; so steep, you can't disturb them – pigeons, jays, woodpeckers, rabbits, foxes, hares, pheasants – every mortal thing.'

The track had begun to drop,
and Hilary pointed

Ahead, beyond the dip into the
chine they could see Ferse walking
along a wire fence.

They watched till he vanished
then reappeared on the side of the
hill, having rounded the corner of
the fence.

‘What now?’

‘He can’t see us from there. To
speak to him, we must somehow
get near before we try, otherwise
he’ll just run.’

They crossed the dip and went
up along and round the corner of

the fence under cover of the hawthorns. On the uneven hillside Ferse had again vanished.

‘This is wired for sheep,’ said Hilary, ‘Look! they’re all over the hill – Southdowns.’

They reached a top. There was no sign of him.

They kept along the wire, and reaching the crest of the next rise, stood looking. Away to the left the hill dropped steeply into another chine; in front of them was open grass dipping to a wood. On their right was still the wire fencing and rough pasture. Suddenly Adrian gripped his brother’s arm. Not

seventy yards away on the other side of the wire Ferse was lying face to the grass, with sheep grazing close to him. The brothers crawled to the shelter of a bush. From there, unseen, they could see him quite well, and they watched him in silence. He lay so still that the sheep were paying him no attention. Round-bodied, short-legged, snub-nosed, of a greyish white, and with the essential cosiness of the Southdown breed, they grazed on, undisturbed.

‘Is he asleep, d’you think?’

Adrian shook his head. ‘Peaceful, though.’

There was something in his attitude that went straight to the heart; something that recalled a small boy hiding his head in his mother's lap; it was as if the feel of the grass beneath his body, his face, his outstretched hands, were bringing him comfort; as if he were groping his way back into the quiet security of Mother Earth. While he lay like that it was impossible to disturb him.

The sun, in the west, fell on their backs, and Adrian turned his face to receive it on his cheek. All the nature-lover and country man in him responded to that warmth, to

the scent of the grass, the song of the larks, the blue of the sky; and he noticed that Hilary too had turned his face to the sun. It was so still that, but for the larks' song and the muffled sound of the sheep cropping, one might have said Nature was dumb. No voice of man or beast, no whirr of traffic came up from the weald.

‘Three o’clock. Have a nap, old man,’ he whispered to Hilary; ‘I’ll watch.’

Ferse seemed asleep now. Surely his brain would rest from its disorder here. If there were healing in air, in form, in colour, it was

upon this green cool hill for a thousand years and more undwelt on and freed from the restlessness of men. The men of old, indeed, had lived up there; but since then nothing had touched it but the winds and the shadows of the clouds. And today there was no wind, no cloud to throw soft and moving darkness on the grass.

So profound a pity for the poor devil, lying there as if he would never move again, stirred Adrian that he could not think of himself, nor even feel for Diana. Ferse, so lying, awakened in him a sensation quite impersonal, the deep herding

kinship men have for each other in the face of Fortune's strokes which seem to them unfair. Yes 1 He was sleeping now, grasping at the earth for refuge; to grasp for eternal refuge in the earth was all that was left him. And for those two quiet hours of watching that prostrate figure among the sheep, Adrian was filled not with futile rebellion and bitterness but with a strange unhappy wonder. The old Greek dramatists had understood the tragic plaything which the gods make of man; such understanding had been overlaid by the Christian doctrine of a merciful God.

Merciful? – No! Hilary was right! Faced by Ferse's fate – what would one do? What – while the gleam of sanity remained? When a man's life was so spun that no longer he could do his job, be no more to his fellows than a poor distraught and frightening devil, the hour of eternal rest in quiet earth had surely come. Hilary had seemed to think so too; yet he was not sure what his brother would do if it came to the point. His job was with the living, a man who died was lost to him, so much chance of service gone! And Adrian felt a sort of thankfulness that his own job was

with the dead, classifying the bones of men – the only part of men that did not suffer, and endured, age on age, to afford evidence of a marvellous animal. So he lay, and watched, plucking blade after blade of grass and rubbing the sweetness of them out between his palms.

The sun wore on due west, till it was almost level with his eyes; the sheep had ceased cropping and were moving slowly together over the hill, as if waiting to be folded. Rabbits had stolen out and were nibbling the grass; and the larks, one by one, had dropped from the

sky. A chill was creeping on the air; the trees down in the weald had darkened and solidified; and the whitening sky seemed waiting for the sunset glow. The grass too had lost its scent; there was no dew as yet.

Adrian shivered. In ten minutes now the sun would be off the hill, and then it would be cold. When Ferse awoke, would he be better or worse? They must risk it. He touched Hilary, who lay with his knees drawn up, still sleeping. He woke instantly.

‘Hallo, old man!’

‘Hssh! He’s still asleep. What are

we to do when he wakes? Shall we go up to him now and wait for it?’

Hilary jerked his brother’s sleeve. Ferse was on his feet. From behind their bush they could see him wildly looking round, as some animal warned of danger might stand gazing before he takes to flight. It was clear that he could not see them, but that he had heard or sensed some presence. He began walking towards the wire, crawled through and stood upright, turned towards the reddening sun balanced now like a fiery globe on the far wooded hill. With the glow from it on his face, bareheaded and

so still that he might have been dead on his feet, he stood till the sun vanished.

‘Now,’ whispered Hilary, and stood up. Adrian saw Ferse come suddenly to life, fling out his arm with a wild defiance, and turn to run.

Hilary said, aghast: ‘He’s desperate. There’s a chalk pit just above the main road. Come on, old man, come on!’

They ran, but stiffened as they were, had no chance with Ferse, who gained with every stride. He ran like a maniac, flinging his arms out, and they could hear him shout.

Hilary gasped out:

‘Stop! He’s not going for that pit after all. It’s away to the right. He’s making for the wood down there. Better let him think we’ve given up.’

They watched him running down the slope, and lost him as, still running, he entered the wood.

‘Now!’ said Hilary.

They laboured on down to the wood and entered it as near to the point of his disappearance as they could. It was of beech and except at the edge there was no undergrowth. They stopped to

listen, but there was no sound. The light in there was already dim, but the wood was narrow and they were soon at its far edge. Below they could see some cottages and farm buildings.

‘Let’s get down to the road.’

They hurried on, came suddenly to the edge of a high chalk pit, and stopped aghast.

‘I didn’t know of this,’ said Hilary. ‘Go that way and I’ll go this along the edge.’

Adrian went upwards till he reached the top. Below, at the bottom some sixty steep feet down,

he could see a dark thing lying. Whatever it was, it did not move, and no sound came up. Was this the end then, a headlong dive into the half dark? A choking sensation seized him by the throat, and for a moment he stood unable to call out or move. Then hastily he ran along the edge till he came to where Hilary was standing.

‘Well?’

Adrian pointed back into the pit. They went on along the edge through undergrowth till they could scramble down, and make their way over the grassed floor of the old pit to the farther corner below

the highest point.

The dark thing was Ferse.
Adrian knelt and raised his head.
His neck was broken; he was dead.

Whether he had dived
deliberately to that end, or in his
mad rush fallen over, they could
not tell. Neither of them spoke, but
Hilary put his hand on his brother's
shoulder.

At last he said: 'There's a cart
shed a little way along the road,
but perhaps we ought not to move
him. Stay with him, while I go on
to the village and 'phone. It's a
matter for the police, I suppose.'

Adrian nodded, still on his knees beside the broken figure.

‘There’s a post office quite near, I shan’t be long.’ Hilary hurried away.

Alone in the silent darkening pit Adrian sat cross-legged, with the dead man’s head resting against him. He had closed the eyes and covered the face with his handkerchief. In the wood above birds rustled and chirped, on their way to bed. The dew had begun to fall, and into the blue twilight the ground mist of autumn was creeping. Shape was all softened, but the tall chalk pit face still

showed white. Though not fifty yards from a road on which cars were passing, this spot where Ferse had leapt to his rest seemed to Adrian desolate, remote, and full of ghostliness. Though he knew that he ought to be thankful for Ferse, for Diana, for himself, he could feel nothing but that profound pity for a fellow man so tortured and broken in his prime – profound pity, and a sort of creeping identification with the mystery of Nature enwrapping the dead man and this his resting-place.

A voice roused him from that strange coma. An old whiskered

countryman was standing there with a glass in his hand.

‘So there been an accident, I year,’ he was saying; ‘a parson gentleman sent me with this. ’Tis brandy, sir.’ He handed the glass to Adrian. ‘Did ’e fall over yere, or what?’

‘Yes, he fell over.’

‘I allus said as they should put a fence up there. The gentleman said I was to tell you as the doctor and the police was comin’.’

‘Thank you,’ said Adrian, handing back the emptied glass.

‘There be a nice cosy cartshed a

little ways along the road maybe we could carry 'im along there.'

'We mustn't move him till they come.'

'Ah!' said the old countryman: 'I've read as there was a law about that, in case as 'twas murder or sooicide.' He peered down. 'He do look quiet, don't 'e! D'e know 'oo 'e is, Sir?'

'Yes. A Captain Ferse. He came from round here.'

'What, one of the Ferses o' Burton Rise? Why, I worked there as a boy; born in that parish I were.' He peered closer: 'This'd

never be Mr Ronald, would it?’

Adrian nodded.

‘Yeou don’ say! There’s none of ’em there neow. His grandfather died mad, so ’e did. Yeou don’ say! Mr Ronald! I knew ’im as a young lad.’ He stooped to look at the face in the last of the light, then stood, moving his whiskered head mournfully from side to side. To him – Adrian could see – it made all the difference that here was no ‘foreigner’.

The sudden sputtering of a motor cycle broke the stillness; it came with gleaming headlight down the cart track into the pit,

and two figures got off. A young man and a girl. They came gingerly towards the group disclosed by the beam from the headlight, and stood, peering down.

‘We heard there’s been an accident.’

‘Ah!’ said the old countryman.

‘Can we do anything?’

‘No, thank you,’ said Adrian; ‘the doctor and the police are coming. We must just wait.’

He could see the young man open his mouth as if to ask more, close it without speaking, and put

his arm round the girl, then, like the old countryman, they stood silent with their eyes fixed on the figure with the broken neck lying against Adrian's knee. The cycle's engine, still running, throbbed in the silence, and its light made even more ghostly the old pit and the little group of the living around the dead.

Chapter Twenty-nine



AT Condaford, the telegram came just before dinner. It ran: 'Poor F dead down chalk pit here Removed to Chichester Adrian and I going with him Inquest will be there. Hilary.'

Dinny was in her room when it was brought to her, and she sat down on her bed with that feeling of constriction in the chest which comes when relief and sorrow struggle together for expression. Here was what she had prayed for, and all she could think of was the

last sound she had heard him utter, and the look on his face, when he was standing in the doorway listening to Diana singing. She said to the maid who had brought in the telegram:

‘Amy, find Scaramouch.’

When the Scotch terrier came with his bright eyes and his air of knowing that he was of value, she clasped him so tight that he became uneasy. With that warm and stiffly hairy body in her arms, she regained the power of feeling; relief covered the background of her being, but pity forced tears into her eyes. It was a curious state, and

beyond the comprehension of her dog. He licked her nose and wriggled till she set him down. She finished dressing hurriedly and went to her mother's room.

Lady Cherrell, dressed for dinner, was moving between open wardrobe and open chest of drawers, considering what she could best part with for the approaching jumble sale which must keep the village nursing fund going over the year's end. Dinny put the telegram into her hand without a word. Having read it, she said quietly:

‘That's what you prayed for,

dear.'

'Does it mean suicide?'

'I think so.'

'Ought I to tell Diana now, or wait till she's had a night's sleep?'

'Now, I think. *I* will, if you like.'

'No, no, darling. It's up to me. She'll like dinner upstairs, I expect. Tomorrow, I suppose, we shall have to go to Chichester.'

'This is all very dreadful for you, Dinny.'

'It's good for me.' She took back the telegram and went out.

Diana was with the children, who were giving as long as

possible to the process of going to bed, not having reached the age when to do such a thing has become desirable. Dinny beckoned her out into her own room, and, once more without a word, handed over the telegram. Though she had been so close to Diana these last days, there were sixteen years between them, and she made no consoling gesture as she might have to one of her own age. She had, indeed, a feeling of never quite knowing how Diana would take things. She took this stonily. It might have been no news at all. Her beautiful face, fine and worn

as that on a coin, expressed nothing. Her eyes fixed on Dinny's, remained dry and clear. All she said was: 'I won't come down. Tomorrow – Chichester?'

Checking all impulse, Dinny nodded and went out. Alone with her mother after dinner, she said:

'I wish I had Diana's self-control.'

'Self-control like hers is the result of all she's been through.'

'There's the Vere de Vere touch about it, too.'

'That's no bad thing, Dinny.'

'What will this inquest mean?'

‘She’ll need all her self-control there, I’m afraid.’

‘Mother, shall I have to give evidence?’

‘You were the last person who spoke to him so far as is known, weren’t you?’

‘Yes. Must I speak of his coming to the door last night?’

‘I suppose you ought to tell everything you know, if you’re asked.’

A flush stained Dinny’s cheeks.

‘I don’t think I will. I never even told Diana that. And I don’t see what it has to do with outsiders.’

‘No, I don’t see either; but we’re not supposed to exercise our own judgements as to that.’

‘Well, I shall; I’m not going to pander to people’s beastly curiosity, and give Diana pain.’

‘Suppose one of the maids heard him?’

‘They can’t prove that *I* did.’

Lady Cherrell smiled. ‘I wish your father were here.’

‘You are not to tell Dad what I told you, Mother. I can’t have the male conscience fussing around; the female’s is bad enough, but one has it in hand.’

‘Very well.’

‘I shan’t have the faintest scruple,’ said Dinny, fresh from her recollection of London Police Courts, ‘about keeping a thing dark, if I can safely. What do they want an inquest for, anyway? He’s dead. It’s just morbidity.’

‘I oughtn’t to aid and abet you, Dinny.’

‘Yes, you ought, Mother. You know you agree at heart.’

Lady Cherrell said no more. She did....

The General and Alan Tasburgh came down next morning by the

first train, and half an hour later they all started in the open car; Alan driving, the General beside him, and in the back seat Lady Cherrell, Dinny and Diana wedged together. It was a long and gloomy drive. Leaning back with her nose just visible above her fur, Dinny pondered. It was dawning on her gradually that she was in some sort the hub of the approaching inquest. She it was to whom Ferse had opened his heart; she who had taken the children away; she who had gone down in the night to telephone; she who had heard what she did not mean to tell; and, lastly

but much the most importantly, it must be she who had called in Adrian and Hilary. Only behind her, their niece, who had caused Diana to turn to them for assistance when Ferse vanished, could Adrian's friendship for Diana be masked. Like everybody else, Dinny read, and even enjoyed, the troubles and scandals of others, retailed in the papers; like everybody else, she revolted against the papers having anything that could be made into scandal to retail about her family or her friends. If it came out crudely that her uncle had been applied to as an

old and intimate friend of Diana's, he and she would be asked all sorts of questions, leading to all sorts of suspicions in the sex-ridden minds of the Public. Her roused imagination roamed freely. If Adrian's long and close friendship with Diana became known, what would there be to prevent the Public from suspecting even that her uncle had pushed Ferse over the edge of that chalk pit, unless, of course, Hilary were with him – for as yet they knew no details. Her mind, in fact, began running before the hounds. A lurid explanation of anything was so

much more acceptable than a dull and true one! And there hardened within her an almost vicious determination to cheat the Public of the thrills it would be seeking.

Adrian met them in the hall of the hotel at Chichester, and she took her chance to say: 'Uncle, can I speak to you and Uncle Hilary privately?'

'Hilary had to go back to Town, my dear, but he'll be down the last thing this evening; we can have a talk then. The inquest's tomorrow.'

With that she had to be content. When he had finished his story,

determined that Adrian should not take Diana to see Ferse, she said: 'If you'll tell us where to go, Uncle, *I'll* go with Diana.'

Adrian nodded. He had understood.

When they reached the mortuary, Diana went in alone, and Dinny waited in a corridor which smelled of disinfectant and looked out on to a back street. A fly, disenchanted by the approach of winter, was crawling dejectedly up the pane. Gazing out into that colourless back alley, under a sky drained of all warmth and light, she felt very miserable. Life seemed

exceptionally bleak, and heavy with sinister issues. This inquest, Hubert's impending fate – no light or sweetness anywhere! Not even the thought of Alan's palpable devotion gave her comfort.

She turned to see Diana again beside her, and, suddenly forgetting her own woe, threw an arm round her and kissed her cold cheek. They went back to the hotel without speaking, except for Diana's: 'He looked marvellously calm.'

She went early to her room after dinner, and sat there with a book, waiting for her uncles. It was ten

o'clock before Hilary's cab drew up, and a few minutes later they came. She noted how shadowy and worn they both looked; but there was something reassuring in their faces. They were the sort who ran till they dropped, anyway. They both kissed her with unexpected warmth, and sat down sideways, one on each side of her bed. Dinny stood between them at the foot and addressed Hilary.

‘It's about Uncle Adrian, Uncle. I've been thinking. This inquest is going to be horrid if we don't take care.’

‘It is, Dinny. I came down with a

couple of journalists who didn't suspect my connexion. They've got hold of the mental home, and are all agog. I've a great respect for journalists, they do their job very thoroughly.'

Dinny addressed Adrian.

'You won't mind my talking freely, will you, Uncle?'

Adrian smiled 'No, Dinny. You're a loyal baggage; go ahead!'

'It seems to me then,' she went on, plaiting her fingers on the bed-rail, 'that the chief point is to keep Uncle Adrian's friendship for Diana out of it, and I thought that the

asking of you two to find him ought to be put entirely on to me. You see, I was the last person known to speak to him, when he cut the telephone wire, you know, so, when I'm called, I could get it into their minds that you were entirely my suggestion, as a couple of Uncles who were clever and good at crossword puzzles. Otherwise, why did we go to Uncle Adrian? Because he was *such a friend*, and then you'd get at once all that they may think that means, especially when they hear that Captain Ferse was away four years.'

There was silence before Hilary said:

‘She’s wise, old boy. Four years’ friendship with a beautiful woman in a husband’s absence means only one thing with a jury, and many things with the Public.’

Adrian nodded. ‘But I don’t see how the fact that I’ve known them both so long can be concealed.’

‘First impressions,’ said Dinny eagerly, ‘will be everything. I can say that Diana suggested going to her doctor and Michael, but that I overruled her, knowing that you were marvellous at tracing things out because of your job, and could

get at Uncle Hilary, who was so good at human nature. If we *start* them right, I don't believe the mere fact that you knew both of them would matter. It seems to me awfully important that I should be called as early as possible.'

'It's putting a lot on you, my dear.'

'Oh! no. If I'm not called before you and Uncle Hilary, will you both say that it was I who came and asked you, and I can rub it in afterwards?'

'After the doctor and the police, Diana will be the first witness.'

‘Yes, but I can speak to her, so that we shall all be saying the same thing.’

Hilary smiled. ‘I don’t see why not, it’s very white lying. I can put in that I’ve known them as long as you, Adrian. We both met Diana first at that picnic Lawrence gave near the Land’s End, when she was a flapper, and we both met Ferse first at her wedding. Family friendship, um?’

‘My visits to the Mental Home will come out,’ said Adrian, ‘the Doctor’s been summoned as witness.’

‘Oh! well,’ said Dinny, ‘you went

there as his friend, and specially interested in mental derangement. After all, you're supposed to be scientific, Uncle.'

Both smiled, and Hilary said: 'All right, Dinny, we'll speak to the Sergeant, he's a very decent chap, and get you called early, if possible.' He went to the door.

'Good night, little serpent,' said Adrian.

'Goodnight, dear Uncle; you look terribly tired. Have you got a hot water-bottle?'

Adrian shook his head. 'I've nothing but a tooth-brush which I

bought today.'

Dinny hauled her bottle out of her bed, and forced it on him.

'Shall I speak to Diana, then, about what we've been saying?'

'If you will, Dinny.'

'After tomorrow the sun will shine.'

'Will it?' said Adrian.

As the door closed, Dinny sighed. Would it? Diana seemed as if dead to feeling. And – there was Hubert's business!

Chapter Thirty



THE reflections of Adrian and his niece, when together they entered the Coroner's Court on the following day, might have been pooled as follows:

A coroner's inquest was like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays, devised for other times. When Sunday afternoons were devoted to games, murders infrequent, and suicides no longer buried at cross-roads, neither custom had its initial wisdom. In old days, Justice and its emissaries

were regarded as the foes of mankind, so it was natural to interpose a civilian arbiter between death and the Law. In an age in which one called the police ‘a splendid force’ was there not something unnatural in supposing them incapable of judging when it was necessary for them to take action? Their incompetence, therefore, could not well be considered the reason for the preservation of these rites. The cause was, surely, in one’s dread of being deprived of knowledge. Every reader of a newspaper felt that the more he or she heard about

what was doubtful, sensational, and unsavoury, the better for his or her soul. One knew that, without coroners' inquests, there would often be no published inquiry at all into sensational death; and never two inquiries. If, then, in place of no inquiry one could always have one inquiry, and in place of one inquiry sometimes have two inquiries, how much pleasanter! The dislike which one had for being nosy disappeared the moment one got into a crowd. The nosier one could be in a crowd the happier one felt. And the oftener one could find room in a Coroner's Court, the

greater the thankfulness to Heaven. 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow' could never go up more fervently than from the hearts of such as had been privileged to find seats at an inquiry about death. For an inquiry about death nearly always meant the torture of the living, and than that was anything more calculated to give pleasure?

The fact that the Court was full confirmed these reflections and they passed on into a little room to wait. Adrian saying: 'You go in fifth wicket down, Dinny, both Hilary and I are taken before you.'

If we keep out of Court till we're wanted they can't say we copied each other.'

They sat very silent in the little bare room. The police, the doctor, Diana and Hilary had all to be examined first.

'It's like the ten little nigger boys,' murmured Dinny. Her eyes were fixed on a calendar on the wall opposite; she could not read it, but it seemed necessary.

'See, my dear,' said Adrian, and drew a little bottle from his breast pocket, 'take a sip or two of this – not more – it's fifty-fifty sal volatile and water; it'll steady you no end.

Be careful!’

Dinny took a little gulp. It burned her throat, but not too badly.

‘You too, Uncle.’

Adrian also took a cautious gulp.

‘No finer dope,’ he said, ‘before going in to bat, or anything like that.’

And they again sat silent, assimilating the fumes. Presently Adrian said:

‘If spirits survive, as I don’t believe, what is poor Ferse thinking of this farce? We’re still barbarians. There’s a story of

Maupassant's about a Suicide Club that provided a pleasant form of death to those who felt they had to go. I don't believe in suicide for the sane, except in very rare cases. We've got to stick things out; but for the insane, or those threatened with it, I wish we had that Club, Dinny. Has that stuff steadied you?'

Dinny nodded.

'It'll last pretty well an hour.' He got up. 'My turn, I see. Good-bye, my dear, good luck! Stick in a "Sir", to the Coroner, now and then.'

Watching him straighten himself as he passed through the door,

Dinny felt a sort of inspiration. Uncle Adrian was the man she admired most of any she had ever seen. And she sent up a little illogical prayer for him. Certainly that stuff had steadied her; the sinking, fluttering feeling she had been having was all gone. She took out her pocket mirror and powder-puff. She could go to the stake, anyway, with a nose that did not shine.

Another quarter of an hour, however, passed before she was called, and she spent it, with her eyes still fixed on that calendar, thinking of Condaford and

recalling all her pleasantest times there. The old days of its unrestored state, when she was very small, hayfield days, and picnics in the woods; pulling lavender, riding on the retriever, promotion to the pony when Hubert was at school; days of pure delight in a new, fixed home, for, though she had been born there, she had been nomadic till she was four – at Aldershot, and Gibraltar. She remembered with special pleasure winding the golden silk off the cocoons of her silk-worms, how they had made her think of creeping, crawling elephants, and

how peculiar had been their smell.

‘Elizabeth Charwell.’

Nuisance to have a name that everyone pronounced wrong as a matter of course! And she rose, murmuring to herself:

‘One little nigger, walking all alone,
Up came a coroner, and then there
was none.’

Someone took charge of her on her entry, and, taking her across the Court, placed her in a sort of pen. It was fortunate that she had been in such places lately, for it all felt rather familiar, and even faintly comic. The jury in front of

her looked as it were disused, the coroner had a funny importance. Down there, not far to her left, were the other little niggers; and, behind them, stretching to the blank wall, dozens and dozens and dozens of faces in rows, as of sardines set up on their tails in a huge sardine box. Then aware that she was being addressed, she concentrated on the coroner's face.

‘Your name is Elizabeth Cherrell. You are the daughter, I believe, of Lieutenant-General Sir Conway Cherrell, K.C.B., C.M.G., and Lady Cherrell?’

Dinny bowed. ‘I believe he likes

me for that,' she thought.

'And you live with them at Condaford Grange in Oxfordshire?'

'Yes.'

'I believe, Miss Cherrell, that you were staying with Captain and Mrs Ferse up to the morning on which Captain Ferse left his house?'

'I was.'

'Are you a close friend of theirs?'

'Of Mrs Ferse. I had seen Captain Ferse only once, I think, before his return.'

'Ah! his return. Were you staying with Mrs Ferse when he returned?'

'I had come up to stay with her

on that very afternoon.'

'The afternoon of his return from the Mental Home?'

'Yes. I actually went to stay at their house the following day.'

'And were you there until Captain Ferse left his house?'

'I was.'

'During that time what was his demeanour?'

At this question for the first time Dinny realized the full disadvantage of not knowing what has been said already. It almost looked as if she must say what she really knew and felt.

‘He seemed to me quite normal, except that he would not go out or see anybody. He looked quite healthy, only his eyes made one feel unhappy.’

‘How do you mean exactly?’

‘They – they looked like a fire behind bars, they seemed to flicker.’

And, at those words, she noticed that the jury for a moment looked a trifle less disused.

‘He would not go out, you say? Was that during the whole time you were there?’

‘No; he went out on the day

before he left his home. He was out all that day, I believe.'

'You believe? Were you not there?'

'No; that morning I took the two children down to my mother's at Condaford Grange, and returned in the evening just before dinner. Captain Ferse was not in then.'

'What made you take the children down?'

'Mrs Ferse asked me to. She had noticed some change in Captain Ferse, and she thought the children would be better away.'

'Could you say that you had

noticed a change?’

‘Yes. I thought he seemed more restless, and, perhaps, suspicious; and he was drinking more at dinner.’

‘Nothing very striking?’

‘No. I – ’

‘Yes, Miss Cherrell?’

‘I was going to say something that I don’t know of my own knowledge.’

‘Something that Mrs Ferse had told you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, you needn’t tell us that.’

‘Thank you, Sir.’

‘Coming back to when you returned from taking the children to your home, Captain Ferse was not in, you say; was Mrs Ferse in?’

‘Yes, she was dressed for dinner. I dressed quickly and we dined alone together. We were very anxious about him.’

‘And then?’

‘After dinner we went up to the drawing-room, and to distract her I made Mrs Ferse sing, she was so nervous and anxious. After a little we heard the front door, and Captain Ferse came in and sat down.’

‘Did he say anything?’

‘No.’

‘How was he looking?’

‘Dreadful, I thought. Very strange and strained, as if under the power of some terrible thought.’

‘Yes?’

‘Mrs Ferse asked him if he had had dinner, and if he would like to go to bed; and if he would see a doctor; but he wouldn’t speak – he sat with his eyes closed, almost as if he might be asleep, until at last I whispered: “Is he asleep, d’you think?” Then suddenly he cried out:

“Sleep! I’m for it again, and I won’t stand it. By God! I won’t stand it.” ’

When she had repeated those words of Ferse, Dinny understood better than hitherto what is meant by the expression ‘sensation in Court’; in some mysterious way she had supplied what had been lacking to the conviction carried by the witnesses who had preceded her. Whether she had been wise in this, she was utterly unable to decide; and her eyes sought Adrian’s face. He gave her an almost imperceptible nod.

‘Yes, Miss Cherrell?’

‘Mrs Ferse went towards him,

and he cried out: "Leave me alone. Go away!" I think she said:

"Ronald, won't you see someone just to give you something to make you sleep?" but he sprang up and cried out violently: "Go away! I'll see no one – no one!" '

'Yes, Miss Cherrell, what then?'

'We were frightened. We went up to my room and consulted, and I said we ought to telephone.'

'To whom?'

'To Mrs Ferse's doctor. She wanted to go, but I prevented her and ran down. The telephone was in the little study on the ground

floor, and I was just getting the number when I felt my hand seized, and there was Captain Ferse behind me. He cut the wire with a knife. Then he stood holding my arm, and I said: "That's silly, Captain Ferse; you know we wouldn't hurt you." He let me go, and put his knife away, and told me to put on my shoes, because I had them in my other hand.'

'You mean you had taken them off?'

'Yes, to run down quietly. I put them on. He said: "I'm not going to be messed about. I shall do what I like with myself." I said: "You

know we only want your good.” And he said: “I know that good – no more of that for me.” And then he looked out of the window and said: “It’s raining like hell,” and turned to me and cried: “Get out of this room, quick. Get out!” and I flew back upstairs again.’

Dinny paused and took a long breath. This second living through those moments was making her heart beat. She closed her eyes.

‘Yes, Miss Cherrell, what then?’

She opened her eyes. There was the coroner still, and there the jury with their mouths a little open, as it seemed.

‘I told Mrs Ferse. We didn’t know what to do or what was coming – we didn’t see what we could do, and I suggested that we should drag the bed against the door and try to sleep.’

‘And did you?’

‘Yes; but we were awake a long time. Mrs Ferse was so exhausted that she did sleep at last, and I think I did towards morning. Anyway the maid woke me by knocking.’

‘Did you hear nothing further of Captain Ferse during the night?’

The old school-boy saying ‘If you

tell a lie, tell a good 'un,' shot through her mind, and she said firmly: 'No, nothing.'

'What time was it when you were called?'

'Eight o'clock. I woke Mrs Ferse and we went down at once. Captain Ferse's dressing-room was in disorder, and he seemed to have lain upon the bed; but he was nowhere in the house; and his hat and overcoat were gone from the chair where he had thrown them down in the hall.'

'What did you do then?'

'We consulted, and Mrs Ferse

wanted to go to her doctor and to her cousin and mine, Mr Michael Mont, the Member of Parliament; but I thought if I could get my uncles they would be better able to trace Captain Ferse; so I persuaded her to come with me to my Uncle Adrian and ask him to get my Uncle Hilary and see if they could find Captain Ferse. I knew they were both very clever men and very tactful,' Dinny saw the coroner bow slightly towards her uncles, and hurried on, 'and they were old family friends; I thought if they couldn't manage to find him without publicity, nobody could. So

we went to my Uncle Adrian, and he agreed to get my Uncle Hilary to help him and try; then I took Mrs Ferse down with me to the children at Condaford, and that's all I know, Sir.'

The coroner bowed quite low towards her and said: 'Thank you, Miss Cherrell. You have given your evidence admirably.' The jury moved uneasily as if trying to bow too, and Dinny, with an effort, stepped down from the pen and took her seat beside Hilary, who put his hand on hers. She sat very still, and then was conscious that a tear, as it were the last of the sal

volatile, was moving slowly down her cheek. Listening dully to what followed, the evidence of the Doctor in charge of the Mental Home, and the coroner's address, then waiting dumbly for the jury's verdict, she suffered from the feeling that in her loyalty to the living she had been disloyal to the dead. It was a horrid sensation, that: of having borne evidence of mania against one who could not defend or explain himself; and it was with a fearful interest that she watched the jury file back into their seats, and the foreman stand up in answer to the demand for

their verdict.

‘We find that the deceased died from falling down a chalk pit.’

‘That,’ said the coroner, ‘is death from misadventure.’

‘We wish to express our sympathy with the widow.’

Dinny almost clapped her hands. So! They had given him the benefit of the doubt – those disused men! And with a sudden, almost personal, warmth she tilted her head up and smiled at them.

Chapter Thirty-one



WHEN she had come to from smiling, Dinny perceived that her uncle was looking at her quizzically.

‘Can we go now, Uncle Hilary?’

‘It would be as well, Dinny, before you’ve quite vamped the foreman.’

Outside, in the damp October air, for the day was English autumn personified, she said:

‘Let’s go for a little breather, Uncle, and get the smell of that

Court out of us.'

They turned down towards the distant sea, walking at a good pace.

'I'm frightfully anxious to know what went before me, Uncle; did I say anything contradictory?'

'No. It came out at once in Diana's evidence that Ferse had come back from the Home, and the coroner treated her tenderly. It was lucky they called me before Adrian, so that his evidence was only a repetition of mine, and he was no way conspicuous. I feel quite sorry for the journalists. Juries avoid suicide and unsound mind when

they can, and, after all, we don't know what happened to poor Ferse at that last minute. He may quite easily have run on over the edge, it was pretty blind there and the light was failing.'

'Do you really think that, Uncle?'

Hilary shook his head. 'No, Dinny. I think he meant to do it all along, and that was the nearest place to his old home. And, though I say it that shouldn't, thank God he did, and is at rest.'

'Yes, oh! yes! What will happen to Diana and Uncle Adrian, now?'

Hilary filled his pipe and stopped to light it. 'Well, my dear, I've given Adrian some advice. I don't know whether he'll take it, but you might back it up if you get a chance. He's waited all these years. He'd better wait another.'

'Uncle, I agree terribly.'

'Oh!' said Hilary, surprised.

'Yes. Diana is simply not fit to think even of him. She ought to be left to herself and the children.'

'I'm wondering,' said Hilary, 'whether one couldn't wangle some "bones" expedition that would take him out of England for a year.'

‘Hallorsen!’ said Dinny, clasping her hands: ‘He’s going again. And he loves Uncle Adrian.’

‘Good! But would he take him?’

‘If *I* asked him,’ said Dinny, simply.

Hilary again gave her a quizzical look. ‘What a dangerous young woman you are! I daresay the Trustees would give Adrian leave. I can set old Shropshire and Lawrence on to it. We must go back now, Dinny. I’ve got to catch a train. It’s distressing, because this air smells good; but the Meads are pining for me.’

Dinny slipped her hand through his arm.

‘I do admire you, Uncle Hilary.’

Hilary stared. ‘I doubt if I follow you, my dear.’

‘Oh! you know what I mean: you’ve got all the old “I serve” tradition, and that kind of thing; and yet you’re so frightfully up-to-date, and tolerant, and free-thinking.’

‘H’m!’ said Hilary, emitting a cloud of smoke.

‘I’m sure you believe in birth control?’

‘Well,’ said Hilary, ‘the position

there is ironical for us parsons. It used to be considered unpatriotic to believe in limiting our population. But now that flying and poison gas have made food for powder unnecessary, and unemployment is rampant, I'm afraid there's no question but that it's unpatriotic *not* to believe in limiting our population. As for our Christian principles; being patriots, we didn't apply the Christian principle "Thou shalt not kill" during the war, so, being patriots, we can't logically apply the Christian principle "Thou shalt not limit" now. Birth control is essential for the slums anyway.'

‘And you don’t believe in hell.’

‘I do, they’ve got it.’

‘You support games on Sundays, don’t you?’ Hilary nodded. ‘And sun bathing with nothing on?’

‘I might, if there were any sun.’

‘And pyjamas and smoking for women.’

‘Not stinkers; emphatically not stinkers.’

‘I call that undemocratic.’

‘I can’t help it, Dinny. Sniff!’
And he puffed some smoke at her.

Dinny sniffed. ‘There’s latakia in that, it does smell good; but women can’t smoke pipes. I suppose we all

have a blind spot somewhere, and yours is: "No stinkers." Apart from that you're amazingly modern, Uncle. When I was in that Court looking at all those people, it seemed to me that yours was the only really modern face.'

'It's a Cathedral town, my dear.'

'Well, I think the amount of modernity is awfully over-estimated.'

'You don't live in London, Dinny. All the same, you're right in a way. Frankness about things is not change. The difference between the days of my youth and today is only the difference of expression.'

We had doubts, we had curiosity, we had desires; but we didn't express them. Now they do. I see a lot of young 'Varsity men – they come and work in the Meads, you know. Well, from their cradles they've been brought up to say whatever comes into their heads, and just don't they? We didn't, you know; but the same things came into our heads. That's all the difference. That and cars.'

'Then I'm still old-fashioned. I'm not a bit good at expressing things.'

'That's your sense of humour, Dinny. It acts as a restraint, and

keeps you self-conscious. Few young people nowadays seem to have much sense of humour; they often have wit – it isn't the same thing. Our young writers, and painters and musicians, could they carry on as they do if they could see a joke against themselves? Because that's the real test of humour.'

'I'll think that over.'

'Yes, but don't lose your sense of humour, Dinny. It's the scent to the rose. Are you going back to Condaford now?'

'I expect so, Hubert's remand won't be till after that mail boat

comes in, and that's not for ten days yet.'

'Well, give my love to Condaford. I don't suppose I'll ever have days again quite so good as when we were children there.'

'That's what I was thinking, Uncle, when I was waiting to be the last little nigger boy.'

'You're a bit young for that conclusion, Dinny. Wait till you're in love.'

'I am.'

'What, in love?'

'No, in waiting.'

'Fearsome process, being in

love,' said Hilary. 'Still, I never regretted it.'

Dinny gazed at him sideways, and her teeth showed.

'What if you took it again, Uncle?'

'Ah! there,' said Hilary, knocking his pipe out on a pillar box, 'I'm definitely out of it. In my profession we can't run to it. Besides, I've never really got over my first attack.'

'No,' said Dinny, with compunction, 'Aunt May's such a duck.'

'You've said a mouthful. Here's

the station. Good-bye, and bless you! I sent my bag down this morning.' He waved his hand and was gone.

On reaching the hotel Dinny sought Adrian. He was not in, and, rather disconsolate, she wandered out again into the Cathedral. She was just about to sit down and take its restful beauty in, when she saw her Uncle standing against a column with his eyes fixed on the rose window. Going up she slid her arm through his. He squeezed it, but said nothing.

'Fond of glass, Uncle?'

'Terribly fond of good glass,

Dinny. Ever see York Minster?’

Dinny shook her head; then, conscious that nothing she could say would lead up to what she wanted to say, she asked directly: ‘What are you going to do now, Uncle dear?’

‘Have you been talking to Hilary?’

‘Yes.’

‘He wants me to keep away for a year.’

‘So do I.’

‘It’s a long time, Dinny; I’m getting on.’

‘Would you go on Professor

Hallorsen's expedition if he wanted you?'

'He wouldn't want me.'

'Yes, he would.'

'I could only go if I were certain that Diana wished it.'

'She would never say so, but I'm quite sure she wants complete rest for a long time.'

'When you worship the sun,' said Adrian, very low, 'it is hard to go where the sun never shines.'

Dinny squeezed his arm. 'I know; but you'd have it to look forward to. And it's a nice healthy expedition this time, only to New

Mexico. You'd come back very young, with hair all down the outsides of your legs. They do in the films. You'd be irresistible, Uncle; and I do want you to be irresistible. All that's wanted is to let the tumult and the shouting die.'

'And my job?'

'Oh! that can be wangled all right. If Diana doesn't have to think of anything for a year, she'll be a different creature, and you will seem like the promised land. I do feel I know what I'm talking about.'

'You're an endearing little serpent,' said Adrian, with his

shadowy smile.

‘Diana is pretty badly wounded.’

‘I sometimes think it’s a mortal wound, Dinny.’

‘No, no!’

‘Why should she think of me again, if I once go away?’

‘Because women are like that.’

‘What do you know about women, at your age? I went away long ago, and she thought of Ferse. I fancy I’m made of the wrong stuff.’

‘If you are, New Mexico’s the very place. You’ll come back a “he-man”. Think of that! I promise to

watch over her, and the children will keep you to the fore. They're always talking of you. And I'll see that they go on doing it.'

'It's certainly curious,' said Adrian, impersonally, 'but I feel she's further from me now than when Ferse was alive.'

'For the moment, and it'll be a long moment. But I know it'll dry straight in the long run. Really, Uncle.'

Adrian was silent a long time. Then he said:

'I'll go, Dinny, if Hallorsen will take me.'

‘He shall. Bend down, Uncle. I *must* kiss you.’

Adrian bent down. The kiss lighted on his nose. A verger coughed....

The return to Condaford was made by car that afternoon in precisely the same order, young Tasburgh driving. He had been extremely tactful during these twenty-four hours, had not proposed at all, and Dinny was proportionately grateful. If Diana wanted peace, so did she. Alan left that same evening, Diana and the children the following day, and Clare came back from her long stay

in Scotland, so that none but her own family were at the Grange. Yet had she no peace. For now that the preoccupation with poor Ferse was gone, she was oppressed and worried by the thought of Hubert. Extraordinary what power of disturbance was in that overhanging issue! He and Jean wrote cheerfully from the East Coast. According to themselves they were not worrying. Dinny was. And she knew that her mother, and even more her father, were. Clare was more angry than worried, and the effect of anger on her was to stimulate her energy, so

that she went ‘cubbing’ with her father; and in the afternoons would disappear with the car to neighbouring houses, where she would often stay till after dinner. The festive member of the family, she was always in great request. Dinny had her anxiety to herself. She had written to Hallorsen about her uncle, sending him the promised photograph, which depicted her in her presentation frock of two years back, when she and Clare had been economically presented together. Hallorsen answered promptly: ‘The picture is just too lovely. Nothing will please

me more than to take your uncle. I am getting in touch with him rightaway': he signed himself 'Always your devoted servant.'

She read the letter gratefully, but without a tremor, and called herself a hard-hearted beast. Her mind thus set at rest about Adrian, for she knew his year of leave could be safely left to Hilary, she thought all the time of Hubert with a growing presentiment of evil. She tried to persuade herself that this came from having nothing particular to do, from the reaction after Ferse, and the habit of nerves into which he had thrown her; but

such excuses were unconvincing. If they did not believe Hubert sufficiently here to refuse his extradition, what chance would he have out there? She spent surreptitious minutes staring at the map of Bolivia, as if its conformation could give her insight into the psychology of its people. She had never loved Condaford more passionately than during these uneasy days. The place was entailed, and if Hubert were sent out there and condemned, or died in prison, or was murdered by one of those muleteers, and if Jean had no son, it would pass away to

Hilary's eldest boy – a cousin she had barely seen, a boy at school; in the family, yes, but as good as lost. With Hubert's fate was wrapped up the fate of her beloved home. And, though astonished that she could think of herself at all, when it meant so terribly much more to Hubert, she never quite lost the thought.

One morning she got Clare to run her over to Lippinghall. Dinny hated driving, and not without reason, for her peculiar way of seeing the humours of what she was passing had often nearly brought her to grief. They arrived

at lunch time. Lady Mont was just sitting down, and greeted them with:

‘My dear, but how provokin’! Unless you can eat carrots – your Uncle’s away – so purifyin’. Blore, see if Augustine has a cooked bird somewhere. Oh! and, Blore, ask her to make those nice pancakes with jam, that I can’t eat.’

‘Oh! but, Aunt Em, nothing that you can’t eat, please.’

‘I can’t eat anythin’ just now. Your Uncle’s fattenin’, so I’m slimmin’. And, Blore, cheese ramequins, and a nice wine – and coffee.’

‘But this is awful, Aunt Em.’

‘Grapes, Blore. And those cigarettes up in Mr Michael’s room. Your Uncle doesn’t smoke them, and I smoke gaspers, so we run low. And, Blore.’

‘Yes, my lady?’

‘Cocktails, Blore.’

‘Aunt Em, we never drink cocktails.’

‘You do; I’ve seen you. Clare, you’re lookin’ thin; are you slimmin’ too?’

‘No. I’ve been in Scotland, Aunt Em.’

‘Followin’ the guns, and fishin’.

Now run about the house. I'll wait for you.'

When they were running about the house, Clare said to Dinny:

'Where on earth did Aunt Em learn to drop her g's?'

'Father told me once that she was at a school where an un-dropped "g" was worse than a dropped "h". They were bringin' in a county fashion then, huntin' people, you know. Isn't she a dear?'

Clare nodded, slightly brightening her lips.

Re-entering the dining-room,

they heard Lady Mont say:

‘James’s trousers, Blore.’

‘Yes, my lady.’

‘They look as if they were comin’ down. Can somethin’ be done about it?’

‘Yes, my lady.’

‘Here you are! Your Aunt Wilmet’s gone to stay with Hen, Dinny. They’ll be differin’ all over the place. You’ve got a cold bird each. Dinny, what have you been doin’ with Alan? He’s lookin’ so interestin’, and his leave’s up tomorrow.’

‘I’ve not been doing anything

with him, Aunt Em.'

'That's it, then. No. Give me my carrots, Blore. Aren't you goin' to marry him? I know he has prospects in Chancery – somewhere – Wiltshire, is it? He comes and puts his head in my hand about you.'

Under Clare's gaze Dinny sat with fork suspended.

'If you don't take care, he'll be gettin' transferred to China and marryin' a purser's daughter. They say Hong Kong's full of them. Oh! And my portulaca's dead, Dinny. Boswell and Johnson went and watered it with liquid manure.

They've no sense of smell. D'you know what they did once?'

'No, Aunt Em.'

'Had hay fever all over my pedigree rabbit – sneezin' about the hutch, and the poor thing died. I gave them notice, but they didn't go. They don't, you know. Your Uncle pets them. Are you to wed, Clare?'

'To "wed"! Aunt Em!'

'I think it's rather sweet, the uneducated papers use it. But are you?'

'Of course not.'

'Why? Haven't you the time? I

don't like carrots really – so depressin'. But your Uncle's gettin' to a time of life – I have to be careful. I don't know why men have a time of life. By rights he ought to be over it.'

'He is, Aunt Em. Uncle Lawrence is sixty-nine; didn't you know?'

'Well, he's never shown any signs yet. Blore!'

'Yes, my lady.'

'Go away!'

'Yes, my lady.'

'There are some things,' said Lady Mont, as the door closed, 'that you can't talk about before

Blore – birth control, and your uncle, and that. Poor Pussy!’

She rose, went to the window, and dropped a cat into a flower bed.

‘How perfectly sweet Blore is with her!’ murmured Dinny.

‘They stray,’ she said, as she came back, ‘at forty-five, and they stray at sixty-five, and I don’t know when after that. I never strayed. But I’m thinkin’ of it with the Rector.’

‘Is he very lonely now, Auntie?’

‘No,’ said Lady Mont, ‘he’s enjoyin’ himself. He comes up here

a lot.'

'It would be delicious if you could work up a scandal.'

'Dinny!'

'Uncle Lawrence would love it.'

Lady Mont seemed to go into a sort of coma.

'Where's Blore?' she said: 'I want one of those pancakes after all.'

'You sent him away.'

'Oh! yes.'

'Shall I tread on the gas, Aunt Em?' said Clare; 'it's under my chair.'

'I had it put there for your Uncle. He's been readin' me

Gulliver's Travels, Dinny. The man was coarse, you know.'

'Not so coarse as Rabelais, or even as Voltaire.'

'Do you read coarse books?'

'Oh! well, those are classics.'

'They say there was a book – Achilles, or something; your Uncle bought it in Paris; and they took it away from him at Dover. Have you read that?'

'No,' said Dinny.

'I have,' said Clare.

'From what your Uncle tells me, you oughtn't to.'

'Oh! one reads anything now,

Auntie, it never makes any difference.'

Lady Mont looked from one niece to the other.

'Well,' she said, cryptically, 'there's the Bible. Blore!'

'Yes, my lady.'

'Coffee in the hall on the tiger. And put a sniff on the fire, Blore. My Vichy.'

When she had drunk her glass of Vichy they all rose.

'Marvellous!' whispered Clare in Dinny's ear.

'What are you doin' about Hubert?' said Lady Mont, in front

of the hall fire.

‘Sweating in our shoes, Auntie.’

‘I told Wilmet to speak to Hen. She sees Royalty, you know. Then there’s flyin’. Couldn’t he fly somewhere?’

‘Uncle Lawrence went bail for him.’

‘He wouldn’t mind. We would do without James, he’s got adenoids; and we could have one man instead of Boswell and Johnson.’

‘Hubert would mind, though.’

‘I’m fond of Hubert,’ said Lady Mont: ‘and bein’ married – it’s too soon. Here’s the sniff.’

Blore, bearing coffee and cigarettes, was followed by James bearing a cedar log; and a religious silence ensued while Lady Mont made coffee.

‘Sugar, Dinny?’

‘Two spoonfuls, please.’

‘Three for me. I know it’s fattenin’. Clare?’

‘One, please.’

The girls sipped, and Clare sighed out:

‘Amazing!’

‘Yes. Why is your coffee so much better than anybody else’s, Aunt Em?’

‘I agree,’ said her aunt. ‘About that poor man, Dinny: I was so relieved that he didn’t bite either of you after all. Adrian will get her now. Such a comfort.’

‘Not for some time, Aunt Em: Uncle Adrian’s going to America.’

‘But why?’

‘We all thought it best. Even he did.’

‘When he goes to Heaven,’ said Lady Mont, ‘someone will have to go with him, or he won’t get in.’

‘Surely he’ll have a seat reserved!’

‘You never know. The Rector

was preachin' on that last Sunday.'

'Does he preach well?'

'Well, cosy.'

'I expect Jean wrote his sermons.'

'Yes, they used to have more zip. Where did I get that word, Dinny?'

'From Michael, I expect.'

'He always caught everythin'. The rector said we were to deny ourselves; he came here to lunch.'

'And had a whacking good feed.'

'Yes.'

'What does he weigh, Aunt Em?'

'Without his clothes – I don't

know.'

'But with?'

'Oh! quite a lot. He's goin' to write a book.'

'What about?'

'The Tasburghs. There was that one that was buried, and lived in France afterwards, only she was a Fitzherbert by birth. Then there was the one that fought the battle of – not Spaghetti – the other word, Augustine gives it us sometimes.'

'Navarino? But did he?'

'Yes, but they said he didn't. The rector's goin' to put that right. Then there was the Tasburgh that

got beheaded, and forgot to put it down anywhere. The rector's nosed that out.'

'In what reign?'

'I never can be bothered with reigns, Dinny. Edward the Sixth – or Fourth, was it? He was a red rose. Then there was the one that married into us. Roland his name was – or was it? But he did somethin' strikin' – and they took away his land. Recusancy – what is that?'

'It means he was a Catholic, Auntie, in a Protestant reign.'

'They burnt his house first. He's

in Mercurius Rusticus, or some book. The rector says he was greatly beloved. They burnt his house twice, I think, and then robbed it – or was it the other way? It had a moat. And there's a list of what they took.'

‘How entrancing!’

‘Jam, and silver, and chickens, and linen, and I think his umbrella, or something funny.’

‘When was all this, Auntie?’

‘In the Civil War. He was a Royalist. Now I remember his name wasn't Roland, and she was Elizabeth after you, Dinny. History

repeatin' itself.'

Dinny looked at the log.

'Then there was the last Admiral – under William the Fourth – he died drunk, not William. The Rector says he didn't, so he's writin' to prove it. He says he caught cold and took rum for it; and it didn't click – where did I get *that* word?'

'I sometimes use it, Auntie.'

'Yes. So there's quite a lot, you see, besides all the dull ones, right away back to Edward the Confessor or somebody. He's tryin' to make out they're older than we

are. So unreasonable.'

'My Aunt!' murmured Clare.
'Who would read a book like that?'

'I shouldn't think so. But he'll simply love snobbin' into it: and it'll keep him awake. Here's Alan! Clare, you haven't seen where my portulaca was. Shall we take a turn?'

'Aunt Em, you're shameless,' said Dinny in her ear; 'and it's no good.'

' "If at first you don't succeed" – d'you remember every mornin' when we were little? Wait till I get my hat, Clare.'

They passed away.

‘So your leave’s up, Alan?’ said Dinny, alone with the young man. ‘Where shall you be?’

‘Portsmouth.’

‘Is that nice?’

‘Might be worse. Dinny, I want to talk to you about Hubert. If things go wrong at the Court next time, what’s going to happen?’

All ‘bubble and squeak’ left Dinny, she sank down on a fireside cushion, and gazed up with troubled eyes.

‘I’ve been inquiring,’ said young Tasburgh; ‘they leave it two or three weeks for the Home Secretary

to go into, and then, if he confirms, cart them off as soon as they can. From Southampton it would be, I expect.'

'You don't really think it will come to that, do you?'

He said gloomily: 'I don't know. Suppose a Bolivian had killed somebody, here, and gone back, we should want him rather badly, shouldn't we, and put the screw on to get him?'

'But it's fantastic!'

The young man looked at her with an extremely resolute compassion.

‘We’ll hope for the best; but if it goes wrong something’s got to be done about it. I’m not going to stand for it, nor is Jean.’

‘But what could be done?’

Young Tasburgh walked round the hall looking at the doors; then, leaning above her, he said:

‘Hubert can fly, and I’ve been up every day since Chichester. Jean and I are working the thing out – in case.’

Dinny caught his hand.

‘My dear boy, that’s crazy!’

‘No crazier than thousands of things done in the war.’

‘But it would ruin your career.’

‘Blast my career! Look on and see you and Jean miserable for years, perhaps, and a man like Hubert broken rottenly like that – what d’you think?’

Dinny squeezed his hand convulsively and let it go.

‘It can’t, it shan’t come to that. Besides, how could you get Hubert? He’d be under arrest.’

‘I don’t know, but I shall know all right if and when the time comes. What’s certain is that if they once get him over there, he’ll have a damned thin chance.’

‘Have you spoken to Hubert?’

‘No. It’s all perfectly vague as yet.’

‘I’m sure he wouldn’t consent.’

‘Jean will see to that.’

Dinny shook her head. ‘You don’t know Hubert; he would never let you.’

Alan grinned, and she suddenly recognized that in him there was something formidably determined.

‘Does Professor Hallorsen know?’

‘No, and he won’t, unless it’s absolutely necessary. But he’s a good egg, I admit.’

She smiled faintly. ‘Yes, he’s a good egg; but an outsize.’

‘Dinny, you’re not gone on him, are you?’

‘No, my dear.’

‘Well, thank God for that! You see,’ he went on, ‘they’re not likely to treat Hubert as an ordinary criminal. That will make things easier perhaps.’

Dinny gazed at him, thrilled to her very marrow. Somehow that last remark convinced her of the reality of his purpose. ‘I’m beginning to understand Zeebrugge. But – ’

‘No buts, and buck up! That boat arrives the day after tomorrow, and then the case will be on again. I shall see you in Court, Dinny. I must go now – got my daily flight. I just thought I’d like you to know that if the worst comes to the worst, we aren’t going to take it lying down. Give my love to Lady Mont; shan’t be seeing her again. Good-bye, and bless you!’ And, kissing her hand, he was out of the hall before she could speak.

Dinny sat on beside the cedar log, very still, and strangely moved. The idea of defiance had not before occurred to her, mainly

perhaps because she had never really believed that Hubert would be committed for trial. She did not really believe it now, and that made this 'crazy' idea the more thrilling; for it has often been noticed that the less actual a risk, the more thrilling it seems. And to the thrill was joined a warmer feeling for Alan. The fact that he had not even proposed added to the conviction that he was in dead earnest. And on that tiger-skin, which had provided very little thrill to the eighth baronet, who from an elephant had shot its owner while it was trying to avoid notice, Dinny

sat, warming her body in the glow from the cedar log, and her spirit in the sense of being closer to the fires of life than she had ever yet been. Her Uncle's old black and white spaniel dog, Quince, who in his master's absences, which were frequent, took little interest in human beings, came slowly across the hall and, lying down four-square, put his head on his forepaws and looked up at her with eyes that showed red rims beneath them. 'It may be all that, and it may not,' he seemed to say. The log hissed faintly, and a grandfather clock on the far side of

the hall struck three with its special slowness.

Chapter Thirty-two



OVER any impending issue, whether test match, ultimatum, the Cambridgeshire, or the hanging of a man, excitement beats up in the last few hours, and the feeling of suspense in the Cherrell family became painful when the day of Hubert's remand was reached. As some Highland clan of old, without summons issued, assembled when one of its number was threatened, so were Hubert's relatives collected in the Police Court. Except Lionel, who was in session, and his and

Hilary's children, who were at school, they were all there. It might have been a wedding or a funeral, but for the grimness of their faces, and the sense of unmerited persecution at the back of every mind. Dinny and Clare sat between their father and mother, with Jean, Alan, Hallorsen and Adrian next them; just behind them were Hilary and his wife, Fleur and Michael and Aunt Wilmet; behind them again sat Sir Lawrence and Lady Mont, and in the extreme rear the Rector formed the spear tail of an inverted phalanx.

Coming in with his lawyer,

Hubert gave them a clansman's smile.

Now that she was actually in Court, Dinny felt almost apathetic. Her brother was innocent of all save self-defence. If they committed him, he would still be innocent. And, after she had answered Hubert's smile, her attention was given to Jean's face. If ever the girl looked like a leopardess, it was now; her strange, deep-set eyes kept sliding from her 'cub' to him who threatened to deprive her of it.

The evidence from the first hearing having been read over, the

new evidence – Manuel’s affidavit – was produced by Hubert’s lawyer. But then Dinny’s apathy gave way, for this affidavit was countered by the prosecution with another, sworn by four muleteers, to the effect that Manuel had not been present at the shooting.

That was a moment of real horror.

Four half-castes against one!

Dinny saw a disconcerted look flit across the magistrate’s face.

‘Who procured this second affidavit, Mr Buttall?’

‘The lawyer in charge of the case

in La Paz, Your Honour. It became known to him that the boy Manuel was being asked to give evidence.'

'I see. What do you say now on the question of the scar shown us by the accused?'

'Beyond the accused's own statement there is no evidence whatever before you, Sir, or before me, as to how or when that scar was inflicted.'

'That is so. You are not suggesting that this scar could have been inflicted by the dead man after he was shot?'

'If Castro, having drawn a knife,

had fallen forward after he was shot, it is conceivable, I suppose.'

'Not likely, I think, Mr Buttall.'

'No. But my evidence, of course, is that the shooting was deliberate, cold-blooded, and at a distance of some yards. I know nothing of Castro's having drawn a knife.'

'It comes to this, then: Either your six witnesses are lying, or the accused and the boy Manuel are.'

'That would appear to be the position, Your Honour. It is for you to judge whether the sworn words of six citizens are to be taken, or the sworn words of two.'

Dinny saw the magistrate wriggle.

‘I am perfectly aware of that, Mr Buttall. What do you say, Captain Cherrell, to this affidavit that has been put in as to the absence of the boy Manuel?’

Dinny’s eyes leaped to her brother’s face. It was impassive, even slightly ironic.

‘Nothing, Sir. I don’t know where Manuel was. I was too occupied in saving my life. All I know is that he came up to me almost immediately afterwards.’

‘Almost? How long afterwards?’

‘I really don’t know, Sir – perhaps a minute. I was trying to stop the bleeding; I fainted just as he came.’

During the speeches of the two lawyers which followed, Dinny’s apathy returned. It fled again during the five minutes of silence which succeeded them. In all the Court the magistrate alone seemed occupied; and it was as if he would never be done. Through her lowered lashes she could see him consulting this paper, consulting that; he had a red face, a long nose, a pointed chin, and eyes which she liked whenever she could

see them. Instinctively she knew that he was not at ease. At last he spoke.

‘In this case,’ he said, ‘I have to ask myself not whether a crime has been committed, or whether the accused has committed it; I have only to ask myself whether the evidence brought before me is such as to satisfy me that the alleged crime is an extraditable offence, that the foreign warrant is duly authenticated, and that such evidence has been produced as would in this country justify me in committing the accused to take his trial.’ He paused a moment and

then added: 'There is no question but that the crime alleged is an extraditable offence, and that the foreign warrant is duly authenticated.' He paused again, and in the dead silence Dinny heard a long sigh, as if from a spirit, so lonely and disembodied was the sound. The Magistrate's eyes passed to Hubert's face, and he resumed:

'I have come to the conclusion reluctantly that it is my duty on the evidence adduced to commit the accused to prison to await surrender to the foreign State on a warrant from the Secretary of

State, if he sees fit to issue it. I have heard the accused's evidence to the effect that he had an antecedent justification removing the act complained of from the category of crime, supported by the affidavit of a witness which is contradicted by the affidavit of four others. I have no means of judging between the conflicting evidence of these two affidavits except in so far that it is in the proportion of four to one, and I must therefore dismiss it from my mind. In face of the sworn testimony of six witnesses that the shooting was deliberate, I do not

think that the unsupported word of the accused to the contrary would justify me in the case of an offence committed in this country in refusing to commit for trial; and I am therefore unable to accept it as justification for a refusal to commit for trial in respect of an offence committed in another country. I make no hesitation in confessing my reluctance to come to this conclusion, but I consider that I have no other course open to me. The question, I repeat, is not whether the accused is guilty or innocent, it is a question of whether or not there should be a

trial. I am not able to take on myself the responsibility of saying that there should not. The final word in cases of this nature rests with the Secretary of State, who issues the surrender warrant. I commit you, therefore, to prison to await the issue of such a warrant. You will not be surrendered until after fifteen days, and you have the right to apply for a writ of *habeas corpus* in regard to the lawfulness of your custody. I have not the power to grant you any further bail; but it may be that you may secure it, if you so desire, by application to the King's Bench

Division.'

Dinny's horrified eyes saw Hubert, standing very straight, make the magistrate a little bow, and leave the dock, walking slowly and without a look back. Behind him his lawyer, too, passed out of Court.

She herself sat as if stunned, and her only impression of those next minutes was the sight of Jean's stony face, and of Alan's brown hands gripping each other on the handle of his stick.

She came to herself conscious that tears were stealing down her mother's face, and that her father

was standing up.

‘Come!’ he said: ‘Let’s get out of here!’

At that moment she was more sorry for her father than for any other of them all. Since this thing began he had said so little and had felt so much. It was ghastly for him! Dinny understood very well his simple feelings. To him, in the refusal of Hubert’s word, an insult had been flung not merely in his son’s face, and his own as Hubert’s father, but in the face of what they stood for and believed in; in the face of all soldiers and all gentlemen! Whatever happened

now, he would never quite get over this. Between justice and what was just, what inexorable incompatibility! Were there men more honourable than her father and her brother, or than that magistrate, perhaps? Following him out into that dishevelled backwater of life and traffic, Bow Street, she noted that they were all there except Jean, Alan and Hallorsen. Sir Lawrence said:

‘We must just “take cabs and go about!” Better come to Mount Street and consult what we can each best do.’

When half an hour later they

assembled in Aunt Em's drawing-room, those three were still absent.

‘What's happened to them?’ asked Sir Lawrence.

‘I expect they went after Hubert's lawyer,’ answered Dinny; but she knew better. Some desperate plan was being hatched, and she brought but a distracted mind to council.

In Sir Lawrence's opinion Bobbie Ferrar was still their man. If he could do nothing with ‘Walter’, nothing could be done. He proposed to go again to him and to the Marquess.

The General said nothing. He stood a little apart, staring at one of his brother-in-law's pictures, evidently without seeing it. Dinny realized that he did not join in because he could not. She wondered of what he was thinking. Of when he was young like his son, just married; of long field-days under burning sun among the sands and stones of India and South Africa; of longer days of administrative routine; of strenuous poring over maps with his eyes on the clock and his ear to the telephone; of his wounds and his son's long sickness; of two lives

given to service and this strange reward at the end?

She herself stood close to Fleur, with the instinctive feeling that from that clear, quick brain might come a suggestion of real value.

‘The Squire carries weight with the Government; I might go to Bentworth,’ she heard Hilary say, and the Rector add:

‘Ah! I knew him at Eton, I’ll come with you.’

She heard her Aunt Wilmet’s gruff: ‘I’ll go to Hen again about Royalty.’ And Michael’s:

‘In a fortnight the House will be

sitting'; and Fleur's impatient:

'No good, Michael. The Press is no use either. I've got a hunch.'

'Ah!' she thought, and moved closer.

'We haven't gone deep enough. What's at the back of it? Why should the Bolivian Government care about a half-caste Indian? It's not the actual shooting, it's the slur on their country. Floggings and shootings by foreigners! What's wanted is something done to the Bolivian Minister that will make him tell "Walter" that they don't really care.'

‘We can’t kidnap him,’ muttered Michael; ‘it’s not done in the best circles.’

A faint smile came on Dinny’s lips; she was not so sure.

‘I’ll see,’ said Fleur, as if to herself. ‘Dinny, you must come to us. They’ll get no further here.’ And her eyes roved swiftly over the nine elders. ‘I shall go to Uncle Lionel and Alison. He won’t dare move, being a new judge, but she will, and she knows all the Legation people. Will you come, Dinny?’

‘I ought to be with mother and father.’

‘They’ll be here, Em’s just asked them. Well, if you stay here too, come round as much as you can; you might help.’

Dinny nodded, relieved at staying in town; for the thought of Condaford during this suspense oppressed her.

‘We’ll go now,’ said Fleur, ‘and I’ll get on to Alison at once.’

Michael lingered to squeeze Dinny’s arm.

‘Buck up, Dinny! We’ll get him out of it somehow. If only it wasn’t “Walter!” He’s the worst kind of egg. To fancy yourself “just” is

simply to addle.'

When all except her own people had gone, Dinny went up to her father. He was still standing before a picture, but not the same one. Slipping her hand under his arm, she said:

'It's going to be all right, Dad dear. You could see the magistrate was really sorry. He hadn't the power, but the Home Secretary must have.'

'I was thinking,' said the General, 'what the people of this country would do if we didn't sweat and risk our lives for them.' He spoke without bitterness, or

even emphasis: 'I was thinking why we should go on doing our jobs, if our words aren't to be believed. I was wondering where that magistrate would be – oh! I dare say he's all right according to his lights – if boys like Hubert hadn't gone off before their time. I was wondering why we've chosen lives that have landed me on the verge of bankruptcy, and Hubert in this mess, when we might have been snug and comfortable in the City or the Law. Isn't a man's whole career to weigh a snap when a thing like this happens? I feel the insult to the Service, Dinny.'

She watched the convulsive movement of his thin brown hands, clasped as if he were standing at ease, and her whole heart went out to him, though she could perfectly well see the unreason of the exemption he was claiming. 'It is easier for Heaven and Earth to pass than for one tittle of the Law to fail.' Wasn't that the text she had just read in what she had suggested might be made into a secret naval code?

'Well,' he said, 'I must go out now with Lawrence. See to your mother, Dinny, her head's bad.'

When she had darkened her

mother's bedroom, applied the usual remedies, and left her to try and sleep, she went downstairs again. Clare had gone out, and the drawing-room, just now so full, seemed deserted. She passed down its length and opened the piano. A voice said:

‘No, Polly, you must go to bed, I feel too sad’; and she became aware of her Aunt in the alcove at the end placing her parakeet in its cage.

‘Can we be sad together, Aunt Em?’

Lady Mont turned round.

‘Put your cheek against mine, Dinny.’

Dinny did so. The cheek was pink and round and smooth and gave her a sense of relaxation.

‘From the first I knew what he would say,’ said Lady Mont, ‘his nose was so long. In ten years’ time it’ll touch his chin. Why they allow them, I don’t know. You can do nothing with a man like that. Let’s cry, Dinny. You sit there, and I’ll sit here.’

‘Do you cry high or low, Aunt Em?’

‘Either. You begin. A man who

can't take a responsibility. I could have taken that responsibility perfectly, Dinny. Why didn't he just say to Hubert "Go and sin no more"?'

‘But Hubert hasn't sinned.’

‘It makes it all the worse. Payin' attention to foreigners! The other day I was sittin' in the window at Lippin' hall, and there were three starlin's on the terrace, and I sneezed twice. D'you think they paid any attention? Where is Bolivia?’

‘In South America Aunt Em.’

‘I never could learn geography.

My maps were the worst ever made at my school, Dinny. Once they asked me where Livin'stone kissed Stanley, and I answered: "Niagara Falls." And it wasn't.'

'You were only a continent wrong there, Auntie.'

'Yes. I've never seen anybody laugh as my schoolmistress laughed when I said that. Excessive – she was fat. I thought Hubert lookin' thin.'

'He's always thin, but he's looking much less "tucked up" since his marriage.'

'Jean's fatter, that's natural. You

ought, Dinny, you know.'

'You never used to be so keen on people getting married, Auntie.'

'What happened on the tiger the other day?'

'I can't possibly tell you that, Aunt Em.'

'It must have been pretty bad, then.'

'Or do you mean good?'

'You're laughin' at me.'

'Did you ever know me disrespectful, Auntie?'

'Yes. I perfectly well remember you writin' a poem about

I do not care for Auntie Em,
She says I cannot sew or hem.
Does she? Well! I can sew a dem
Sight better than my Auntie Em.

I kept it. I thought it showed
character.'

'Was I such a little demon?'

'Yes. There's no way, is there, of
shortenin' dogs?' And she pointed
to the golden retriever lying on a
rug. 'Bonzo's middle is really too
long.'

'I told you that, Aunt Em, when
he was a puppy.'

'Yes, but I didn't notice it till he
began to scratch for rabbits. He

can't get over the hole properly. It makes him look so weak. Well! If we're not goin' to cry, Dinny, what shall we do?'

'Laugh?' murmured Dinny.

Chapter Thirty-three



HER father and Sir Lawrence not coming back to dinner, and her mother remaining in bed, Dinny dined alone with her aunt, for Clare was staying with friends.

‘Aunt Em,’ she said, when they had finished, ‘do you mind if I go round to Michael’s? Fleur has had a hunch.’

‘Why?’ said Lady Mont: ‘It’s too early for that – not till March.’

‘You’re thinking of the hump, Auntie. A “hunch” means an idea.’

‘Then why didn’t she say so?’
And, with that simple dismissal of the more fashionable forms of speech, Lady Mont rang the bell.

‘Blore, a taxi for Miss Dinny.
And, Blore, when Sir Lawrence comes in, let me know; I’m goin’ to have a hot bath, and wash my hair.’

‘Yes, my lady.’

‘Do you wash your hair when you’re sad, Dinny?’

Driving through the misty dark evening to South Square, Dinny experienced melancholy beyond all she had felt yet. The thought of

Hubert actually in a prison cell, torn from a wife not more than three weeks married, facing separation that might be permanent, and a fate that would not beat thinking of; and all because they were too scrupulous to stretch a point and take his word, caused fear and rage to bank up in her spirit, as unspent heat before a storm.

She found Fleur and her Aunt Lady Alison discussing ways and means. The Bolivian Minister, it appeared, was away convalescing after an illness, and a subordinate was in charge. This in Lady Alison's

opinion made it more difficult, for he would probably not take any responsibility. She would, however, arrange a luncheon to which Fleur and Michael should be bidden, and Dinny, too, if she wished; but Dinny shook her head – she had lost faith in her power of manipulating public men.

‘If you and Fleur can’t manage it, Aunt Alison, I certainly can’t. But Jean is singularly attractive when she likes.’

‘Jean telephoned just now, Dinny. If you came in tonight, would you go round and see her at their flat; otherwise she was

writing to you.'

Dinny stood up. 'I'll go at once.'

She hurried through the mist along the Embankment and turned down towards the block of workmen's flats where Jean had found her lodgment. At the corner boys were crying the more sanguinary tidings of the day; she bought a paper to see if Hubert's case was mentioned, and opened it beneath a lamp. Yes! There it was! 'British officer committed. Extradition on shooting charge.' How little attention she would have given to that, if it had not concerned her! This, that was

agony to her and hers, was to the Public just a little pleasurable excitement. The misfortunes of others were a distraction; and the papers made their living out of it! The man who had sold the paper to her had a thin face, dirty clothes, and was lame; and, throwing a libationary drop out of her bitter cup, she gave him back the paper and a shilling. His eyes widened in a puzzled stare, his mouth remained a little open. Had she backed the winner – that one?

Dinny went up the bricked stairs. The flat was on the second floor. Outside its door a grown

black cat was spinning round after its own tail. It flew round six times on the same spot, then sat down, lifted one of its back legs high into the air, and licked it.

Jean herself opened the door. She was evidently in the throes of packing, having a pair of combinations over her arm. Dinny kissed her and looked round. She had not been here before. The doors of the small sitting-room, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom were open; the walls were distempered apple green, the floors covered with dark-green linoleum. For furniture there was a double

bed, and some suit-cases in the bedroom, two armchairs and a small table in the sitting-room; a kitchen table and some bath salts in a glass jar; no rugs, no pictures, no books, but some printed linen curtains to the windows and a hanging cupboard along one whole side of the bedroom, from which Jean had been taking the clothes piled on the bed. A scent of coffee and lavender bags distinguished the atmosphere from that on the stairs.

Jean put down the combinations.

‘Have some coffee, Dinny? I’ve

just made it.’

She poured out two cups, sweetened them, handed Dinny one and a paper packet of cigarettes, then pointed to one of the armchairs and sat down in the other.

‘You got my message, then? I’m glad you’ve come – saves my making up a parcel. I hate making parcels, don’t you?’

Her coolness and unharassed expression seemed to Dinny miraculous.

‘Have you seen Hubert since?’

‘Yes. He’s fairly comfortable. It’s

not a bad cell, he says, and they've given him books and writing paper. He can have food in, too; but he's not allowed to smoke. Someone ought to move about that. According to English law Hubert's still as innocent as the Home Secretary; there's no law to prevent the Home Secretary smoking, is there? I shan't be seeing him again, but you'll be going, Dinny – so give him my special love, and take him some cigarettes in case they let him.'

Dinny stared at her.

'What are you going to do, then?'

‘Well, I wanted to see you about that. This is all strictly for your ear only. Promise to lie absolutely doggo, Dinny, or I shan’t say anything.’

Dinny said, resolutely: ‘Cross my heart as they say. Go on.’

‘I’m going to Brussels tomorrow. Alan went today; he’s got extension of leave for urgent family affairs. We’re simply going to prepare for the worst, that’s all. I’m to learn flying in double quick time. If I go up three times a day, three weeks will be quite enough. Our lawyer has guaranteed us three weeks, at least. Of course, he knows nothing.

Nobody is to know anything, except you. I want you to do something for me.' She reached forward and took out of her vanity bag a tissue-papered packet.

'I've got to have five hundred pounds. We can get a good second-hand machine over there for very little, they say, but we shall want all the rest. Now, look here Dinny, this is an old family thing. It's worth a lot. I want you to pop it for five hundred; if you can't get as much as that by popping, you'll have to sell it. Pop, or sell, in your name, and change the English notes into Belgian money and send

it to me registered to the G.P.O. Brussels. You ought to be able to send me the money within three days.’ She undid the paper, and disclosed an old-fashioned but very beautiful emerald pendant.

‘Oh!’

‘Yes,’ said Jean, ‘it really is good. You can afford to take a high line. Somebody will give you five hundred on it, I’m sure. Emeralds are up.’

‘But why don’t you “pop” it yourself before you go?’

Jean shook her head.

‘No, nothing whatever that

awakens suspicion. It doesn't matter what you do, Dinny, because you're not going to break the law. We possibly are, but we're not going to be copped.'

'I think,' said Dinny, 'you ought to tell me more.'

Again Jean shook her head.

'Not necessary, and not possible; we don't know enough yet ourselves. But make your mind easy, they're not going to get away with Hubert. You'll take this, then?' And she wrapped up the pendant.

Dinny took the little packet, and, having brought no bag,

slipped it down her dress. She leaned forward and said earnestly:

‘Promise you won’t do anything, Jean, till everything else has failed.’

Jean nodded. ‘Nothing till the very last minute. It wouldn’t be good enough.’

Dinny grasped her hand. ‘I oughtn’t to have let you in for this, Jean, it was I who brought the young things together, you know.’

‘My dear, I’d never have forgiven you if you hadn’t. I’m in love.’

‘But it’s so ghastly for you.’

Jean looked into the distance so that Dinny could almost feel the cub coming round the corner.

‘No! I like to think it’s up to me to pull him out of it. I’ve never felt so alive as I feel now.’

‘Is there much risk for Alan?’

‘Not if we work things properly. We’ve several schemes, according as things shape.’

Dinny sighed.

‘I hope to God they’ll none of them be necessary.’

‘So do I, but it’s impossible to leave things to chance, with a “just beast” like “Walter”.’

‘Well, good-bye, Jean, and good luck!’

They kissed, and Dinny went down into the street with the emerald pendant weighing like lead on her heart. It was drizzling now and she took a cab back to Mount Street. Her father and Sir Lawrence had just come in. Their news was inconsiderable. Hubert, it seemed, did not wish for bail again. ‘Jean,’ thought Dinny, ‘has to do with that.’ The Home Secretary was in Scotland and would not be back till Parliament sat, in about a fortnight’s time. The warrant could not be issued till

after that. In expert opinion they had three weeks at least in which to move heaven and earth. Ah! but it was easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the Law to fail. And yet was it quite nonsense when people talked of 'interest' and 'influence' and 'wangling' and 'getting things through'? Was there not some talismanic way of which they were all ignorant?

Her father kissed her and went dejectedly up to bed, and Dinny was left alone with Sir Lawrence. Even he was in heavy mood.

‘No bubble and squeak in the

pair of us,' he said. 'I sometimes think, Dinny, that the Law is overrated. It's really a rough-and-ready system, with about as much accuracy in adjusting penalty to performance as there is to a doctor's diagnosis of a patient he sees for the first time; and yet for some mysterious reason we give it the sanctity of the Holy Grail and treat its dicta as if they were the broadcastings of God. If ever there was a case where a Home Secretary might let himself go and be human, this is one. And yet I don't see him doing it. I don't, Dinny, and Bobbie Ferrar doesn't. It seems that some

wrongly-inspired idiot, not long ago, called Walter “the very spirit of integrity”, and Bobbie says that instead of turning up his stomach, it went to his head, and he hasn’t reprieved anybody since. I’ve been wondering whether I couldn’t write to *The Times* and say: “This pose of inexorable incorruptibility in certain quarters is more dangerous to justice than the methods of Chicago.” Chicago ought to fetch him. He’s been there, I believe. It’s an awful thing for a man to cease to be human.’

‘Is he married?’

‘Not even that, now,’ said Sir

Lawrence.

‘But some men don’t even begin to be human, do they?’

‘That’s not so bad; you know where you are, and can take a fire-shovel to them. No, it’s the blokes who get swelled head that make the trouble. By the way, I told my young man that you would sit for your miniature.’

‘Oh! Uncle, I simply couldn’t sit with Hubert on my mind!’

‘No, no! Of course not! But something must turn up.’ He looked at her shrewdly and added: ‘By the way, Dinny, young Jean?’

Dinny lifted a wide and simple gaze:

‘What about her?’

‘She doesn’t look to me too easy to bite.’

‘No, but what can she do, poor dear?’

‘I wonder,’ said Sir Lawrence, raising one eyebrow. ‘I just wonder. “They’re dear little innocent things, they are, they’re angels without any wings, they are.” That’s “Punch” before your time, Dinny. And it will continue to be “Punch” after your time, except that wings are growing on you all

so fast.'

Dinny, still looking at him innocently, thought: 'He's rather uncanny, Uncle Lawrence!' And soon after she went up to bed.

To go to bed with one's whole soul in a state of upheaval! And yet how many other upheaved souls lay, cheek to pillow, unsleeping! The room seemed full of the world's unreasoning misery. If one were talented, one would get up and relieve oneself in a poem about Azrael, or something! Alas! It was not so easy as all that. One lay, and was sore – sore and anxious and angry. She could remember

still how she had felt, being thirteen, when Hubert, not quite eighteen, had gone off to the war. That had been horrid, but this was much worse; and she wondered why. Then he might have been killed at any minute; now he was safer than anybody who was not in prison. He would be preserved meticulously even while they sent him across the world and put him up for trial in a country not his own, before some judge of alien blood. He was safe enough for some months yet. Why, then, did this seem so much worse than all the risks through which he had

passed since he first went soldiering, even than that long, bad time on the Hallorsen expedition? Why? If not that those old risks and hardships had been endured of his free will; while the present trouble was imposed on him. He was being held down, deprived of the two great boons of human existence, independence and private life, boons to secure which human beings in communities had directed all their efforts for thousands of years, until – until they went Bolshy! Boons to every human being, but especially to people like themselves, brought

up under no kind of whip except that of their own consciences. And she lay there as if she were lying in his cell, gazing into his future, longing for Jean, hating the locked-in feeling, cramped and miserable and bitter. For what had he done, what in God's name had he done that any other man of sensibility and spirit would not do!

The mutter of the traffic from Park Lane formed a sort of ground base to her rebellious misery. She became so restless that she could not lie in bed, and, putting on her dressing gown, stole noiselessly about her room till she was chilled

by the late October air coming through the opened window. Perhaps there was something in being married, after all; you had a chest to snuggle against and if need be weep on; you had an ear to pour complaint into; and lips that would make the mooing sounds of sympathy. But worse than being single during this time of trial was being inactive. She envied those who, like her father and Sir Lawrence, were at least taking cabs and going about; greatly she envied Jean and Alan. Whatever they were up to was better than being up to nothing,

like herself! She took out the emerald pendant and looked at it. That at least was something to do on the morrow, and she pictured herself with this in her hand forcing large sums of money out of some flinty person with a tendency towards the art of lending.

Placing the pendant beneath her pillow, as though its proximity were an insurance against her sense of helplessness, she fell asleep at last.

Next morning she was down early. It had occurred to her that she could perhaps pawn the pendant, get the money, and take

it to Jean before she left. And she decided to consult the butler, Blore. After all, she had known him since she was five; he was an institution and had never divulged any of the iniquities she had confided in him in her childhood.

She went up to him, therefore, when he appeared with her Aunt's special coffee machine.

‘Blore.’

‘Yes, Miss Dinny.’

‘Will you be frightfully nice and tell me, *in confidence*, who is supposed to be the best pawnbroker in London?’

Surprised but impassive – for, after all, anybody might have to ‘pop’ anything in these days – the butler placed the coffee machine at the head of the table and stood reflecting.

‘Well, Miss Dinny, of course there’s Attenborough’s, but I’m told the best people go to a man called Frewen in South Molton Street. I can get you the number from the telephone book. They say he’s reliable and very fair.’

‘Splendid, Blore! It’s just a little matter.’

‘Quite so, Miss.’

‘Oh! And, Blore, would you – should I give my own name?’

‘No, Miss Dinny; if I might suggest: give my wife’s name and this address. Then, if there has to be any communication, I could get it to you by telephone, and no one the wiser.’

‘Oh! that’s a great relief. But wouldn’t Mrs Blore mind?’

‘Oh! no, Miss, only too glad to oblige you. I could do the matter for you if you wish.’

‘Thank you, Blore, but I’m afraid I must do it myself.’

The butler caressed his chin and

regarded her; his eye seemed to Dinny benevolent but faintly quizzical.

‘Well, Miss, if I may say so, a little nonchalance goes a long way even with the best of them. There are others if he doesn’t offer value.’

‘Thank you frightfully, Blore; I’ll let you know if he doesn’t. Would half past nine be too early?’

‘From what I hear, Miss, that is the best hour; you get him fresh and hearty.’

‘Dear Blore!’

‘I’m told he’s an understanding gent, who can tell a lady when he

sees one. He won't confuse you with some of those Tottie madams.'

Dinny laid her finger to her lips.

'Cross your heart, Blore.'

'Oh! absolutely, Miss. After Mr Michael you were always my favourite.'

'And so were you, Blore.' She took up *The Times* as her father entered, and Blore withdrew.

'Sleep well, Dad?'

The General nodded.

'And Mother's head?'

'Better. She's coming down. We've decided that it's no use to worry, Dinny.'

‘No, darling, it isn’t, of course. D’you think we could begin breakfast?’

‘Em won’t be down, and Lawrence has his at eight. You make the coffee.’

Dinny, who shared her Aunt’s passion for good coffee went reverentially to work.

‘What about Jean?’ asked the General, suddenly. ‘Is she coming to us?’

Dinny did not raise her eyes.

‘I don’t think so, Dad; she’ll be too restless; I expect she’ll just make out by herself. I should want

to, if I were her.'

'I daresay, poor girl. She's got pluck, anyway. I'm glad Hubert married a girl of spirit. Those Tasburghs have got their hearts in the right place. I remember an uncle of hers in India – daring chap, a Goorkha regiment, they swore by him. Let me see, where was he killed?'

Dinny bent lower over the coffee.

It was barely half past nine when she went out with the pendant in her vanity bag, and her best hat on. At half past nine precisely she was going up to the

first floor above a shop in South Molton Street. Within a large room, at a mahogany table, were two seated gentlemen, who might have seemed to her like high-class bookmakers if she had known what such were like. She looked at them anxiously, seeking for signs of heartiness. They appeared, at least, to be fresh, and one of them came towards her.

Dinny passed an invisible tongue over her lips.

‘I’m told that you are so good as to lend money on valuable jewellery?’

‘Quite, Madam.’ He was grey,

and rather bald, and rather red, with light eyes, and he stood regarding her through a pair of pince-nez which he held in his hand. Placing them on his nose, he drew a chair up to the table, made a motion with one hand, and resumed his seat. Dinny sat down.

‘I want rather a lot, five hundred,’ and she smiled: ‘It was an heirloom, quite nice.’

Both the seated gentlemen bowed slightly.

‘And I want it at once, because I have to make a payment. Here it is!’ And out of her bag she drew the pendant, unwrapped it and pushed

it forward on the table. Then, remembering the needed touch of nonchalance, she leaned back and crossed her knees.

Both of them looked at the pendant for a full minute without movement or speech. Then the second gentleman opened a drawer and took out a magnifying glass. While he was examining the pendant, Dinny was conscious that the first gentleman was examining herself. That – she supposed – was the way they divided labour. Which would they decide was the more genuine piece? She felt rather breathless, but kept her eyebrows

slightly raised and her eyelids half closed.

‘Your own property, Madam?’ said the first gentleman.

Remembering once more the old proverb, Dinny uttered an emphatic: ‘Yes.’

The second gentleman lowered his glass, and seemed to weigh the pendant in his hand.

‘Very nice,’ he said. ‘Old-fashioned, but very nice. And for how long would you want the money?’

Dinny, who had no idea, said boldly: ‘Six months; but I suppose I

could redeem it before?’

‘Oh! yes. Five hundred, did you say?’

‘Please.’

‘If you are satisfied, Mr Bondy,’ said the second gentleman, ‘I am.’

Dinny raised her eyes to Mr Bondy’s face. Was he going to say, ‘No, she’s just told me a lie?’ Instead, he pushed his underlip up over his upper lip, bowed to her and said:

‘Quite!’

‘I wonder,’ she thought, ‘if they always believe what they hear, or never? I suppose it’s the same

thing, really – *they* get the pendant and it's I who have to trust them – or, rather, it's Jean.'

The second gentleman now swept up the pendant, and, producing a book, began to write in it. Mr Bondy, on the other hand, went towards a safe.

'Did you wish for notes, Madam?'

'Please.'

The second gentleman, who had a moustache and white spats, and whose eyes goggled slightly, passed her the book.

'Your name and address,

Madam.'

As she wrote: 'Mrs Blore' and her aunt's number in Mount Street, the word 'Help!' came into her mind, and she cramped her left hand so as to hide what should have been the ringed finger. Her gloves fitted dreadfully well and there was no desirable circular protuberance.

'Should you require the article, we shall want £550 on the 29th of April next. After that, unless we hear from you, it will be for sale.'

'Yes, of course. But if I redeem it before?'

'Then the amount will be

according. The interest is at 20 per cent, so in a month, say, from now, we should only require £508 6s 8d.’

‘I see.’

The first gentleman detached a slip of paper and gave it to her.

‘That is the receipt.’

‘Could the pendant be redeemed on payment by anyone with this receipt, in case I can’t come myself?’

‘Yes, Madam.’

Dinny placed the receipt in her vanity bag, together with as much of her left hand as would go in, and listened to Mr Bondy counting

notes on the table. He counted beautifully; the notes, too, made a fine crackle, and seemed to be new. She took them with her right hand, inserted them into the bag, and still holding it with her concealed left hand, arose.

‘Thank you very much.’

‘Not at all, Madam, the pleasure is ours. Delighted to be of service. Good-bye!’

Dinny bowed, and made slowly for the door. There, from under her lashes she distinctly saw the first gentleman close one eye.

She went down the stairs rather

dreamily, shutting her bag.

‘I wonder if they think I’m going to have a baby,’ she thought; ‘or it may be only the Cambridgeshire.’ Anyway she had the money, and it was just a quarter to ten. Thomas Cook’s would change it, perhaps, or at least tell her where to get Belgian money.

It took an hour and visits to several places before she had most of it in Belgian money, and she was hot when she passed the barrier at Victoria with a platform ticket. She moved slowly down the train, looking into each carriage. She had gone about two-thirds

down when a voice behind had called:

‘Dinny!’ And, looking round, she saw Jean in the doorway of a compartment.

‘Oh! there you are, Jean! I’ve had such a rush. Is my nose shiny?’

‘You never look hot, Dinny.’

‘Well! I’ve done it; here’s the result, five hundred nearly all in Belgian.’

‘Splendid!’

‘And the receipt. Anyone can get it on this. The interest’s at 20 per cent calculated from day to day, but after 28 April, unless redeemed,

it'll be for sale.'

'You keep that, Dinny.' Jean lowered her voice. 'If we have to do things, it will mean we shan't be on hand. There are several places that have no treaties with Bolivia, and that's where we shall be till things have been put straight somehow.'

'Oh!' said Dinny, blankly, 'I could have got more. They lapped it up.'

'Never mind! I must get in. G.P.O. Brussels. Good-bye! Give my dear love to Hubert and tell him all's well.' She flung her arms round Dinny, gave her a hug, and

sprang back into the train. It moved off almost at once, and Dinny stood waving to that brilliant browned face turned back towards her.

Chapter Thirty-four



THIS active and successful opening to her day had the most acute drawbacks, for it meant that she was now the more loose-ended.

The absence of the Home Secretary and the Bolivian Minister seemed likely to hold up all activity even if she could have been of use in those directions, which was improbable. Nothing for it but to wait, eating one's heart out! She spent the rest of the morning wandering about, looking at shop windows, looking at the people

who looked at shop windows. She lunched off poached eggs at an ABC and went into a cinema, with a vague idea that whatever Jean and Alan were preparing would seem more natural if she could see something of the sort on the screen. She had no luck. In the film she saw were no aeroplanes, no open spaces, no detectives, no escaping from justice whatever; it was the starkest record of a French gentleman, not quite in his first youth, going into wrong bedrooms for an hour and more on end, without anyone actually losing her virtue. Dinny could not help

enjoying it – he was a dear, and perhaps the most accomplished liar she had ever watched.

After this warmth and comfort, she set her face again towards Mount Street.

She found that her mother and father had taken the afternoon train back to Condaford, and this plunged her into uncertainty. Ought she to go back, too, and ‘be a daughter’ to them? Or ought she to remain ‘on the spot’ in case anything turned up for her to do?

She went up to her room undecided, and began half-heartedly to pack. Pulling open a

drawer, she came on Hubert's diary, which still accompanied her. Turning the pages idly, she lighted on a passage which seemed to her unfamiliar, having nothing to do with his hardships:

‘Here's a sentence in a book I'm reading: “We belong, of course, to a generation that's seen through things, seen how futile everything is, and had the courage to accept futility, and say to ourselves: There's nothing for it but to enjoy ourselves as best we can.” Well, I suppose that's my generation, the one that's seen the war and its aftermath; and, of course, it *is* the

attitude of quite a crowd; but when you come to think of it, it might have been said by any rather unthinking person in any generation; certainly might have been said by the last generation after religion had got the knock that Darwin gave it. For what does it come to? Suppose you admit having seen through religion and marriage and treaties, and commercial honesty and freedom and ideals of every kind, seen that there's nothing absolute about them, that they lead of themselves to no definite reward, either in this world or a next which doesn't exist

perhaps, and that the only thing absolute is pleasure and that you mean to have it – are you any farther towards getting pleasure? No! you're a long way farther off. If everybody's creed is consciously and crudely “grab a good time at all costs”, everybody is going to grab it at the expense of everybody else, and the devil will take the hindmost, and that'll be nearly everybody, especially the sort of slackers who naturally hold that creed, so that *they*, most certainly, aren't going to get a good time. All those things they've so cleverly seen through are only rules of the

road devised by men throughout the ages to keep people within bounds, so that we may all have a reasonable chance of getting a good time, instead of the good time going only to the violent, callous, dangerous and able few. All our institutions, religion, marriage, treaties, the law, and the rest, are simply forms of consideration for others necessary to secure consideration for self. Without them we should be a society of feeble motor-bandits and street-walkers in slavery to a few super-crooks. You can't, therefore, disbelieve in consideration for

others without making an idiot of yourself and spoiling your own chances of a good time. The funny thing is that no matter how we all talk, we recognize that perfectly. People who prate like the fellow in that book don't act up to their creed when it comes to the point. Even a motor-bandit doesn't turn King's evidence. In fact, this new philosophy of "having the courage to accept futility and grab a good time" is simply a shallow bit of thinking; all the same, it seemed quite plausible when I read it.'

Dinny dropped the page as if it had stung her, and stood with a

transfigured look on her face. Not the words she had been reading caused this change – she was hardly conscious of what they were. No! She had got an inspiration, and she could not think why she had not had it before! She ran downstairs to the telephone and rang up Fleur's house.

‘Yes?’ came Fleur's voice.

‘I want Michael, Fleur; is he in?’

‘Yes. Michael – Dinny.’

‘Michael? Could you by any chance come round at once? It's about Hubert's diary. I've had a “hunch”, but I'd rather not discuss

it on the 'phone. Or could I come to you? – You *can* come? Good! Fleur too, if she likes; or, if not, bring her wits.'

Ten minutes later Michael arrived alone. Something in the quality of Dinny's voice seemed to have infected him, for he wore an air of businesslike excitement. She took him into the alcove and sat down with him on a sofa under the parakeet's cage.

'Michael dear, it came to me suddenly: if we could get Hubert's diary – about 15,000 words – printed at once, ready for publication, with a good title like

“Betrayed” – or something – ’

‘ “Deserted”,’ said Michael.

‘Yes, “Deserted”, and it could be shown to the Home Secretary as about to come out with a fighting preface, it might stop him from issuing a warrant. With that title and preface and a shove from the Press, it would make a real sensation, and be very nasty for him. We could get the Preface to pitch it strong about desertion of one’s kith and kin, and pusillanimity and truckling to the foreigner and all that. The Press would surely take it up on those lines.’

Michael ruffled his hair.

‘It is a hunch, Dinny; but there are several points: first, how to do it without making it blackmailish. If we can’t avoid that, then it’s no go. If Walter sniffs blackmail, he can’t possibly rise.’

‘But the whole point is to make him feel that if he issues the warrant he’s going to regret it.’

‘My child,’ said Michael, blowing smoke at the parakeet, ‘it’s got to be much more subtle than that. You don’t know public men. The thing is to make them do of their own accord out of high motives what is for their own good. We must get

Walter to do this from a low motive, and feel it to be a high one. That's indispensable.'

'Won't it do if he says it's a high one? I mean need he feel it?'

'He must, at least by daylight. What he feels at three in the morning doesn't matter. He's no fool, you know. I believe,' and Michael rumpled his hair again, 'that the only man who can work it after all is Bobbie Ferrar. He knows Walter upside down.'

'Is he a nice man? Would he?'

'Bobbie's a sphinx, but he's a perfectly good sphinx. And he's in

the know all round. He's a sort of receiving station, hears everything naturally, so that we shouldn't have to appear directly in any way.'

'Isn't the first thing, Michael, to get the diary printed, so that it looks ready to come out on the nail?'

'Yes, but the Preface is the hub.'

'How?'

'What we want is that Walter should read the printed diary, and come to the conclusion from it that to issue the warrant will be damned hard luck on Hubert – as,

of course, it will. In other words, we want to sop his private mind. After that, what I see Walter saying to himself is this: "Yes, hard luck on young Cherrell, hard luck, but the magistrate committed him, and the Bolivians are pressing, and he belongs to the classes; one must be careful not to give an impression of favouring privilege – " "

'I think that's so unfair,' interrupted Dinny, hotly. 'Why should it be made harder for people just because they happen not to be Tom, Dick and Harry? I call it cowardly.'

'Ah! Dinny, but we are cowardly

in that sort of way. But as Walter was saying when you broke out: “One must not lightly stretch points. The little Countries look to us to treat them with special consideration.” ’

‘But why?’ began Dinny again: ‘That seems – ’

Michael held up his hand.

‘I know, Dinny, I know. And this seems to me the psychological moment when Bobbie, out of the blue as it were, might say: “By the way, there’s to be a preface. Someone showed it me. It takes the line that England is always being generous and just at the expense of

her own subjects. It's pretty hot stuff, Sir. The Press will love it. That lay: We can't stand by our own people, is always popular. And you know" – Bobbie would continue – "it has often seemed to me, Sir, that a strong man, like you, ought perhaps to do something about this impression that we can't stand by our own people. It oughtn't to be true, perhaps it isn't true, but it exists and very strongly; and you, Sir, perhaps better than anyone, could redress the balance there. This particular case wouldn't afford a bad chance at all of restoring

confidence on that point. In itself it would be right, I think” – Bobbie would say – “not to issue a warrant, because that scar, you know, was genuine, the shooting really *was* an act of self-defence; and it would certainly do the country good to feel that it could rely again on the authorities not to let our own people down.” And there he would leave it. And Walter would feel, not that he was avoiding attack, but that he was boldly going to do what was good for the Country – indispensable, that, Dinny, in the case of public men.’ And Michael rolled his eyes.

‘You see,’ he went on, ‘Walter is quite up to realizing, without admitting it, that the preface won’t appear if he doesn’t issue the warrant. And I daresay he’ll be frank with himself in the middle of the night; but if in his 6 PM mind he feels he’s doing the courageous thing in not issuing the warrant, then what he feels in his 3 AM mind won’t matter. See?’

‘You put it marvellously, Michael. But won’t he have to read the preface?’

‘I hope not, but I think it ought to be in Bobbie’s pocket, in case he

has to fortify his line of approach. There are no flies on Bobbie, you know.'

'But will Mr Ferrar care enough to do all this?'

'Yes,' said Michael, 'on the whole, yes. My Dad once did him a good turn, and old Shropshire's his uncle.'

'And who could write that preface?'

'I believe I could get old Blythe. They're still afraid of him in our party, and when he likes he can make livers creep all right.'

Dinny clasped her hands.

‘Do you think he will like?’

‘It depends on the diary.’

‘Then I think he will.’

‘May I read it before I turn it over to the printers?’

‘Of course! Only, Michael, Hubert doesn’t want the diary to come out.’

‘Well, that’s OK. If it works with Walter and he doesn’t issue the warrant, it won’t be necessary; and if it doesn’t work, it won’t be necessary either, because the “fat will be in the fire”, as old Forsyte used to say.’

‘Will the cost of printing be

much?’

‘A few pounds – say twenty.’

‘I can manage that,’ said Dinny; and her mind flew to the two gentlemen, for she was habitually hard up.

‘Oh! that’ll be all right, don’t worry!’

‘It’s my hunch, Michael, and I should like to pay for it. You’ve no idea how horrible it is to sit and do nothing, with Hubert in this danger! I have the feeling that if he’s once given up, he won’t have a dog’s chance.’

‘It’s ill prophesying,’ said

Michael, 'where public men are concerned. People underrate them. They're a lot more complicated than they're supposed to be, and perhaps better principled; they're certainly a lot shrewder. All the same, I believe this will click, if we can work old Blythe and Bobbie Ferrar properly. I'll go for Blythe, and set Bart on to Bobbie. In the meantime this shall be printed,' and he took up the diary. 'Good-bye, Dinny dear, and don't worry more than you can help.'

Dinny kissed him, and he went.

That evening about ten he rang her up.

‘I’ve read it, Dinny. Walter must be pretty hard-boiled if it doesn’t fetch him. He won’t go to sleep over it, anyway, like the other bloke; he’s a conscientious card, whatever else he is. After all this is a sort of reprieve case, and he’s bound to recognize its seriousness. Once in his hands, he’s got to go through with this diary, and it’s moving stuff, apart from the light on the incident itself. So buck up!’

Dinny said: ‘Bless you!’ fervently, and went to bed lighter at heart than she had been for two days.

Chapter Thirty-five



IN the slow long days, and they seemed many, which followed, Dinny remained at Mount Street, to be in command of any situation that might arise. Her chief difficulty lay in keeping people ignorant of Jean's machinations. She seemed to succeed with all except Sir Lawrence, who, raising his eyebrow, said cryptically:

‘Pour une gaillarde, c’est une gaillarde!’

And, at Dinny's limpid glance, added: ‘Quite the Botticellian

virgin! Would you like to meet Bobbie Ferrar? We're lunching together underground at Dumourieux's in Drury Lane, mainly on mushrooms.'

Dinny had been building so on Bobbie Ferrar that the sight of him gave her a shock, he had so complete an air of caring for none of those things. With his carnation, bass drawl, broad bland face, and slight drop of the underjaw, he did not inspire her.

'Have you a passion for mushrooms, Miss Cherrell?' he said.

'Not French mushrooms.'

‘No?’

‘Bobbie,’ said Sir Lawrence, looking from one to the other, ‘no one would take you for one of the deepest cards in Europe. You are going to tell us that you won’t guarantee to call Walter a strong man, when you talk about the preface?’

Several of Bobbie Ferrar’s even teeth became visible.

‘I have no influence with Walter.’

‘Then who has?’

‘No one. Except –’

‘Yes?’

‘Walter.’

Before she could check herself, Dinny said:

‘You do understand, Mr Ferrar, that this is practically death for my brother and frightful for all of us?’

Bobbie Ferrar looked at her flushed face without speaking. He seemed, indeed, to admit or promise nothing all through that lunch, but when they got up and Sir Lawrence was paying his bill, he said to her:

‘Miss Cherrell, when I go to see Walter about this, would you like to go with me? I could arrange for

you to be in the background.'

'I should like it terribly.'

'Between ourselves, then. I'll let you know.'

Dinny clasped her hands and smiled at him.

'Rum chap!' said Sir Lawrence, as they walked away: 'Lots of heart, really. Simply can't bear people being hanged. Goes to all the murder trials. Hates prisons like poison. You'd never think it.'

'No,' said Dinny, dreamily.

'Bobbie,' continued Sir Lawrence, 'is capable of being Private Secretary to a Cheka,

without their ever suspecting that he's itching to boil them in oil the whole time. He's unique. The diary's in print, Dinny, and old Blythe's writing that preface. Walter will be back on Thursday. Have you seen Hubert yet?

‘No, but I’m to go with Dad tomorrow.’

‘I’ve refrained from pumping you, but those young Tasburghs are up to something, aren’t they? I happen to know young Tasburgh isn’t with his ship.’

‘Not?’

‘Perfect innocence!’ murmured

Sir Lawrence. 'Well, my dear, neither nods nor winks are necessary; but I hope to goodness they won't strike before peaceful measures have been exhausted.'

'Oh! surely they wouldn't!'

'They're the kind of young person who still make one believe in history. Has it ever struck you, Dinny, that history is nothing but the story of how people have taken things into their own hands, and got themselves or others into and out of trouble over it? They can cook at that place, can't they? I shall take your aunt there some day when she's thin enough.'

And Dinny perceived that the dangers of cross-examination were over.

Her father called for her and they set out for the prison the following afternoon of a windy day charged with the rough melancholy of November. The sight of the building made her feel like a dog about to howl. The Governor, who was an army man, received them with great courtesy and the special deference of one to another of higher rank in his own profession. He made no secret of his sympathy with them over Hubert's position, and gave them more than the time

limit allowed by the regulations.

Hubert came in smiling. Dinny felt that if she had been alone he might have shown some of his real feelings, but that in front of his father he was determined to treat the whole thing as just a bad joke. The General, who had been grim and silent all the way there, became at once matter-of-fact and as if ironically amused. Dinny could not help thinking how almost absurdly alike, allowing for age, they were in looks and in manner. There was that in both of them which would never quite grow up, or rather which had grown up in

early youth and would never again budge. Neither, from beginning to end of that half-hour, touched on feeling. The whole interview was a great strain, and so far as intimate talk was concerned, might never have taken place. According to Hubert, everything in his life there was perfectly all right, and he wasn't worrying at all; according to the General, it was only a matter of days now, and the coverts were waiting to be shot. He had a good deal to say about India, and the unrest on the frontier. Only when they were shaking hands at the end did their faces

change at all, and then only to the simple gravity of a very straight look into each other's eyes. Dinny followed with a hand-clasp and a kiss behind her father's back.

‘Jean?’ asked Hubert, very low.

‘Quite all right, sent her dear love. Nothing to worry about, she says.’

The quiver of his lips hardened into a little smile, he squeezed her hand, and turned away.

In the gateway the doorkeeper and two warders saluted them respectfully. They got into their cab, and not one word did they say

the whole way home. The thing was a nightmare from which they would awaken some day, perhaps.

Practically the only comfort of those days of waiting was derived by Dinny from Aunt Em, whose inherent incoherence continually diverted thought from logical direction. The antiseptic value, indeed, of incoherence became increasingly apparent as day by day anxiety increased. Her aunt was genuinely worried by Hubert's position, but her mind was too plural to dwell on it to the point of actual suffering. On the fifth of November she called Dinny to the

drawing-room window to look at some boys dragging a guy down a Mount Street desolate in wind and lamplight.

‘The rector’s workin’ on that,’ she said; ‘there was a Tasburgh who wasn’t hanged, or beheaded, or whatever they did with them, and he’s tryin’ to prove that he ought to have been; he sold some plate or somethin’ to buy the gunpowder, and his sister married Catesby, or one of the others. Your father and I and Wilmet, Dinny, used to make a guy of our governess; she had very large feet, Robbins. Children are so unfeelin’.

Did you?’

‘Did I what, Aunt Em?’

‘Make guys?’

‘No.’

‘We used to go out singin’ carols, too, with our faces blacked. Wilmet was the corker. Such a tall child, with legs that went down straight like sticks wide apart from the beginning, you know – angels have them. It’s all rather gone out. I do think there ought to be somethin’ done about it. Gibbets, too. We had one. We hung a kitten from it. We drowned it first – not we – the staff.’

‘Horrible, Aunt Em!’

‘Yes; but not really. Your father brought us up as Red Indians. It was nice for him, then he could do things to us and we couldn’t cry. Did Hubert?’

‘Oh! no. Hubert only brought himself up as a Red Indian.’

‘That was your mother; she’s a gentle creature, Dinny. Our mother was a Hungerford. You must have noticed.’

‘I don’t remember Grandmother.’

‘She died before you were born. That was Spain. The germs there are extra special. So did your

grandfather. I was thirty-five. He had very good manners. They did, you know, then. Only sixty. Claret and piquet, and a funny little beard thing. You've seen them, Dinny?'

'Imperials?'

'Yes, diplomatic. They wear them now when they write those articles on foreign affairs. I like goats myself, though they butt you rather.'

'Their smell, Aunt Em!'

'Penetratin'. Has Jean written to you lately?'

In Dinny's bag was a letter just

received. ‘No,’ she said. The habit was growing on her.

‘This hidin’ away is weak-minded. Still, it *was* her honeymoon.’

Her Aunt had evidently not been made a recipient of Sir Lawrence’s suspicions.

Upstairs she read the letter again before tearing it up.

Poste restante, Brussels.

DEAR DINNY,

All goes on for the best here and I’m enjoying it quite a lot. They say I take to it like a duck to water. There’s nothing much to choose now between Alan and me, except that I have the better hands. Thanks awfully for your letters.

Terribly glad of the diary stunt, I think it may quite possibly work the oracle. Still we can't afford not to be ready for the worst. You don't say whether Fleur's having any luck. By the way, could you get me a Turkish conversation book, the pronouncing kind? I expect your Uncle Adrian could tell you where to get it. I can't lay hands on one here. Alan sends you his love. Same from me. Keep us informed by wire if necessary.

Your aff^{te}

JEAN.

A Turkish conversation book! This first indication of how their minds were working set Dinny's working too. She remembered Hubert having told her that he had saved the life of a Turkish officer at the end of the war, and had kept up with him ever since. So Turkey

was to be the asylum if –! But the whole plan was desperate. Surely it would not, must not come to that! But she went down to the Museum the next morning.

Adrian, whom she had not seen since Hubert's committal, received her with his usual quiet alacrity, and she was sorely tempted to confide in him. Jean must know that to ask his advice about a Turkish conversation book would surely stimulate his curiosity. She restrained herself, however, and said:

‘Uncle, you haven't a Turkish conversation book? Hubert thought

he'd like to kill time in prison brushing up his Turkish.'

Adrian regarded her, and closed one eye.

'He hasn't any Turkish to brush. But here you are – ' And, fishing a small book from a shelf, he added: 'Serpent!'

Dinny smiled.

'Deception,' he continued, 'is wasted on me, Dinny, I am in whatever know there is.'

'Tell me, Uncle!'

'You see,' said Adrian, 'Hallorsen is in it.'

'Oh!'

‘And I, whose movements are dependent on Hallorsen’s, have had to put two and two together. They make five, Dinny, and I sincerely trust the addition won’t be needed. But Hallorsen’s a fine chap.’

‘I know that,’ said Dinny, ruefully. ‘Uncle, do tell me exactly what’s in the wind.’

Adrian shook his head.

‘They obviously can’t tell themselves till they hear how Hubert is to be exported. All I know is that Hallorsen’s Bolivians are going back to Bolivia instead of to the States, and that a very queer

padded, well-ventilated case is being made to hold them.’

‘You mean his Bolivian bones?’

‘Or possibly replicas. They’re being made, too.’

Thrilled, Dinny stood gazing at him.

‘And,’ added Adrian, ‘the replicas are being made by a man who believes he is repeating Siberians, and not for Hallorsen, and they’ve been very carefully weighed – one hundred and fifty-two pounds, perilously near the weight of a man. How much is Hubert?’

‘About eleven stone.’

‘Exactly.’

‘Go on, Uncle.’

‘Having got so far, Dinny, I’ll give you my theory, for what it’s worth. Hallorsen and his case full of replicas will travel by the ship that Hubert travels by. At any port of call in Spain or Portugal, Hallorsen will get off with his case, containing Hubert. He will contrive to have extracted and dropped the replicas overboard. The real bones will be waiting there for him, and he will fill up when Hubert has been switched off to a plane: that’s where Jean and Alan come in.

They'll fly to, well – Turkey, judging from your request just now. I was wondering where before you came. Hallorsen will pop his genuine bones into the case to satisfy the authorities, and Hubert's disappearance will be put down to a jump overboard – the splash of the replicas, I shouldn't wonder – or anyway will remain mysterious. It looks to me pretty forlorn.'

'But suppose there's no port of call?'

'They're pretty certain to stop somewhere; but, if not, they'll have some alternative, which will

happen on the way down to the ship. Or possibly they may elect to try the case dodge on the arrival in South America. That would really be safest, I think, though it lets out the flying.'

'But why is Professor Hallorsen going to run such a risk?'

'*You* ask me that, Dinny?'

'It's too much – I – I don't want him to.'

'Well, my dear, he also has the feeling, I know, that he got Hubert into this, and must get him out. And you must remember that he belongs to a nation that is nothing

if not energetic and believes in taking the law into its own hands. But he's the last man to trade on a service. Besides, it's a three-legged race he's running with young Tasburgh, who's just as deep in it, so you're no worse off.'

'But I don't want to owe anything to either of them. It simply mustn't come to that. Besides, there's Hubert – do you think he'll ever consent?'

Adrian said gravely:

'I think he has consented, Dinny; otherwise he'd have asked for bail. Probably he'll be in charge of Bolivians and won't feel he's

breaking English law. I fancy they've convinced him between them that they won't run much risk. No doubt he feels fed up with the whole thing and ready for anything. Don't forget that he's really being very unjustly treated, and is just married.'

'Yes,' said Dinny, in a hushed voice. 'And you, Uncle? How are things?'

Adrian's answer was no less quiet:

'Your advice was right; and I'm fixed up to go, subject to this business.'

Chapter Thirty-six



THE feeling that such things did not happen persisted with Dinny even after her interview with Adrian; she had too often read of them in books. And yet, there was history, and there were the Sunday papers! Thought of the Sunday papers calmed her curiously and fortified her resolution to keep Hubert's affair out of them. But she conscientiously posted to Jean the Turkish primer, and took to poring over maps in Sir Lawrence's study when he was out. She also studied

the sailing dates of the South American lines.

Two days later Sir Lawrence announced at dinner that 'Walter' was back; but after a holiday it would no doubt take him some time to reach a little thing like Hubert's.

'A little thing!' cried Dinny: 'merely his life and our happiness.'

'My dear, people's lives and happiness are the daily business of a Home Secretary.'

'It must be an awful post. I should hate it.'

'That,' said Sir Lawrence, 'is

where your difference from a public man comes in, Dinny. What a public man hates is *not* dealing with the lives and happiness of his fellow-beings. Is our bluff ready, in case he comes early to Hubert?’

‘The diary’s printed – I’ve passed the proof; and the preface is written. I haven’t seen that, but Michael says it’s a “corker”.’

‘Good! Mr Blythe’s corks give no mean pause. Bobbie will let us know when Walter reaches the case.’

‘What is Bobbie?’ asked Lady Mont.

‘An institution, my dear.’

‘Blore, remind me to write about that sheep-dog puppy.’

‘Yes, my lady.’

‘When their faces are mostly white they have a kind of divine madness, have you noticed, Dinny? They’re all called Bobbie.’

‘Anything less divinely made than our Bobbie – eh, Dinny?’

‘Does he always do what he says he will, Uncle?’

‘Yes; you may bet on Bobbie.’

‘I do want to see some sheep-dog trials,’ said Lady Mont: ‘Clever creatures. People say they know

exactly what sheep not to bite; and so thin, really. All hair and intelligence. Hen has two. About your hair, Dinny?’

‘Yes, Aunt Em?’

‘Did you keep what you cut off?’

‘I did.’

‘Well, don’t let it go out of the family; you may want it. They say we’re goin’ to be old-fashioned again. Ancient but modern, you know.’

Sir Lawrence cocked his eye.

‘Have you ever been anything else, Dinny? That’s why I want you to sit. Permanence of the type.’

‘What type?’ said Lady Mont.
‘Don’t be a type, Dinny; they’re so dull. There was a man said Michael was a type; I never could see it.’

‘Why don’t you get Aunt Em to sit instead, Uncle? She’s younger than I am any day, aren’t you, Auntie?’

‘Don’t be disrespectful. Blore, my Vichy.’

‘Uncle, how old is Bobbie?’

‘No one really knows. Rising sixty, perhaps. Some day, I suppose, his date will be discovered; but they’ll have to cut a section and tell it from his rings.

You're not thinking of marrying him, are you, Dinny? By the way, Walter's a widower. Quaker blood somewhere, converted Liberal – inflammable stuff.'

'Dinny takes a lot of wooin', said Lady Mont.

'Can I get down, Aunt Em? I want to go to Michael's.'

'Tell her I'm comin' to see Kit tomorrow mornin'. I've got him a new game called Parliament – they're animals divided into Parties; they all squeak and roar differently, and behave in the wrong places. The Prime Minister's a zebra, and the Chancellor of the

Exchequer's a tiger – striped. Blore, a taxi for Miss Dinny.'

Michael was at the House, but Fleur was in. She reported that Mr Blythe's preface had already been sent to Bobbie Ferrar. As for the Bolivians – the Minister was not back, but the Attaché in charge had promised to have an informal talk with Bobbie. He had been so polite that Fleur was unable to say what was in his mind. She doubted if there was anything.

Dinny returned on as many tenterhooks as ever. It all seemed to hinge on Bobbie Ferrar, and he 'rising' sixty, so used to everything

that he must surely have lost all persuasive flame. But perhaps that was for the best. Emotional appeal might be wrong. Coolness, calculation, the power of hinting at unpleasant consequences, of subtly suggesting advantage, might be what was wanted. She felt, indeed, completely at sea as to what really moved the mind of Authority. Michael, Fleur, Sir Lawrence had spoken from time to time as if they knew, and yet she felt that none of them were really wiser than herself. It all seemed to balance on the knife-edge of mood and temper. She went to bed and had

practically no sleep.

One more day like that, and then, as a sailor, whose ship has been in the doldrums, wakes to movement under him, so felt Dinny when at breakfast she opened an unstamped envelope with 'Foreign Office' imprinted on it.

DEAR MISS CHERRELL, –

I handed your brother's diary to the Home Secretary yesterday afternoon. He promised to read it last night, and I am to see him today at six o'clock. If you will come to the Foreign Office at ten minutes to six, we might go round together.

Sincerely yours,

R. FERRAR.

So! A whole day to get through

first! By now 'Walter' must have read the diary; had perhaps already made up his mind on the case! With the receipt of that formal note, a feeling of being in conspiracy and pledged to secrecy had come to her. Instinctively she said nothing of it; instinctively wanted to get away from everybody till all was over. This must be like waiting for an operation. She walked out into a fine morning, and wondered where on earth she should go; thought of the National Gallery, and decided that pictures required too much mind given to them; thought of

Westminster Abbey and the girl Millicent Pole. Fleur had got her a post as mannequin at Frivolle's. Why not go there, look at the winter models, and perhaps see that girl again? Rather hateful being shown dresses if you were not going to buy, giving all that trouble for nothing. But if only Hubert were released she would 'go off the deep end' and buy a real dress, though it took all her next allowance. Hardening her heart, therefore, she turned in the direction of Bond Street, forded that narrow drifting river, came to Frivolle's, and went in.

‘Yes, Madam’; and she was shown up, and seated on a chair. She sat there with her head a little on one side, smiling and saying pleasant things to the saleswoman; for she remembered one day in a big shop an assistant saying: ‘You’ve no idea, Moddam, what a difference it makes to us when a customer smiles and takes a little interest. We get so many difficult ladies and – oh! well –’ The models were very ‘late’, very expensive, and mostly, she thought, very unbecoming, in spite of the constant assurance: ‘The frock would just suit you, Madam, with

your figure and colouring.'

Not sure whether to ask after her would harm or benefit the girl Millicent Pole, she selected two dresses for parade. A very thin girl, haughty, with a neat little head and large shoulder blades came wearing the first, a creation in black and white; she languished across with a hand on where one hip should have been, and her head turned as if looking for the other, confirming Dinny in the aversion she already had from the dress. Then, in the second dress, of sea green and silver, the one that she really liked except for its price,

came Millicent Pole. With professional negligence she took no glance at the client, as who should say: 'What do you think! If you lived in underclothes all day – and had so many husbands to avoid!' Then, in turning, she caught Dinny's smile, answered it with a sudden startled brightness, and moved across again, languid as ever. Dinny got up, and going over to that figure now standing very still, took a fold of the skirt between finger and thumb, as if to feel its quality.

'Nice to see you again.'

The girl's loose flower-like

mouth smiled very sweetly. 'She's marvellous!' thought Dinny.

'I know Miss Pole,' she said to the saleswoman. 'That dress looks awfully nice on her.'

'Oh! but Madam, it's your style completely. Miss Pole has a little too much line for it. Let me slip it on you.'

Not sure that she had been complimented, Dinny said:

'I shan't be able to decide today; I'm not sure I can afford it.'

'That is quite all right, Madam. Miss Pole, just come in here and slip it off, and we'll slip it on

Madam.'

In there the girl slipped it off. 'Even more marvellous,' thought Dinny: 'Wish I looked as nice as that in undies,' and suffered her own dress to be removed.

'Madam is beautifully slim,' said the saleswoman.

'Thin as a rail!'

'Oh, no, Madam is well covered.'

'I think she's just right!' The girl spoke with a sort of eagerness. 'Madam has style.'

The saleswoman fastened the hook.

'Perfect,' she said. 'A little

fullness here, perhaps; we can put that right.'

'Rather a lot of my skin,' murmured Dinny.

'Oh! But so becoming, with a skin like Madam's.'

'Would you let me see Miss Pole in that other frock – the black and white?'

This she said, knowing that the girl could not be sent to fetch it in her underclothes.

'Certainly; I'll get it at once. Attend to Madam, Miss Pole.'

Left to themselves, the two girls stood smiling at each other.

‘How do you like it now you’ve got it, Millie?’

‘Well, it isn’t all I thought, Miss.’

‘Empty?’

‘I expect nothing’s what you think it. Might be a lot worse, of course.’

‘It was you I came in to see.’

‘Did you reely? But I hope you’ll have the dress, Miss – suits you a treat. You look lovely in it.’

‘They’ll be putting you in the sales department, Millie, if you don’t look out.’

‘Oh! I wouldn’t go there. It’s nothing but a lot of soft sawder.’

‘Where do I unhook?’

‘Here. It’s very economic – only one. And you can do it for yourself, with a wriggle. I read about your brother, Miss. I do think that’s a shame.’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, and stood stony in her underclothes. Suddenly she stretched out her hand and gripped the girl’s. ‘Good luck, Millie!’

‘And good luck to you, Miss!’

They had just unclasped hands when the saleswoman came back.

‘I’m so sorry to have bothered you,’ smiled Dinny, ‘but I’ve quite

made up my mind to have this one, if I can afford it. The price is appalling.'

'Do you think so, Madam? It's a Paris model. I'll see if I can get Mr Better to do what he can for *you* – it's *your* frock. Miss Pole, find Mr Better for me, will you?'

The girl, now in the black and white creation, went out.

Dinny, who had resumed her dress, said:

'Do your mannequins stay long with you?'

'Well, no; in and out of dresses all day, it's rather a restless

occupation.'

'What becomes of them?'

'In one way or another they get married.'

How discreet! And soon after, Mr Better – a slim man with grey hair and perfect manners – having said he would reduce the price 'for Madam' to what still seemed appalling, Dinny went out into the pale November sunlight saying she would decide tomorrow. Six hours to kill. She walked North-East towards the Meads, trying to soothe her own anxiety by thinking that everyone she passed, no matter how they looked, had

anxieties of their own. Seven million people, in one way or another all anxious. Some of them seemed so, and some did not. She gazed at her own face in a shop window, and decided that she was one of those who did not; and yet how horrid she felt! The human face was a mask, indeed! She came to Oxford Street and halted on the edge of the pavement, waiting to cross. Close to her was the bony white-nosed head of a van horse. She began stroking its neck, wishing she had a lump of sugar. The horse paid no attention, nor did its driver. Why should they?

From year's end to year's end they passed and halted, halted and passed through this maelstrom, slowly, ploddingly, without hope of release, till they both fell down and were cleared away. A policeman reversed the direction of his white sleeves, the driver jerked his reins, and the van moved on, followed by a long line of motor vehicles. The policeman again reversed his sleeves and Dinny crossed, walked on to Tottenham Court Road, and once more stood waiting. What a seething and intricate pattern of creatures, and their cars, moving to what end, fulfilling what secret

purpose? To what did it all amount? A meal, a smoke, a glimpse of so-called life in some picture palace, a bed at the end of the day. A million jobs faithfully and unfaithfully pursued, that they might eat, and dream a little, and sleep, and begin again. The inexorability of life caught her by the throat as she stood there, so that she gave a little gasp, and a stout man said:

‘Beg pardon, did I tread on your foot, Miss?’

As she was smiling her ‘No’, a policeman reversed his white sleeves, and she crossed. She came

to Gower Street, and walked rapidly up its singular desolation. ‘One more ribber, one more ribber to cross,’ and she was in the Meads, that network of mean streets, gutters, and child life. At the Vicarage both her Uncle and Aunt for once were in, and about to lunch. Dinny sat down, too. She did not shrink from discussing the coming ‘operation’ with them. They lived so in the middle of operations. Hilary said:

‘Old Tasburgh and I got Bentworth to speak to the Home Secretary, and I had this note from “the Squire” last night. “All Walter

would say was that he should treat the case strictly on its merits without reference to what he called your nephew's status – what a word! I always said the fellow ought to have stayed Liberal.” ’

‘I wish he *would* treat it on its merits!’ cried Dinny; ‘then Hubert would be safe. I do hate that truckling to what they call Democracy! He’d give a cabman the benefit of the doubt.’

‘It’s the reaction from the old times, Dinny, and gone too far, as reaction always does. When I was a boy there was still truth in the accusation of privilege. Now, it’s

the other way on; station in life is a handicap before the Law. But nothing's harder than to steer in the middle of the stream – you want to be fair, and you can't.'

'I was wondering, Uncle, as I came along. What was the use of you and Hubert and Dad and Uncle Adrian, and tons of others doing their jobs faithfully – apart from bread and butter, I mean?'

'Ask your Aunt,' said Hilary.

'Aunt May, what is the use?'

'I don't know, Dinny. I was bred up to believe there was a use in it, so I go on believing. If you married

and had a family, you probably wouldn't ask the question.'

'I knew Aunt May would get out of answering. Now, Uncle?'

'Well, Dinny, I don't know either. As she says, we do what we're used to doing; that's about it.'

'In his diary Hubert says that consideration for others is really consideration for ourselves. Is that true?'

'Rather a crude way of putting it. I should prefer to say that we're all so interdependent that in order to look after oneself one's got to

look after others no less.'

'But is one worth looking after?'

'You mean: is life worth while at all?'

'Yes.'

'After five hundred thousand years (Adrian says a million at least) of human life, the population of the world is very considerably larger than it has ever been yet. Well, then! Considering all the miseries and struggles of mankind, would human life, self-conscious as it is, have persisted if it wasn't worth while to be alive?'

'I suppose not,' mused Dinny; 'I

think in London one loses the sense of proportion.'

At this moment a maid came in.

'Mr Cameron to see you, Sir.'

'Show him in, Lucy. He'll help you to regain it, Dinny. A walking proof of the unquenchable love of life, had every malady under the sun, including black-water, been in three wars, two earthquakes, had all kinds of jobs in all parts of the world, is out of one now, and has heart disease.'

Mr Cameron entered; a short spare man getting on for fifty, with bright Celtic grey eyes, dark

grizzled hair, and a slightly hooked nose. One of his hands was bound up, as if he had sprained a thumb.

‘Hallo, Cameron,’ said Hilary, rising. ‘In the wars again?’

‘Well, Vicar, where I live, the way some of those fellows treat horses is dreadful. I had a fight yesterday. Flogging a willing horse, overloaded, poor old feller – never can stand that.’

‘I hope you gave him beans!’

Mr Cameron’s eyes twinkled.

‘Well, I tapped his claret, and sprained my thumb. But I called to tell you, Sir, that I’ve got a job on

the Vestry. It's not much, but it'll keep me going.'

'Splendid! Look here, Cameron, I'm awfully sorry, but Mrs Cherrell and I have to go to a Meeting now. Stay and have a cup of coffee and talk to my niece. Tell her about Brazil.'

Mr Cameron looked at Dinny. He had a charming smile.

The next hour went quickly and did her good. Mr Cameron had a fine flow. He gave her practically his life story, from boyhood in Australia, and enlistment at sixteen for the South African war, to his experiences since the Great War.

Every kind of insect and germ had lodged in him in his time; he had handled horses, Chinamen, Kaffirs, and Brazilians, broken collar-bone and leg, been gassed and shell-shocked, but there was – he carefully explained – nothing wrong with him now but ‘a touch of this heart disease’. His face had a kind of inner light, and his speech betrayed no consciousness that he was out of the common. He was, at the moment, the best antidote Dinny could have taken, and she prolonged him to his limit. When he had gone she herself went away into the medley of the streets

with a fresh eye. It was now half-past three, and she had two hours and a half still to put away. She walked towards Regent's Park. Few leaves were left upon the trees, and there was a savour in the air from bonfires of them burning; through their bluish drift she passed, thinking of Mr Cameron, and resisting melancholy. What a life to have lived! And what a zest at the end of it! From beside the Long Water in the last of the pale sunlight, she came out into Marylebone, and bethought herself that before she went to the Foreign Office she must go where she could

titivate. She chose Harridge's and went in. It was half-past four. The stalls were thronged; she wandered among them, bought a new powder-puff, had some tea, made herself tidy, and emerged. Still a good half-hour, and she walked again, though by now she was tired. At a quarter to six precisely she gave her card to a commissionaire at the Foreign Office, and was shown into a waiting-room. It was lacking in mirrors, and taking out her case she looked at herself in its little powder-flecked round of glass. She seemed plain to herself and wished

that she didn't; though, after all, she was not going to see 'Walter' – only to sit in the background, and wait again. Always waiting!

There was Bobbie Ferrar in the doorway. He looked just as usual. But of course he didn't care. Why should he?

He tapped his breast pocket. 'I've got the preface. Shall we trot?' And he proceeded to talk of the Chingford murder. Had she been following it? She had not. It was a clear case – completely! And he added, suddenly:

'The Bolivian won't take the responsibility, Miss Cherrell.'

‘Oh!’

‘Never mind.’ And his face broadened.

‘His teeth *are* real,’ thought Dinny, ‘I can see some gold filling.’

They reached the Home Office and went in. Up some wide stairs, down a corridor, into a large and empty room, with a fire at the end, their guide took them. Bobbie Ferrar drew a chair up to the table.

‘The *Graphic* or this?’ and he took from his side pocket a small volume.

‘Both, please,’ said Dinny, wanly. He placed them before her.

‘This’ was a little flat red edition of some War Poems.

‘It’s a first,’ said Bobbie Ferrar; ‘I picked it up after lunch.’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, and sat down.

An inner door was opened, and a head put in.

‘Mr Ferrar, the Home Secretary will see you.’

Bobbie Ferrar turned on her a look, muttered between his teeth: ‘Cheer up!’ and moved squarely away.

In that great waiting-room never in her life had she felt so alone, so glad to be alone, or so dreaded the

end of loneliness. She opened the little volume and read:

He eyed a neat framed notice there
Above the fireplace hung to show
Disabled heroes where to go
For arms and legs, with scale of
price,
And words of dignified advice
How officers could get them free –
Elbow or shoulder, hip or knee.
Two arms, two legs, though all
were lost,
They'd be restored him free of
cost.

Then a girl guide looked in and
said...

The fire crackled suddenly and
spat out a spark. Dinny saw it die

on the hearthrug, with regret. She read more poems, but did not take them in, and, closing the little book, opened the *Graphic*. Having turned its pages from end to end she could not have mentioned the subject of any single picture. The sinking feeling beneath her heart absorbed every object she looked upon. She wondered if it were worse to wait for an operation on oneself or on someone loved; and decided that the latter must be worse. Hours seemed to have passed; how long had he really been gone? Only half-past six! Pushing her chair back, she got up.

On the walls were the effigies of Victorian statesmen, and she roamed from one to the other; but they might all have been the same statesman, with his whiskers at different stages of development. She went back to her seat, drew her chair close in to the table, rested her elbows on it, and her chin on her hands, drawing little comfort from that cramped posture. Thank Heaven! Hubert didn't know his fate was being decided, and was not going through this awful waiting. She thought of Jean and Alan, and with all her heart hoped that they were ready for the worst.

For with each minute the worst seemed more and more certain. A sort of numbness began creeping over her. He would never come back – never, never! And she hoped he wouldn't, bringing the death-warrant. At last she laid her arms flat on the table, and rested her forehead on them. How long she had stayed in that curious torpor she knew not, before the sound of a throat being cleared roused her, and she started back.

Not Bobbie Ferrar, but a tall man with a reddish, clean-shaven face and silver hair brushed in a cockscomb off his forehead, was

standing before the fire with his legs slightly apart and his hands under his coat tails; he was staring at her with very wide-opened light grey eyes, and his lips were just apart as if he were about to emit a remark. Dinny was too startled to rise, and she sat staring back at him.

‘Miss Cherrell! Don’t get up.’ He lifted a restraining hand from beneath a coat-tail. Dinny stayed seated – only too glad to, for she had begun to tremble violently.

‘Ferrar tells me that you edited your brother’s diary?’

Dinny bowed her head. Take

deep breaths!

‘As printed, is it in its original condition?’

‘Yes.’

‘Exactly?’

‘Yes. I haven’t altered or left out a thing.’

Staring at his face she could see nothing but the round brightness of the eyes and the slight superior prominence of the lower lip. It was almost like staring at God. She shivered at the queerness of the thought and her lips formed a little desperate smile.

‘I have a question to ask you,

Miss Cherrell.'

Dinny uttered a little sighing:
'Yes.'

'How much of this diary was written since your brother came back?'

She stared; then the implication in the question stung her.

'None! Oh, none! It was all written out there at the time.' And she rose to her feet.

'May I ask how you know that?'

'My brother –' Only then did she realize that throughout she had nothing but Hubert's word – 'my brother told me so.'

‘His word is gospel to you?’

She retained enough sense of humour not to ‘draw herself up’, but her head tilted.

‘Gospel. My brother is a soldier and – ’

She stopped short, and, watching that superior lower lip, hated herself for using that cliché.

‘No doubt, no doubt! But you realize, of course, the importance of the point?’

‘There is the original –’ stammered Dinny. Oh! Why hadn’t she brought it! ‘It shows clearly – I mean it’s all messy and stained.

You can see it at any time. Shall –?’

He again put out a restraining hand.

‘Never mind that. Very devoted to your brother, Miss Cherrell?’

Dinny’s lips quivered.

‘Absolutely. We all are.’

‘He’s just married, I hear?’

‘Yes, just married.’

‘Your brother wounded in the war?’

‘Yes. He had a bullet through his left leg.’

‘Neither arm touched?’

Again that sting!

‘No!’ The little word came out like a shot fired. And they stood looking at each other half a minute – a minute; words of appeal, of resentment, incoherent words were surging to her lips, but she kept them closed; she put her hand over them. He nodded.

‘Thank you, Miss Cherrell. Thank you.’ His head went a little to one side; he turned, and rather as if carrying that head on a charger, walked to the inner door. When he had passed through, Dinny covered her face with her hands. What had she done? Antagonized him? She ran her

hands down over her face, over her body, and stood with them clenched at her sides, staring at the door through which he had passed, quivering from head to foot. A minute passed. The door was opened again, and Bobbie Ferrar came in. She saw his teeth. He nodded, shut the door, and said:

‘It’s all right.’

Dinny spun round to the window. Dark had fallen, and if it hadn’t, she couldn’t have seen. All right! All right! She dashed her knuckles across her eyes, turned round, and held out both hands, without seeing where to hold them.

They were not taken, but his voice said:

‘I’m very happy.’

‘I thought I’d spoiled it.’

She saw his eyes then, round as a puppy dog’s.

‘If he hadn’t made up his mind already he wouldn’t have seen you, Miss Cherrell. He’s not as case-hardened as all that. As a matter of fact, he’d seen the Magistrate about it at lunch time – that helped a lot.’

‘Then I had all that agony for nothing,’ thought Dinny.

‘Did he have to see the preface, Mr Ferrar?’

‘No, and just as well – it might have worked the other way. We really owe it to the Magistrate. But you made a good impression on him. He said you were transparent.’

‘Oh!’

Bobbie Ferrar took the little red book from the table, looked at it lovingly, and placed it in his pocket. ‘Shall we go?’

In Whitehall Dinny took a breath so deep that the whole November dusk seemed to pass into her with the sensation of a long, and desperately wanted drink.

‘A Post Office!’ she said. ‘He couldn’t change his mind, could he?’

‘I have his word. Your brother will be released tonight.’

‘Oh! Mr Ferrar!’ Tears suddenly came out of her eyes. She turned away to hide them, and when she turned back to him, he was not there.

Chapter Thirty-seven



WHEN from that Post Office she had despatched telegrams to her father and Jean, and telephoned to Fleur, to Adrian and Hilary, she took a taxi to Mount Street, and opened the door of her Uncle's study. Sir Lawrence, before the fire with a book he was not reading, looked up.

‘What’s your news, Dinny?’

‘Saved!’

‘Thanks to you!’

‘Bobbie Ferrar says, thanks to

the Magistrate. I nearly wrecked it, Uncle.'

'Ring the bell!' Dinny rang.

'Blore, tell Lady Mont I want her.'

'Good news, Blore; Mr Hubert's free.'

'Thank you, Miss; I was laying six to four on it.'

'What can we do to relieve our feelings, Dinny?'

'I must go to Condaford, Uncle.'

'Not till after dinner. You shall go drunk. What about Hubert? Anybody going to meet him?'

'Uncle Adrian said I'd better not,

and he would go. Hubert will make for the flat, of course, and wait for Jean.'

Sir Lawrence gave her a whimsical glance.

'Where will she be flying from?'

'Brussels.'

'So that was the centre of operations! The closing down of that enterprise gives me almost as much satisfaction, Dinny, as Hubert's release. You can't get away with that sort of thing, nowadays.'

'I think they might have,' said Dinny, for with the removal of the

need for it, the idea of escape seemed to have become less fantastic. ‘Aunt Em! What a nice wrapper!’

‘I was dressin’. Blore’s won four pounds. Dinny, kiss me. Give your Uncle one, too. You kiss very nicely – there’s body in it. If I drink champagne, I shall be ill tomorrow.’

‘But need you, Auntie?’

‘Yes, Dinny, promise me to kiss that young man.’

‘Do you get a commission on kissing, Aunt Em?’

‘Don’t tell me he wasn’t goin’ to

cut Hubert out of prison, or something. The Rector said he flew in with a beard one day, and took a spirit level and two books on Portugal. They always go to Portugal. The Rector'll be so relieved; he was gettin' thin about it. So I think you ought to kiss him.'

'A kiss means nothing nowadays, Auntie. I nearly kissed Bobbie Ferrar; only he saw it coming.'

'Dinny can't be bothered to do all this kissing,' said Sir Lawrence; 'she's got to sit to my miniature painter. The young man will be at Condaford tomorrow, Dinny.'

‘Your Uncle’s got a bee, Dinny; collectin’ the Lady. There aren’t any, you know. It’s extinct. We’re all females now.’

By the only late evening train Dinny embarked for Condaford. They had plied her with wine at dinner, and she sat in sleepy elation, grateful for everything – the motion, and the moon-ridden darkness flying past the windows. Her exhilaration kept breaking out in smiles. Hubert free! Condaford safe! Her father and mother at ease once more! Jean happy! Alan no longer threatened with disgrace! Her fellow-passengers, for she was

travelling third-class, looked at her with the frank or furtive wonderment that so many smiles will induce in the minds of any taxpayers. Was she tipsy, weak-minded, or merely in love? Perhaps all three!¹ And she looked back at them with a benevolent compassion because they were obviously not half-seas-over with happiness. The hour and a half seemed short, and she got out on to the dimly lighted platform, less sleepy, but as elated as when she had got into the train. She had forgotten to add in her telegram that she was coming, so she had to

leave her things and walk. She took the main road; it was longer, but she wanted to swing along and breathe home air to the full. In the night, as always, things looked unfamiliar, and she seemed to pass houses, hedges, trees that she had never known. The road dipped through a wood. A car came with its headlights glaring luridly, and in that glare she saw a weasel slink across just in time – queer little low beast, snakily humping its long back. She stopped a moment on the bridge over their narrow twisting little river. That bridge was hundreds of years old, nearly as old

as the oldest parts of the Grange, and still very strong. Just beyond it was their gate, and when the river flooded, in very wet years, it crept up the meadow almost to the shrubbery where the moat had once been. Dinny pushed through the gate and walked on the grass edging of the drive between the rhododendrons. She came to the front of the house, which was really its back – long, low, unlighted. They did not expect her, and it was getting on for midnight; and the idea came to her to steal round and see it all grey and ghostly, tree-and-creeper-covered

in the moonlight. Past the yew trees, throwing short shadows under the raised garden, she came round on to the lawn, and stood breathing deeply, and turning her head this way and that, so as to miss nothing that she had grown up with. The moon flicked a ghostly radiance on to the windows, and shiny leaves of the magnolias; and secrets lurked all over the old stone face. Lovely! Only one window was lighted, that of her father's study. It seemed strange that they had gone to bed already, with relief so bubbling in them. She stole from the lawn on to

the terrace and stood looking in through the curtains not quite drawn. The General was at his desk with a lot of papers spread before him, sitting with his hands between his knees, and his head bent. She could see the hollow below his temple, the hair above it, much greyer of late, the set mouth, the almost beaten look on the face. The whole attitude was that of a man in patient silence, preparing to accept disaster. Up in Mount Street she had been reading of the American Civil War, and she thought that just so, but for his lack of beard, might some old Southern

General have looked, the night before Lee's surrender. And, suddenly, it came to her that by an evil chance they had not yet received her telegram. She tapped on the pane. Her father raised his head. His face was ashen grey in the moonlight, and it was evident that he mistook her apparition for confirmation of the worst; he opened the window. Dinny leaned in, and put her hands on his shoulders.

‘Dad! Haven't you had my wire? It's all right, Hubert's free.’

The General's hands shot up and grasped her wrists, colour came

into his face, his lips relaxed, he looked suddenly ten years younger.

‘Is it – is it certain, Dinny?’

Dinny nodded. She was smiling, but tears stood in her eyes.

‘My God! That’s news! Come in! I must go up and tell your Mother!’ He was out of the room before she was in it.

In this room, which had resisted her mother’s and her own attempts to introduce aestheticism, and retained an office-like barrenness, Dinny stood staring at this and at that evidence of Art’s defeat, with the smile that was becoming

chronic. Dad with his papers, his military books, his ancient photographs, his relics of India and South Africa, and the old-style picture of his favourite charger, his map of the estate; his skin of the leopard that had mauled him, and the two fox masks – happy again! Bless him!

She had the feeling that her mother and he would rather be left alone to rejoice, and slipped upstairs to Clare's room. That vivid member of the family was asleep with one pyjama-d arm outside the sheet and her cheek resting on the back of the hand. Dinny looked

amiably at the dark shingled head and went out again. No good spoiling beauty sleep! She stood at her opened bedroom window, gazing between the nearly bare elm-trees, at the moonlit rise of fields and the wood beyond. She stood and tried hard not to believe in God. It seemed mean and petty to have more belief in God when things were going well than when they were instinct with tragedy; just as it seemed mean and petty to pray to God when you wanted something badly, and not pray when you didn't. But after all God was Eternal Mind that you couldn't

understand; God was not a loving Father that you could. The less she thought about all that the better. She was home like a ship after storm; it was enough! She swayed, standing there, and realized that she was nearly asleep. Her bed was not made ready; but getting out an old, thick dressing-gown, she slipped off shoes, dress, and corset belt, put on the gown and curled up under the eiderdown. In two minutes, still with that smile on her lips, she was sleeping....

A telegram from Hubert, received at breakfast next morning, said that he and Jean would be

down in time for dinner.

‘ “The Young Squire Return!” ’
murmured Dinny, ‘ “Brings Bride !”
Thank goodness it’ll be after dark,
and we can kill the fatted calf in
private. Is the fatted calf ready
Dad?’

‘I’ve got two bottles of your
great-grandfather’s Chambertin
1865 left. We’ll have that, and the
old brandy.’

‘Hubert likes woodcock best, if
there are any to be had, Mother,
and pancakes. And how about the
inland oyster? He loves oysters.’

‘I’ll see, Dinny.’

‘And mushrooms,’ added Clare.

‘You’ll have to scour the country, I’m afraid, Mother.’

Lady Cherrell smiled, she looked quite young.

‘It’s “a mild hunting day”,’ said the General: ‘What about it, Clare? The meet’s at Wyvell’s Cross, eleven.’

‘Rather!’

Returning from the stables after seeing her father and Clare depart, Dinny and the dogs lingered. The relief from that long waiting, the feeling of nothing to worry about, was so delicious that she did not

resent the singular similarity in the present state of Hubert's career to the state which had given her so much chagrin two months back. He was in precisely the same position, only worse, because married; and yet she felt as blithe as a 'sand-boy'. It proved that Einstein was right, and everything relative!

She was singing 'The Lincolnshire Poacher' on her way to the raised garden when the sound of a motor-cycle on the drive caused her to turn. Someone in the guise of a cyclist waved his hand, and shooting the cycle into a rhododendron bush came towards

her, removing his hood.

Alan, of course! And she experienced at once the sensation of one about to be asked in marriage. Nothing – she felt – could prevent him this morning, for he had not even succeeded in doing the dangerous and heroic thing which might have made the asking for reward too obvious.

‘But perhaps,’ she thought, ‘he still has a beard – that might stop him.’ Alas! He had only a jaw rather paler than the rest of his brown face.

He came up holding out both hands and she gave him hers. Thus

grappled, they stood looking at each other.

‘Well,’ said Dinny, at last, ‘tell your tale. You’ve been frightening us out of our wits, young man.’

‘Let’s go and sit down up there, Dinny.’

‘Very well. Mind Scaramouch, he’s under your foot, and the foot large.’

‘Not so very. Dinny, you look – ’

‘No,’ said Dinny; ‘rather worn than otherwise. I know all about the Professor and the special case for his Bolivian bones, and the projected substitution of Hubert on

the ship.'

'What!'

'We're not half-wits, Alan. What was *your* special lay, beard and all? We can't sit on this seat without something between us and the stone.'

'I couldn't be the something?'

'Certainly not. Put your overall there. Now!'

'Well,' he said, looking with disfavour at his boot, 'if you really want to know. There's nothing certain, of course, because it all depended on the way they were going to export Hubert. We had to

have alternatives. If there was a port of call, Spanish or Portuguese, we *were* going to use the box trick. Hallorsen was to be on the ship, and Jean and I at the port with a machine and the real bones. Jean was to be the pilot when we got him – she's a natural flier; and they were to make for Turkey.'

'Yes,' said Dinny; 'we guessed all that.'

'How?'

'Never mind. What about the alternative?'

'If there was no port of call it wasn't going to be easy; we'd

thought of a faked telegram to the chaps in charge of Hubert when the train arrived at Southampton or whatever the port was, telling them to take him to the Police Station and await further instructions. On the way there Hallorsen on a cycle would have bumped into the taxi on one side, and I should have bumped in on the other; and Hubert was to slip out into my car and be nipped off to where the machine was ready.'

'Mm!' said Dinny. 'Very nice on the screen; but are they so confiding in real life?'

'Well, we really hadn't got that

worked out. We were betting on the other.'

'Has all that money gone?'

'No; only about two hundred, and we can re-sell the machine.' Dinny heaved a long sigh, and her eyes rested on him.

'Well,' she said, 'if you ask me, you're jolly well out of it.'

He grinned. 'I suppose so; especially as if it had come off I couldn't very well have bothered you. Dinny, I've got to rejoin today. Won't you -?'

Dinny said softly: 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder, Alan.'

When you come back next time, I really will see.'

'May I have one kiss?'

'Yes.' She tilted her cheek towards him.

'Now,' she thought, 'is when they kiss you masterfully full on the lips. He hasn't! He must almost respect me!' And she got up.

'Come along, dear boy; and thank you ever so for all you luckily didn't have to do. I really will try and become less virginal.'

He looked at her ruefully, as though repenting of his self-control, then smiled at her smile.

And soon the splutter of his motorcycle faded into the faintly sighing silence of the day.

Still with the smile on her lips Dinny went back to the house. He was a dear! But really one must have time! Such a lot of repenting at leisure could be done even in these days!

After their slight and early lunch Lady Cherrell departed in the Ford driven by the groom in search of the fatted calf. Dinny was preparing to hunt the garden for whatever flowers November might yield when a card was brought to her:

‘Mr Neil Wintney,
Ferdinand
Studios,
Orchard Street,
Chelsea.’

‘Help!’ she thought; ‘Uncle Lawrence’s young man!’ ‘Where is he, Amy?’

‘In the hall, Miss.’

‘Ask him into the drawing-room; I’ll be there in a minute.’

Divested of her gardening gloves and basket, she looked at her nose in her little powdery mirror; then, entering the drawing-room through

the French window, saw with surprise the ‘young man’ sitting up good in a chair with some apparatus by his side. He had thick white hair, and an eyeglass on a black ribbon; and when he stood she realized that he must be at least sixty. He said:

‘Miss Cherrell? Your Uncle, Sir Lawrence Mont, has commissioned me to do a miniature of you.’

‘I know,’ said Dinny; ‘only I thought –’ She did not finish. After all, Uncle Lawrence liked his little joke, or possibly this was his idea of youth.

The ‘young man’ had screwed his

monocle into a comely red cheek, and through it a full blue eye scrutinized her eagerly. He put his head on one side and said: 'If we can get the outline, and you have some photographs, I shan't give you much trouble. What you have on – that flax-blue – is admirable for colour; background of sky – through that window – yes, not too blue – an English white in it. While the light's good, can we –?' And, talking all the time, he proceeded to make his preparations.

'Sir Lawrence's idea,' he said, 'is the English lady; culture deep but not apparent. Turn a little

sideways. Thank you – the nose – ’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny; ‘hopeless.’

‘Oh! no, no! Charming. Sir Lawrence, I understand, wants you for his collection of types. I’ve done two for him. Would you look down? No! Now full at me! Ah! The teeth – admirable!’

‘All mine, so far.’

‘That smile is just right, Miss Cherrell: it gives us the sense of spoof we want; not too much spoof, but just spoof enough.’

‘You don’t want me to hold a smile with exactly three ounces of spoof in it?’

‘No, no, my dear young lady; we shall chance on it. Now suppose you turn three-quarters. Ah! Now I get the line of the hair; the colour of it admirable.’

‘Not too much ginger, but just ginger enough?’

The ‘young man’ was silent. He had begun with singular concentration to draw and to write little notes on the margin of the paper.

Dinny, with crinkled eyebrows, did not like to move. He paused and smiled at her with a sort of winey sweetness.

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ he said. ‘I see, I see.’

What did he see? The nervousness of the victim seized her suddenly, and she pressed her open hands together.

‘Raise the hands, Miss Cherrell. No! Too Madonnaish. We must think of the devil in the hair. The eyes to me, full.’

‘Glad?’ asked Dinny.

‘Not too glad; just – Yes, an English eye; candid but reserved. Now the turn of the neek. Ah! A leetle tilt. Ye—es. Almost stag-like; almost – a touch of the – not

startled – no, of the aloof.’

He again began to draw and write with a sort of remoteness, as if he were a long way off.

And Dinny thought: ‘If Uncle Lawrence wants self-consciousness he’ll get it all right.’

The ‘young man’ stopped and stood back, his head very much on one side, so that all his attention seemed to come out of his eyeglass.

‘The expression,’ he muttered.

‘I expect,’ said Dinny, ‘you want an unemployed look.’

‘Naughty!’ said the ‘young man’: ‘Deeper. Could I play that piano

for a minute?’

‘Of course. But I’m afraid it’s not been played on lately.’

‘It will serve.’ He sat down, opened the piano, blew on the keys, and began playing. He played strongly, softly, well. Dinny stood in the curve of the piano, listening, and speedily entranced. It was obviously Bach, but she did not know what. An endearing, cool, and lovely tune, coming over and over and over, monotonous, yet moving as only Bach could be.

‘What is it?’

‘A Chorale of Bach, set by a

pianist.’ And the ‘young man’ nodded his eyeglass towards the keys.

‘Glorious! Your ears on heaven and your feet in flowery fields,’ murmured Dinny.

The ‘young man’ closed the piano and stood up.

‘That’s what I want, that’s what I want, young lady!’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny. ‘Is that all?’

FLOWERING WILDERNESS



TO
Herman Ould

Chapter One



IN 1930, shortly after the appearance of the Budget, the eighth wonder of the world might have been observed in the neighbourhood of Victoria Station – three English people, of wholly different type, engaged in contemplating simultaneously a London statue. They had come separately, and stood a little apart from each other in the south-west corner of the open space clear of the trees, where the drifting late afternoon light of spring was not

in their eyes. One of these three was a young woman of about twenty-six, one a youngish man of perhaps thirty-four, and one a man of between fifty and sixty. The young woman, slender and far from stupid-looking, had her head tilted slightly upward to one side, and a faint smile on her parted lips. The younger man, who wore a blue overcoat with a belt girt tightly round his thin middle, as if he felt the spring wind chilly, was sallow from fading sunburn; and the rather disdainful look of his mouth was being curiously contradicted by eyes fixed on the

statue with real intensity of feeling. The elder man, very tall, in a brown suit and brown buckskin shoes, lounged, with his hands in his trouser pockets, and his long, weathered, good-looking face masked in a sort of shrewd scepticism.

In the meantime the statue, which was that of Marshal Foch on his horse, stood high up among those trees, stiller than any of them.

The youngish man spoke suddenly.

‘He delivered us.’

The effect of this breach of form on the others was diverse; the elder man's eyebrows went slightly up, and he moved forward as if to examine the horse's legs. The young woman turned and looked frankly at the speaker, and instantly her face became surprised.

‘Aren't you Wilfrid Desert?’

The youngish man bowed.

‘Then,’ said the young woman, ‘we’ve met. At Fleur Mont’s wedding. You were best man, if you remember, the first I’d seen. I was only sixteen. You wouldn’t remember me – Dinny Cherrell,

baptized Elizabeth. They ran me in for bridesmaid at the last minute.'

The youngish man's mouth lost its disdain.

'I remember your hair perfectly.'

'Nobody ever remembers me by anything else.'

'Wrong! I remember thinking you'd sat to Botticelli. You're still sitting, I see.'

Dinny was thinking: 'His eyes were the first to flutter me. And they really are beautiful.'

The said eyes had been turned again upon the statue.

'He *did* deliver us,' said Desert.

‘You were there, of course.’

‘Flying, and fed up to the teeth.’

‘Do you like the statue?’

‘The horse.’

‘Yes,’ murmured Dinny, ‘it *is* a horse, not just a prancing barrel, with teeth, nostrils and an arch.’

‘The whole thing’s workmanlike, like Foch himself.’

Dinny wrinkled her brow.

‘I like the way it stands up quietly among those trees.’

‘How is Michael? You’re a cousin of his, if I remember.’

‘Michael’s all right. Still in the House; he has a seat he simply

can't lose.'

'And Fleur?'

'Flourishing. Did you know she had a daughter last year?'

'Fleur? H'm! That makes two, doesn't it?'

'Yes; they call this one Catherine.'

'I haven't been home since 1927. Gosh! It's a long time since that wedding.'

'You look,' said Dinny, contemplating the sallow darkness of his face, 'as if you had been in the sun.'

'When I'm not in the sun I'm not

alive.'

'Michael once told me you lived in the East.'

'Well, I wander about there.' His face seemed to darken still more, and he gave a little shiver. 'Beastly cold, the English spring!'

'And do you still write poetry?'

'Oh! you know of that weakness?'

'I've read them all. I like the last volume best.'

He grinned. 'Thank you for stroking me the right way; poets, you know, like it. Who's that tall man? I seem to know his face.'

The tall man, who had moved to the other side of the statue, was coming back.

‘Somehow,’ murmured Dinny, ‘I connect him with that wedding, too.’

The tall man came up to them.

‘The hocks aren’t all that,’ he said.

Dinny smiled.

‘I always feel so thankful I haven’t got hocks. We were just trying to decide whether we knew you. Weren’t you at Michael Mont’s wedding some years ago?’

‘I was. And who are you, young

lady?’

‘We all met there. I’m his first cousin on his mother’s side, Dinny Cherrell. Mr Desert was his best man.’

The tall man nodded.

‘Oh! Ah! My name’s Jack Muskham, I’m a first cousin of his father’s.’ He turned to Desert. ‘You admired Foch, it seems.’

‘I did.’

Dinny was surprised at the morose look that had come on his face.

‘Well,’ said Muskham, ‘he was a soldier all right; and there weren’t

too many about. But I came here to see the horse.'

'It is, of course, the important part,' murmured Dinny.

The tall man gave her his sceptical smile.

'One thing we have to thank Foch for, he never left us in the lurch.'

Desert suddenly faced round:

'Any particular reason for that remark?'

Muskham shrugged his shoulders, raised his hat to Dinny, and lounged away.

When he had gone there was a

silence as over deep waters.

‘Which way were you going?’
said Dinny at last.

‘Any way that you are.’

‘I thank you kindly, sir. Would
an aunt in Mount Street serve as a
direction?’

‘Admirably.’

‘You must remember her,
Michael’s mother; she’s a darling,
the world’s perfect mistress of the
ellipse – talks in stepping stones,
so that you have to jump to follow
her.’

They crossed the road and set
out up Grosvenor Place on the

Buckingham Palace side.

‘I suppose you find England changed every time you come home, if you’ll forgive me for making conversation?’

‘Changed enough.’

‘Don’t you “love your native land”, as the saying is?’

‘She inspires me with a sort of horror.’

‘Are you by any chance one of those people who wish to be thought worse than they are?’

‘Not possible. Ask Michael.’

‘Michael is incapable of slander.’

‘Michael and all angels are

outside the count of reality.'

'No,' said Dinny, 'Michael is very real, and very English.'

'That is his contradictory trouble.'

'Why do you run England down? It's been done before.'

'I never run her down except to English people.'

'That's something. But why to me?'

Desert laughed.

'Because you seem to be what I should like to feel that England is.'

'Flattered and fair, but neither fat nor forty.'

‘What I object to is England’s belief that she is still “the goods”.’

‘And isn’t she, really?’

‘Yes,’ said Desert, surprisingly, ‘but she has no reason to think so.’

Dinny thought:

‘You’re perverse, brother Wilfrid, the young woman said,

And your tongue is exceedingly wry;
You do not look well when you stand on
your head –

Why will you continually try?’

She remarked, more simply:

‘If England is still “the goods”, has no reason to think so and yet does, she would seem to have intuition, anyway. Was it by

intuition that you disliked Mr Muskham?’ Then, looking at his face, she thought: ‘I’m dropping a brick.’

‘Why should I dislike him? He’s just the usual insensitive type of hunting, racing man who bores me stiff.’

‘That wasn’t the reason,’ thought Dinny, still regarding him. A strange face! Unhappy from deep inward disharmony, as though a good angel and a bad were for ever seeking to fire each other out; but his eyes sent the same thrill through her as when, at sixteen, with her hair still long, she had

stood near him at Fleur's wedding.

‘And do you really like wandering about in the East?’

‘The curse of Esau is on me.’

‘Some day,’ she thought, ‘I’ll make him tell me why. Only probably I shall never see him again.’ And a little chill ran down her back.

‘I wonder if you know my Uncle Adrian. He was in the East during the war. He presides over bones at a museum. You probably know Diana Ferse, anyway. He married her last year.’

‘I know nobody to speak of.’

‘Our point of contact, then, is only Michael.’

‘I don’t believe in contacts through other people. Where do you live, Miss Cherrell?’

Dinny smiled.

‘A short biographical note seems to be indicated. Since the umpteenth century, my family has been “seated” at Condaford Grange in Oxfordshire. My father is a retired General; I am one of two daughters; and my only brother is a married soldier just coming back from the Soudan on leave.’

‘Oh!’ said Desert, and again his

face had that morose look.

‘I am twenty-six, unmarried but with no children as yet. My hobby seems to be attending to other people’s business. I don’t know why I have it. When in Town I stay at Lady Mont’s in Mount Street. With a simple upbringing I have expensive instincts and no means of gratifying them. I believe I can see a joke. Now you?’

Desert smiled and shook his head.

‘Shall I?’ said Dinny. ‘You are the second son of Lord Mullyon; you had too much war; you write poetry; you have nomadic instincts

and are your own enemy; the last item has the only news value. Here we are in Mount Street; do come in and see Aunt Em.'

'Thank you – no. But will you lunch with me tomorrow and go to a matinée?'

'I will. Where?'

'Dumourieux's, one-thirty.'

They exchanged hand-grips and parted, but as Dinny went into her aunt's house she was tingling all over, and she stood still outside the drawing-room to smile at the sensation.

Chapter Two



THE smile faded off her lips under the fire of noises coming through the closed door.

‘My goodness!’ she thought: ‘Aunt Em’s birthday “pawty”, and I’d forgotten.’

Someone playing the piano stopped, there was a rush, a scuffle, the scraping of chairs on the floor, two or three squeals, silence, and the piano-playing began again.

‘Musical chairs!’ she thought,

and opened the door quietly. She who had been Diana Ferse was sitting at the piano. To eight assorted chairs, facing alternatively east and west, were clinging one large and eight small beings in bright paper hats, of whom seven were just rising to their feet and two still sitting on one chair. Dinny saw from left to right: Ronald Ferse; a small Chinese boy; Aunt Alison's youngest, little Anne; Uncle Hilary's youngest, Tony; Celia and Dingo (children of Michael's married sister Celia Moriston); Sheila Ferse; and on the single chair Uncle Adrian and Kit

Mont. She was further conscious of Aunt Em panting slightly against the fireplace in a large headpiece of purple paper, and of Fleur pulling a chair from Ronald's end of the row.

‘Kit, get up! You were out.’

Kit sat firm and Adrian rose.

‘All right, old man, you're up against your equals now. Fire away!’

‘Keep your hands off the backs,’ cried Fleur. ‘Wu Fing, you mustn't sit till the music stops. Dingo, don't stick at the end chair like that.’

The music stopped. Scurry,

hustle, squeals, and the smallest figure, little Anne, was left standing.

‘All right, darling,’ said Dinny, ‘come here and beat this drum. Stop when the music stops, that’s right. Now again. Watch Auntie Di!’

Again, and again, and again, till Sheila and Dingo and Kit only were left.

‘I back Kit,’ thought Dinny.

Sheila out! Off with a chair! Dingo, so Scotch-looking, and Kit, so bright-haired, having lost his paper cap, were left padding round

and round the last chair. Both were down; both up and on again, Diana carefully averting her eyes, Fleur standing back now with a little smile; Aunt Em's face very pink. The music stopped, Dingo was down again; and Kit left standing, his face flushed and frowning.

‘Kit,’ said Fleur’s voice, ‘play the game!’

Kit’s head was thrown up and he rammed his hands into his pockets.

‘Good for Fleur!’ thought Dinny.

A voice behind her said:

‘Your aunt’s purple passion for the young, Dinny, leads us into

strange riots. What about a spot of quiet in my study?’

Dinny looked round at Sir Lawrence Mont’s thin, dry, twisting face, whose little moustache had gone quite white, while his hair was still only sprinkled.

‘I haven’t done my bit, Uncle Lawrence.’

‘Time you learned not to. Let the heathen rage. Come down and have a quiet Christian talk.’

Subduing her instinct for service with the thought: ‘I *should* like to talk about Wilfrid Desert!’ Dinny went.

‘What are you working on now, Uncle?’

‘Resting for the minute and reading the Memoirs of Harriette Wilson – a remarkable young woman, Dinny. In the days of the Regency there were no reputations in high life to destroy; but she did her best. If you don’t know about her, I may tell you that she believed in love and had a great many lovers, only one of whom she loved.’

‘And yet she believed in love?’

‘Well, she was a kind-hearted baggage, and the others loved her. All the difference in the world

between her and Ninon de l'Enclos, who loved them all; both vivid creatures. A duologue between those two on "virtue"? It's to be thought of. Sit down!

'While I was looking at Foch's statue this afternoon, Uncle Lawrence, I met a cousin of yours, Mr Muskham.'

'Jack?'

'Yes.'

'Last of the dandies. All the difference in the world, Dinny, between the "buck", the "dandy", the "swell", the "masher", the "blood", the "knut", and what's the

last variety called? – I never know. There's been a steady decrescendo. By his age Jack belongs to the "masher" period, but his cut was always pure dandy – a dyed-in-the-wool Whyte Melville type. How did he strike you?

‘Horses, piquet and imperturbability.’

‘Take your hat off, my dear. I like to see your hair.’

Dinny removed her hat.

‘I met someone else there, too; Michael's best man.’

‘What! Young Desert? He back again?’ And Sir Lawrence's loose-

eyebrow mounted.

A slight colour had stained Dinny's cheeks.

‘Yes,’ she said.

‘Queer bird, Dinny.’

Within her rose a feeling rather different from any she had ever experienced. She could not have described it, but it reminded her of a piece of porcelain she had given to her father on his birthday, two weeks ago; a little china group, beautifully modelled, of a vixen and four fox cubs tucked in under her. The looks on the vixen's face, soft yet watchful, so completely

expressed her own feeling at this moment.

‘Why queer?’

‘Tales out of school, Dinny. Still, to *you* – There’s no doubt in my mind that that young man made up to Fleur a year or two after her marriage. That’s what started him as a rolling stone.’

Was that, then, what he had meant when he mentioned Esau? No! By the look of his face when he spoke of Fleur, she did not think so.

‘But that was ages ago,’ she said.

‘Oh, yes! Ancient story; but one’s heard other things. Clubs are the

mother of all uncharitableness.'

The softness of Dinny's feeling diminished, the watchfulness increased.

'What other things?'

Sir Lawrence shook his head.

'I rather like the young man; and not even to you, Dinny, do I repeat what I really know nothing of. Let a man live an unusual life, and there's no limit to what people invent about him.' He looked at her rather suddenly; but Dinny's eyes were limpid.

'Who's the little Chinese boy upstairs?'

‘Son of a former Mandarin, who left his family here because of the ructions out there – quaint little image. A likeable people, the Chinese. When does Hubert arrive?’

‘Next week. They’re flying from Italy. Jean flies a lot, you know.’

‘What’s become of her brother?’ And again he looked at Dinny.

‘Alan? He’s out on the China station.’

‘Your aunt never ceases to bemoan your not clicking there.’

‘Dear Uncle, almost anything to oblige Aunt Em; but, feeling like a sister to him, the prayer-book was

against me.'

'I don't want you to marry,' said Sir Lawrence, 'and go out to some Barbary or other.'

Through Dinny flashed the thought: 'Uncle Lawrence is uncanny,' and her eyes became more limpid than ever.

'This confounded officialism,' he continued, 'seems to absorb all our kith and kin. My two daughters, Celia in China, Flora in India; your brother Hubert in the Soudan; your sister Clare off as soon as she's spliced – Jerry Corven's been given a post in Ceylon. I hear Charlie Muskham's got attached to

Government House, Cape Town; Hilary's eldest boy's going into the Indian Civil, and his youngest into the Navy. Dash it all, Dinny, you and Jack Muskham seem to be the only pelicans in my wilderness. Of course there's Michael.'

'Do you see much of Mr Muskham, then, Uncle?'

'Quite a lot at "Burton's", and he comes to me at "The Coffee House"; we play piquet – we're the only two left. That's in the illegitimate season – from now on I shall hardly see him till after the Cambridgeshire.'

'Is he a terribly good judge of a

horse?’

‘Yes. Of anything else, Dinny – no. They seldom are. The horse is an animal that seems to close the pores of the spirit. He makes you too watchful. You don’t only have to watch him, but everybody connected with him. How was young Desert looking?’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny, almost taken aback: ‘a sort of dark yellow.’

‘That’s the glare of the sand. He’s a kind of Bedouin, you know. His father’s a recluse, so it’s a bit in his blood. The best thing I know about him is that Michael likes him, in spite of that business.’

‘His poetry?’ said Dinny.

‘Disharmonic stuff, he destroys with one hand what he gives with the other.’

‘Perhaps he’s never found his home. His eyes are rather beautiful, don’t you think?’

‘It’s his mouth I remember best, sensitive and bitter.’

‘One’s eyes are what one is, one’s mouth what one becomes.’

‘That and the stomach.’

‘He hasn’t any,’ said Dinny. ‘I noticed.’

‘The handful of dates and cup of coffee habit. Not that the Arabs

drink coffee – green tea is their weakness, with mint in it. My God! Here's your aunt. When I said "My God!" I was referring to the tea with mint.'

Lady Mont had removed her paper headdress and recovered her breath.

'Darling,' said Dinny, 'I *did* forget your birthday, and I haven't got anything for you.'

'Then give me a kiss, Dinny. I always say your kisses are the best. Where have you sprung from?'

'I came up to shop for Clare at the Stores.'

‘Have you got your night things with you?’

‘No.’

‘That doesn’t matter. You can have one of mine. Do you still wear nightdresses?’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny.

‘Good girl! I don’t like pyjamas for women – your uncle doesn’t either. It’s below the waist, you know. You can’t get over it – you try to, but you can’t. Michael and Fleur will be stayin’ on to dinner.’

‘Thank you, Aunt Em; I do want to stay up. I couldn’t get half the things Clare needs today.’

‘I don’t like Clare marryin’ before you, Dinny.’

‘But she naturally would, Auntie.’

‘Fiddle! Clare’s brilliant – they don’t as a rule. I married at twenty-one.’

‘You see, dear!’

‘You’re laughin’ at me. I was only brilliant once. You remember, Lawrence – about that elephant – I wanted it to sit, and it would kneel. All their legs bend one way, Dinny. And I said it *would* follow its bent.’

‘Aunt Em! Except for that one

occasion you're easily the most brilliant woman I know. Women are so much too consecutive.'

'Your nose is a comfort, Dinny, I get so tired of beaks, your Aunt Wilmet's, and Hen Bentworth's, and my own.'

'Yours is only faintly aquiline, darling.'

'I was terrified of its gettin' worse, as a child. I used to stand with the tip pressed up against a wardrobe.'

'I've tried that too, Auntie, only the other way.'

'Once while I was doin' it your

father was lyin' concealed on the top, like a leopard, you know, and he hopped over me and bit through his lip. He bled all down my neck.'

'How nasty!'

'Yes. Lawrence, what are you thinking about?'

'I was thinking that Dinny has probably had no lunch. Have you, Dinny?'

'I was going to have it tomorrow, Uncle.'

'There you are!' said Lady Mont. 'Ring for Blore. You'll never have enough body until you're married.'

'Let's get Clare over first, Aunt

Em.'

'St George's. I suppose Hilary's doin' them?'

'Of course!'

'I shall cry.'

'Why, exactly, do you cry at weddings, Auntie?'

'She'll look like an angel; and the man'll be in black tails and a toothbrush moustache, and not feelin' what she thinks he is. Saddenin'!'

'But perhaps he's feeling more. I'm sure Michael was about Fleur, or Uncle Adrian when he married Diana.'

‘Adrian’s fifty-three and he’s got a beard. Besides, he’s Adrian.’

‘I admit that makes a difference. But I think we ought rather to cry over the man. The woman’s having the hour of her life and the man’s waistcoat is almost certain to be too tight.’

‘Lawrence’s wasn’t. He was always a thread-paper, and I was as slim as you, Dinny.’

‘You must have looked lovely in a veil, Aunt Em. Didn’t she, Uncle?’ The whimsically wistful look on both those mature faces stopped her, and she added: ‘Where did you first meet?’

‘Out huntin’, Dinny. I was in a ditch, and your uncle didn’t like it, he came and pulled me out.’

‘I think that’s ideal.’

‘Too much mud. We didn’t speak to each other all the rest of the day.’

‘Then what brought you together?’

‘One thing and another. I was stayin’ with Hen’s people, the Corderoys, and your uncle called to see some puppies. What are you catechisin’ me for?’

‘I only just wanted to know how it was done in those days.’

‘Go and find out for yourself how it’s done in these days.’

‘Uncle Lawrence doesn’t want to get rid of me.’

‘All men are selfish, except Michael and Adrian.’

‘Besides, I should hate to make you cry.’

‘Blore, a cocktail and a sandwich for Miss Dinny, she’s had no lunch. And, Blore, Mr and Mrs Adrian and Mr and Mrs Michael to dinner. And, Blore, tell Laura to put one of my nightdresses and the other things in the blue spare room. Miss Dinny’ll stay the night. Those

children!’ And, swaying slightly, Lady Mont preceded her butler through the doorway.

‘What a darling, Uncle!’

‘I’ve never denied it, Dinny.’

‘I always feel better after her. Was she ever out of temper?’

‘She can begin to be, but she always goes on to something else before she’s finished.’

‘What saving grace...!’

At dinner that evening, Dinny listened for any allusion by her uncle to Wilfred Desert’s return. There was none.

After dinner, she seated herself

by Fleur in her habitual, slightly mystified admiration of this cousin by marriage, whose pretty poise was so assured, whose face and figure so beautifully turned out, whose clear eyes were so seeing, whose knowledge of self was so disillusioned, and whose attitude to Michael seemed at once that of one looking up and looking down.

‘If I ever married,’ thought Dinny, ‘I could never be like that to him. I would have to look him straight in the face as one sinner to another.’

‘Do you remember your wedding, Fleur?’ she said.

‘I do, my dear. A distressing ceremony!’

‘I saw your best man today.’

The clear white round Fleur’s eyes widened.

‘Wilfrid? How did you remember him?’

‘I was only sixteen, and he fluttered my young nerves.’

‘That is, of course, the function of a best man. Well, and how was he?’

‘Very dark and dissolvent.’

Fleur laughed. ‘He always was.’

Looking at her, Dinny decided to press on.

‘Yes. Uncle Lawrence told me he tried to carry dissolution rather far.’

Fleur looked surprised. ‘I didn’t know Bart ever noticed that.’

‘Uncle Lawrence,’ said Dinny, ‘is a bit uncanny.’

‘Wilfrid,’ murmured Fleur, with a little reminiscent smile, ‘really behaved quite well. He went East like a lamb.’

‘But surely that hasn’t kept him East ever since?’

‘No more than measles keep you permanently to your room. Oh! no, he likes it. He’s probably got a

harem.'

'No,' said Dinny, 'he's fastidious, or I should be surprised.'

'Quite right, my dear; and one for my cheap cynicism. Wilfrid's the queerest sort of person, and rather a dear. Michael loved him. But,' she said, suddenly looking at Dinny, 'he's impossible to be in love with – disharmony personified. I studied him pretty closely at one time – had to, you know. He's elusive. Passionate, and a bundle of nerves. Soft-hearted and bitter. And search me for anything he believes in.'

'Except,' queried Dinny, 'beauty,

perhaps; and truth if he could find it?’

Fleur made the unexpected answer, ‘Well, my dear, we all believe in those, when they’re about. The trouble is they aren’t, unless – unless they lie in oneself, perhaps. And if you happen to be disharmonic, what chance have you? Where did you see him?’

‘Staring at Foch.’

‘Ah! I seem to remember he rather idolized Foch. Poor Wilfrid, he hasn’t much chance. Shell-shock, poetry, and his breeding – a father who’s turned his back on life; a mother who was half an Italian,

and ran off with another. Not restful. His eyes were his best point, they made you sorry for him; and they're beautiful – rather a fatal combination. Did the young nerves flutter again?' She looked rather more broadly into Dinny's face.

'No, but I wondered if yours would still if I mentioned him.'

'Mine? My child, I'm nearly thirty. I have two children, and' – her face darkened – 'I have been inoculated. If I ever told anyone about *that*, Dinny, I might tell you, but there are things one doesn't tell.'

Up in her room, somewhat incommoded by the amplitude of Aunt Em's nightgown, Dinny stared into a fire lighted against protest. She felt that what she was feeling was absurd – a queer eagerness, at once shy and bold, the sensations, as it were, of direct action impending. And why? She had seen again a man who ten years before had made her feel silly; from all accounts a most unsatisfactory man. Taking a looking-glass, she scrutinized her face above the embroidery on the too ample gown. She saw what might have satisfied but did not.

‘One gets tired of it,’ she thought
– ‘always the same Botticellian
artifact,

‘The nose that’s snub,
The eyes of blue!

‘Ware self, you red-haired nymph,
And shun the image that is you!’

He was so accustomed to the
East, to dark eyes through veils,
languishing; to curves enticingly
disguised; to sex, mystery, teeth
like pearls – *vide* houri! Dinny
showed her own teeth to the glass.
There she was on safe ground – the
best teeth in her family. Nor was
her hair really red – more what

Miss Braddon used to call auburn.
Nice word! Pity it had gone out.
With all that embroidery it was no
good examining herself below the
Victorian washing line. Remember
that tomorrow before her bath! For
what she was about to examine
might the Lord make her truly
thankful! Putting down the glass
with a little sigh, she got into bed.

Chapter Three



WILFRID DESERT still maintained his chambers in Cork Street. They were, in fact, paid for by Lord Mullyon, who used them on the rare occasions when he emerged from rural retreat. It was not saying much that the secluded peer had more in common with his second than with his eldest son, who was in Parliament. It gave him, however, no particular pain to encounter Wilfrid; but as a rule the chambers were occupied only by Stack, who had been Wilfrid's

batman in the war, and had for him one of those sphinx-like habits which wear better than expressed devotions. When Wilfrid returned, at a moment or two's notice, his rooms were ever exactly as he left them, neither more or less dusty and unaired; the same clothes hung on the same clothes-stretchers; and the same nicely cooked steak and mushrooms appeased his first appetite. The ancestral 'junk', fringed and dotted by Eastern whims brought home, gave to the large sitting-room the same castled air of immutable possession. And the divan before the log fire

received Wilfrid as if he had never left it. He lay there the morning after his encounter with Dinny, wondering why he could only get really good coffee when Stack made it. The East was the home of coffee, but Turkish coffee was a rite, a toy; and, like all rites and toys, served but to titillate the soul. This was his third day in London after three years; and in the last two years he had been through a good deal more than he would ever care to speak of, or even wish to remember; including one experience which still divided him against himself, however much he

effected to discredit its importance. In other words, he had come back with a skeleton in his cupboard. He had brought back, too, enough poems for a fourth slender volume. He lay there, debating whether its slender bulk could not be increased by inclusion of the longest poem he had ever written, the outcome of that experience; in his view, too, the best poem he had ever written – a pity it should not be published, but—! And the ‘but’ was so considerable that he had many times been on the point of tearing the thing up, obliterating all trace of it, as he would have wished to

blot remembrance from his mind. Again, but—! The poem expressed his defence for allowing what he hoped no one knew had happened to him. To tear it up would be parting with his defence. For he could never again adequately render his sensations in that past dilemma. He would be parting with his best protection from his own conscience, too; and perhaps with the only means of laying a ghost. For he sometimes thought that, unless he proclaimed to the world what had happened to him, he would never again feel quite in possession of his soul.

Reading it through, he thought: 'It's a damned sight better and deeper than Lyall's confounded poem.' And without any obvious connexion he began to think of the girl he had met the day before. Curious that he had remembered her from Michael's wedding, a transparent slip of a young thing like a Botticelli Venus, Angel, or Madonna – so little difference between them. A charming young thing, then! Yes, and a charming young woman now, of real quality, with a sense of humour and an understanding mind. Dinny Cherrell! Charwell they spelled it,

he remembered. He wouldn't mind showing her his poems; he would trust her reactions.

Partly because he was thinking of her, and partly because he took a taxi, he was late for lunch, and met Dinny on the doorstep of Dumourieux's just as she was about to go away.

There is perhaps no better test of woman's character than to keep her waiting for lunch in a public place. Dinny greeted him with a smile.

'I thought you'd probably forgotten.'

‘It was the traffic. How can philosophers talk of time being space or space time? It’s disproved whenever two people lunch together. I allowed ten minutes for under a mile from Cork Street, and here I am ten minutes late. Terribly sorry!’

‘My father says you must add ten per cent to all timing since taxis took the place of hansoms. Do you remember the hansom?’

‘Rather!’

‘I never was in London till they were over.’

‘If you know this place, lead on!’

I was told of it, but I've not yet been here.'

'It's under ground. The cooking's French.'

Divested of their coats, they proceeded to an end table.

'Very little for me, please,' said Dinny. 'Say cold chicken, a salad, and some coffee.'

'Anything the matter?'

'Only a spare habit.'

'I see. We both have it. No wine?'

'No, thanks. Is eating little a good sign, do you think?'

'Not if done on principle.'

‘You don’t like things done on principle?’

‘I distrust the people who do them – self-righteous.’

‘I think that’s too sweeping. You are rather sweeping, aren’t you?’

‘I was thinking of the sort of people who don’t eat because it’s sensual. That’s not your reason, is it?’

‘Oh! no,’ said Dinny, ‘I only dislike feeling full. And very little makes me feel that. I don’t know very much about them so far, but I think the senses are good things.’

‘The only things, probably.’

‘Is that why you write poetry?’
Desert grinned.

‘I should think *you* might write
verse, too.’

‘Only rhymes.’

‘The place for poetry is a desert.
Ever seen one?’

‘No. I should like to.’ And,
having said that, she sat in slight
surprise, remembering her negative
reaction to the American professor
and his great open spaces. But no
greater contrast was possible than
between Hallorsen and this dark,
disharmonic young man, who sat
staring at her with those eyes of his

till she had again that thrill down her spine. Crumbling her roll, she said: 'I saw Michael and Fleur last night at dinner.'

'Oh!' His lips curled. 'I made a fool of myself over Fleur once. Perfect, isn't she – in her way?'

'Yes,' and her eyes added: 'Don't run her down!'

'Marvellous equipment and control.'

'I don't think you know her,' said Dinny, 'and I'm sure I don't.'

He leaned forward. 'You seem to me a loyal sort of person. Where did you pick that up?'

‘Our family motto is the word “Leal”. That ought to have cured me, oughtn’t it?’

‘I don’t know,’ he said, abruptly, ‘whether I understand what loyalty is. Loyalty to what? To whom? Nothing’s fixed in this world; everything’s relative. Loyalty’s the mark of the static mind, or else just a superstition, and anyway the negation of curiosity.’

‘There *are* things worth being loyal to, surely. Coffee, for instance, or one’s religion.’

He looked at her so strangely that Dinny was almost scared.

‘Religion? Have you one?’

‘Well, roughly, I suppose.’

‘What? Can you swallow the dogmas of any religious creed? Do you believe one legend more true than another? Can you suppose one set of beliefs about the Unknowable has more value than the rest? Religion! You’ve got a sense of humour. Does it leave you at the word?’

‘No; only religion, I suppose, may be just a sense of an all-pervading spirit, and the ethical creed that seems best to serve it.’

‘H’m! A pretty far cry from

what's generally meant, and even then how do you know what best serves an all-pervading spirit?’

‘I take that on trust.’.

‘There's where we differ. Look!’ he said, and it seemed to her that excitement had crept into his voice: ‘What's the use of our reasoning powers, our mental faculties? I take each problem as it comes, I do the sum, I return the answer, and so I act. I act according to a reasoned estimate of what is best.’

‘For whom?’

‘For myself and the world at large.’

‘Which first?’

‘It’s the same thing.’

‘Always? I wonder. And, anyway, that means doing so long a sum every time that I can’t think how you ever get to acting. And surely ethical rules are just the result of countless decisions on those same problems made by people in the past, so why not take them for granted?’

‘None of those decisions were made by people of my temperament or in my circumstances.’

‘No, I see that. You follow what

they call case law, then. But how English!’

‘Sorry!’ said Desert, abruptly: ‘I’m boring you. Have a sweet?’

Dinny put her elbows on the table and, leaning her chin on her hands, looked at him earnestly.

‘You weren’t boring me. On the contrary, you’re interesting me frightfully. Only I suppose that women act much more instinctively; I suppose that really means they accept themselves as more like each other than men do, and are more ready to trust their instinctive sense of general experience.’

‘That *has* been women’s way; whether it will be much longer, I don’t know.’

‘I think it will,’ said Dinny. ‘I don’t believe we shall ever much care for sums. I *will* have a sweet, please. Stewed prunes, I think.’

Desert stared at her, and began to laugh.

‘You’re wonderful. We’ll both have them. Is your family a very formal one?’

‘Not exactly formal, but they do believe in tradition and the past.’

‘And do you?’

‘I don’t know. I definitely like

old things, and old places, and old people. I like anything that's stamped like a coin. I like to feel one has roots. I was always fond of history. All the same one can't help laughing. There's something very comic about the way we're all tied – like a hen by a chalk mark to its beak.'

Desert stretched out his hand and she put hers into it.

'Shake hands on that saving grace.'

'Some day,' said Dinny, 'you're going to tell me something. But at the moment what play are we going to?'

‘Is there anything by a man called Shakespeare?’

With some difficulty they discovered that a work by the world’s greatest dramatist was being given in a theatre beyond the pale of the river. They went to it, and, when the show was over, Desert said, hesitating: ‘I wonder if you would come and have tea at my rooms?’

Dinny smiled and nodded, and from that moment was conscious of a difference in his manner. It was at once more intimate yet more respectful, as if he had said to himself: ‘This is my equal.’

That hour of tea, brought by Stack, a man with strange, understanding eyes and something monk-like in his look, seemed to her quite perfect. It was like no other hour she had ever spent, and at the end of it she knew she was in love. The tiny seed planted ten years before had flowered. This was such a marvel, so peculiar to one who at twenty-six had begun to think she would never be in love, that every now and then she drew in her breath and looked wonderingly at his face. Why on earth did she feel like this? It was absurd! And it was going to be

painful, because he wasn't going to love her. Why should he? And if he wasn't, she mustn't show, and how was she to help showing?

‘When am I going to see you again?’ he said, when she stood up to go.

‘Do you want to?’

‘Extraordinarily.’

‘But why?’

‘Why not? You’re the first lady I’ve spoken to for ten years. I’m not at all sure you’re not the first lady I’ve ever spoken to.’

‘If we are going to see each other again, you mustn’t laugh at

me.'

'Laugh at you! One couldn't. So when?'

'Well! At present I'm sleeping in a foreign nightgown at Mount Street. By rights I ought to be at Condaford. But my sister's going to be married in town next week, and my brother's coming back from Egypt on Monday, so perhaps I'll send for things and stay up. Where would you like to see me?'

'Will you come for a drive tomorrow? I haven't been to Richmond or Hampton Court for years.'

‘I’ve never been.’

‘All right! I’ll pick you up in front of Foch at two o’clock, wet or fine.’

‘I will be pleased to come, young sir.’

‘Splendid!’ And suddenly bending, he raised her hand and put his lips to it.

‘Highly courteous,’ said Dinny.
‘Good-bye!’

Chapter Four



PREOCCUPIED with this stupendous secret, Dinny's first instinct was for solitude, but she was booked for dinner with the Adrian Cherrells. On her uncle's marriage with Diana Ferse the house of painful memories in Oakley Street had been given up, and they were economically installed in one of those spacious Bloomsbury squares now successfully regaining the gentility lost in the eighteen-thirties and forties. The locality had been chosen for its proximity to

Adrian's 'bones', for at his age he regarded as important every minute saved for the society of his wife. The robust virility which Dinny had predicted would accrue to her uncle from a year spent in the presence of Professor Hallorsen and New Mexico was represented by a somewhat deeper shade of brown in his creased cheeks, and a more frequent smile on his long face. It was a lasting pleasure to Dinny to think that she had given him the right advice, and that he had taken it. Diana, too, was fast regaining the sparkle which, before her marriage with poor Ferse, had

made her a member of 'Society'. But the hopeless nature of Adrian's occupation and the extra time he needed from her had precluded her from any return to that sacred ring. She inclined more and more, in fact, to be a wife and mother. And this seemed natural to one with Dinny's partiality for her uncle. On her way there she debated whether or not to say what she had been doing. Having little liking for shifts and subterfuge, she decided to be frank. 'Besides,' she thought, 'a maiden in love always likes to talk about the object of her affections.' Again, if not to have a confidant

became too wearing, Uncle Adrian was the obvious choice; partly because he knew at first hand something of the East, but chiefly because he was Uncle Adrian.

The first topics at dinner, however, were naturally Clare's marriage and Hubert's return. Dinny was somewhat exercised over her sister's choice. Sir Gerald (Jerry) Corven was forty, active and middle-sized, with a daring face. She recognized that he had great charm, and her fear was, rather, that he had too much. He was high in the Colonial service, one of those men who – people

instinctively said – would go far. She wondered also whether Clare was not too like him, daring and brilliant, a bit of a gambler, and, of course, seventeen years younger. Diana, who had known him well, said:

‘The seventeen years’ difference is the best thing about it. Jerry wants steadying. If he can be a father to her as well, it may work. He’s had infinite experiences. I’m glad it’s Ceylon.’

‘Why?’

‘He won’t meet his past.’

‘Has he an awful lot of past?’

‘My dear, he’s very much in love at the moment; but with men like Jerry you never know; all that charm, and so much essential liking for thin ice.’

‘Marriage doth make cowards of us all,’ murmured Adrian.

‘It won’t have that effect on Jerry Corven; he takes to risk as a goldfish takes to mosquito larvae. Is Clare very smitten, Dinny?’

‘Yes, but Clare loves thin ice, too.’

‘And yet,’ said Adrian, ‘I shouldn’t call either of them really modern. They’ve both got brains

and like using them.'

'That's quite true, Uncle. Clare gets all she can out of life, but she believes in life terribly. She might become another Hester Stanhope.'

'Good for you, Dinny! But to be that she'd have to get rid of Gerald Corven first. And if I read Clare, I think she might have scruples.'

Dinny regarded her uncle with wide eyes.

'Do you say that because you know Clare, or because you're a Cherrell, Uncle?'

'I think because *she's* a Cherrell, my dear.'

‘Scruples,’ murmured Dinny. ‘I don’t believe Aunt Em has them. Yet she’s as much of a Cherrell as any of us.’

‘Em,’ said Adrian, ‘reminds me of nothing so much as a find of bones that won’t join up. You can’t say of what she’s the skeleton. Scruples are emphatically co-ordinate.’

‘No! Adrian,’ murmured Diana, ‘not bones at dinner. When does Hubert arrive? I’m really anxious to see him and young Jean. After eighteen months of bliss in the Soudan which will be top dog?’

‘Jean, surely,’ said Adrian.

Dinny shook her head. 'I don't think so, Uncle.'

'That's your sisterly pride.'

'No. Hubert's got more continuity. Jean rushes at things and must handle them at once, but Hubert steers the course, I'm pretty sure. Uncle, where is a place called Darfur? And how do you spell it?'

'With an "r" or without. It's west of the Soudan; much of it is desert and pretty inaccessible, I believe. Why?'

'I was lunching today with Mr Desert, Michael's best man, you remember, and he mentioned it.'

‘Has he been there?’

‘I think he’s been everywhere in the Near East.’

‘I know his brother,’ said Diana, ‘Charles Desert, one of the most provocative of the younger politicians. He’ll almost certainly be Minister of Education in the next Tory Government. That’ll put the finishing touch to Lord Mullyon’s retirement. I’ve never met Wilfrid. Is he nice?’

‘Well,’ said Dinny, with what she believed to be detachment, ‘I only met him yesterday. He seems rather like a mince pie, you take a spoonful and hope. If you can eat

the whole, you have a happy year.'

'I should like to meet the young man,' said Adrian. 'He did good things in the war, and I know his verse.'

'Really, Uncle? I could arrange it; so far we are in daily communication.'

'Oh!' said Adrian, and looked at her. 'I'd like to discuss the Hittite type with him. I suppose you know that what we are accustomed to regard as the most definitely Jewish characteristics are pure Hittite according to ancient Hittite drawings?'

‘But weren’t they all the same stock, really?’

‘By no means, Dinny. The Israelites were Arabs. What the Hittites were we have yet to discover. The modern Jew in this country and in Germany is probably more Hittite than Semite.’

‘Do you know Mr Jack Muskham, Uncle?’

‘Only by repute. He’s a cousin of Lawrence’s and an authority on bloodstock. I believe he advocates a reintroduction of Arab blood into our race-horses. There’s something in it if you could get the very best strain. Has young Desert been to

Nejd? You can still only get it there, I believe.'

'I don't know. Where is Nejd?'

'Centre of Arabia. But Muskham will never get his idea adopted, there's no tighter mind than the pukka racing man's. He's a pretty pure specimen himself, I believe, except for this bee in his bonnet.'

'Jack Muskham,' said Diana, 'was once romantically in love with one of my sisters; it's made him a misogynist.'

'H'm! That's a bit cryptic!'

'He's rather fine-looking, I think,' said Dinny.

‘Wears clothes wonderfully and has a reputation for hating everything modern. I haven’t met him for years, but I used to know him rather well. Why, Dinny?’

‘I just happened to see him the other day, and wondered.’

‘Talking of Hittites,’ said Diana, ‘I’ve often thought those very old Cornish families, like the Deserts, have a streak of Phoenician in them. Look at Lord Mullyon. There’s a queer type!’

‘Fanciful, my love. You’d be more likely to find that streak in the simple folk. The Deserts must have married into non-Cornish

stock for hundreds of years. The higher you go in the social scale, the less chance of preserving a primitive strain.'

'Are they a very old family?' said Dinny.

'Hoary and pretty queer. But you know my views about old families, Dinny, so I won't enlarge.'

Dinny nodded. She remembered very well that nerve-racked walk along Chelsea Embankment just after Ferse returned. And she looked affectionately into his face. It *was* nice to think that he had come into his own at last....

When she got back to Mount Street that night her uncle and aunt had gone up, but the butler was seated in the hall. He rose as she entered.

‘I didn’t know you had a key, Miss.’

‘I’m terribly sorry, Blore, you were having such a nice snooze.’

‘I was, Miss Dinny. After a certain age, as you’ll find out, one gets a liking for dropping off at improper moments. Now Sir Lawrence, he’s not a good sleeper, but, give you my word, if I go into his study almost any time when

he's at work, I'll find him opening his eyes. And my Lady, she can do her eight hours, but I've known her to drop off when someone's talking to her, especially the old Rector at Lippinghall, Mr Tasburgh – a courtly old gentleman, but he has that effect. Even Mr Michael – but then he's in Parliament, and they get the 'abit. Still, I do think, Miss, whether it was the war, or people not having any hope of anything, and running about so, that there's a tendency, as the saying is, towards sleep. Well, it does you good. Give you my word, Miss; I was dead to the world before I had

that forty winks, and now I could talk to you for hours.’

‘That would be lovely, Blore. Only I find, so far, that I’m sleepest at bedtime.’

‘Wait till you’re married, Miss. Only I do hope you won’t be doing that yet awhile. I said to Mrs Blore last night: “If Miss Dinny gets taken off, it’ll be the life and soul of the party gone!” I’ve never seen much of Miss Clare, so that leaves me cold; but I heard my Lady yesterday telling you to go and find out for yourself how it was done, and, as I said to Mrs Blore, “Miss Dinny’s like a daughter of the

house, and” – well – you know my sentiments, Miss.’

‘Dear Blore! I’m afraid I must go up now, I’ve had rather a tiring day.’

‘Quite, Miss. Pleasant dreams!’

‘Good night!’

Pleasant dreams! Perhaps the dreams might be, but would reality? What uncharted country was she not entering with just a star to guide! And was it a fixed star, or some flaring comet? At least five men had wanted to marry her, all of whom she had felt she could sum up, so that a

marriage would have been no great risk. And now she only wanted to marry one, but there he was, an absolutely uncertain quantity except that he could rouse in her a feeling she had never had before. Life was perverse. You dipped your finger in a lucky bag, and brought out – what? Tomorrow she would walk with him. They would see trees and grass together; scenery and gardens, pictures, perhaps; the river, and fruit blossom. She would know at least how his spirit and her own agreed about many things she cared for. And yet, if she found they didn't agree, would it make

any difference to her feeling? It would not.

‘I understand now,’ she thought, ‘why we call lovers dotty. All I care about is that he should feel what I feel, and be dotty too. And of course he won’t – why should he?’

Chapter Five



THE drive to Richmond Park, over Ham Common and Kingston Bridge to Hampton Court, and back through Twickenham and Kew, was remarkable for alternation between silence and volubility. Dinny was, as it were, the observer, and left to Wilfrid all the piloting. Her feelings made her shy, and it was apparent that he was only able to expand if left to his free will – the last person in the world to be drawn out. They duly lost themselves in the maze at

Hampton Court, where, as Dinny said,

‘Only spiders who can spin threads out of themselves, or ghosts who can tails unfold, would have a chance.’

On the way back they got out at Kensington Gardens, dismissed the hired car, and walked to the tea kiosk. Over the pale beverage he asked her suddenly whether she would mind reading his new poems in manuscript.

‘Mind? I should love it.’

‘I want a candid opinion.’

‘You will get it,’ said Dinny.

‘When can I have them?’

‘I’ll bring them round to Mount Street and drop them in your letter-box after dinner.’

‘Won’t ou come in this time?’

He shook his head.

When he left her at Stanhope Gate, he said abruptly:

‘It’s been a simply lovely afternoon. Thank you!’

‘It is for me to thank you.’

‘You! You’ve got more friends than quills upon the fretful porpentine. It’s I who am the pelican.’

‘Adieu, pelican!’

‘Adieu, flowering wilderness!’

The words seemed musical all the way down Mount Street.

A fat unstamped envelope was brought in about half past nine with the last post. Dinny took it from Blore, and slipping it under *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, went on listening to her aunt.

‘When I was a girl I squeezed my own waist, Dinny. We suffered for a principle. They say it’s comin’ in again. I shan’t do it, so hot and worryin’; but you’ll have to.’

‘Not I.’

‘When the waist has settled

down there'll be a lot of squeezin'.'

'The really tight waist will never come in again, Auntie.'

'And hats. In 1900 we were like eggstands with explodin' eggs in them. Cauliflowers and hydrangeas, and birds of a feather, enormous. They stuck out. The Parks were comparatively pure. Sea-green suits you, Dinny; you ought to be married in it.'

'I think I'll go up, Aunt Em. I'm rather tired.'

'That's eatin' so little.'

'I eat enormously. Good night, dear.'

Without undressing she sat down to the poems, nervously anxious to like them, for she knew that he would see through any falsity. To her relief they had the tone she remembered in his other volumes, but were less bitter and more concerned with beauty. When she had finished the main sheaf, she came on a much longer poem entitled 'The Leopard', wrapped round in a blank sheet of paper. Was it so wrapped to keep her from reading it; why, then, had he enclosed it? She decided that he had been doubtful, and wanted her verdict. Below the title was written

the line:

‘Can the leopard change its spots?’

It was the story of a young monk, secretly without faith, sent on a proselytizing expedition. Seized by infidels, and confronted with the choice between death or recantation, he recants and accepts the religion of his captors. The poem was seared with passages of such deep feeling that they hurt her. It had a depth and fervour which took her breath away; it was a paean in praise of contempt for convention faced with the stark reality of the joy in living, yet with a haunting moan of betrayal

running through it. It swayed her this way and that; and she put it down with a feeling almost of reverence for one who could so express such a deep and tangled spiritual conflict. With that reverence were mingled a compassion for the stress he must have endured before he could have written this and a feeling, akin to that which mothers feel, of yearning to protect him from his disharmonies and violence.

They had arranged to meet the following day at the National Gallery, and she went there before time, taking the poems with her.

He came on her in front of Gentile Bellini's 'Mathematician'. They stood for some time looking at it without a word.

'Truth, quality, and decorative effect. Have you read my stuff?'

'Yes. Come and sit down, I've got them here.'

They sat down, and she gave him the envelope.

'Well?' he said; and she saw his lips quivering.

'Terribly good, I think.'

'Really?'

'Even truly. One, of course, is much the finest.'

‘Which?’

Dinny’s smile said: ‘You ask that?’

‘ “The Leopard”?’

‘Yes. It hurt me, here.’

‘Shall I throw it out?’

By intuition she realized that on her answer he would act, and said feebly: ‘You wouldn’t pay attention to what I said, would you?’

‘What you say shall go.’

‘Then of course you can’t throw it out. It’s the finest thing you’ve done.’

‘Inshallah!’

‘What made you doubt?’

‘It’s a naked thing.’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, ‘naked – but beautiful. When a thing’s naked it must be beautiful.’

‘Hardly the fashionable belief.’

‘Surely a civilized being naturally covers deformities and sores. There’s nothing fine in being a savage that I can see, even in art.’

‘You run the risk of excommunication. Ugliness is a sacred cult now.’

‘Reaction from the chocolate box,’ murmured Dinny.

‘Ah! Whoever invented those lids

sinned against the holy ghost – he offended the little ones.’

‘Artists are children, you mean?’

‘Well, aren’t they? or would they carry on as they do?’

‘Yes, they do seem to love toys. What gave you the idea for that poem?’ His face had again that look of deep waters stirred, as when Muskham had spoken to them under the Foch statue.

‘Tell you some day, perhaps. Shall we go on round?’

When they parted, he said: ‘Tomorrow’s Sunday. I shall be seeing you?’

‘If you will.’

‘What about the Zoo?’

‘No, not the Zoo. I hate cages.’

‘Quite right. The Dutch garden near Kensington Palace?’

‘Yes.’

And that made the fifth consecutive day of meeting.

For Dinny it was like a spell of good weather, when every night you go to sleep hoping it will last, and every morning wake up and rub your eyes seeing that it has.

Each day she responded to his: ‘Shall I see you tomorrow?’ with an ‘If you will’; each day she

concealed from everybody with care whom she was seeing, and how, and when; and it all seemed to her so unlike herself that she would think: 'Who is this young woman who goes out stealthily like this, and meets a young man, and comes back feeling as if she had been treading on air? Is it some kind of a long dream I'm having?' Only, in dreams one didn't eat cold chicken and drink tea.

The moment most illuminative of her state of mind was when Hubert and Jean walked into the hall at Mount Street, where they were to stay till after Clare's

wedding. This first sight for eighteen months of her beloved brother should surely have caused her to feel tremulous. But she greeted him steady as a rock, even to the power of cool appraisement. He seemed extremely well, brown, and less thin, but more commonplace. She tried to think that was because he was now safe and married and restored to soldiering, but she knew that comparison with Wilfrid had to do with it. She seemed to know suddenly that in Hubert there had never been capacity for any deep spiritual conflict; he was of the

type she knew so well, seeing the trodden path and without real question following. Besides, Jean made all the difference! One could never again be to him, or he to her, as before his marriage. Jean was brilliantly alive and glowing. They had come the whole way from Khartoum to Croydon by air with four stops. Dinny was troubled by the inattention which underlay her seeming absorption in their account of life out there, till a mention of Darfur made her prick her ears. Darfur was where something had happened to Wilfrid. There were still followers

of the Mahdi there, she gathered. The personality of Jerry Corven was discussed. Hubert was enthusiastic about 'a job of work' he had done. Jean filled out the gap. The wife of a Deputy Commissioner had gone off her head about him. It was said that Jerry Corven had behaved badly.

'Well, well!' said Sir Lawrence, 'Jerry's a privateer, and women ought not to go off their heads about him.'

'Yes,' said Jean. 'It's silly to blame men nowadays.'

'In old days,' murmured Lady Mont, 'men did the advancing and

women were blamed; now women do it and the men are blamed.’

The extraordinary consecutiveness of the speech struck with a silencing effect on every tongue, until she added: ‘I once saw two camels, d’you remember, Lawrence, so pretty.’

Jean looked rather horrified, and Dinny smiled.

Hubert came back to the line. ‘I don’t know,’ he said; ‘he’s marrying our sister.’

‘Clare’ll give and take,’ said Lady Mont. ‘It’s only when their noses are curved. The Rector,’ she

added to Jean, 'says there's a Tasburgh nose. You haven't got it. It crinkles. Your brother Alan had it a little.' And she looked at Dinny. 'In China, too,' she added. 'I said he'd marry a purser's daughter.'

'Good God, Aunt Em, he hasn't!' cried Jean.

'No. Very nice girls, I'm sure. Not like clergymen's.'

'Thank you!'

'I mean the sort you find in the Park. They call themselves that when they want company. I thought everybody knew.'

'Jean was rectory-bred, Aunt

Em,' said Hubert.

'But she's been married to you two years. Who was it said: "And they shall multiply exceedin'ly?" '

'Moses?' said Dinny.

'And why not?'

Her eyes rested on Jean, who flushed. Sir Lawrence remarked quickly: 'I hope Hilary will be as short with Clare as he was with you and Jean, Hubert. That was a record.'

'Hilary preaches beautifully,' said Lady Mont. 'At Edward's death he preached on "Solomon in all his glory". Touchin'! And when we

hung Casement, you remember – so stupid of us! – on the beam and the mote. We had it in our eye.’

‘If I could love a sermon,’ said Dinny, ‘it would be Uncle Hilary’s.’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Mont, ‘he could borrow more barley-sugar than any little boy I ever knew and look like an angel. Your Aunt Wilmet and I used to hold him upside down – like puppies, you know – hopin’, but we never got it back.’

‘You must have been a lovely family, Aunt Em.’

‘Tryin’. Our father that was not in Heaven took care not to see us

much. Our mother couldn't help it – poor dear! We had no sense of duty.'

'And now you all have so much; isn't it queer?'

'Have I a sense of duty, Lawrence?'

'Emphatically not, Em.'

'I thought so.'

'But wouldn't you say as a whole, Uncle Lawrence, that the Cherrells have too much sense of duty?'

'How can they have *too* much?' said Jean.

Sir Lawrence fixed his monocle.

‘I scent heresy, Dinny.’

‘Surely duty’s narrowing, Uncle? Father and Uncle Lionel and Uncle Hilary, and even Uncle Adrian, always think first of what they ought to do. They despise their own wants. Very fine, of course, but rather dull.’

Sir Lawrence dropped his eyeglass.

‘Your family, Dinny,’ he said, ‘perfectly illustrate the mandarin. They hold the Empire together. Public schools, Osborne, Sandhurst; oh! ah! and much more. From generation to generation it begins in the home. Mother’s milk with

them. Service to Church and State – very interesting, very rare now, very admirable.’

‘Especially when they’ve kept on top by means of it,’ murmured Dinny.

‘Shucks!’ said Hubert: ‘As if anyone thought of that in the Services!’

‘You don’t think of it because you don’t have to; but you would fast enough if you did have to.’

‘Somewhat cryptic, Dinny,’ put in Sir Lawrence; ‘you mean if anything threatened them, they’d think: “We simply mustn’t be

removed, we're It." ' "

‘But are they It, Uncle?’

‘With whom have you been associating, my dear?’

‘Oh! no one. One must think sometimes.’

‘Too depressin’,’ said Lady Mont. ‘The Russian revolution, and all that.’

Dinny was conscious that Hubert was regarding her as if thinking: ‘What’s come to Dinny?’

‘If one wants to take out a linch-pin,’ he said, ‘one always can, but the wheel comes off.’

‘Well put, Hubert,’ said Sir

Lawrence; 'it's a mistake to think one can replace type or create it quickly. The sahib's born, not made – that is, if you take the atmosphere of homes as part of birth. And, if you ask me, he's dying out fast. A pity not to preserve him somehow; we might have National Parks for them, as they have for bisons.'

'No,' said Lady Mont, 'I won't.'

'What, Aunt Em?'

'Drink champagne on Wednesday, nasty bubbly stuff!'

'Must we have it at all, dear?'

'I'm afraid of Blore. He's so used.

I might tell him not, but it'd be there.'

'Have you heard of Hallorsen lately, Dinny?' asked Hubert suddenly.

'Not since Uncle Adrian came back. I believe he's in Central America.'

'He *was* large,' said Lady Mont. 'Hilary's two girls, Sheila, Celia, and little Anne, five – I'm glad you're not to be, Dinny. It's superstition, of course.'

Dinny leaned back and the light fell on her throat.

'To be a bridesmaid once is quite

enough, Aunt Em...’

When next morning she met Wilfrid at the Wallace Collection, she said:

‘Would you by any chance like to be at Clare’s wedding tomorrow?’

‘No hat and no black tails; I gave them to Stack.’

‘I remember how you looked, perfectly. You had a grey cravat and a gardenia.’

‘And you had on sea-green.’

‘Eau-de-nil. I’d like you to have seen my family, though, they’ll all be there; and we could have

discussed them afterwards.’

‘I’ll turn up among the “also ran” and keep out of sight.’

‘Not from me,’ thought Dinny. So she would not have to go a whole day without seeing him!

With every meeting he seemed less, as it were, divided against himself; and sometimes would look at her so intently that her heart would beat. When she looked at him, which was seldom, except when he wasn’t aware, she was very careful to keep her gaze limpid. How fortunate that one always had that pull over men, knew when they were looking at

one, and was able to look at them without their knowing!

When they parted this time, he said: ‘Come down to Richmond again on Thursday. I’ll pick you up at Foch – two o’clock as before.’

And she said: ‘Yes.’

Chapter Six



CLARE CHERRELL's wedding, in Hanover Square, was 'fashionable' and would occupy with a list of names a quarter of a column in the traditional prints. As Dinny said:

‘So delightful for them!’

With her father and mother Clare came to Mount Street from Condaford overnight. Busy with her younger sister to the last, and feeling an emotion humorously disguised, Dinny arrived with Lady Cherrell at the church not long before the bride. She lingered to

speaking to an old retainer at the bottom of the aisle, and caught sight of Wilfrid. He was on the bride's side, far back, gazing at her. She gave him a swift smile, then passed up the aisle to join her mother in the left front pew. Michael whispered as she went by:

‘People *have* rolled up, haven't they?’

They had. Clare was well known and popular, Jerry Corven even better known, if not so popular. Dinny looked round at the ‘audience’ – one could never credit a wedding with the word congregation. Irregular and with a

good deal of character, their faces refused generalization. They looked like people with convictions and views of their own. The men conformed to no particular type, having none of that depressing sameness which used to characterize the German officer caste. With herself and her mother in the front pew were Hubert and Jean, Uncle Lawrence and Aunt Em; in the pew behind sat Adrian with Diana, Mrs Hilary, and Lady Alison. Dinny caught sight of Jack Muskham at the end of two or three rows back, tall, well-dressed, rather bored-looking. He nodded to

her, and she thought: Odd, his remembering me!

On the Corven side of the aisle were people of quite as much diversity of face and figure. Except Jack Muskham, the bridegroom, and his best man, hardly a man gave the impression of being well dressed or of having thought about his clothes. But from their faces Dinny received the impression that they were all safe in the acceptance of a certain creed. Not one gave her the same feeling that Wilfrid's face brought of spiritual struggle and disharmony, of dreaming, suffering, and discovery.

‘I’m fanciful,’ she thought. And her eyes came to rest on Adrian, who was just behind her. He was smiling quietly above that goatee beard of his, which lengthened his thin brown visage. ‘He has a dear face,’ she thought, ‘not conceited, like the men who wear those pointed beards as a rule. He always will be the nicest man in the world.’ And she whispered: ‘Fine collection of bones here, Uncle.’

‘I should like your skeleton, Dinny.’

‘I mean to be burned and scattered. H’ssh!’

The choir was coming in,

followed by the officiating priests. Jerry Corven turned. Those lips smiling like a cat's beneath that thin-cut moustache, those hardwood features and daring, searching eyes! Dinny thought with sudden dismay: 'How could Clare! But after all I'd think the same of any face but one, just now. I'm going potty.' Then Clare came swaying up the aisle on her father's arm! 'Looking a treat! Bless her!' A gush of emotion caught Dinny by the throat, and she slipped her hand into her mother's. Poor mother! She was awfully pale! Really the whole thing was stupid!

People *would* make it long and trying and emotional. Thank goodness Dad's old black tail-coat really looked quite decent – she had taken out the stains with ammonia; and he stood as she had seen him when reviewing troops. If Uncle Hilary happened to have a button wrong, Dad would notice it. Only there wouldn't be any buttons. She longed fervently to be beside Wilfrid away at the back. He would have nice unorthodox thoughts, and they would soothe each other with private smiles.

Now the bridesmaids! Hilary's two girls, her cousins Monica and

Joan, slender and keen, Little Celia Moriston, fair as a seraph (if that was female), Sheila Ferse, dark and brilliant; and toddly little Anne – a perfect dumpling!

Once on her knees, Dinny quietened down. She remembered how they used to kneel, nightgowned, against their beds, when Clare was a tiny of three and she herself a ‘big girl’ of six. She used to hang on to the bed-edge by the chin so as to save the knees; and how ducky Clare had looked when she held her hands up like the child in the Reynolds picture! ‘That man,’ thought Dinny, ‘will

hurt her! I know he will!’ Her thoughts turned again to Michael’s wedding all those ten years ago. There she had stood, not three yards from where she was kneeling now, alongside a girl she didn’t know – some relative of Fleur’s. And her eyes, taking in this and that with the fluttered eagerness of youth, had lighted on Wilfrid standing sideways, keeping watch on Michael. Poor Michael! He had seemed rather daft that day, from excessive triumph! She could remember quite distinctly thinking: ‘Michael and his lost angel!’ There had been in Wilfrid’s face

something which suggested that he had been cast out of happiness, a scornful and yet yearning look. That was only two years after the Armistice, and she knew now what utter disillusionment and sense of wreckage he had suffered after the war. He had been talking to her freely the last two days; had even dwelled with humorous contempt on his infatuation for Fleur eighteen months after that marriage which had sent him flying off to the East. Dinny, but ten when the war broke out, remembered it chiefly as meaning that mother had been anxious

about father, had knitted all the time, and been a sort of sock depot; that everybody hated the Germans; that she had been forbidden sweets because they were made with saccharine, and finally the excitement and grief when Hubert went off to the war and letters from him didn't often come. From Wilfrid these last few days she had gathered more clearly and poignantly than ever yet what the war had meant to some who, like Michael and himself, had been in the thick of it for years. With his gift of expression he had made her feel the tearing away of roots, the

hopeless change of values, and the gradual profound mistrust of all that age and tradition had decreed and sanctified. He had got over the war now, he said. He might think so, but there were in him still torn odds and ends of nerves not yet mended up. She never saw him without wanting to pass a cool hand over his forehead.

The ring was on now, the fateful words said, the exhortations over; they were going to the vestry. Her mother and Hubert followed. Dinny sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the East window. Marriage! What an impossible state, except – with a

single being.

A voice in her ear said:

‘Lend me your hanky, Dinny. Mine’s soakin’, and your uncle’s is blue.’

Dinny passed her a scrap of lawn, and surreptitiously powdered her own nose.

‘Be done at Condaford, Dinny,’ continued her aunt. ‘All these people – so fatiguin’, rememberin’ who they aren’t. That was his mother, wasn’t it? She isn’t dead, then.’

Dinny was thinking: ‘Shall I get another look at Wilfrid?’

‘When I was married everybody kissed me,’ whispered her aunt, ‘so promiscuous. I knew a girl who married to get kissed by his best man. Aggie Tellusson. I wonder. They’re comin’ back!’

Yes! How well Dinny knew that bride’s smile! How could Clare feel it, not married to Wilfrid! She fell in behind her father and mother, alongside Hubert, who whispered: ‘Buck up, old girl, it might be a lot worse!’ Divided from him by a secret that absorbed her utterly, Dinny squeezed his arm. And, even as she did so, saw Wilfrid, with his arms folded, looking at her. Again

she gave him a swift smile, and then all was hurly-burly, till she was back at Mount Street and Aunt Em saying to her, just within the drawing-room door:

‘Stand by me, Dinny, and pinch me in time.’

Then came the entry of the guests and her aunt’s running commentary.

‘It *is* his mother – kippered. Here’s Hen Bentworth!... Hen, Wilmet’s here, she’s got a bone to pick.... How d’you do? Yes, isn’t it – so tirin’.... How d’you do? The ring was so well done, don’t you think? Conjurers!... Dinny, who’s

this?... How do you do? Lovely!
No! Cherrell. Not as it's spelled,
you know – so awkward!... The
presents are over there by the man
with the boots, tryin' not to. Silly, I
think! But they will.... How d'you
do? You *are* Jack Muskham?
Lawrence dreamed the other night
you were goin' to burst.... Dinny,
get me Fleur, too, she knows
everybody.'

Dinny went in search of Fleur
and found her talking to the
bridegroom.

As they went back to the door
Fleur said: 'I saw Wilfrid Desert in
the church. How did he come

there?’

Really Fleur was too sharp for anything!

‘Here you are!’ said Lady Mont. ‘Which of these three comin’ is the Duchess? The scraggy one. Ah!... How d’you do? Yes, charmin’. Such a bore, weddin’s! Fleur, take the Duchess to have some presents.... How d’you do? No, my brother Hilary. He does it well, don’t you think? Lawrence says he keeps his eye on the ball. Do have an ice, they’re downstairs.... Dinny, is this one after the presents, d’you think? – Oh! How d’you do, Lord Beevenham? My sister-in-law ought

to be doin' this. She ratted. Jerry's in there.... Dinny, who was it said: "The drink, the drink!" Hamlet? He said such a lot. Not Hamlet?... Oh! How d'you do?... How d'you do?... How d'you do, or don't you? Such a crush!... Dinny, your hanky!

'I've put some powder on it, Auntie.'

'There! Have I streaked?... How d'you do? Isn't it silly, the whole thing? As if they wanted anybody but themselves, you know.... Oh! Here's Adrian! Your tie's on one side, dear. Dinny, put it right. How d'you do? Yes, they are. I don't like flowers at funerals – poor things,

lyin' there, and dyin'.... How's your dear dog? You haven't one? Quite! ... Dinny, you ought to have pinched me.... How d'you do? How d'you do? I was tellin' my niece she ought to pinch me. Do you get faces right? No. How nice! How d'you do? How d'you do? How d'you do?... That's three! Dinny, who's the throwback just comin'? Oh!... How d'you do? So you got here? I thought you were in China.... Dinny, remind me to ask your uncle if it was China. He gave me such a dirty look. Could I give the rest a miss? Who is it's always sayin' that? Tell Blore "the drink",

Dinny. Here's a covey!... How d'you do?... How de do?... How do?... Do!... Do!... How?... So sweet!... Dinny, I want to say: Blast!'

On her errand to Blore Dinny passed Jean talking to Michael, and wondered how anyone so vivid and brown had patience to stand about in this crowd. Having found Blore, she came back. Michael's queer face, which she thought grew pleasanter every year, as if from the deepening impress of good feeling, looked strained and unhappy.

'I don't believe it, Jean,' she

heard him say.

‘Well,’ said Jean, ‘the bazaars do buzz with rumour. Still, without fire of some sort there’s never smoke.’

‘Oh! yes, there is – plenty. He’s back in England, anyway. Fleur saw him in the church today. I shall ask him.’

‘I wouldn’t,’ said Jean: if it’s true he’ll probably tell you, and if it isn’t, it’ll only worry him for nothing.’

So! They were talking of Wilfrid. How find out why without appearing to take interest? And suddenly she thought: ‘Even if I

could, I wouldn't. Anything that matters he must tell me himself. I won't hear it from anyone else.' But she felt disturbed, for instinct was always warning her of something heavy and strange on his mind.

When that long holocaust of sincerity was over and the bride had gone, she subsided into a chair in her uncle's study, the only room which showed no signs of trouble. Her father and mother had started back to Condaford, surprised that she wasn't coming too. It was not like her to cling to London when the tulips were out at home, the

lilacs coming on, the apple blossom thickening every day. But the thought of not seeing Wilfrid daily had become a positive pain.

‘I *have* got it badly,’ she thought, ‘worse than I ever believed was possible. Whatever is going to happen to me?’

She was lying back with her eyes closed when her uncle’s voice said:

‘Ah! Dinny, how pleasant after those hosts of Midian! The mandarin in full feather! Did you know a quarter of them? Why do people go to weddings? A registrar’s, or under the stars, there’s no other way of preserving

decency. Your poor aunt has gone to bed. There's a lot to be said for Mohammedanism, except that it's the fashion now to limit it to one wife, and she not in Purdah. By the way, there's a story going round that young Desert's become a Moslem. Did he say anything to you about it?'

Dinny raised her startled head.

'I've only twice known it happen to fellows in the East, and they were Frenchmen and wanted harems.'

'Money's the only essential for that Uncle.'

‘Dinny, you’re getting cynical. Men like to have the sanction of religion. But that wouldn’t be Desert’s reason; a fastidious creature, if I remember.’

‘Does religion matter, Uncle, so long as people don’t interfere with each other?’

‘Well, some Moslems’ notions of woman’s rights are a little primitive. He’s liable to wall her up if she’s unfaithful. There was a sheikh when I was in Marakesh – gruesome.’

Dinny shuddered.

‘ “From time immemorial”, as

they say,’ went on Sir Lawrence, ‘religion has been guilty of the most horrifying deeds that have happened on this earth. I wonder if young Desert has taken up with it to get him access to Mecca. I shouldn’t think he believes anything. But you never know – it’s a queer family.’

Dinny thought: ‘I can’t and won’t talk about him.’

‘What proportion of people in these days do you think really have religion, Uncle!’

‘In northern countries? Very difficult to say. In this country ten to fifteen per cent of the adults,

perhaps. In France and southern countries, where there's a peasantry, more, at least on the surface.'

'What about the people who came this afternoon?'

'Most of them would be shocked if you said they weren't Christians, and most of them would be still more shocked if you asked them to give half their goods to the poor, and that would only make them well disposed Pharisees, or was it Sadducees!'

'Are you a Christian, Uncle Lawrence?'

‘No, my dear; if anything a Confucian, who, as you know, was simply an ethical philosopher. Most of our caste in this country, if they only knew it, are Confucian rather than Christian. Belief in ancestors, and tradition, respect for parents, honesty, moderation of conduct, kind treatment of animals and dependents, absence of self-obtrusion, and stoicism in face of pain and death.’

‘What more,’ murmured Dinny, wrinkling her nose, ‘does one want except the love of beauty?’

‘Beauty? That’s a matter of temperament.’

‘But doesn’t it divide people more than anything?’

‘Yes, but willy nilly. You can’t make yourself love a sunset.’

‘ “You are wise, Uncle Lawrence, the young niece said.” I shall go for a walk and shake the wedding-cake down.’

‘And I shall stay here, Dinny, and sleep the champagne off.’

Dinny walked and walked. It seemed an odd thing to be doing alone. But the flowers in the Park were pleasing, and the waters of the Serpentine shone and were still, and the chestnut trees were

coming alight. And she let herself go on her mood, and her mood was of love.

Chapter Seven



LOOKING back on that second afternoon in Richmond Park, Dinny never knew whether she had betrayed herself before he said so abruptly:

‘If you believe in it, Dinny, will you marry me?’

It had so taken her breath away that she sat growing paler and paler, then colour came to her face with a rush.

‘I’m wondering why you ask me. You know nothing of me.’

‘You’re like the East. One loves it at first sight, or not at all, and one never knows it any better.’

Dinny shook her head: ‘Oh! I am not mysterious.’

‘I should never get to the end of you; no more than of one of those figures over the staircase in the Louvre. Please answer me, Dinny.’

She put her hand in his, nodded, and said: ‘That must be a record.’

At once his lips were on hers, and when they left her lips she fainted.

This was without exception the most singular action of her life so

far and coming to almost at once, she said so.

‘It’s the sweetest thing you could have done.’

If she had thought his face strange before, what was it now? The lips, generally contemptuous, were parted and quivering, the eyes, fixed on her, glowed; he put up his hand and thrust back his hair, so that she noticed for the first time a scar at the top of his forehead. Sun, moon, stars, and all the works of God stood still while they were looking each into the other’s face.

At last she said:

‘The whole thing is most irregular. There’s been no courtship; not even a seduction.’

He laughed and put his arm around her. Dinny whispered:

‘ “Thus the two young people sat wrapped in their beatitude.” My poor mother!’

‘Is she a nice woman?’

‘A darling. Luckily she’s fond of father.’

‘What is your father like?’

‘The nicest General I know.’

‘Mine is a hermit. You won’t have to realize him. My brother is an ass. My mother ran away when

I was three, and I have no sisters. It's going to be hard for you, with a nomadic, unsatisfactory brute like me.'

' "Where thou goest, I go." We seem to be visible to that old gentleman over there. He'll write to the papers about the awful sights to be seen in Richmond Park.'

'Never mind!'

'I don't. There's only one first hour. And I was beginning to think I should never have it.'

'Never been in love?'

She shook her head.

‘How wonderful! When shall it be, Dinny?’

‘Don’t you think our families ought first to know?’

‘I suppose so. They won’t want you to marry me.’

‘Certainly you are my social superior, young sir.’

‘One can’t be superior to a family that goes back to the twelfth century. We only go back to the fourteenth. A wanderer and a writer of bitter verse. They’ll know I shall want to cart you off to the East. Besides, I only have fifteen hundred a year, and practically no

expectations.'

'Fifteen hundred a year! Father may be able to spare me two-he's doing it for Clare.'

'Well, thank God there'll be no obstacle from your fortune.'

Dinny turned to him, and there was a touching confidence in her eyes.

'Wilfrid, I heard something about your having turned Moslem. That wouldn't matter to me.'

'It would matter to them.'

His face had become drawn and dark. She clasped his hand tight in both of hers.

‘Was that poem “The Leopard” about yourself?’

He tried to draw his hand away.

‘Was it?’

‘Yes. Out in Darfur. Fanatical Arabs. I recanted to save my skin. Now you can chuck me.’ Exerting all her strength, Dinny pulled his hand to her heart.

‘What you did or didn’t do is nothing. You are *you*!’ To her dismay and yet relief, he fell on his knees and buried his face in her lap.

‘Darling!’ she said. Protective tenderness almost annulled the

wilder, sweeter feeling in her.

‘Does anyone know of that but me?’

‘It’s known in the bazaars that I’ve turned Moslem, but it’s supposed of my free will.’

‘I know there are things you would die for, Wilfrid, and that’s enough. Kiss me!’

The afternoon drew on while they sat there. The shadows of the oak trees splayed up to their log; the crisp edge of the sunlight receded over the young fern: some deer passed, moving slowly towards water. The sky, of a clear

bright blue, with white promising clouds, began to have the evening look; a sappy scent of fern fronds and horse chestnut bloom crept in slow whiffs; and dew began to fall. The sane and heavy air, the grass so green, the blue distance, the branching, ungraceful solidity of the oak trees, made a trysting hour as English as lovers ever loved in.

‘I shall break into cockney if we sit here much longer,’ said Dinny, at last; ‘besides, dear heart, “fast falls the dewy eve”.’...

Late that evening in the drawing-room at Mount Street her aunt said suddenly:

‘Lawrence, look at Dinny!
Dinny, you’re in love.’

‘You take me flat aback, Aunt
Em. I am.’

‘Who is it?’

‘Wilfrid Desert.’

‘I used to tell Michael that young
man would get into trouble. Does
he love you too?’

‘He is good enough to say so.’

‘Oh! dear. I *will* have some
lemonade. Which of you proposed?’

‘As a fact, he did.’

‘His brother has no issue, they
say.’

‘For heaven’s sake, Aunt Em!’

‘Why not? Kiss me!’

But Dinny was regarding her uncle across her aunt’s shoulder. He had said nothing.

Later, he stopped her as she was following out.

‘Are your eyes open, Dinny?’

‘Yes, this is the ninth day.’

‘I won’t come the heavy uncle; but you know the drawbacks?’

‘His religion; Fleur; the East? What else?’

Sir Lawrence shrugged his thin shoulders.

‘That business with Fleur sticks in my gizzard, as old Forsyte would

have said. One who could do that to the man he has led to the altar can't have much sense of loyalty.'

Colour rose in her cheeks.

'Don't be angry, my dear, we're all too fond of you.'

'He's been quite frank about everything, Uncle.'

Sir Lawrence sighed.

'Then there's no more to be said, I suppose. But I beg you to look forward before it's irrevocable. There's a species of china which it's almost impossible to mend. And I think you're made of it.'

Dinny smiled and went up to her

room, and instantly she began to look back.

The difficulty of imagining the physical intoxication of love was gone. To open one's soul to another seemed no longer impossible. Love stories she had read, love affairs she had watched, all seemed savourless compared with her own. And she had only known him nine days, except for that glimpse ten years ago! Had she had what was called a complex all this time? Or was love always sudden like this? A wild flower seeding on a wild wind?

Long she sat half dressed, her

hands clasped between her knees, her head drooping, steeped in the narcotic of remembrance, and with a strange feeling that all the lovers in the world were sitting within her on that bed bought at Pullbred's in the Tottenham Court Road.

Chapter Eight



CONDAFORD resented this business of love, and was, with a fine rain, as if sorrowing for the loss of its two daughters.

Dinny found her father and mother elaborately ‘making no bones’ over the loss of Clare, and only hoped they would continue the motion in her own case. Feeling, as she said, ‘very towny’, she prepared for the ordeal of disclosure by waterproofing herself and going for a tramp. Hubert and Jean were expected in time for

dinner, and she wished to kill all her birds with one stone. The rain on her face, the sappy fragrance, the call of the cuckoos, and that state of tree when each has leaves in different stage of opening, freshened her body but brought a little ache to her heart. Entering a covert, she walked along a ride. The trees were beech and ash, with here and there an English yew, the soil being chalky. A woodpecker's constant tap was the only sound, for the rain was not yet heavy enough for leaf-dripping to have started. Since babyhood she had been abroad but three times – to

Italy, to Paris, to the Pyrenees, and had always come home more in love with England and Condaford than ever. Henceforth her path would lie she knew not where; there would, no doubt, be sand, fig-trees, figures by wells, flat roofs, voices calling the Muezzin, eyes looking through veils. But surely Wilfrid would feel the charm of Condaford and not mind if they spent time there now and then. His father lived in a show place, half shut up and never shown, which gave everyone the blues. And that, apart from London and Eton, was all he seemed to know of England,

for he had been four years away in the war and eight years away in the East.

‘For me to discover England to him,’ she thought; ‘for him to discover the East to me.’

A gale of last November had brought down some beech trees. Looking at their wide flat roots exposed, Dinny remembered Fleur saying that selling timber was the only way to meet death duties. But Dad was only sixty-two! Jean’s cheeks the night of their arrival, when Aunt Em quoted the ‘multiply exceedingly’. A child coming! Surely a son. Jean was the sort to

have sons. Another generation of Cherrells in direct line! If Wilfrid and she had a child! What then? One could not wander about with babes. A tremor of insecurity went through her. The future, how uncharted! A squirrel crossed close to her still figure and scampered up a trunk. Smiling, she watched it, lithe, red, bushy-tailed. Thank God, Wilfrid cared for animals! 'When to God's fondouk the donkeys are taken.' Condaford, its bird life, woods and streams, mullions, magnolias, fantails, pastures green, surely he would like it! But her father and mother, Hubert and

Jean; would he like them? Would they like him? They would not – too unshackled, too fitful, and too bitter; all that was best in him he hid away, as if ashamed of it; and his yearning for beauty they would not understand! And his change of religion, even though they would not know what he had told her, would seem to them strange and disconcerting!

Condaford Grange had neither butler nor electric light, and Dinny chose the moment when the maids had set decanters and dessert on the polished chestnut wood, lit by candles.

‘Sorry to be personal,’ she said, quite suddenly; ‘but I’m engaged.’

No one answered. Each of those four was accustomed to say and think – not always the same thing – that Dinny was the ideal person to marry, so none was happier for the thought that she was going to be married. Then Jean said:

‘To whom, Dinny?’

‘Wilfrid Desert, the second son of Lord Mullyon – he was Michael’s best man.’

‘Oh! but –!’

Dinny was looking hard at the other three. Her father’s face was

impassive, as was natural, for he did not know the young man from Adam; her mother's gentle features wore a fluttered and enquiring look; Hubert's an air as if he were biting back vexation.

Then Lady Cherrell said: 'But, Dinny, when did you meet him?'

'Only ten days ago, but I've seen him every day since. I'm afraid it's a first-sight case like yours, Hubert. We remembered each other from Michael's wedding.'

Hubert looked at his plate. 'You know he's become a Moslem, or so they say in Khartoum.'

Dinny nodded.

‘What!’ said the General.

‘That’s the story, sir.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t know, I’ve never seen him. He’s been a lot about in the East.’

On the point of saying: ‘One might just as well be Moslem as Christian, if one’s not a believer,’ Dinny stopped. It was scarcely a testimonial to character.

‘I can’t understand a man changing his religion,’ said the General bluntly.

‘There doesn’t seem to be much

enthusiasm,' murmured Dinny.

'My dear, how can there be when we don't know him?'

'No, of course, Mother. May I ask him down? He *can* support a wife; and Aunt Em says his brother has no issue.'

'Dinny!' said the General.

'I'm not serious, darling.'

'What is serious,' said Hubert, 'is that he seems to be a sort of Bedouin – always wandering about.'

'Two can wander about, Hubert.'

'You've always said you hate to be away from Condaford.'

‘I remember when you said you couldn’t see anything in marriage, Hubert. And I’m sure both you and Father said that at one time, Mother. Have any of you said it since?’

‘Cat!’

With that simple word Jean closed the scene.

But at bedtime in her mother’s room, Dinny said:

‘May I ask Wilfrid down, then?’

‘Of course, when you like. We shall be only too anxious to see him.’

‘I know it’s a shock, Mother,

coming so soon after Clare; still, you did expect me to go some time.'

Lady Cherrell sighed: 'I suppose so.'

'I forgot to say that he's a poet, a real one.'

'A poet?' repeated her mother, as if this had put the finishing touch to her disquiet.

'There are quite a lot in Westminster Abbey. But don't worry, *he'll* never be there.'

'Difference in religion is serious, Dinny, especially when it comes to children.'

‘Why, Mother? No child has any religion worth speaking of till it’s grown up, and then it can choose for itself. Besides, by the time my children, if I have any, are grown up, the question will be academic.’

‘Dinny!’

‘It’s nearly so even now, except in ultra-religious circles. Ordinary people’s religion becomes more and more just ethical.’

‘I don’t know enough about it to say, and I don’t think you do.’

‘Mother, dear, stroke my head.’

‘Oh! Dinny, I do hope you’ve chosen wisely.’

‘Darling, it chose me.’

That she perceived was not the way to reassure her mother, but as she did not know one, she took her good night kiss and went away.

In her room she sat down and wrote:

Condaford Grange: Friday.

DARLING,

This is positively and absolutely my first love-letter, so you see I don't know how to express myself. I think I will just say 'I love you' and leave it at that. I have spread the good tidings. They have, of course, left everyone guessing, and anxious to see you as soon as possible. When will you come? Once you are here the whole thing will seem to me less like a very real and very lovely dream. This is quite a simple place.

Whether we should live in style if we could, I can't say. But three maids, a groom-chauffeur, and two gardeners are all our staff. I believe you will like my mother, and I don't believe you will get on very well with my father or brother, though I expect his wife Jean will tickle your poetic fancy, she's such a vivid creature. Condaford itself I'm sure you'll love. It has the real 'old' feeling. We can go riding; and I want to walk and talk with you and show you my pet nooks and corners. I hope the sun will shine, as you love it so much. For me almost any sort of day does down here; and absolutely any will do if I can be with you. The room you will have is away by itself and supernaturally quiet; you go up to it by five twisty steps, and it's called the priest's room, because Anthony Charwell, brother of the Gilbert who owned Condaford under Elizabeth, was walled up there and fed from a basket let down nightly to his window. He was a conspicuous Catholic priest, and Gilbert was a Protestant, but he put his brother first, as any decent body would. When he'd been there

three months they took the wall down one night, and got him across country all the way south to the Beaulieu river and ‘aboard the lugger’. The wall was put up again to save appearances and only done away with by my great-grandfather, who was the last of us to have any money to speak of. It seemed to prey on his nerves, so he got rid of it. They still speak of him in the village, probably because he drove four-in-hand. There’s a bath-room at the bottom of the twisty steps. The window was enlarged, of course, and the view’s jolly from it, especially now, at lilac and apple-blossom time. My own room, if it interests you to know, is somewhat cloistral and narrow, but it looks straight over the lawns to the hill-rise and the woods beyond. I’ve had it ever since I was seven, and I wouldn’t change for anything, until you’re making me

‘brooches and toys for my delight
Of birds’ song at morning and
starshine at night.’

I almost think that little ‘Stevenson’ is my favourite poem; so you see, in spite of my homing tendency, I must have a streak of the wanderer in me. Dad, by the way, has a great feeling for Nature, likes beasts and birds and trees. I think most soldiers do – it’s rather odd. But, of course, their love is on the precise and knowledgeable rather than the aesthetic side. Any dreaminess they incline to look on as ‘a bit barmy’. I have been wondering whether to put my copies of your poems under their noses. On the whole I don’t think; they might take you too seriously. There is always something about a person more ingratiating than his writings. I don’t expect to sleep much tonight, for this is the first day that I haven’t seen you since the world began. Goodnight, my dear, be blessed and take my kiss.

Your

DINNY.

P.S.—I have looked you out the photo where I approximate most to the angels, or rather where

my nose turns up least – to send tomorrow. In the meantime here are two snaps. And when, sir, do I get some of you?

D.

And that was the end of this to her far from perfect day.

Chapter Nine



SIR LAWRENCE MONT, recently elected to Burton's Club whereon he had resigned from the Aeroplane, retaining besides only 'Snooks' (so-called), The Coffee House and the Parthenaeum, was accustomed to remark that, allowing himself another ten years of life, it would cost him twelve shillings and sixpence every time he went into any of them.

He entered Burton's, however, on the afternoon after Dinny had told him of her engagement, took

up a list of the members, and turned to D. 'Hon. Wilfrid Desert.' Quite natural, seeing the Club's pretension to the monopoly of travellers. 'Does Mr Desert ever come in here?' he said to the porter.

'Yes, Sir Lawrence, he's been in this last week; before that I don't remember him for years.'

'Usually abroad. When does he come in as a rule?'

'For dinner, mostly, Sir Lawrence.'

'I see. Is Mr Muskham in?'

The porter shook his head.

‘Newmarket today, Sir Lawrence.’

‘Oh! Ah! How on earth you remember everything!’

‘Matter of ’abit, Sir Lawrence.’

‘Wish I had it.’ Hanging up his hat, he stood for a moment before the tape in the hall.

Unemployment and taxation going up all the time, and more money to spend on cars and sports than ever. A pretty little problem! He then sought the Library as the room where he was least likely to see anybody; and the first body he saw was that of Jack Muskham, who was talking, in a voice hushed to the level of the locality, to a thin

dark little man in a corner.

‘That,’ thought Sir Lawrence, cryptically, ‘explains to me why I never find a lost collar-stud. My friend the porter was so certain Jack would be at Newmarket, and not under that chest of drawers, that he took him for someone else when he came in.’

Reaching down a volume of Burton’s *Arabian Nights*, he rang for tea. He was attending to neither when the two in the corner rose and came up to him.

‘Don’t get up, Lawrence,’ said Jack Muskham with some languor; ‘Telfourd Yule, my cousin Sir

Lawrence Mont.'

'I've read thrillers of yours, Mr Yule,' said Sir Lawrence, and thought: 'Queer-looking little cuss!'

The thin, dark, smallish man, with a face rather like a monkey's, grinned. 'Truth whips fiction out of the field,' he said.

'Yule,' said Jack Muskham, with his air of superiority to space and time, 'has been out in Arabia, going into the question of how to corkscrew a really pure-strain Arab mare or two out of them for use here. It's always baffled us, you know. Stallions, yes; mares never. It's much the same now in Nejd as

when Palgrave wrote. Still, we think we've got a rise. The owner of the best strain wants an aeroplane, and if we throw in a billiard table we believe he'll part with at least one daughter of the sun.'

'Good God!' said Sir Lawrence. 'By what base means? We're all Jesuits, Jack!'

'Yule has seen some queer things out there. By the way, there's one I want to talk about. May we sit down?'

He stretched his long body out in a long chair, and the dark little man perched himself on another,

with his black twinkling eyes fixed on Sir Lawrence, who had come to uneasy attention without knowing why.

‘When,’ said Jack Muskham, ‘Yule here was in the Arabian desert, he heard a vague yarn among some Bedouins about an Englishman having been held up somewhere by Arabs and forced to become a Moslem. He had rather a row with them, saying no Englishman would do that. But when he was back in Egypt he went flying into the Libyan desert, met another lot of Bedouins coming from the south, and came on

precisely the same yarn, only more detailed, because they said it happened in Darfur, and they even had the man's name – Desert. Then, when he was up in Khartoum, Yule found it was common talk that young Desert had changed his religion. Naturally he put two and two together. But there's all the difference in the world, of course, between voluntarily swapping religions and doing it at the pistol's point. An Englishman who does that lets down the lot of us.'

Sir Lawrence, who during this recital had tried every motion for

his monocle with which he was acquainted, dropped it and said: 'But, my dear Jack, if a man is rash enough to become a Mohammedan in a Mohammedan country, do you suppose for a minute that gossip won't say he was forced to?'

Yule, who had wriggled on to the very verge of his chair, said:

'I thought that; but the second account was extremely positive. Even to the month and the name of the Sheikh who forced the recantation; and I found that Mr Desert had in fact returned from Darfur soon after the month mentioned. There may be nothing

in it; but whether there is or not, I needn't tell you that an undenied story of that kind grows by telling and does a lot of harm, not only to the man himself, but to our prestige. There seems to me a sort of obligation on one to let Mr Desert know what the Bedawi are spreading about him.'

'Well, he's over here,' said Sir Lawrence, gravely.

'I know,' said Jack Muskham, 'I saw him the other day, and he's a member of this Club.'

Through Sir Lawrence was passing waves of infinite dismay. What a sequel to Dinny's ill-starred

announcement! To his ironic, detached personality, capricious in its likings, Dinny was precious. She embroidered in a queer way his plain-washed feelings about women; as a young man he might even have been in love with her, instead of being merely her uncle by marriage. During this silence he was fully conscious that both the other two were thoroughly uncomfortable. And the knowledge of their disquiet deepened the significance of the matter in an odd way.

At last he said: 'Desert was my boy's best man. I'd like to talk to

Michael about it, Jack. Mr Yule will say nothing further at present, I hope.'

'Not on your life,' said Yule. 'I hope to God there's nothing in it. I like his verse.'

'And you, Jack?'

'I don't care for the look of him; but I'd refuse to believe that of an Englishman till it was plainer than the nose on my face, which is saying a good bit. You and I must be getting on, Yule, if we're to catch that train to Royston.'

This speech of Jack Muskham's further disturbed Sir Lawrence, left

alone in his chair. It seemed so entirely to preclude leniency of judgment among the 'pukka sahibs' if the worst were true.

At last he rose, found a small volume, sat down again and turned its pages. The volume was Sir Alfred Lyall's *Verses Written in India*, and he looked for the poem called 'Theology in Extremis'.

He read it through, restored the volume, and stood rubbing his chin. Written, of course, more than forty years ago, and yet doubtful if its sentiments were changed by an iota! There was that poem, too, by Dogle, about the Corporal in the

Bufs who, brought before a Chinese General and told to 'kow-tow' or die, said: 'We don't do that sort of thing in the Bufs,' and died. Well! That was the standard even today, among people of any caste or with any tradition. The war had thrown up innumerable instances. Could young Desert really have betrayed the tradition? It seemed improbable. And yet, in spite of his excellent war record, might there be a streak of yellow in him? Or was it, rather, that at times a flow of revolting bitterness carried him on to complete cynicism, so that he flouted almost for the joy of

flouting?

With a strong mental effort Sir Lawrence tried to place himself in a like dilemma. Not being a believer, his success was limited to the thought: 'I should immensely dislike being dictated to in such a matter.' Aware that this was inadequate, he went down to the hall, shut himself up in a box, and rang up Michael's house. Then, feeling that if he lingered in the Club he might run into Desert himself, he took a cab to South Square.

Michael had just come in from the House; they met in the hall;

and, with the instinct that Fleur, however acute, was not a fit person to share this particular consultation, Sir Lawrence demanded to be taken to his son's study. He commenced by announcing Dinny's engagement, which Michael heard with as strange a mixture of gratification and disquietude as could be seen on human visage.

‘What a little cat, keeping it so dark!’ he said. ‘Fleur did say something about her being too limpid just now; but I never thought! One's got so used to Dinny being single. To Wilfrid, too! Well,

I hope the old son has exhausted the East.'

'There's this question of his religion,' said Sir Lawreenc gravely.

'I don't know why that should matter much; Dinny's not fervent. But I never thought Wilfrid cared enough to change his. It rather staggered me.'

'There's a story.'

When his father had finished, Michael's ears stood out and his face looked haggard.

'You know him better than anyone,' Sir Lawrence concluded:

‘What do you think?’

‘I hate to say it, but it might be true. It might even be natural for *him*; but no one would ever understand why. This is pretty ghastly, Dad, with Dinny involved.’

‘Before we fash ourselves, my dear, we must find out if it’s true. Could you go to him?’

‘In old days – easily.’

Sir Lawrence nodded. ‘Yes, I know all about that, but it’s a long time ago.’

Michael smiled faintly. ‘I never knew whether you spotted that, but I rather thought so. I’ve seen very

little of Wilfrid since he went East. Still, I could—' He stopped, and added, 'If it is true, he must have told Dinny. He couldn't ask her to marry him with that untold.'

Sir Lawrence shrugged. 'If yellow in one way, why not in the other?'

'Wilfrid is one of the most perverse, complex, unintelligible natures one could come across. To judge him by ordinary standards is a wash-out. But if he *has* told Dinny, she'll never tell us.'

And they stared at each other.

'Mind you,' said Michael, 'there's

a streak of the heroic in him. It comes out in the wrong places. That's why he's a poet.'

Sir Lawrence began twisting at an eyebrow, always a sign that he had reached a decision.

'The thing's got to be faced; it's not in human nature for a sleeping dog like that to be allowed to lie. I don't care about young Desert – '

'I do,' said Michael.

'It's Dinny I'm thinking of.'

'So am I. But there again, Dad, Dinny will do what she will do, and you needn't think we can deflect her.'

‘It’s one of the most unpleasant things,’ said Sir Lawrence slowly, ‘that I’ve ever come across. Well, my boy, are you going to see him, or shall I?’

‘I’ll do it,’ said Michael, and sighed.

‘Will he tell you the truth?’

‘Yes. Won’t you stay to dinner?’

Sir Lawrence shook his head.

‘Daren’t face Fleur with this on my mind. Needless to say, no one ought to know until you’ve seen him, not even she.’

‘No. Dinny still with you?’

‘She’s gone back to Condaford.’

‘Her people!’ and Michael whistled.

Her people! The thought remained with him all through a dinner during which Fleur discussed the future of Kit. She was in favour of his going to Harrow, because Michael and his father had been at Winchester. He was down for both, and the matter had not yet been decided.

‘All your mother’s people,’ she said, ‘were at Harrow. Winchester seems to me so superior and dry. And they never get any notoriety. If you hadn’t been at Winchester you’d have been a pet of the

newspapers by now.'

'D'you want Kit to have notoriety?'

'Yes, the nice sort, of course, like your Uncle Hilary. You know, Michael, Bart's a dear, but I prefer the Cherrell side of your family.'

'Well, I was wondering,' said Michael, 'whether the Cherrel's weren't too straight-necked and servicely for anything.'

'Yes, they're that, but they've got a quirk in them, and they look like gentlemen.'

'I believe,' said Michael, 'that you really want Kit to go to

Harrow because they play at Lords.'

Fleur straightened her own neck.

'Well, I do. I should have chosen Eton, only it's so obvious, and I hate light blue.'

'Well,' said Michael, 'I'm prejudiced in favour of my own school, so the choice is up to you. A school that produced Uncle Adrian will do for me, anyway.'

'No school produced your Uncle Adrian, dear,' said Fleur; 'he's palaeolithic. The Cherrells are the oldest strain in Kit's make-up, anyway, and I would like to breed

to it, as Mr Jack Muskham would say. Which reminds me that when I saw him at Clare's wedding he wanted us to come down to see his stud farm at Royston. I should like to. He's like an advertisement for shooting capes – divine shoes and marvellous control of his facial muscles.'

Michael nodded.

'Jack's an example of so much stamp on the coin that there's hardly any coin behind it.'

'Don't you believe it, my dear. There's plenty of metal at the back.'

‘The “pukka sahib”,’ said Michael. ‘I never can make up my mind whether that article is to the good or to the bad. The Cherrells are the best type of it, because there’s no manner to them as there is to Jack; but even with them I always have the feeling of too much in heaven and earth that isn’t dreamed of in their philosophy.’

‘We can’t all have divine sympathy, Michael.’

Michael looked at her fixedly. He decided against malicious intent and went on: ‘I never know where understanding and tolerance ought to end.’

‘That’s where men are inferior to us. We wait for the mark to fix itself; we trust our nerves. Men don’t, poor things. Luckily you’ve a streak of woman in you, Michael. Give me a kiss. Mind Coaker, he’s very sudden. It’s decided, then: Kit goes to Harrow.’

‘If there’s a Harrow to go to by the time he’s of age.’

‘Don’t be foolish. No constellations are more fixed than the public schools. Look at the way they flourished on the war.’

‘They won’t flourish on the next war.’

‘There mustn’t be one, then.’

‘Under “pukka sahibism” it couldn’t be avoided.’

‘My dear, you don’t suppose that keeping our word and all that was not just varnish? We simply feared German preponderance.’

Michael rumped his hair.

‘It was a good instance, anyway, of what I said about there being more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of by the “pukka sahib”; yes, and of many situations that he’s not adequate to handle.’

Fleur yawned.

‘We badly want a new dinner

service, Michael.'

Chapter Ten



AFTER dinner Michael set forth, without saying where he was going. Since the death of his father-in-law, and the disclosure then made to him about Fleur and John Forsyte, his relations with her had been the same, with a slight but deep difference. He was no longer a tied but a free agent in his own house. Not a word had ever been spoken between them on a matter now nearly four years old, nor had there been in his mind any doubt about her since; the infidelity was

scotched and buried. But, though outwardly the same, he was inwardly emancipated, and she knew it. In this matter of Wilfrid, for instance, his father's warning had not been needed. He would not have told her of it, anyway. Not because he did not trust her discretion – he could always trust that – but because he secretly felt that in a matter such as this he would not get any real help from her.

He walked. 'Wilfrid's in love,' he thought, 'so he ought to be in by ten, unless he's got an attack of verse; but even then you can't

write poetry in this traffic or in a club, the atmosphere stops the flow.' He crossed Pall Mall and threaded the maze of narrow streets dedicated to unattached manhood till he came to Piccadilly, quiet before its storm of after-theatre traffic. Passing up a side street devoted to those male ministering angels – tailors, bookmakers and moneylenders – he rounded into Cork Street. It was ten o'clock exactly when he paused before the well-remembered house. Opposite was the gallery where he had first met Fleur, and he stood for a moment almost dizzy from

past feelings. For three years, before Wilfrid's queer infatuation for Fleur had broken it all up, he had been Wilfrid's fidus Achates. 'Regular David and Jonathan stunt,' he thought and all his old feelings came welling up as he ascended the stairs.

The monastic visage of the henchman Stack relaxed at sight of him.

'Mr Mont? Pleasure to see you, sir.'

'And how are you, Stack?'

'A little older, sir; otherwise in fine shape, thank you. Mr Desert is

in.'

Michael resigned his hat, and entered.

Wilfrid, lying on the divan in a dark dressing-gown, sat up.

'Hallo!'

'How are you, Wilfrid?'

'Stack! Drinks!'

'Congratulations, old man!'

'I met her first at your wedding, you know.'

'Ten years ago, nearly. You've plucked the flower of our family, Wilfrid; we're all in love with Dinny.'

'I won't talk about her, but I

think the more.'

'Any verse, old man?'

'Yes, a booklet going in tomorrow, same publisher. Remember the first?'

'Don't I? My only scoop.'

'This is better. There's one that is a poem.'

Stack re-entered with a tray.

'Help yourself, Michael.'

Michael poured out a little brandy and diluted it but slightly. Then with a cigarette he sat down.

'When's it to be?'

'Registrar's, as soon as possible.'

‘Oh! And then?’

‘Dinny wants to show me England. While there’s any sun I suppose we shall hang around.’

‘Going back to Syria?’

Desert wriggled on his cushions.

‘I don’t know: further afield, perhaps – she’ll say.’

Michael looked at his feet, beside which on the Persian rug some cigarette ash had fallen.

‘Old man,’ he said.

‘Well?’

‘D’you know a bird called Telfourd Yule?’

‘His name – writer of sorts.’

‘He’s just come back from Arabia and the Soudan; he brought a yarn with him.’ Without raising his eyes, he was conscious that Wilfrid was sitting upright.

‘It concerns you; and it’s queer and damaging. He thinks you ought to know.’

‘Well?’

Michael uttered an involuntary sigh.

‘Shortly: The Bedouin are saying that your conversion to Islam was at the pistol’s point. He was told the yarn in Arabia, and again in the Libyan desert, with the name of

the Sheikh, and the place in Darfur, and the Englishman's name.' And, still without looking up, he knew that Wilfrid's eyes were fixed on him, and that there was sweat on his forehead.

'Well?'

'He wanted you to know, so he told my dad at the Club this afternoon, and Bart told me. I said I'd see you about it. Forgive me.'

Then, in the silence, Michael raised his eyes. What a strange, beautiful, tortured, compelling face!

'Nothing to forgive; it's true.'

‘My dear old man!’ The words burst from Michael, but no others would follow.

Desert got up, went to a drawer and took out a manuscript.

‘Here, read this!’

During the twenty minutes Michael took to read the poem, there was not a sound, except from the sheets being turned. Michael put them down at last.

‘Magnificent!’

‘Yes, but *you’d* never have done it.’

‘I haven’t an idea what I should have done.’

‘Oh, yes, you have. You’d never have let sophistication and God knows what stifle your first instinct, as I did. My first instinct was to say: “Shoot and be damned,” and I wish to God I’d kept to it, then I shouldn’t be here. The queer thing is, if he’d threatened torture I’d have stood out. Yet I’d much rather be killed than tortured.’

‘Torture’s caddish.’

‘Fanatics aren’t cads. I’d have sent him to hell, but he really hated shooting me; he begged me – stood there with the pistol and begged me not to make him. His brother’s

a friend of mine. Fanaticism's a rum thing! He stood there ready to loose off, begging me. Damned human. I can see his eyes. He was under a vow. I never saw a man so relieved.'

'There's nothing of that in the poem,' said Michael.

'Being sorry for your executioner is hardly an excuse. I'm not proud of it, especially when it saved my life. Besides, I don't know if that *was* the reason. Religion, if you haven't got it, is a fake. To walk out into everlasting dark for the sake of a fake! If I must die I want a reality to die for.'

‘You don’t think,’ said Michael miserably, ‘that you’d be justified in denying the thing?’

‘I’ll deny nothing. If it’s come out, I’ll stand by it.’

‘Does Dinny know?’

‘Yes. She’s read the poem. I didn’t mean to tell her, but I did. She behaved as people don’t. Marvellous!’

‘Yes. I’m not sure that you oughtn’t to deny it for her sake.’

‘No, but I ought to give her up.’

‘She would have something to say about that. If Dinny’s in love, it’s over head and ears, Wilfrid.’

‘Same here!’

Overcome by the bleakness of the situation, Michael got up and helped himself to more brandy.

‘Exactly!’ said Desert, following him with his eyes. ‘Imagine if the Press gets hold of it!’ and he laughed.

‘I gather,’ said Michael, with a spurt of cheerfulness, ‘that it was only in the desert both times that Yule heard the story.’

‘What’s in the desert today is in the bazaars tomorrow. It’s no use, I shall have to face the music.

Michael put a hand on his

shoulder. ‘Count on me, anyway. I suppose the bold way is the only way. But I feel all you’re up against.’

‘Yellow. Labelled: “Yellow” – might give any show away. And they’ll be right.’

‘Rot!’ said Michael.

Wilfrid went on without heeding: ‘And yet my whole soul revolts against dying for a gesture that I don’t believe in. Legends and superstitions – I hate the lot. I’d sooner die to give them a death-blow than to keep them alive. If a man tried to force me to torture an animal, to hang another man, to

violate a woman, of course I'd die rather than do it. But why the hell should I die to gratify those whom I despise for believing outworn creeds that have been responsible for more misery in the world than any other mortal thing? Why? Eh?'

Michael had recoiled before the passion in this outburst, and was standing miserable and glum.

'Symbol,' he muttered.

'Symbol! For conduct that's worth standing for, honesty, humanity, courage, I hope I'd stand; I went through with the war, anyway; but why should I stand for what I look on as dead wood?'

‘It simply mustn’t come out,’ said Michael violently. ‘I loathe the idea of a lot of swabs looking down their noses at you.’

Wilfrid shrugged. ‘I look down my nose at myself, I assure you. Never stifle your instinct, Michael.’

‘But what are you going to *do*?’

‘What does it matter what I do? Things will be as they will be. Nobody will understand, or side with me if they did understand. Why should they? I don’t even side with myself.’

‘I think lots of people might nowadays.’

‘The sort I wouldn’t be seen dead with. No, I’m outcast.’

‘And Dinny?’

‘I’ll settle that with her.’

Michael took up his hat.

‘If there’s anything I can do, count on me. Good night, old man!’

‘Good night, and thanks!’

Michael was out of the street before any thinking power returned to him. Wilfrid had been caught, as it were, in a snare! One could see how his rebellious contempt for convention and its types had blinded him to the normal view. But one could not

dissociate this or that from the general image of an Englishman: betrayal of one feature would be looked on as betrayal of the whole. As for that queer touch of compassion for his would-be executioner, who would see that who didn't know Wilfrid? The affair was bitter and tragic. The 'yellow' label would be stuck on indiscriminately for all eyes to see.

'Of course,' thought Michael, 'he'll have his supporters – egomaniacs, and Bolshies, and that'll make him feel worse than ever.' Nothing was more galling than to be backed up by people

you didn't understand, and who didn't understand you. And how was support like that going to help Dinny, more detached from it even than Wilfrid? The whole thing was —!

And with that blunt reflection he crossed Bond Street and went down Hay Hill into Berkeley Square. If he did not see his father before he went home, he would not sleep.

At Mount Street his mother and father were receiving a special pale negus, warranted to cause slumber, from the hands of Blore.

‘Catherine?’ said Lady Mont:
‘Measles?’

‘No, Mother; I want to have a talk with Dad.’

‘About that young man – changin’ his religion. He always gave me a pain – defyin’ the lightnin’, and that.’

Michael stared. ‘It is about Wilfrid.’

‘Em,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘this is dead private. Well, Michael?’

‘The story’s true; he doesn’t and won’t deny it. Dinny knows.’

‘What story?’ asked Lady Mont.

‘He recanted to some fanatical Arabs on pain of death.’

‘What a bore!’

Michael thought swiftly: 'My God! If only everyone would take that view!'

'D'you mean, then,' said Sir Lawrence, gravely, 'that I've got to tell Yule there's no defence?'

Michael nodded.

'But if so, dear boy, it won't stop there.'

'No, but he's reckless.'

'The lightnin', said Lady Mont, suddenly.

'Exactly, Mother. He's written a poem on it, and a jolly good one it is. He's sending it in a new volume to his publisher tomorrow. But,

Dad, at any rate, get Yule and Jack Muskham to keep their mouths shut. After all, what business is it of theirs?’

Sir Lawrence shrugged the thin shoulders which at seventy-two were only beginning to suggest age.

‘There are two questions, Michael, and so far as I can see they’re quite separate. The first is how to muzzle club gossip. The second concerns Dinny and her people. You say Dinny knows; but her people don’t, except ourselves; and as she didn’t tell us, she won’t tell them. Now that’s not fair. And

it's not wise,' he went on without waiting for an answer, 'because this thing's dead certain to come out later, and they'd never forgive Desert for marrying her without letting them know. I wouldn't myself, it's too serious.'

'Agitatin',' murmured Lady Mont. 'Ask Adrian.'

'Better Hilary,' said Sir Lawrence.

Michael broke in: 'That second question, Dad, seems to me entirely up to Dinny. She must be told that the story's in the wind, then either she or Wilfrid will let her people know.'

‘If only she’d let him drop her! Surely he can’t want to go on with it, with this story going about?’

‘I don’t see Dinny droppin’ him,’ murmured Lady Mont. ‘She’s been too long pickin’ him up. Love’s young dream.’

‘Wilfrid said he knew he ought to give her up. Oh! damn!’

‘Come back to question one, then, Michael. I can try, but I’m very doubtful, especially if this poem is coming out. What is it, a justification?’

‘Or explanation.’

‘Bitter and rebellious, like his

early stuff?’

Michael nodded.

‘Well, they might keep quiet out of charity, but they’ll never stomach that sort of attitude, if I know Jack Muskham. He hates the bravado of modern scepticism like poison.’

‘We can’t tell what’s going to happen in any direction, but it seems to me we ought all to play hard for delay.’

‘Hope the Hermit,’ murmured Lady Mont. ‘Good night, dear boy; I’m goin’ up. Mind the dog – he’s not been out.’

‘Well, I’ll do what I can,’ said Sir Lawrence.

Michael received his mother’s kiss, wrung his father’s hand, and went.

He walked home, uneasy and sore at heart, for this concerned two people of whom he was very fond, and he could see no issue that was not full of suffering to both. And continually there came back to him the thought: ‘What should I have done in Wilfrid’s place?’ And he concluded, as he walked, that no man could tell what he would do if he were in the shoes of another man. And so, in the spring wind of

a night not devoid of beauty, he came to South Square and let himself in.

Chapter Eleven



WILFRID sat in his rooms with two letters before him, one that he had just written to Dinny, and one that he had just received from her. He stared at the snapshots and tried to think clearly, and since he had been trying to think clearly ever since Michael's visit of the previous evening, he was the less successful. Why had he chosen this particular moment to fall really in love, to feel that he had found the one person with whom he could bear to think of permanent

companionship? He had never intended to marry, he had never supposed he would feel towards women anything but a transient urge that soon died in satisfaction. Even at the height of this infatuation with Fleur he had never supposed it would last. On the whole he was as profoundly sceptical about women as about religion, patriotism, or the qualities popularly attributed to the Englishman. He had thought himself armoured in scepticism, but in his armour was a joint so weak that he had received a fatal thrust. With bitter amusement he

perceived that the profound loneliness left by that experience in Darfur had started in him an involuntary craving for spiritual companionship of which Dinny had, as involuntarily, availed herself. The thing that should have kept them apart had brought them together.

After Michael had left he had spent half the night going over and over it, and always coming back to the crude thought that, when all was said and done, he would be set down as a coward. And yet, but for Dinny, would even that matter? What did he care for society and its

opinion? What did he care for England and the English? Even if they had prestige, was it deserved, any more than the prestige of any other country? The war had shown all countries and their inhabitants to be pretty much alike, capable of the same heroisms, basenesses, endurance, and absurdities. The war had shown mob feeling in every country to be equally narrow, void of discrimination, and generally contemptible. He was a wanderer by nature, and even if England and the nearer East were closed to him, the world was wide, the sun shone in many places, the

stars wheeled over one, books could be read, women had beauty, flowers scent, tobacco its flavour, music its moving power, coffee its fragrance, horses and dogs and birds were the same seductive creatures, and thought and feeling brought an urge to rhythmic expression, almost wherever one went. Save for Dinny he could strike his tent and move out, and let tongues wag behind him! And now he couldn't! Or could he? Was he not, indeed, in honour bound to? How could he saddle her with a mate at whom fingers were pointed? If she had inspired him

with flaming desire, it would have been much simpler; they could have had their fling and parted, and no one the worse. But he had a very different feeling for her. She was like a well of sweet water met with in a desert; a flower with a scent coming up among the dry vegetation of the wilderness. She gave him the reverent longing that some tunes and pictures inspire; roused the same ache of pleasure as the scent of new-mown grass. She was a cool refreshment to a spirit sun-dried, wind-dried and dark. Was he to give her up because of this damned business?

In the morning when he woke the same confused struggle of feeling had gone on. He had spent the afternoon writing her a letter, and had barely finished it when her first love-letter came. And he sat now with the two before him.

‘I can’t send this,’ he thought suddenly; ‘it goes over and over and gets nowhere. Rotten!’ He tore it up, and read her letter a third time.

‘Impossible!’ he thought; ‘to go down there! God and the King and the rest of it. Impossible!’ And seizing a piece of paper, he wrote:

Cork Street: Saturda

Bless you for your letter. Come up here to lunch Monday. We must talk. – WILFRID.

Having sent Stack out with this missive, he felt a little more at peace....

Dinny did not receive this note till Monday morning, and was the more relieved to get it. The last two days had been spent by her in avoiding any mention of Wilfrid, listening to Hubert and Jean's account of their life in the Soudan, walking and inspecting the state of trees with her father, copying his income tax return, and going to church with him and her mother.

The tacit silence about her engagement was very characteristic of a family whose members were mutually devoted and accustomed to spare each other's feelings; it was all the more ominous.

After reading Wilfrid's note she said to herself blankly: 'For a love-letter it's not a love-letter.' And she said to her mother:

'Wilfrid's shy of coming, dear. I must go up and talk to him. If I can, I will bring him down with me. If I can't, I'll try and arrange for you to see him at Mount Street. He's lived alone so much that

seeing people is a real strain.'

Lady Cherrell's answer was a sigh, but it meant more to Dinny than words; she took her mother's hand and said: 'Cheer up, Mother dear. It's something that I'm happy, isn't it?'

'That would be everything, Dinny.'

Dinny was too conscious of implications in the 'would be' to answer.

She walked to the station, reached London at noon, and set out for Cork Street across the Park. The day was fine, the sun shone;

spring was established to the full, with lilac and with tulips, young green of plane-tree leaves, songs of birds, and the freshness of the grass. But though she looked in tune, she suffered from presentiment. Why should she feel so, going to a private lunch with her lover, she could not have explained. There could be but few people in all the great town at such an hour of day with prospect before them so closely joyful; but Dinny was not deceived: all was not well – she knew it. Being before her time, she stopped at Mount Street to titivate. According

to Blore, Sir Lawrence was out, but his lady in. Dinny left the message that she might be in to tea.

Passing the pleasant smell at the corner of Burlington Street, she had that peculiar feeling, experienced by all at times, of having once been someone else which accounts for so much belief in the transmigration of souls.

‘It only means,’ she thought, ‘something I’ve forgotten. Oh! here’s the turning!’ And her heart began to beat.

She was nearly breathless when Stack opened the door to her. ‘Lunch will be ready in five

minutes, miss.' His eyes, dark, prominent above his jutting nose, and yet reflective, and the curly benevolence of his lips always gave her the impression that he was confessing her before she had anything to confess. He opened the inner door, shut it behind her, and she was in Wilfrid's arms. That was a complete refutation of presentiment; the longest and most satisfactory moment of the sort she had yet experienced. So long that she was afraid he would not let her go in time. At last she said gently:

‘Lunch has already been in a minute, darling, according to

Stack.'

'Stack has tact.'

Not until after lunch, when they were alone once more with coffee, did discomfiture come with the suddenness of a thunder clap in a clear sky.

'That business has come out, Dinny.'

What! That? *That!* She mastered the rush of her dismay.

'How?'

'A man called Telfourd Yule has brought the story back with him. They talk of it among the tribes. It'll be in the bazaars by now, in

the London clubs tomorrow. I shall be in Coventry in a few weeks' time. Nothing can stop a thing like that.'

Without a word Dinny got up, pressed his head against her shoulder, then sat down beside him on the divan.

'I'm afraid you don't understand,' he said gently.

'That this makes any difference? No, I don't. The only difference could have been when you told me yourself. That made none. How can this, then?'

'How can I marry you?'

‘That sort of thing is only in books, Wilfrid. We won’t have linked misery long drawn out.’

‘False heroics are not in my line either; but I don’t think you see yet.’

‘I do. Now you can stand up straight again, and those who can’t understand – well, they don’t matter.’

‘Then don’t your people matter?’

‘Yes, they matter.’

‘But you don’t suppose for a minute that they’ll understand?’

‘I shall make them.’

‘My poor dear!’

It struck her, ominously, how quiet and gentle he was being. He went on:

‘I don’t know your people, but if they’re the sort you’ve described – charm ye never so wisely, they won’t rise. They can’t, it’s against their root convictions.’

‘They’re fond of me.’

‘That will make it all the more impossible for them to see you tied to me.’

Dinny drew away a little and sat with her chin on her hands. Then, without looking at him, she said:

‘Do you want to get rid of me,

Wilfrid?’

‘Dinny!’

‘Yes, but do you?’

He drew her into his arms.

Presently she said:

‘I see. Then if you don’t, you must leave this to me. And anyway it’s no good going to meet trouble. It isn’t known yet in London. We’ll wait until it is. I know you won’t marry me till then, so I *must* wait. After that it will be a clear issue, but you mustn’t be heroic then, Wilfrid, because it’ll hurt me too much – too much.’ She clutched him suddenly; and he stayed silent.

With her cheek to his she said quietly:

‘Do you want me to be everything to you before you marry me? If so, I can.’

‘Dinny!’

‘Very forward, isn’t it?’

‘No! But we’ll wait. You make me feel too reverent.’

She sighed. ‘Perhaps it’s best.’

Presently she said: ‘Will you leave it to me to tell my people everything or not?’

‘I will leave anything to you.’

‘And if I want you to meet any one of them, will you?’

Wilfrid nodded.

‘I won’t ask you to come to Condaford – yet. That’s all settled, then. Now tell me exactly how you heard about this.’

When he had finished, she said reflectively:

‘Michael and Uncle Lawrence. That will make it easier. Now, darling, I’m going. It’ll be good for Stack, and I want to think. I can only think when I’m insulated from you.’

‘Angel!’

She took his head between her hands. ‘Don’t be tragic, and I won’t

either. Could we go joy-riding on Thursday? Good! Foch at noon! I'm far from an angel, I'm your love.'

She went dizzily down the stairs, now that she was alone, terribly conscious of the ordeal before them. She turned suddenly towards Oxford Street. 'I'll go and see Uncle Adrian,' she thought.

Adrian's thoughts at his Museum had been troubled of late by the claim of the Gobi desert to be the cradle of Homo Sapiens. The idea had been patented and put on the market, and it bid fair to have its day. He was reflecting on the changeability of anthropological

fashions, when Dinny was announced.

‘Ah! Dinny! I’ve been in the Gobi desert all the afternoon, and was just thinking of a nice cup of “hot” tea. What do you say?’

‘China tea always gives me an ick feeling, Uncle.’

‘We don’t go in for so-called luxuries. My duenna here makes good old Dover tea with leaves in it, and we have the homely bun.’

‘Perfect! I came to tell you that I’ve given my young heart.’

Adrian stared.

‘It’s really rather a terrible tale,

so can I take off my hat?’

‘My dear,’ said Adrian, ‘take off anything. Have tea first. Here it is.’

While she was having tea Adrian regarded her with a rueful smile, caught, as it were, between his moustache and goatee. Since the tragic Ferse affair she had been more than ever his idea of a niece; and he perceived that she was really troubled.

Lying back in the only easy chair, with her knees crossed and the tips of her fingers pressed together, she looked, he thought, ethereal, as if she might suddenly float, and his eyes rested with

comfort on the cap of her chestnut hair. But his face grew perceptibly longer while she was telling him her tale, leaving nothing out. She stopped at last and added:

‘Uncle, please don’t look like that!’

‘Was I?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, Dinny, is it surprising?’

‘I want your “reaction”, as they call it, to what he did.’ And she looked straight into his eyes.

‘My personal reaction? Without knowing him – judgement reserved.’

‘If you wouldn’t mind, you *shall* know him.’

Adrian nodded, and she said:

‘Tell me the worst. What will the others who don’t know him think and do?’

‘What was your own reaction, Dinny?’

‘I knew him.’

‘Only a week.’

‘And ten years.’

‘Oh! don’t tell me that a glimpse and three words at a wedding – ’

‘The grain of mustard-seed, dear. Besides, I’d read the poem, and knew from that all his feelings. He

isn't a believer; it must have seemed to him like some monstrous practical joke.'

'Yes, yes, I've read his verse – scepticism and love of beauty. His type blooms after long national efforts, when the individual's been at a discount, and the State has exacted everything. Ego crops out and wants to kick the State and all its shibboleths. I understand all that. But – You've never been out of England, Dinny.'

'Only Italy, Paris, and the Pyrenees.'

'They don't count. You've never been where England has to have a

certain prestige. For Englishmen in such parts of the world it's all for one and one for all.'

'I don't think he realized that at the time, Uncle.'

Adrian looked at her, and shook his head.

'I still don't,' said Dinny. 'And thank God he didn't, or I should never have known him. Ought one to sacrifice oneself for false values?'

'That's not the point, my dear. In the East, where religion still means everything, you can't exaggerate the importance

attached to a change of faith. Nothing could so damage the Oriental's idea of the Englishman as a recantation at the pistol's point. The question before him was: Do I care enough for what is thought of my country and my people to die sooner than lower that conception? Forgive me, Dinny, but that was, brutally, the issue.'

She was silent for a minute and then said:

'I'm perfectly sure Wilfrid would have died sooner than do lots of things that would have lowered that conception; but he simply

couldn't admit that the Eastern conception of an Englishman ought to rest on whether he's a Christian or not.'

'That's special pleading; he not only renounced Christianity, he accepted Islam – one set of superstitions for another.'

'But, can't you see, Uncle, the whole thing was a monstrous jest to him?'

'No, my dear, I don't think I can.'

Dinny leaned back, and he thought how exhausted she looked.

'Well, if *you* can't, no one else

will. I mean no one of our sort, and that's what I wanted to know.'

A bad ache started in Adrian's midriff. 'Dinny, there's a fortnight of this behind you, and the rest of your life before you; you told me he'd give you up – for which I respect him. Now, doesn't it need a wrench, if not for your sake – for his?'

Dinny smiled.

'Uncle, you're so renowned for dropping your best pals when they're in a mess. And you know so little about love! You only waited eighteen years. Aren't you rather funny?'

‘Admitted,’ said Adrian. ‘I suppose the word “Uncle” came over me. If I knew that Desert was likely to be as faithful as you, I should say: “Go to it and be damned in your own ways, bless you!” ’

‘Then you simply *must* see him.’

‘Yes; but I’ve seen people seem so unalterably in love that they were divorced within the year. I knew a man so completely satisfied by his honeymoon that he took a mistress two months later.’

‘We,’ murmured Dinny, ‘are not of that devouring breed. Seeing so many people on the screen

examining each other's teeth has spiritualized me, I know.'

'Who has heard of this development?'

'Michael and Uncle Lawrence, possibly Aunt Em. I don't know whether to tell them at Condaford.'

'Let me talk to Hilary. He'll have another point of view; and it won't be orthodox.'

'Oh! Yes, I don't mind Uncle Hilary.' And she rose. 'May I bring Wilfrid to see you, then?'

Adrian nodded, and, when she had gone, stood again in front of a map of Mongolia, where the Gobi

desert seemed to bloom like the
rose in comparison with the
wilderness across which his
favourite niece was moving.

Chapter Twelve



DINNY stayed on at Mount Street for dinner to see Sir Lawrence.

She was in his study when he came in, and said at once:

‘Uncle Lawrence, Aunt Em knows what you and Michael know, doesn’t she?’

‘She does, Dinny. Why?’

‘She’s been so discreet. I’ve told Uncle Adrian; he seems to think Wilfrid has lowered English prestige in the East. Just what is this English prestige? I thought we

were looked on as a race of successful hypocrites. And in India as arrogant bullies.'

Sir Lawrence wriggled.

'You're confusing national with individual reputation. The things are totally distinct. The individual Englishman in the East is looked up to as a man who isn't to be rattled, who keeps his word, and sticks by his own breed.'

Dinny flushed. The implication was not lost on her.

'In the East,' Sir Lawrence went on, the Englishman, or rather the Briton, because as often as not he's

a Scot or a Welshman or a North Irishman, is generally isolated: traveller, archaeologist, soldier, official, civilian, planter, doctor, engineer, or missionary, he's almost always head man of a small separate show; he maintains himself against odds on the strength of the Englishman's reputation. If a single Englishman is found wanting, down goes the stock of all those other isolated Englishmen. People know that and recognize its importance. That's what you're up against, and it's no use under-estimating. You can't expect Orientals, to whom religion

means something, to understand that to some of us it means nothing. An Englishman to them is a believing Christian, and if he recants, he's understood as recanting his most precious belief.'

Dinny said drily: 'In fact, then, Wilfrid has no case in the eyes of our world.'

'In the eyes of the world that runs the Empire, I'm afraid – none, Dinny. Could it be otherwise? Unless there were complete mutual confidence between these isolated beings that none of them will submit to dictation, take a dare, or let the others down, the thing

wouldn't work at all. Now would it?'

'I never thought about it.'

'Well, you can take it from me. Michael has explained to me how Desert's mind worked; and from the point of view of a disbeliever like myself, there's a lot to be said. I should intensely dislike being wiped out over such an issue. But it wasn't the real issue; and if you say: "He didn't see that", then I'm afraid my answer is he didn't because he has too much spiritual pride. And that won't help him as a defence, because spiritual pride is anathema to the Services, and

indeed to the world generally. It's the quality, you remember, that got Lucifer into trouble.'

Dinny, who had listened with her eyes fixed on her uncle's twisting features, said:

'It's extraordinary the things one can do without.'

Sir Lawrence screwed in a puzzled eyeglass.

'Have you caught the jumping habit from your aunt?'

'If one can't have the world's approval, one can do without it.'

' "The world well lost for love" sounds gallant, Dinny, but it's been

tried out and found wanting. Sacrifice on one side is the worst foundation for partnership, because the other side comes to resent it.'

'I don't expect more happiness than most people get.'

'That's not as much as I want for you, Dinny.'

'Dinner!' said Lady Mont, in the doorway: 'Have you a vacuum, Dinny? They use those cleaners,' she went on, as they went towards the dining-room, 'for horses now.'

'Why not for human beings,' murmured Dinny, 'and clear out

their fears and superstitions? Uncle wouldn't approve, though.'

'You've been talkin', then. Blore, go away!'

When he had gone, she added: 'I'm thinkin' of your father, Dinny.'

'So am I.'

'I used to get over him. But daughters! Still, he must.'

'Em!' said Sir Lawrence, warningly, as Blore came back.

'Well,' said Lady Mont, 'beliefs and that – too fatiguin'. I never liked christenin's – so unfeelin' to the baby; and puttin' it upon other people; only they don't bother,

except for cups and Bibles. Why do they put fern-leaves on cups? Or is that archery? Uncle Cuffs won a cup at archery when he was a curate. They used. It's all very agitating'.

‘Aunt Em,’ said Dinny, ‘all I hope and want is that no one will agitate themselves over me and my small affair. If people won't agitate we can be happy.’

‘So wise! Lawrence, tell Michael that. Blore! Give Miss Dinny some sherry.’

Dinny, putting her lips to the sherry, looked across at her aunt's face. It was comforting – slightly

raised in the eyebrows, drooped in the lids, curved in the nose, and as if powdered in the hair above the comely neck, shoulders and bust.

In the taxi for Paddington she had such a vivid vision of Wilfrid, alone, with this hanging over him, that she very nearly leaned out to say: 'Cork Street.' The cab turned a corner. Praed Street? Yes, it would be! All the worry in the world came from the conflict of love against love. If only her people didn't love her, and she them, how simple things would be!

A porter was saying: 'Any luggage, miss?'

‘None, thank you.’ As a little girl she had always meant to marry a porter! That was before her music master came from Oxford. He had gone off to the war when she was ten. She bought a magazine and took her seat in the train. But she was very tired and lay back in her corner of the third-class carriage; railway travelling was a severe tax on her always slender purse. With head tilted, she went to sleep.

When she alighted from the train there was a nearly full moon, and the night was blowy and sweet-smelling. She would have to walk. It was light enough to take the

short cut, and she climbed the first stile into the field path. She thought of the night, nearly two years ago, when she came back by this train with the news of Hubert's release and found her father sitting up, grey and worn, in his study, and how years had seemed to drop off him when she told him the good news. And now she had news that must grieve him. It was her father she really dreaded facing. Her mother, yes! Mother, though gentle, was stubborn; but women had not the same hard-and-fast convictions about what was not 'done' as men. Hubert? In old days

she would have minded him most. Curious how lost he was to her! Hubert would be dreadfully upset. He was rigid in his views of what was 'the game'. Well! she could bear his disapproval. But Father! It seemed so unfair to him, after his forty years of hard service!

A brown owl floated from the hedge over to some stacks. These moony nights were owl-nights, and there would be the screams of captured victims, so dreadful in the night-time. Yet who could help liking owls, their blunt soft floating flight, their measured stirring calls? The next stile led her on to their

own land. There was a linhay in this field where her father's old charger sheltered at night. Was it Plutarch or Pliny who had said: 'For my part I would not sell even an old ox who had laboured for me'? Nice man! Now that the sound of the train had died away it was very quiet: only the brushing of a little wind on young leaves, and the stamp of old Kismet's foot in the linhay. She crossed a second field and came to the narrow tree-trunk bridge. The night's sweetness was like the feeling always within her now. She crossed the plank and slipped in among the apple-trees.

They seemed to live brightly between her and the moving, moonlit, wind-brushed sky. They seemed to breathe, almost to be singing in praise at the unfolding of their blossoms. They were lit in a thousand shapes of whitened branches, and all beautiful, as if someone had made each with a rapt and moonstruck pleasure and brightened it with starshine. And this had been done in here each spring for a hundred years and more. The whole world seemed miraculous on a night like this, but always the yearly miracle of the apple blooming was to Dinny most

moving of all. The many miracles
of England thronged her memory,
while she stood among the old
trunks inhaling the lichen-bark-
dusted air. Upland grass with larks
singing; the stilly drip in coverts
when sun came after rain; gorse on
wind-blown commons; horses
turning and turning at the end of
the long mole-coloured furrows;
river waters now bright, now
green-tinged beneath the willows;
thatch and its wood smoke;
swathed hay meadows, tawnied
cornfields; the bluish distances
beyond; and the ever-changing sky
– all these were as jewels in her

mind, but the chief was this white magic of the spring. She became conscious that the long grass was drenched and her shoes and stockings wet through; there was light enough to see in that grass the stars of jonquil, grape hyacinth and the pale cast-out tulips; there would be polyanthus, too, bluebells and cowslips – a few. She slipped on upward, cleared the trees, and stood a moment to look back at the whiteness of the whole. ‘It might have dropped from the moon,’ she thought: ‘My best stockings, too!’

Across the low-walled fruit garden and lawn she came to the

terrace. Past eleven! Only her father's study window lighted on the ground floor! How like that other night!

‘Shan't tell him’ she thought, and tapped on it.

He let her in.

‘Hallo, Dinny, you didn't stop the night at Mount Street, then?’

‘No, Dad, there's a limit to my powers of borrowing nightgowns.’

‘Sit down and have some tea. I was just going to make some.’

‘Darling, I came through the orchard, and I'm wet to the knees.’

‘Take off your stockings; here's

an old pair of slippers.'

Dinny stripped off the stockings and sat contemplating her legs in the lamplight, while the General lit the etna. He liked to do things for himself. She watched him bending over the tea-things, and thought how trim he still was, and how quick and precise his movements. His browned hands, with little dark hairs on them, had long, clever fingers. He stood up, motionless, watching the flame.

'Want's a new wick,' he said. 'There's going to be bad trouble in India, I'm afraid.'

'India seems to be getting almost

more trouble than it's worth to us.'

The General turned his face with its high but small cheek-bones; his eyes rested on her, and his thin lips beneath the close little grey moustache smiled.

'That often happens with trusts, Dinny. You've got very nice legs.'

'So I ought, dear, considering you and mother.'

'Mine are all right for a boot – stringy. Did you ask Mr Desert down?'

'No, not today.'

The General put his hands into his side-pockets. He had taken off

his dinner jacket and was wearing an old snuff-coloured shooting coat; Dinny noticed that the cuffs were slightly frayed, and one leather button missing. His dark, high-shaped eyebrows contracted till there were three ridges right in the centre of his forehead; he said gently:

‘I don’t understand that change of religion, you know, Dinny. Milk or lemon?’

‘Lemon, please.’

She was thinking: ‘Now is the moment, after all. Courage!’

‘Two lumps?’

‘Three, with lemon, Dad.’

The General took up the tongs. He dropped three lumps into the cup, then a slice of lemon, put back the tongs, and bent down to the kettle.

‘Boiling,’ he said, and filled up the cup; he put a covered spoonful of tea into it, withdrew the spoon and handed the cup to his daughter.

Dinny sat stirring the thin golden liquid. She took a sip, rested the cup on her lap, and turned her face up to him.

‘I can explain it, Dad,’ she said,

and thought: 'It will only make him understand even less.'

The General filled his own cup, and sat down. Dinny clutched her spoon.

'You see, when Wilfrid was far out in Darfur he ran into a nest of fanatical Arabs, remaining from the Mahdi times. The chief of them had him brought into his tent and offered him his life if he would embrace Islam.'

She saw her father make a little convulsive movement, so that some of the tea was spilled into his saucer. He raised the cup and poured it back. Dinny went on:

‘Wilfrid is like most of us nowadays about belief, only a great deal more so. It isn’t only that he doesn’t believe in Christianity, he actually hates any set forms of religion, he thinks they divide mankind and do more harm and bring more suffering than anything else. And then, you know – or you would if you’d read his poetry, Dad – the war left him very bitter about the way lives are thrown away, simply spilled out like water at the orders of people who don’t know what they’re about.’

Again the General made that

slight convulsive movement.

‘Yes, Dad, but I’ve heard Hubert talk in much the same way about that. Anyway, it has left Wilfrid with a horror of wasting life, and the deepest distrust of all shibboleths and beliefs. He only had about five minutes to decide in. It wasn’t cowardice, it was just bitter scorn that men can waste each other’s lives for beliefs that to him seem equally futile. And he just shrugged and accepted. Having accepted, he had to keep his word and go through the forms. Of course, you don’t know him, so I suppose it’s useless.’ She sighed and

drank thirstily.

The General had put his own cup down; he rose, filled a pipe, lit it, and stood by the hearth. His face was lined and dark and grave. At last he said:

‘I’m out of my depth. Is the religion of one’s fathers for hundreds of years to go for nothing, then? Is all that has made us the proudest people in the world to be chucked away at the bidding of an Arab? Have men like the Lawrences, John Nicholson, Chamberlayne, Sandeman, a thousand others, who spent and gave their lives to build up an idea

of the English as brave men and true, to be knocked into a cocked hat by every Englishman who's threatened with a pistol?'

Dinny's cup clattered on its saucer.

'Yes, but if not by every Englishman, Dinny, why by one? Why by this one?'

Quivering all over, Dinny did not answer. Neither Adrian nor Sir Lawrence had made her feel like this – for the first time she had been reached and moved by the other side. Some age-long string had been pulled within her, or she was infected by the emotion of one

whom she had always admired and loved, and whom she had hardly ever seen stirred to eloquence. She could not speak.

‘I don’t know if I’m a religious man,’ the General went on; ‘the faith of my fathers is enough for me’ – and he made a gesture, as if adding, ‘I leave myself aside’ – ‘but, Dinny, I could not take dictation of that sort; I could not, and I cannot understand how he could have.’

Dinny said, quietly: ‘I won’t try to make you, Dad; let’s take it that you can’t. Most people have done something in their lives that other

people could not understand if it were known. The difference here is that this thing of Wilfrid's *is* known.'

'You mean the threat is known – the reason for the –?'

Dinny nodded.

'How?'

'A Mr Yule brought the story back from Egypt; Uncle Lawrence thinks it can't be scotched. I want you to know the worst.' She gathered her wet stockings and shoes in her hand. 'Would you mind telling Mother and Hubert for me, Dad?' And she stood up.

The General drew deeply at his pipe, which emitted a gurgling sound.

‘Your pipe wants cleaning, dear. I’ll do it tomorrow.’

‘He’ll be a pariah,’ burst from the General, ‘he’ll be a pariah! Dinny, Dinny!’

No two words could have moved and disarmed her more. At one stroke they shifted his opposition from the personal to the altruistic.

She bit her lip and said:

‘Dad, I shall pipe my eye if I stay down here with you. And my feet are very cold. Good night,

darling!’

She turned and went quickly to the door, whence she saw him standing like a horse that has just been harnessed.

She went up to her room and sat on her bed, rubbing her cold feet one against the other. It was done! Now she had only to confront the feeling that would henceforth surround her like a wall over which she must climb to the fulfilment of her love. And what surprised her most, while she rubbed and rubbed, was knowing that her father’s words had drawn from her a secret endorsement which had not made

the slightest inroad on her feeling for Wilfrid. Was love, then, quite detached from judgement? Was the old image of a blind God true? Was it even true that defects in the loved one made him the dearer? That seemed borne out, at all events, by the dislike one had for the too good people in books; one's revolt against the heroic figure; one's impatience at the sight of virtue rewarded.

‘Is it that my family's standard,’ she thought, ‘is higher than mine, or simply that I want him close to me and don't care what he is or does so long as he comes?’ And she

had a strange and sudden feeling of knowing Wilfrid to the very core, with all his faults and shortcomings, and with a something that redeemed and made up for them and would keep her love alive, for in that, in that only, was an element mysterious to her. And she thought with a rueful smile: 'All evil I know by instinct; it's goodness, truth, beauty that keep me guessing!' And, almost too tired to undress, she got into bed.

Chapter Thirteen



‘THE BRIERY’, Jack Muskham’s residence at Royston, was old-fashioned and low, unpretentious without, comfortable within. It was lined with the effigies of race-horses and sporting prints. Only in one room, seldom used, was any sign of a previous existence. ‘Here’, as an American newspaper man put it, when he came to interview the ‘last of the dandies’ on the subject of bloodstock, ‘here were evidences of this aristocrat’s early life in our glorious South West.

Here were specimens of Navaho rugs and silver work; the plaited horsehair from El Paso; the great cowboy hats; and a set of Mexican harness dripping with silver. I questioned my host about this phase in his career. "Oh! that," he said, in his Britisher's drawl, "I had five years cow-punchin' when I was a youngster. You see, I had only one thought – horses, and my father thought that might be better for me than ridin' steeplechases here."

‘ “Can I put a date to that?” I asked this long, lean patrician with the watchful eyes and the languid

manner.

‘ “Why, yes, I came back in 1901, and except for the war I’ve been breedin’ bloodstock ever since.”

‘ “And in the war?” I queried.

‘ “Oh!” he answered; and I seemed to sense that I was intruding on him: “The usual thing. Yeomanry, cavalry, trenches, and that.”

‘ “Tell me, Mr Muskham,” I said: “Did you enjoy your life over with us out there?”

‘ “Enjoy?” he said: “Rather, don’t you know.” ’

The interview, produced in a Western paper, was baptized with the heading:

ENJOYED LIFE IN SOUTHLAND,
SAYS BRITISH DANDY.

The stud farm was fully a mile from Royston village, and at precisely a quarter to ten every day, when not away at races, bloodstock sales, or what not, Jack Muskham mounted his potter pony and ambled off to what the journalist had termed his 'equine nursery'. He was accustomed to point to this potter pony as an example of what horses become if

never spoken to in any but a gentle voice. She was an intelligent little three-year-old, three-quarter-bred, with a fine mouse-coloured coat over which someone seemed to have thrown a bottle of ink and then imperfectly removed the splashes. Beyond a slightly ragged crescent on her forehead, she had no white at all; her mane was hogged, and her long tail banged just below her hocks. Her eyes were quiet and bright, and – for a horse – her teeth were pearly. She moved with a daisy-clipping action, quickly recovering from any stumble. Ridden with a single rein

applied to her neck, her mouth was never touched. She was but fourteen-two, and Jack Muskham's legs, he using long stirrup leathers, came down very far. Riding her, as he said, was like sitting in a very easy chair. Besides himself, only one boy, chosen for the quietness of his voice, hands, nerves, and temper, was allowed to handle her.

Dismounting from this animal at the gate of the quadrangular yard which formed the stables, Jack Muskham would enter, smoking one of his special cigarettes in a short amber holder, and be joined on the central grass by his stud

groom. He would then put out his cigarette, and they would go round the boxes – where the foals would be with their mothers, and the yearlings – and have this and that one out to be led round the tan track which adjoined the boxes round the yard. After this inspection, they would pass under the archway opposite the entrance and go to the paddocks to see the mares, foals, and yearlings at grass. Discipline in his ‘equine nursery’ was perfect; to all seeming his employees were as quiet, as clean, as well-behaved as the horses they had charge of. From the

moment of his entrance to the moment when he emerged and remounted his potter pony, his talk would be of horses – sparing and to the point. And, daily, there were so many little things to see and say that he was rarely back at the house till one o'clock. He never discussed breeding on its scientific side with his stud groom, in spite of that functionary's considerable knowledge, because, to Jack Muskham, the subject was as much a matter of high politics as the foreign relations of his country are to a Secretary for Foreign Affairs. His mating decisions were made in

privacy, following the conclusions of close study welded to what he would have termed his 'flair' and others might have called his prejudices. Stars might come loose, Prime Ministers be knighted, Archdukes restored, towns swallowed up by earthquakes, together with all other forms of catastrophe, so long as Jack Muskham could blend St Simon on Speculum with the right dashes of Hampton and Bend Or; or, in accordance with a more original theory of his own, could get old Herod through Le Sancy at the extreme top and extreme bottom of

a pedigree which had Carbine and Barcaldine blood in between. He was, in fact, an idealist. To breed the perfect horse was his ideal, as little realizable, perhaps, as the ideals of other men, and far more absorbing – in his view. Not that he ever mentioned it – one did not use such a word! Nor did he bet, so that he was never deflected in his judgements by earthly desires. Tall, in his cigar-brown overcoat, specially lined with camel's hair, and his fawn-coloured Buckskin shoes and fawn-coloured face, he was probably the most familiar figure at Newmarket; nor was there

any member of the Jockey Club, with the exception of three, whose dicta were more respected. He was in fact an outstanding example of the eminence in his walk of life that can be attained by a man who serves a single end with complete and silent fidelity. In truth, behind this ideal of the 'perfect horse' lay the shape of his own soul. Jack Muskham was a formalist, one of the few survivors in a form-shattering age; and that his formalism had pitched on the horse for its conspicuous expression was due in part to the completeness with which the race-horse was tied

to the Stud Book, in part to the essential symmetry of that animal, and in part to the refuge the cult of it afforded from the whirr, untidiness, glare, blare, unending scepticism, and intrusive blatancy of what he termed 'this mongrel age'.

At 'The Briery' two men did all the work except scrubbing, for which a woman came in daily. But for that, there was no sign in all the house that women existed in this world. It was monastic as a club which has not succumbed to female service, and as much more comfortable as it was smaller. The

rooms were low, and two wide staircases reached the only upper floor, where the rooms were lower still. The books, apart from endless volumes relating to the race-horse, were either works of travel or of history, or detective novels; other fiction, with its scepticism, slangy diction, descriptions, sentiment, and sensation, was absent, if an exception be made of complete sets of Surtees, Whyte-Melville, and Thackeray.

As, in the pursuit by men of their ideals, there is almost always some saving element of irony, so in the case of Jack Muskham. He, whose

aim in life was the production of the perfect thoroughbred, was actually engaged in an attempt to cast the thoroughbred, as hitherto conceived, from muzzle to crupper, on to the scrap-heap, and substitute for it an animal with a cross of blood not as yet in the Stud Book!

Unconscious of this discrepancy, he was seated at lunch with Telfourd Yule, still discussing the transportation of Arab mares, when Sir Lawrence Mont was announced.

‘Lunch, Lawrence?’

‘I have lunched, Jack. But coffee would be the very thing; also some

brandy.'

'Then let's go into the other room.'

'You have here,' said Sir Lawrence, 'what I never thought to see again, the bachelor's box of my youth. Jack is very remarkable, Mr Yule. A man who can afford to date in these days is a genius. Do I see Surtees and Whyte-Melville entire? Mr Yule, what did Mr Waffles say in Mr Sponge's *Sporting Tour* when they were holding Caingey up by the heels to let the water run out of his pockets and boots?'

Yule's humorous mug expanded, but he was silent.

‘Exactly!’ said Sir Lawrence: ‘No one knows nowadays. He said: “Why, Caingey, old boy, you look like a boiled porpoise with parsley sauce.” Yes, and what did Mr Sawyer answer in *Market Harboro*, when the Honourable Crasher drove at the turnpike gate, saying: “It’s open, I think”?’

Yule’s face, as of indiarubber, expanded further, and he was still more silent.

‘Dear, dear! Jack?’

‘He said: “I think not”.’

‘Good!’ Sir Lawrence sank into a chair. ‘And was it? No. Well! Have

you arranged to steal that mare?
Fine! And when you get her over?’

‘I shall put her to the most suitable sire standing. I shall mate the result with the most suitable sire or mare I can find. Then I shall match the result of that mating privately against the best of our present thoroughbreds of the same age. If I’m proved right I ought to be able to get my Arab mares entered in the Stud Book. I’m trying to get three mares, by the way.’

‘How old are you, Jack?’

‘Rising fifty-three.’

‘I’m sorry. This is good coffee.’

After that the three sat silent, awaiting the real purpose of this visit.

‘I’ve come, Mr Yule,’ said Sir Lawrence, suddenly, ‘about that affair of young Desert’s.’

‘Not true, I hope?’

‘Unfortunately, yes. He makes no bones about it.’ And, turning his monocle on Jack Muskham’s face, he saw there exactly what he had expected.

‘A man,’ said Muskham slowly, ‘ought to keep his form better than that, even if he *is* a poet.’

‘We won’t go into the rights and wrongs, Jack. Let it go at what you say. All the same’ – and Sir Lawrence’s manner acquired strange gravity – ‘I want you two to keep mum. If it comes out, it can’t be helped, but I beg that you’ll neither of you say anything.’

‘I don’t like the look of the fellow,’ said Muskham shortly.

‘That applies to at least nine-tenths of the people we see about; the reason is not adequate.’

‘He’s one of those bitter, sceptical young moderns, with no real knowledge of the world and no reverence for anything.’

‘I know you hold a brief for the past, Jack, but don’t bring it into this.’

‘Why not?’

‘Well, I didn’t want to mention it, but he’s engaged to my favourite niece, Dinny Cherrell.’

‘That nice girl!’

‘Yes. We none of us like it, except my boy Michael, who still swears by Desert. But Dinny has got her teeth into it, and I don’t think anything will budge her.’

‘She can’t be allowed to marry a man who’s bound for Coventry the moment this comes out.’

‘The more he’s taboo, the closer she’ll stick to him.’

‘I like *that*,’ said Muskham.
‘What do you say, Yule?’

‘It’s no affair of mine. If Sir Lawrence wants me to say nothing, I shall say nothing.’

‘Of course it’s no affair of ours; all the same, if making it known would stop your niece, I’d do it. I call it a damned shame!’

‘It would have just the opposite effect, Jack. Mr Yule, you know a lot about the Press. Suppose this story leaks into the Press, as it well may; what then?’

Yule's eyes snapped.

‘First they’ll tell it vaguely of a certain English traveller; then they’ll find out whether it’s denied by Desert; then they’ll tell it of him, with a good many details wrong, but not so wrong as all that. If he admits it, he can’t object. The Press is pretty fair, and damned inaccurate.’

Sir Lawrence nodded. ‘If I knew anyone going in for journalism, I should say: “Be strictly accurate, and you will be unique.” I have not read any absolutely accurate personal paragraphs in the papers since the war.’

‘That’s their dodge,’ said Yule; ‘they get a double shot – first the inaccurate report and then the correction.’

‘I loathe the Press,’ said Muskham. ‘I had an American press-man here. There he sat, and short of kicking him out – I don’t know what on earth he made of me.’

‘Yes, you date, Jack. To you Marconi and Edison are the world’s two greatest malefactors. Is it agreed, then, about young Desert?’

‘Yes,’ said Yule; and Muskham nodded.

Sir Lawrence passed swiftly from the subject.

‘Nice country about here. Are you staying long, Mr Yule?’

‘I go back to Town this afternoon.’

‘Let me take you.’

‘Willingly.’

Half an hour later they had started.

‘My cousin Jack,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘ought to be left to the nation. In Washington there’s a museum with groups of the early Americans under glass smoking the communal pipe, holding

tomahawks over each other, and that sort of thing. One might have Jack – ’ Sir Lawrence paused: ‘That’s the trouble! How could one have Jack preserved? It’s so difficult to perpetuate the unemphatic. You can catch anything that jumps around; but when there’s no attitude except a watchful languor – and yet a man with a God of his own.’

‘Form, and Muskham is its prophet.’

‘He might, of course,’ murmured Sir Lawrence, ‘be preserved in the act of fighting a duel. That’s perhaps the only human activity

formal enough.'

'Form's doomed,' said Yule.

'H'm! Nothing so hard to kill as the sense of shape. For what is life but the sense of shape, Mr Yule? Reduce everything to dead similarity, and still shape will "out".'

'Yes,' said Yule, 'but "form" is shape brought to perfection-point and standardized; and perfection bores our bright young things.'

'That nice expression. But do they exist outside books, Mr Yule?'

'Don't they! And yawn-making – as they'd call it! I'd sooner attend

City dinners for the rest of my life than spend a weekend in the company of those bright young things.'

'I doubt,' said Sir Lawrence, 'whether I've come across them.'

'You should thank God. They never stop talking day or night, not even in their couplings.'

'You don't seem to like them.'

'Well,' said Yule, looking like a gargoyle, 'they can't stand me any more than I can stand them. A boring little crowd, but, luckily, of no importance.'

'I hope,' said Sir Lawrence, 'that

Jack is not making the mistake of thinking young Desert is one.'

'Muskham's never met a bright young thing. No; what gets his goat about Desert is the look of his face. It's a deuced strange face.'

'Lost angel,' said Sir Lawrence.
' "Spiritual pride, my buck!"
Something fine about it.'

Yule nodded. 'I don't mind it myself; and his verse is good. But all revolt's anathema to Muskham. He likes mentality clipped, with its mane plaited, stepping delicately to the snaffle.'

'I don't know,' murmured Sir

Lawrence, 'I think those two might like each other, if they could shoot each other first. Queer people, we English!'

Chapter Fourteen



WHEN, about the same time that afternoon, Adrian entered his brother's parish and traversed the mean street leading to the Vicarage of St Augustine's-in-the-Meads, English people were being almost too well illustrated six doors round the corner.

An ambulance stood in front of a house without a future, and all who had something better to do were watching it. Adrian made one of the party. From the miserable edifice two men and a nurse were

bearing the stretched-out body of a child, followed by a wailing, middle-aged, red-faced woman and a growling, white-faced man with a drooping moustache.

‘What’s up?’ said Adrian to a policeman.

‘The child’s got to have an operation. You’d think she was goin’ to be murdered, instead of havin’ the best that care can give her. There’s the Vicar. If he can’t quiet ’em, no one can.’

Adrian saw his brother come out of the house and join the white-faced man. The growling ceased, but the woman’s wails increased.

The child was ensconced by now in the ambulance, and the mother made an unwieldy rush at its door.

‘Where’s their sense?’ said the policeman, stepping forward.

Adrian saw Hilary put his hand on the woman’s shoulder. She turned as if to deliver a wide-mouthed imprecation, but a mere whimper issued. Hilary put his arm through hers and drew her quietly back into the house. The ambulance drove away. Adrian moved up to the white-faced man and offered him a cigarette. He took it with a ‘Thanks, mister’, and followed his wife.

All was over. The little crowd had gone. The policeman stood there alone.

‘The Vicar’s a wonder,’ he said.

‘My brother,’ said Adrian.

The policeman looked at him more respectfully.

‘A rare card, sir, the Vicar.’

‘I quite agree. Was that child very bad?’

‘Won’t live the day out, unless they operate. Seems as if they’d saved it up to make a close run. Just an accident the Vicar happening on it. Some people’d rather die than go into ’ospitals, let

alone their children.'

'Independence,' said Adrian. 'I understand the feeling.'

'Well, if you put it that way, sir, so do I. Still they've got wretched home in there, and everything of the best in the 'ospital.'

' "Be it never so humble – " ' quoted Adrian.

'That's right. And in my opinion it's responsible for these slums. Very slummy round these parts, but try and move the people, and don't they let you know! The Vicar does good work, reconditionin' the 'ouses, as they call it. If you want

him, I'll go and tell him.'

'Oh! I'll wait.'

'You'd be surprised,' said the policeman, 'the things people'll put up with sooner than be messed about. And you can call it what you like: Socialism, Communism, Government by the people for the people, all comes to that in the end, messin' you about. Here! You move on! No hawkin' in this street!'

A man with a barrow who had looked as if he had been going to cry 'Winkles!' altered the shape of his mouth.

Adrian, stirred by the confusion of the policeman's philosophy, waited in hopes of more, but at this moment Hilary emerged and came towards them.

'It won't be their fault if she lives,' he said, and, answering the policeman's salute, added: 'Are those petunias coming up, Bell?'

'They are, sir; my wife thinks no end of 'em.'

'Splendid! Look here! You'll pass the hospital on your way home, you might ask about that child for me; and ring me if the news is bad.'

‘I will, Vicar; pleased to do it.’

‘Thanks, Bell. Now, old man, let’s go in and have some tea.’

Mrs Hilary being at a meeting, the brothers had tea by themselves.

‘I’ve come about Dinny,’ said Adrian, and unfolded her story.

Hilary lighted a pipe. ‘That saying,’ he said at last: ‘ “Judge not that ye be not judged”, is extraordinarily comforting, until you’ve got to do something about it. After that it appears to amount to less than nothing; all action is based on judgements, tacit or not. Is Dinny very much in love?’

Adrian nodded. Hilary drew deeply at his pipe.

‘I don’t like it a little bit, then. I’ve always wanted a clear sky for Dinny; and this looks to me like a sirocco. I suppose no amount of putting it to her from other people’s points of view is any good?’

‘I should say none.’

‘Is there anything you want me to do?’

Adrian shook his head. ‘I only wanted your reaction.’

‘Just sorrow that Dinny’s going to have a bad time. As to that

recantation, my cloth rises on me, but whether it rises because I'm a parson, or a public-school Englishman, I don't know. I suspect the older Adam.'

'If Dinny means to stick to this,' said Adrian, 'one must stick to her. I always feel that if a thing one hates has to happen to a person one loves, one can only help by swallowing the idea of it whole. I shall try to like him and see his point of view.'

'He probably hasn't one,' said Hilary. '*Au fond*, you know, like "Lord Jim", he just jumped; and he almost certainly knows it at heart.'

‘The more tragic for them both; and the more necessary to stand by.’

Hilary nodded.

‘Poor old Con will be badly hit. It gives such a chance to people to play the Pharisee. I can see the skirts being drawn aside.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Adrian, ‘modern scepticism will just shrug its shoulders and say: “Another little superstition gone west!” ’

Hilary shook his head.

‘Human nature, in the large, will take the view that he kowtowed to save his life. However sceptical

people are nowadays about religion, patriotism, the Empire, the word gentleman, and all that, they still don't like cowardice – to put it crudely. I don't mean to say that a lot of them aren't cowards, but they still don't like it in other people; and if they can safely show their dislike, they will.'

'Perhaps the thing won't come out.'

'Bound to, one way or another; and, for young Desert, the sooner the better. Give him a chance to captain his soul again. Poor little Dinny! This'll test her sense of humour. Oh! dear me! I feel older.

What does Michael say?’

‘Haven’t seen him since.’

‘Do Lawrence and Em know?’

‘Probably.’

‘Otherwise it’s to be kept dark, eh?’

‘Yes. Well, I must be getting on.’

‘I,’ said Hilary, ‘shall carve my feelings into my Roman galley; I shall get half an hour at it, unless that child has collapsed.’

Adrian strode on to Bloomsbury. And while he went he tried to put himself in the place of one threatened with sudden extinction. No future life, no chance of seeing

again those he loved; no promise, assured or even vague, of future conscious experience analogous to that of this life!

‘It’s the sudden personal emergency coming out of the blue,’ he thought, ‘with no eyes on you, that’s the acid test. Who among us knows how he’ll come through it?’

His brothers, the soldier and the priest, would accept extinction as a matter of simple duty; even his brother the judge, though he would want to argue the point and might convert his executioner. ‘But I?’ he thought. ‘How rotten to die like that for a belief I haven’t got, in a

remote corner of the earth, without even the satisfaction of knowing that my death was going to benefit anybody, or would ever even be known!' Without professional or official prestige to preserve, faced by such an issue, requiring immediate decision, one would have no time to weigh and balance; would be thrown back on instinct. One's temperament would decide. And if it were like young Desert's, judging from his verse; if he were accustomed to being in opposition to his fellows, or at least out of touch with them; scornful of convention and matter-

of-fact English bull-doggedness; secretly, perhaps, more in sympathy with Arabs than with his own countrymen, would he not almost infallibly decide as Desert had? 'God knows how I should have acted,' thought Adrian, 'but I understand, and in a way I sympathize. Anyway, I'm with Dinny in this, and I'll see her through; as she saw me through that Ferse business.' And, having reached a conclusion, he felt better....

But Hilary carved away at his Roman galley. Those classical studies he had so neglected had led

up to his becoming a parson, and he could no longer understand why. What sort of young man could he have been to think he was fit for it? Why had he not taken to forestry, become a cowboy, or done almost anything that kept him out of doors instead of in the slummy heart of a dim city? Was he or was he not based on revelation? And, if not, on what was he based? Planning away at an afterdeck such as that whence those early plumbers, the Romans, had caused so many foreigners to perspire freely, he thought: 'I serve an idea, with a superstructure which doesn't

bear examination.' Still, the good of mankind was worth working for! A doctor did it in the midst of humbug and ceremony. A statesman, though he knew that democracy, which made him a statesman, was ignorance personified. One used forms in which one didn't believe, and even exhorted others to believe in them. Life was a practical matter of compromise. 'We're all Jesuits,' he thought, 'using doubtful means to good ends. I should have had to die for my cloth, as a soldier dies for his. But that's neither here nor there!'

The telephone bell rang, and a voice said:

‘The Vicar!... Yes, sir!... That girl. Too far gone to operate. So if you’d come, sir.’

Hilary put down the receiver, snatched his hat, and ran out of the house. Of all his many duties the deathbed was least to his taste, and, when he alighted from the taxi before the hospital, the lined mask of his face concealed real dread. Such a child! And nothing to be done except patter a few prayers and hold her hand. Criminal the way her parents had let it run on till it was too late. But

to imprison them for it would be to imprison the whole British race, which never took steps to interfere with its independence till the last minute, and that too late!

‘This way, sir,’ said a nurse.

In the whiteness and order of a small preliminary room Hilary saw the little figure, white-covered, collapsed, and with a deathly face. He sat down beside it, groping for words with which to warm the child’s last minutes.

‘Shan’t pray,’ he thought, ‘she’s too young.’

The child’s eyes, struggling out

of their morphined immobility, flitted with terror round the room and fixed themselves, horror-stricken, first on the white figure of the nurse, then on the doctor in his overalls. Hilary raised his hand.

‘D’you mind,’ he said, ‘leaving her with me a moment?’

They passed into an adjoining room.

‘Loo!’ said Hilary softly.

Recalled by his voice from their terrified wandering, the child’s eyes rested on his smile.

‘Isn’t this a nice clean place?
Loo! What d’you like best in all the

world?’

The answer came almost inaudibly from the white puckered lips: ‘Pictures.’

‘That’s exactly what you’re going to have, every day – twice a day. Think of that. Shut your eyes and have a nice sleep, and when you wake the pictures will begin. Shut your eyes! And I’ll tell you a story. Nothing’s going to happen to you. See! I’m here.’

He thought she had closed her eyes, but pain gripped her suddenly again; she began whimpering and then screamed.

‘God!’ murmured Hilary.

‘Another touch, doctor, quick!’

The doctor injected morphia.

‘Leave us alone again.’

The doctor slipped away, and the child’s eyes came slowly back to Hilary’s smile. He laid his fingers on her small emaciated hand.

‘Now, Loo, listen!

‘ “The Walrus and the Carpenter
were walking hand in hand,
They wept like anything to see
such quantities of sand.

‘If seven maids with seven brooms
could sweep for half a year,
Do you suppose,’ the Walrus said,
‘that they could get it clear?’

‘I doubt it,’ said the Carpenter, and

shed a bitter tear!” ’

On and on went Hilary, reciting ‘The Mad Hatter’s Tea-party’. And, while he murmured, the child’s eyes closed, the small hand lost warmth.

He felt its cold penetrating his own hand and thought: ‘Now, God, if you are – give her pictures!’

Chapter Fifteen



WHEN Dinny opened her eyes on the morning after she had told her father, she could not remember what her trouble was. Realization caused her to sit up with a feeling of terror. Suppose Wilfrid ran away from it all, back to the East or further! He well might, and think he was doing it for her sake.

‘I can’t wait till Thursday,’ she thought; ‘I must go up. If only I had money, in case – !’ She rummaged out her trinkets and took hasty stock of them. The two gentlemen

of South Molton Street! In the matter of Jean's emerald pendant they had behaved beautifully. She made a little parcel of her pledgeable ornaments, reserving the two or three she normally wore. There were none of much value, and to get a hundred pounds on them, she felt, would strain benevolence.

At breakfast they all behaved as if nothing had happened. So, then, they all knew the worst!

‘Playing the angel!’ she thought.

When her father announced that he was going up to Town, she said she would come with him.

He looked at her, rather like a monkey questioning man's right not to be a monkey too. Why had she never before noticed that his brown eyes could have that flickering mournfulness?

‘Very well,’ he said.

‘Shall I drive you?’ asked Jean.

‘Thankfully accepted,’ murmured Dinny.

Nobody said a word on the subject occupying all their thoughts.

In the opened car she sat beside her father. The may-blossom, rather late, was at its brightest,

and its scent qualified the frequent drifts of petrol fume. The sky had the high brooding grey of rain withheld. Their road passed over the Chilterns, through Hampden, Great Missenden, Chalfont, and Chorley Wood; land so English that no one, suddenly awakened, could at any moment of the drive have believed he was in any other country. It was a drive Dinny never tired of; but today the spring green and brightness of the may and apple blossom, the windings and divings through old villages, could not deflect her attention from the impassive figure by whom she sat.

She knew instinctively that he was going to try and see Wilfrid, and, if so – she was, too. But when he talked it was of India. And when she talked it was of birds. And Jean drove furiously and never looked behind her. Not till they were in the Finchley Road did the General say:

‘Where d’you want to be set down, Dinny?’

‘Mount Street.’

‘You’re staying up, then?’

‘Yes, till Friday.’

‘We’ll drop you, and I’ll go on to my Club. You’ll drive me back this

evening, Jean?’

Jean nodded without turning and slid between two vermillion-coloured buses, so that two drivers simultaneously used the same qualitative word.

Dinny was in a ferment of thought. Dared she telephone Stack to ring her up when her father came? If so, she could time her visit to the minute. Dinny was of those who at once establish liaison with ‘staff’. She could not help herself to a potato without unconsciously conveying to the profferer that she was interested in his personality. She always said ‘Thank you’, and

rarely passed from the presence without having made some remark which betrayed common humanity. She had only seen Stack three times, but she knew he felt that she was a human being, even if she did not come from Barnstaple. She mentally reviewed his no longer youthful figure, his monastic face, black haired and large-nosed, with eyes full of expression, his curly mouth, at once judgmatic and benevolent. He moved upright and almost at a trot. She had seen him look at her as if saying to himself: 'If this is to be our fate, could I do with it? I could.' He was, she felt,

permanently devoted to Wilfrid. She determined to risk it. When they drove away from her at Mount Street, she thought: 'I hope I shall never be a father!'

'Can I telephone, Blore?'

'Certainly, miss.'

She gave Wilfrid's number...

'Is that Stack? Miss Cherrell speaking.... Would you do me a little favour? My father is going to see Mr Desert today, General Sir Conway Cherrell; I don't know at what time, but I want to come myself while he's there.... Could you ring me up here as soon as he

arrives? I'll wait in.... Thank you so very much.... Is Mr Desert well? ... Don't tell him or my father, please, that I'm coming. Thank you ever so!

‘Now,’ she thought, ‘unless I’ve misread Dad! There’s a picture gallery opposite, I shall be able to see him leave from the window of it.’

No call came before lunch, which she had with her aunt.

‘Your uncle has seen Jack Muskham,’ said Lady Mont, in the middle of lunch; ‘Royston, you know; and he brought back the other one, just like a monkey –

they won't say anything. But Michael says he mustn't, Dinny.'

'Mustn't what, Aunt Em?'

'Publish that poem.'

'Oh! but he will.'

'Why? Is it good?'

'The best he has ever written.'

'So unnecessary.'

'Wilfrid isn't ashamed, Aunt Em.'

'Such a bore for you, I do think. I suppose one of those companionable marriages wouldn't do, would it?'

'I've offered it, dear.'

'I'm surprised at you, Dinny.'

‘He didn’t accept it.’

‘Thank God! I should hate you to get into the papers.’

‘Not more than I should myself, Auntie.’

‘Fleur got into the papers, libellin’.

‘I remember.’

‘What’s that thing that comes back and hits you by mistake?’

‘A boomerang?’

‘I knew it was Australian. Why do they have an accent like that?’

‘Really I don’t know, darling.’

‘And marsupials? Blore, Miss Dinny’s glass.’

‘No more, thank you, Aunt Em.
And may I get down?’

‘Let’s both get down’; and,
getting up, Lady Mont regarded
her niece with her head on one
side. ‘Deep breathin’ and carrots to
cool the blood. Why Gulf Stream,
Dinny? What gulf is that?’

‘Mexico, dear.’

‘The eels come from there, I was
readin’. Are you goin’ out?’

‘I’m waiting for a ’phone call.’

‘When they say tr-r-roubled, it
hurts my teeth. Nice girls, I’m sure.
Coffee?’

‘Yes, *please!*’

‘It does. One comes together like a puddin’ after it.’

Dinny thought: ‘Aunt Em always sees more than one thinks.’

‘Bein’ in love,’ continued Lady Mont, ‘is worse in the country – there’s the cuckoo. They don’t have it in America, somebody said. Perhaps they don’t fall in love there. Your Uncle’ll know. He came back with a story about a poppa at Nooport. But that was years and years ago. I feel other people’s insides,’ continued her aunt, uncannily. ‘Where’s your father gone?’

‘To his Club.’

‘Did you tell him, Dinny?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’re his favourite.’

‘Oh, no! Clare is.’

‘Fiddle!’

‘Did the course of your love run smooth, Aunt Em?’

‘I had a good figure,’ replied her aunt; ‘too much, perhaps; we had then. Lawrence was my first.’

‘Really?’

‘Except for choir-boys and our groom, and a soldier or two. There was a little captain with a black moustache. Inconsiderate, when one’s fourteen.’

‘I suppose your “wooing” was very decorous?’

‘No; your uncle was passionate. ‘Ninety-one. There’d been no rain for thirty years.’

‘No such rain?’

‘No! No rain at all – I forget where. There’s the telephone!’

Dinny reached the ‘phone just in front of the butler.

‘It’ll be for me, Blore, thank you.’

She took up the receiver with a shaking hand.

‘Yes?... I see... thank you, Stack... thank you very much....

Will you get me a taxi, Blore?’

She directed the taxi to the gallery opposite Wilfrid's rooms, bought a catalogue, and went upstairs to the window. Here, under pretext of minutely examining Number 35, called ‘Rhythm’, a misnomer so far as she could see, she kept watch on the door opposite. Her father could not already have left Wilfrid, for it was only seven minutes since the telephone call. Very soon, however, she saw him issuing from the door, and watched him down the street. His head was bent, and he shook it once or twice; she could

not see his face, but she could picture its expression.

‘Gnawing his moustache,’ she thought; ‘poor lamb!’

The moment he rounded the corner she ran down, slipped across the street and up the first flight. Outside Wilfrid’s door she stood with her hand raised to the bell. Then she rang.

‘Am I too late, Stack?’

‘The General’s just gone, Miss.’

‘Oh! May I see Mr Desert? Don’t announce me.’

‘No, miss,’ said Stack? Had she ever seen eyes more full of

understanding?

Taking a deep breath, she opened the door. Wilfrid was standing at the hearth with his head bent down on his folded arms. She stole silently up, waiting for him to realize her presence.

Suddenly he threw his head up, and saw her.

‘Darling!’ said Dinny, ‘so sorry for startling you!’ And she tilted her head, with lips a little parted and throat exposed, watching the struggle on his face.

He succumbed and kissed her.

‘Dinny, your father – ’

‘I know. I saw him go. “Mr Desert, I believe! My daughter has told me of an engagement, and – er – your position. I – er – have come about that. You have – er – considered what will happen when your – er – escapade out there becomes – er – known. My daughter is of age, she can please herself, but we are all extremely fond of her, and I think you will agree that in the face of such a – er – scandal it would be wholly wrong on your part – er – to consider yourself engaged to her at present.” ’

‘Almost exact.’

‘And you answered?’

‘That I’d think it over. He’s perfectly right.’

‘He is perfectly wrong. I have told you before, “Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds”. Michael thinks you ought not to publish “The Leopard”.’

‘I must. I want it off my chest. When I’m not with you I’m hardly sane.’

‘I know! But, darling, those two are not going to say anything; need it ever come out? Things that don’t come out quickly often don’t come out at all. Why go to meet

trouble?’

‘It isn’t that. It’s some damned fear in me that I *was* yellow. I want the whole thing out. Then, yellow or not, I can hold my head up. Don’t you see, Dinny?’

She did see. The look on his face was enough. ‘It’s my business,’ she thought, ‘to feel as he does, whatever I think; only so can I help him; perhaps only so can I keep him.’

‘I understand, perfectly. Michael’s wrong. We’ll face the music, and our heads shall be “bloody but unbowed”. But we won’t be “captains of our souls”,

whatever happens.’

And, having got him to smile, she drew him down beside her. After that long close silence, she opened her eyes with the slow look all women know how to give.

‘Tomorrow is Thursday, Wilfrid. Will you mind if we drop in on Uncle Adrian on the way home? He’s on our side. And about our engagement, we can say we aren’t engaged, and *be* all the same. Good-bye, my love!’

Down in the vestibule by the front door as she was opening it, Stack’s voice said:

‘Excuse me, miss.’

‘Yes?’

‘I’ve been with Mr Desert a long time, and I was thinking. You’re engaged to him, if I don’t mistake, miss?’

‘Yes and no, Stack. I hope to marry him, however.’

‘Quite, miss. And a good thing, too, if you’ll excuse me. Mr Desert is a sudden gentleman, and I was thinking if we were in leeaision, as you might say, it’d be for his good.’

‘I quite agree; that’s why I rang you up this morning.’

‘I’ve seen many young ladies in

my time, but never one I'd rather he married, miss, which is why I've taken the liberty.'

Dinny held out her hand. 'I'm terribly glad you did; it's just what I wanted; because things are difficult, and going to be more so, I'm afraid.'

Having polished his hand, Stack took hers, and they exchanged a rather convulsive squeeze.

'I know there's something on his mind,' he said. 'That's not my business. But I have known him to take very sudden decisions. And if you were to give me your telephone numbers, miss, I might

be of service to you both.'

Dinny wrote them down. 'This is the town one at my uncle, Sir Lawrence Mont's, in Mount Street; and this is my country one at Condaford Grange in Oxfordshire. One or the other is almost sure to find me. And thank you ever so. It takes a load off my mind.'

'And off mine, miss. Mr Desert has every call on me. And I want the best for him. He's not everybody's money, but he's mine.'

'And mine, Stack.'

'I won't bandy compliments, miss, but he'll be a lucky one, if

you'll excuse me.'

Dinny smiled. 'No, I shall be the lucky one. Good-bye, and thank you again.'

She went away, treading, so to speak, on Cork Street. She had an ally in the lion's mouth; a spy in the friend's camp; a faithful traitor! Thus mixing her metaphors, she scurried back to her aunt's house. Her father would almost certainly go there before returning to Condaford.

Seeing his unmistakable old bowler in the hall, she took the precaution of removing her own hat before going to the drawing-

room. He was talking to her aunt, and they stopped as she came in. Everyone would always stop now as she came in! Looking at them with quiet directness, she sat down.

The General's eyes met hers.

‘I've been to see Mr Desert, Dinny.’

‘I know, dear. He is thinking it over. We shall wait till everyone knows, anyway.’

The General moved uneasily.

‘And if it is any satisfaction to you, we are not formally engaged.’

The General gave her a slight bow, and Dinny turned to her aunt,

who was fanning a pink face with a piece of lilac-coloured blotting-paper.

There was a silence, then the General said:

‘When are you going to Lippinghall, Em?’

‘Next week,’ replied Lady Mont, ‘or is it the week after? Lawrence knows. I’m showing two gardeners at the Chelsea Flower Show. Boswell and Johnson, Dinny.’

‘Oh! Are they still with you?’

‘More so. Con, you ought to grow pestifera – no, that’s not the name – that hairy anemone thing.’

‘Pulsatilla, Auntie.’

‘Charmin’ flowers. They want lime.’

‘We’re short of lime at Condaford,’ said the General, ‘as you ought to know, Em.’

‘Our azaleas were a dream this year, Aunt Em.’

Lady Mont put down the blotting-paper.

‘I’ve been tellin’ your father, Dinny, that it’s no good fussin’ you.’

Dinny, watching her father’s glum face, said: ‘Do you know that nice shop in Bond Street, Auntie,

where they make animals? I got a lovely little vixen and her cubs there to make Dad like foxes better.'

'Huntin',' said Lady Mont, and sighed. 'When they get up chimneys, it's rather touchin'.'

'Even Dad doesn't like digging out, or stopping earths, do you, Dad?'

'N-no!' said the General, 'on the whole, no!'

'Bloodin' children, too,' said Lady Mont. 'I saw you blooded, Con.'

'Messy job, and quite

unnecessary! Only the old raw-hide school go in for it now.'

'He looked so nasty, Dinny.'

'Yes, you haven't got the face for it, Dad. It wants one of those snub-nosed, red-haired, freckled boys, that like killing for the sake of killing.'

The general rose.

'I must be going back to the Club. Jean picks me up there. When shall we see you, Dinny? Your mother – ' and he stopped.

'Aunt Em's keeping me till Saturday.'

The General nodded. He suffered

his sister's and daughter's kiss with a face that seemed to say, 'Yes – but – '

From the window Dinny watched his figure moving down the street, and her heart twitched.

'Your father!' said her aunt's voice behind her. 'All this is very wearin', Dinny.'

'I think it's very dear of Dad not to have mentioned the fact that I'm dependent on him.'

'Con is a dear,' said Lady Mont; 'he said the young man was respectful. Who was it said: "Goroo – goroo"?''

‘The old Jew in *David Copperfield*.’

‘Well, it’s what I feel.’

Dinny turned from the window.

‘Auntie! I don’t feel the same being at all as I did two weeks ago. I’m utterly changed. Then I didn’t seem to have any desires; now I’m all one desire, and I don’t seem to care whether I’m decent or not. Don’t say Epsom salts!’

Lady Mont patted her arm.

‘“Honour thy father and thy mother”,’ she said; ‘but then there was “Forsake all and follow me”, so you can’t tell.’

‘I can,’ said Dinny. ‘Do you know what I’m hoping now? That everything will come out tomorrow. If it did, we could be married at once.’

‘Let’s have some tea, Dinny. Blore, tea! Indian and rather strong!’

Chapter Sixteen



DINNY took her lover to Adrian's door at the museum the next day, and left him there. Looking round at his tall, hatless, girt-in figure, she saw him give a violent shiver. But he smiled, and even at that distance she felt warmed by his eyes.

Adrian, already notified, received the young man with what he stigmatized to himself as 'morbid curiosity', and placed him at once in mental apposition to Dinny. A curiously diverse couple

they would make! Yet, with a perception not perhaps unconnected with the custody of skeletons, he had a feeling that his niece was not physically in error. This was a figure that could well stand or lie beside her. Its stringy grace and bony gallantry accorded with her style and slenderness; and the darkened face, with its drawn and bitter lines, had eyes which even Adrian, who had all the public-school-man's impatience of male film stars, could see would be attractive to the feminine gender. Bones broke the ice to some degree; and over the identity of a supposed

Hittite in moderate preservation they became almost cordial. Places and people whom they had both seen in strange conditions were a further incentive to human feeling. But not till he had taken up his hat to go did Wilfrid say suddenly:

‘Well, Mr Cherrell, what would *you* do?’

Adrian, who was looking up, halted and considered his questioner with narrowed eyes.

‘I’m a poor hand at advice, but Dinny is a precious baggage – ’

‘She is.’

Adrian bent and shut the door of

a cabinet.

‘This morning,’ he said, ‘I watched a solitary ant in my bathroom trying to make its way and find out about things. I’m sorry to say I dropped some ashes from my pipe on it to see what it would do. Providence all over – always dropping ashes from its pipe on us to observe the result. I’ve been in several minds, but I’ve come to the conclusion that if you’re really in love with Dinny –’ a convulsive movement of Wilfrid’s body ended in the tight clenching of his hands on his hat – ‘as I see you are, and as I know her to be with you, then

stand fast and work your way with her through the ashes. She'd rather be in the cart with you than in a Pullman with the rest of us. I believe' – and Adrian's face was illuminated by earnestness – 'that she is one of those of whom it is not yet written, "and they twain shall be one *spirit*".' The young man's face quivered.

'Genuine!' thought Adrian.

'So think first of her, but not in the "I love you so that nothing will induce me to marry you" fashion. Do what she wants – when she wants it – she's not unreasonable. And, honestly, I don't believe you'll

either of you regret it.'

Desert took a step towards him, and Adrian could see that he was intensely moved. But he mastered all expression, save a little jerky smile, made a movement of one hand, turned, and went out.

Adrian continued to shut the doors of cupboards that contained bones. 'That,' he was thinking, 'is the most difficult, and in some ways the most beautiful face I've seen. The spirit walks upon its waters and is often nearly drowned. I wonder if that advice was criminal, because for some reason or other I believe he's going

to take it.' And he returned to the reading of a geographical magazine which Wilfrid's visit had interrupted. It contained a spirited account of an Indian tribe on the Amazon which had succeeded, even without the aid of American engineers at capitalistic salaries, in perfecting the Communistic ideal. None of them, apparently, owned anything. Their whole lives, including the processes of nature, were passed in the public eye. They wore no clothes, they had no laws; their only punishment, something in connexion with red ants, was inflicted for the only offence, that

of keeping anything to themselves. They lived on the cassava root variegated with monkey, and were the ideal community!

‘A wonderful instance,’ thought Adrian, ‘of how the life of man runs in cycles. For the last twenty thousand years or so we’ve been trying, as we thought, to improve on the principle which guides the life of these Indians, only to find it reintroduced as the perfect pattern.’

He sat for some time with a smile biting deep into the folds about his mouth. Doctrinaires, extremists! That Arab who put a

pistol to young Desert's head was a symbol of the most mischievous trait in human nature! Ideas and creeds – what were they but half-truths, only useful in so far as they helped to keep life balanced? The geographical magazine slipped off his knee.

He stopped on the way home in the garden of his square to feel the sun on his cheek and listen to a blackbird. He had all he wanted in life: the woman he loved, fair health, a fair salary – seven hundred a year and the prospect of a pension – two adorable children, not his own, so that he was free

from the misgivings of more normal parents; an absorbing job, a love of nature, and another thirty years, perhaps, before him. 'If at this moment,' he thought, 'someone put a pistol to my head and said: "Adrian Cherrell, renounce Christianity or out go your brains!" should I say with Clive in India: "Shoot and be damned!"?' And he could not answer. The blackbird continued to sing, the young leaves to twitter in the breeze, the sun to warm his cheek, and life to be desirable in the quiet of that one-time fashionable square....

Dinny, when she left those two

on the verge of acquaintanceship, had paused, in two minds, and then gone north to St Augustine's-in-the-Meads. Her instinct was to sap the opposition of the outlying portions of her family, so as to isolate the defences of her immediate people. She moved towards the heart of practical Christianity with a certain rather fearful exhilaration.

Her Aunt May was in the act of dispensing tea to two young ex-Collegians before their departure to a club where they superintended the skittles, chess, draughts, and ping-pong of the neighbourhood.

‘If you want Hilary, Dinny, he had two committees, but they might collapse, because he’s almost the whole of both.’

‘You and uncle know about me, I suppose?’

Mrs Hilary nodded. She was looking very fresh in a sprigged dress.

‘Would you mind telling me what uncle feels about it?’

‘I’d rather leave that to him, Dinny. We neither of us remember Mr Desert very well.’

‘People who don’t know him well will always misjudge him. But

neither you nor uncle care what other people think.' She said this with a guileless expression which by no means deceived Mrs Hilary, accustomed to Women's Institutes.

'We're neither of us very orthodox, as you know, Dinny, but we do both of us believe very deeply in what Christianity stands for, and it's no good pretending we don't.'

Dinny thought a moment.

'Is that more than gentleness and courage and self-sacrifice, and must one be a Christian to have those?'

‘I’d rather not talk about it. I should be sorry to say anything that would put me in a position different from Hilary’s.’

‘Auntie, how model of you!’

Mrs Hilary smiled. And Dinny knew that judgement in this quarter was definitely reserved.

She waited, talking of other things, till Hilary came in. He was looking pale and worried. Her aunt gave him tea, passed a hand over his forehead, and went out.

Hilary drank off his tea and filled his pipe with a knot of tobacco screwed up in a circular

paper.

‘Why corporations, Dinny? Why not three doctors, three engineers, three architects, an adding machine, and a man of imagination to work it and keep them straight?’

‘Are you in trouble, Uncle?’

‘Yes, gutting houses on an overdraft is ageing enough, without corporational red tape.’

Looking at his worn but smiling face, Dinny thought: ‘I can’t bother him with my little affairs.’ ‘You and Aunt May couldn’t spare time, I suppose, to come to the Chelsea

Flower Show on Tuesday?’

‘My goodness!’ said Hilary, sticking one end of a match into the centre of the knob and lighting the knob with the other end, ‘how I would love to stand in a tent and smell azaleas!’

‘We thought of going at one o’clock, so as to avoid the worst of the crush. Aunt Em would send for you.’

‘Can’t promise, so don’t send. If we’re not at the main entrance at one, you’ll know that Providence has intervened. And now, what about you? Adrian has told me.’

‘I don’t want to bother you, Uncle.’

Hilary’s shrewd blue eyes almost disappeared. He expelled a cloud of smoke.

‘Nothing that concerns you will bother me, my dear, except in so far as it’s going to hurt you. I suppose you *must*, Dinny?’

‘Yes, I must.’

Hilary sighed.

‘In that case it remains to make the best of it. But the world loves the martyrdom of others. I’m afraid he’ll have a bad Press, as they say.’

‘I’m sure he will.’

‘I can only just remember him, as a rather tall, scornful young man in a buff waistcoat. Has he lost the scorn?’

Dinny smiled.

‘It’s not the side I see much of at present.’

‘I sincerely trust,’ said Hilary, ‘that he has not what they call devouring passions.’

‘Not so far as I have observed.’

‘I mean, Dinny, that once that type has eaten its cake, it shows all the old Adam with a special virulence. Do you get me?’

‘Yes. But I believe it’s a

“marriage of true minds” with us.’

‘Then, my dear, good luck! Only, when people begin to throw bricks, don’t resent it. You’re doing this with your eyes open, and you’ll have no right to. Harder to bear than having your own toe trodden on is seeing one you love batted over the head. So catch hold of yourself hard at the start, and go on catching hold, or you’ll make it worse for him. If I’m not wrong, Dinny, you can get very hot about things.’

‘I’ll try not to. When Wilfrid’s book of poems comes out, I want you to read one called “The

Leopard”; it gives his state of mind about the whole thing.’

‘Oh!’ said Hilary blankly.

‘Justification? That’s a mistake.’

‘That’s what Michael says. I don’t know whether it is or not; I think in the end – not. Anyway, it’s coming out.’

‘There beginneth a real dog-fight. “Turn the other cheek” and “too proud to fight” would have been better left unsaid. All the same, it’s asking for trouble, and that’s all about it.’

‘I can’t help it, Uncle.’

‘I realize that, Dinny; it’s when I

think of the number of things you won't be able to help that I feel so blue. And what about Condaford? Is it going to cut you off from that?'

'People do come round, except in novels; and even there they have to in the end, or else die, so that the heroine may be happy. Will you say a word for us to Father if you see him, Uncle?'

'No, Dinny. An elder brother never forgets how superior he was to you when he was big and you were not.'

Dinny rose.

‘Well, Uncle; thank you ever so for not believing in damnation, and even more for not saying so. I shall remember all you’ve said. Tuesday, one o’clock at the main entrance; and don’t forget to eat something first; it’s a very tiring business.’

When she had gone Hilary refilled his pipe.

‘ “And even more for not saying so!” ’ he repeated in thought. ‘That young woman can be caustic. I wonder how often I say things I don’t mean in the course of my professional duties.’ And, seeing his wife in the doorway, he added:

‘May, would you say I was a humbug – professionally?’

‘Yes, dear. How could it be otherwise?’

‘You mean, the forms a parson uses aren’t broad enough to cover the variations of human nature? But I don’t see how they could be. Would you like to go to the Chelsea Flower Show on Tuesday?’

Mrs Hilary, thinking: ‘Dinny might have asked *me*,’ replied cheerfully: ‘Very much.’

‘Let’s try and arrange so that we can get there at one o’clock.’

‘Did you talk to her about her

affair?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is she immovable?’

‘Quite.’

Mrs Hilary sighed. ‘It’s an awful pity. Do you think a man could ever live that down?’

‘Twenty years ago I should have said “No”. Now I’m not sure. It seems a queer thing to say, but it’s not the really religious people who’ll matter.’

‘Why?’

‘Because they won’t come across them. It’s the army, and Empire people, and Englishmen overseas,

whom they will come across continually. The hub of unforgiveness is in her own family to start with. It's the yellow label. The gum they use putting that on is worse than the patent brand of any hotel that wants to advertise itself.'

'I wonder,' said Mrs Hilary, 'what the children would say about it?'

'Queer that we don't know.'

'We know less about our children than any of their friends do. Were we like that to our own elders, I wonder?'

'Our elders looked on us as

biological specimens; they had us at an angle, and knew quite a lot about us. *We've* tried to put ourselves on a level with our youngsters, elder brother and sister business, and we don't know a thing. We've missed the one knowledge, and haven't got the other. A bit humiliating, but they're a decent crowd. It's not the young people I'm afraid of in Dinny's business, it's those who've had experience of the value of English prestige, and they'll be justified; and those who like to think he's done a thing they wouldn't have done themselves – and they won't

be justified a bit.'

'I think Dinny's over-estimating her strength, Hilary.'

'No woman really in love could do otherwise. To find out whether she is or not will be her job. Well, she won't rust.'

'You speak as if you rather liked it.'

'The milk is spilled, and it's no good worrying. Let's get down to the wording of that new appeal. There's going to be a bad trade slump. Just our luck! All the people who've got money will be sticking to it.'

‘I wish people wouldn’t be less extravagant when times are bad. It only means less work still. The shopkeepers are moaning about that already.’

Hilary reached for a notebook and began writing. His wife looked over his shoulder presently and read:

To all whom it may concern:

And whom does it not concern that there should be in our midst thousands of people so destitute from birth to death of the bare necessities of life that they don’t know what real cleanliness, real health, real fresh air, real good food are?

‘One “real” will cover the lot,

dear.'

Chapter Seventeen



ARRIVING at the Chelsea Flower Show, Lady Mont said thoughtfully: ‘I’m meetin’ Boswell and Johnson at the calceolarias, Dinny. What a crowd!’

‘Yes, and all plain. Do they come, Auntie, because they’re yearning for beauty they haven’t got?’

‘I can’t get Boswell and Johnson to yearn. There’s Hilary! He’s had that suit ten years. Take this and run for tickets, or he’ll try and pay.’

With a five-pound note Dinny slid towards the wicket, avoiding her uncle's eyes. She secured four tickets, and turned smiling.

‘I saw you being a serpent,’ he said. ‘Where are we going first? Azaleas? I like to be thoroughly sensual at a flower show.’

Lady Mont's deliberate presence caused a little swirl in the traffic, while her eyes from under slightly drooped lids took in the appearance of people selected, as it were, to show off flowers.

The tent they entered was warm with humanity and perfume, though the day was damp and cool.

The ingenious beauty of each group of blossoms was being digested by variegated types of human being linked only through that mysterious air of kinship which comes from attachment to the same pursuit. This was the great army of flower-raisers – growers of primulas in pots, of nasturtiums, gladioli and flags in London back gardens, of stocks, hollyhocks and sweet-williams in little provincial plots; the gardeners of larger grounds; the owners of hothouses and places where experiments are made – but not many of these, for they had already passed through or would

come later. All moved with a prying air, as if marking down their own next ventures; and alongside the nurserymen would stop and engage as if making bets. And the subdued murmur of voices, cockneyfied, countrified, cultivated, all commenting on flowers, formed a hum like that of bees, if not so pleasing. This subdued expression of a national passion, walled-in by canvas, together with the scent of the flowers, exercised on Dinny an hypnotic effect, so that she moved from one brilliant planted posy to another, silent and with her

slightly upturned nose twitching delicately.

Her aunt's voice roused her.

‘There they are!’ she said, pointing with her chin.

Dinny saw two men standing so still that she wondered if they had forgotten why they had come. One had a reddish moustache and sad cow-like eyes; the other looked like a bird with a game wing; their clothes were stiff with Sundays. They were not talking, nor looking at the flowers, but as if placed there by Providence without instructions.

‘Which is Boswell, Auntie?’

‘No moustache,’ said Lady Mount; ‘Johnson has the green hat. He’s deaf. So like them.’

She moved towards them, and Dinny heard her say:

‘Ah!’

The two gardeners rubbed their hands on the sides of their trousered legs, but did not speak.

‘Enjoyin’ it?’ she heard her aunt say. Their lips moved, but no sound came forth that she could catch. The one she had called Boswell lifted his cap and scratched his head. Her aunt was pointing now

at the calceolarias, and suddenly the one in the green hat began to speak. He spoke so that, as Dinny could see, not even her aunt could hear a word, but his speech went on and on and seemed to afford him considerable satisfaction. Every now and then she heard her aunt say: 'Ah!' But Johnson went on. He stopped suddenly; her aunt said 'Ah!' again and came back to her.

'What was he saying?' asked Dinny.

'No,' said Lady Mont, 'not a word. You can't. But it's good for him.' She waved her hand to the

two gardeners, who were again standing without sign of life, and led the way.

They passed into the rose tent now, and Dinny looked at her watch. She had appointed to meet Wilfrid at the entrance of it.

She cast a hurried look back. There he was! She noted that Hilary was following his nose, Aunt May following Hilary, Aunt Em talking to a nurseryman. Screened by a prodigious group of 'K. of Ks.' she skimmed over to the entrance, and, with her hands in Wilfrid's, forgot entirely where she was.

‘Are you feeling strong, darling?’

Aunt Em is here, and my Uncle Hilary and his wife. I should so like them to know you, because they all count in our equation.'

He seemed to her at that moment like a highly strung horse asked to face something it has not faced before.

'If you wish, Dinny.'

They found Lady Mont involved with the representatives of 'Plantem's Nurseries'.

'That one – south aspect and chalk. The nemesias don't. It's cross-country – they do dry so. The phloxes came dead. At least they

said so: you can't tell. Oh! Here's my niece! Dinny, this is Mr Plantem. He often sends – Oh! ... ah! Mr Desert! How d'you do? I remember you holdin' Michael's arms up at his weddin'.' She had placed her hand in Wilfrid's and seemingly forgotten it, the while her eyes from under their raised brows searched his face with a sort of mild surprise.

'Uncle Hilary,' said Dinny.

'Yes,' said Lady Mont, coming to herself. 'Hilary, May – Mr Desert.'

Hilary, of course, was entirely his usual self, but Aunt May looked as if she were greeting a dean. And

almost at once Dinny was tacitly abandoned to her lover.

‘What do you think of Uncle Hilary?’

‘He looks like a man to go to in trouble.’

‘He is. He knows by instinct how not to run his head against brick walls, and yet he’s always in action. I suppose that comes of living in a slum. He agrees with Michael that to publish “The Leopard” is a mistake.’

‘Running my head against a brick wall – um?’

‘Yes.’

‘The die, as they say, is cast. Sorry if you’re sorry, Dinny.’

Dinny’s hand sought his. ‘No. Let’s sail under our proper colours – only, for my sake, Wilfrid, try to take what’s coming quietly, and so will I. Shall we hide behind this firework of fuchsias and slip off? They’ll expect it.’

Once outside the tent they moved towards the Embankment exit, past the rock gardens, each with its builder standing in the damp before it, as though saying: ‘Look on this, and employ me!’

‘Making nice things and having to cadge round to get people to

notice them!’ said Dinny.

‘Where shall we go, Dinny?’

‘Battersea Park?’

‘Across this bridge, then.’

‘You were a darling to let me introduce them, but you did so look like a horse trying to back through its collar. I wanted to stroke your neck.’

‘I’ve got out of the habit of people.’

‘It’s nice not to be dependent on them.’

‘The worst mixer in the world. But you, I should have thought – ’

‘I only want you; I think I must

have a nature like a dog's. Without you, now, I should just be lost.'

The twitch of his mouth was better than an answer.

'Ever seen the Lost Dogs' Home? It's over there.'

'No. Lost dogs are dreadful to think about. Perhaps one ought to, though. Yes, let's!'

The establishment had its usual hospitalized appearance of all being for the best considering that it was the worst. There was a certain amount of barking and of inquiry on the faces of a certain number of dogs. Tails wagged as

they approached. Such dogs as were of any breed looked quieter and sadder than the dogs that were of no breed, and those in the majority. A black spaniel was sitting in a corner of the wired enclosure, with head drooped between long ears. They went round to him.

‘How on earth,’ said Dinny, ‘can a dog as nice as that stay unclaimed? He *is* sad!’

Wilfrid put his fingers through the wire. The dog looked up. They saw a little red under his eyes, and a wisp of hair loose and silky on his forehead. He raised himself

slowly from off his haunches, and they could see him pant very slightly as though some calculation or struggle were going on in him.

‘Come on, old boy!’

The dog came slowly, all black, foursquare on his feathered legs. He had every sign of breeding, making his forlorn position more mysterious than ever. He stood almost within reach; his shortened tail fluttered feebly, then came to a droop again, precisely as if he had said: ‘I neglect no chance, but you are not.’

‘Well, old fellow?’ said Wilfrid.

Dinny bent down. 'Give me a kiss.'

The dog looked up at them. His tail moved once, and again drooped.

'Not a good mixer, either,' said Wilfrid.

'He's too sad for words.' She bent lower and this time got her hand through the wire. 'Come, darling!' The dog sniffed her glove. Again his tail fluttered feebly; a pink tongue showed for a moment as though to make certain of his lips. With a supreme effort Dinny's fingers reached his muzzle smooth as silk.

‘He’s awfully well bred, Wilfrid.’

‘Stolen, I expect, and then got away. Probably from some country kennel.’

‘I believe I could hang dog-thieves.’

The dog’s dark-brown eyes had the remains of moisture in their corners. They looked back at Dinny, with suspended animation, as if saying: ‘You are not my past, and I don’t know if there is a future.’

She looked up. ‘Oh, Wilfrid!’

He nodded and left her with the dog. She stayed stooped on her

heels, slowly scratching behind the dog's ears, till Wilfrid, followed by a man with a chain and collar, came back.

‘I’ve got him,’ he said; ‘he reached his time-limit yesterday, but they were keeping him another week because of his looks.’

Dinny turned her back, moisture was oozing from her eyes. She mopped them hastily, and heard the man say:

‘I’ll put this on, sir, before he comes out, or he might leg it; he’s never taken to the place.’

Dinny turned round.

‘If his owner turns up we’ll give him back at once.’

‘Not much chance of that, miss. In my opinion that’s the dog of someone who’s died. He slipped his collar, probably, and went out to find him, got lost, and no one’s cared enough to send here and see. Nice dog, too. You’ve got a bargain. I’m glad. I didn’t like to think of that dog being put away; young dog, too.’

He put the collar on, led the dog out to them, and transferred the chain to Wilfrid, who handed him a card.

‘In case the owner turns up.

Come on, Dinny; let's walk him a bit. Walk, boy!'

The nameless dog, hearing the sweetest word in his vocabulary, moved forward to the limit of the chain.

'That theory's probably right,' said Wilfrid, 'and I hope it is. We shall like this fellow.'

Once on grass they tried to get through to the dog's inner consciousness. He received their attentions patiently, without response, tail and eyes lowered, suspending judgement.

'We'd better get him home,' said

Wilfrid. 'Stay here, and I'll bring up a cab.'

He wiped a chair with his handkerchief, transferred the chain to her, and swung away.

Dinny sat watching the dog. He had followed Wilfrid to the limit of the chain and then seated himself in the attitude in which they had first seen him.

What did dogs feel? They certainly put one and one together; loved, disliked, suffered, yearned, sulked, and enjoyed, like human beings; but they had a very small vocabulary and so – no ideas! Still, anything must be better than living

in a wire enclosure with a lot of dogs less sensitive than yourself!

The dog came back to her side, but kept his head turned in the direction Wilfrid had taken, and began to whine.

A taxi cab drew up. The dog stopped whining, and began to pant.

‘Master’s coming!’ The dog gave a tug at the chain.

Wilfrid had reached him. Through the slackened chain she could feel the disillusionment; then it tightened, and the wagging of the tail came fluttering down the

links as the dog sniffed at the turn-ups of Wilfrid's trousers.

In the cab the dog sat on the floor with his chin hanging over Wilfrid's shoe. In Piccadilly he grew restless and ended with his chin on Dinny's knee. Between Wilfrid and the dog the drive was an emotional medley for her, and she took a deep breath when she got out.

‘Wonder what Stack will say,’ said Wilfrid. ‘A spaniel in Cork Street is no catch.’

The dog took the stairs with composure.

‘House-trained,’ said Dinny thankfully.

In the sitting-room the dog applied his nose to the carpet. Having decided that the legs of all the furniture were uninteresting and the place bereft of his own kind, he leaned his nose on the divan and looked out of the corners of his eyes.

‘Up!’ said Dinny. The dog jumped on to the divan.

‘Jove! He does smell!’ said Wilfrid.

‘Let’s give him a bath. While you’re filling it, I’ll look him over.’

She held the dog, who would have followed Wilfrid, and began parting his hair. She found several yellow fleas, but no other breed.

‘Yes, you do smell, darling.’

The dog turned his head and licked her nose.

‘The bath’s ready, Dinny!’

‘Only dog fleas.’

‘If you’re going to help, put on that bath gown, or you’ll spoil your dress.’

Behind his back, Dinny slipped off her frock and put on the blue bath gown, half-hoping he would turn, and respecting him because

he didn't. She rolled up the sleeves and stood beside him. Poised over the bath, the dog protruded a long tongue.

‘He’s not going to be sick, is he?’

‘No; they always do that. Gently, Wilfrid, don’t let him splash – that frightens them. Now!’

Lowered into the bath, the dog, after a scramble, stood still with his head drooped, concentrated on keeping foothold of the slippery surface.

‘This is hair shampoo, better than nothing. I’ll hold him. You do the rubbing in.’

Pouring some of the shampoo on the centre of that polished black back, Dinny heaped water up the dog's sides and began to rub. Their first domestic incident with Wilfrid was pure joy, involving no mean personal contact with him as well as with the dog. She straightened up at last.

‘Phew! My back! Sluice him and let the water out. I’ll hold him.’

Wilfrid sluiced, the dog behaving as if not too sorry for his fleas. He shook himself vigorously, and they both jumped back.

‘Don’t let him out,’ cried Dinny; ‘we must dry him in the bath.’

‘All right. Put your hands round his neck and hold him still.’

Wrapped in a huge bath towel, the dog lifted his face to her; its expression was drooping and forlorn.

‘Poor boy, soon over now, and you’ll smell lovely.’

The dog shook himself.

Wilfrid withdrew the towel.

‘Hold him a minute, I’ll get an old blanket; we’ll make him curl up till he’s dry.’

Alone with the dog, who was now trying to get out of the bath, Dinny held him with his forepaws

over the edge, and worked away at the accumulations of sorrow about his eyes.

‘There! That’s better!’

They carried the almost inanimate dog to the divan, wrapped in an old Guards’ blanket.

‘What shall we call him, Dinny?’

‘Let’s try him with a few names, we may hit on his real one.’

He answered to none. ‘Well,’ said Dinny, let’s call him “Foch”. But for Foch we should never have met.’

Chapter Eighteen



FEELINGS at Condaford, after the General's return, were vexed and uneasy. Dinny had said she would be back on Saturday, but it was now Wednesday and she was still in London. Her saying, 'We are not formally engaged,' had given little comfort, since the General had added, 'That was soft sawder.' Pressed by Lady Cherrell as to what exactly had taken place between him and Wilfrid, he was laconic.

'He hardly said a word, Liz. Polite and all that, and I must say

he doesn't look like a fellow who'd quit. His record's very good, too. The thing's inexplicable.'

'Have you read any of his verse, Con?'

'No. Where is it?'

'Dinny has them somewhere. Very bitter. So many writers seem to be like that. But I could put up with anything if I thought Dinny would be happy.'

'Dinny says he's actually going to publish a poem about that business. He must be a vain chap.'

'Poets almost always are.'

'I don't know who can move

Dinny. Hubert says he's lost touch with her. To begin married life under a cloud like that!'

'I sometimes think,' murmured Lady Cherrell, 'that living here, as we do, we don't know what will cause clouds and what won't.'

'There can't be a question,' said the General, with finality, 'among people who count.'

'Who does count, nowadays?'

The General was silent. Then he said shrewdly:

'England's still aristocratic underneath. All that keeps us going comes from the top. Service and

tradition still rule the roost. The socialists can talk as they like.'

Lady Cherrell looked up, astonished at this flow.

'Well,' she said, 'what are we to do about Dinny?'

The General shrugged.

'Wait till things come to a crisis of some sort. Cut-you-off-with-a-shilling is out of date and out of question – we're too fond of her. You'll speak to her, Liz, when you get a chance, of course...'

Between Hubert and Jean discussion of the matter took a rather different line.

‘I wish to God, Jean, Dinny had taken to your brother.’

‘Alan’s got over it. I had a letter from him yesterday. He’s at Singapore now. There’s probably somebody out there. I only hope it isn’t a married woman. There are so few girls in the East.’

‘I don’t think he’d go for a married woman. Possibly a native; they say Malay girls are often pretty.’

Jean grimaced.

‘A Malay girl instead of Dinny!’

Presently she murmured: ‘I’d like to see this Mr Desert. I think I

could give him an idea, Hubert, of what'll be thought of him if he carries Dinny into this mess.'

'You must be careful with Dinny.'

'If I can have the car I'll go up tomorrow and talk it over with Fleur. She must know him quite well; he was their best man.'

'I'd choose Michael of the two; but for God's sake take care, old girl.'

Jean, who was accustomed to carry out her ideas, slid away next day before the world was up and was at South Square, Westminster,

by ten o'clock. Michael, it appeared, was down in his constituency.

‘The safer his seat,’ said Fleur, ‘the more he thinks he has to see of them. It’s the gratitude complex. What can I do for you?’

Jean slid her long-lashed eyes round from the Fragonard, which she had been contemplating as though it were too French, and Fleur almost jumped. Really, she *was* like a ‘leopardess’!

‘It’s about Dinny and her young man, Fleur. I suppose you know what happened to him out there?’

Fleur nodded.

‘Then can’t something be done?’

Fleur’s face became watchful.

She was twenty-nine, Jean twenty-three; but it was no use coming the elder matron!

‘I haven’t seen anything of Wilfrid for a long time.’

‘Somebody’s got to tell him pretty sharply what’ll be thought of him if he lugs Dinny into this mess.’

‘I’m by no means sure there’ll be a mess; even if his poem comes out. People like the Ajax touch.’

‘You’ve not been in the East.’

‘Yes, I have; I’ve been round the

world.'

'That's not the same thing at all.'

'My dear,' said Fleur, 'excuse my saying so, but the Cherrells are about thirty years behind the times.'

'I'm not a Cherrell.'

'No, you're a Tasburgh, and, if anything, that's a little worse. Country rectories, cavalry, navy, Indian civil – how much d'you suppose all that counts nowadays?'

'It counts with those who belong to it; and he belongs to it, and Dinny belongs to it.'

'No one who's really in love

belongs anywhere,' said Fleur. 'Did you care two straws when you married Hubert with a murder charge hanging over his head?'

'That's different. He'd done nothing to be ashamed of.'

Fleur smiled.

'True to type. Would it surprise you, as they say in the courts, if I told you that there isn't one in twenty people about town who'd do otherwise than yawn if you asked them to condemn Wilfrid for what he did? And there isn't one in forty who won't forget all about it in a fortnight.'

‘I don’t believe you,’ said Jean flatly.

‘You don’t know modern Society, my dear.’

‘It’s modern Society,’ said Jean, even more flatly, ‘that doesn’t count.’

‘Well, I don’t know that it does much; but then what does?’

‘Where does he live?’

Fleur laughed.

‘In Cork Street, opposite the Gallery. You’re not thinking of bearding him, are you?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Wilfrid can bite.’

‘Well,’ said Jean, ‘thanks. I must be going.’

Fleur looked at her with admiration. The girl had flushed, and that pink in her brown cheeks made her look more vivid than ever.

‘Well, good-bye, my dear; and do come and tell me about it. I know you’ve the pluck of the devil.’

‘I don’t know that I’m going at all,’ said Jean. ‘Good-bye!’

She drove, rather angry, past the House of Commons. Her temperament believed so much in action that Fleur’s worldly wisdom

had merely irritated her. Still, it was not so easy as she had thought to go to Wilfrid Desert and say: 'Stand and deliver me back my sister-in-law.' She drove, however, to Pall Mall, parked her car near the Parthenaeum, and walked up to Piccadilly. People who saw her, especially men, looked back, because of the admirable grace of her limbs and the colour and light in her face. She had no idea where Cork Street was, except that it was near Bond Street. And, when she reached it, she walked up and down before locating the Gallery. 'That must be the door, opposite,'

she thought. She was standing uncertainly in front of a door without a name, when a man with a dog on a lead came up the stairs and stood beside her.

‘Yes, miss?’

‘I am Mrs Hubert Cherrell. Does Mr Desert live here?’

‘Yes, ma’am; but whether you can see him I don’t know. Here, Foch, good dog! If you’ll wait a minute I’ll find out.’

A minute later Jean, swallowing resolutely, was in the presence. ‘After all,’ she was thinking, ‘he can’t be worse than a parish

meeting when you want money from it.'

Wilfrid was standing at the window, with his eyebrows raised.

'I'm Dinny's sister-in-law,' said Jean. 'I beg your pardon for coming, but I wanted to see you.'

Wilfrid bowed.

'Come here, Foch.'

The spaniel, who was sniffing round Jean's skirt, did not respond until he was called again. He licked Wilfrid's hand and sat down behind him. Jean had flushed.

'It's frightful cheek on my part, but I thought you wouldn't mind.'

We've just come back from the Soudan.'

Wilfrid's face remained ironic, and irony always upset her. Not quite stammering, she continued:

'Dinny has never been in the East.'

Again Wilfrid bowed. The affair was not going like a parish meeting.

'Won't you sit down?' he said.

'Oh, thank you, no; I shan't be a minute. You see, what I wanted to say was that Dinny can't possibly realize what certain things mean out there.'

‘D’you know, that’s what occurred to me.’

‘Oh!’

A minute of silence followed, while the flush on her face and the smile on Wilfrid’s deepened. Then he said:

‘Thank you so much for coming. Anything else?’

‘Er – no! Good-bye!’

All the way downstairs she felt shorter than she had ever felt in her life. And the first man she passed in the street jumped, her eyes had passed through him like a magnetic shock. He had once been

touched by an electric eel in Brazil, and preferred the sensation. Yet, curiously, while she retraced her steps towards her car, though worsted, she bore no grudge. Even more singularly, she had lost most of her feeling that Dinny was in danger.

Regaining her car, she had a slight altercation with a policeman and took the road for Condaford. Driving to the danger of the public all the way, she was home to lunch. All she said of her adventure was that she had been for a long drive. Only in the four-poster of the chief spare room did she say to Hubert:

‘I’ve been up and seen him. D’you know, Hubert, I really believe Dinny will be all right. He’s got charm.’

‘What on earth,’ said Hubert, turning on his elbow, ‘has that to do with it?’

‘A lot,’ said Jean. ‘Give me a kiss, and don’t argue...’

When his strange young visitor had gone, Wilfrid flung himself on the divan and stared at the ceiling. He felt like a general who has won a ‘victory’ – the more embarrassed. Having lived for thirty-five years, owing to a variety of circumstances, in a condition of

marked egoism, he was unaccustomed to the feelings which Dinny from the first had roused within him. The old-fashioned word 'worship' was hardly admissable, but no other adequately replaced it. When with her his sensations were so restful and refreshed that when not with her he felt like one who had taken off his soul and hung it up. Alongside this new beatitude was a growing sense that his own happiness would not be complete unless hers was too. She was always telling him that she was only happy in his presence. But that was absurd, he could never

replace all the interests and affections of her life before the statue of Foch had made them acquainted. And, if not, for what was he letting her in? The young woman with the eyes, who had just gone, had stood there before him like an incarnation of this question. Though he had routed her, she had left the query printed on the air.

The spaniel, seeing the incorporeal more clearly than his master, was resting a long nose on his knee. Even this dog he owed to Dinny. He had got out of the habit of people. With this business hanging over him, he was quite cut

off. If he married Dinny, he took her with him into isolation. Was it fair?

But, having appointed to meet her in half an hour, he rang the bell.

‘I’m going out now, Stack.’

‘Very good, sir.’

Leading the dog, he made his way to the Park. Opposite the Cavalry Memorial he sat down to wait for her, debating whether he should tell her of his visitor. And just then he saw her coming.

She was walking quickly from Park Lane, and had not yet seen

him. She seemed to skim, straight, and – as those blasted novelists called it – ‘willowy’! She had a look of spring, and was smiling as if something pleasant had just happened to her. This glimpse of her, all unaware of him, soothed Wilfrid. If she could look so pleased and care-free, surely he need not worry. She halted by the bronze horse which she had dubbed ‘the jibbing barrel’, evidently looking for him. Though she turned her head so prettily this way and that, her face had become a little anxious. He stood up. She waved her hand and came quickly across

the drive.

‘Been sitting to Botticelli, Dinny?’

‘No – to a pawnbroker. If you ever want one I recommend Frewens of South Molton Street.’

‘*You*, at a pawnbroker’s?’

‘Yes, darling. I’ve got more money of my own on me than I ever had in my life.’

‘What do you want it for?’

Dinny bent and stroked the dog.

‘Since I knew you I’ve grasped the real importance of money.’

‘And what’s that?’

‘Not to be divided from you by

the absence of it. The great open spaces are what we want now. Take Foch off the lead, Wilfrid; he'll follow, I'm sure.'

Chapter Nineteen



IN a centre of literature such as London, where books come out by the half-dozen almost every day, the advent of a slender volume of poems is commonly of little moment. But circumstances combined to make the appearance of *The Leopard, and other Poems* a 'literary event'. It was Wilfrid's first production for four years. He was a lonely figure, marked out by the rarity of literary talent among the old aristocracy, by the bitter, lively quality of his earlier poems,

by his Eastern sojourn and isolation from literary circles, and finally by the report that he had embraced Islam. Someone, on the appearance of his third volume four years ago, had dubbed him 'a sucking Byron'; the phrase had caught the ear. Finally, he had a young publisher who understood the art of what he called 'putting it over'. During the few weeks since he received Wilfrid's manuscript, he had been engaged in lunching, dining, and telling people to look out for 'The Leopard', the most sensation-making poem since 'The Hound of Heaven'. To the query

‘Why?’ he replied in nods and becks and wreathed smiles. Was it true that young Desert had become a Mussulman? Oh! Yes. Was he in London? Oh! yes, but, of course, the shyest and rarest bird in the literary flock.

He who was Compson Grice Ltd had from the first perceived that in ‘The Leopard’ he had ‘a winner’ – people would not enjoy it, but they would talk about it. He had only to start the snowball rolling down the slope, and when moved by real conviction no one could do this better than he. Three days before the book came out he met Telfourd

Yule by a sort of accidental prescience.

‘Hallo, Yule, back from Araby?’

‘As you see.’

‘I say, I’ve got a most amazing book of poems coming out on Monday. *The Leopard*, by Wilfrid Desert. Like a copy? The first poem’s a corker.’

‘Oh!’

‘Takes the wind clean out of that poem in Alfred Lyall’s *Verses written in India*, about the man who died sooner than change his faith. Remember?’

‘I do.’

‘What’s the truth about Desert taking to Islam?’

‘Ask him.’

‘That poem’s so personal in feeling – it might be about himself.’

‘Indeed?’

And Compson Grice thought, suddenly: ‘If it were! What a stunt!’

‘Do you know him, Yule?’

‘No.’

‘You must read the thing; I couldn’t put it down.’

‘Ah!’

‘But would a man publish such a thing about his own experience?’

‘Can’t say.’

And, still more suddenly, Compson Grice thought: ‘If it were, I could sell a hundred thousand!’

He returned to his office, thinking: ‘Yule was deuced close. I believe I was right, and he knows it. He’s only just back; everything’s known in the bazaars, they say. Now, let’s see, where am I?’

Published at five shillings, on a large sale there would, after royalty paid, be a clear profit of sixpence a copy. A hundred thousand copies would be two thousand five hundred pounds, and about the same in royalties to

Desert! By George! But, of course, loyalty to client first! And there came to him one of those inspirations which so often come to loyal people who see money ahead of them.

‘I must draw his attention to the risk of people saying that it’s his own case. I’d better do it the day after publication. In the meantime I’ll put a second big edition in hand.’

On the day before publication, a prominent critic, Mark Hanna, who ran a weekly bell in the *Carillon*, informed him that he had gone all out for the poem. A younger man,

well known for a certain buccaneering spirit, said no word, but wrote a criticism. Both critiques appeared on the day of publication. Compson Grice cut them out and took them with him to the 'Jessamine' restaurant, where he had bidden Wilfrid to lunch.

They met at the entrance and passed to a little table at the far end. The room was crowded with people who knew everybody in the literary, dramatic and artistic world. And Compson Grice waited, with the experience of one who had entertained many authors, until a

bottle of Mouton Rothschild 1870 had been drunk to its dregs. Then, producing from his pocket the two reviews, he placed that of Mark Hanna before his guest, with the words: 'Have you seen this? It's rather good.'

Wilfrid read it.

The reviewer had indeed gone 'all out'. It was almost all confined to 'The Leopard', which it praised as the most intimate revelation of the human soul in verse since Shelley.

'Bunk! Shelley doesn't reveal except in his lyrics.'

‘Ah! well,’ said Compson Grice, ‘they have to work in Shelley.’

The review acclaimed the poem as ‘tearing away the last shreds of the hypocritical veil which throughout our literature has shrouded the muse in relation to religion’. It concluded with these words: ‘This poem, indeed, in its unflinching record of a soul tortured by cruel dilemma, is the most amazing piece of imaginative psychology which has come our way in the twentieth century.’

Watching his guest lay down the cutting, Compson Grice said softly: ‘Pretty good! It’s the personal

fervour of the thing that gets them.'

Wilfrid gave his queer shiver.

'Got a cigar-cutter?'

Compson Grice pushed one forward with the other review.

'I think you ought to read this in *The Daily Phase*.'

The review was headed:
'Defiance: Bolshevism and the Empire.'

Wilfrid took it up.

'Geoffrey Coltham?' he said.
'Who's he?'

The review began with some fairly accurate personal details of the poet's antecedents, early work

and life, ending with the mention of his conversion to Islam. Then, after some favourable remarks about the other poems, it fastened on ‘The Leopard’, sprang, as it were, at the creature’s throat, and shook it as a bulldog might. Then, quoting these lines:

Into foul ditch each dogma leads.
Cursed be superstitious creeds,
In every driven mind the weeds!
There’s but one liquor for the sane

—

Drink deep! Let scepticism reign
And its astringence clear the brain!

it went on with calculated
brutality!

The thin disguise assumed by the narrative covers a personal disruptive bitterness which one is tempted to connect with the wounded and overweening pride of one who has failed himself and the British world. Whether Mr Desert intended in this poem to reveal his own experience and feelings in connexion with his conversion to Islam – a faith, by the way, of which, judging from the poor and bitter lines quoted above, he is totally unworthy – we cannot of course say, but we advise him to come into the open and let us know. Since we have in our midst a poet who, with all his undoubted thrust, drives at our entrails, and cuts deep into our religion and our prestige, we have the right to know whether or not he – like his hero – is a renegade.

‘That, I think,’ said Compson Grice, quietly, ‘is libellous.’

Wilfrid looked up at him, so that he said afterwards: ‘I never knew

Desert had such eyes.'

'I *am* a renegade. I took conversion at the pistol's point, and you can let everybody know it.'

Smothering the words: 'Thank God!' Compson Grice reached out his hand. But Wilfrid had leaned back and veiled his face in the smoke of his cigar. His publisher moved forward on to the edge of his chair.

'You mean that you want me to send a letter to *The Daily Phase* to say that 'The Leopard' is practically your own experience?'

‘Yes.’

‘My dear fellow, I think it’s wonderful of you. That is courage, if you like.’

The smile on Wilfrid’s face caused Compson Grice to sit back, swallow the words: ‘The effect on the sales will be enormous,’ and substitute:

‘It will strengthen your position enormously. But I wish we could get back on that fellow.’

‘Let him stew!’

‘Quite!’ said Compson Grice. He was by no means anxious to be embroiled, and have all his authors

slated in the important *Daily Phase*.

Wilfrid rose. 'Thanks very much. I must be going.'

Compson Grice watched him leave, his head high and his step slow. 'Poor devil!' he thought. 'It is a scoop!'

Back in his office, he spent some time finding a line in Colthan's review which he could isolate from its context and use as advertisement. He finally extracted this: '*Daily Phase*: "No poem in recent years has had such power" ' (the remaining words of the sentence he omitted because they were 'to cut the ground from under

the feet of all we stand for'). He then composed a letter to the editor. He was writing – he said – at the request of Mr Desert, who, far from needing any challenge to come into the open, was only too anxious that everyone should know that 'The Leopard' was indeed founded on his personal experience. For his own part – he went on – he considered that this frank avowal was a more striking instance of courage than could be met with in a long day's march. He was proud to have been privileged to publish a poem which, in psychological content, quality of

workmanship, and direct human interest, was by far the most striking of this generation.

He signed himself 'Your obedient servant, Compson Grice'. He then increased the size of the order for the second edition, directed that the words 'First edition exhausted; second large impression', should be ready for use immediately, and went to his club to play bridge.

His club was the Polyglot, and in the hall he ran on Michael. The hair of his erstwhile colleague in the publishing world was ruffled, the ears stood out from his head, and he spoke at once:

‘Grice, what are you doing about that young brute Coltham?’

Compson Grice smiled blandly and replied:

‘Don’t worry! I showed the review to Desert, and he told me to draw its sting by complete avowal.’

‘Good God!’

‘Why? Didn’t you know?’

‘Yes, I knew, but – ’

These words were balm to the ears of Compson Grice, who had been visited by misgiving as to the truth of Wilfrid’s admission. Would a man really publish that poem if it were his own case; could he really

want it known? But this was conclusive: Mont had been Desert's discoverer and closest friend.

‘So I’ve written to *The Phase* and dealt with it.’

‘Did Wilfrid tell you to do that?’

‘He did.’

‘To publish that poem was crazy. “Quem deus – ” ’ He suddenly caught sight of the expression on Compson Grice’s face. ‘Yes,’ he added, bitterly, ‘you think you’ve got a scoop!’

Compson Grice said coldly:

‘Whether it will do us harm or good remains to be seen.’

‘Bosh!’ said Michael. ‘Everybody will read the thing now, blast them! Have you seen Wilfrid today?’

‘He lunched with me.’

‘How’s he looking?’

Tempted to say ‘Like Asrael!’ Compson Grice substituted: ‘Oh! all right – quite calm.’

‘Calm as hell! Look here, Grice! If you don’t stand by him and help him all you can through this, I’ll never speak to you again.’

‘My dear fellow,’ said Compson Grice, with some dignity, ‘what do you suppose?’ And, straightening

his waistcoat, he passed into the card room.

Michael, muttering, 'Cold-blooded fish!' hurried in the direction of Cork Street. 'I wonder if the old chap would like to see me,' he thought.

But at the very mouth of the street he recoiled and made for Mount Street instead. He was informed that both his father and mother were out, but that Miss Dinny had come up that morning from Condaford.

'All right, Blore. If she's in I'll find her.'

He went up and opened the drawing-room door quietly. In the alcove, under the cage of her aunt's parakeet, Dinny was sitting perfectly still and upright, like a little girl at a lesson, with her hands crossed on her lap and her eyes fixed on space. She did not see him till his hand was on her shoulder.

‘Penny!’

‘How does one learn not to commit murder, Michael?’

‘Ah! Poisonous young brute! Have your people seen *The Phase*?’

Dinny nodded.

‘What was the reaction?’

‘Silence, pinched lips.’

Michael nodded.

‘Poor dear! So you came up?’

‘Yes, I’m going to the theatre with Wilfrid.’

‘Give him my love, and tell him that if he wants to see me I’ll come at any moment. Oh! and, Dinny, try to make him feel that we admire him for spilling the milk.’

Dinny looked up, and he was moved by the expression on her face.

‘It wasn’t all pride that made him, Michael. There’s something

egging him on, and I'm afraid of it. Deep down he isn't sure that it wasn't just cowardice that made him renounce. I know he can't get that thought out of his mind. He feels he's got to prove, not to others so much as to himself, that he isn't a coward. Oh! I know he isn't. But so long as he hasn't proved it to himself and everybody, I don't know what he might do.'

Michael nodded. From his one interview with Wilfrid he had formed something of the same impression.

'Did you know that he's told his publisher to make a public

admission?’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny blankly. ‘What then?’

Michael shrugged.

‘Michael, will anyone grasp the situation Wilfrid was in?’

‘The imaginative type is rare. I don’t pretend *I* can grasp it. Can you?’

‘Only because it happened to Wilfrid.’

Michael gripped her arm.

‘I’m glad you’ve got the old-fashioned complaint, Dinny, not just this modern “physiological urge”.’

Chapter Twenty



WHILE Dinny was dressing her aunt came to her room.

‘Your uncle read me that article, Dinny. I wonder!’

‘What do you wonder, Aunt Em?’

‘I knew a Coltham – but he died.’

‘This one will probably die, too.’

‘Where do you get your boned bodies, Dinny? So restful.’

‘Harridge’s.’

‘Your uncle says he ought to resign from his club.’

‘Wilfrid doesn’t care two straws

about his club; he probably hasn't been in a dozen times. But I don't think he'll resign.'

'Better make him.'

'I should never dream of "making" him do anything.'

'So awkward when they use black balls.'

'Auntie, dear, could I come to the glass?'

Lady Mont crossed the room and took up the slim volume from the bedside table.

'*The Leopard!* But he did change them, Dinny.'

'He did not, Auntie; he had no

spots to change.'

'Baptism and that.'

'If baptism really meant anything, it would be an outrage on children till they knew what it was about.'

'Dinny!'

'I mean it. One doesn't commit people to things entirely without their consent; it isn't decent. By the time Wilfrid could think at all he had no religion.'

'It wasn't the givin' up, then, it was the takin' on.'

'He knows that.'

'Well,' said Lady Mont, turning

towards the door, 'I think it served that Arab right; so intrudin'! If you want a latch-key ask Blore.'

Dinny finished dressing quickly and ran downstairs. Blore was in the dining-room.

'Aunt Em says I may have a key, Blore, and I want a taxi, please.'

Having telephoned to the cab-stand and produced a key, the butler said: 'What with her ladyship speaking her thoughts out loud, miss, I'm obliged to know, and I was saying to Sir Lawrence this morning: "If Miss Dinny could take him off just now, on a tour of the Scotch Highlands where they don't

see the papers, it would save a lot of vexation.” In these days, miss, as you’ll have noticed, one thing comes on the top of another, and people haven’t the memories they had. You’ll excuse my mentioning it.’

‘Thank you ever so, Blore. Nothing I’d like better; only I’m afraid he wouldn’t think it proper.’

‘In these days a young *lady* can do anything, miss.’

‘But men still have to be careful, Blore.’

‘Well, miss, of course, relatives are difficult; but it could be

arranged.'

'I think we shall have to face the music.'

The butler shook his head.

'In my belief, whoever said that first is responsible for a lot of unnecessary unpleasantness. Here's your taxi, miss.'

In the taxi she sat a little forward, getting the air from both windows on her cheeks, which needed cooling. Even the anger and vexation left by that review were lost in this sweeter effervescence. At the corner of Piccadilly she read a newspaper

poster: 'Derby horses arrive.' The Derby tomorrow! How utterly she had lost count of events! The restaurant chosen for their dinner was Blafard's in Soho, and her progress was impeded by the traffic of a town on the verge of national holiday. At the door, with the spaniel held on a leash, stood Stack. He handed her a note: 'Mr Desert sent me with this, miss. I brought the dog for a walk.'

Dinny opened the note with a sensation of physical sickness.

DINNY DARLING,

Forgive my failing you tonight. I've been in a torture of doubt all day. The fact is, until I know

where I stand with the world over this business, I have an overwhelming feeling that I must not commit you to anything; and a public jaunt like this is just what I ought to avoid for you. I suppose you saw *The Daily Phase* – that is the beginning of the racket. I must go through this next week on my own, and measure up where I am. I won't run off, and we can write. You'll understand. The dog is a boon, and I owe him to you. Good bye for a little, my dear love.

Your devoted

W.D.

It was all she could do not to put her hand on her heart under the driver's eyes. Thus to be shut away in the heat of the battle was what, she knew now, she had been dreading all along. With an effort she controlled her lips, said 'Wait a

minute!’ and turned to Stack.

‘I’ll take you and Foch back.’

‘Thank you, miss.’

She bent down to the dog. Panic was at work within her breast! The dog! He was a link between them!

‘Put him into the cab, Stack.’

On the way she said quietly:

‘Is Mr Desert in?’

‘No, miss, he went out when he gave me the note.’

‘Is he all right?’

‘A little worried, I think, miss. I must say I’d like to teach manners to that gentleman in *The Daily Phase*.’

‘Oh! you saw that?’

‘I did; it oughtn’t to be allowed is what I say.’

‘Free speech,’ said Dinny. And the dog pressed his chin against her knee. ‘Is Foch good?’

‘No trouble at all, miss. A gentleman, that dog; aren’t you, boy?’

The dog continued to press his chin on Dinny’s knee; and the feel of it was comforting.

When the cab stopped in Cork Street, she took a pencil from her bag, tore off the empty sheet of Wilfrid’s note, and wrote:

DARLING,

As you will. But by these presents know: I am yours for ever and ever. Nothing can or shall divide me from you, unless you stop loving

Your devoted

DINNY.

You won't do that, will you? Oh! don't!

Licking what was left of the gum on the envelope, she put her half sheet in and held it till it stuck. Giving it to Stack, she kissed the dog's head and said to the driver: 'The Park end of Mount Street, please. Good night, Stack!'

'Good night, miss!'

The eyes and mouth of the

motionless henchman seemed to her so full of understanding that she turned her face away. And that was the end of the jaunt she had been so looking forward to.

From the top of Mount Street she crossed into the Park and sat on the seat where she had sat with him before, oblivious of the fact that she was unattached, without a hat, in eveningdress, and that it was past eight o'clock. She sat with the collar of her cloak turned up to her chestnut-coloured hair, trying to see his point of view. She saw it very well. Pride! She had enough herself to understand. Not to

involve others in one's troubles was elementary. The fonder one was, the less would one wish to involve them. Curiously ironical how love divided people just when they most needed each other! And no way out, so far as she could see. The strains of the Guards' band began to reach her faintly. They were playing – *Faust*? – no – *Carmen*! Wilfrid's favourite opera! She got up and walked over the grass towards the sound. What crowds of people! She took a chair some way off and sat down again, close to some rhododendrons. The Habanera! What a shiver its first

notes always gave one! How wild, sudden, strange and inescapable was love! '*L'amour est enfant de Bohème*'...! The rhododendrons were late this year. That deep rosy one! They had it at Condaford.... Where was he – oh! where was he at this moment? Why could not love pierce veils, so that in spirit she might walk beside him, slip a hand into his! A spirit hand was better than nothing! And Dinny suddenly realized loneliness as only true lovers do when they think of life without the loved one. As flowers wilt on their stalks, so would she wilt – if she were cut

away from him. 'See things through alone!' How long would he want to? For ever? At the thought she started up; and a stroller, who thought the movement meant for him, stood still and looked at her. Her face corrected his impression, and he moved on. She had two hours to kill before she could go in; she could not let them know that her evening had come to grief. The band was finishing off *Carmen* with the Toreador's song. A blot on the opera, its most popular tune! No, not a blot, for it was meant, of course, to blare above the desolation of that tragic end, as the

world blared around the passion of lovers. The world was a heedless and a heartless stage for lives to strut across, or in dark corners join and cling together.... How odd that clapping sounded in the open! She looked at her wrist-watch. Half past nine! An hour yet before it would be really dark. But there was a coolness now, a scent of grass and leaves; the rhododendrons were slowly losing colour, the birds had finished with song. People passed and passed her; she saw nothing funny about them, and they seemed to see nothing funny about her. And Dinny thought:

‘Nothing seems funny any more, and I haven’t had any dinner.’ A coffee stall? Too early, perhaps, but there must be places where she could still get something! No dinner, almost no lunch, no tea – a condition appropriate to the love-sick! She began to move towards Knightsbridge, walking fast, by instinct rather than experience, for this was the first time she had ever wandered alone about London at such an hour. Reaching the gate without adventure, she crossed and went down Sloane Street. She felt much better moving, and chalked up in her mind the thought: ‘For

love-sickness, walking!’ In this straight street there was practically nobody to notice her. The carefully closed and blinded houses seemed to confirm, each with its tall formal narrow face, the indifference of the regimented world to the longings of street-walkers such as she. At the corner of the King’s Road a woman was standing.

‘Could you tell me,’ said Dinny, ‘of any place close by where I could get something to eat?’

The woman addressed, she now saw, had a short face with high cheek-bones on which, and round the eyes, was a good deal of make-

up. Her lips were good-natured, a little thick; her nose, too, rather thick; her eyes had the look which comes of having to be now stony and now luring, as if they had lost touch with her soul. Her dress was dark and fitted her curves, and she wore a large string of artificial pearls. Dinny could not help thinking she had seen people in Society not unlike her.

‘There’s a nice little place on the left.’

‘Would you care to come and have something with me?’ said Dinny, moved by impulse or by something hungry in the woman’s

face.

‘Why! I would,’ said the woman. ‘Fact is, I came out without anything. It’s nice to have company, too.’ She turned up the King’s Road and Dinny turned alongside. It passed through her mind that if she met someone it would be quaint; but for all that she felt better.

‘For God’s sake,’ she thought, ‘be natural!’

The woman led her into a little restaurant, or rather public-house, for it had a bar. There was no one in the eating-room, which had a separate entrance, and they sat

down at a small table with a cruet-stand, a handbell, a bottle of Worcester sauce, and in a vase some failing pyrethrums which had never been fresh. There was a slight smell of vinegar.

‘I *could* do with a cigarette,’ said the woman.

Dinny had none. She tinkled the bell.

‘Any particular sort?’

‘Oh! Gaspers.’

A waitress appeared, looked at the woman, looked at Dinny, and said: ‘Yes?’

‘A packet of Players, please. A

large coffee for me, strong and fresh, and some cake or buns, or anything. What will you have?’

The woman looked at Dinny, as though measuring her capacity, looked at the waitress, and said, hesitating: ‘Well, to tell the truth, I’m hungry. Cold beef and a bottle of stout?’

‘Vegetables?’ said Dinny: ‘A salad?’

‘Well, a salad, thank you.’

‘Good! And pickled walnuts? Will you get it all as quickly as you can, please?’

The waitress passed her tongue

over her lips, nodded, and went away.

‘I say,’ said the woman, suddenly, ‘it’s awful nice of you, you know.’

‘It was so friendly of you to come. I should have felt a bit lost without you.’

‘*She* can’t make it out,’ said the woman nodding her head towards the vanished waitress. ‘To tell you the truth, nor can I.’

‘Why? We’re both hungry.’

‘No doubt about that,’ said the woman; ‘you’re going to see me eat. I’m glad you ordered pickled

walnuts, I never can resist a pickled onion, and it don't do.'

'I might have thought of cocktails,' murmured Dinny, 'but perhaps they don't make them here.'

'A sherry wouldn't be amiss. I'll get 'em.' The woman rose and disappeared into the bar.

Dinny took the chance to powder her nose. She also dived her hand down to the pocket in her 'boned body' where the spoils of South Molton Street were stored, and extracted a five-pound note. She was feeling a sort of sad excitement.

The woman came back with two glasses. 'I told 'em to charge it to our bill. The liquor's good here.'

Dinny raised her glass and sipped. The woman tossed hers off at a draught.

'I wanted that. Fancy a country where you couldn't get a drink!'

'But they can, of course, and do.'

'You bet. But they say some of the liquor's awful.'

Dinny saw that her gaze was travelling up and down her cloak and dress and face with insatiable curiosity.

'Pardon me,' said the woman,

suddenly: 'You got a date?'

'No, I'm going home after this.'

The woman sighed. 'Wish she'd bring those bl-inkin' cigarettes.'

The waitress reappeared with a bottle of stout and the cigarettes. Staring at Dinny's hair, she opened the bottle.

'Coo!' said the woman taking a long draw at her 'Gasper', 'I wanted that.'

'I'll bring you the other things in a minute,' said the waitress.

'I haven't seen you on the stage, have I?' said the woman.

'No, I'm not on the stage.'

The advent of food broke the ensuing hush. The coffee was better than Dinny had hoped and very hot. She had drunk most of it and eaten a large piece of plum cake before the woman, putting a pickled walnut in her mouth, spoke again.

‘D’you live in London?’

‘No. In Oxfordshire.’

‘Well, I like the country, too; but I never see it now. I was brought up near Maidstone – pretty round there.’ She heaved a sigh with a flavouring of stout. ‘They say the Communists in Russia have done away with vice – isn’t that a

scream? An American journalist told me. Well! I never knew a budget make such a difference before,' she continued, expelling smoke as if liberating her soul: 'Dreadful lot of unemployment.'

'It does seem to affect everybody.'

'Affects me, I know,' and she stared stonily. 'I suppose you're shocked at that.'

'It takes a lot to shock people nowadays, don't you find?'

'Well, I don't mix as a rule with bishops.'

Dinny laughed.

‘All the same,’ said the woman, defiantly, ‘I came across a parson who talked the best sense to me I ever heard; of course, I couldn’t follow it.’

‘I’ll make you a bet,’ said Dinny, ‘that I know his name. Cherrell?’

‘In one,’ said the woman, and her eyes grew round.

‘He’s my uncle.’

‘Coo! Well, well! It’s a funny world! And not so large. Nice man he was,’ she added.

‘Still is.’

‘One of the best.’

Dinny, who had been waiting

for those inevitable words, thought: ‘This is where they used to do the “My erring sister” stunt.’

The woman uttered a sigh of repletion.

‘I’ve enjoyed that,’ she said, and rose. ‘Thank you ever so. I must be getting on now, or I’ll be late for business.’

Dinny tinkled the bell. The waitress appeared with suspicious promptitude.

‘The bill, please, and can you get me *that* changed?’

The waitress took the note with a certain caution.

‘I’ll just go and fix myself,’ said the woman; ‘see you in a minute.’ She passed through a door.

Dinny drank up the remains of her coffee. She was trying to realize what it must be like to live like that. The waitress came back with the change, received her tip, said ‘Thank you, miss,’ and went. Dinny resumed the process of realization.

‘Well,’ said the woman’s voice behind her, ‘I don’t suppose I’ll ever see you again. But I’d like to say I think you’re a jolly good sort.’

Dinny looked up at her.

‘When you said you’d come out without anything, did you mean you hadn’t anything to come out with?’

‘Sure thing,’ said the woman.

‘Then would you mind taking this change? It’s horrid to have no money in London.’

The woman bit her lips, and Dinny could see that they were trembling.

‘I wouldn’t like to take your money,’ she said, ‘after you’ve been so kind.’

‘Oh! bosh! Please!’ And, catching her hand, she pressed the money

into it. To her horror, the woman uttered a loud sniff. She was preparing to make a run for the door, when the woman said:

‘D’you know what I’m going to do? I’m going home to have a sleep. My God, I am! I’m going home to have a sleep.’

Dinny hurried back to Sloane Street. Walking past the tall blinded houses, she recognized with gratitude that her love-sickness was much better. If she did not walk too fast, she would not be too soon at Mount Street. It was dark now, and in spite of the haze of city light the sky was alive with stars. She did

not enter the Park again, but walked along its outside railings. It seemed an immense time since she had parted from Stack and the dog in Cork Street. Traffic was thickening as she rounded into Park Lane. Tomorrow all these vehicles would be draining out to Epsom Downs; the Town would be seeming almost empty. And, with a sickening sensation, it flashed on her how empty it would always feel without Wilfrid to see or look forward to.

She came to the gate by the 'jibbing barrel', and suddenly, as though all that evening had been a

dream, she saw Wilfrid standing beside it. She choked and ran forward. He put out his arms and caught her to him.

The moment could hardly be prolonged, for cars and pedestrians were passing in and out; so arm-in-arm they moved towards Mount Street. Dinny just clung to him, and he seemed equally wordless; but the thought that he had come there to be near her was infinitely comforting.

They escorted each other back and forth past the house, like some footman and housemaid for a quarter of an hour off duty. Class

and country, custom and creed, all were forgotten. And, perhaps, no two people in all its seven millions were in those few minutes more moved and at one in the whole of London.

At last the comic instinct woke.

‘We can’t see each other home all night, darling. So one kiss – and yet – one kiss – and yet – one kiss!’

She ran up the steps, and turned the key.

Chapter Twenty-one



WILFRID'S mood when he left his publisher at 'The Jessamine' was angry and confused. Without penetrating to the depths of Compson Grice's mental anatomy, he felt that he had been manipulated; and the whole of that restless afternoon he wandered, swung between relief at having burnt his boats and resentment at the irrevocable. Thus preoccupied, he did not really feel the shock his note would be to Dinny, and only when, returning to his rooms, he

received her answer did his heart go out to her, and with it himself to where she had fortuitously found him. In the few minutes while they paraded Mount Street, silent and half-embraced, she had managed to pass into him her feeling that it was not one but two against the world. Why keep away and make her more unhappy than he need? And he sent her a note by Stack next morning asking her to go 'joy-riding'. He had forgotten the Derby, and their car was involved almost at once in a stream of vehicles.

'I've never seen the Derby,' said

Dinny. 'Could we go?'

There was the more reason why they should go because there seemed to be no reasonable chance of not going.

Dinny was astonished at the general sobriety. No drinking and no streamers, no donkey-carts, false noses, badinage. Not a four-in-hand visible, not a coster nor a Kate; nothing but a wedged and moving stream of motor 'buses and cars mostly shut.

When, at last, they had 'parked' on the Downs, eaten their sandwiches and moved into the crowd, they turned instinctively

towards the chance of seeing a horse.

Frith's 'Derby Day' seemed no longer true, if it ever was. In that picture people seemed to have lives and to be living them; in this crowd everybody seemed trying to get somewhere else.

In the paddock, which at first sight still seemed all people and no horses, Wilfrid said suddenly:

'This is foolish, Dinny; we're certain to be seen.'

'And if we are? Look, there's a horse!'

Quite a number of horses,

indeed, were being led round in a ring. Dinny moved quickly towards them.

‘They all look beautiful to me,’ she said in a hushed voice, ‘and just as good one as the other – except this one; I don’t like his back.’

Wilfrid consulted his card.
‘That’s the favourite.’

‘I still don’t. D’you see what I mean? It comes to a point too near the tail, and then droops.’

‘I agree, but horses run in all shapes.’

‘I’ll back the horse you fancy, Wilfrid.’

‘Give me time, then.’

The people to her left and right kept on saying the horses’ names as they passed. She had a place on the rail with Wilfrid standing close behind her.

‘He’s a pig of a horse,’ said a man on her left, ‘I’ll never back the brute again.’

She took a glance at the speaker. He was broad and about five feet six, with a roll of fat on his neck, a bowler hat, and a cigar in his mouth. The horse’s fate seemed to her the less dreadful.

A lady sitting on a shooting-stick

to her right said:

‘They ought to clear the course for the horses going out. That lost me my money two years ago.’

Wilfrid’s hand rested on her shoulder.

‘I like that one,’ he said, ‘Blenheim. Let’s go and put our money on.’

They went to where people were standing in little queues before a row of what looked like pigeon-holes.

‘Stand here,’ he said. ‘I’ll lay my egg and come back to you.’

Dinny stood watching.

‘How d’you do, Miss Cherrell?’ A tall man in a grey top-hat, with a very long case of field-glasses slung round him, had halted before her.

‘We met at the Foch statue and your sister’s wedding – remember?’

‘Oh! yes. Mr Muskham.’ Her heart was hurrying, and she restrained herself from looking towards Wilfrid.

‘Any news of your sister?’

‘Yes, we heard from Egypt. They must have had it terribly hot in the Red Sea.’

‘Have you backed anything?’

‘Not yet.’

‘I shouldn’t touch the favourite – he won’t stay.’

‘We thought of Blenheim.’

‘Well, nice horse, and handy for the turns. But there’s one more fancied in his stable. I take it you’re a neophyte. I’ll give you two tips, Miss Cherrell. Look for one or both of two things in a horse: leverage behind, and personality – not looks, just personality.’

‘Leverage behind? Do you mean higher behind than in front?’

Jack Muskham smiled. ‘That’s about it. If you see that in a horse, especially where it has to come up

a hill, back it.'

'But personality? Do you mean putting his head up and looking over the tops of people into the distance? I saw one horse do that.'

'By Jove, I should like you as a pupil! That's just about what I do mean.'

'But I don't know which horse it was,' said Dinny.

'That's awkward.' And then she saw the interested benevolence on his face stiffen. He lifted his hat and turned away. Wilfrid's voice behind her said:

'Well, you've got a tenner on.'

‘Let’s go to the Stand and see the race.’ He did not seem to have seen Muskham; and, with his hand within her arm, she tried to forget the sudden stiffening of Jack Muskham’s face. The crowd’s multiple entreaty that she should have her ‘fortune told’ did its best to distract her, and she arrived at the Stand in a mood of indifference to all but Wilfrid and the horses. They found standing room close to the bookmakers near the rails.

‘Green and chocolate – I can remember that. Pistache is my favourite chocolate filling. What shall I win if I do win, darling?’

‘Listen!’

They isolated the words
‘Eighteen to one Blenheim!’

‘A hundred and eighty!’ said
Dinny. ‘Splendid!’

‘Well, it means that he’s not
fancied by the stable; they’ve got
another running. Here they come!
Two with chocolate and green. The
second of them is ours.’

The parade, enchanting to all
except the horses, gave her the
chance to see the brown horse they
had backed adorning its perched
rider.

‘How d’you like him, Dinny?’

‘I love them nearly all. How can people tell which is the best by looking at them?’

‘They can’t.’

The horses were turning now and cantering past the Stand.

‘Would you say Blenheim is higher behind than in front?’ murmured Dinny.

‘No. Very nice action. Why?’

But she only pressed his arm and gave a little shiver.

Neither of them having glasses, all was obscure to them when the race began. A man just behind kept saying: ‘The favourite’s leadin’! The

favourite's leadin'!

As the horses came round Tattenham Corner, the same man bumbled: 'The Pasha – the Pasha'll win – no, the favourite – the favourite wins! – no, he don't – Iliad – Iliad wins.'

Dinny felt Wilfrid's hand grip her arm.

'Ours,' he said, 'on this side – look!'

Dinny saw a horse on the far side in pink and brown, and nearer her the chocolate and green. It was ahead, it was ahead! They had won!

Amidst the silence and discomfiture those two stood smiling at each other. It seemed an omen!

‘I’ll draw your money, and we’ll go to the car and be off.’

He insisted on her taking all the money, and she ensconced it with her other wealth – so much more insurance against any sudden decision to deprive her of himself.

They drove again into Richmond Park on the way home, and sat a long time among the young bracken, listening to the cuckoos, very happy in the sunny, peaceful, whispering afternoon.

They dined together in a Kensington restaurant, and he left her finally at the top of Mount Street.

That night she slept unvisited by doubts or dreams, and went down to breakfast with clear eyes and a flush of sunburn on her cheeks. Her uncle was reading *The Daily Phase*. He put it down and said:

‘When you’ve had your coffee, Dinny, you might glance at this. There is something about publishers,’ he added, ‘which makes one doubt sometimes whether they are men and brothers. And there is something about editors which

makes it certain sometimes that they are not.’

Dinny read Compson Grice’s letter, printed under the headlines:

MR DESERT’S APOSTASY.

OUR CHALLENGE TAKEN UP.

A CONFESSION.

Two stanzas from Sir Alfred Lyall’s poem *Theology in Extremis* followed:

Why? Am I bidding for glory’s roll?
I shall be murdered and clean
forgot;
Is it a bargain to save my soul?
God, whom I trust in, bargains not.
Yet for the honour of English race

May I not live or endure disgrace

...

I must be gone to the crowd untold
Of men by the Cause which they
served unknown,

Who moulder in myriad graves of
old;

Never a story and never a stone
Tells of the martyrs who die like
me,

Just for the pride of the old
countrie.

And the pink of sunburn gave way
to a flood of crimson.

‘Yes,’ murmured Sir Lawrence,
watching her, ‘ “the fat is in the
fire”, as old Forsyte would have
said. Still, I was talking to a man

last night who thought that nowadays nothing makes an indelible mark. Cheating at cards, boning necklaces – you go abroad for two years and it's all forgotten. As for sex abnormality, according to him it's no longer abnormal. So we must cheer up!'

Dinny said passionately: 'What I resent is that any worm will have the power to say what he pleases.'

Sir Lawrence nodded: 'The greater the worm, the greater the power. But it's not the worms we need bother about; it's the people with 'pride of English race', and there are still a few about.'

‘Uncle, is there any way in which Wilfrid can show publicly that he’s not a coward?’

‘He did well in the war.’

‘Who remembers the war?’

‘Perhaps,’ muttered Sir Lawrence, ‘we could throw a bomb at his car in Piccadilly, so that he could look at it over the side and light a cigarette. I can’t think of anything more helpful.’

‘I saw Mr Muskham yesterday.’

‘Then you were at the Derby?’
He took a very little cigar from his pocket. ‘Jack takes the view that you are being victimized.’

‘Oh! Why can’t people leave one alone?’

‘Attractive nymphs are never left alone. Jack’s a misogynist.’

Dinny gave a little desperate laugh.

‘I suppose one’s troubles *are* funny.’

She got up and went to the window. It seemed to her that all the world was barking, like dogs at a cornered cat, and yet there was nothing in Mount Street but a van from the Express Dairy.

Chapter Twenty-two



JACK MUSKHAM occupied a bedroom at Burton's Club when racing kept him overnight in town. Having read an account of the Derby in *The Daily Phase*, he turned the paper idly. The other features in 'that rag' were commonly of little interest to him. Its editing shocked his formalism, its news jarred his taste, its politics offended him by being so like his own. But his perusal was not perfunctory enough to prevent him from seeing the headline 'Mr Desert's Apostasy'.

Reading the half column that followed it, he pushed the paper away and said: 'That fellow must be stopped.'

Glorying in his yellow streak, was he, and taking that nice girl with him to Coventry! Hadn't even the decency to avoid being seen with her in public on the very day when he was confessing himself as yellow as that rag!

In an age when tolerations and condonations seemed almost a disease, Jack Muskham knew and registered his own mind. He had disliked young Desert at first sight. The fellow's name suited him! And

to think that this nice girl, who, without any training, had made those shrewd remarks about the racehorse, was to have her life ruined by this yellow-livered young braggart! It was too much! If it hadn't been for Lawrence, indeed, he would have done something about it before now. But there his mind stammered. What?... Here was the fellow publicly confessing his disgrace! An old dodge, that – taking the sting out of criticism! Making a virtue of necessity! Parading his desertion! That cock shouldn't fight, if he had his way! But once more his mind

stammered.... No outsider could interfere. And yet, unless there were some outward and visible sign condemning the fellow's conduct, it would look as if nobody cared.

‘By George!’ he thought. ‘This Club, at least, can sit up and take notice. We don't want rats in Burton's!’

He brought the matter up in Committee meeting that very afternoon, and was astonished almost to consternation by the apathy with which it was received. Of the seven members present – the ‘Squire’, Wilfrid Bentworth, being

in the Chair – four seemed to think it was a matter between young Desert and his conscience, and, besides, it looked like being a newspaper stunt. Times had changed since Lyall wrote that poem. One member went so far as to say he didn't want to be bothered, he hadn't read *The Leopard*, he didn't know Desert, and he hated *The Daily Phase*.

‘So do I,’ said Jack Muskham, ‘but here’s the poem.’ He had sent out for it and spent an hour after lunch reading it. ‘Let me read you a bit. It’s poisonous.’

‘For heaven’s sake no, Jack!’

The fifth member, who had so far said nothing, supposed that if Muskham pressed it they must all read the thing.

‘I do press it.’

The ‘Squire’, hitherto square and silent, remarked: ‘The secretary will get copies and send them round to the Committee. Better send them, too, a copy of today’s *Daily Phase*. We’ll discuss it at the meeting next Friday. Now about this claret?’ And they moved to consideration of important matters.

It has been noticed that when a newspaper of a certain type lights on an incident which enables it at

once to exhibit virtue and beat the drum of its own policy, it will exploit that incident, within the limits of the law of libel, without regard to the susceptibilities of individuals. Secured by the confession in Compson Grice's letter, *The Daily Phase* made the most of its opportunity, and in the eight days intervening before the next Committee meeting gave the Committeemen little chance of professing ignorance or indifference. Everybody, indeed, was reading and talking about *The Leopard* and, on the morning of the adjourned meeting, *The Daily Phase*

had a long allusive column on the extreme importance of British behaviour in the East. It had also a large-type advertisement. ‘*The Leopard and other Poems*, by Wilfrid Desert: published by Compson Grice: 40,000 copies sold: Third Large Impression ready.’

A debate on the ostracism of a fellow-being will bring almost any man to a Committee meeting; and the attendance included some never before known to come.

A motion had been framed by Jack Muskhams.

‘That the Honourable Wilfrid Desert be requested, under Rule 23,

to resign his membership of Burton's Club, because of conduct unbecoming to a member.'

He opened the discussion in these words:

'You've all had copies of Desert's poem 'The Leopard' and *The Daily Phase* of yesterday week. There's no doubt about the thing. Desert has publicly owned to having ratted from his religion at the pistol's point, and I say he's no longer fit to be a member of this Club. It was founded in memory of a very great traveller who'd have dared Hell itself. We don't want people here who don't act up to English

traditions, and make a song about it into the bargain.'

There was a short silence, and then the fifth member of the Committee at the previous meeting remarked:

'It's a deuced fine poem, all the same.'

A well-known K.C., who had once travelled in Turkey, added:

'Oughtn't he to have been asked to attend?'

'Why?' asked Jack Muskham. 'He can't say more than is said in that poem, or in that letter of his publisher's.'

The fourth member of the Committee at the previous meeting muttered: 'I don't like paying attention to *The Daily Phase*.'

'We can't help his having chosen that particular rag,' said Jack Muskham.

'Very distasteful,' continued the fourth member, 'diving into matters of conscience. Are we all prepared to say we wouldn't have done the same?'

There was a sound as of feet shuffling, and a wrinkled expert on the early civilizations of Ceylon murmured: 'To my mind, Desert is on the carpet – not for apostasy,

but for the song he's made about it. Decency should have kept him quiet. Advertising his book! It's in a third edition, and everybody reading it. Making money out of it seems to me the limit.'

'I don't suppose,' said the fourth member, 'that he thought of that. It's the accident of the sensation.'

'He could have withdrawn the book.'

'Depends on his contract. Besides, that would look like running from the storm he's roused. As a matter of fact, I think it's rather fine to have made an open confession.'

‘Theatrical!’ murmured the K.C.

‘If this,’ said Jack Muskhams, ‘were one of the Service Clubs, they wouldn’t think twice about it.’

An author of *Mexico Revisited* said dryly:

‘But it is not.’

‘I don’t know if you can judge poets like other people,’ mused the fifth member.

‘In matters of ordinary conduct,’ said the expert on the civilization of Ceylon, ‘why not?’

A little man at the end of the table opposite the Chairman remarked, ‘*The D-D-Daily Ph-Phase,*’

as if releasing a small spasm of wind.

‘Everybody’s talking about the thing,’ said the K.C.

‘My young people,’ put in a man who had not yet spoken, ‘scoff. They say: “What does it matter what he did?” They talk about hypocrisy, laugh at Lyall’s poem, and say it’s good for the Empire to have some wind let out of it.’

‘Exactly!’ said Jack Muskham: ‘That’s the modern jargon. All standards gone by the board. Are we going to stand for that?’

‘Anybody here know young

Desert?’ asked the fifth member.

‘To nod to,’ replied Jack Muskham.

Nobody else acknowledged acquaintanceship.

A very dark man with deep lively eyes said suddenly:

‘All I can say is I trust the story has not got about in Afghanistan; I’m going there next month.’

‘Why?’ said the fourth member.

‘Merely because it will add to the contempt with which I shall be regarded, anyway.’

Coming from a well-known traveller, this remark made more

impression than anything said so far. Two members, who, with the Chairman, had not yet spoken, said simultaneously: 'Quite!'

'I don't like condemning a man unheard,' said the K.C.

'What about that, "Squire"?' asked the fourth member.

The Chairman, who was smoking a pipe, took it from his mouth.

'Anybody anything more to say?'

'Yes,' said the author of *Mexico Revisited*, 'let's put it on his conduct in publishing that poem.'

'You can't,' growled Jack

Muskham; ‘the whole thing’s of a piece. The point is simply: Is he fit to be a member here or not? I ask the Chairman to put that to the meeting.’

But the ‘Squire’ continued to smoke his pipe. His experience of Committees told him that the time was not yet. Separate or ‘knot’ discussions would now set in. They led nowhere, of course, but ministered to a general sense that the subject was having justice done to it.

Jack Muskham sat silent, his long face impassive and his long legs stretched out. The discussion

continued.

‘Well?’ said the member who had revisited Mexico, at last.

The ‘Squire’ tapped out his pipe.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘that Mr Desert should be asked to give us his reasons for publishing that poem.’

‘Hear, hear!’ said the K.C.

‘Quite!’ said the two members who had said it before.

‘I agree,’ said the authority on Ceylon.

‘Anybody against that?’ said the ‘Squire’.

‘I don’t see the use of it,’ muttered Jack Muskham. ‘He

ratted, and he's confessed it.'

No one else objecting, the 'Squire' continued:

'The Secretary will ask him to see us and explain. There's no other business, gentlemen.'

In spite of the general understanding that the matter was *sub judice*, these proceedings were confided to Sir Lawrence before the day was out by three members of the Committee, including Jack Muskham. He took the knowledge out with him to dinner at South Street.

Since the publication of the

poems and Compson Grice's letter, Michael and Fleur had talked of little else, forced to by the comments and questionings of practically every acquaintance. They differed radically. Michael, originally averse to publication of the poem, now that it was out, stoutly defended the honesty and courage of Wilfrid's avowal. Fleur could not forgive what she called the 'stupidity of the whole thing'. If he had only kept quiet and not indulged his conscience or his pride, the matter would have blown over, leaving practically no mark. It was, she said, unfair to

Dinny, and unnecessary so far as Wilfrid himself was concerned; but of course he had always been like that. She had not forgotten the uncompromising way in which eight years ago he had asked her to become his mistress, and the still more uncompromising way in which he had fled from her when she had not complied. When Sir Lawrence told them of the meeting at Burton's, she said simply:

‘Well, what could he expect?’

Michael muttered:

‘Why is Jack Muskham so bitter?’

‘Some dogs attack each other at sight. Others come to it more meditatively. This appears to be a case of both. I should say Dinny is the bone.’

Fleur laughed.

‘Jack Muskham and Dinny!’

‘Sub-consciously, my dear. The workings of a misogynist’s mind are not for us to pry into, except in Vienna. They can tell you everything there; even to the origin of hiccoughs.’

‘I doubt if Wilfrid will go before the Committee,’ said Michael, gloomily. Fleur confirmed him.

‘Of course he won’t, Michael.’

‘Then what will happen?’

‘Almost certainly he’ll be expelled under rule whatever it is.’

Michael shrugged. ‘He won’t care. What’s a Club more or less?’

‘No,’ said Fleur; ‘but at present the thing is in flux – people just talk about it; but expulsion from his Club will be definite condemnation. It’s just what’s wanted to make opinion line up against him.’

‘And *for* him.’

‘Oh! for him, yes; but we know what that amounts to – the

disgruntled.'

'That's all beside the point,' said Michael gruffly. 'I know what he's feeling: his first instinct was to defy that Arab, and he bitterly regrets that he went back on it.'

Sir Lawrence nodded.

'Dinny asked me if there was anything he could do to show publicly that he wasn't a coward. You'd think there might be, but it's not easy. People object to being put into positions of extreme danger in order that their rescuers may get into the papers. Van horses seldom run away in Piccadilly. He might throw

someone off Westminster Bridge, and jump in after him; but that would merely be murder and suicide. Curious that, with all the heroism there is about, it should be so difficult to be deliberately heroic.'

'He ought to face the Committee,' said Michael; 'and I hope he will. There's something he told me. It sounds silly; but, knowing Wilfrid, one can see it made all the difference.'

Fleur had planted her elbows on the polished table and her chin on her hands. So, leaning forward, she looked like the girl contemplating

a china image in her father's picture by Alfred Stevens.

‘Well?’ she said. ‘What is it?’

‘He said he felt sorry for his executioner.’

Neither his wife nor his father moved, except for a slight raising of the eyebrows. He went on defiantly:

‘Of course, it sounds absurd, but he said the fellow begged him not to make him shoot – he was under a vow to convert the infidel.’

‘To mention that to the Committee,’ Sir Lawrence said slowly, ‘would certainly be telling

it to the marines.'

'He's not likely to,' said Fleur; 'he'd rather die than be laughed at.'

'Exactly! I only mentioned it to show that the whole thing's not so simple as it appears to the pukka sahib.'

'When,' murmured Sir Lawrence, in a detached voice, 'have I heard anything so nicely ironical? But all this is not helping Dinny.'

'I think I'll go and see him again,' said Michael.

'The simplest thing,' said Fleur, 'is for him to resign at once.'

And with that common-sense

conclusion the discussion closed.

Chapter Twenty-three



THOSE who love, when the object of their love is in trouble, must keep sympathy to themselves and yet show it. Dinny did not find this easy. She watched, lynx-eyed, for any chance to assuage her lover's bitterness of soul; but though they continued to meet daily, he gave her none. Except for the expression of his face when he was off guard, he might have been quite untouched by tragedy. Throughout that fortnight after the Derby she came to his rooms, and they went

joy-riding, accompanied by the spaniel Foch; and he never mentioned that of which all more or less literary and official London was talking. Through Sir Lawrence, however, she heard that he had been asked to meet the Committee of Burton's Club and had answered by resignation. And, through Michael, who had been to see him again, she heard that he knew of Jack Muskham's part in the affair. Since he so rigidly refused to open out to her, she, at great cost, tried to surpass him in obliviousness of purgatory. His face often made her ache, but she kept that ache out of

her own face. And all the time she was in bitter doubt whether she was right to refrain from trying to break through to him. It was a long and terrible lesson in the truth that not even real love can reach and anoint deep spiritual sores. The other half of her trouble, the unending quiet pressure of her family's sorrowful alarm, caused her an irritation of which she was ashamed.

And then occurred an incident which, however unpleasant and alarming at the moment, was almost a relief because it broke up that silence.

They had been to the Tate Gallery and, walking home, had just come up the steps leading to Carlton House Terrace. Dinny was still talking about the pre-Raphaelites, and saw nothing till Wilfrid's changed expression made her look for the cause. There was Jack Muskham, with a blank face, formally lifting a tall hat as if to someone who was not there, and a short dark man removing a grey felt covering, in unison. They passed, and she heard Muskham say:

‘That I consider the limit.’

Instinctively her hand went out

to grasp Wilfrid's arm, but too late. He had spun round in his tracks. She saw him, three yards away, tap Muskham on the shoulder, and the two face each other, with the little man looking up at them like a terrier at two large dogs about to fight. She heard Wilfrid say in a low voice:

‘What a coward and cad you are!’

There followed an endless silence, while her eyes flitted from Wilfrid's convulsed face to Muskham's, rigid and menacing, and the terrier man's black eyes snapping up at them. She heard

him say: 'Come on, Jack!' saw a tremor pass through the length of Muskham's figure, his hands clench, his lips move:

'You heard that, Yule?'

The little man's hand, pushed under his arm, pulled at him; the tall figure turned; the two moved away; and Wilfrid was back at her side.

'Coward and cad!' he muttered: 'Coward and cad! Thank God I've told him!' He threw up his head, took a gulp of air, and said: 'That's better! Sorry, Dinny!'

In Dinny feeling was too

churned up for speech. The moment had been so savagely primitive; and she had the horrid fear that it could not end there; and intuition, too, that she was the cause, the hidden reason of Muskham's virulence. She remembered Sir Lawrence's words: 'Jack thinks you are being victimized.' What if she were! What business was it of that long, lounging man who hated women! Absurd! She heard Wilfrid muttering:

‘ “The limit!” He might know what one feels!’

‘But, darling, if we all knew

what other people felt, we should be seraphim, and he's only a member of the Jockey Club.'

'He's done his best to get me outed, and he couldn't even refrain from *that*.'

'It's I who ought to be angry, not you. It's I who force you to go about with me. Only, you see, I like it so. But, darling, I don't shrink in the wash. What *is* the use of my being your love if you won't let yourself go with me?'

'Why should I worry you with what can't be cured?'

'I exist to be worried by you.'

Please worry me!’

‘Oh! Dinny, you’re an angel!’

‘I repeat it is not so. I really have blood in my veins.’

‘It’s like ear-ache; you shake your head, and shake your head, and it’s no good. I thought publishing *The Leopard* would free me, but it hasn’t. Am I “yellow”, Dinny – am I?’

‘If you were yellow I should not have loved you.’

‘Oh! I don’t know. Women can love anything.’

‘Proverbially we admire courage before all. I’m going to be brutal.

Had doubt of your courage
anything to do with your ache?
Isn't it just due to feeling that other
people doubt?'

He gave a little unhappy laugh.
'I don't know; I only know it's
there.'

Dinny looked up at him.

'Oh! darling, don't ache! I do so
hate it for you.'

They stood for a moment
looking deeply at each other, and a
vendor of matches, without the
money to indulge in spiritual
trouble, said:

'Box o' lights, sir?'...

Though she had been closer to Wilfrid that afternoon than perhaps ever before, Dinny returned to Mount Street oppressed by fears. She could not get the look on Muskham's face out of her head, nor the sound of his: 'You heard that, Yule?'

It was silly! Out of such explosive encounters nothing but legal remedies came nowadays; and of all people she had ever seen, she could least connect Jack Muskham with the Law. She noticed a hat in the hall, and heard voices, as she was passing her uncle's study. She had barely taken

off her own hat when he sent for her. He was talking to the little terrier man, who was perched astride of a chair, as if riding a race.

‘Dinny, Mr Telfourd Yule; my niece Dinny Cherrell.’

The little man bowed over her hand.

‘Yule has been telling me,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘of that encounter. He’s not easy in his mind.’

‘Neither am I,’ said Dinny.

‘I’m sure Jack didn’t mean those words to be heard, Miss Cherrell.’

‘I don’t agree; I think he did.’

Yule shrugged. The expression on his face was rueful, and Dinny liked its comical ugliness.

‘Well, he certainly didn’t mean *you* to hear them.’

‘He ought to have, then. Mr Desert would prefer not to be seen with me in public. It’s I who make him.’

‘I came to your Uncle because when Jack won’t talk about a thing, it’s serious. I’ve known him a long time.’

Dinny stood silent. The flush on her cheeks had dwindled to two red spots. And the two men stared at

her, thinking, perhaps, that, with her cornflower-blue eyes, slenderness, and that hair, she looked unsuited to the matter in hand. She said quietly: 'What can I do, Uncle Lawrence?'

'I don't see, my dear, what anyone can do at the moment. Mr Yule says that he left Jack going back to Royston. I thought possibly I might take you down to see him tomorrow. He's a queer fellow; if he didn't date so, I shouldn't worry. Such things blow over, as a rule.'

Dinny controlled a sudden disposition to tremble.

'What do you mean by "date"?'

Sir Lawrence looked at Yule and said: 'We don't want to seem absurd. There's been no duel fought between Englishmen, so far as I know, for seventy or eighty years; but Jack is a survival. We don't quite know what to think. Horse-play is not in his line; neither is a law court. And yet we can't see him taking no further notice.'

'I suppose,' said Dinny, with spirit, 'he won't see, on reflection, that he's more to blame than Wilfrid?'

'No,' said Yule, 'he won't. Believe me, Miss Cherrell, I am deeply sorry about the whole

business.'

Dinny bowed. 'I think it was very nice of you to come; thank you!'

'I suppose,' said Sir Lawrence, doubtfully, 'you couldn't get Desert to send him an apology?'

'So *that*,' she thought, 'is what they wanted me for.' 'No, Uncle, I couldn't – I couldn't even ask him. I'm quite sure he wouldn't.'

'I see,' said Sir Lawrence glumly.

Bowing to Yule, Dinny turned towards the door. In the hall she seemed to be seeing through the wall behind her the renewed

shrugging of their shoulders, the ruefulness on their glum faces, and she went up to her room. Apology! Thinking of Wilfrid's badgered, tortured face, the very idea of it offended her. Stricken to the quick already on the score of personal courage, it was the last thing he would dream of. She wandered unhappily about her room, then took out his photograph. The face she loved looked back at her with the sceptical indifference of an effigy. Wilful, sudden, proud, self-centred, deeply dual; but cruel, no, and cowardly – *no!*

‘Oh! my darling!’ she thought,

and put it away.

She went to her window and leaned out. A beautiful evening – the Friday of Ascot week, the first of those two weeks when in England fine weather is almost certain! On Wednesday there had been a deluge, but today had the feel of real high summer. Down below a taxi drew up – her Uncle and Aunt were going out to dinner. There they came, with Blore putting them in and standing to look after them. Now the staff would turn on the wireless. Yes! Here it was! She opened her door. Grand opera! *Rigoletto*! The

twittering of those tarnished melodies came up to her in all the bravura of an age which knew better than this, it seemed, how to express the emotions of wayward hearts.

The gong! She did not want to go down and eat, but she must, or Blore and Augustine would be upset. She washed hastily, compromised with her dress, and went down.

But while she ate she grew more restless, as if sitting still and attending to a single function were sharpening the edge of her anxiety. A duel! Fantastic, in these days!

And yet – Uncle Lawrence was uncanny, and Wilfrid in just the mood to do anything to show himself unafraid. Were duels illegal in France? Thank heaven she had all that money. No! It was absurd! People had called each other names with impunity for nearly a century. No good to fuss; tomorrow she would go with Uncle Lawrence and see that man. It was all, in some strange way, on her account. What would one of her own people do if called a coward and a cad – her father, her brother, Uncle Adrian? What *could* they do? Horsewhips, fists, law courts – all such hopeless,

coarse, ugly remedies! And she felt for the first time that Wilfrid had been wrong to use such words. Ah! But was he not entitled to hit back? Yes, indeed! She could see again his head jerked up and hear his: ‘Ah! That’s better!’

Swallowing down her coffee, she got up and sought the drawing-room. On the sofa was her Aunt’s embroidery thrown down, and she gazed at it with a feeble interest. An intricate old French design needing many coloured wools – grey rabbits looking archly over their shoulders at long, curious, yellow dogs seated on yellower

haunches, with red eyes and tongues hanging out; leaves and flowers, too, and here and there a bird, all set in a background of brown wool. Tens of thousands of stitches, which, when finished, would lie under glass on a little table, and last till they were all dead and no one knew who had wrought them. *Tout lasse, tout passe!* The strains of *Rigoletto* still came floating from the basement. Really Augustine must have drama in her soul, to be listening to a whole opera.

‘La Donna è mobile!’

Dinny took up her book, the

Memoirs of Harriette Wilson; a tome in which no one kept any faith to speak of except the authoress, and she only in her own estimation; a loose, bright, engaging, conceited minx, with a good heart and one real romance among a peck of love affairs.

‘*La Donna è mobile!*’ It came mocking up the stairs, fine and free, as if the tenor had reached his Mecca. *Mobile!* No! That was more true of men than of women! Women did not change. One loved – one lost, perhaps! She sat with closed eyes till the last notes of that last act had died away, then went

up to bed. She passed a night broken by dreams, and was awakened by a voice saying:

‘Someone on the telephone for you, Miss Dinny.’

‘For me? Why! What time is it?’

‘Half past seven, miss.’

She sat up startled.

‘Who is it?’

‘No name, miss; but he wants to speak to you special.’

With the thought ‘Wilfrid!’ she jumped up, put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and ran down.

‘Yes. Who is it?’

‘Stack, miss. I’m sorry to disturb

you so early, but I thought it best. Mr Desert, miss, went to bed as usual last night, but this morning the dog was whining in his room, and I went in, and I see he's not been in bed at all. He must have gone out very early, because I've been about since half past six. I shouldn't have disturbed you, miss, only I didn't like the look of him last night... Can you hear me, miss?'

'Yes. Has he taken any clothes or anything?'

'No, miss.'

'Did anybody come to see him last night?'

‘No, miss. But a letter came by hand about half past nine. I noticed him distraight, miss, when I took the whisky in. Perhaps it’s nothing, but being so sudden, I... Can you hear me, miss?’

‘Yes. I’ll dress at once and come round. Stack, can you get me a taxi, or, better, a car, by the time I’m there?’

‘I’ll get a car, miss.’

‘Is there any service to the Continent he could have caught?’

‘Nothing before nine o’clock.’

‘I’ll be round as quick as I can.’

‘Yes, miss. Don’t you worry,

miss; he might be wanting exercise or something.'

Dinny replaced the receiver and flew upstairs.

Chapter Twenty-four



WILFRID'S taxi-cab, whose tank he had caused to be filled to the brim, ground slowly up Haverstock Hill towards the Spaniard's Road. He looked at his watch. Forty miles to Royston – even in this growler he would be there by nine! He took out a letter and read it through once more.

Liverpool Street Station.

Friday.

SIR,

You will agree that the matter of this afternoon cannot rest there. Since the Law denies

one decent satisfaction, I give you due notice that I shall horsewhip you publicly whenever and wherever I first find you unprotected by the presence of a lady.

Yours faithfully,

J. MUSKHAM.

The Briery, Royston.

‘Whenever and wherever I first find you unprotected by the presence of a lady!’ That would be sooner than the swine thought! A pity the fellow was so much older than himself.

The cab had reached the top now, and was speeding along the lonely Spaniard’s Road. In the early glistening morning the view

was worth a poet's notice, but Wilfrid lay back in the cab, unseeing, consumed by his thoughts. Something to hit at. This chap, at any rate, should no longer sneer at him! He had no plan except to be publicly on hand at the first possible moment after reading those words: 'Unprotected by the presence of a lady!' Taken as sheltering behind a petticoat? Pity it was not a real duel! The duels of literature jig-sawed in his brain – Bel Ami, Bazarov, Dr Slammer, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, D'Artagnan, Sir Toby, Winkle – all those creatures of fancy who had

endeared the duel to readers. Duels and runs on banks, those two jewels in the crown of drama – gone! Well, he had shaved – with cold water! – and dressed with as much care as if he were not going to a vulgar brawl. The dandified Jack Muskham and a scene of low violence! Very amusing! The cab ground and whirred its way on through the thin early traffic of market and milk carts; and Wilfrid sat drowsing after his almost sleepless night. Barnet he passed, and Hatfield, and the confines of Welwyn Garden City, then Knebworth, and the long villages

of Stevenage, Graveley and Baldock. Houses and trees seemed touched by unreality in the fine haze. Postmen, and maids on doorsteps, boys riding farm horses, and now and then an early cyclist, alone inhabited the outdoor world. And, with that wry smile on his lips and his eyes half closed, he lay back, his feet pressed against the seat opposite. He had not to stage the scene, nor open the brawl. He had but to deliver himself, as it were registered, so that he could not be missed.

The cab slowed up.

‘We’re gettin’ near Royston,

governor; where d'you want to go?'

'Pull up at the inn.'

The cab resumed its progress. The morning light hardened. All, now, was positive, away to the round, high-lying clumps of beeches. On the grassy slope to his right he saw a string of sheeted race-horses moving slowly back from exercise. The cab entered a long village street, and near its end stopped at an hotel. Wilfrid got out.

'Garage your cab. I'll want you to take me back.'

'Right, governor.'

He went in and asked for breakfast. Just nine o'clock! While eating he inquired of the waiter where the Briery was.

'It's the long low 'ouse lying back on the right, sir; but if you want Mr Muskham, you've only to stand in the street outside 'ere. 'E'll be passing on his pony at five past ten; you can set your watch by him going to his stud farm when there's no racing.'

'Thank you, that will save me trouble.'

At five minutes before ten, smoking a cigarette, he took his position at the hotel gate. Girt-in,

and with that smile, he stood motionless, and through his mind passed and repassed the scene between Tom Sawyer and the boy in the too-good clothes, walking round each other with an elaborate ritual of insults before the whirlwind of their encounter. There would be no ritual today! 'If I can lay him out,' he thought, 'I will!' His hands, concealed in the pockets of his jacket, kept turning into fists; otherwise he stood, still as the gatepost against which he leaned, his face veiled in the thin fume rising from his cigarette. He noticed with satisfaction his

cabman talking to another chauffeur outside the yard, a man up the street opposite cleaning windows, and a butcher's cart. Muskham could not pretend this was not a public occasion. If they had neither of them boxed since schooldays, the thing would be a crude mix-up; all the more chance of hurting or being hurt! The sun topped some trees on the far side and shone on his face. He moved a pace or two to get the full of it. The sun – all good in life came from the sun! And suddenly he thought of Dinny. The sun to her was not what it was to him. Was he in a

dream – was she real? Or, rather, were she and all this English business some rude interval of waking? God knew! He stirred and looked at his watch. Three minutes past ten, and there, sure enough, as the waiter had said, coming up the street was a rider, unconcerned, sedate, with a long easy seat on a small well-bred animal. Closer and closer, unaware! Then the rider's eyes came round, there was a movement of his chin. He raised a hand to his hat, checked the pony, wheeled it and cantered back.

‘H'm!’ thought Wilfrid. ‘Gone for his whip!’ And from the stump of

his cigarette he lighted another. A voice behind him said:

‘What’d I tell you, sir? That’s Mr Muskham.’

‘He seems to have forgotten something.’

‘Ah!’ said the waiter, ‘he’s regular as a rule. They say at the stud he’s a Turk for order. Here he comes again; not lost much time, ’as ’e?’

He was coming at a canter. About thirty yards away he reined up and got off. Wilfrid heard him say to the pony, ‘Stand, Betty!’ His heart began to beat, his hands in

his pockets were clenched fast; he still leaned against the gate. The waiter had withdrawn, but with the tail of his eye Wilfrid could see him at the hotel door, waiting as if to watch over the interview he had fostered. His cabman was still engaged in the endless conversation of those who drive cars; the shopman still cleaning his windows; the butcher's man rejoining his cart. Muskham came deliberately, a cut-and-thrust whip in his hand.

‘Now!’ thought Wilfrid.

Within three yards Muskham stopped. ‘Are you ready?’

Wilfrid took out his hands, let the cigarette drop from his lips, and nodded. Raising the whip, the long figure sprang. One blow fell, then Wilfrid closed. He closed so utterly that the whip was useless and Muskham dropped it. They swayed back clinched together against the gate; then both, as if struck by the same idea, unclined and raised their fists. In a moment it was clear that neither was any longer expert. They drove at each other without science, but with a sort of fury, length and weight on one side, youth and agility on the other. Amidst the scrambling

concussions of this wild encounter, Wilfrid was conscious of a little crowd collecting – they had become a street show! Their combat was so breathless, furious and silent, that its nature seemed to infect that gathering, and from it came nothing but a muttering. Both were soon cut on the mouth and bleeding, both were soon winded and half dazed. In sheer breathlessness they clinched again and stood swaying, striving to get a grip of each other's throats.

‘Go it, Mr Muskham!’ cried a voice.

As if encouraged, Wilfrid

wrenched himself free and sprang; Muskham's fist thumped into his chest as he came on, but his outstretched hands closed round his enemy's neck. There was a long stagger, and then both went crashing to the ground. There, again as if moved by the same thought, they unclined and scrambled up. For a moment they stood panting, glaring at each other for an opening. For a second each looked round him. Wilfrid saw Muskham's blood-stained face change and become rigid, his hands drop and hide in his pockets; saw him turn away. And suddenly he

realized why. Standing up in an open car, across the street, was Dinny, with one hand covering her lips and the other shading her eyes.

Wilfrid turned as abruptly and went into the hotel.

Chapter Twenty-five



WHILE Dinny dressed and skimmed along the nearly empty streets, she had been thinking hard. That letter brought last night by hand surely meant that Muskham was the cause of Wilfrid's early sortie. Since he had slipped like a needle in to a bundle of hay, her only chance was to work from the other end. No need to wait for her uncle to see Jack Muskham. She could see him alone just as well as, perhaps better. It was eight o'clock when she reached Cork Street, and she at

once said: 'Has Mr Desert a revolver, Stack?'

'Yes, miss.'

'Has he taken it?'

'No.'

'I ask because he had a quarrel yesterday.'

Stack passed his hand over his unshaven chin. 'Don't know where you're going, miss, but would you like me to come with you?'

'I think it would be better if you'd go and make sure he isn't taking a boat train.'

'Certainly, miss. I'll take the dog, and do that.'

‘Is that car outside for me?’

‘Yes, miss. Would you like it opened?’

‘I would; the more air, the better.’

The henchman nodded, his eyes and nose seeming to Dinny unusually large and intelligent.

‘If I run across Mr Desert first, where shall I get in touch with you, miss?’

‘I’ll call at Royston post-office for any telegram. I’m going to see a Mr Muskham there. The quarrel was with him.’

‘Have you had anything to eat,

miss? Let me get you a cup of tea.'

'I've had one, thank you.' It saved time to say what was not true.

That drive, on an unknown road, seemed interminable to her, haunted by her uncle's words: 'If Jack didn't date so, I shouldn't worry.... He's a survival.' Suppose that, even now, in some enclosure – Richmond Park, Ken Wood, where not – they were playing the old-fashioned pranks, of honour! She conjured up the scene – Jack Muskham, tall, deliberate; Wilfrid, girt-in, defiant, trees around them, wood-pigeons calling, their hands

slowly rising to the level – ! Yes, but who would give the word? And pistols! People did not go about with duelling pistols nowadays. If that had been suggested, Wilfrid would surely have taken his revolver! What should she say if, indeed, she found Muskham at home? ‘Please don’t mind being called a cad and coward! They are really almost terms of endearment.’ Wilfrid must never know that she had tried to mediate. It would but wound his pride still further. Wounded pride! Was there any older, deeper, more obstinate cause of human trouble, or any more

natural and excusable! The consciousness of having failed oneself! Overmastered by the attraction that knows neither reason nor law, she loved Wilfrid none the less for having failed himself; but she was not blind to that failure. Ever since her father's words 'by any Englishman who's threatened with a pistol' had touched some nerve in the background of her being, she had realized that she was divided by her love from her instinctive sense of what was due from Englishmen.

The driver stopped to examine a back tyre. From the hedge a drift of

elder-flower scent made her close her eyes. Those flat white scented blossoms! The driver remounted and started the car with a jerk. Was life always going to jerk her away from love? Was she never to rest drugged and happy in its arms?

‘Morbid!’ she thought. ‘I ought to be keying my pitch to the Jockey Club.’

Royston began, and she said: ‘Stop at the post-office, please.’

‘Right, lady!’

There was no telegram for her, and she asked for Muskham’s

house. The post-mistress looked at the clock.

‘Nearly opposite, miss; but if you want Mr Muskham, I saw him pass riding just now. He’ll be going to his stud farm – that’ll be through the town and off to the right.’

Dinny resumed her seat, and they drove slowly on.

Afterwards she did not know whether her instinct or the driver’s stopped the car. For when he turned round and said: ‘Appears like a bit of a mix-up, miss,’ she was already standing, to see over the heads of that ring of people in the road. She saw only too well the

stained, blood-streaked faces, the rain of blows, the breathless, swaying struggle. She had opened the door, but with the sudden thought: 'He'd never forgive me!' banged it to again, and stood, with one hand shading her eyes, the other covering her lips, conscious that the driver, too, was standing.

'Something like a scrap!' she heard him say admiringly.

How strange and wild Wilfrid looked! But with only fists they could not kill each other! And mixed with her alarm was a sort of exultation. He had come down to seek battle! Yet every blow seemed

falling on her flesh, each clutch and struggling movement seemed her own.

‘Not a blasted bobby!’ said her driver, carried away. ‘Go it! I back the young ’un.’

Dinny saw them fall apart, then Wilfrid rushing with outstretched hands; she heard the thump of Muskham’s fist on his chest, saw them clinch, stagger, and fall; then rise and stand gasping, glaring. She saw Muskham catch sight of her, then Wilfrid; saw them turn away; and all was over. The driver said: ‘Now, that’s a pity!’ Dinny sank down on the car seat, and

said quietly:

‘Drive on, please.’

Away! Just away! Enough that they had seen her – more than enough, perhaps!

‘Drive on a little, then turn and go back to Town.’ They wouldn’t begin again!

‘Neither of ’em much good with is ’ands, miss, but a proper spirit.’

Dinny nodded. Her hand was still over her mouth, for her lips were trembling. The driver looked at her.

‘You’re a bit pale, miss – too much blood! Why not stop

somewhere and 'ave a drop o' brandy?'

'Not here,' said Dinny, 'the next village.'

'Baldock. Right-o!' And he put the car to speed.

The crowd had disappeared as they repassed the hotel. Two dogs, a man cleaning windows, and a policeman were the only signs of life.

At Baldock she had some breakfast. Conscious that she ought to feel relieved, now that the explosion had occurred, she was surprised by the foreboding which

oppressed her. Would he not resent her having come as if to shield him? Her accidental presence had stopped the fight, and she had seen them disfigured, blood-stained, devoid of their dignities. She decided to tell no one where she had been, or what she had seen – not even Stack or her uncle.

Such precautions are of small avail in a country so civilized. An able, if not too accurate, description of the ‘Encounter at Royston between that well-known breeder of bloodstock, Mr John Muskham – cousin to Sir Charles Muskham, Bart – and the Hon

Wilfrid Desert, second son of Lord Mullyon, author of “The Leopard”, which has recently caused such a sensation,’ appeared in that day’s last edition of the *Evening Sun*, under the heading, ‘Fisticuffs in High Quarters’. It was written with spirit and imagination, and ended thus: ‘It is believed that the origin of the quarrel may be sought in the action which it is whispered was taken by Mr Muskham over Mr Desert’s membership of a certain Club. It seems that Mr Muskham took exception to Mr Desert continuing a member after his public acknowledgment that “The

Leopard” was founded on his own experience. The affair, no doubt, was very high-spirited, if not likely to improve the plain man’s conception of a dignified aristocracy.’

This was laid before Dinny at dinner-time by her uncle without comment. It caused her to sit rigid, till his voice said: ‘Were you there, Dinny?’

‘Uncanny, as usual,’ she thought; but, though by now habituated to the manipulation of truth, she was not yet capable of the lie direct, and she nodded.

‘What’s that?’ said Lady Mont.

Dinny pushed the paper over to her aunt, who read, screwing up her eyes, for she had long sight.

‘Which won, Dinny?’

‘Neither. They just stopped.’

‘Where is Royston?’

‘In Cambridgeshire.’

‘Why?’

Neither Dinny nor Sir Lawrence knew.

‘He didn’t take you on a pillion, Dinny?’

‘No, dear. I just happened to drive up.’

‘Religion is very inflamin’,’ murmured Lady Mont.

‘It is,’ said Dinny bitterly.

‘Did the sight of you stop them?’
said Sir Lawrence.

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t like that. It would have
been better if a bobby or a knock-
out blow – ’

‘I didn’t want them to see me.’

‘Have you seen him since?’

Dinny shook her head.

‘Men are vain,’ said her aunt.

That closed the conversation.

Stack telephoned after dinner
that Wilfrid had returned; but
instinct told her to make no
attempt to see him.

After a restless night she took the morning train to Condaford. It was Sunday, and they were all at church. She seemed strangely divided from her family. Condaford smelled the same, looked the same, and the same people did the same things; yet all was different! Even the Scottish terrier and the spaniels sniffed her with doubting nostrils, as if uncertain whether she belonged to them any more.

‘And do I?’ she thought. ‘The scent is not there when the heart is away!’

Jean was the first to appear, Lady Cherrell having stayed to

Communion, the General to count the offertory and Hubert to inspect the village cricket pitch. She found Dinny sitting by an old sundial in front of a bed of delphiniums.

Having kissed her sister-in-law, she stood and looked at her for quite a minute, before saying: 'Take a pull, my dear, or you'll be going into a decline, whatever that is.'

'I only want my lunch,' said Dinny.

'Same here. I thought my dad's sermons were a trial even after I'd censored them; but your man here!'

'Yes, one *can* "put him down".'

Again Jean paused, and her eyes searched Dinny's face.

‘Dinny, I'm all for you. Get married at once, and go off with him.’

Dinny smiled.

‘There are two parties to every marriage.’

‘Is that paragraph in this morning's paper correct, about a fight at Royston?’

‘Probably not.’

‘I mean was there one?’

‘Yes.’

‘Who began it?’

‘I did. There's no other woman

in the case.'

'Dinny, you're very changed.'

'No longer sweet and disinterested.'

'Very well!' said Jean. 'If you want to play the love-lorn female, play it!'

Dinny caught her skirt. Jean knelt down and put her arms round her.

'You were a brick to me when I was up against it.'

Dinny laughed.

'What are my father and Hubert saying now?'

'Your father says nothing and

looks glum. Hubert either says: “Something must be done”, or “It’s the limit”.’

‘Not that it matters,’ said Dinny suddenly; ‘I’m past all that.’

‘You mean you’re not sure what *he*’ll do? But, of course, he must do what you want.’

Again Dinny laughed.

‘You’re afraid,’ said Jean, with startling comprehension, ‘that he might run off and leave you?’ And she subsided on to her hams the better to look up into Dinny’s face. ‘Of course he might. You know I went to see him?’

‘Oh?’

‘Yes; he got over me. I couldn’t say a word. Great charm, Dinny.’

‘Did Hubert send you?’

‘No. On my own. I was going to let him know what would be thought of him if he married you, but I couldn’t. I should have imagined he’d have told you about it. But I suppose he knew it would worry you.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Dinny; and did not. It seemed to her at that moment that she knew very little.

Jean sat silently pulling an early dandelion to pieces.

‘If I were you,’ she said at last, ‘I’d vamp him. If you’d once belonged to him, he couldn’t leave you.’

Dinny got up. ‘Let’s go round the gardens and see what’s out.’

Chapter Twenty-six



SINCE Dinny said no further word on the subject occupying every mind, no word was said by anyone; and for this she was truly thankful. She spent the next three days trying to hide the fact that she was very unhappy. No letter had come from Wilfrid, no message from Stack; surely, if anything had happened, *he* would have let her know. On the fourth day, feeling that she could bear the suspense no longer, she telephoned to Fleur and asked if she might come up to them.

The expressions on her father's and her mother's faces when she said she was going affected her as do the eyes and tails of dogs whom one must leave. How much more potent was the pressure put by silent disturbance than by nagging!

Panic assailed her in the train. Had her instinct to wait for Wilfrid to make the first move been wrong? Ought she not to have gone straight to him? And on reaching London she told her driver: 'Cork Street.'

But he was out, and Stack did not know when he would be in. The henchman's demeanour

seemed to her strangely different, as if he had retreated to a fence and were sitting on it. Was Mr Desert well? Yes. And the dog? Yes, the dog was well. Dinny drove away disconsolate. At South Square again no one was in; it seemed as if the world were in conspiracy to make her feel deserted. She had forgotten Wimbledon, the Horse Show, and other activities of the time of year. All such demonstrations of interest in life were, indeed, so far from her present mood that she could not conceive people taking part in them.

She sat down in her bedroom to write to Wilfrid. There was no longer any reason for silence, for Stack would tell him she had called.

She wrote:

South Square, Westminster.

Ever since Saturday I've been tortured by the doubt whether to write, or wait for you to write to me. Darling, I never meant to interfere in any way. I had come down to see Mr Muskham and tell him that it's I only who was responsible for what he so absurdly called the limit. I never expected you to be there. I didn't really much hope even to find him. Please let me see you.

Your unhappy

DINNY.

She went out herself to post it.

On the way back she came on Kit, with his governess, the dog, and the two youngest of her Aunt Alison's children. They seemed entirely happy; she was ashamed not to seem so too, so they all went together to Kit's schoolroom to have tea. Before it was over Michael came in. Dinny, who had seldom seen him with his little son, was fascinated by the easy excellence of their relationship. It was, perhaps, a little difficult to tell which was the elder, though a certain difference in size and the refusal of a second helping of strawberry jam seemed to favour

Michael. That hour, in fact, brought her the nearest approach to happiness she had known since she left Wilfrid five days ago. After it was over she went with Michael to his study.

‘Anything wrong, Dinny?’

Wilfrid’s best friend, and the easiest person in the world to confide in, and she did not know what to say! And then suddenly she began to talk, sitting in his armchair, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, staring not at him, but at her future. And Michael sat on the window-sill, his face now rueful, now whimsical,

making little soothing sounds. Nothing would matter, she said, neither public opinion, the Press, nor even her family, if only there were not in Wilfrid himself this deep bitter unease, this basic doubt of his own conduct, this permanent itch to prove to others, and, above all, to himself, that he was not 'yellow'. Now that she had given way, it poured out of her, all that bottled-up feeling that she was walking on a marsh, where at any moment she might sink in some deep, unlooked-for hole thinly covered by specious surface. She ceased and lay back in the chair

exhausted.

‘But, Dinny,’ said Michael, gently, ‘isn’t he really fond of you?’

‘I don’t know, Michael; I thought so – I don’t know. Why should he be? I’m an ordinary person, he’s not.’

‘We all seem ordinary to ourselves. I don’t want to flatter you, but you seem to me less ordinary than Wilfrid.’

‘Oh, no!’

‘Poets,’ said Michael gloomily, ‘give a lot of trouble. What are we going to do about it?’

That evening after dinner he

went forth, ostensibly to the House, in fact to Cork Street.

Wilfrid was not in, so he asked Stack's permission to wait. Sitting on the divan in that unconventional, dimly lighted room, he twitted himself for having come. To imply that he came from Dinny would be worse than useless. Besides, he hadn't. No! He had come to discover, if he could, whether Wilfrid really was in love with her. If not, then – well, then the sooner she was out of her misery the better. It might half break her heart, but that was better than pursuing a substance which

wasn't there. He knew, or thought he knew, that Wilfrid was the last person to endure a one-sided relationship. The worst of all disasters for Dinny would be to join herself to him under a misconception of his feelings for her. On a little table close to the divan, with the whisky, were the night's letters – only two, one of them, he could see, from Dinny herself. The door was opened slightly and a dog came in. After sniffing at Michael's trousers, it lay down with its head on its paws and its eyes fixed on the door. He spoke to it, but it took no notice – the

right sort of dog. 'I'll give him till eleven,' thought Michael. And almost immediately Wilfrid came. He had a bruise on one cheek and some plaster on his chin. The dog fluttered round his legs.

'Well, old man,' said Michael, 'that must have been a hearty scrap.'

'It was. Whisky?'

'No, thanks.'

He watched Wilfrid take up the letters and turn his back to open them.

'I ought to have known he'd do that,' thought Michael; 'there goes

my chance! He's bound to pretend to be in love with her!'

Before turning round again Wilfrid made himself a drink and finished it. Then, facing Michael, he said: 'Well?'

Disconcerted by the abruptness of that word, and by the knowledge that he had come to pump his friend, Michael did not answer.

'What d'you want to know?'

Michael said abruptly: 'Whether you're in love with Dinny.'

Wilfrid laughed. 'Really, Michael!'

‘I know. But things can’t go on like this. Damn it! Wilfrid, you ought to think of her.’

‘I do.’ He said it with a face so withdrawn and unhappy that Michael thought: ‘He means that.’

‘Then for God’s sake,’ he said, ‘show it! Don’t let her eat her heart out like this!’

Wilfrid had turned to the window. Without looking round he said:

‘You’ve never had occasion to try and prove yourself the opposite of yellow. Well, don’t! You won’t find the chance. It comes when you

don't want it, not when you do.'

'Naturally! But, my dear fellow, that's not Dinny's fault.'

'Her misfortune.'

'Well, then?'

Wilfrid wheeled round.

'Oh! damn you, Michael! Go away! No one can interfere in this. It's much too intimate.'

Michael rose and clutched his hat. Wilfrid had said exactly what he himself had really been thinking ever since he came.

'You're quite right,' he said humbly, 'Good night, old man! That's a nice dog.'

‘I’m sorry,’ said Wilfrid; ‘you meant well, but you can’t help. No one can. Good night!’

Michael got out, and all the way downstairs he looked for the tail between his legs.

When he reached home Dinny had gone up, but Fleur was waiting down for him. He had not meant to speak of his visit, but, after looking at him keenly, she said:

‘You haven’t been to the House, Michael. You’ve been to see Wilfrid.’

Michael nodded.

‘Well?’

‘No go!’

‘I could have told you that. If you come across a man and woman quarrelling in the street, what do you do?’

‘Pass by on the other side, if you can get there in time.’

‘Well?’

‘They’re *not* quarrelling.’

‘No, but they’ve got a special world no one else can enter.’

‘That’s what Wilfrid said.’

‘Naturally.’

Michael stared. Yes, of course. She had once had her special world, and not with – him!

‘It was stupid of me. But I *am* stupid.’

‘No, not stupid; well-intentioned. Are you going up?’

‘Yes.’

As he went upstairs he had the peculiar feeling that it was she who wanted to go to bed with him rather than he with her. And yet, once in bed, that would all change, for of such was the nature of man!

Dinny, in her room above theirs, through her open window could hear the faint murmur of their voices, and, bowing her face on her hands, gave way to a feeling of

despair. The stars in their courses fought against her! External opposition one could cut through or get round; but this deep spiritual unease in the loved one's soul, that – ah! that – one could not reach; and the unreachable could not be pushed away, cut through, or circumvented. She looked up at the stars that fought against her. Did the ancients really believe that, or was it, with them, as with her, just a manner of speaking? Did those bright wheeling jewels on the indigo velvet of all space really concern themselves with little men, the lives and loves of human

insects, who, born from an embrace, met and clung and died and became dust? Those candescent worlds, circled by little offsplit planets – were their names taken in vain, or were they really in their motions and their relative positions the writing on the wall for men to read?

No! That was only human self-importance! To his small wheel man bound the Universe. Swing low, sweet chariots! But they didn't! Man swung with them – in space....

Chapter Twenty-seven



Two days later the Cherrell family met in conclave because of a sudden summons received by Hubert to rejoin his regiment in the Soudan. He wished to have something decided about Dinny before he left. The four Cherrell brothers, Sir Lawrence, Michael, and himself, gathered, therefore, in Adrian's room at the Museum after Mr Justice Cherrell's Court had risen. They all knew that the meeting might be futile, because, as even Governments find, to

decide is useless if decision cannot be carried out.

Michael, Adrian, and the General, who had been in personal touch with Wilfrid, were the least vocal, Sir Lawrence and the Judge the most vocal; Hubert and Hilary were now vocal and now dumb.

Starting from the premise, which nobody denied, that the thing was a bad business, two schools of thought declared themselves – Adrian, Michael, and to some extent Hilary believed there was nothing to be done but wait and see; the rest thought there was much to be done, but what – they

could not say.

Michael, who had never seen his four uncles so close together before, was struck by the resemblance in the shape and colouring of their faces, except that the eyes of Hilary and Lionel were blue and grey, and of the General and Adrian brown and hazel. They all, notably, lacked gesture, and had a lean activity of figure. In Hubert these characteristics were accentuated by youth, and his hazel eyes at times looked almost grey.

‘If only,’ Michael heard his father say, ‘you could injunct her, Lionel?’ and Adrian’s impatient:

‘We must let Dinny alone; trying to control her is absurd. She’s got a warm heart, an unselfish nature, and plenty of sense.’ Then Hubert’s retort:

‘We know all that, Uncle, but the thing will be such a disaster for her, we must do what we can.’

‘Well, what *can* you do?’

‘Exactly!’ thought Michael, and said: ‘Just now she doesn’t know how she stands.’

‘You couldn’t get her to go out with you to the Soudan, Hubert?’ said the Judge.

‘I’ve lost all touch with her.’

‘If someone wanted her badly – ’
began the General, and did not
finish.

‘Even then,’ murmured Adrian,
‘only if she were quite sure Desert
didn’t want her more.’

Hilary took out his pipe. ‘Has
anyone tried Desert?’

‘I have,’ said the General.

‘And I, twice,’ muttered Michael.

‘Suppose,’ said Hubert gloomily,
‘I had a shot.’

‘Not, my dear fellow,’ put in Sir
Lawrence, ‘unless you can be quite
certain of keeping your temper.’

‘I never can be certain of that.’

‘Then don’t!’

‘Would *you* go, Dad?’ asked Michael.

‘I?’

‘He used to respect you.’

‘Not even a blood relation!’

‘You might take a chance, Lawrence,’ said Hilary.

‘But why?’

‘None of the rest of us can, for one reason or another.’

‘Why shouldn’t *you*?’

‘In a way I agree with Adrian; it’s best to leave it all alone.’

‘What exactly is the objection to

Dinny's marrying him?' asked Adrian. The General turned to him abruptly.

'She'd be marked out for life.'

'So was that fellow who stuck to his wife when she was convicted. Everybody respected him the more.'

'There's no such sharp hell,' said the Judge, 'as seeing fingers pointed at your life's partner.'

'Dinny would learn not to notice them.'

'Forgive me, but you're missing the point,' muttered Michael. 'The point is Wilfrid's own feeling. If he

remains bitter about himself and marries her – that'll be hell for her, if you like. And the fonder she is of him, the worse it'll be.'

'You're right, Michael,' said Sir Lawrence unexpectedly. 'I'd think it well worth while to go if I could make him see that.'

Michael sighed.

'Whichever way it goes, it's hell for poor Dinny.'

'“Joy cometh in the morning”,’ murmured Hilary through a cloud of smoke.

'Do you believe that, Uncle Hilary?'

‘Not too much.’

‘Dinny’s twenty-six. This is her first love. If it goes wrong – what then?’

‘Marriage.’

‘With somebody else?’

Hilary nodded.

‘Lively!’

‘Life is lively.’

‘Well, Lawrence?’ asked the General, sharply: ‘You’ll go?’

Sir Lawrence studied him for a moment, and then replied: ‘Yes.’

‘Thank you!’

It was not clear to any of them

what purpose would be served, but it was a decision of sorts, and at least could be carried out....

Wilfrid had lost most of his bruise and discarded the plaster on his chin when Sir Lawrence, encountering him on the stairs at Cork Street that same late afternoon, said:

‘D’you mind if I walk a little way with you?’

‘Not at all, sir.’

‘Any particular direction?’

Wilfrid shrugged, and they walked side by side, till at last Sir Lawrence said:

‘Nothing’s worse than not knowing where you’re going!’

‘You’re right.’

‘Then why go, especially if in doing it you take someone with you? Forgive my putting things crudely, but, except for Dinny, would you be caring a hang about all this business? What other ties have you got here?’

‘None. I don’t want to discuss things. If you’ll forgive me, I’ll branch off.’

Sir Lawrence stopped. ‘Just one moment, and then I’ll do the branching. Have you realized that

a man who has a quarrel with himself is not fit to live with until he's got over it? That's all I wanted to say; but it's a good deal. Think it over!' And, raising his hat, Sir Lawrence turned on his heel. By George! He was well out of that! What an uncomfortable young man! And, after all, one had said all one had come to say! He walked towards Mount Street, reflecting on the limitations imposed by tradition. But for tradition, would Wilfrid mind being thought 'yellow'? Would Dinny's family care? Would Lyall have written his confounded poem? Would not the

Corporal in the Buffs have kowtowed? Was a single one of the Cherrells, met in conclave, a real believing Christian? Not even Hilary – he would bet his boots! Yet not one of them could stomach this recantation. Not religion, but the refusal to take the ‘dare’! That was the rub to them. The imputation of cowardice, or at least of not caring for the good name of one’s country. Well! About a million British had died for that good name in the war; had they all died for a futility? Desert himself had nearly died for it, and got the M.C., or D.S.O., or something! All very contradictory!

People cared for their country in a crowd, it seemed, but not in a desert; in France, but not in Darfur.

He heard hurrying footsteps, and turning round, saw Desert behind him. Sir Lawrence had almost a shock looking at his face, dry, dark, with quivering lips and deep suffering eyes.

‘You were quite right,’ he said; ‘I thought I’d let you know. You can tell her family I’m going away.’

At this complete success of his mission Sir Lawrence experienced dismay.

‘Be careful!’ he said: ‘You might

do her a great injury.'

'I shall do her that, anyway. Thank you for speaking to me. You've made me see. Good-bye!' He turned and was gone.

Sir Lawrence stood looking after him, impressed by his look of suffering. He turned in at his front door doubtful whether he had not made bad worse. While he was putting down his hat and stick, Lady Mont came down the stairs.

'I'm so bored, Lawrence. What have you been doin'?'

'Seeing young Desert; and, it seems, I've made him feel that until

he can live on good terms with himself he won't be fit to live with at all.'

'That's wicked.'

'How?'

'He'll go away. I always knew he'd go away. You must tell Dinny at once what you've done.' And she went to the telephone.

'Is that you, Fleur?... Oh! Dinny... This is Aunt Em!... Yes... Can you come round here?... Why not?... That's not a reason... But you must! Lawrence wants to speak to you... At once? Yes. He's done a very stupid thing... What?

... No!... He wants to explain. In ten minutes... very well.'

'My God!' thought Sir Lawrence. He had suddenly realized that to deaden feeling on any subject one only needed to sit in conclave. Whenever the Government got into trouble, they appointed a Commission. Whenever a man did something wrong, he went into consultation with solicitor and counsel. If he himself hadn't been sitting in conclave, would he ever have gone to see Desert and put the fat into the fire like this? The conclave had dulled his feelings. He had gone to Wilfrid as some

juryman comes in to return his verdict after sitting in conclave on a case for days. And now he had to put himself right with Dinny, and how the deuce would he do that? He went into his study, conscious that his wife was following.

‘Lawrence, you must tell her exactly what you’ve done, and how he took it. Otherwise it may be too late. And I shall stay until you’ve done it.’

‘Considering, Em, that you don’t know what I said, or what he said, that seems superfluous.’

‘No,’ said Lady Mont, ‘nothing is, when a man’s done wrong.’

‘I was charged to go and see him by your family.’

‘You ought to have had more sense. If you treat poets like innkeepers, they blow up.’

‘On the contrary, he thanked me.’

‘That’s worse. I shall have Dinny’s taxi kept at the door.’

‘Em,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘when you want to make your will, let me know.’

‘Why?’

‘Because of getting you consecutive before you start.’

‘Anything I have,’ said Lady

Mont, 'is to go to Michael, to be kept for Catherine. And if I'm dead when Kit goes to Harrow, he's to have my grandfather's 'stirrup-cup' that's in the armoire in my sitting-room at Lippin' hall. But he's not to take it to school with him, or they'll melt it, or drink boiled peppermints out of it, or something. Is that clear?'

'Perfectly.'

'Then,' said Lady Mont, 'get ready and begin at once when Dinny comes.'

'Quite!' said Sir Lawrence meekly. 'But how the deuce am I to put it to Dinny?'

‘Just put it, and don’t invent as you go along.’

Sir Lawrence played a tune with his fingers on the windowpane. His wife stared at the ceiling. They were like that when Dinny came.

‘Keep Miss Dinny’s taxi, Blore.’

At the sight of his niece Sir Lawrence perceived that he had indeed lost touch with feeling. Her face, under its chestnut-coloured hair, was sharpened and blanched, and there was a look in her eyes that he did not like.

‘Begin,’ said Lady Mont.

Sir Lawrence raised one high

thin shoulder as if in protection.

‘My dear, your brother has been recalled, and I was asked whether I would go and see young Desert. I went. I told him that if he had a quarrel with himself he would not be fit to live with till he’d made it up. He said nothing and turned off. Afterwards he came up behind me in this street, and said that I was right. Would I tell your family that he was going away. He looked very queer and troubled. I said: “Be careful! You might do her a great injury.” “I shall do her that, anyway,” he said. And he went off. That was about twenty minutes

ago.'

Dinny looked from one to the other, covered her lips with her hand, and went out.

A moment later they heard her cab move off.

Chapter Twenty-eight



EXCEPT for receiving a little note in answer to her letter, which relieved her not at all, Dinny had spent these last two days in distress of mind. When Sir Lawrence made his communication, she felt as if all depended on whether she could get to Cork Street before he was back there, and in her taxi she sat with hands screwed tight together in her lap and her eyes fixed on the driver's back, a back, indeed, so broad that it was not easy to fix them elsewhere. Useless to think of

what she was going to say – she must say whatever came into her head when she saw him. His face would give her a lead. She realized that if he once got away from England it would be as if she had never seen him. She stopped the cab in Burlington Street and walked swiftly to his door. If he had come straight home, he must be in! In these last two days she had realized that Stack had perceived some change in Wilfrid and was conforming to it, and when he opened the door she said:

‘You mustn’t put me off, Stack, I *must* see Mr Desert.’ And, slipping

past, she opened the door of the sitting-room. Wilfrid was pacing up and down.

‘Dinny!’

She felt that if she said the wrong thing it might be, then and there, the end; and she only smiled. He put his hands over his eyes; and, while he stood thus blinded, she stole up and put her arms round his neck.

Was Jean right? Ought she to – ?

Then, through the opened door, Foch came in. He slid the velvet of his muzzle under her hand, and she sank on her knees to kiss him.

When she looked up, Wilfrid had turned away. Instantly she scrambled up, and stood, as it were, lost. She did not know of what, if of anything, she thought, not even whether she were feeling. All seemed to go blank within her. He had thrown the window open and was leaning there holding his hands to his head. Was he going to throw himself out? She made a violent effort to control her nerves, and said very gently: 'Wilfrid!' He turned and looked at her, and she thought: 'My God! He hates me!' Then his expression changed, and became the one she knew; and she

was aware once more of how at sea one is with wounded pride – so multiple and violent and changing in its moods!

‘Well?’ she said. ‘What do you wish me to do?’

‘I don’t know. The whole thing is mad. I ought to have buried myself in Siam by now.’

‘Would you like me to stay here tonight?’

‘Yes! No! I don’t know.’

‘Wilfrid, why take it so hard? It’s as if love were nothing to you. Is it nothing?’

For answer he took out Jack

Muskham's letter.

‘Read this!’

She read it. ‘I see. It was doubly unfortunate that I came down.’

He threw himself down again on the divan, and sat there looking up at her.

‘If I do go,’ thought Dinny, ‘I shall only begin tearing to get back again.’ And she said: ‘What are you doing for dinner?’

‘Stack’s got something, I believe.’

‘Would there be enough for me?’

‘Too much, if you feel as I do.’

She rang the bell.

‘I’m staying to dinner, Stack. I only want about a pin’s head of food.’

And, craving for a moment in which to recover her balance, she said: ‘May I have a wash, Wilfrid?’

While she was drying her face and hands, she took hold of herself with all her might, and then as suddenly relaxed. Whatever she decided would be wrong, painful, perhaps impossible. Let it go!

When she came back to the sitting-room he was not there. The door into his bedroom was open, but it was empty. Dinny rushed to the window. He was not in the

street. Stack's voice said.

‘Excuse me, miss: Mr Desert was called out. He told me to say he would write. Dinner will be ready in a minute.’

Dinny went straight up to him.

‘Your first impression of me was the right one, Stack; not your second. I am going now. Mr Desert need have no fear of me. Tell him that, please.’

‘Miss,’ said Stack, ‘I told you he was very sudden; but this is the most sudden thing I’ve ever known him do. I’m sorry, miss. But I’m afraid it’s a case of cutting your

losses. If I can be of service to you, I will.'

'If he leaves England,' said Dinny, 'I should like to have Foch.'

'If I know Mr Desert, miss, he means to go. I've seen it coming on him ever since he had that letter the night before you came round in the early morning.'

'Well,' said Dinny, 'shake hands, and remember what I said.'

They exchanged a hand-grip, and, still unnaturally steady, she went out and down the stairs. She walked fast, giddy and strange in her head, and nothing but the

word: So! recurring in her mind. All that she had felt, all that she had meant to feel, compressed into that word of two letters. In her life she had never felt so withdrawn and tearless, so indifferent as to where she went, what she did, or whom she saw. The world might well be without end, for its end had come. She did not believe that he had designed this way of breaking from her. He had not enough insight into her for that. But, in fact, no way could have been more perfect, more complete. Drag after a man! Impossible! She did not even have to form that thought, it was

instinctive.

She walked and walked for three hours about the London streets, and turned at last towards Westminster with the feeling that if she didn't she would drop. When she went in at South Square, she summoned all that was left in her to a spurt of gaiety; but, when she had gone up to her room, Fleur said:

‘Something very wrong, Michael.’

‘Poor Dinny! What the hell has he done now?’

Going to the window, Fleur drew

aside the curtain. It was not yet quite dark. Except for two cats, a taxi to the right, and a man on the pavement examining a small bunch of keys, there was nothing to be seen.

‘Shall I go up and see if she’ll talk?’

‘No. If Dinny wants us, she’ll let us know. If it’s as you think, she’ll want no one. She’s proud as the devil when her back’s to the wall.’

‘I hate pride,’ said Fleur; and, closing the curtain, she went towards the door. ‘It comes when you don’t want it, and does you down. If you want a career, don’t

have pride.' She went out.

'I don't know,' thought Michael, 'if I have pride, but I haven't got a career.' He followed slowly upstairs, and for some little time stood in the doorway of his dressing-room. But no sound came from upstairs...

Dinny, indeed, was lying on her bed, face down. So this was the end! Why had the force called love exalted and tortured her, then thrown her, used and exhausted, quivering, longing, wounded, startled, to eat her heart out in silence and grief? Love and pride, and the greater of these is pride! So

the saying seemed to go within her, and to be squeezed into her pillow. Her love against his pride! Her love against her own pride! And the victory with pride! Wasteful and bitter! Of all that evening only one moment now seemed to her real: when he had turned from the window, and she had thought: 'He hates me!' Of course he hated her, standing like the figure of his wounded self-esteem; the one thing that prevented him from crying out: 'God damn you all! Good-bye!'

Well, now he could cry it and go! And she – suffer, suffer – and slowly get over it. No! Lie on it,

keep it down, keep it silent, press it into her pillows. Make little of it, make nothing of it, while inside her it swelled and ravaged her. The expression of instinct is not so clear as that; but behind all formless throbbing there is meaning; and that was the meaning within Dinny's silent and half-smothered struggle on her bed. How could she have acted differently? Not her fault that Muskham had sent the letter with that phrase about the protection of a woman! Not her fault that she had rushed down to Royston! What had she done wrong? The whole thing arbitrary,

gratuitous! Perhaps love in its courses was always so! It seemed to her that the night ticked while she lay there; the rusty ticking of an old clock. Was it the night, or her own life, abandoned and lying on its face?

Chapter Twenty-nine



WILFRID had obeyed impulse when he ran down into Cork Street. Ever since the sudden breaking off of that fierce undignified scuffle at Royston, and the sight of Dinny standing in the car covering her eyes with a hand, his feelings towards her had been terribly confused. Now at the sudden sight, sound, scent of her, warmth had rushed up in him and spent itself in kisses; but the moment she left him his insane feeling had returned and hurled him down into a London

where at least one could walk and meet no one. He went south and became involved with a queue of people trying to get into 'His Majesty's'. He stood among them thinking: 'As well in here as anywhere.' But, just as his turn came, he broke away and branched off eastward; passed through Covent Garden, desolate and smelling of garbage; and came out into Ludgate Hill. Hereabouts he was reminded by scent of fish that he had eaten nothing since breakfast. And, going into a restaurant, he drank a cocktail and ate some *hors-d'oeuvre*. Asking for a

sheet of paper and envelope, he wrote:

‘I had to go. If I had stayed, you and I would have been one. I don’t know what I’m going to do – I may finish in the river tonight, or go abroad, or come back to you. Whatever I do, forgive, and believe that I have loved you. Wilfrid.’

He addressed the envelope and thrust it into his pocket. But he did not post it. He felt he could never express what he was feeling. Again he walked east. Through the City zone, deserted as if it had been mustard-gassed, he was soon in the cheerier Whitechapel Road. He

walked, trying to tire himself out and stop the whirling of his thoughts. He moved northwards now, and towards eleven was nearing Chingford. All was moonlit and still when he passed the hotel and went on towards the Forest. One car, a belated cyclist, a couple or two, and three tramps were all he met before he struck off the road in among the trees. Daylight was gone, and the moon was silvering the leaves and branches. Thoroughly exhausted, he lay down on the beech mast. The night was an unwritten poem – the gleam and drip of light like the play of an

incoherent mind, fluttering,
slipping in and out of reality;
never at rest; never the firm silver
of true metal; burnished and gone
like a dream. Up there were the
stars he had travelled by times
without number, the Wain, and all
the others that seemed
meaningless, if not nameless, in
this town world.

He turned over and lay on his
face, pressing his forehead to the
ground. And suddenly he heard the
drone of a flying machine. But
through the heavily leafed boughs
he could see no gliding, sky-
scurrying shape. Some night-flier to

Holland; some English airman pricking out the lighted shape of London, or practising flight between Hendon and an East Coast base. After flying in the war he had never wished to fly again. The very sound of it brought back still that sick, fed-up feeling from which the Armistice had delivered him. The drone passed on and away. A faint rumbling murmur came from London, but here the night was still and warm, with only a frog croaking, a bird cheeping feebly once, two owls hooting against each other. He turned again on to his face, and fell into an uneasy

sleep.

When he woke light was just rifting the clear darkness. A heavy dew had fallen; he felt stiff and chilled, but his mind was clear. He got up and swung his arms, lit a cigarette, and drew the smoke deep in. He sat with his arms clasped round his knees, smoking his cigarette to its end without ever moving it from his lips, and spitting out the stub with its long ash just before it burned his mouth. Suddenly he began to shiver. He got up to walk back to the road. Stiff and sore, he made poor going. It was full dawn by the time he

reached the road, and then, knowing that he ought to go towards London, he went in the opposite direction. He plodded on, and every now and then shivered violently. At last he sat down and, bowed over his knees, fell into a sort of coma. A voice saying: 'Hi!' roused him. A fresh-faced young man in a small car had halted alongside.

'Anything wrong?'

'Nothing,' muttered Wilfrid.

'You appear to be in poor shape, all the same. Do you know what time it is?'

‘No.’

‘Get in here, and I’ll run you to the hotel at Chingford. Got any money?’

Wilfrid looked at him grimly and laughed.

‘Yes.’

‘Don’t be touchy! What you want is a sleep and some strong coffee! Come on!’

Wilfrid got up. He could hardly stand. He lay back in the little car, huddled beside the young man, who said: ‘Now we shan’t be long.’

In ten minutes, which to a blurred and shivering consciousness

might have been five hours, they were in front of the hotel.

‘I know the “boots” here,’ said the young man; ‘I’ll put you in charge of him. What’s your name?’

‘Hell!’ muttered Wilfrid.

‘Hi! George! I found this gentleman on the road. He seems to have gone a bit wonky. Put him into some decent bedroom. Heat him up a good hot bottle, and get him into bed with it. Brew him some strong coffee, and see that he drinks it.’

The boots grinned. ‘That all?’

‘No; take his temperature, and

send for a doctor. Look here, sir,' the young man turned to Wilfrid, 'I recommend this chap. He can polish boots with the best. Just let him do for you, and don't worry. I must get on. It's six o'clock.' He waited a moment, watching Wilfrid stagger into the hotel on the arm of the 'boots', then sped away.

The 'boots' assisted Wilfrid to a room. 'Can you undress, governor?'

'Yes,' muttered Wilfrid.

'Then I'll go and get you that bottle and the coffee. Don't be afraid, we don't 'ave damp beds 'ere. Were you out all night?'

Wilfrid sat on the bed and did not answer.

‘Ere!’ said the ‘boots’: ‘give us your sleeves!’ He pulled Wilfrid’s coat off, then his waistcoat and trousers. ‘You’ve got a proper chill, it seems to me. Your underthings are all damp. Can you stand?’

Wilfrid shook his head.

The ‘boots’ stripped the sheets off the bed, pulled Wilfrid’s shirt over his head; then with a struggle wrenched off vest and drawers, and wrapped him in a blanket.

‘Now, governor, a good pull and a pull together.’ He forced Wilfrid’s

head on to the pillow, heaved his legs on to the bed, and covered him with two more blankets.

‘You lie there; I won’t be gone ten minutes.’

Wilfrid lay, shivering so that his thoughts would not join up, nor his lips make consecutive sounds owing to the violent chattering of his teeth. He became conscious of a chambermaid, then of voices.

‘His teeth’ll break it. Isn’t there another place?’

‘I’ll try under his arm.’

A thermometer was pressed under his arm and held there.

‘You haven’t got yellow fever, have you, sir?’

Wilfrid shook his head.

‘Can you raise yourself, governor, and drink this?’

Robust arms raised him, and he drank.

‘One ’undred and four.’

‘Gawd! ’Ere, pop this bottle to his feet, I’ll phone the Doc.’

Wilfrid could see the maid watching him, as if wondering what sort of fever she was going to catch.

‘Malaria,’ he said, suddenly, ‘not infectious. Give me a cigarette! In

my waistcoat.'

The maid put a cigarette between his lips and lit it. Wilfrid took a long pull.

'A-again!' he said.

Again she put it between his lips, and again he took a pull.

'They say there's mosquitoes in the forest. Did you find any last night, sir?'

'In the sys-system.'

Shivering a little less now, he watched her moving about the room, collecting his clothes, drawing the curtains so that they shaded the bed. Then she

approached him, and he smiled up at her.

‘Another nice drop of hot coffee?’

He shook his head, closed his eyes again, and shivered deep into the bed, conscious that she was still watching him, and then again of voices.

‘Can’t find a name, but he’s some sort of nob. There’s money and this letter in his coat. The doctor’ll be here in five minutes.’

‘Well, I’ll wait till then, but I’ve got my work to do.’

‘Same ’ere. Tell the missus when

you call her.'

He saw the maid standing looking at him with a sort of awe. A stranger and a nob, with a curious disease, interesting to a simple mind. Of his face, pressed into the pillow, she couldn't see much – one dark cheek, one ear, some hair, the screwed-up eye under the brow. He felt her touch his forehead timidly with a finger. Burning hot, of course!

'Would you like your friends written to, sir?'

He shook his head.

'The doctor'll be here in a

minute.’

‘I’ll be like this two days – nothing to be done – quinine – orange juice – ’ Seized by a violent fit of shivering, he was silent. He saw the doctor come in; and the maid still leaning against the chest of drawers, biting her little finger. She took it from her mouth, and he heard her say:

‘Shall I stay, sir?’

‘Yes, you can stay.’

The doctor’s fingers closed on his pulse, raised his eyelid, pushed his lips apart.

‘Well, sir? Had much of this?’

Wilfrid nodded.

‘All right! You’ll stay where you are, and shove in quinine, and that’s all I can do for you. Pretty sharp bout.’

Wilfrid nodded.

‘There are no cards on you. What’s your name?’

Wilfrid shook his head.

‘All right! Don’t worry! Take this.’

Chapter Thirty



STEPPING from an omnibus, Dinny walked into the large of Wimbledon Common. After a nearly sleepless night, she had slipped out, leaving a note to say she would be away all day. She hurried over the grass into a birch grove, and lay down. The high moving clouds, the sunlight striking in and out of the birchtree branches, the water wagtails, the little dry patches of sand, and that stout wood-pigeon, undismayed by her motionless figure, brought her

neither peace nor the inclination to think of Nature. She lay on her back, quivering and dry-eyed, wondering for whose inscrutable delight she was thus suffering. The stricken do not look for outside help, they seek within. To go about exuding tragedy was abhorrent to her. She would not do that! But the sweetness of the wind, the moving clouds, the rustle of the breeze, the sound of children's voices, brought no hint of how she was to disguise herself and face life afresh. The isolation in which she had been ever since the meeting with Wilfrid under Foch's statue now showed

nakedly. All her eggs had been in one basket, and the basket had fallen. She dug with her fingers at the sandy earth, and a dog, seeing a hole, came up and sniffed it. She had begun to live, and now she was dead. 'No flowers by request!'

So sharp had been her realization of finality yesterday evening that she did not even consider the possibility of tying up the broken thread. If he had pride, so had she! Not the same sort, but as deep in her marrow. No one had any real need of her! Why not go away? She had nearly three hundred pounds. The notion gave

her neither exhilaration nor any real relief; but it would save her from making herself a nuisance to those who would expect her to be her old cheerful self. She thought of the hours she had spent with Wilfrid in places like this. So sharp was her memory that she had to cover her lips to prevent anguish welling out of them. Until she met him she had never felt alone. And now – she *was* alone! Chill, terrifying, endless! Remembering how she had found swift motion good for heartache, she got up and crossed the road where the Sunday stream of cars was already flowing

out of town. Uncle Hilary had once exhorted her not to lose her sense of humour. But had she ever had one? At the end of Barnes Common she climbed on to a 'bus and went back to London. She must have something to eat, or she would be fainting. She got down near Kensington Gardens and went into an hotel.

After lunch she sat some time in the Gardens, and then walked to Mount Street. No one was in, and she sank down on the sofa in the drawing-room. Thoroughly exhausted, she fell asleep. Her aunt's entrance woke her, and,

sitting up, she said:

‘You can all be happy about me, Aunt Em. It’s finished.’

Lady Mont stared at her niece sitting there with such a ghostly little smile, and two tears, starting not quite together, ran down her cheeks.

‘I didn’t know you cried at funerals, too, Aunt Em.’

She got up, went over to her aunt, and with her handkerchief removed the marks the tears had made.

‘There!’

Lady Mont got up. ‘I *must* howl,’

she said, 'I simply must.' And she swayed rapidly out of the room.

Dinny sat on, that ghost of a smile still on her face. Blore brought in the tea-things, and she talked to him of Wimbledon, and his wife. He did not seem to know which of the two was in worse shape, but, as he was going out, he turned and said:

'And if I might suggest, Miss Dinny, a little sea air for you.'

'Yes, Blore, I was thinking of it.'

'I'm glad, miss; one overdoes it at this time of year.'

He, too, seemed to know that

her course was run. And, feeling suddenly that she could not go on thus attending her own funeral, she stole to the door, listened for sounds, then slipped down the stairs and away.

But she was so physically exhausted that she could scarcely drag herself as far as St James's Park. There she sat down by the water. People, sunbeams, and ducks, shading leaves, spiky reeds, and this sirocco within her! A tall man walking from the Whitehall end made a little convulsive movement, as if to put his hand to his hat, corrected it at sight of her

face, and lounged on. Realizing what her face must be expressing, she got up, and, trailing on to Westminster Abbey, went in and sat down in a pew. There, bent forward, with her face resting on her arms, she stayed quite half an hour. She had not prayed, but she had rested, and the expression on her face had changed. She felt more fit to face people and not show so much.

It was past six, and she went on to South Square. Getting unseen to her room, she had a long hot bath, put on a dinner frock, and resolutely went down. Only Fleur

and Michael were there, and neither of them asked her any questions. It was clear to her that they knew. She got through the evening somehow. When she was going up, both of them kissed her, and Fleur said:

‘I’ve told them to put you a hot-water bottle; stuck against your back, it helps you to sleep. Good night, bless you!’

Again Dinny had the feeling that Fleur had once suffered as she was suffering now. She slept better than she could have hoped.

With her early tea she received a letter with the heading of an hotel

at Chingford.

MADAM,

The enclosed letter addressed to you was found in the pocket of a gentleman who is lying here with a very sharp attack of malaria. I am posting it on to you, and am

Truly yours,

ROGER QUEAL, M.D.

She read the letter... 'Whatever I do, forgive, and believe that I have loved you. Wilfrid.' And he was ill! All the impulses which sprang up she instantly thrust back. Not a second time would she rush in where angels feared to tread! But, hurrying down, she telephoned to Stack the news that he was lying at

the Chingford hotel with an attack of malaria.

‘He’ll want his pyjamas and his razors, then, miss. I’ll take ’em down to him.’

Forcing back the words: ‘Give him my love,’ she said instead, ‘He knows where I am if there is anything I can do.’

The blacker bitterness of her mood was gone; yet she was as cut off from him as ever! Unless he came or sent for her she could make no move; and deep down she seemed to know that he would neither come nor send. No! He would strike his tent and flit away

from where he had felt too much.

Towards noon Hubert came to say good-bye. It was at once clear to her that he, too, knew. He was coming back for the rest of his leave in October, he said. Jean was to stay at Condaford till after her child was born in November. She had been ordered to be out of the summer heat. He seemed to Dinny that morning like the old Hubert again. He dwelt on the advantage of being born at Condaford. And, endeavouring to be sprightly, she said:

‘Quaint to find you talking like that, Hubert. You never used to

care about Condaford.'

'It makes a difference to have an heir!'

'Oh! It'll be an heir, will it?'

'Yes, we've made up our minds to a boy.'

'And will there be a Condaford by the time he comes into it?'

Hubert shrugged. 'We'll have a try at keeping it. Things don't last unless you set yourself to keep them.'

'And not always then,' murmured Dinny.

Chapter Tbirty-one



WILFRID'S words: 'You can tell her family I'm going away', and Dinny's: 'It's finished', had travelled, if not like wildfire, throughout the Cherrell family. There was no rejoicing as over a sinner that repenteth. All were too sorry for her, with a sorrow nigh unto dismay. Each wanted to show sympathy, none knew how. Sympathy smelling of sympathy was worse than none. Three days passed, during which not one member of the family succeeded in

expressing anything. Then Adrian had a brainwave: He would ask her to eat something with him, though why food should be regarded as consolatory neither he nor anyone else had ever known. He appointed a café which had perhaps more repute than merit.

Since Dinny was not of those young women who make the ravages of life into an excuse for French-varnishing their surfaces, he had every opportunity to note her pallor. He forbore to comment. Indeed, he found it difficult to talk at all, for he knew that, though men, when enthralled by women,

remain devoted to their mental mainsprings, women, less bodily enthralled, stay mentally wrapped up in the men they love. He began, however, to tell her how someone had tried to ‘sell him a pup.’

‘He wanted five hundred pounds, Dinny, for a Cromagnon skull found in Suffolk. The whole thing looked extraordinarily genuine. But I happened to see the county archaeologist. “Oh!” he said: “So he’s been trying to palm that off on you, has he? That’s the well-known ‘pup’. He’s dug it up at least three times. The man ought to be in gaol. He keeps it in a

cupboard and every five or six years digs a hole, puts it in, takes it out, and tries to sell it. It possibly is a Cromagnon skull, but he picked it up in France, about twenty years ago. It would be unique, of course, as a British product.” Thereon I went off to have another look at where it was found last time. And it was plain enough, when you already knew it, that he’d put the thing in. There’s something about antiques that saps what the Americans call one’s *moral*.’

‘What sort of man was he, Uncle?’

‘An enthusiastic-looking chap,

rather like my hairdresser.'

Dinny laughed. 'You ought to do something, or he *will* sell it next time.'

'The depression is against him, my dear. Bones and first editions are extraordinarily sensitive. He'll have to live a good ten years to get anything like a price.'

'Do many people try to palm things off on you?'

'Some succeed, Dinny. I regret that "pup", though; it was a lovely skull. There aren't many as good nowadays.'

'We English certainly are getting

uglier.'

'Don't you believe it. Put the people we meet in drawing-rooms and shops into cassocks and cowls, armour and jerkins, and you'll have just the faces of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.'

'But we do despise beauty, Uncle. We connect it with softness and immorality.'

'Well, it makes people happy to despise what they haven't got. We're only about the third – no, the fourth – plainest people in Europe. But take away the Celtic infusions, and I admit we'd be the first.'

Dinny looked round the café. Her survey added nothing to her conclusions, partly because she took but little in, and partly because the lunchers were nearly all Jews or Americans.

Adrian watched her with an ache. She looked so bone-listless.

‘Hubert’s gone, then?’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘And what are you going to do, my dear?’

Dinny sat looking at her plate. Suddenly she raised her head and said:

‘I think I shall go abroad, Uncle.’

Adrian's hand went to his goatee.

'I see,' he said, at last. 'Money?'

'I have enough.'

'Where?'

'Anywhere.'

'By yourself?'

Dinny nodded.

'The drawback to going away,' murmured Adrian, 'is the having to come back.'

'There doesn't seem to be anything much for me to do just now. So I think I'll cheer people up by not seeing them for a bit.'

Adrian debated within himself.

‘Well, my dear, only you can decide what’s best for you. But if you felt like a long travel, it strikes me that Clare might be glad to see you in Ceylon.’

Seeing by the surprised movement of her hands that the idea was new to her, he went on:

‘I have a feeling that she may not be finding life very easy.’

Her eyes met his.

‘That’s what I thought at the wedding, Uncle; I didn’t like his face.’

‘You have a special gift for helping others, Dinny; and

whatever's wrong about Christianity, it's not the saying "To give is more blessed than to receive".'

'Even the Son of Man liked His little joke, Uncle.'

Adrian looked at her hard, and said:

'Well if you do go to Ceylon, mind you eat your mangoes over a basin.'

He parted from her a little later and, too much out of mood to go back to work, went to the Horse Show instead.

Chapter Thirty-two



AT South Square *The Daily Phase* was among those journals which politicians take lest they should miss reading correctly the temperature of Fleet Street. Michael pushed it over to Fleur at breakfast.

During the six days since Dinny's arrival neither of them had said a word to her on the subject of Wilfrid; and it was Dinny who now said: 'May I see that?'

Fleur handed her the paper. She read, gave a little shudder, and

went on with her breakfast. Kit broke the ensuing hush by stating Hobbs's average. Did Aunt Dinny think he was as great as W. G. Grace?

‘I never saw either of them, Kit.’

‘Didn't you see W. G.?’

‘I think he died before I was born.’

Kit scrutinized her doubtfully.

‘Oh!’

‘He died in 1915,’ said Michael: ‘You'd have been eleven.’

‘But haven't you really seen Hobbs, Auntie?’

‘No.’

‘I’ve seen him three times. I’m practising his hook to leg. *The Daily Phase* says Bradman is the best batsman in the world now. Do you think he’s better than Hobbs?’

‘Better news than Hobbs.’

Kit stared.

‘What is “news”?’

‘What newspapers are for.’

‘Do they make it up?’

‘Not always.’

‘What news were you reading just now?’

‘Nothing that would interest you.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Kit, don’t worry!’ said Fleur.

‘May I have an egg?’

‘Yes.’

The hush began again, till Kit stopped his eggspoon in midair and isolated a finger:

‘Look! The nail’s blacker than it was yesterday. Will it come off, Auntie?’

‘How did you do that?’

‘Pinched it in a drawer. I didn’t cry.’

‘Don’t boast, Kit.’

Kit gave his mother a clear upward look and resumed his egg.

Half an hour later, when

Michael was just settling down to his correspondence, Dinny came into his study.

‘Busy, Michael?’

‘No, my dear.’

‘That paper! Why can’t they leave him alone?’

‘You see *The Leopard* is selling like hot cakes. Dinny, how do things stand now?’

‘I know he’s been having malaria, but I don’t even know where or how he is.’

Michael looked at her face, masked in its desperate little smile, and said hesitatingly:

‘Would you like me to find out?’

‘If he wants me, he knows where I am.’

‘I’ll see Compson Grice. I’m not lucky with Wilfrid himself.’

When she was gone he sat staring at the letters he had not begun to answer, half dismayed, half angered. Poor dear Dinny! What a shame! Pushing the letters aside, he went out.

Compson Grice’s office was near Covent Garden, which, for some reason still to be discovered, attracts literature. When Michael reached it, about noon, that young

publisher was sitting in the only well-furnished room in the building, with a newspaper cutting in his hand and a smile on his lips. He rose and said: ‘Hallo, Mont! Seen this in *The Phase*?’

‘Yes.’

‘I sent it round to Desert, and he wrote that at the top and sent it back. Neat, eh!’

Michael read in Wilfrid’s writing:

‘Whene’er the lord who
rules his roosts

Says: “Bite!” he bites,

says: "Boost!" he boosts.'

'He's in town, then?'

'Was half an hour ago.'

'Have you seen him at all?'

'Not since the book came out.'

Michael looked shrewdly at that comely fattish face. 'Satisfied with the sales?'

'We're in the forty-first thousand, and going strong.'

'I suppose you don't know whether Wilfrid is returning to the East?'

'Haven't the least little idea.'

'He must be pretty sick with the

whole thing.'

Compson Grice shrugged.

'How many poets have ever made a thousand pounds out of a hundred pages of verse?'

'Small price for a soul, Grice.'

'It'll be two thousand before we've done.'

'I always thought it a mistake to print 'The Leopard'. Since he did it I've defended it, but it was a fatal thing to do.'

'I don't agree.'

'Obviously. It's done you proud.'

'You can sneer,' said Grice, with some feeling, 'but he wouldn't have

sent it to me if he hadn't wished it to come out. I am not my brother's keeper. The mere fact that it turns out a scoop is nothing to the point.'

Michael sighed.

'I suppose not; but this is no joke for him. It's his whole life.'

'Again, I don't agree. That happened when he recanted to save himself being shot. This is expiration, and damned good business into the bargain. His name is known to thousands who'd never heard of it.'

'Yes,' said Michael, brooding, 'there is that, certainly. Nothing

like persecution to keep a man alive. Grice, will you do something for me? Make an excuse to find out what Wilfrid's intentions are. I've put my foot into it with him and can't go myself, but I specially want to know.'

'H'm!' said Grice. 'He bites.'

Michael grinned. 'He won't bite his benefactor. I'm serious. Will you?'

'I'll try. By the way, there's a book by that French Canadian I've just published. Top-hole! I'll send you a copy – your wife will like it.' 'And,' he added to himself, 'talk about it.' He smoothed back his

sleek dark hair and extended his hand. Michael shook it with a little more warmth than he really felt and went away.

‘After all,’ he thought, ‘what is it to Grice except business? Wilfrid’s nothing to him! In these days we have to take what the gods send.’ And he fell to considering what was really making the public buy a book not concerned with sex, memoirs or murders. The Empire! The prestige of the English! He did not believe it. No! What was making them buy it was that fundamental interest which attached to the question how far a

person might go to save his life without losing what was called his soul. In other words, the book was being sold by that little thing – believed in some quarters to be dead – called Conscience. A problem posed to each reader's conscience, that he could not answer easily; and the fact that it had actually happened to the author brought it home to the reader that some awful alternative might at any moment be presented to himself. And what would he do then, poor thing? And Michael felt one of those sudden bursts of consideration and even respect for

the public which often came over him and so affected his more intelligent friends that they alluded to him as ‘Poor Michael!’

So meditating, he reached his room at the House of Commons, and had settled down to the consideration of a private bill to preserve certain natural beauties when a card was brought to him:

General Sir Conway
Cherrell

Can you see me?

Pencilling: ‘*Delighted, sir!*’ he handed the card back to the

attendant and got up. Of all his uncles he knew Dinny's father least, and he waited with some trepidation.

The General came in, saying:
'Regular rabbit-warren this, Michael.'

He had the confirmed neatness of his profession, but his face looked worn and worried.

'Luckily we don't breed here, Uncle Con.'

The General emitted a short laugh.

'No, there's that. I hope I'm not interrupting you. It's about Dinny.'

She still with you?’

‘Yes, sir.’

The General hesitated, and then, crossing his hands on his stick, said firmly:

‘You’re Desert’s best friend, aren’t you?’

‘Was. What I am now, I really don’t know.’

‘Is he still in town?’

‘Yes; he’s been having a bout of malaria, I believe.’

‘Dinny still seeing him?’

‘No, sir.’

Again the General hesitated, and again seemed to firm himself by

gripping his stick.

‘Her mother and I, you know, only want what’s best for her. We want her happiness; the rest doesn’t matter. What do you think?’

‘I really don’t believe it matters what any of us think.’

The General frowned.

‘How do you mean?’

‘It’s just between those two.’

‘I understood that he was going away.’

‘He said so to my father, but he hasn’t gone. His publisher told me just now that he was still at his

rooms this morning.'

'How is Dinny?'

'Very low in her mind. But she keeps her end up.'

'He ought to do something.'

'What, sir?'

'It's not fair to Dinny. He ought either to marry her or go right away.'

'Would you find it easy, in his place, to make up your mind?'

'Perhaps not.'

Michael made a restless tour of his little room.

'I think the whole thing is way below any question of just yes or

no. It's a case of wounded pride, and when you've got that, the other emotions don't run straight. You ought to know that, sir. You must have had similar cases, when fellows have been court-martialled.'

The word seemed to strike the General with the force of a revelation. He stared at his nephew and did not answer.

'Wilfrid,' said Michael, 'is being court-martialled, and it isn't a short sharp business like a real court-martial – it's a desperate long-drawn-out affair, with no end to it that I can grasp.'

‘I see,’ said the General, quietly: ‘But he should never have let Dinny in for it.’

Michael smiled. ‘Does love ever do what’s correct?’

‘That’s the modern view, anyway.’

‘According to report, the ancient one, too.’

The General went to the window and stood looking out.

‘I don’t like to go and see Dinny,’ he said, without turning round; ‘it seems like worrying her. Her mother feels the same. And there’s nothing we can do.’

His voice, troubled not for himself, touched Michael.

‘I believe,’ he said, ‘that in some way it’ll all be over very soon. And whichever way will be better for them and all of us than this.’

The General turned round.

‘Let’s hope so. I wanted to ask you to keep in touch with us, and not let Dinny do anything without letting us know. It’s very hard waiting down there. I won’t keep you now; and thank you, it’s been a relief. Good-bye, Michael!’

He grasped his nephew’s hand, squeezed it firmly, and was gone.

Michael thought: ‘Hanging in the wind! There’s nothing worse. Poor old boy!’

Chapter Thirty-three



COMPSON GRICE, who had no mean disposition and a certain liking for Michael, went out to lunch mindful of his promise. A believer in the power of meals to solve difficulties, he would normally have issued an invitation and obtained his information over the second or third glass of really old brandy. But he was afraid of Wilfrid. Discussing his simple *sole meunière* and half-bottle of Chablis, he decided on a letter. He wrote it in the Club's little green-panelled writing-room,

with a cup of coffee by his side and a cigar in his mouth.

The Hotch Potch Club.
Friday.

DEAR DESERT,

In view of the remarkable success of *The Leopard* and the probability of further large sales, I feel that I ought to know definitely what you would like me to do with the royalty cheques when they fall due. Perhaps you would be so good as to tell me whether you contemplate going back to the East, and if so when; and at the same time let me have an address to which I can remit with safety. Possibly you would prefer that I should simply pay your royalties into your bank, whatever that is, and take their receipt. Hitherto our financial transactions have been somewhat lean, but *The Leopard* will certainly have – indeed, is already having – an influence on the sales of your two previous books; and it will

be advisable that you should keep me in touch with your whereabouts in future. Shall you be in Town much longer? I am always delighted to see you, if you care to look in.

With hearty congratulations and best wishes,
I am, sincerely yours,

COMPSON GRICE.

This letter, in his elegant and upright hand, he addressed to Cork Street and sent at once by the club messenger. The remains of his recess he spent sounding in his rather whispering voice the praises of his French Canadian product, and then took a taxi back to Covent Garden. A clerk met him in the lobby.

‘Mr Desert is waiting up in your

room, sir.'

'Good!' said Compson Grice, subduing a tremor and thinking: 'Quick work!'

Wilfrid was standing at a window which commanded a slanting view of Covent Garden market; and Grice was shocked when he turned round – the face was so dark and wasted and had such a bitter look: the hand, too, had an unpleasant dry heat in the feel of it.

'So you got my letter?' he said.

'Thanks. Here's the address of my bank. Better pay all cheques

into it and take their receipt.'

'You don't look too fearfully well. Are you off again?'

'Probably. Well, good-bye, Grice. Thanks for all you've done.'

Compson Grice said, with real feeling: 'I'm terribly sorry it's hit you so hard.'

Wilfrid shrugged and turned to the door.

When he was gone his publisher stood, twisting the bank's address, in his hands. Suddenly he said out loud: 'I don't like his looks; I absolutely don't!' And he went to the telephone....

Wilfrid walked north; he had another visit to pay. He reached the museum just as Adrian was having his cup of ‘Dover’ tea and bun.

‘Good!’ said Adrian, rising. ‘I’m glad to see you. There’s a spare cup. Do sit down.’

He had experienced the same shock as Grice at the look on Desert’s face and the feel of his hand.

Wilfrid took a sip of tea. ‘May I smoke?’ He lighted a cigarette, and sat, hunched in his chair. Adrian waited for him to speak.

‘Sorry to butt in on you like this,’ said Wilfrid, at last, ‘but I’m going back into the blue. I wanted to know which would hurt Dinny least – just to clear out or to write.’

Adrian lived through a wretched and bleak minute.

‘You mean that if you see her you can’t trust yourself.’ Desert gave a shivering shrug.

‘It’s not that exactly. It sounds brutal, but I’m so fed up that I don’t feel anything. If I saw her – I might wound her. She’s been an angel. I don’t suppose you can understand what’s happened in me. I can’t myself. I only know that I

want to get away from everything and everybody.'

Adrian nodded.

'I was told you'd been ill – you don't think that accounts for your present feeling? For God's sake don't make a mistake in your feelings now!'

Wilfrid smiled.

'I'm used to malaria. It's not that. You'll laugh, but I feel like bleeding to death inside. I want to get to where nothing and nobody remind me. And Dinny reminds me more than anyone.'

'I see,' said Adrian gravely. And

he was silent, passing his hand over his bearded chin. Then he got up and began to walk about.

‘Do you think it’s fair to Dinny or yourself not to try what seeing her might do?’

Wilfrid answered, almost with violence: ‘I tell you, I should hurt her.’

‘You’ll hurt her any way; her eggs are all in one basket. And look here, Desert! You published that poem deliberately. I always understood you did so as a form of expiation, even though you had asked Dinny to marry you. I’m not such a fool as to want you to go on

with Dinny if your feelings have really changed; but are you sure they have?’

‘My feelings haven’t changed. I simply have none. Being a pariah dog has killed them.’

‘Do you realize what you’re saying?’

‘Perfectly! I knew I was a pariah from the moment I recanted, and that whether people knew it or not didn’t matter. All the same – it *has* mattered.’

‘I see,’ said Adrian again, and came to a standstill. ‘I suppose that’s natural.’

‘Whether it is to others, I don’t know; it is to me. I am out of the herd, and I’ll stay there. I don’t complain. I side against myself.’ He spoke with desperate energy.

Adrian said, very gently: ‘Then you just want to know how to hurt Dinny least? I can’t tell you: I wish I could. I gave you the wrong advice when you came before. Advice is no good, anyway. We have to wrestle things out for ourselves.’

Wilfrid stood up. ‘Ironical, isn’t it! I was driven to Dinny by my loneliness. I’m driven away from her by it. Well, good-bye, sir; I

don't suppose I shall ever see you again. And thanks for trying to help me.'

'I wish to God I could.'

Wilfrid smiled the sudden smile that gave him his charm.

'I'll try what one more walk will do. I may see some writing on the wall. Anyway, you'll know I didn't want to hurt her more than I could help. Good-bye!'

Adrian's tea was cold and his bun uneaten. He pushed them away. He felt as if he had failed Dinny, and yet for the life of him could not see what he could have

done. That young man looked very queer! 'Bleeding to death inside!' Gruesome phrase! And true, judging by his face! Fibre sensitive as his, and a consuming pride! 'Going back into the blue.' To roam about in the East – a sort of Wandering Jew; become one of those mysterious Englishmen found in out-of-the-way places, with no origins that they would speak of, and no future but their present. He filled a pipe and tried his best to feel that, after all, in the long run Dinny would be happier unmarried to him. And he did not succeed. There was only one flowering of

real love in a woman's life, and this was hers. He had no doubt on that point. She would make shift – oh! yes; but she would have missed ‘the singing and the gold’. And, grabbing his battered hat, he went out. He strode along in the direction of Hyde Park; then, yielding to a whim, diverged towards Mount Street.

When Blore announced him his sister was putting the last red stitches in the tongue of one of the dogs in her French tapestry. She held it up.

‘It ought to drip. He's looking at that bunny. Would blue drips be

right?’

‘Grey, Em, on that background.’

Lady Mont considered her brother sitting in a small chair with his long legs hunched up.

‘You look like a war correspondent – camp stools, and no time to shave. I do want Dinny to be married, Adrian. She’s twenty-six. All that about bein’ yellow. They could go to Corsica.’

Adrian smiled. Em was so right, and yet so wrong!

‘Con was here today,’ resumed his sister, ‘he’s been seein’ Michael. Nobody knows anythin’. And Dinny

just goes for walks with Kit and Dandy, Fleur says, and nurses Catherine, and sits readin' books without turnin' the page.'

Adrian debated whether to tell her of Desert's visit to him.

'And Con says,' went on Lady Mont, 'that he can't make two ends meet this year – Clare's weddin' and the Budget, and Jean expectin' – he'll have to cut down some trees, and sell the horses. We're hard up, too. It's lucky Fleur's got so much. Money is such a bore. What do you think?'

Adrian gave a start.

‘Well, no one expects a good thing nowadays, but one wants enough to live on.’

‘It’s havin’ dependants. Boswell’s got a sister than can only walk with one leg; and Johnson’s wife’s got cancer – poor thing! And everybody’s got somebody or somethin’. Dinny says at Condaford her mother does everythin’ in the village. So how it’s to go on, I don’t know. Lawrence doesn’t save a penny.’

‘We’re falling between two stools, Em; and one fine day we shall reach the floor with a bump.’

‘I suppose we shall live in

almshouses.’ And Lady Mont lifted her work up to the light. ‘No, I shan’t make it drip. Or else go to Kenya; they say there’s somethin’ that pays there.’

‘What I hate,’ said Adrian with sudden energy, ‘is the thought of Mr Tom Noddy or somebody buying Condaford and using it for week-end cocktail parties.’

‘I should go and be a Banshee in the woods. There couldn’t be Condaford without Cherrells.’

‘There dashed well could, Em. There’s a confounded process called evolution; and England is its home.’

Lady Mont sighed, and, getting up, swayed over to her parakeet.

‘Polly! You and I will go and live in an almshouse.’

Chapter Thirty-four



WHEN Compson Grice telephoned to Michael, or rather to Fleur, for Michael was not in, he sounded embarrassed.

‘Is there any message I can give him, Mr Grice?’

‘Your husband asked me to find out Desert’s movements. Well, Desert’s just been in to see me, and practically said he was off again; but – er – I didn’t like his looks, and his hand was like a man’s in fever.’

‘He’s been having malaria.’

‘Oh! Ah! By the way, I’m sending you a book I’m sure you’ll like; it’s by that French Canadian.’

‘Thank you, very much. I’ll tell Michael when he comes in.’

And Fleur stood thinking. Ought she to pass this on to Dinny? Without consulting Michael she did not like to, and he, tied tightly to the House just now, might not even be in to dinner. How like Wilfrid to keep one on tenterhooks! She always felt that she knew him better than either Dinny or Michael. They were convinced of a vein of pure gold in him. She, for

whom he had once had such a pressing passion, could only assess that vein at nine carat. ‘That, I suppose,’ she thought, rather bitterly, ‘is because my nature is lower than theirs.’ People assessed others according to their own natures, didn’t they? Still, it was difficult to give high value to one whose mistress she had not become, and who had then fled into the blue. There was always extravagance in Michael’s likings; in Dinny – well, Dinny she did not really understand.

And so she went back to the letters she was writing. They were

important, for she was rallying the best and brightest people to meet some high-caste Indian ladies who were over for the Conference. She had nearly finished when she was called to the telephone by Michael, asking if there were any message from Compson Grice. Having given him what news there was, she went on:

‘Are you coming in to dinner?... Good! I dread dining alone with Dinny; she’s so marvellously cheerful, it gives me the creeps. Not worry other people and all that, of course; but if she showed her feelings more it would worry us

less... Uncle Con! ... That's rather funny, the whole family seems to want now the exact opposite of what they wanted at first. I suppose it's the result of watching her suffer... Yes, she went in the car to sail Kit's boat on the Round Pond; they sent Dandy and the boat back in the car, and are walking home... All right dear boy. Eight o'clock; don't be late if you can help it... Oh! Here *are* Kit and Dinny. Good-bye!'

Kit had come into the room. His face was brown, his eyes blue, his sweater the same colour as his eyes, his shorts darker blue; his

green stockings were gartered below his bare knees, and his brown shoes had brogues; he wore no cap on his bright head.

‘Auntie Dinny has gone to lie down. She had to sit on the grass. She says she’ll be all right soon. D’you think she’s going to have measles? I’ve had them, Mummy, so when she’s isolated I can still see her. We saw a man who frightened her.’

‘What sort of man?’

‘He didn’t come near; a tall sort of man; he had his hat in his hand, and when he saw us, he almost ran.’

‘How do you know he saw you?’

‘Oh! he went like that, and scooted.’

‘Was that in the Park?’

‘Yes.’

‘Which?’

‘The Green Park.’

‘Was he thin, and dark in the face?’

‘Yes; do you know him too?’

‘Why “too”, Kit? Did Auntie Dinny know him?’

‘I think so; she said: “Oh!” like that, and put her hand here. And then she looked after him; and then she sat down on the grass. I fanned

her with her scarf. I love Auntie Dinny. Has she a husband?’

‘No.’

When he had gone up, Fleur debated. Dinny must have realized that Kit would describe everything. She decided only to send up a message and some sal volatile.

The answer came back: ‘I shall be all right by dinner.’

But at dinner-time a further message came to say she still felt rather faint: might she just go to bed and have a long night?

Thus it was that Michael and Fleur sat down alone.

‘It was Wilfrid, of course.’

Michael nodded.

‘I wish to God he’d go. It’s so wretched – the whole thing! D’you remember that passage in Turgenev, where Litvinov watches the train smoke curling away over the fields?’

‘No. Why?’

‘All Dinny’s tissue going up in smoke.’

‘Yes,’ said Fleur between tight lips. ‘But the fire will burn out.’

‘And leave –?’

‘Oh! She’ll be recognizable.’

Michael looked hard at the

partner of his board. She was regarding the morsel of fish on her fork. With a little set smile on her lips she raised it to her mouth and began champing, as if chewing the cud of experience. Recognizable! Yes, *she* was as pretty as ever, though more firmly moulded, as if in tune with the revival of shape. He turned his eyes away, for he still squirmed when he thought of that business four years ago, of which he had known so little, suspected so much, and talked not at all. Smoke! Did all human passion burn away and drift in a blue film over the fields, obscure

for a moment the sight of the sun and the shapes of the crops and the trees, then fade into air and leave the clear hard day; and no difference anywhere? Not quite! For smoke was burnt tissue, and where fire had raged there was alteration. Of the Dinny he had known from a small child up, the outline would be changed – hardened, sharpened, refined, withered? And he said:

‘I must be back at the House by nine, the Chancellor’s speaking. Why one should listen to him, I don’t know, but one does.’

‘Why you should listen to

anyone will always be a mystery. Did you ever know any speaker in the House change anyone's opinions?'

'No,' said Michael with a wry smile, 'but one lives in hopes. We sit day after day talking of some blessed measure, and then take a vote, with the same result as if we'd taken it at the end of the first two speeches. And that's gone on for hundreds of years.'

'So filial!' said Fleur. 'Kit thinks Dinny is going to have measles. He's asking, too, if she has a husband.... Coaker, bring the coffee, please. Mr Mont has to go.'

When he had kissed her and gone, Fleur went up to the nurseries. Catherine was the soundest of sleepers, and it was pleasant to watch her, a pretty child with hair that would probably be like her own and eyes so hesitating between grey

and hazel that they gave promise of becoming ice-green. One small hand was crumpled against her cheek, and she breathed lightly as a flower. Nodding to the nurse, Fleur pushed open the door into the other nursery. To wake Kit was dangerous. He would demand

biscuits, and, very likely, milk, want light conversation, and ask her to read to him. But in spite of the door's faint creaking he did not wake. His bright head was thrust determinedly into the pillow from under which the butt of a pistol protruded. It was hot, and he had thrown back the clothes, so that, by the glimmer of the night-light, his blue-pyjama'd figure was disclosed to the knees. His skin was brown and healthy, and he had a Forsyte's chin. Fleur moved up and stood quite close. He looked 'such a duck', thus determinedly asleep in face of the opposition put up by his

quickenning imagination. With feathered finger-tips she gripped the sheet, pulled it up, and gingerly let it down over him; then stood back with her hands on her hips, and one eyebrow raised. He was at the best age in life, and would be for another two years until he went to school. No sex to bother him as yet! Everybody kind to him; everything an adventure out of books. Books! Michael's old books, her own, the few written since fit for children. He was at the wonderful age! She looked swiftly round the twilit room. His gun and sword lay ready on a chair! One

supported disarmament, and armed children to the teeth! His other toys, mostly mechanized, would be in the schoolroom. No; there on the window-sill was the boat he had sailed with Dinny, its sails still set; and there on a cushion in the corner was 'the silver dog', aware of her but too lazy to get up. She could see the slim feather of his tail cocked and waving gently at her. And, afraid lest she might disturb this admirable peace, she blew a kiss to both of them and stole back through the door. Nodding again to the nurse, she inspected Catherine's eyelashes and went out. Down the

stairs she tip-toed to the floor on which was Dinny's room, above her own. Was it unfeeling not to look in and ask if there were anything she wanted? She moved closer to the door. Only half past nine! She could not be asleep. Probably she would not sleep at all. It was hateful to think of her lying there silent and unhappy. Perhaps to talk

would be a comfort, would take her mind off! She was raising her hand to knock when a sound came forth, smothered, yet unmistakable – the gasping sobs of one crying into her pillow. Fleur stood as if

turned to stone. A noise she had not heard since she herself had made it nearly four years ago! It turned her sick with the force of memory – a horrible, but a sacred sound. Not for worlds would she go in! She covered her ears, drew back, and fled downstairs. For further protection from that searing sound she turned on the portable wireless. It gave forth from the second act of *Madame Butterfly*. She turned it off and sat down again at her bureau. She wrote rapidly a kind of formula: ‘Such a pleasure if, etc. – meet those very charming Indian ladies

who, etc. – Yours, etc., Fleur Mont.’
Over and over and over, and the
sound of that sobbing in her ears!
It was stuffy tonight! She drew the
curtains aside and threw the
window wider to let in what air
there was. A hostile thing, life, full
of silent menace and small
annoyances. If you went towards
and grasped life with both hands, it
yielded, perhaps, then drew back
to deal some ugly stroke. Half past
ten! What were they jabbering
about now in Parliament? Some
twopenny-ha’penny taxi She closed
the window and drew the curtains
again, stamped her letters, and

stood looking round the room before turning out and going up. And, suddenly, came a memory – of Wilfrid's face outside close to the glass of the window, on the night he fled from her to the East. If it were there now; if, for a second time in his strange life, he came like a disembodied spirit to that window, seeking now not her but Dinny? She switched off the light and groped her way to the window, cautiously drew the curtains apart a very little, and peered out. Nothing but the last of the artificially delayed daylight! Impatiently she dropped the

curtain and went upstairs. Standing before her long mirror, she listened a moment, and then carefully did not. How like life, that! One shut eyes and ears to all that was painful – if one could. And who could blame one? Plenty, to which one could shut neither eyes nor ears, seeped-in even through closed lids and cotton-wool. She was just getting into bed when Michael came.

She told him of the sobbing, and he in turn stood listening; but nothing penetrated the room's solid roofing. He went into his dressing-room and came back presently in a

dressing-gown she had given him, blue, with embroidered cuffs and collar, and began to walk up and down.

‘Come to bed,’ said Fleur; ‘you can’t help by doing that.’

They talked a little in bed. It was Michael who fell asleep. Fleur lay wakeful. Big Ben struck twelve. The town murmured on, but the house was very still. A little crack now and then, as though some board were settling down after the day’s pressure of feet; the snuffle, not loud, of Michael’s breathing – such, and the whispering, as it were, of her own thoughts, were its

only noises. From the room above not a sound. She began to think of where they should go in the long vacation. Scotland had been spoken of, and Cornwall; she herself wanted the Riviera for a month at least. To come back brown all over; she had never been properly sun-browned yet! With Mademoiselle and Nanny the children would be safe! What was that? A door closing. Surely the creaking of stairs! She touched Michael.

‘Yes?’

‘Listen!’

Again that faint creaking.

‘It began above,’ whispered Fleur; ‘I think you ought to see.’

He got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and, opening the door quietly, looked out. Nothing on the landing, but the sound of someone moving in the hall! He slipped down the stairs.

There was a dim figure by the front door, and he said gently:

‘Is that you, Dinny?’

‘Yes.’

Michael moved forward. Her figure left the door, and he came on her sitting on the coat

‘sarcophagus’. He could just see that her hand was raised, holding a scarf over her head and face.

‘Is there anything I can get you?’

‘No. I wanted some air.’

Michael checked his impulse to turn the light up. He moved forward, and in the darkness stroked her arm.

‘I didn’t think you’d hear,’ she said. ‘I’m sorry.’

Dared he speak of her trouble? Would she hate him for it, or be grateful?

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘anything that’ll do you good.’

‘It’s silly. I’ll go up again.’

Michael put his arm round her; he could feel that she was fully dressed. After a moment she relaxed against him, still holding the scarf so that it veiled her face and head. He rocked her gently – the least little movement side to side. Her body slipped till her head rested against his shoulder. Michael ceased to rock, ceased almost to breathe. As long as she would, let her rest there!

Chapter Thirty-five



WHEN Wilfrid left Adrian's room at the Museum, he had no plan or direction in his mind, and walked along like a man in one of those dreams where the theme is repeated over and over, and the only end is awakening. He went down the Kingsway to the Embankment, came to Westminster Bridge, turned on to it, and stood leaning over the parapet. A jump, and he would be out of it! The tide was running down—English water escaping to the seas, nevermore to

come back, glad to go! Escape! Escape from all those who made him think of himself. To be rid of this perpetual self-questioning and self-consciousness! To end this damned mawkish indecision, this puling concern as to whether one would hurt her too much! But of course one would not hurt her too much! She would cry and get over it. Sentiment had betrayed him once! Not again! By God! Not again!

He stood there a long time, leaning on the parapet, watching the bright water and the craft creeping by; and every now and

then a passing Cockney would stand beside him, as if convinced that he was looking out at something of sensational interest. And he was! He was seeing his own life finally 'in the blue', unmoored, careering like the Flying Dutchman on far waters to the far ends of the world. But at least without need for bravado, kow-towing, appeal, or pretence, under his own flag, and that not at half-mast.

'I've 'eard,' said a voice, 'that lookin' at the water long enough will make 'em jump sometimes.'

Wilfrid shuddered and walked away. God! How raw and jagged

one had got! He walked off the bridge past the end of Whitehall into St James's Park, skirted the long water up to the geraniums and the large stone males, females, and fruits in front of the Palace, passed into the Green Park, and threw himself down on the dry grass. He lay there perhaps an hour on his back with his hand over his eyes, grateful for the sun soaking into him. When he got up he felt dizzy, and had to stand some minutes to get his balance before moving towards Hyde Park Corner. He had gone but a little way when he started and swerved off to the

right. Coming towards him, nearer the riding track, were a young woman and a little boy. Dinny! He had seen her gasp, her hand go to her heart. And he had swerved and walked away. It was brutal, horrible, but it was final. So a man, who had thrust a dagger home, would feel. Brutal, horrible, but final! No more indecision! Nothing now but to get away as quick as ever he could! He turned towards his rooms, striding along as if possessed, his lips drawn back in such a smile as a man has in a dentist's chair. He had stricken down the only woman who had

ever seemed to him worth marrying, the only woman for whom he had felt what was worthy to be called real love. Well! Better strike her down like that than kill her by living with her! He was as Esau, and as Ishmael, not fit for a daughter of Israel. And a messenger boy turned and stared after him – the pace at which he walked was so foreign to the youth's habitual feelings. He crossed Piccadilly with no concern whatever for its traffic, and plunged into the narrow mouth of Bond Street. It suddenly struck him that he would never see Scott's hats

again. The shop had just been shut, but those hats rested in rows, super-conventional hats, tropical hats, ladies' hats, and specimens of the newest Trilby or Homburg, or whatever they called it now. He strode on, rounded the scent of Atkinson's, and came to his own door. There he had to sit down at the foot of the stairs before he could find strength to climb. The spasmodic energy which had followed the shock of seeing her had ebbed out in utter lassitude. He was just beginning to mount when Stack and the dog came down. Foch rushed at his legs and stood

against him, reaching his head up. Wilfrid crumpled his ears. To leave him once more without a master!

‘I’m off early tomorrow morning, Stack. To Siam. I probably shan’t be coming back.’

‘Not at all, sir?’

‘Not at all.’

‘Would you like me to come too, sir?’

Wilfrid put his hand on the henchman’s shoulder.

‘Jolly good of you, Stack; but you’d be bored to death.’

‘Excuse me, sir, but you’re hardly fit to travel alone at present.’

‘Perhaps not, but I’m going to.’

The henchman bent his eyes on Wilfrid’s face. It was a grave intent gaze, as if he were committing that face finally to heart.

‘I’ve been with you a long time, sir.’

‘You have, Stack; and nobody could have been nicer to me. I’ve made provision in case anything happens to me. You’d prefer to go on here, I expect, keeping the rooms for when my father wants them.’

‘I should be sorry to leave here, if I can’t come with you. Are you

sure about that, sir?’

Wilfrid nodded. ‘Quite sure, Stack. What about Foch?’

Stack hesitated, then said with a rush: ‘I think I ought to tell you, sir, that when Miss Cherrell was here last – the night you went off to Epping – she said that if you was to go away at any time, she would be glad to have the dog. He’s fond of her, sir.’

Wilfrid’s face became a mask.

‘Take him for his run,’ he said, and went on up the stairs.

His mind was once again in turmoil. Murder! But it was done!

One did not bring a corpse to life with longing or remorse. The dog, if she wanted him, was hers, of course! Why did women cling to memories, when all they should wish should be to forget? He sat down at his bureau and wrote:

I am going away for good. Foch comes to you with this. He is yours if you care to have him. I am only fit to be alone. Forgive me if you can, and forget me. – WILFRID.

He addressed it, and sat on at the bureau slowly turning his head and looking round the room. Under three months since the day he had come back. He felt as if he had

lived a lifetime. Dinny over there at the hearth, after her father had been! Dinny on the divan looking up at him! Dinny here, Dinny there!

Her smile, her eyes, her hair! Dinny, and that memory in the Arab tent, pulling at each other, wrestling for him. Why had he not seen the end from the beginning? He might have known himself! He took a sheet of paper and wrote:

MY DEAR FATHER,

England doesn't seem to agree with me, and I am starting tomorrow for Siam. My bank will have my address from time to time. Stack will keep things going here as usual, so that the rooms will be ready whenever you want them. I

hope you'll take care of yourself. I'll try and send you a coin for your collection now and then. Good-bye.

Yours affectionately,

WILFRID.

His father would read it and say: 'Dear me! Very sudden! Queer fellow!' And that was about all that anyone would think or say – except – !

He took another sheet of paper and wrote to his bank; then lay down, exhausted, on the divan.

Stack must pack, he hadn't the strength. Luckily his passport was in order – that curious document which rendered one independent of

one's kind; that password to whatever loneliness one wanted. The room was very still, for at this hour of lull before dinner traffic began there was hardly any noise from the streets. The stuff which he took after attacks of malaria had opium in it, and a dreamy feeling came over him. He drew a long breath and relaxed. To his half-drugged senses scents kept coming – the scent of camels' dung, of coffee roasting, carpets, spices, and humanity in the *Suks*, the sharp unscented air of the desert, and the foetid reek of some river village; and sounds – the whine of beggars,

a camel's coughing grunts, the cry of the jackal, Muezzin call, padding of donkeys' feet, tapping of the silversmiths, the creaking and moaning of water being drawn. And before his half-closed eyes visions came floating; a sort of long dream-picture of the East as he had known it. Now it would be another East, further and more strange!... He slipped into a real dream....

Chapter Thirty-six



SEEING him turn away from her in the Green Park, Dinny had known for certain it was all over. The sight of his ravaged face had moved her to the depths. If only he could be happy again she could put up with it. For since the evening he left her in his rooms she had been steeling herself, never really believing in anything but this. After those moments with Michael in the dark hall she slept a little and had her coffee upstairs. A message was brought her about ten

o'clock that a man with a dog was waiting to see her.

She finished dressing quickly, put on her hat, and went down. It could only be Stack.

The henchman was standing beside the 'sarcophagus', holding Foch on a lead. His face, full of understanding as ever, was lined and pale, as if he had been up all night.

'Mr Desert sent this, miss.' He held out a note.

Dinny opened the door of the drawing-room.

'Come in here, please, Stack.

Let's sit down.'

He sat down and let go of the lead. The dog went to her and put his nose on her knee. Dinny read the note.

'Mr Desert says that I may have Foch.'

Stack bent his gaze on his boots. 'He's gone, miss. Went by the early service to Paris and Marseilles.'

She could see moisture in the folds of his cheeks. He gave a loud sniff, and angrily brushed his hand over his face.

'I've been with him fourteen years, miss. It was bound to hit me.

He talks of not coming back.'

'Where has he gone?'

'Siam.'

'A long way,' said Dinny with a smile. 'The great thing is that he should be happy again.'

'That is so, miss. I don't know if you'd care to hear about the dog's food. He has a dry biscuit about nine, and shin of beef or sheep's head, cooked, with crumbled hound-meal, between six and seven, and nothing else. A good quiet dog, he is, perfect gentleman in the house. He'll sleep in your bedroom if you like.'

‘Do you stay where you are, Stack?’

‘Yes, miss. The rooms are his lordship’s. As I told you, Mr Desert is sudden; but I think he means what he says. He never was happy in England.’

‘I’m sure he means what he says. Is there anything I can do for you, Stack?’

The henchman shook his head, his eyes rested on Dinny’s face, and she knew he was debating whether he dared offer sympathy. She stood up.

‘I think I’ll take Foch a walk and

get him used to me.'

'Yes, miss. I don't let him off the lead except in the parks. If there's anything you want to know about him any time, you have the number.'

Dinny put out her hand.

'Well, good-bye, Stack, and best wishes.'

'The same to you, miss, I'm sure.' His eyes had what was more than understanding in them, and the grip of his hand had a spasmodic strength. Dinny continued to smile till he was gone and the door closed, then sat down on the sofa

with her hands over her eyes. The dog, who had followed Stack to the door, whined once, and came back to her. She uncovered her eyes, took Wilfrid's note from her lap, and tore it up.

‘Well, Foch,’ she said, ‘what shall we do? Nice walk?’

The tail moved; he again whined slightly.

‘Come along then, boy.’

She felt steady, but as if a spring had broken. With the dog on the lead she walked towards Victoria Station, and stopped before the statue. The leaves had thickened

round it, and that was all the change. Man and horse, remote, active, and contained – ‘workmanlike’! A long time she stood there, her face raised, dry-eyed, thin and drawn; and the dog sat patiently beside her.

Then, with a shrug, she turned away and led him rapidly towards the Park. When she had walked some time, she went to Mount Street and asked for Sir Lawrence. He was in his study.

‘Well, my dear,’ he said, ‘that looks a nice dog; is he yours?’

‘Yes. Uncle Lawrence, will you do something for me?’

‘Surely.’

‘Wilfrid has gone. He went this morning. He is not coming back. Would you be so very kind as to let my people know, and Michael, and Aunt Em, and Uncle Adrian. I don’t want ever to have to speak of it.’

Sir Lawrence inclined his head, took her hand and put it to his lips. ‘There was something I wanted to show you, Dinny.’ He took from his table a little statuette of Voltaire. ‘I picked that up two days ago. Isn’t he a delightful old cynic? Why the French should be so much pleasanter as cynics than other people is mysterious, except, of

course, that cynicism, to be tolerable, must have grace and wit; apart from those, it's just bad manners. An English cynic is a man with a general grievance. A German cynic is a sort of wild boar. A Scandinavian cynic is a pestilence. An American jumps around too much to make a cynic, and a Russian's state of mind is not constant enough. You might get a perfectly good cynic in Austria, perhaps, or northern China – possibly it's a question of latitude.'

Dinny smiled.

'Give my love to Aunt Em, please. I'm going home this

afternoon.'

'God bless you, my dear,' said Sir Lawrence. 'Come here, or to Lippinghall, whenever you want; we love having you.' And he kissed her forehead.

When she had gone, he went to the telephone, and then sought his wife.

'Em, poor Dinny has just been here. She looks like a smiling ghost. It's all over. Desert went off for good this morning. She doesn't want ever to speak of it. Can you remember that?'

Lady Mont, who was arranging

some flowers in a Chinese ginger jar, dropped them and turned round.

‘Oh! dear!’ she said. ‘Kiss me, Lawrence!’

They stood for a moment embraced. Poor Em! Her heart was soft as butter! She said into his shoulder: ‘Your collar’s all covered with hairs. You *will* brush your hair after you’ve put your coat on. Turn! I’ll pick them off.’

Sir Lawrence turned.

‘I’ve telephoned to Condaford and Michael and Adrian. Remember, Em! The thing is as if it

never was.'

'Of course I shall remember.
Why did she come to you?'

Sir Lawrence shrugged. 'She's
got a new dog, a black spaniel.'

'Very faithful, but they get fat.
There! Did they say anything on
the telephone?'

'Only: "Oh!" and "I see" and "Of
course".'

'Lawrence, I want to cry; come
back presently and take me
somewhere.'

Sir Lawrence patted her
shoulders and went out quickly.
He, too, felt peculiar. Back in his

study, he sat in thought. Desert's flight was the only possible solution! Of all those affected by this incident, he had the clearest and most just insight into Wilfrid. True, probably, that the fellow had a vein of gold in him which his general nature did its best to hide! But to live with? Not on your life! Yellow? Of course he wasn't that! The thing was not plain-sailing, as Jack Muskham and the pukka sahibs supposed, with their superstition that black was not white, and so on. No, no! Young Desert had been snared in a most peculiar way. Given his perverse

nature, its revolts,
humanitarianism, and want of
belief, given his way of
hobnobbing with the Arabs, his
case was as different from that of
the ordinary Englishman as chalk
from cheese. But, whatever his
case, he was not a man to live
with! Poor Dinny was well out of
that! What pranks Fate played!
Why should her choice have fallen
there? If you came to that, why
anything where love was
concerned? It knew no laws, not
even those of common sense. Some
element in her had flown straight
to its kindred element in him,

disregarding all that was not kindred, and all outside circumstance. She might never get again the chance of that particular 'nick', as Jack Muskhams would call it. But – good Gad! – marriage was a lifelong business; yes, even in these days, no passing joke! For marriage you wanted all the luck and all the give and take that you could get. Not much give and take about Desert – restless, disharmonic, and a poet! And proud – with that inner self-depreciative pride which never lets up on a man! A liaison, one of those leaping companionships

young people went in for now – possibly; but that didn't fit Dinny; even Desert must have felt so. In her the physical without the spiritual seemed out of place. Ah! Well! Another long heartache in the world – poor Dinny.

‘Where,’ he thought, ‘can I take Em at this time in the morning? The Zoo she doesn't like; I'm sick of the Wallace. Madame Tussaud's! Gaiety will break through. Madame Tussaud's!’

Chapter Thirty-seven



AT Condaford Jean went straight from the telephone to find her mother-in-law, and repeated Sir Lawrence's words with her usual decision. The gentle rather timid expression on Lady Cherrell's face changed to a startled concern.

‘Oh!’

‘Shall I tell the General?’

‘Please, dear.’

Alone again with her accounts, Lady Cherrell sat thinking. The only one of the family, except

Hubert, who had never seen Wilfrid Desert, she had tried to keep an open mind, and had no definite opposition on her conscience. She felt now only a troubled sympathy. What could one do? And, as is customary in the case of another's bereavement, she could only think of flowers.

She slipped out into the garden and went to the rose beds, which, flanked by tall yew hedges, clustered round the old sundial. She plucked a basket full of the best blossoms, took them up to Dinny's narrow and conventual bedroom, and disposed them in bowls by the

bedside and on the window-sill. Then, opening the door and mullioned window wide, she rang for the room to be dusted and the bed made. The Medici prints on the walls she carefully set exactly straight, and said:

‘I’ve dusted the pictures, Annie. Keep the window and door open. I want it all to smell sweet. Can you do the room now?’

‘Yes, m’lady.’

‘Then I think you’d better, I don’t know what time Miss Dinny will be here.’

Back with her accounts, she

could not settle to them, and, pushing them into a drawer, went to find her husband. He, too, was seated before bills and papers without sign of animation. She went up to him and pressed his head against her.

‘Jean’s told you, Con?’

‘Yes. It’s the only thing, of course; but I hate Dinny to be sad.’

They were silent till Lady Cherrell said:

‘I’d tell Dinny about our being so hard up. It would take her mind off.’

The General ruffled his hair. ‘I

shall be three hundred down on the year. I might get a couple of hundred for the horses, the rest must come out of trees. I don't know which I dislike more. Do you think she could suggest something?’

‘No, but she would worry, and that would prevent her troubling so much over the other thing.’

‘I see. Well, Jean or you tell her, then. I don't like to. It looks like hinting that I want to reduce her allowance. It's a pittance as it is. Make it plain there's no question of that. Travel would have been the thing for her, but where's the money to come from?’

Lady Cherrell did not know, and the conversation lapsed.

Into that old house, which for so many centuries human hopes, fears, births, deaths, and all the medley of everyday emotions had stamped with a look of wary age, had come an uneasiness which showed in every word and action, even of the maids. What attitude to adopt? How to show sympathy, and yet not show it? How to welcome, and yet make it clear that welcome did not carry rejoicing? Even Jean was infected. She brushed and combed the dogs, and insisted on taking the car to

meet every afternoon train.

Dinny came by the third. Leading Foch, she stepped out of the carriage almost into Jean's arms.

‘Hallo, my dear,’ said Jean, ‘here you are! New dog?’

‘Yes; a darling.’

‘What have you got?’

‘Only these things. It's no use looking for a porter, they're always trundling bicycles.’

‘I'll get them out.’

‘Indeed you won't! Hold Foch.’

When, carrying her suitcase and dressing-bag, she reached the car,

Dinny said:

‘Would you mind if I walk up by the fields, Jean? It’s good for Foch; and the train was stuffy; I should like a sniff of the hay.’

‘Yes, there’s some down still. I’ll take these along, and have fresh tea ready.’

She left Dinny standing with a smile on her face. And all the way to the Grange she thought of that smile and swore under her breath....

Entering the field path, Dinny let Foch off his lead. By the way he rushed to the hedgerow, she

realized how he had missed all this. A country dog! For a moment his busy joy took up her attention; then the sore and bitter aching came back again. She called him and walked on. In the first of their own fields the hay was still lying out, and she flung herself down. When she once got home she must watch every word and look, must smile and smile, and show nothing! She wanted desperately these few minutes of abandonment. She didn't cry, but pressed herself against the hay-covered earth, and the sun burned her neck. She turned on her back and gazed up at

the blue. She framed no thoughts,
dissolved in aching for what was
lost and could never be found now.
And the hum of summer beat
drowsily above her from the wings
of insects drunk on heat and
honey. She crossed her arms on her
chest to compress the pain within
her. If she could die, there, now, in
full summer with its hum and the
singing of the larks; die and ache
no more! So she lay motionless,
until the dog came and licked her
cheek. And, ashamed, she got up
and stood brushing the hay-seeds
and stalks from her dress and
stockings.

Past old Kismet in the next field she came to the thread of stream and crossed it into the disenchanted orchard, smelling of nettles and old trees; then on, to the garden and the flagstones of the terrace. One magnolia flower was out, but she dared not stop and sniff, lest its lemon-honey scent should upset her again; and, coming to the French window, she looked in.

Her mother was sitting with the look on her face that Dinny called 'waiting for Father'. Her father was standing with the look on his face that she called 'waiting for

Mother'. Jean seemed expecting her cub to come round the corner.

'And I'm the cub,' thought Dinny, and stepped over the threshold, saying:

'Well, Mother darling, can I have some tea?'...

That evening, after good night had been said, she came down again and went to her father's study. He was at his bureau, poring, with a pencil, over something he had written. She stole up, and read over his shoulder:

Hunters for sale: Bay gelding, fifteen three, rising ten, sound, good-looking, plenty of bone, fine jumper. Mare: blue roan: fifteen one, rising

nine, very clever, carries lady, show jumper, sound wind and limb. Apply Owner, Condaford Grange, Oxon.

‘H’m!’ he muttered, and crossed out the ‘wind and limb’.

Dinny reached down and took the paper.

The General started and looked round.

‘No,’ she said. And tore the sheet.

‘Here! You mustn’t do that. It took me – ’

‘No, Dad, you can’t sell the horses, you’d be lost.’

‘But I *must* sell the horses,

Dinny.'

'I know. Mother told me. But it isn't necessary. I happen to have quite a lot.' She put the notes she had been carrying about so long on his bureau.

The General got up.

'Impossible!' he said. 'Very good of you, Dinny, but quite impossible!'

'You mustn't refuse me, Dad. Let me do something for Condaford. I've no use for it, and it happens to be just the three hundred Mother says you want.'

'No use for it? Nonsense, my

dear! Why! With that you could have a good long travel.'

'I don't want a good long travel. I want to stay at home and help you both.'

The General looked hard into her face.

'I should be ashamed to take it,' he said. 'It's my own fault that I've got behind.'

'Dad! You never spend anything on yourself.'

'Well, I don't know how it is – one little thing and another, it piles up.'

'You and I will go into it. There

must be things we could do without.'

'The worst is having no capital. Something comes along and I have to meet it out of income; insurance is heavy, and with rates and taxes always going up, income gets smaller all the time.'

'I know; it must be awful. Couldn't one breed something?'

'Costs money to start. Of course we could do perfectly well in London or Cheltenham, or abroad. It's keeping the place up, and the people dependent on it.'

'Leave Condaford! Oh! no!

Besides, who would take it? In spite of all you've done, we're not up to date, Dad.'

'We're certainly not.'

'We could never put "this desirable residence" without blushing. People won't pay for other people's ancestors.'

The General stared before him.

'I do frankly wish, Dinny, the thing wasn't such a trust. I hate bothering about money, screwing here and screwing there, and always having to look forward to see if you can make do. But, as you say, to sell's unthinkable. And

who'd rent it? It wouldn't make a boys' school, or a country club, or an asylum. Those seem the only fates before country houses nowadays. Your Uncle Lionel's the only one of us who's got any money – I wonder if he'd like to take it on for his weekends.'

'No, Dad! No! Let's stick to it. I'm sure we can do it, somehow. Let me do the screwing and that. In the meantime you *must* take this. Then we shall start fair.'

'Dinny, I – '

'To please me, dear.'

The General drew her to him.

‘That business of yours,’ he muttered into her hair. ‘My God, I wish – !’

She shook her head.

‘I’m going out for a few minutes now, just to wander round. It’s so nice and warm.’

And, winding a scarf round her neck, she was gone through the opened window.

The last dregs of the long daylight had drained down beyond the rim, but warmth abode, for no air stirred, and no dew fell – a still, dry, dark night, with swarming stars. From the moment she

stepped out Dinny was lost in it. But the old house shrouded in its creepers lived for her eyes, a dim presence with four still-lighted windows. She stood under an elm tree leaning against its trunk, with her arms stretched back and her hands clasping it behind her. Night was a friend – no eye to see, no ear to listen. She stared into it, unmoving, drawing comfort from the solidity and breadth behind her. Moths flew by, almost touching her face. Insentient nature, warm, incurious, busy even in the darkness. Millions of little creatures burrowed and asleep,

hundreds floating or creeping
about, billions of blades of grass
and flowers straightening up ever
so slowly in the comparative
coolness of the night. Nature!
Pitiless and indifferent even to the
only creatures who crowned and
petted her with pretty words!
Threads broke and hearts broke, or
whatever really happened to the
silly things – Nature twitched no
lip, heaved no sigh! One twitch of
Nature's lip would have been more
to her than all human sympathy. If,
as in the 'Birth of Venus', breezes
could puff at her, waves like doves
lap to her feet, bees fly round her

seeking honey! If for one moment in this darkness she could feel at one with the starshine, the smell of earth, the twitter of that bat, the touch of a moth's wing on her nose!

With her chin tilted up and all her body taut against the tree trunk she stood, breathless from the darkness and the silence and the stars. Ears of a weasel, nose of a fox to hear and scent out what was stirring! In the tree above her head a bird chirped once. The drone of the last train, still far away, began, swelled, resolved itself into the sound of wheels and the sound of

steam, stopped, then began again and faded out in a far drumming. All hushed once more! Where she stood the moat had been, filled in so long that this great elm tree had grown. Slow, the lives of trees, and one long fight with the winds; slow and tenacious like the life of her family clinging to this spot.

‘I *will* not think of him,’ she thought, ‘I *will* not think of him!’ As a child that refuses to remember what has hurt it, so would she be! And, instantly, his face formed in the darkness – his eyes and his lips. She turned round to the trunk and leaned her forehead on its

roughness. But his face came between. Recoiling, she walked away over the grass swiftly and without noise, invisible as a spirit. Up and down she walked, and the wheeling soothed her.

‘Well,’ she thought, ‘I have had my hour. It can’t be helped. I must go in.’

She stood for a moment looking up at the stars, so far, so many, bright and cold. And with a faint smile she thought:

‘I wonder which is my lucky star!’

OVER THE RIVER



TO

Rudolf and Viola Sauter

Chapter One



CLARE, who for seventeen months had been the wife of Sir Gerald Corven of the Colonial Service, stood on the boat deck of an Orient liner in the river Thames, waiting for it to dock. It was ten o'clock of a mild day in October, but she wore a thick tweed coat, for the voyage had been hot. She looked pale – indeed, a little sallow – but her clear brown eyes were fixed eagerly on the land and her slightly touched-up lips were parted, so that her face had the vividness to

which it was accustomed. She stood alone, until a voice said:

‘Oh! *here* you are!’ and a young man, appearing from behind a boat, stood beside her. Without turning, she said:

‘Absolutely perfect day! It ought to be lovely at home.’

‘I thought you’d be staying in Town for a night at least; and we could have had a dinner and theatre. Won’t you?’

‘My dear young man, I shall be met.’

‘Perfectly damnable, things coming to an end!’

‘Often more damnable, things beginning.’

He gave her a long look, and said suddenly:

‘Clare, you realize, of course, that I love you?’

She nodded. ‘Yes.’

‘But you don’t love me?’

‘Wholly without prejudice.’

‘I wish – I wish you could catch fire for a moment.’

‘I am a respectable married woman, Tony.’

‘Coming back to England because –’

‘Of the climate of Ceylon.’

He kicked at the rail. 'Just as it's getting perfect. I've not said anything, but I know that your – that Corven –'

Clare lifted her eyebrows, and he was silent; then both looked at the shore, becoming momentarily more and more a consideration.

When two young people have been nearly three weeks together on board a ship, they do not know each other half so well as they think they do. In the abiding inanity of a life when everything has stopped except the engines, the water slipping along the ship's sides, and the curving of the sun in

the sky, their daily chair-to-chair intimacy gathers a queer momentum and a sort of lazy warmth. They know that they are getting talked about, and do not care. After all, they cannot get off the ship, and there is nothing else to do. They dance together, and the sway of the ship, however slight, favours the closeness of their contacts. After ten days or so they settle down to a life together, more continuous than that of marriage, except that they still spend their nights apart. And then, all of a sudden, the ship stops, and they stop, and there is a feeling, at least

on one side, perhaps on both, that stocktaking has been left till too late. A hurried vexed excitement, not unpleasurable, because suspended animation is at an end, invades their faculties; they are faced with the real equation of land animals who have been at sea.

Clare broke the silence.

‘You’ve never told me why you’re called Tony when your name is James.’

‘That *is* why. I *wish* you’d be serious, Clare; we haven’t much time before the darned ship docks. I simply can’t bear the thought of

not seeing you every day.'

Clare gave him a swift look, and withdrew her eyes to the shore again. 'How clean!' she was thinking. He had, indeed, a clean oval-shaped brown face, determined, but liable to good humour, with dark grey eyes inclined to narrow with his thoughts and darkish hair; and he was thin and active.

He took hold of a button of her coat.

'You haven't said a word about yourself out there, but you aren't happy, I know.'

‘I dislike people who talk about their private lives.’

‘Look!’ he put a card into her hand: ‘That club always finds me.’

She read:

MR JAMES BERNARD CROOM

The Coffee House,
St James’ Street.

‘Isn’t the Coffee House very out of date?’

‘Yes, but it’s still rather “the thing.” My Dad put me down when I was born.’

‘I have an uncle by marriage

who belongs – Sir Lawrence Mont, tall and twisty and thin; you'll know him by a tortoise-shell-rimmed eyeglass.'

'I'll look out for him.'

'What are you going to do with yourself in England?'

'Hunt a job. That's more than one man's work, it seems.'

'What sort of job?'

'Anything except schoolmastering and selling things on commission.'

'But does anybody ever get anything else nowadays?'

'No. It's a bad look-out. What I'd

like would be an estate agency, or something to do with horses.'

'Estates and horses are both dying out.'

'I know one or two racing men rather well. But I expect I shall end as a chauffeur. Where are you going to stay?'

'With my people. At first, anyway. If you still want to see me when you've been home a week, Condaford Grange, Oxfordshire, will find me.'

'Why did I ever meet you?' said the young man, with sudden gloom.

‘Thank you.’

‘Oh! you know what I mean. God! she’s casting anchor. Here’s the tender! Oh! Clare!’

‘Sir?’

‘Hasn’t it meant anything to you?’

Clare looked at him steadily before answering.

‘Yes. But I don’t know if it will ever mean any more. If it doesn’t, thank you for helping me over a bad three weeks.’

The young man stood silent, as only those can be silent whose feelings are raging for

expression....

The beginnings and endings of all human undertakings are untidy: the building of a house, the writing of a novel, the demolition of a bridge, and, eminently, the finish of a voyage. Clare landed from the tender in the usual hurly-burly, and, still attended by young Croom, came to rest in the arms of her sister.

‘Dinny! How sweet of you to face this bally-hooley! My sister, Dinny Cherrell – Tony Croom. I shall be all right now, Tony. Go and look after your own things.’

‘I’ve got Fleur’s car,’ said Dinny.

‘What about your trunks?’

‘They’re booked through to Condaford.’

‘Then we can go straight off.’

The young man, going with them to the car, said ‘Good-bye’ with a jauntiness which deceived no one; and the car slid away from the dock.

Side by side the sisters looked at each other, a long and affectionate scrutiny; and their hands lay, squeezed together, on the rug.

‘Well, ducky!’ said Dinny, at last. ‘Lovely to see you! Am I wrong to read between the lines?’

‘No. I’m not going back to him, Dinny.’

‘No, never, non?’

‘No, never, non!’

‘Oh! dear! Poor darling!’

‘I won’t go into it, but it became impossible.’ Clare was silent, then added suddenly, with a toss back of her head: ‘Quite impossible!’

‘Did he consent to your coming?’

Clare shook her head. ‘I slipped off. He was away. I wirelesslyed him, and wrote from Suez.’

There was another silence. Then Dinny squeezed her hand and said:

‘I was always afraid of it.’

‘The worst of it is I haven’t a penny. Is there anything in hats now, Dinny?’

‘ “All British” hats – I wonder.’

‘Or, perhaps, I could breed dogs – bull terriers; what d’you think?’

‘I don’t at present. We’ll inquire.’

‘How are things at Condaford?’

‘We rub on. Jean has gone out to Hubert again, but the baby’s there – just a year old now. Cuthbert Conway Cherrell. I suppose we shall call him “Cuffs.” He’s rather a duck.’

‘Thank God I haven’t that

complication! Certain things have their advantages.’ Her face had the hardness of a face on a coin.

‘Have you had any word from him?’

‘No, but I shall, when he realizes that I mean it.’

‘Was there another woman?’

Clare shrugged.

Again Dinny’s hand closed on hers.

‘I’m not going to make a song of my affairs, Dinny.’

‘Is he likely to come home about it?’

‘I don’t know. I won’t see him if

he does.’

‘But, darling, you’ll be hopelessly hung up.’

‘Oh! Don’t let’s bother about me. How have you been?’ And she looked critically at her sister: ‘You look more Botticellian than ever.’

‘I’ve become an adept at skimping. Also, I’ve gone in for bees.’

‘Do they pay?’

‘Not at present. But on a ton of honey we could make about seventy pounds.’

‘How much honey did you have this year?’

‘About two hundredweight.’

‘Are there any horses still?’

‘Yes, we’ve saved the horses, so far. I’ve got a scheme for a Condaford Grange bakery. The home farm is growing wheat at double what we sell it at. I want to mill and bake our own and supply the neighbourhood. The old mill could be set going for a few pounds, and there’s a building for the bakery. It wants about three hundred to start it. We’ve nearly decided to cut enough timber.’

‘The local traders will rage furiously.’

‘They will.’

‘Can it really pay?’

‘At a ton of wheat to the acre – *vide Whitaker* – we reckon thirty acres of our wheat, plus as much Canadian to make good light bread, would bring us in more than eight hundred and fifty pounds, less, say, five hundred, cost of milling and baking. It would mean baking one hundred and sixty two-pound loaves a day and selling about 56,000 loaves a year. We should need to supply eighty households, but that’s only the village, more or less. And we’d make the best and brightest bread.’

‘Three hundred and fifty a year profit,’ said Clare. ‘I wonder.’

‘So do I,’ said Dinny. ‘Experience doesn’t tell me that every estimate of profit should be halved, because I haven’t had any, but I suspect it. But even half would just tip the beam the right way for us, and we could extend operations gradually. We could plough a lot of grass in time.’

‘It’s a scheme,’ said Clare, ‘but would the village back you?’

‘So far as I’ve sounded them – yes.’

‘You’d want somebody to run it.’

‘M’yes. It would have to be someone who didn’t mind what he did. Of course he’d have the future, if it went.’

‘I wonder,’ said Clare, again, and wrinkled her brows.

‘Who,’ asked Dinny suddenly, ‘was that young man?’

‘Tony Croom? Oh! He was on a tea plantation, but they closed down.’ And she looked her sister full in the face.

‘Pleasant?’

‘Yes, rather a dear. *He* wants a job, by the way.’

‘So do about three million

others.'

'Including me.'

'You haven't come back to a very cheery England, darling.'

'I gather we fell off the gold standard or something while I was in the Red Sea. What is the gold standard?'

'It's what you want to be on when you're off, and to be off when you're on.'

'I see.'

'The trouble, apparently, is that our exports and carrying-trade profits and interests from investments abroad don't any

longer pay for our imports; so we're living beyond our income. Michael says anybody could have seen that coming; but we thought "it would be all right on the night." And it isn't. Hence the National Government and the election.'

'Can they do anything if they remain in?'

. 'Michael says "yes"; but he's notably hopeful. Uncle Lawrence says they can put a drag on panic, prevent money going out of the country, keep the pound fairly steady, and stop profiteering; but that nothing under a wide and definite reconstruction that will

take twenty years will do the trick; and during that time we shall all be poorer. Unfortunately no Government, he says, can prevent us liking play better than work, hoarding to pay these awful taxes, or preferring the present to the future. He also says that if we think people will work as they did in the war to save the country, we're wrong; because, instead of being one people against an outside enemy, we're two peoples against the inside enemy of ourselves, with quite opposite views as to how our salvation is to come.'

‘Does he think the socialists have

a cure?’

‘No; he says they’ve forgotten that no one will give them food if they can neither produce it nor pay for it. He says that communism or free trade socialism only has a chance in a country which feeds itself. You see, I’ve been learning it up. They all use the word Nemesis a good deal.’

‘Phew! Where are we going now, Dinny?’

‘I thought you’d like lunch at Fleur’s; afterwards we can take the three-fifty to Condaford.’

Then there was silence, during

which each thought seriously about the other, and neither was happy. For Clare was feeling in her elder sister the subtle change which follows in one whose springs have been broken and mended to go on with. And Dinny was thinking: 'Poor child! Now we've both been in the wars. What will she do? And how can I help her?'

Chapter Two



‘WHAT a nice lunch!’ said Clare, eating the sugar at the bottom of her coffee cup: ‘The first meal on shore is lovely! When you get on board a ship and read the first menu, you think: “My goodness! What an enchanting lot of things!” and then you come down to cold ham at nearly every meal. Do you know that stealing disappointment?’

‘Don’t I?’ said Fleur. ‘The curries used to be good, though.’

‘Not on the return voyage. I

never want to see a curry again.
How's the Round Table Conference going?'

'Plodding on. Is Ceylon interested in India?'

'Not very. Is Michael?'

'We both are.'

Clare's brows went up with delightful suddenness.

'But you can't know anything about it.'

'I *was* in India, you know, and at one time I saw a lot of Indian students.'

'Oh! yes, students. That's the trouble. They're so advanced and

the people are so backward.'

'If Clare's to see Kit and Kat before we start,' said Dinny, 'we ought to go up, Fleur.'

The visit to the nurseries over, the sisters resumed their seats in the car.

'Fleur always strikes me,' said Clare, 'as knowing so exactly what she wants.'

'She gets it, as a rule; but there've been exceptions. I've always doubted whether she really wanted Michael.'

'D'you mean a love affair went wrong?'

Dinny nodded. Clare looked out of the window.

‘Well, she’s not remarkable in that.’

Her sister did not answer.

‘Trains,’ Dinny said, in their empty third-class compartment, ‘always have great open spaces now.’

‘I rather dread seeing Mother and Dad, Dinny, having made such an almighty bloomer. I really must get something to do.’

‘Yes, you won’t be happy at Condaford for long.’

‘It isn’t that. I want to prove

that I'm not the complete idiot. I wonder if I could run an hotel. English hotels are still pretty backward.'

'Good idea. It's strenuous, and you'd see lots of people.'

'Is that caustic?'

'No, darling, just common sense; you never liked being buried.'

'How does one go to work to get such a thing?'

'You have me there. But now's the time if ever, nobody's going to be able to travel. But I'm afraid there's a technical side to managing hotels that has to be

learned. Your title might help.'

'I shouldn't use his name. I should call myself Mrs Clare.'

'I see. Are you sure it wouldn't be wise to tell me more about things?'

Clare sat silent for a little, then said suddenly: 'He's a sadist.'

Looking at her flushed face, Dinny said: 'I've never understood exactly what that means.'

'Seeking sensation, and getting more sensation when you hurt the person you get it from. A wife is most convenient.'

'Oh! darling!'

‘There was a lot first, my riding whip was only the last straw.’

‘You don’t mean – !’ cried Dinny, horrified.

‘Oh! yes.’

Dinny came over to her side and put her arms round her.

‘But, Clare, you must get free!’

‘And how? My word against his. Besides, who would make a show of beastliness? You’re the only person I could ever ever speak to of it.’

Dinny got up and let down the window. Her face was as flushed as her sister’s. She heard Clare say

dully:

‘I came away the first moment I could. It’s none of it fit for publication. You see, ordinary passion palls after a bit, and it’s a hot climate.’

‘Oh! heaven!’ said Dinny, and sat down again opposite.

‘My own fault. I always knew it was thin ice, and I’ve popped through, that’s all.’

‘But, darling, at twenty-four you simply can’t stay married and not married.’

‘I don’t see why not; *mariage manqué* is very steadying to the

blood. All I'm worrying about is getting a job. I'm not going to be a drag on Dad. Is his head above water, Dinny?'

'Not quite. We were breaking even, but this last taxation will just duck us. The trouble is how to get on without reducing staff.

Everyone's in the same boat. I always feel that we and the village are one. We've got to sink or swim together, and somehow or other we're going to swim. Hence my bakery scheme.'

'If I haven't got another job, could I do the delivering? suppose we've still got the old car.'

‘Darling, you can help any way you like. But it all has to be started. That’ll take till after Christmas. In the meantime there’s the election.’

‘Who is our candidate?’

‘His name is Dornford – a new man, quite decent.’

‘Will he want canvassers?’

‘Rather!’

‘All right. That’ll be something to do for a start. Is this National Government any use?’

‘They talk of “completing their work”; but at present they don’t tell us how.’

‘I suppose they’ll quarrel among

themselves the moment a constructive scheme is put up to them. It's all beyond me. But I can go round saying "Vote for Dornford." How's Aunt Em?"

'She's coming to stay tomorrow. She suddenly wrote that she hadn't seen the baby; says she's feeling romantic – wants to have the priest's room, and will I see that "no one bothers to do her up behind, and that." She's exactly the same.'

'I often thought about her,' said Clare. 'Extraordinarily restful.'

After that there was a long silence, Dinny thinking about Clare

and Clare thinking about herself. Presently, she grew tired of that and looked across at her sister. Had Dinny really got over that affair of hers with Wilfrid Desert of which Hubert had written with such concern when it was on, and such relief when it was off? She had asked that her affair should never be spoken of, Hubert had said, but that was over a year ago. Could one venture, or would she curl up like a hedgehog? 'Poor Dinny!' she thought: 'I'm twenty-four, so she's twenty-seven!' And she sat very still looking at her sister's profile. It was charming, the more so for

that slight tip-tilt of the nose which gave to the face a touch of adventurousness. Her eyes were as pretty as ever – that cornflower blue wore well; and their fringing was unexpectedly dark with such chestnut hair. Still, the face was thinner, and had lost what Uncle Lawrence used to call its ‘bubble and squeak.’ ‘I should fall in love with her if I were a man,’ thought Clare, ‘she’s *good*. But it’s rather a sad face, now, except when she’s talking.’ And Clare drooped her lids, spying through her lashes: No! one could not ask! The face she spied on had a sort of hard-won

privacy that it would be unpardonable to disturb.

‘Darling,’ said Dinny, ‘would you like your old room? I’m afraid the fantails have multiplied exceedingly – they coo a lot just under it.’

‘I shan’t mind that.’

‘And what do you do about breakfast? Will you have it in your room?’

‘My dear, don’t bother about me in any way. If anybody does, I shall feel dreadful. England again on a day like this! Grass is really lovely stuff, and the elm trees, and

that blue look!’

‘Just one thing, Clare. Would you like me to tell Dad and Mother, or would you rather I said nothing?’

Clare’s lips tightened.

‘I suppose they’ll have to know that I’m not going back.’

‘Yes; and something of the reason.’

‘Just general impossibility, then.’

Dinny nodded. ‘I don’t want them to think you in the wrong. We’ll let other people think that you’re home for your health.’

‘Aunt Em?’ said Clare.

‘I’ll see to her. She’ll be absorbed in the baby, anyway. Here we are, very nearly.’

Condaford Church came into view, and the little group of houses, mostly thatched, which formed the nucleus of that scattered parish. The home-farm buildings could be seen, but not the Grange, for, situated on the lowly level dear to ancestors, it was wrapped from the sight in trees.

Clare, flattening her nose against the window, said:

‘It gives you a thrill. Are you as fond of home as ever, Dinny?’

‘Fonder.’

‘It’s funny. I love it, but I can’t live in it.’

‘Very English – hence America and the Dominions. Take your dressing-case, and I’ll take the suitcase.’

The drive up through the lanes, where the elms were flecked by little golden patches of turned leaves, was short and sweet in the lowered sunlight, and ended with the usual rush of dogs from the dark hall.

‘This one’s new,’ said Clare, of the black spaniel sniffing at her

stockings.

‘Yes, Foch. Scaramouch and he have signed the Kellogg Pact, so they don’t observe it. I’m a sort of Manchuria.’ And Dinny threw open the drawing-room door.

‘Here she is, Mother.’

Advancing towards her mother, who stood smiling, pale and tremulous, Clare felt choky for the first time. To have to come back like this and disturb their peace!

‘Well, Mother darling,’ she said, ‘here’s your bad penny! You look just the same, bless you!’

Emerging from that warm

embrace, Lady Cherrell looked at her daughter shyly and said:

‘Dad’s in his study.’

‘I’ll fetch him,’ said Dinny.

In that barren abode, which still had its military and austere air, the General was fidgeting with a gadget he had designed to save time in the putting on of riding boots and breeches.

‘Well?’ he said.

‘She’s all right, dear, but it is a split, and I’m afraid complete.’

‘That’s bad!’ said the General, frowning.

Dinny took his lapels in her

hands.

‘It’s not her fault. But I wouldn’t ask her any questions, Dad. Let’s take it that she’s just on a visit; and make it as nice for her as we can.’

‘What’s the fellow been doing?’

‘Oh! his nature. I knew there was a streak of cruelty in him.’

‘How d’you mean – knew it, Dinny?’

‘The way he smiled – his lips.’

The General uttered a sound of intense discomfort.

‘Come along!’ he said: ‘Tell me later.’

With Clare he was perhaps

rather elaborately genial and open, asking no questions except about the Red Sea and the scenery of Ceylon, his knowledge of which was confined to its spicy offshore scent and a stroll in the Cinnamon Gardens at Colombo. Clare, still emotional from the meeting with her mother, was grateful for his reticence. She escaped rather quickly to her room, where her bags had already been unpacked.

At its dormer window she stood listening to the coorooing of the fantails and the sudden flutter and flip-flap of their wings climbing the air from the yew-hedged garden.

The sun, very low, was still shining through an elm tree. There was no wind, and her nerves sucked up repose in that pigeon-haunted stillness, scented so differently from Ceylon. Native air, deliciously sane, fresh and homespun, with a faint tang of burning leaves. She could see the threading blue smoke from where the gardeners had lighted a small bonfire in the orchard. And almost at once she lit a cigarette. The whole of Clare was in that simple action. She could never quite rest and be still, must always move on to that fuller savouring which for such natures

ever recedes. A fantail on the gutter of the sloped stone roof watched her with a soft dark little eye, preening itself slightly.

Beautifully white it was, and had a pride of body; so too had that small round mulberry tree which had dropped a ring of leaves, with their unders uppermost, spangling the grass. The last of the sunlight was stirring in what yellowish-green foliage was left, so that the tree had an enchanted look. Seventeen months since she had stood at this window and looked down over that mulberry tree at the fields and the rising coverts! Seventeen months of

foreign skies and trees, foreign scents and sounds and waters. All new, and rather exciting, tantalizing, unsatisfying. No rest! Certainly none in the white house with the wide verandah she had occupied at Kandy. At first she had enjoyed, then she had wondered if she enjoyed, then she had known she was not enjoying, lastly she had hated it. And now it was all over and she was back! She flipped the ash off her cigarette and stretched herself, and the fantail rose with a fluster.

Chapter Three



DINNY was 'seeing to' Aunt Em. It was no mean process. With ordinary people one had question and answer and the thing was over. But with Lady Mont words were not consecutive like that. She stood with a verbena sachet in her hand, sniffing, while Dinny unpacked for her.

'This is delicious, Dinny. Clare looks rather yellow. It isn't a baby, is it?'

'No, dear.'

‘Pity! When we were in Ceylon everyone was havin’ babies. The baby elephants – so enticin’! In this room – we always played a game of feedin’ the Catholic priest with a basket from the roof. Your father used to be on the roof, and I was the priest. There was never anythin’ worth eatin’ in the basket. Your Aunt Wilmet was stationed in a tree to call ‘Cooee’ in case of Protestants.’

‘ “Cooee” was a bit premature, Aunt Em. Australia wasn’t discovered under Elizabeth.’

‘No. Lawrence says the Protestants at that time were

devils. So were the Catholics. So were the Mohammedans.'

Dinny winced and veiled her face with a corset belt.

'Where shall I put these undies?'

'So long as I see where. Don't stoop too much! They were all devils then. Animals were treated terribly. Did Clare enjoy Ceylon?'

Dinny stood up with an armful of underthings.

'Not much.'

'Why not? Liver?'

'Auntie, you won't say anything, except to Uncle Lawrence and Michael, if I tell you? There's been

a split.'

Lady Mont buried her nose in the verberna bag.

'Oh!' she said: 'His mother looked it. D'you believe in "like mother like son"?''

'Not too much.'

'I always thought seventeen years' difference too much, Dinny. Lawrence says people say: "Oh! Jerry Corven!" and then don't say. So, what was it?'

Dinny bent over a drawer and arranged the things.

'I can't go into it, but he seems to be quite a beast.'

Lady Mont tipped the bag into the drawer, murmuring: ‘Poor dear Clare!’

‘So, Auntie, she’s just to be home for her health.’

Lady Mont put her nose into a bowl of flowers. ‘Boswell and Johnson call them “God-eat-yers”. They don’t smell. What disease could Clare have – nerves?’

‘Climate, Auntie.’

‘So many Anglo-Indians go back and back, Dinny.’

‘I know, but for the present. Something’s bound to happen. So not even to Fleur, please.’

‘Fleur will know whether I tell her or not. She’s like that. Has Clare a young man?’

‘Oh! no!’ And Dinny lifted a puce-coloured wrapper, recalling the expression of the young man when he was saying good-bye.

‘On board ship,’ murmured her Aunt dubiously.

Dinny changed the subject.

‘Is Uncle Lawrence very political just now?’

‘Yes, so borin’. Things always sound so when you talk about them. Is your candidate here safe, like Michael?’

‘He’s new, but he’ll get in.’

‘Married?’

‘No.’

Lady Mont inclined her head slightly to one side and scrutinized her niece from under half-drooped lids.

Dinny took the last thing out of the trunk. It was a pot of antiphlogistine.

‘That’s not British, Auntie.’

‘For the chest. Delia puts it in. I’ve had it, years. Have you talked to your candidate in private?’

‘I have.’

‘How old is he?’

‘Rather under forty, I should say.’

‘Does he do anything besides?’

‘He’s a K. C.’

‘What’s his name?’

‘Dornford.’

‘There were Dornfords when I was a girl. Where was that? Ah! Algeciras! He was a Colonel at Gibraltar.’

‘That would be his father, I expect.’

‘Then he hasn’t any money.’

‘Only what he makes at the Bar.’

‘But they don’t – under forty.’

‘He does, I think.’

‘Energetic?’

‘Very.’

‘Fair?’

‘No, darkish. He won the Bar point-to-point this year. Now, darling, will you have a fire at once, or last till dressing time?’

‘Last. I want to see the baby.’

‘All right, he ought to be just in from his pram. Your bathroom’s at the foot of these stairs, and I’ll wait for you in the nursery.’

The nursery was the same mullion-windowed, low-pitched room as that wherein Dinny and

Aunt Em herself had received their first impressions of that jigsaw puzzle called life; and in it the baby was practising his totter. Whether he would be a Charwell or a Tasburgh when he grew up seemed as yet uncertain. His nurse, his aunt and his great-aunt stood, in triangular admiration, for him to fall alternatively into their outstretched hands.

‘He doesn’t crow,’ said Dinny.

‘He does in the morning, Miss.’

‘Down he goes!’ said Lady Mont.

‘Don’t cry, darling!’

‘He never cries, Miss.’

‘That’s Jean. Clare and I cried a lot till we were about seven.’

‘I cried till I was fifteen,’ said Lady Mont, ‘and I began again when I was forty-five. Did you cry, Nurse?’

‘We were too large a family, my lady. There wasn’t room like.’

‘Nanny had a lovely mother – five sisters as good as gold.’

The nurse’s fresh cheeks grew fresher; she drooped her chin, smiling, shy as a little girl.

‘Take care of bow legs!’ said Lady Mont: ‘That’s enough totterin’.’

The nurse, retrieving the still persistent baby, placed him in his cot, whence he frowned solemnly at Dinny, who said:

‘Mother’s devoted to him. She thinks he’ll be like Hubert.’

Lady Mont made the sound supposed to attract babies.

‘When does Jean come home again?’

‘Not till Hubert’s next long leave.’

Lady Mont’s gaze rested on her niece.

‘The rector says Alan has another year on the China station.’

Dinny, dangling a bead chain over the baby, paid no attention. Never since the summer evening last year, when she came back home after Wilfrid's flight, had she made or suffered any allusion to her feelings. No one, perhaps not even she herself, knew whether she was heart-whole once more. It was, indeed, as if she had no heart. So long, so earnestly had she resisted its aching, that it had slunk away into the shadows of her inmost being, where even she could hardly feel it beating.

‘What would you like to do now, Auntie? He has to go to sleep.’

‘Take me round the garden.’

They went down and out on to the terrace.

‘Oh!’ said Dinny, with dismay, ‘Glover has gone and beaten the leaves off the little mulberry. They were so lovely, shivering on the tree and coming off in a ring on the grass. Really gardeners have no sense of beauty.’

‘They don’t like sweepin’.
Where’s the cedar I planted when I was five?’

They came on it round the corner of an old wall, a spreading youngster of nearly sixty, with

flattening boughs gilded by the level sunlight.

‘I should like to be buried under it, Dinny. Only I suppose they won’t. There’ll be something stuffy.’

‘I mean to be burnt and scattered. Look at them ploughing in that field. I do love horses moving slowly against a skyline of trees.’

‘ “The lowin’ kine,” ’ said Lady Mont irrelevantly.

A faint clink came from a sheepfold to the East.

‘Listen, Auntie!’

Lady Mont thrust her arm within her niece's.

‘I’ve often thought,’ she said, ‘that I should like to be a goat.’

‘Not in England, tied to a stake and grazing in a mangy little circle.’

‘No, with a bell on a mountain. A he-goat, I think, so as not to be milked.’

‘Come and see our new cutting bed, Auntie. There’s nothing now, of course, but dahlias, godetias, chrysanthemums, Michaelmas daisies, and a few pentstemons and cosmos.’

‘Dinny,’ said Lady Mont, from among the dahlias, ‘about Clare? They say divorce is very easy now.’

‘Until you try for it, I expect.’

‘There’s desertion and that.’

‘But you have to *be* deserted.’

‘Well, you said he made her.’

‘It’s not the same thing, dear.’

‘Lawyers are so fussy about the law. There was that magistrate with the long nose in Hubert’s extradition.’

‘Oh! but he turned out quite human.’

‘How was that?’

‘Telling the Home Secretary that

Hubert was speaking the truth.'

'A dreadful business,' murmured Lady Mont, 'but nice to remember.'

'It had a happy ending,' said Dinny quickly.

Lady Mont stood, ruefully regarding her.

And Dinny, staring at the flowers, said suddenly: 'Aunt Em, somehow there must be a happy ending for Clare.'

Chapter Four



THE custom known as canvassing, more peculiar even than its name, was in full blast round Condaford. Every villager had been invited to observe how appropriate it would be if they voted for Dornford, and how equally appropriate it would be if they voted for Stringer. They had been exhorted publicly and vociferously, by ladies in cars, by ladies out of cars, and in the privacy of their homes by voices speaking out of trumpets. By newspaper and by leaflet they had

been urged to perceive that they alone could save the country. They had been asked to vote early, and only just not asked to vote often. To their attention had been brought the startling dilemma that whichever way they voted the country would be saved. They had been exhorted by people who knew everything, it seemed, except how it would be saved. Neither the candidates nor their ladies, neither the mysterious disembodied voices, nor the still more incorporeal print, had made the faintest attempt to tell them that. It was better not; for, in the first place, no one knew.

And, in the second place, why mention the particular when the general would serve? Why draw attention, even, to the fact that the general is made up of the particular; or to the political certainty that promise is never performance? Better, far better, to make large loose assertion, abuse the other side, and call the electors the sanest and soundest body of people in the world.

Dinny was not canvassing. She was 'no good at it,' she said; and, perhaps, secretly she perceived the peculiarity of the custom. Clare, if she noticed any irony about the

business, was too anxious to be doing something to abstain. She was greatly helped by the way everybody took it. They had always been 'canvassed,' and they always would be. It was a harmless enough diversion to their ears, rather like the buzzing of gnats that did not bite. As to their votes, they would record them for quite other reasons – because their fathers had voted this or that before them, because of something connected with their occupation, because of their landlords, their churches, or their trades unions; because they wanted a change, while not expecting

anything much from it; and not a few because of their common sense.

Clare, dreading questions, pattered as little as possible and came quickly to their babies or their health. She generally ended by asking what time they would like to be fetched. Noting the hour in a little book, she would come out not much the wiser. Being a Charwell – that is to say, no ‘foreigner’ – she was taken as a matter of course; and though not, like Dinny, personally known to them all, she was part of an institution, Condaford without

Charwells being still almost inconceivable.

She was driving back from this dutiful pastime towards the Grange about four o'clock on the Saturday before the election, when a voice from an overtaking two-seater called her name, and she saw young Tony Croom.

‘What on earth are you doing here, Tony?’

‘I couldn’t go any longer without a glimpse of you.’

‘But, my dear boy, to come down here is too terribly pointed.’

‘I know, but I’ve seen you.’

‘You weren’t going to call, were you?’

‘If I didn’t see you otherwise. Clare, you look so lovely!’

‘That, if true, is not a reason for queering my pitch at home.’

‘The last thing I want to do; but I’ve got to see you now and then, otherwise I shall go batty.’

His face was so earnest and his voice so moved, that Clare felt for the first time stirred in that hackneyed region, the heart.

‘That’s bad,’ she said; ‘because I’ve got to find my feet, and I can’t have complications.’

‘Let me kiss you just once. Then I should go back happy.’

Still more stirred, Clare thrust forward her cheek.

‘Well, quick!’ she said.

He glued his lips to her cheek, but when he tried to reach her lips she drew back.

‘No. Now Tony, you must go. If you’re to see me, it must be in Town. But what is the good of seeing me? It’ll only make us unhappy.’

‘Bless you for that “us”.’

Clare’s brown eyes smiled; their colour was like that of a glass of

Malaga wine held up to the light.

‘Have you found a job?’

‘There are none.’

‘It’ll be better when the election’s over. *I’m* thinking of trying to get with a milliner.’

‘You!’

‘I must do something. My people here are as hard pressed as everybody else. Now, Tony, you said you’d go.’

‘Promise to let me know the first day you come up.’

Clare nodded, and re-started her engine. As the car slid forward gently, she turned her face and

gave him another smile.

He continued to stand with his hands to his head till the car rounded a bend and she was gone.

Turning the car into the stable yard, she was thinking 'Poor boy!' and feeling the better for it. Whatever her position in the eyes of the law, or according to morality, a young and pretty woman breathes more easily when inhaling the incense of devotion. She may have strict intentions, but she has also a sense of what is due to her, and a dislike of waste. Clare looked the prettier and felt the happier all that evening. But the

night was ridden by the moon; nearly full, it soared up in front of her window, discouraging sleep. She got up and parted the curtains. Huddling into her fur coat, she stood at the window. There was evidently a frost, and a ground mist stretched like fleece over the fields. The tall elms, ragged-edged, seemed to be sailing slowly along over the white vapour. The earth out there was unknown by her, as if it had dropped from that moon. She shivered. It might be beautiful, but it was cold, uncanny; a frozen glamour. She thought of the nights in the Red Sea, when she lay with

bedclothes thrown off, and the very moon seemed hot. On board that ship people had ‘talked’ about her and Tony – she had seen many signs of it, and hadn’t cared. Why should she? He had not even kissed her all those days. Not even the evening he came to her state-room and she had shown him photographs, and they had talked. A nice boy, modest and a gentleman! And if he was in love, now, she couldn’t help it – she hadn’t tried to ‘vamp’ him. As to what would happen, life always tripped one up, it seemed, whatever one did! Things must

take care of themselves. To make resolutions, plans, lay down what was called 'a line of conduct', was not the slightest use! She had tried that with Jerry. She shivered, then laughed, then went rigid with a sort of fury. No! If Tony expected her to rush into his arms he was very much mistaken. Sensual love! She knew it inside out. No, thank you! As that moonlight, now, she was cold! Impossible to speak of it even to her Mother, whatever she and Dad might be thinking.

Dinny must have told them something, for they had been most awfully decent. But even Dinny

didn't know. Nobody should ever know! If only she had money it wouldn't matter. 'Ruined life', of course, and all that, was just old-fashioned tosh. Life could always be amusing if one made it so. She was not going to skulk and mope. Far from that! But money she must somehow make. She shivered even in her fur coat. The moonlight seemed to creep into one's bones. These old houses – no central heating, because they couldn't afford to put it in! The moment the election was over she would go up to London and scout round. Fleur might know of something. If there

was no future in hats, one might get a political secretaryship. She could type, she knew French well, people could read her handwriting. She could drive a car with anybody, or school a horse. She knew all about country house life, manners, and precedence. There must be lots of Members who wanted somebody like her, who could tell them how to dress, and how to decline this and that without anybody minding, and generally do their crossword puzzles for them. She'd had quite a lot of experience with dogs, and some with flowers, especially the

arrangement of them in bowls and vases. And if it were a question of knowing anything about politics, she could soon mug that up. So, in that illusory cold moonshine, Clare could not see how they could fail to need her. With a salary and her own two hundred a year she could get along quite well! The moon, behind an elm tree now, no longer had its devastating impersonality, but rather an air of bright intrigue, peeping through those still thick boughs with a conspiring eye. She hugged herself, danced a few steps to warm her feet, and slipped back into her bed....

Young Croom, in his borrowed two-seater, had returned to Town at an unobtrusive sixty miles an hour. His first kiss on Clare's cold but glowing cheek had given him slight delirium. It was an immense step forward. He was not a vicious young man. That Clare was married was to him no advantage. But whether, if she had not been married, his feelings towards her would have been of quite the same brand, was a question he left unexamined. The subtle difference which creeps into the charm of a woman who has known physical love, and the sting which the

knowledge of that implants in a man's senses – such is food for a psychologist rather than for a straightforward young man really in love for the first time. He wanted her as his wife if possible; if that were not possible, in any other way that was. He had been in Ceylon three years, hard-worked, seeing few white women, and none that he had cared for. His passion had, hitherto, been for polo, and his meeting with Clare had come just as he had lost both job and polo. Clare filled for him a yawning gap. As with Clare, so with him in the matter of money,

only more so.

He had some two hundred pounds saved, and would then be 'bang up against it' unless he got a job. Having returned the two-seater to his friend's garage, he considered where he could dine most cheaply, and decided on his club. He was practically living there, except for a bedroom in Ryder Street, where he slept and breakfasted on tea and boiled eggs. A simple room it was, on the ground floor, with a bed and a dress cupboard, looking out on the tall back of another building, the sort of room that his father, coming

on the Town in the 'nineties, had slept and breakfasted in for half the money.

On Saturday nights the Coffee House was deserted, save for a certain number of 'old buffers' accustomed to week-ending in St James's Street. Young Croom ordered the three-course dinner and ate it to the last crumb. He drank Bass, and went down to the smoking-room for a pipe. About to sink into an armchair, he noticed standing before the fire a tallish thin man with twisting dark eyebrows and a little white moustache, who was examining

him through a tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle. Acting on the impulse of a lover craving connexion with his lady, he said:

‘Excuse me, sir, but aren’t you Sir Lawrence Mont?’

‘That has been my lifelong conviction.’

Young Croom smiled.

‘Then, sir, I met your niece, Lady Corven, coming home from Ceylon. She said you were a member here. My name’s Croom.’

‘Ah!’ said Sir Lawrence, dropping his eyeglass: ‘I probably knew your father – he was always

here, before the war.'

'Yes, he put me down at birth. I believe I'm about the youngest in the Club.'

Sir Lawrence nodded. 'So you met Clare. How was she?'

'All right, I think, sir.'

'Let's sit down and talk about Ceylon. Cigar?'

'Thank you, sir, I have my pipe.'

'Coffee, anyway. Waiter, two coffees. My wife is down at Condaford staying with Clare's people. An attractive young woman.'

Noting those dark eyes, rather

like a snipe's, fixed on him, young Croom regretted his impulse. He had gone red, but he said bravely:

‘Yes, sir, I thought her delightful.’

‘Do you know Corven?’

‘No,’ said young Croom shortly.

‘Clever fellow. Did you like Ceylon?’

‘Oh! yes. But it's given me up.’

‘Not going back?’

‘Afraid not.’

‘It's a long time since I was there. India has rather smothered it. Been in India?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Difficult to know how far the people of India really want to cut the painter. Seventy per cent peasants! Peasants want stable conditions and a quiet life. I remember in Egypt before the war there was a strong nationalist agitation, but the fellaheen were all for Kitchener and stable British rule. We took Kitchener away and gave them unstable conditions in the war, and so they went on the other tack. What were you doing in Ceylon?’

‘Running a tea plantation. But they took up economy, amalgamated three plantations,

and I wasn't wanted any more. Do you think there's going to be a recovery, sir? I can't understand economics.'

'Nobody can. There are dozens of causes of the present state of things, and people are always trying to tie it to one. Take England: There's the knock-out of Russian trade, the comparative independence of European countries, the great shrinkage of Indian and Chinese trade; the higher standard of British living since the war; the increase of national expenditure from two hundred-odd millions to eight

hundred millions, which means nearly six hundred millions a year less to employ labour with. When they talk of over-production being the cause, it certainly doesn't apply to us. We haven't produced so little for a long time past. Then there's dumping, and shocking bad organization, and bad marketing of what little food we produce. And there's our habit of thinking it'll be "all right on the night," and general spoiled-child attitude. Well, those are all special English causes, except that the too high standard of living and the spoiled-child attitude are American too.'

‘And the other American causes, sir?’

‘The Americans certainly have over-produced and over-speculated. And they’ve been living so high that they’ve mortgaged their future – instalment system and all that. Then they’re sitting on gold, and gold doesn’t hatch out. And, more than all, they don’t realize yet that the money they lent to Europe during the war was practically money they’d made out of the war. When they agree to general cancellation of debts they’ll be agreeing to general recovery, including their own.’

‘But will they ever agree?’

‘You never know what the Americans will do, they’re looser-jointed than we of the old world. They’re capable of the big thing, even in their own interests. Are you out of a job?’

‘Very much so.’

‘What’s your record?’

‘I was at Wellington and at Cambridge for two years. Then this tea thing came along, and I took it like a bird.’

‘What age are you?’

‘Twenty-six.’

‘Any notion of what you want to

do?’

Young Croom sat forward.

‘Really, sir, I’d have a shot at anything. But I’m pretty good with horses. I thought possibly I might get into a training stable; or with a breeder; or get a riding mastership.’

‘Quite an idea. It’s queer about the horse – he’s coming in as he goes out. I’ll talk to my cousin Jack Muskham – he breeds bloodstock. And he’s got a bee in his bonnet about the reintroduction of Arab blood into the English thoroughbred. In fact he’s got some Arab mares coming over. Just

possibly he might want someone.’

Young Croom flushed and smiled.

‘That would be frightfully kind of you, sir. It sounds ideal. I’ve had Arab polo ponies.’

‘Well,’ murmured Sir Lawrence thoughtfully, ‘I don’t know that anything excites my sympathy more than a man who really wants a job and can’t find one. We must get this election over first, though. Unless the socialists are routed horse-breeders will have to turn their stock into potted meat. Imagine having the dam of a Derby winner between brown bread and

butter for your tea – real
“Gentleman’s Relish!” ’

He got up.

‘I’ll say good-night, now. My
cigar will just last me home.’

Young Croom rose too, and
remained standing till that spare
and active figure had vanished.

‘Frightfully nice old boy!’ he
thought, and in the depths of his
armchair he resigned himself to
hope and to Clare’s face wreathed
by the fumes of his pipe.

Chapter Five



ON that cold and misty evening, which all the newspapers had agreed was to 'make history,' the Charwells sat in the drawing-room at Condaford round the portable wireless, a present from Fleur. Would the voice breathe o'er Eden, or would it be the striking of Fate's clock? Not one of those five but was solemnly convinced that the future of Great Britain hung in the balance; convinced, too, that their conviction was detached from class or party. Patriotism divorced from

thought of vested interest governed, as they supposed, their mood. And if they made a mistake in so thinking, quite a number of other Britons were making it too. Across Dinny's mind, indeed, did flit the thought: 'Does anyone know what will save the country and what won't?' But, even by her, time and tide, incalculably rolling, swaying and moulding the lives of nations, was ungauged.

Newspapers and politicians had done their work and stamped the moment for her as a turning point. In a sea-green dress, she sat, close to the 'present from Fleur,' waiting

to turn it on at ten o'clock, and regulate its stridency. Aunt Em was working at a new piece of French Tapestry, her slight aquilinity emphasized by tortoise-shell spectacles. The General nervously turned and re-turned *The Times* and kept taking out his watch. Lady Charwell sat still and a little forward, like a child in Sunday School before she has become convinced that she is going to be bored. And Clare lay on the sofa, with the dog Foch on her feet.

‘Time, Dinny,’ said the General; ‘turn the thing on.’

Dinny fingered a screw, and ‘the

thing' burst into music.

‘ “Rings on our fingers and bells on our toes,” ’ she murmured, ‘ “We have got music wherever we goes.” ’

The music stopped, and the voice spoke:

‘This is the first election result: Hornsey... Conservative, no change.’

The General added: ‘H’m!’ and the music began again.

Aunt Em, looking at the portable, said: ‘Coax it, Dinny. That burrin’!’

‘It always has that, Auntie.’

‘Blore does something to ours with a penny. Where is Hornsey – Isle of Wight?’

‘Middlesex, darling.’

‘Oh! Yes! I was thinkin’ of Southsea. There he goes again.’

‘These are some more election results.... Conservative, gain from Labour.... Conservative, no change.... Conservative, gain from Labour.’

The General added: ‘Ha!’ and the music began again.

‘What nice large majorities!’ said Lady Mont: ‘Gratifyin’!

Clare got off the sofa and

squatted on a footstool against her mother's knees. The General had dropped *The Times*. The 'voice' spoke again:

'... Liberal National, gain from Labour.... Conservative, no change.... Conservative, gain from Labour.'

Again and again the music spurted up and died away; and the voice spoke.

Clare's face grew more and more vivid, and above her Lady Charwell's pale and gentle face wore one long smile. From time to time the General said: 'By George!' and 'This is something like!'

And Dinny thought: 'Poor Labour!'

On and on and on the voice
breathed o'er Eden.

'Crushin',' said Lady Mont: 'I'm
gettin' sleepy.'

'Go to bed, Auntie. I'll put a slip
under your door when I come up.'

Lady Charwell, too, got up.
When they were gone, Clare went
back to the sofa and seemed to fall
asleep. The General sat on,
hypnotized by the chant of victory.
Dinny, with knees crossed and eyes
closed, was thinking: 'Will it really
make a difference; and, if it does,

shall I care? Where is *he*? Listening as we are? Where? Where?' Not so often now, but quite often enough, that sense of groping for Wilfrid returned to her. In all these sixteen months since he left her she found no means of hearing of him. For all she knew he might be dead. Once – only once – she had broken her resolve never to speak of her disaster, and had asked Michael. Compson Grice, his publisher, had, it seemed, received a letter from him written in Bangkok, which said he was well and had begun to write. That was nine months ago. The veil, so little lifted, had

dropped again. Heartache – well, she was used to it.

‘Dad, it’s two o’clock. It’ll be like this all the time now Clare’s asleep.’

‘I’m not,’ said Clare.

‘You ought to be. I’ll let Foch out for his run, and we’ll all go up.’

The General rose.

‘Enough’s as good as a feast. I suppose we’d better.’

Dinny opened the French window and watched the dog Foch trotting out in semblance of enthusiasm. It was cold, with a ground mist, and she shut the

window. If she didn't he would neglect his ritual and with more than the semblance of enthusiasm trot in again. Having kissed her father and Clare, she turned out the lights and waited in the hall. The wood fire had almost died. She stood with her foot on the stone hearth, thinking. Clare had spoken of trying to get a secretaryship to some new Member of Parliament. Judging by the returns that were coming in, there would be plenty of them. Why not to their own new member? He had dined with them, and she had sat next him. A nice man, well read, not bigoted. He

even sympathized with Labour, but did not think they knew their way about as yet. In face he was rather notably what the drunken youth in the play called: 'A Tory Socialist.' He had opened out to her and been very frank and pleasant. An attractive man, with his crisp dark hair, brown complexion, little dark moustache and rather high soft voice; a good sort, energetic and upright-looking. But probably he already had a secretary. However, if Clare was in earnest, one could ask. She crossed the hall to the garden door. There was a seat in the porch outside, and under it

Foch would be crouched, waiting to be let in. Sure enough, he emerged, fluttering his tail, and padded towards the dogs' communal water-bowl. How cold and silent! Nothing on the road; even the owls quiet; the garden and the fields frozen, moonlit, still, away up to that long line of covert! England silvered and indifferent to her fate, disbelieving in the Voice o'er Eden; old and permanent and beautiful, even though the pound had gone off gold. Dinny gazed at the unfeverish night. Men and their policies – how little they mattered, how soon they passed, a dissolving

dew on the crystal immensity of
God's toy! How queer – the
passionate intensity of one's heart,
and the incalculable cold
callousness of Time and Space! To
join, to reconcile?...

She shivered and shut the door.

At breakfast the next morning
she said to Clare:

‘Shall we strike while the iron's
hot, and go and see Mr Dornford?’

‘Why?’

‘In case he wants a secretary,
now he's in.’

‘Oh! Is he in?’

‘Very much so.’ Dinny read the

figures. The usual rather formidable Liberal opposition had been replaced by a mere five thousand Labour votes.

‘The word “national” is winning this election,’ said Clare. ‘Where I went canvassing in the town they were all Liberals. I just used the word “national,” and they fell.’

Hearing that the new Member would be at his headquarters all the morning, the sisters started about eleven o’clock. There was so much coming and going round the doors that they did not like to enter.

‘I do hate asking for things,’ said Clare.

Dinny, who hated it quite as much, answered:

‘Wait here and I’ll just go in and congratulate him. I might have a chance of putting in a word. He’s seen you, of course.’

‘Oh! yes, he’s seen me all right.’

Eustace Dornford, K.C., new member elect, was sitting in a room that seemed all open doors, running his eye over the lists his agent was putting on the table before him. From one of those doors Dinny could see his riding boots under the table, and his bowler hat, gloves and riding whip upon it. Now that she was nearly

in the presence it seemed impossible to intrude at such a moment, and she was just slipping away when he looked up.

‘Excuse me a moment, Minns. Miss Cherrell!’

She stopped and turned. He was smiling and looking pleased.

‘Anything I can do for you?’

She put out her hand.

‘I’m awfully glad you’ve won. My sister and I just wanted to congratulate you.’

He squeezed her hand, and Dinny thought: ‘Oh! dear! this is the last moment to ask him,’ but

she said:

‘It’s perfectly splendid, there’s never been such a majority here.’

‘And never will be again. That’s my luck. Where’s your sister?’

‘In the car.’

‘I’d like to thank her for canvassing.’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny, ‘she enjoyed it;’ and, suddenly feeling that it was now or never, added: ‘She’s at a loose end, you know, badly wants something to do. Mr Dornford, you don’t think – this is too bad – but I suppose she wouldn’t be of any use to you as a secretary, would she?’

There, it's out! She does know the county pretty well; she can type, and speak French, and German a little, if that's any use.' It had come with a rush, and she stood looking at him ruefully. But his eager expression had not changed.

'Let's go and see her,' he said.

Dinny thought: 'Gracious! I hope he hasn't fallen in love with her!' and she glanced at him sidelong. Still smiling, his face looked shrewd now. Clare was standing beside the car. 'I wish,' thought Dinny, 'I had her coolness.' Then she stood still and watched. All this triumphal business, these people coming and

going, those two talking so readily and quickly; the clear and sparkling morning! He came back to her.

‘Thank you most awfully, Miss Cherrell. It’ll do admirably. I did want someone, and your sister is very modest.’

‘I thought you’d never forgive me for asking at such a moment.’

‘Always delighted for you to ask anything at any moment. I must go back now, but I’ll hope to see you again very soon.’

Gazing after him as he re-entered the building, she thought:

‘He has very nicely cut riding breeches!’ And she got into the car.

‘Dinny,’ said Clare, with a laugh, ‘he’s in love with you.’

‘What!’

‘I asked for two hundred, and he made it two hundred and fifty at once. How did you do it in one evening?’

‘I didn’t. It’s you he’s in love with, I’m afraid.’

‘No, no, my dear. I have eyes, and I know it’s you; just as you knew that Tony Croom was in love with me.’

‘I could see that.’

‘And I could see this.’

Dinny said quietly: ‘That’s absurd. When do you begin?’

‘He’s going back to Town today. He lives in the Temple – Harcourt Buildings. I shall go up this afternoon and start in the day after tomorrow.’

‘Where shall you live?’

‘I think I shall take an unfurnished room or a small studio, and decorate and furnish it gradually myself. It’ll be fun.’

‘Aunt Em is going back this afternoon. She would put you up till you find it.’

‘Well,’ said Clare, pondering;
‘perhaps.’

Just before they reached home
Dinny said:

‘What about Ceylon, Clare?
Have you thought any more?’

‘What’s the good of thinking? I
suppose he’ll do something, but I
don’t know what, and I don’t care.’

‘Haven’t you had a letter?’

‘No.’

‘Well, darling, be careful.’

Clare shrugged: ‘Oh! I’ll be
careful.’

‘Could he get leave if he
wanted?’

‘I expect so.’

‘You’ll keep in touch with me,
won’t you?’

Clare leaned sideways from the
wheel and gave her cheek a kiss.

Chapter Six



THREE days after their meeting at the Coffee House, young Croom received a letter from Sir Lawrence Mont, saying that his cousin Muskham was not expecting the Arab mares till the spring. In the meantime he would make a note of Mr Croom and a point of seeing him soon. Did Mr Croom know any vernacular Arabic?

‘No,’ thought young Croom, ‘but I know Stapylton.’

Stapylton, of the Lancers, who had been his senior at Wellington,

was home from India on leave. A noted polo player, he would be sure to know the horse jargon of the East; but, having broken his thigh-bone schooling a steeplechaser, he would keep; the business of finding an immediate 'job of work' would not. Young Croom continued his researches. Everyone said: 'Wait till the election's over!'

On the morning after the election, therefore, he issued from Ryder Street with the greater expectation, and, on the evening after, returned to the Coffee House, with the less, thinking: 'I might just

as well have gone to Newmarket and seen the Cambridgeshire.'

The porter handed him a note, and his heart began to thump. Seeking a corner, he read:

DEAR TONY –

I have got the job of secretary to our new member, Eustace Dornford, who's a K.C. in the Temple. So I've come up to Town. Till I find a tent of my own, I shall be at my Aunt Lady Mont's in Mount Street. I hope you've been as lucky. I promised to let you know when I came up; but I adjure you to sense and not sensibility, and to due regard for pride and prejudice.

Your shipmate and well-wisher,

CLARE CORVEN

'The darling!' he thought. 'What luck!' He read the note again,

placed it beneath the cigarette case in his left-hand waistcoat pocket, and went into the smoking-room. There, on a sheet of paper stamped with the Club's immemorial design, he poured out an ingenuous heart:

DARLING CLARE –

Your note has perked me up no end. That you will be in Town is magnificent news. Your uncle has been very kind to me, and I shall simply have to call and thank him. So do look out for me about six o'clock tomorrow. I spend all my time hunting a job, and am beginning to realize what it means to poor devils to be turned down day after day. When my pouch is empty, and that's not far away, it'll be even worse for me. No dole for this child, unfortunately. I hope the pundit you're going to take in hand is a decent sort. I always think of M.P.'s as a bit on the wooden side. And somehow I can't see you among Bills and

petitions and letters about public-house licences and so forth. However, I think you're splendid to want to be independent. What a thumping majority! If they can't do things with that behind them, they can't do things at all. It's quite impossible for me not to be in love with you, you know, and to long to be with you all day and all night, too. But I'm going to be as good as I can, because the very last thing I want is to cause you uneasiness of any sort. I think of you all the time, even when I'm searching the marble countenance of some fish-faced blighter to see if my piteous tale is weakening his judgement. The fact is I love you terribly. Tomorrow, Thursday, about six!

Good night, dear and lovely
one,

YOUR TONY

Having looked up Sir Lawrence's number in Mount Street, he addressed the note, licked the

envelope with passion, and went out to post it himself. Then, suddenly, he did not feel inclined to return to the Coffee House. The place had a grudge against his state of mind. Clubs were so damned male, and their whole attitude to women so after-dinnerish – half contempt, half lechery! Funk-holes they were, anyway, full of comfort, secured against women, immune from writs; and men all had the same armchair look once they got inside. The Coffee House, too, about the oldest of all clubs, was stuffed with regular buffers, men you couldn't

imagine outside a club. 'No!' he thought. 'I'll have a chop somewhere, and go to that thing at Drury Lane.'

He got a seat rather far back in the upper boxes, but, his sight being very good, he saw quite well. He was soon absorbed. He had been out of England long enough to have some sentiment about her. This pictorial pageant of her history for the last thirty years moved him more than he would have confessed to anyone sitting beside him. Boer war, death of the Queen, sinking of the *Titanic*, Great War, Armistice, health to 1931 – if

anyone asked him afterwards, he would probably say: 'Marvellous! but gave me the pip rather!' While sitting there it seemed more than the 'pip'; the heartache of a lover, who wants happiness with his mistress and cannot reach it; the feeling of one who tries to stand upright and firm and is for ever being swayed this way and that. The last words rang in his ears as he went out: 'Greatness and dignity and peace.' Moving and damned ironical! He took a cigarette from his case and lighted it. The night was dry and he walked, threading his way through the streams of

traffic, with the melancholy
howling of street-singers in his
ears. Sky-signs and garbage!
People rolling home in their cars,
and homeless night-birds!
'Greatness and dignity and peace!'

'I must absolutely have a drink,'
he thought. The Club seemed
possible again now, even inviting,
and he made towards it.

' "Farewell, Piccadilly! Good-bye,
Leicester Square!" ' Marvellous that
scene, where those Tommies
marched up in a spiral through the
dark mist, whistling; while in the
lighted front of the stage three
painted girls rattled out: ' "We

don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go." ' And from the boxes on the stage at the sides people looked down and clapped! The whole thing there! The gaiety on those girls' painted faces getting more and more put-on and heart-breaking! He must go again with Clare! Would it move her? And suddenly he perceived that he didn't know. What did one know about anyone, even the woman one loved? His cigarette was scorching his lip, and he spat out the butt. That scene with the honeymooning couple leaning over the side of the *Titanic*, everything

before them, and nothing before them but the cold deep sea! Did that couple know anything except that they desired each other? Life was damned queer, when you thought about it! He turned up the Coffee House steps, feeling as if he had lived long since he went down them....

It was just six o'clock when he rang the bell at Mount Street on the following day.

A butler, with slightly raised eyebrows, opened the door.

‘Is Sir Lawrence Mont at home?’

‘No, sir. Lady Mont is in, sir.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t know Lady Mont. I wonder if I could see Lady Corven for a moment?’

One of the butler’s eyebrows rose still higher. ‘Ah!’ he seemed to be thinking.

‘If you’ll give me your name, sir.’

Young Croom produced a card.

“Mr James Bernard Croom,”
chanted the butler.

‘Mr Tony Croom, tell her, please.’

‘Quite! If you’ll wait in here a moment. Oh! here is Lady Corven.’

A voice from the stairs said:

‘Tony? What punctuality! Come up and meet my Aunt.’

She was leaning over the stair-rail, and the butler had disappeared.

‘Put your hand down. How can you go about without a coat? I shiver all the time.’

Young Croom came close below her.

‘Darling!’ he murmured.

She placed one finger to her lips, then stretched it down to him, so that he could just reach it with his own.

‘Come along!’ She had opened a

door when he reached the top, and was saying: 'This is a shipmate, Aunt Em. He's come to see Uncle Lawrence. Mr Croom, my Aunt, Lady Mont.'

Young Croom was aware of a presence slightly swaying towards him. A voice said: 'Ah! Ships! Of course! How d'you do?'

Young Croom, aware that he had been 'placed', saw Clare regarding him with a slightly mocking smile. If only they could be alone five minutes, he would kiss that smile off her face! He would – !

'Tell me about Ceylon, Mr

Craven.'

'Croom, Auntie. Tony Croom. Better call him Tony. It isn't his name, but everybody does.'

'Tony! Always heroes. I don't know why.'

'This Tony is quite ordinary.'

'Ceylon. Did you know her there, Mr – Tony?'

'No. We only met on the ship.'

'Ah! Lawrence and I used to sleep on deck. That was in the "naughty nineties". The river here used to be full of punts, I remember.'

'It still is, Aunt Em.'

Young Croom had a sudden vision of Clare and himself in a punt up a quiet backwater. He roused himself and said:

‘I went to *Cavalcade* last night. Great!’

‘Ah!’ said Lady Mont. ‘That reminds me.’ She left the room.

Young Croom sprang up.

‘Tony! Behave!’

‘But surely that’s what she went for!’

‘Aunt Em is extraordinarily kind, and I’m not going to abuse her kindness.’

‘But, Clare, you don’t know what

‘Yes, I do. Sit down again.’

Young Croom obeyed.

‘Now listen, Tony! I’ve had enough physiology to last me a long time. If you and I are going to be pals, it’s got to be platonic.’

‘Oh, God!’ said young Croom.

‘But it’s got to; or else – we simply aren’t going to see each other.’

Young Croom sat very still with his eyes fixed on hers, and there passed through her the thought : ‘It’s going to torture him. He looks too nice for that. I don’t believe we

ought to see each other.'

'Look!' she said, gently, 'you want to help me, don't you? There's lots of time, you know. Some day – perhaps.'

Young Croom grasped the arms of his chair. His eyes had a look of pain.

'Very well,' he said slowly, 'anything so long as I can see you. I'll wait till it means something more than physiology to you.'

Clare sat examining the *glacé* toe of her slowly wiggling shoe; suddenly she looked straight into his brooding eyes.

‘If,’ she said, ‘I had not been married, you would wait cheerfully and it wouldn’t hurt you. Think of me like that.’

‘Unfortunately I can’t. Who could?’

‘I see, I am fruit, not blossom – tainted by physiology.’

‘Don’t! Oh! Clare, I will be anything you want to you. And if I’m not always as cheery as a bird, forgive me.’

She looked at him through her eyelashes and said: ‘Good!’

Then came silence, during which she was conscious that he was

fixing her in his mind from her shingled dark head to her *glacé* kid toe. She had not lived with Jerry Corven without having been made conscious of every detail of her body. She could not help its grace or its provocation. She did not want to torture him, but she could not find it unpleasant that she did. Queer how one could be sorry and yet pleased, and, withal, sceptical and a little bitter. Give yourself, and after a few months how much would he want you! She said abruptly:

‘Well, I’ve found rooms – a quaint little hole – used to be an

antique shop, in a disused mews.'

He said eagerly: 'Sounds jolly. When are you going in?'

'Next week.'

'Can I help?'

'If you can distemper walls.'

'Rather! I did all my bungalow in Ceylon, two or three times over.'

'We should have to work in the evenings, because of my job.'

'What about your boss? Is he decent?'

'Very, and in love with my sister. At least, I think so.'

'Oh!' said young Croom dubiously.

Clare smiled. He was so obviously thinking: ‘Could a man be that when he sees *you* every day?’

‘When can I come first?’

‘Tomorrow evening, if you like. It’s 2, Melton Mews, off Malmesbury Square. I’ll get the stuff in the morning, and we’ll begin upstairs. Say six-thirty.’

‘Splendid!’

‘Only, Tony – no importunities. “Life is real, life is earnest”.’

Grinning ruefully, he put his hand on his heart.

‘And you must go now. I’ll take

you down and see if my Uncle's come in.'

Young Croom stood up.

'What is happening about Ceylon?' he said, abruptly. 'Are you being worried?'

Clare shrugged. 'Nothing is happening so far.'

'That can't possibly last. Have you thought things out?'

'Thinking won't help me. It's quite likely he'll do nothing.'

'I can't bear your being –' he stopped.

'Come along,' said Clare, and led the way downstairs.

‘I don’t think I’ll try to see your Uncle,’ said young Croom.
‘Tomorrow at half-past six, then.’
He raised her hand to his lips, and
marched to the door. There he
turned. She was standing with her
head a little on one side, smiling.
He went out, distracted.

A young man, suddenly
awakened amid the doves of
Cytherea, conscious for the first
time of the mysterious magnetism
which radiates from what the
vulgar call ‘a grass widow’, and
withheld from her by scruples or
convention, is to be pitied. He has
not sought his fate. It comes on him

by stealth, bereaving him ruthlessly of all other interest in life. It is an obsession replacing normal tastes with a rapturous aching. Maxims such as 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife', 'Blessed are the pure in heart', become singularly academic. Young Croom had been brought up to the tinkling of the school bell: 'Play the game!' He now perceived its strange inadequacy. What *was* the game? Here was she, young and lovely, fleeing from a partner seventeen years older than herself, because he was a brute; she hadn't said so, but

of course he must be! Here was himself, desperately in love with her, and liked by her – not in the same way, but still as much as could be expected! And nothing to come of it but tea together! There was a kind of sacrilege in such waste.

Thus preoccupied he passed a man of middle height and alert bearing, whose rather cat-like eyes and thin lips were set into a brown face with the claws of many little wrinkles, and who turned to look after him with a slight contraction of the mouth which might have been a smile.

Chapter Seven



AFTER young Croom had gone Clare stood for a moment in the hall recollecting the last time she had gone out of that front door, in a fawn-coloured suit and a little brown hat, between rows of people saying: ‘Good luck!’ and ‘Good-bye, darling!’ and ‘Give my love to Paris!’ Eighteen months ago, and so much in between! Her lip curled, and she went into her Uncle’s study.

‘Oh! Uncle Lawrence, you *are* in! Tony Croom’s been here to see

you.'

'That rather pleasant young man without occupation?'

'Yes. He wanted to thank you.'

'For nothing, I'm afraid.' And Sir Lawrence's quick dark eyes, like a snipe's or woodcock's, roved sceptically over his pretty niece. She was not, like Dinny, a special favourite, but she was undoubtedly attractive. It was early days to have messed up her marriage; Em had told him and said that it wasn't to be mentioned. Well, Jerry Corven! People had always shrugged and hinted. Too bad! But no real business of his.

A subdued voice from the door said:

‘Sir Gerald Corven has called, Sir Lawrence.’

Involuntarily Sir Lawrence put his finger to his lips. The butler subdued his voice still further.

‘I put him in the little room and said I would see if Lady Corven was in.’

Sir Lawrence noted Clare’s hands hard pressed down on the back of the chair behind which she was standing.

‘*Are* you in, Clare?’

She did not answer, but her face

was hard and pale as stone.

‘A minute, Blore. Come back when I ring.’

The butler withdrew.

‘Now, my dear?’

‘He must have taken the next boat. Uncle, I don’t want to see him.’

‘If we only say you’re out, he’ll probably come again.’

Clare threw back her head.

‘Well, I’ll see him!’

Sir Lawrence felt a little thrill.

‘If you’d tell me what to say, I’d see him for you.’

‘Thank you, Uncle, but I don’t

see why you should do my dirty work.'

Sir Lawrence thought: 'Thank God!'

'I'll be handy in case you want me. Good luck, my dear!' And he went out.

Clare moved over to the fire; she wanted the bell within reach. She had the feeling, well known to her, of settling herself in the saddle for a formidable jump. 'He shan't touch me, anyway,' she thought. She heard Blore's voice say:

'Sir Gerald Corven, my lady.'
Quaint! Announcing a husband to

his wife! But staff knew everything!

Without looking she saw perfectly well where he was standing. A surge of shamed anger stained her cheeks. He had fascinated her; he had used her as every kind of plaything. He had – !

His voice, cuttingly controlled, said:

‘Well, my dear, you were very sudden.’ Neat and trim, as ever, and like a cat, with that thin-lipped smile and those daring despoiling eyes!

‘What do you want?’

‘Only yourself.’

‘You can’t have me.’

‘Absurd!’

He made the quickest kind of movement and seized her in his arms. Clare bent her head back and put her finger on the bell.

‘Move back, or I ring!’ and she put her other hand between his face and hers. ‘Stand over there and I’ll talk to you, otherwise you must go.’

‘Very well! But it’s ridiculous.’

‘Oh! Do you think I should have gone if I hadn’t been in earnest?’

‘I thought you were just riled,

and I don't wonder. I'm sorry.'

'It's no good discussing what happened. I know you, and I'm not coming back to you.'

'My dear, you have my apology, and I give you my word against anything of the sort again.'

'How good of you!'

'It was only an experiment. Some women adore it, if not at the time.'

'You are a beast.'

'And beauty married me. Come, Clare, don't be silly, and make us a laughing-stock! You can fix your own conditions.'

‘And trust you to keep them! Besides, that’s not my idea of a life. I’m only twenty-four.’

The smile left his lips.

‘I see. I noticed a young man come out of this house. Name and estate?’

‘Tony Croom. Well?’

He walked over to the window, and after a moment’s contemplation of the street, turned and said:

‘You have the misfortune to be my wife.’

‘So I was thinking.’

‘Quite seriously, Clare, come

back to me.'

'Quite seriously, no.'

'I have an official position, and I can't play about with it. Look at me!' He came closer. 'I may be all you think me, but I'm neither a humbug nor old-fashioned. I don't trade on my position, or on the sanctity of marriage, or any of that stuff. But they still pay attention to that sort of thing in the Service, and I can't afford to let you divorce me.'

'I didn't expect it.'

'What then?'

'I know nothing except that I'm

not coming back.'

'Just because of -?'

'And a great deal else.' The cat-like smile had come back and prevented her from reading what he was thinking.

'Do you want me to divorce you?'

Clare shrugged. 'You have no reason.'

'So you would naturally say.'

'And mean.'

'Now look here, Clare, this is all absurd, and quite unworthy of anyone with your sense and knowledge of things. You can't be

a perpetual grass widow. You didn't dislike the life out there.'

'There are some things that can't be done to me, and you have done them.'

'I've said that they shan't be done again.'

'And I've said that I can't trust you.'

'This is going round the mulberry bush. Are you going to live on your people?'

'No. I've got a job.'

'Oh! What?'

'Secretary to our new Member.'

'You'll be sick of that in no

time.'

'I don't think so.'

He stood staring at her without his smile. For a moment she could read his thoughts, for his face had the expression which preludes sex. Suddenly he said: 'I won't stand for another man having you.'

It was a comfort to have seen for once the bottom of his mind. She did not answer.

'Did you hear me?'

'Yes.'

'I meant it.'

'I could see that.'

'You're a stony little devil.'

‘I wish I had been.’

He took a turn up and down the room, and came to a stand dead in front of her.

‘Look at me! I’m not going back without you. I’m staying at the Bristol. Be sensible, there’s a darling, and come to me there. We’ll start again. I’ll be ever so nice to you.’

Her control gave way and she cried out: ‘Oh, for God’s sake, understand! You killed all the feeling I had for you.’

His eyes dilated and then narrowed, his lips became a line.

He looked like a horse-breaker.

‘And understand *me*,’ he said, very low, ‘you either come back to me or I divorce you. I won’t leave you here, to kick your heels.’

‘I’m sure you’ll have the approval of every judicious husband.’

The smile reappeared on his lips.

‘For that,’ he said, ‘I’m going to have a kiss.’ And before she could stop him he had fastened his lips on hers. She tore herself away and pressed the bell. He went quickly to the door.

‘*Au revoir!*’ he said, and went

out.

Clare wiped her lips. She felt bewildered and exhausted, and quite ignorant whether to him or to her the day had gone.

She stood leaning her forehead on her hands over the fire, and became aware that Sir Lawrence had come back and was considerately saying nothing.

‘Awfully sorry, Uncle; I shall be in my digs next week.’

‘Have a cigarette, my dear.’

Clare took the cigarette, and inhaled its comfort. Her uncle had seated himself and she was

conscious of the quizzical expression of his eyebrows.

‘Conference had its usual success?’

Clare nodded.

‘The elusive formula. The fact is, human beings are never satisfied with what they don’t want, however cleverly it’s put. Is it to be continued in our next?’

‘Not so far as I’m concerned.’

‘Pity there are always two parties to a conference.’

‘Uncle Lawrence,’ she said suddenly, ‘what is the law of divorce now?’

The baronet uncrossed his long thin legs.

‘I’ve never had any particular truck with it. I believe it’s less old-fashioned than it was, but see *Whitaker*.’ He reached for the red-backed volume. ‘[Page 258](#) – here you are, my dear.’

Clare read in silence, while he gazed at her ruefully. She looked up and said.

‘Then, if I want him to divorce me, I’ve got to commit adultery.’

‘That is, I believe, the elegant way they put it. In the best circles, however, the man does the dirty

work.'

'Yes, but he won't. He wants me back. Besides, he's got his position to consider.'

'There is that, of course,' said Sir Lawrence, thoughtfully; 'a career in this country is a tender plant.'

Clare closed the *Whitaker*.

'If it weren't for my people,' she said, 'I'd give him cause tomorrow and have done with it.'

'You don't think a better way would be to give partnership another trial?'

Clare shook her head.

'I simply couldn't.'

‘That’s that, then,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘and it’s an awkward “that”. What does Dinny say?’

‘I haven’t discussed it with her. She doesn’t know he’s here.’

‘At present, then, you’ve no one to advise you?’

‘No. Dinny knows why I left, that’s all.’

‘I should doubt if Jerry Corven is a very patient man.’

Clare laughed.

‘We’re neither of us long-suffering.’

‘Do you know where he is staying?’

‘At the Bristol.’

‘It might,’ said Sir Lawrence slowly, ‘be worth while to keep an eye on him.’

Clare shivered. ‘It’s rather degrading; besides, Uncle, I don’t want to hurt his career. He’s very able, you know.’

Sir Lawrence shrugged. ‘To me,’ he said, ‘and to all your kin, his career is nothing to your good name. How long has he got over here?’

‘Not long, I should think.’

‘Would you like me to see him, and try to arrange that you go your

own ways?’

Clare was silent, and Sir Lawrence, watching her, thought: ‘Attractive, but a lot of naughty temper. Any amount of spirit, and no patience at all.’ Then she said:

‘It was all my fault, nobody wanted me to marry him. I hate to bother you. Besides, he wouldn’t consent.’

‘You never know,’ murmured Sir Lawrence. ‘If I get a natural chance, shall I?’

‘It would be lovely of you, only —’

‘All right, then. In the meantime

young men without jobs – are they wise?’

Clare laughed. ‘Oh, I’ve “larned” him. Well, thank you frightfully, Uncle Lawrence. You’re a great comfort. I was an awful fool; but Jerry has a sort of power, you know; and I’ve always liked taking risks. I don’t see how I can be my mother’s daughter, she hates them; and Dinny only takes them on principle.’ She sighed. ‘I won’t bore you any more now.’ And, blowing a kiss, she went out.

Sir Lawrence stayed in his armchair thinking: ‘Putting my oar in! A nasty mess, and going to be

nastier! Still, at her age
something's got to be done. I must
talk to Dinny.'

Chapter Eight



FROM Condaford the hot airs of election time had cleared away, and the succeeding atmosphere was crystallized in the General's saying:

‘Well, those fellows got their deserts.’

‘Doesn't it make you tremble, Dad, to think what *these* fellows' deserts will be if they don't succeed in putting it over now?’

The General smiled.

‘“Sufficient unto the day”,
Dinny. Has Clare settled down?’

‘She’s in her diggings. Her work so far seems to have been writing letters of thanks to people who did the dirty work at the cross-roads.’

‘Cars? Does she like Dornford?’

‘She says he’s quite amazingly considerate.’

‘His father was a good soldier. I was in his brigade in the Boer War for a bit.’ He looked at his daughter keenly, and added: ‘Any news of Corven?’

‘Yes, he’s over here.’

‘Oh! I wish I wasn’t kept so in the dark. Parents have to stand on the mat nowadays, and trust to

what they can hear through the keyhole.'

Dinny drew his arm within hers.

'One has to be careful of their feelings. Sensitive plants, aren't you, Dad?'

'Well, it seems to your mother and me an extraordinarily bad look-out. We wish to goodness the thing could be patched up.'

'Not at the expense of Clare's happiness, surely?'

'No,' said the General, dubiously, 'no; but there you are at once in all these matrimonial things. What is and will be her happiness? She

doesn't know, and you don't, and I don't. As a rule in trying to get out of a hole you promptly step into another.'

'Therefore don't try? Stay in your hole? That's rather what Labour wanted to do, isn't it?'

'I ought to see him,' said the General, passing over the simile, 'but I can't go blundering in the dark. What do you advise, Dinny?'

'Let the sleeping dog lie until it gets up to bite you.'

'You think it will?'

'I do.'

'Bad!' muttered the General.

‘Clare’s too young.’

That was Dinny’s own perpetual thought. What at the first blush she had said to her sister: ‘You must get free,’ remained her conviction. But how was she to get free?

Knowledge of divorce had been no part of Dinny’s education. She knew that the process was by no means uncommon, and she had as little feeling against it as most of her generation. To her father and mother it would probably seem lamentable, doubly so if Clare were divorced instead of divorcing – that would be a stigma on her to be avoided at almost all cost. Since

her soul-racking experience with Wilfrid, Dinny had been very little in London. Every street, and above all the park, seemed to remind her of him and the desolation he had left in her. It was now, however, obvious to her that Clare could not be left unsupported in whatever crisis was befalling.

‘I think I ought to go up, Dad, and find out what’s happening.’

‘I wish to God you would. If it’s at all possible to patch things up, they ought to be.’

Dinny shook her head.

‘I don’t believe it is, and I don’t

believe you'd wish it if Clare had told you what she told me.'

The General stared. 'There it is, you see. In the dark.'

'Yes, dear, but till she tells you herself I can't say more.'

'Then the sooner you go up the better.'

Free from the scent of horse, Melton Mews was somewhat strikingly impregnated with the odour of petrol. This bricked alley had become, indeed, the haunt of cars. To right and to left of her, entering late that afternoon, the doors of garages gaped or

confronted her with more or less new paint. A cat or two stole by, and the hinder parts of an overalled chauffeur bending over the carburettor could be seen in one opening; otherwise life was at a discount, and the word 'mews' no longer justified by manure.

No. 2 had the peacock-green door of its former proprietress, whom, with so many other luxury traders, the slump had squeezed out of business. Dinny pulled a chased bell-handle, and a faint tinkle sounded, as from some errant sheep. There was a pause, then a spot of light showed for a moment

on a level with her face, was obscured, and the door was opened. Clare, in a jade-green overall, said:

‘Come in, my dear. This is the lioness in her den, “the Douglas in her hall!” ’

Dinny entered a small, almost empty room hung with the green Japanese silk of the antique dealer and carpeted with matting. A narrow spiral staircase wormed into it at the far corner, and a subdued light radiated from a single green-paper-shaded bulb hanging in the centre. A brass electric heater diffused no heat.

‘Nothing doing here so far,’ said Clare. ‘Come upstairs.’

Dinny made the tortuous ascent, and stepped into a rather smaller sitting-room. It had two curtained windows looking over the mews, a couch with cushions, a little old bureau, three chairs, six Japanese prints, which Clare had evidently just been hanging, an old Persian rug over the matted floor, an almost empty bookcase, and some photographs of the family standing on it. The walls were distempered a pale grey, and a gas fire was burning.

‘Fleur gave me the prints and

the rug, and Aunt Em stumped up the bureau. I took the other things over.'

'Where do you sleep?'

'On that couch – quite comfy. I've got a little bath-dressing-room next door, with a geyser, and a what-d'ye-call-it, and a cupboard for clothes.'

'Mother told me to ask what you wanted.'

'I could do with our old Primus stove, some blankets and a few knives and forks and spoons, and a small tea-set, if there's one to spare, and any spare books.'

‘Right!’ said Dinny. ‘Now, darling, how are you?’

‘Bodily fine, mentally rather worried. I told you he was over.’

‘Does he know of this place?’

‘Not so far. You and Fleur and Aunt Em – oh! and Tony Croom – are the only people who know of it. My official address is Mount Street. But he’s bound to find out if he wants to.’

‘You saw him?’

‘Yes, and told him I wasn’t coming back; and I’m not, Dinny; that’s flat, to save breath. Have some tea? I can make it in a brown

pot.'

'No, thank you, I had it on the train.' She was sitting on one of the taken-over chairs, in a bottle-green suit that went beautifully with her beech-leaf-coloured hair.

'How jolly you look, sitting there !' said Clare, curling up on the sofa. 'Gasper?'

Dinny was thinking the same about her sister. Graceful creature, one of those people who couldn't look ungraceful; with her dark short hair, and dark, alive eyes, and ivory pale face, and not too brightened lips holding the cigarette, she looked – well,

‘desirable’. And, in all the circumstances, the word appeared to Dinny an awkward one. Clare had always been vivid and attractive, but without question marriage had subtly rounded, deepened, and in some sort bedevilled that attraction. She said suddenly:

‘Tony Croom, you said?’

‘He helped me distemper these walls; in fact, he practically did them, while I did the bathroom – these are better.’

Dinny’s eyes took in the walls with apparent interest.

‘Quite neat. Mother and Father are nervous, darling.’

‘They would be.’

‘Naturally, don’t you think?’

Clare’s brow drew down. Dinny suddenly remembered how strenuously they had once debated the question of whether eyebrows should be plucked. Thank heaven! Clare never had yet.

‘I can’t help it, Dinny. I don’t know what Jerry’s going to do.’

‘I suppose he can’t stay long, without giving up his job?’

‘Probably not. But I’m not going to bother. What will be will.’

‘How quickly could a divorce be got? I mean against him?’

Clare shook her head, and a dark curl fell over her forehead, reminding Dinny of her as a child.

‘To have him watched would be pretty revolting. And I’m not going into court to describe being brutalized. It’s only my word against his. Men are safe enough.’

Dinny got up and sat down beside her on the couch.

‘I could kill him!’ she said.

Clare laughed.

‘He wasn’t so bad in many ways. Only I simply won’t go back. If

you've once been skinned, you can't.'

Dinny sat, silent, with closed eyes.

'Tell me,' she said, at last, 'how you stand with Tony Croom.'

'He's on probation. So long as he behaves I like to see him.'

'If,' said Dinny slowly, 'he were known to come here, it would be all that would be wanted, wouldn't it?'

Clare laughed again.

'Quite enough for men of the world, I should think; I believe juries can never withstand being

called that. But you see, Dinny, if I begin to look at things from a jury's point of view, I might as well be dead. And, as a matter of fact, I feel very much alive. So I'm going straight ahead. Tony knows I've had enough physiology to last me a long time.'

'Is he in love with you?'

Their eyes, brown and blue, met.

'Yes.'

'Are you in love with him?'

'I like him – quite a lot. Beyond that I've no feeling at present.'

'Don't you think that while Jerry is here –?'

‘No. I think I’m safer while he’s here than when he goes. If I don’t go back with him he’ll probably have me watched. That’s one thing about him – he does what he says he’ll do.’

‘I wonder if that’s an advantage. Come out and have some dinner.’

Clare stretched herself.

‘Can’t darling. I’m dining with Tony in a little grubby restaurant suited to our joint means. This living on next to nothing is rather fun.’

Dinny got up and began to straighten the Japanese prints.

Clare's recklessness was nothing new. To come the elder sister! To be a wet blanket! Impossible! She said:

‘These are good, my dear. Fleur has very jolly things.’

‘D’you mind if I change?’ said Clare, and vanished into the bathroom.

Left alone with her sister's problem, Dinny had the feeling of helplessness which comes to all but such as constitutionally ‘know better’. She went dejectedly to the window and drew aside the curtain. All was darkish and dingy. A car had drawn out of a

neighbouring garage and stood waiting for its driver.

‘Imagine trying to sell antiques here!’ she thought. She saw a man come round the corner close by and stop, looking at the numbers. He moved along the opposite side, then came back and stood still just in front of No. 2. She noted the assurance and strength in that trim over-coated figure.

‘Good heavens!’ she thought: ‘Jerry!’ She dropped the curtain and crossed quickly to the bathroom door. As she opened it she heard the desolate tinkling of the sheep-bell installed by the

antique dealer.

Clare was standing in her underthings under the single bulb, examining her lips with a hand-glass. Dinny filled the remains of the four feet by two of standing room.

‘Clare,’ she said, ‘it’s *him!*’

Clare turned. The gleam of her pale arms, the shimmer of her silk garments, the startled light in her dark eyes, made her even to her sister something of a vision.

‘Jerry?’

Dinny nodded.

‘Well, I won’t see him.’ She

looked at the watch on her wrist.
'And I'm due at seven. Damn!'

Dinny, who had not the faintest desire that she should keep her rash appointment, said, to her own surprise:

'Shall I go? He must have seen the light.'

'Could you take him away with you, Dinny?'

'I can try.'

'Then do, darling. It'd be ever so sweet of you. I wonder how he's found out. Hell! It's going to be a persecution.'

Dinny stepped back into the

sitting-room, turned out the light there, and went down the twisting stair. The sheep-bell tinkled again above her as she went. Crossing that little empty room to the door, she thought: 'It opens inwards, I must pull it to behind me.' Her heart beat fast, she took a deep breath, opened the door swiftly, stepped out and pulled it to with a slam. She was chest to chest with her brother-in-law, and she started back with an admirably impromptu: 'Who is it?'

He raised his hat, and they stood looking at each other.

'Dinny! Is Clare in?'

‘Yes; but she can’t see anyone.’

‘You mean she *won’t* see *me*?’

‘If you like to put it that way.’

He stood looking intently at her with his daring eyes.

‘Another day will do. Which way are you going?’

‘To Mount Street.’

‘I’ll come with you, if I may.’

‘Do.’

She moved along at his side, thinking: ‘Be careful!’ For in his company she did not feel towards him quite as in his absence. As everybody said, Jerry Corven had charm!

‘Clare’s been giving me bad marks, I suppose?’

‘We won’t discuss it, please; what ever she feels, I do too.’

‘Naturally. Your loyalty is proverbial. But consider, Dinny, how provocative she is.’ His eyes smiled round at her. That vision – of neck, and curve, and shimmer, dark hair and eyes! Sex appeal – horrible expression! ‘You’ve got no idea how tantalizing. Besides, I was always an experimentalist.’

Dinny stood still suddenly: ‘This is my sister, you know.’

‘You’re sure, I suppose? It seems

queer when one looks at you both.'

Dinny walked on, and did not answer.

'Now listen, Dinny,' began that pleasant voice. 'I'm a sensualist, if you like, but what does it matter? Sex is naturally aberrational. If anyone tells you it isn't, don't believe them. These things work themselves out, and anyway they're not important. If Clare comes back to me, in two years' time she won't even remember. She likes the sort of life, and I'm not fussy. Marriage is very much a go-as-you-please affair.'

'You mean that by that time

you'll be experimenting with someone else?'

He shrugged, looked round at her, and smiled.

'Almost embarrassing this conversation, isn't it? What I want you to grasp is that I'm two men. One, and it's the one that matters, has his work to do and means to do it. Clare should stick to that man, because he'll give her a life in which she won't rust; she'll be in the thick of affairs and people who matter; she'll have stir and movement – and she loves both. She'll have a certain power, and she's not averse from that. The

other man – well, he wants his fling, he takes it, if you like; but the worst is over so far as she's concerned – at least, it will be when we've settled down again. You see, I'm honest, or shameless if you like it better.'

'I don't see, in all this,' said Dinny drily, 'where love comes in.'

'Perhaps it doesn't. Marriage is composed of mutual interest and desire. The first increases with the years, the latter fades. That ought to be exactly what she wants.'

'I can't speak for Clare, but I don't see it that way.'

‘You haven’t tried yourself out, my dear.’

‘No,’ said Dinny, ‘and on those lines, I trust I never may. I should dislike alternation between commerce and vice.’

He laughed.

‘I like your bluntness. But seriously, Dinny, you ought to influence her. She’s making a great mistake.’

A sudden fury seized on Dinny.

‘I think,’ she said, between her teeth, ‘it was you who made the great mistake. If you do certain things to certain horses you’re

never on terms with them again.'

He was silent at that.

'You don't want a divorce in the family,' he said at last, and looked round at her steadily. 'I've told Clare that I can't let her divorce me. I'm sorry, but I mean that. Further, if she won't come back to me, she can't go as she pleases.'

'You mean,' said Dinny, between her teeth, 'that if she does come back to you she can?'

'That's what it would come to, I daresay.'

'I see. I think I'll say good night.'

'As you please. You think me

cynical. That's as may be. I shall do my best to get Clare back. If she won't come she must watch out.'

They had stopped under a lamp-post and with an effort Dinny forced her eyes to his. He was as formidable, shameless, and mesmerically implacable as a cat, with that thin smile and unflinching stare. She said quietly: 'I quite understand. Good night!'

'Good night, Dinny! I'm sorry, but it's best to know where we stand. Shake hands?'

Rather to her surprise she let him take her hand, then turned the corner into Mount Street.

Chapter Nine



SHE entered her Aunt's house with all her passionate loyalty to her own breed roused, yet understanding better what had made Clare take Jerry Corven for husband. There *was* mesmerism about him, and a clear shameless daring which had its fascination. One could see what a power he might be among native peoples, how ruthlessly, yet smoothly, he would have his way with them; and how he might lay a spell over his associates. She could see, too, how

difficult he might be to refuse physically, until he had outraged all personal pride.

Her aunt's voice broke her painful absorption with the words: 'Here she is, Adrian.'

At the top of the stairs her Uncle Adrian's goatee-bearded face was looking over his sister's shoulder.

'Your things have come, my dear. Where have you been?'

'With Clare, Auntie.'

'Dinny,' said Adrian, 'I haven't seen you for nearly a year.'

'This is where we kiss, Uncle. Is all well in Bloomsbury, or has the

slump affected bones?’

‘Bones *in esse* are all right; *in posse* they look dicky – no money for expeditions. The origin of *Homo sapiens* is more abstruse than ever.’

‘Dinny, we needn’t dress. Adrian’s stoppin’ for dinner. Lawrence will be so relieved. You can pow-wow while I loosen my belt, or do you want to tighten yours?’

‘No, thank you, Auntie.’

‘Then go in there.’

Dinny entered the drawing-room and sat down beside her Uncle. Grave and thin and bearded,

wrinkled, and brown even in November, with long legs crossed and a look of interest in her, he seemed as ever the ideal pillar-box for confidences.

‘Heard about Clare, Uncle?’

‘The bare facts, no whys or wherefores.’

‘They’re not “nice”. Did you ever know a sadist?’

‘Once – at Margate. My private school. I didn’t know at the time, of course, but I’ve gathered it since. Do you mean that Corven is one?’

‘So Clare says. I walked here with him from her rooms. He’s a

very queer person.'

'Not mentally abnormal?' said Adrian, with a shudder.

'Saner than you or I, dear; he wants his own way regardless of other people; and when he can't get it he bites. Could Clare get a divorce from him without publicly going into their life together?'

'Only by getting evidence of a definite act of misconduct.'

'Would that have to be over here?'

'Well, to get it over there would be very expensive, and doubtful at that.'

‘Clare doesn’t want to have him watched at present.’

‘It’s certainly an unclean process,’ said Adrian.

‘I know, Uncle; but if she won’t, what chance is there?’

‘None.’

‘At present she’s in the mood that they should leave each other severely alone; but if she won’t go back with him, he says she must “look out for herself”.’

‘Is there anybody else involved, then, Dinny?’

‘There’s a young man in love with her, but she says it’s quite all

right.'

'H'm! "Youth's a stuff –" as Shakespeare said. Nice young man?'

'I've only seen him a for a few minutes; he looked quite nice, I thought.'

'That cuts both ways.'

'I trust Clare completely.'

'You know her better than I do, my dear; but I should say she might get very impatient. How long can Corven stay over here?'

'Not more than a month at most, she thinks; he's been here a week already.'

‘He’s seen her?’

‘Once. He tried to again today. I drew him off. She dreads seeing him, I know.’

‘As things are he has every right to see her, you know.’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, and sighed.

‘Can’t your Member that she’s with suggest a way out? He’s a lawyer.’

‘I wouldn’t like to tell him. It’s so private. Besides, people don’t like being involved in matrimonial squabbles.’

‘Is he married?’

‘No.’

She saw him look at her intently, and remembered Clare's laugh and words: 'Dinny, he's in love with you.'

'You'll see him here tomorrow night,' Adrian went on. 'Em's asked him to dinner, I gather; Clare too, I believe. Quite candidly, Dinny, I don't see anything to be done. Clare may change her mind and go back, or Corven may change his and let her stay without bothering about her.'

Dinny shook her head. 'They're neither of them like that. I must go and wash, Uncle.'

Adrian reflected upon the

undeniable proposition that everyone had his troubles. His own at the moment were confined to the fact that his step-children, Sheila and Ronald Ferse, had measles, so that he was something of a pariah in his own house, the sanctity attaching to an infectious disease having cast his wife into purdah. He was not vastly interested in Clare. She had always been to him one of those young women who took the bit between their teeth and were bound to fetch up now and again with broken knees. Dinny, to him, was worth three of her. But if Dinny were

going to be worried out of her life by her sister's troubles, then, indeed, they became important to Adrian. She seemed to have the knack of bearing vicarious burdens: Hubert's, his own, Wilfrid Desert's, and now Clare's.

And he said to his sister's parakeet: 'Not fair, Polly, is it?'

The parakeet, who was used to him, came out of its open cage on to his shoulder and tweaked his ear.

'You don't approve, do you?'

The green bird emitted a faint chattering sound and clutched its

way on to his waistcoat. Adrian scratched its poll.

‘Who’s going to scratch her poll? Poor Dinny!’

His sister’s voice startled him:

‘I can’t have Dinny scratched again.’

‘Em,’ said Adrian, ‘did any of *us* worry about the others?’

‘In large families you don’t. I was the nearest – gettin’ Lionel married, and now he’s a judge – depressin’. Dornford – have you seen him?’

‘Never.’

‘He’s got a face like a portrait.

They say he won the long jump at Oxford. Is that any good?’

‘It’s what you call desirable.’

‘Very well made,’ said Lady Mont. ‘I looked him over at Condaford.’

‘My dear Em!’

‘For Dinny, of course. What do you do with a gardener who *will* roll the stone terrace?’

‘Tell him not to.’

‘Whenever I look out at Lippin’hall, he’s at it, takin’ the roller somewhere else. There’s the gong, and here’s Dinny; we’ll go in.’

Sir Lawrence was at the sideboard in the dining-room, extracting a crumbled cork.

‘Lafite ’65. Goodness knows what it’ll be like. Decant it very gently, Blore. What do you say, Adrian, warm it a little or no?’

‘I should say no, if it’s that age.’

‘I agree.’

Dinner began in silence. Adrian was thinking of Dinny, Dinny of Clare, and Sir Lawrence of the claret.

‘French art,’ said Lady Mont.

‘Ah!’ said Sir Lawrence: ‘that reminds me, Em; some of old

Forsythe's pictures are going to be lent. Considering he died saving them, they owe it to him.'

Dinny looked up.

'Fleur's father? Was he a nice man, Uncle?'

'Nice?' repeated Sir Lawrence: 'It's not the word. Straight, yes: careful, yes – too careful for these times. He got a picture on his head, you know, in the fire – poor old chap. He knew something about French art, though. This exhibition that's coming would have pleased him.'

'There'll be nothing in it to touch

“The Birth of Venus”,’ said Adrian.

Dinny gave him a pleased look.

‘That was divine,’ she said.

Sir Lawrence cocked his eyebrow.

‘I’ve often thought of going into the question: Why a nation ceases to be poetic. The old Italians – and look at them now!’

‘Isn’t poetry an effervescence, Uncle? Doesn’t it mean youth, or at least enthusiasm?’

‘The Italians were never young, and they’re enthusiastic enough now. When we were in Italy last May you should have seen the

trouble they took over our passports.'

'Touchin'!' agreed Lady Mont.

'It's only a question,' said Adrian, 'of the means of expression. In the fourteenth century the Italians were expressing themselves in daggers and verse, in the fifteenth and sixteenth in poison, sculpture and painting, in the seventeenth in music, in the eighteenth in intrigue, in the nineteenth in rebellion, and in the twentieth their poetry is spelled in wireless and rules.'

'I did get so tired,' murmured Lady Mont, 'of seein' rules I

couldn't read.'

'You were fortunate, my dear; I could.'

'There's one thing about the Italians,' continued Adrian; 'century by century they throw up really great men of one sort or another. Is that climate, blood, or scenery, Lawrence?'

Sir Lawrence shrugged. 'What do you think of the claret? Put your nose to it. Dinny. Sixty years ago, you two young women wouldn't be here, and Adrian and I would be soppy about it. It's as near perfect as makes no matter.'

Adrian sipped and nodded.

‘Absolutely prime!’

‘Well, Dinny?’

‘I’m sure it’s perfect, dear –
wasted on me.’

‘Old Forsyte would have
appreciated this; he had wonderful
sherry. Do you get the bouquet,
Em?’

Lady Mont, who was holding her
glass with her elbow on the table,
moved her nostrils delicately.

‘Such nonsense,’ she murmured,
‘almost any flower beats it.’

The remark caused complete
silence.

Dinny's eyes were the first to come to the level.

‘How are Boswell and Johnson, Auntie?’

‘I was tellin’ Adrian: Boswell’s taken to rollin’ the stone terrace, and Johnson’s lost his wife – poor thing. He’s a different man. Whistles all the time. His tunes ought to be collected.’

‘Survivals of old England?’

‘No, modern – he just wanders.’

‘Talking of survivals,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘did you ever read *Ask Mamma*, Dinny?’

‘No; who wrote it?’

‘Surtees. You should. It’s a corrective.’

‘Of what, Uncle?’

‘Modernity.’

Lady Mont lowered her glass; it was empty.

‘So wise of them to be stoppin’ this picture exhibition at 1900. D’you remember, Lawrence – in Paris, all those wiggly things we saw, and so much yellow and light blue – scrolls and blobs and faces upside-down? Dinny, we’d better go up.’

And when presently Blore brought the message – Would Miss

Dinny go down to the study? She murmured:

‘It’s about Jerry Corven. Don’t encourage your Uncle – he thinks he can do good, but he can’t.’...

‘Well, Dinny?’ said Sir Lawrence: ‘I always like talking to Adrian; he’s a well-tempered fellow with a mind of his own. I told Clare I would see Corven, but it’s no good seeing him without knowing what one wants to say. And not much then, I’m afraid. What do *you* think?’

Dinny, who had seated herself on the edge of her chair, set her elbows on her knees. It was an

attitude from which Sir Lawrence augured ill.

‘Judging from what he said to me today, Uncle Lawrence, his mind’s made up. Either Clare must go back to him or he’ll try to divorce her.’

‘How will your people feel about that?’

‘Very badly.’

‘You know there’s a young man hanging around?’

‘Yes.’

‘He hasn’t a bean.’

Dinny smiled. ‘We’re used to that.’

‘I know, but no beans when you’re out of bounds is serious. Corven might claim damages, he looks a vindictive sort of chap.’

‘D’you really think he would? It’s very bad form, nowadays, isn’t it?’

‘Form matters very little when a man’s monkey is up. I suppose you couldn’t get Clare to apply the closure to young Croom?’

‘I’m afraid Clare will refuse to be dictated to about whom she sees. She thinks the break-up is entirely Jerry’s fault.’

‘I,’ said Sir Lawrence, emitting a slow puff, ‘am in favour of having

Corven watched while he's over here, and collecting a shot, if possible, to fire across his bows, but she doesn't like the idea of that.'

'She believes in his career and doesn't want to spoil it. Besides, it's so revolting.'

Sir Lawrence shrugged.

'What would you? The law's the law. He belongs to Burton's. Shall I waylay him there and appeal to him to leave her here quietly, and see if absence will make her heart grow fond again?'

Dinny wrinkled her brows.

‘It might be worth trying, but I don’t believe he’ll budge.’

‘What line are you going to take yourself?’

‘Back Clare in whatever she does or doesn’t do.’

Sir Lawrence nodded, having received the answer he expected.

Chapter Ten



THE quality which from time immemorial has made the public men of England what they are, tempted so many lawyers into Parliament, caused so many divines to put up with being bishops, floated so many financiers, saved so many politicians from taking thought for the morrow, and so many judges from the pangs of remorse, was present in Eustace Dornford to no small degree. Put more shortly, he had an excellent digestion; could

eat and drink at all times without knowing anything about it afterwards. He was an indefatigably hard worker even at play; and there was in him just that added fund of nervous energy which differentiates the man who wins the long jump from the man who loses it. And now, though his practice was going up by leaps and bounds since, two years ago, he had taken silk, he had stood for Parliament. And yet he was the last sort of man to incur the epithet 'go-getter'. His pale-brown, hazel-eyed, well-featured face had a considerate, even a sensitive look,

and a pleasant smile. He had kept a little fine dark moustache, and his wig had not yet depleted his natural hair, which was dark and of rather curly texture. After Oxford he had eaten dinners and gone into the Chambers of a well-known Common Law Junior. Being a subaltern in the Shropshire Yeomanry when the war broke out, he had passed into the Cavalry, and not long after into the trenches, where he had known better luck than most people. His rise at the Bar after the war had been rapid. Solicitors liked him. He never fell foul of judges, and as a

cross-examiner stood out, because he almost seemed to regret the points he scored. He was a Roman Catholic, from breeding rather than observance. Finally, he was fastidious in matters of sex, and his presence at a dinner-table on circuit had, if not a silencing, at least a moderating effect on tongues.

He occupied in Harcourt Buildings a commodious set of chambers designed for life as well as learning. Early every morning, wet or fine, he went for a ride in the Row, having already done at least two hours' work on his cases.

By ten o'clock, bathed, breakfasted, and acquainted with the morning's news, he was ready for the Courts. When at four those Courts rose, he was busy again till half-past six on his cases. The evenings, hitherto free, would now be spent at the House: and since it would be seldom that he could go to bed without working an hour or so on some case or other, his sleep was likely to be curtailed from six hours to five, or even four.

The arrangement come to with Clare was simple. She arrived at a quarter to ten, opened his correspondence, and took his

instructions from ten to a quarter past. She remained to do what was necessary, and came again at six o'clock, ready for anything fresh or left over.

On the evening after that last described, at the hour of eight-fifteen, he entered the drawing-room in Mount Street, was greeted, and introduced to Adrian, who had again been bidden. Discussing the state of the pound and other grave matters, they waited, till Lady Mont said suddenly: 'Soup. What have you done with Clare, Mr Dornford?'

His eyes, which had hitherto

taken in little but Dinny, regarded his hostess with a faint surprise.

‘She left the Temple at half-past six, saying we should meet again.’

‘Then,’ said Lady Mont, ‘we’ll go down.’

There followed one of those uncomfortable hours well known to well-bred people, when four of them are anxious upon a subject which they must not broach to the fifth, and the fifth becomes aware of this anxiety.

They were, indeed, too few for the occasion, for all that each one of them said could be heard by the

others. It was impossible for Eustace Dornford to be confidential with either of his neighbours; and since he instinctively felt that without a preliminary confidence he would only put his foot into it, he was careful to be public-minded and keep to such topics as the Premier, the undiscovered identity of certain poisoners, the ventilation of the House of Commons, the difficulty of knowing exactly what to do with one's hat there, and other subjects of general interest. But, by the end of dinner he was so acutely aware that they were burning to say

things he mustn't hear, that he invented a professional telephone call, and was taken out of the room by Blore.

The moment he had gone Dinny said:

‘She must have been waylaid, Auntie. Could I be excused and go and see?’

Sir Lawrence answered:

‘Better wait till we break, Dinny; a few minutes can't matter now.’

‘Don't you think,’ said Adrian, ‘that Dornford ought to know how things stand? She goes to him every day.’

‘I’ll tell him,’ said Sir Lawrence.

‘No,’ said Lady Mont. ‘Dinny must tell him. Wait for him here, Dinny. We’ll go up.’

Thus it was that, returning to the dining-room after his trunk call to someone whom he knew to be away from home, Dornford found Dinny waiting. She handed him the cigars and said:

‘Forgive us, Mr Dornford. It’s about my sister. Please light up, and here’s coffee. Blore, would you mind getting me a taxi?’

When they had drunk their coffee, and were standing together

by the fire, she turned her face to it and went on hurriedly:

‘You see, Clare has split from her husband, and he’s just come over to take her back. She won’t go, and it’s rather a difficult time for her.’

Dornford made a considerate sound.

‘I’m very glad you told me. I’ve been feeling unhappy all dinner.’

‘I must go now, I’m afraid, and find out what’s happened.’

‘Could I come with you?’

‘Oh! thank you, but –’

‘It would be a real pleasure.’

Dinny stood hesitating. He

looked like a present help in trouble; but she said: 'Thank you, but perhaps my sister wouldn't like it.'

'I see. Any time I can help, please let me know.'

'Your taxi's at the door, Miss.'

'Some day,' she said. 'I'd like to ask you about divorce.'

In the taxi she wondered what she would do if she could not get in; and then what she would do if she could get in and Corven were there. She stopped the cab at the corner of the Mews.

'Stay here, please, I'll let you

know in a minute if I want you again.'

Dark and private loomed that little backwater.

'Like one's life,' thought Dinny, and pulled at the ornamental bell. It tinkled all forlorn, and nothing happened. Again and again she rang, then moved backward to look up at the windows. The curtains – she remembered they were heavy – had been drawn close; she could not decide whether or no there was light behind them. Once more she rang and used the knocker, holding her breath to listen. No sound at all! At last, baffled and disquiet,

she went back to the cab. Clare had said Corven was staying at the Bristol, and she gave that address. There might be a dozen explanations; only why, in a town of telephones, had Clare not let them know? Half-past ten! Perhaps she had by now!

The cab drew up at the hotel. 'Wait, please!' Entering its discreetly gilded hall, she stood for a moment at a loss. The setting seemed unsuitable for private trouble.

'Yes, madam?' said a page-boy's voice.

'Could you find out for me,

please, if my brother-in-law, Sir Gerald Corven, is in the hotel?’

What should she say if they brought him to her? Her figure in its evening cloak was reflected in a mirror, and that it was straight filled her with a sort of surprise – she felt so as if she were curling and creeping this way and that. But they did not bring him to her. He was not in his room, nor in any of the public rooms. She went out again to her cab.

‘Back to Mount Street, please.’

Dornford and Adrian were gone, her Aunt and Uncle playing piquet.

‘Well, Dinny?’

‘I couldn’t get into her rooms, and he was not in his hotel.’

‘You went there?’

‘It was all I could think of to do.’

Sir Lawrence rose. ‘I’ll telephone to Burton’s.’ Dinny sat down beside her Aunt.

‘I feel she’s in trouble, Auntie. Clare’s never rude.’

‘Kidnapped or locked up,’ said Lady Mont. ‘There was a case when I was young. Thompson, or Watson – a great fuss. Habeas corpus, or something – husbands can’t now. Well, Lawrence?’

‘He hasn’t been in the Club since five o’clock. We must just wait till the morning. She may have forgotten, you know; or got the evening mixed.’

‘But she told Mr Dornford that they would meet again.’

‘So they will, tomorrow morning. No good worrying, Dinny.’

Dinny went up, but did not undress. Had she done all she could? The night was clear and fine and warm for November. Only a quarter of a mile or so away, was that backwater of Mews – should she slip out and go over there

again?

She threw off her evening frock, put on a day dress, hat and fur coat, and stole downstairs. It was dark in the hall. Quietly drawing back the bolts, she let herself out, and took to the streets. When she entered the Mews – where a couple of cars were being put away for the night – she saw light coming from the upper windows of No. 2. They had been opened and the curtains drawn aside. She rang the bell.

After a moment Clare, in her dressing-gown, opened the door.

‘Was it you who came before, Dinny?’

‘Yes.’

‘Sorry I couldn’t let you in. Come up!’

She led the way up the spiral stairs, and Dinny followed.

Upstairs it was warm and light, the door into the tiny bathroom open, and the couch in disorder. Clare looked at her sister with a sort of unhappy defiance.

‘Yes, I’ve had Jerry here, he’s not been gone ten minutes.’

A horrified shiver went down Dinny’s spine.

‘After all, he’s come a long way,’ said Clare; ‘good of you to worry,

Dinny.'

'Oh! darling!'

'He was outside here when I got back from the Temple. I was an idiot to let him in. After that – oh! well, it doesn't matter! I'll take care it doesn't happen again.'

'Would you like me to stay?'

'Oh! no. But have some tea. I've just made it. I don't want anyone to know of this.'

'Of course not. I'll say you had a bad headache and couldn't get out to telephone.'

When they were drinking the tea Dinny said:

‘This hasn’t altered your plans?’

‘God! no!’

‘Dornford was there tonight. We thought it best to tell him you were having a difficult time.’

Clare nodded.

‘It must all seem very funny to you.’

‘It seems to me tragic.’

Clare shrugged, then stood up and threw her arms round her sister. After that silent embrace, Dinny went out into the Mews, now dark and deserted. At the corner leading into the Square she almost walked into a young man.

‘Mr Croom, isn’t it?’

‘Miss Cherrell? Have you been at Lady Corven’s?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is she all right?’

His face was worried, and his voice anxious. Dinny took a breath before answering:

‘Oh! yes. Why not?’

‘She was saying last night that man was over here. It worries me terribly.’

Through Dinny shot the thought: ‘If he’d met “that man”!’ But she said, quietly:

‘Walk with me as far as Mount

Street.'

'I don't mind your knowing,' he said, 'I'm over head and ears in love with her. Who wouldn't be? Miss Cherrell, I don't think she ought to be in that place alone. She told me he came yesterday while you were there.'

'Yes. I took him away with me, as I'm taking you. I think my sister should be left to herself.'

He seemed to hunch himself together.

'Have *you* ever been in love?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then you know.'

Yes, she knew!

‘It’s absolute torture not to be with her, able to see that she’s all right. She takes it all lightly, but I can’t.’

Takes it all lightly! Clare’s face looking at her! She did not answer.

‘The fact is,’ said young Croom, with incoherence, ‘people can say and think what they like, but if they felt as I feel, they simply couldn’t. I won’t bother her, I really won’t; but I can’t stand her being in danger from that man.’

Dinny controlled herself to say quietly: ‘I don’t think Clare’s in any

danger. But she might be if it were known that you –' He met her eyes squarely.

'I'm glad she's got you. For God's sake look after her, Miss Cherrell.'

They had reached the corner of Mount Street, and she held out her hand.

'You may be certain that whatever Clare does I shall stick by her. Good night! And cheer up!'

He wrung her hand, and went off as if the devil were after him. Dinny went in, and slid the bolts quietly.

On what thin ice! She could

hardly drag one foot before the other as she went upstairs, and sank down on her bed exhausted.

Chapter Eleven



WHEN Sir Lawrence Mont reached Burton's Club the following afternoon he was feeling, in common with many who undertake to interfere in the affairs of others, as uneasy self-importance coupled with a desire to be somewhere else. He did not know what the deuce he was going to say to Corven, or why the deuce he should say it, since, in his opinion, by far the best solution would be for Clare to give her marriage another trial. Having discovered from the porter that Sir

Gerald was in the Club, he poked his nose gingerly into three rooms before locating the back of his quarry seated in the corner of an apartment too small to be devoted to anything but writing. He sat down at a table close to the door, so that he could simulate surprise when Corven came up to leave the room. The fellow was an unconscionable time. Noting a copy of the British Statesman's vade-mecum beside him, he began idly looking up the figures of British imports. He found potatoes: consumption sixty-six million five hundred thousand tons, production

eight million eight hundred and seventy-four thousand tons! Somebody the other day had written to say that we imported forty million pounds' worth of bacon every year. Taking a sheet of paper he wrote: 'Prohibition and protection, in regard to food that we *can* produce here. Annual Imports: Pigs, £40,000,000; Poultry say, £12,000,000; Potatoes – God knows how much! All this bacon, all these eggs, and half these potatoes could be produced here. Why not a five-year plan? By prohibition lessen the import of bacon and eggs one-fifth every

year, and the import of potatoes by one-tenth every year, increasing home production gradually to replace them. At the end of five years our bacon and eggs and half our potatoes would be all-British. We should save eighty millions on our Imports Bill and our trade would practically be balanced.'

Taking another sheet of paper, he wrote:

'To the Editor of *The Times*.

'The Three P. Plan.

'SIR –

'A simple plan for the balancing of our trade would seem to merit the attention of all those not wedded to the longest way round. There are three

articles of food on importing which we expend annually some —— pounds, but which could be produced in our own country without, I venture to think, causing the price of living to rise to any material extent if we took the simple precaution of hanging a profiteer at the beginning. These articles are Pigs, Poultry, Potatoes. There would be no need to put on duties, for all that is required is —’

But at this moment, becoming aware that Corven was passing from the room, he said:

‘Hello!’

Corven turned and came towards him.

Hoping that he showed as little sign of embarrassment as his nephew twice removed by

marriage, Sir Lawrence rose.

‘Sorry I didn’t see you when you called the other day. Have you got long leave?’

‘Another week only, and then I shall have to fly the Mediterranean probably.’

‘Not a good month for flying. What do you think of this adverse balance of trade?’

Jerry Corven shrugged.

‘Something to keep them busy for a bit. They never see two inches before their noses.’

‘*“Tiens! Une montagne!”*

Remember the Caran d’Ache

cartoon of Buller in front of
Ladysmith? No, you wouldn't. It's
thirty-two years ago. National
character doesn't change much,
does it? How's Ceylon? Not in love
with India, I hope?

‘Nor with us particularly, but we
jog on.’

‘The climate doesn't suit Clare,
apparently.’

Corven's expression remained
watchful and slightly smiling.

‘The hot weather didn't, but
that's over.’

‘Are you taking her back with
you?’

‘Yes.’

‘I wonder if that’s wise.’

‘To leave her would be less so.
One’s either married or not.’

Sir Lawrence, watching his eyes, thought: ‘Shan’t go further. It’s hopeless. Besides, he’s probably right. Only I would bet –’

‘Forgive me,’ said Corven, ‘I must get these letters off.’ He turned and moved away, trim and assured.

‘H’m!’ thought Sir Lawrence, ‘not exactly what you’d call fruitful.’ And he sat down again to his letter to *The Times*.

‘I must get precise figures,’ he muttered. ‘I’ll turn Michael on to it’... And his thoughts went back to Corven. Impossible, in such cases, to know where the blame really lay. After all, a misfit was a misfit, no amount of pious endeavour, or even worldly wisdom, would cure it. ‘I ought to have been a judge,’ he thought, ‘then I could have expressed my views. Mr Justice Mont in the course of his judgement said: “It is time to warn the people of this country against marriage. That tie, which was all very well under Victoria, should now only be contracted in cases

where there is full evidence to show that neither party has any individuality to speak of... I think I'll go home to Em.' He blotted the perfectly dry letter to *The Times*, put it into his pocket, and sought the darkening placidity of Pall Mall. He had stopped to look in at the window of his wine merchant's in St James's Street, and consider once more where the extra ten per cent on his surtax was to come from, when a voice said:

‘Good evening, Sir Lawrence!’ It was the young man called Croom.

They crossed the street together.

‘I wanted to thank you, sir, for

speaking to Mr Muskham. I've seen him today.'

'How did you find him?'

'Oh! very affable. Of course I agree it *is* a bee in his bonnet about introducing that cross of Arab blood into our racehorses.'

'Did you show him you thought so?'

Young Croom smiled: 'Hardly! But the Arab horse is so much smaller.'

'There's something in it, all the same. Jack's only wrong in expecting quick results. It's like politics, people won't lay down for

the future. If a thing doesn't work within five years, we think it's no good. Did Jack say he'd take you on?'

'He'll give me a trial. I'm to go down for a week, so that he can see me with horses. But the mares are not going to Royston. He's got a place for them above Oxford near Bablock Hythe. I should be there if I pass muster. It's not till the spring, though.'

'Jack's a formalist,' said Sir Lawrence, as they entered the Coffee House; 'you'll have to mind your p's and q's.'

Young Croom smiled.

‘You bet. Everything’s simply perfect at his stud farm. Luckily I really am frightfully keen about horses. I didn’t feel at sea with Mr Muskham. It’s an immense relief to have a chance again; and there’s nothing I’d like better.’

Sir Lawrence smiled – enthusiasm was always pleasant.

‘You must know my son,’ he said, ‘he’s an enthusiast too, though he must be thirty-seven by now. You’ll be in his constituency – no, just out of it. You’ll be in Dornford’s, I expect. But the way, you know my niece is acting secretary for him?’

Young Croom nodded.

‘I don’t know,’ murmured Sir Lawrence, ‘whether that’ll go on now Corven’s over.’ And he watched the young man’s expression.

It had perceptibly darkened. ‘Oh! it will. She won’t go back to Ceylon.’

It was said with frowning suddenness, and Sir Lawrence thought: ‘This is where I weigh myself.’ Young Croom followed him to the weighing machine, as if he did not know how not to. He was very red.

‘What makes you sure of that?’ said Sir Lawrence, looking up from the historic chair. Young Croom went even redder.

‘One doesn’t come away just to go back.’

‘Or one does. If Life were a racehorse it’d be always up before the stewards for running in and out.’

‘I happen to know Lady Corven won’t, sir.’

It was clear to Sir Lawrence that he had lighted on a moment when feeling gets the better of discretion. So the young man *was* in love with

her! Was this a chance to warn him off the course? Or was it more graceful to take no notice?

‘Just eleven stone,’ he said; ‘do you go up or down, Mr Croom?’

‘I keep about ten twelve.’

Sir Lawrence scrutinized his lean figure.

‘Well, you look very fit.

Extraordinary what a shadow can be cast on life by the abdomen.

However, you won’t have to worry till you’re fifty.’

‘Surely, sir, you’ve never had any bother there?’

‘Not to speak of; but I’ve

watched it darken so many doors.
And now I must be getting on.
Good night to you!’

‘Good night, sir. I really am
awfully grateful.’

‘Not at all. My cousin Jack
doesn’t bet, and if you take my
advice, you won’t either.’

Young Croom said heartily: ‘I
certainly shan’t, sir.’

They shook hands and Sir
Lawrence resumed his progress up
St James’s Street.

‘That young man,’ he was
thinking, ‘impresses me favourably,
and I can’t think why – he appears

to be going to be a nuisance. What I ought to have said to him was: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife." But God so made the world that one doesn't say what one ought!' The young were very interesting; one heard of them being disrespectful to Age and all that, but really he couldn't see it. They seemed to him fully as well-mannered as he himself had been at their age, and easier to talk to. One never knew what they were thinking, of course; but that might be as well. After all, one used to think that the old – and Sir Lawrence winced on the kerbstone

of Piccadilly – were only fit to be measured for their coffins.

‘Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis’; but was that true? No more really than the difference in the pronunciation of Latin since one’s youth. Youth would always be Youth and Age would be Age, with the same real divergence and distrust between them, and the same queer hankering by Age to feel as Youth was feeling and think as Youth was thinking; the same pretence that it wouldn’t so feel and think for the world, and, at the back of all, the instinct that, really given the

chance, Age wouldn't have its life over again. Merciful – that! With stealthy quietude Life, as it wore one out, supplied the adjustment of a suitable lethargy. At each stage of existence the zest for living was tailored to what man had before him and no more. That fellow Goethe had attained immortality to the tunes of Gounod by fanning a dying spark into a full-blown flame. ‘Rats!’ thought Sir Lawrence: ‘and very German rats! Would I choose the sighing and the sobbing, the fugitive raptures and the lingering starvations in front of that young man, if I could? I would

not! Sufficient unto the old buffer is the bufferism thereof. Is that policeman never going to stop this blamed traffic?' No, there was no real change! Men drove cars now to the same tick as the old horse-bus and the hansom-cab drivers had driven their slipping, clattering gees. Young men and women experienced the same legal or illegal urge towards each other. The pavements were different, and the lingo in which those youthful hankerings were expressed. But – Lord Almighty! – the rules of the road, the collisions and slips and general miraculous avoidances, the

triumphs, mortifications, and fulfilments for better for worse, were all the same as ever. 'No,' he thought; 'the Police may make rules, Divines write to the papers, Judges express themselves as they like, but human nature will find its own way about as it did when I was cutting my wisdom teeth.'

The policeman reversed his sleeves, and Sir Lawrence crossed, pursuing his way to Berkeley Square. Here was change enough! The houses of the great were going fast. Piecemeal, without expressed aim, almost shamefacedly, in true English fashion, London was being

rebuilt. The dynastic age was gone, with its appendages, feudalism, and the Church. Even wars would now be fought for peoples and their markets. No more dynastic or religious wars. Well, that was something! 'We're getting more like insects daily,' thought Sir Lawrence. And how interesting! Religion was nearly dead because there was no longer real belief in future life; but something was struggling to take its place – service – social service – the ants' creed, the bees' creed! Communism had formulated it and was whipping it into the people from

the top. So characteristic! They were always whipping something into somebody in Russia. The quick way, no doubt, but the sure way? No! The voluntary system remained the best, because when once it got hold it lasted – only it was so darned slow! Yes, and darned ironical! So far the sense of social service was almost the perquisite of the older families, who had somehow got hold of the notion that they must do something useful to pay for their position. Now that they were dying out would the sense of service persist? How were the ‘people’ to pick it up? ‘Well,’

thought Sir Lawrence, ‘after all, there’s the bus conductor; and the fellow in the shop, who’ll take infinite trouble to match the colour of your socks; and the woman who’ll look after her neighbour’s baby, or collect for the waifs and strays; and the motorist who’ll stop and watch you tinkering at your car; and the postman who’s grateful for a tip; and the almost anybody who’ll try and pull you out of a pond if he can really see you’re in it. What’s wanted is the slogan: “Fresh air and exercise for good instincts.” One might have it on all the buses, instead of:

“Canon’s Colossal Crime,” or
“Strange Sweepstake Swindle.” And
that reminds me to ask Dinny what
she knows about Clare and that
young man.’

So thinking, he paused before his
house door, and inserted his key in
its latch.

Chapter Twelve



IN spite of Sir Gerald Corven's assurance, the course before a husband wishing to resume the society of his wife is not noticeably simple, especially if he has but a week wherein to encompass his desire. The experience of that evening had made Clare wary. On leaving the Temple at lunch-time the day after, a Saturday, she took train for Condaford, where she carefully refrained from saying that she had sought asylum. On Sunday morning she lay long in

bed, with the windows wide open, watching the sky beyond the tall denuded elms. The sun shone in upon her, the air was mild and alive with sounds surprised into life, the twittering once more of birds, the lowing of a cow, the occasional caw of a rook, the continual cooing of the fantails. There was but little poetry in Clare, but for a moment to her easeful stretched-out being came a certain perception of the symphony which is this world. The lacing of the naked boughs and those few leaves against the soft, gold-bright, moving sky; that rook balancing

there; the green and fallow upland, the far line of trees; and all those sounds, and the pure unscented air on her face; the twittering quietude and perfect freedom of each separate thing, and yet the long composure of design – all this for a moment drew her out of herself into a glimpse of the universal.

The vision passed; she thought instead of Thursday night, and Tony Croom, and the dirty little boy outside the restaurant in Soho, who had said in such endearing tone: ‘Remember the poor old guy, lady; remember the poor old guy.’ If Tony had seen her the next

night! How irrelevant was event to feeling, how ignorant were even the closest of each other! She uttered a little discomfited laugh. Where ignorance was bliss, indeed!

The village church bell began ringing now. Marvellous how her father and mother continued to go every Sunday, hoping – she supposed – for the best; or was it because if they didn't the village wouldn't, and the church would fall into disuse, or at least behind the chapel? It was nice to lie here in one's own old room, feel safe, and warm, and idle, with a dog on one's feet! Till next Saturday she

was at bay, like a chased vixen taking advantage of every cover; and Clare drew taut her lips, as a vixen does at sight of hounds. Go back he must – he had said – with her or without. Well, it would be without!

Her sense of asylum was rudely shaken about four o'clock, when, returning from a walk with the dogs, she saw a car outside and was met by her mother in the hall.

‘Jerry’s with your father.’

‘Oh!’

‘Come up to my room, dear.’

In that first-floor room adjoining

her bedroom Lady Char-well's personality had always more scope than in the rest of the old, tortuous, worn-down house, so full of relics and the past tense. This room's verbenascent, powder-blue scheme had a distinct if faded elegance. It had been designed; the rest of the house had grown, emerging here and there into small oases of modernity, but for the most part a wilderness strewn with the débris of Time.

Clare turned and turned a china figure, in front of the wood fire. She had not foreseen this visit. Now were conjoined the forces of creed,

convention, and comfort, and against them was only a defence that it was hateful to lay bare. She waited for her mother to speak.

‘You see, darling, you haven’t told us anything.’

But how tell one who looked and spoke like that? She flushed, went pale, and said: ‘I can only say there’s a beast in him. I know it doesn’t show; but there is, Mother, there is!’

Lady Charwell, too, had flushed. It did not suit her, being over fifty.

‘Your father and I will help you all we can, dear; only, of course, it

is so important to take a right decision now.'

'And I, having made a wrong one already, can only be trusted to make another? You've got to take my word, Mother; I simply can't talk about it, and I simply won't go back with him.'

Lady Charwell had sat down, a furrow between her grey-blue eyes which seemed fixed on nothing. She turned them on her daughter, and said, hesitating:

'You're sure it's not just the beast that is in nearly all men?'

Clare laughed.

‘Oh! no. I’m not easily upset.’

Lady Charwell sighed.

‘Don’t worry, Mother dear; it’ll be all right once we’ve got this over. Nothing really matters nowadays.’

‘So they say, but one has the bad habit still of believing that it does.’

At this near approach to irony Clare said quickly:

‘It matters that one should keep one’s self-respect. Really, with him I couldn’t.’

‘We’ll say no more then. Your father will want to see you. You’d better take your things off.’

Clare kissed her and went out. There was no sound from below, and she went on up to her room. She felt her will-power stiffening. The days when men disposed of their women folk were long over, and – whatever Jerry and her father were concocting – she would not budge! When the summons came, she went to the encounter, blade-sharp, and hard as stone.

They were standing in the General's office-like study, and she felt at once that they were in agreement. Nodding to her husband, she went over to her father.

‘Well?’

But Corven spoke first.

‘I leave it to you, sir.’

The General’s lined face looked mournful and irritated. He braced himself. ‘We’ve been going into this, Clare. Jerry admits that you’ve got much on your side, but he’s given me his word that he won’t offend you again. I want to appeal to you to try and see his point of view. He says, I think rightly, that it’s more to your interest even than to his. The old idea about marriage may have gone, but, after all, you both took certain vows – but leaving that

aside –’

‘Yes,’ said Clare.

The General twirled his little moustache, and thrust the other hand deep into his pocket.

‘Well, what on earth is going to happen to you both? You can’t have a divorce – there’s your name, and his position, and – after only eighteen months. What are you going to do? Live apart? That’s not fair to you, or to him.’

‘Fairer to both of us than living together will be.’

The General glanced at her hardened face. ‘So you say now;

but we've both of us had more experience than you.'

'That was bound to be said sooner or later. You want me to go back with him?'

The General looked acutely unhappy.

'You know, my dear, that I only want what's best for you.'

'And Jerry has convinced you that is the best. Well, it's the worst. I'm not going, Dad, and there's an end of it.'

The General looked at her face, looked at the face of his son-in-law, shrugged his shoulders, and began

filling his pipe.

Jerry Corven's eyes, which had been passing from face to face, narrowed and came to rest on Clare's. That look lasted a long time, and neither flinched.

'Very well,' he said, at last, 'I will make other arrangements. Good-bye, sir; good-bye, Clare!' And turning on his heel, he went out.

In the silence that followed, the sound of his car crunching away on the drive could be heard distinctly. The General smoking glumly, kept his glance averted; Clare went to the window. It was growing dark

outside, and now that the crisis was over she felt unstrung.

‘I wish to God,’ said her father’s voice, ‘that I could understand this business.’

Clare did not move from the window: ‘Did he tell you he’d used my riding whip on me?’

‘What!’ said the General.

Clare turned round.

‘Yes.’

‘On *you*?’

‘Yes. That was not my real reason, but it put the finishing touch. Sorry to hurt you, Dad!’

‘By God!’

Clare had a moment of illumination. Concrete facts! Give a man a fact!

‘The ruffian!’ said the General: ‘The ruffian! He told me he spent the evening with you the other day; is that true?’

A slow flush had burned up in her cheeks.

‘He practically forced himself in.’

‘The ruffian!’ said the General once more.

When she was alone again, she meditated wryly on the sudden difference that little fact about the

whip had made in her father's feelings. He had taken it as a personal affront, an insult to his own flesh and blood. She felt that he could have stood it with equanimity of someone else's daughter; she remembered that he had even sympathized with her brother's flogging of the muleteer, which had brought such a peck of trouble on them all. How little detached, how delightfully personal, people were! Feeling and criticizing in terms of their own prejudices! Well! She was over the worst now, for her people were on her side, and she would make

certain of not seeing Jerry alone again. She thought of the long look he had given her. He was a good loser, because for him the game was never at an end. Life itself – not each item of life – absorbed him. He rode Life, took a toss, got up, rode on; met an obstacle, rode over it, rode through it, took the scratches as all in the day's work. He had fascinated her, ridden through and over her; the fascination was gone, and she wondered that it had ever been. What was he going to do now? Well! One thing was certain: somehow, he would cut his losses 1

Chapter Thirteen



ONE who gazes at the Temple's smooth green turt, fine trees, stone-silled buildings, and pouter pigeons, feels dithyrambic, till on him intrudes the vision of countless bundles of papers tied round with pink tape, unending clerks in little outer chambers sucking thumbs and waiting for solicitors, calf-bound tomes stored with reports of innumerable cases so closely argued that the light-minded sigh at sight of them and think of the Café Royal. Who shall deny that

the Temple harbours the human mind *in excelsis*, the human body in chairs; who shall gainsay that the human spirit is taken off at its entrances and left outside like the shoes of those who enter a mosque? Not even to its Grand Nights is the human spirit admitted, for the legal mind must not 'slop over,' and warning is given by the word 'Decorations' on the invitation cards. On those few autumn mornings when the sun shines, the inhabitant of the Temple who faces East may possibly feel in his midriff as a man feels on a hilltop, or after hearing a Brahms

symphony, or even when seeing first daffodils in spring; if so, he will hastily remember where he is, and turn to: Collister v. Daverday: Popdick intervening.

And yet, strangely, Eustace Dornford, verging on middle age, was continually being visited, whether the sun shone or not, by the feeling of one who sits on a low wall in the first spring warmth, seeing life as a Botticellian figure advancing towards him through an orchard of orange trees and spring flowers. At less expenditure of words, he was 'in love' with Dinny. Each morning when he saw Clare

he was visited by a longing not to dictate on parliamentary subjects, but rather to lead her to talk about her sister. Self-controlled, however, and with a sense of humour, he bowed to his professional inhibitions, merely asking Clare whether she and her sister would dine with him, 'on Saturday – here, or at the Café Royal?'

‘Here would be more original.’

‘Would you care to ask a man to make a fourth?’

‘But won’t you, Mr Dornford?’

‘You might like someone special.’

‘Well, there’s young Tony Croom, who was on the boat with me. He’s a nice boy.’

‘Good! Saturday, then. And you’ll ask your sister?’

Clare did not say: ‘She’s probably on the doorstep,’ for, as a fact, she was. Every evening that week she was coming at half-past six to accompany Clare back to Melton Mews. There were still chances, and the sisters were not taking them.

On hearing of the invitation Dinny said: ‘When I left you late that night I ran into Tony Croom, and we walked back to Mount

Street together.'

'You didn't tell him about Jerry's visit to me?'

'Of course not!'

'It's hard on him, as it is. He really is a nice boy, Dinny.'

'So I saw. And I wish he weren't in London.'

Clare smiled. 'Well, he won't be for long; he's to take charge of some Arab mares for Mr Muskham down at Bablock Hythe.'

'Jack Muskham lives at Royston.'

'The mares are to have a separate establishment in a milder

climate.'

Dinny roused herself from memories with an effort.

'Well, darling, shall we strap-hang on the Tube, or go a bust in a taxi?'

'I want air. Are you up to walking?'

'Rather! We'll go by the Embankment and the Parks.'

They walked quickly, for it was cold. Lamplit and star-covered, that broad free segment of the Town had a memorable dark beauty; even on the buildings, their daylight features abolished, was

stamped a certain grandeur.

Dinny murmured: 'London at night is beautiful.'

'Yes, you go to bed with a beauty and wake up with a barmaid. And, what's it all for? A clotted mass of energy like an ant-heap.'

' "So fatiguin'," as Aunt Em would say.'

'But what is it all for, Dinny?'

'A workshop trying to turn out perfect specimens; a million failures to each success.'

'Is that worth while?'

'Why not?'

‘Well, what is there to *believe* in?’

‘Character.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Character’s our way of showing the desire for perfection. Nursing the best that’s in one.’

‘Hum!’ said Clare. ‘Who’s to decide what’s best within one?’

‘You have me, my dear.’

‘Well, I’m too young for it, anyway.’

Dinny hooked her arm within her sister’s.

‘You’re older than I am, Clare.’

‘No, I’ve had more experience

perhaps, but I haven't communed with my own spirit and been still. I feel in my bones that Jerry's hanging round the Mews.'

'Come into Mount Street, and we'll go to a film.'

In the hall Blore handed Dinny a note.

'Sir Gerald Corven called, Miss, and left this for you.'

Dinny opened it.

DEAR DINNY, —

I'm leaving England tomorrow instead of Saturday. If Clare will change her mind I shall be very happy to take her. If not, she must not expect me to be long-suffering. I have left a note to this effect at her lodgings, but as I do not know

where she is, I wrote to you also, so as to be sure that she knows. She or a message from her will find me at the Bristol up to three o'clock tomorrow, Thursday. After that 'à la guerre comme à la guerre.'

With many regrets that things are so criss-cross and good wishes to yourself,

I am,

Very sincerely yours,

GERALD CORVEN

Dinny bit her lip.

'Read this!'

Clare read the note.

'I shan't go, and he can do what he likes.'

While they were titivating themselves in Dinny's room, Lady Mont came in.

‘Ah!’ she said: ‘Now I can say my piece. Your Uncle has seen Jerry Corven again. What are you goin’ to do about him, Clare?’

As Clare swivelled round from the mirror, the light fell full on cheeks and lips whose toilet she had not quite completed.

‘I’m never going back to him, Aunt Em.’

‘May I sit on your bed, Dinny? “Never” is a long time, and – er – that Mr Craven. I’m sure you have principles, Clare, but you’re too pretty.’

Clare put down her lipstick.

‘Sweet of you, Aunt Em; but really I know what I’m about.’

‘So comfortin’! When I say that myself, I’m sure to make a *gaffe*.’

‘If Clare promises, she’ll perform, Auntie.’

Lady Mont sighed. ‘I promised my father not to marry for a year. Seven months – and then your uncle. It’s always somebody.’

Clare raised her hands to the little curls on her neck.

‘I’ll promise not to “kick over” for a year. I ought to know my own mind by then; if I don’t, I can’t have got one.’

Lady Mont smoothed the eiderdown.

‘Cross your heart.’

‘I don’t think you should,’ said Dinny quickly.

Clare crossed her fingers on her breast.

‘I’ll cross where it ought to be.’

Lady Mont rose.

‘She ought to stay here tonight, don’t you think, Dinny?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ll tell them, then. Sea-green is your colour, Dinny. Lawrence says I haven’t one.’

‘Black and white, dear.’

‘Magpies and the Duke of Portland. I haven’t been to Ascot since Michael went to Winchester – savin’ our pennies. Hilary and May are comin’ to dinner. They won’t be dressed.’

‘Oh!’ said Clare suddenly: ‘Does Uncle Hilary know about me?’

‘Broad-minded,’ murmured Lady Mont. ‘I can’t help bein’ sorry, you know.’

Clare stood up.

‘Believe me, Aunt Em, Jerry’s not the sort of man who’ll let it hurt him long.’

‘Stand back to back, you two; I

thought so – Dinny by an inch.’

‘I’m five foot five,’ said Clare, ‘without shoes.’

‘Very well. When you’re tidy, come down.’

So saying, Lady Mont swayed to the door, said to herself: ‘Solomon’s seal – remind Boswell,’ and went out.

Dinny returned to the fire, and resumed her stare at the flames.

Clare’s voice, close behind her, said: ‘I feel inclined to sing, Dinny. A whole year’s holiday from everything. I’m glad Aunt Em made me promise. But isn’t she a

scream?’

‘Emphatically not. She’s the wisest member of our family. Take life seriously and you’re nowhere. She doesn’t. She may want to, but she can’t.’

‘But she hasn’t any real worries.’

‘Only a husband, three children, several grandchildren, two households, three dogs, some congenial gardeners, not enough money, and two passions – one for getting other people married, and one for French tapestry; besides trying hard not to get fat on it all.’

‘Oh she’s a duck all right. What

d'you advise about these "tendrils," Dinny? They're an awful plague. Shall I shingle again?'

'Let them grow at present, we don't know what's coming; it might be ringlets.'

'Do you believe that women get themselves up to please men?'

'Certainly not.'

'To excite and annoy each other, then?'

'Fashion mostly; women are sheep about appearance.'

'And morals?'

'Have we any? Man-made, anyway. By nature we've only got

feelings.'

'I've none now.'

'Sure?'

Clare laughed. 'Oh! well, in hand, anyhow.' She put on her dress, and Dinny took her place at the mirror....

The slum parson does not dine out to observe human nature. He eats. Hilary Charwell, having spent the best part of his day, including meal-times, listening to the difficulties of parishioners who had laid up no store for the morrow because they had never had store enough for today, absorbed the

good food set before him with perceptible enjoyment. If he was aware that the young woman whom he had married to Jerry Corven had burst her bonds, he gave no sign of it. Though seated next to her, he never once alluded to her domestic existence, conversing freely on the election, French art, the timber wolves at Whipsnade Zoo, and a new system of building schools with roofs that could be used or not as the weather dictated. Over his face, long, wrinkled, purposeful, and shrewdly kind, flitted an occasional smile, as if he were summing something up;

but he gave no indication of what that something was, except that he looked across at Dinny, as though saying: 'You and I are going to have a talk presently.'

No such talk occurred, for he was summoned by telephone to a death-bed before he had finished his glass of port. Mrs Hilary went with him.

The two sisters settled down to bridge with their Uncle and Aunt, and at eleven o'clock went up to bed.

'Armistice day,' said Clare, turning into her bedroom. 'Did you realize?'

‘Yes.’

‘I was in a bus at eleven o’clock. I noticed two or three people looking funny. How can one be expected to feel anything? I was only ten when the war stopped.’

‘I remember the Armistice,’ said Dinny, ‘because Mother cried. Uncle Hilary was with us at Condaford. He preached on: “They also serve who only stand and wait.” ’

‘Who serves except for what he can get from it?’

‘Lots of people do hard jobs all their lives for mighty little return.’

‘Well, yes.’

‘Why do they?’

‘Dinny, I sometimes feel as if you might end up religious. Unless you marry, you will.’

‘ “Get thee to a nunnery, go!” ’

‘Seriously, ducky, I wish I could see more of “the old Eve” in you. In my opinion you ought to be a mother.’

‘When doctors find a way without preliminaries.’

‘You’re wasting yourself, my dear. At any moment that you liked to crook your little finger, old man Dornford would fall on his knees to

you. Don't you like him?’

‘As nice a man as I've seen for a long time.’

‘ “Murmured she coldly, turning towards the door.” Give me a kiss.’

‘Darling,’ said Dinny, ‘I do hope things are going to be all right. I shan't pray for you, in spite of my look of decline; but I'll dream that your ship comes home.’

Chapter Fourteen



YOUNG CROOM's second visit to England's Past at Drury Lane was the first visit of the other three members of Dornford's little dinner party, and by some fatality, not unconnected with him who took the tickets, they were seated two by two; young Croom with Clare in the middle of the tenth row, Dornford and Dinny in returned stalls at the end of the third....

‘Penny for your thoughts, Miss Cherrell?’

‘I was thinking how the English

face has changed since 1900.'

'It's the hair. Faces in pictures a hundred to a hundred and fifty years ago are much more like ours.'

'Drooping moustaches and chignons do hide expression, but was there the expression?'

'You don't think the Victorians had as much character?'

'Probably more, but surely they suppressed it; even in their dresses, always more stuff than was needed; frock-coats, high collars, cravats, bustles, button boots.'

'The leg *was* on their nerves, but the neck wasn't.'

‘I give you the woman’s necks. But look at their furniture: tassels, fringes, antimacassars, chandeliers, enormous sideboards. They *did* play hide-and-seek with the soul, Mr Dornford.’

‘And every now and then it popped out, like little Edward after unclothing himself under his mother’s dining-table at Windsor.’

‘He never did anything quite so perfect again.’

‘I don’t know. He was another Restoration in a mild way. Big opening of floodgates under him.’...

‘He *has* sailed, hasn’t he, Clare?’

‘Yes, he’s sailed all right. Look at Dornford! He’s fallen for Dinny completely. I wish she’d take to him.’

‘Why shouldn’t she?’

‘My dear young man, Dinny’s been in very deep waters. She’s in them even now.’

‘I don’t know anyone I’d like better for a sister-in-law.’

‘Don’t you wish you may get her?’

‘God! Yes! Don’t I!’

‘What do *you* think of Dornford, Tony?’

‘Awfully decent, not a bit dry.’

‘If he were a doctor he’d have a wonderful bedside manner. He’s a Catholic.’

‘Wasn’t that against him in the election?’

‘It would have been, but his opponent was an atheist, so they cried quits.’

‘Terrible humbug, politics.’

‘But rather fun.’

‘Still, Dornford won that Bar point-to-point – he must have guts.’

‘Lots. I should say he’d face anything in his quiet way. I’m quite fond of him.’

‘Oh!’

‘No intention to incite you,
Tony.’

‘This is like being on board ship,
sitting side by side, and – stymied.
Come out for a cigarette.’

‘People are coming back.
Prepare yourself to point me the
moral of the next act. At present I
don’t see any.’

‘Wait!’...

Dinny drew in her breath.

‘That’s terrible. I can just
remember the *Titanic*. Awful, the
waste in the world!’

‘You’re right.’

‘Waste of life, and waste of love.’

‘Have *you* come up against much waste?’

‘Yes.’

‘You don’t care to talk about it?’

‘No.’

‘I don’t believe that your sister’s going to be wasted. She’s too vivid.’

‘Yes, but her head’s in chancery.’

‘She’ll duck from under.’

‘I can’t bear to think of her life being spoiled. Isn’t there some legal dodge, Mr Dornford; without publicity, I mean?’

‘If he would give cause, there need be very little of that.’

‘He won’t. He’s feeling vindictive.’

‘I see. Then I’m afraid there’s nothing for it but to wait. These things generally disentangle themselves. Catholics are not supposed to believe in divorce. But if *you* feel this is a case for one –’

‘Clare’s only twenty-four. She can’t live alone the rest of her life.’

‘Were *you* thinking of doing that?’

‘I! That’s different.’

‘Yes, you’re very unlike, but to

have you wasted would be far worse. Just as much worse as wasting a lovely day in winter is than wasting one in summer.’

‘The curtain’s going up.’...

‘I wonder,’ muttered Clare: ‘It didn’t look to me as if their love would have lasted long. They were eating each other like sugar.’

‘My God, if you and I on that boat had been –’

‘You’re very young, Tony.’

‘Two years older than you.’

‘And about ten years younger.’

‘Don’t you really believe in love lasting, Clare?’

‘Not passion. And after that generally the deluge. Only with those two on the *Titanic* it came too soon. A *cold* sea! Ugh!’

‘Let me pull your cloak up.’

‘I don’t believe I like this show too frightfully, Tony. It digs into you, and I don’t want to be dug into.’

‘I liked it better the first time, certainly.’

‘Thank you!’

‘It’s being close to you, and not close enough. But the war part of the play’s the best.’

‘The whole thing makes me feel I

don't want to be alive.'

'That's "the satire." '

'One half of him is mocking the other. It gives me the fidgets. Too like oneself.'

'I wish we'd gone to a movie, I could have held your hand.'

'Dornford's looking at Dinny as if she were the Madonna of the future that he wanted to make a Madonna of the past.'

'So he does, you say.'

'He really has a nice face. I wonder what he'll think of the war part. "Weigh-hey! Up she rises!" '...

Dinny sat with closed eyes,

acutely feeling the remains of moisture on her cheeks.

‘But she never would have done that,’ she said, huskily, ‘not waved a flag and cheered. Never! She might have mixed in the crowd, but never that!’

‘No, that’s a stage touch. Pity! But a jolly good act. Really good!’

‘These poor gay raddled singing girls, getting more and more wretched and raddled, and that “Tipperary” whistling! The war must have been *awful!*’

‘One got sort of exalted.’

‘Did that feeling last?’

‘In a way. Does that seem rather horrible to you?’

‘I never can judge what people ought to feel. I’ve heard my brother say something of the kind.’

‘It wasn’t the “Into Battle” feeling either – I’m not the fighting man. It’s a cliché to say it was the biggest thing that will ever be in one’s life.’

‘You still feel that?’

‘It has been up to now. But – ! I must tell you while I’ve a chance – I’m in love with you, Dinny. I know nothing about you, you know nothing about me. That doesn’t

make any difference. I fell in love with you at once; it's been getting deeper ever since. I don't expect you to say anything, but you might think about it now and then....'

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

'Did people really go on like that at the Armistice? Tony! Did people —?'

'What?'

'Really go on like that?'

'I don't know.'

'Where were you?'

'At Wellington, my first term. My father was killed in the war.'

'Oh! I suppose mine might have

been, and my brother. But even then! Dinny says my mother cried when the Armistice came.'

'So did mine, I believe.'

'The bit I liked best was that between the son and the girl. But the whole thing makes you feel too much. Take me out, I want a cigarette. No, we'd better not. One always meets people.'

'Damn!'

'Coming here with you was the limit. I've promised solemnly not to give offence for a whole year. Oh! cheer up! You'll see lots of me....'

' "Greatness, and dignity, and

peace,” ’ murmured Dinny,
standing up, ‘and the greatest of
these is “dignity.” ’

‘The hardest to come by,
anyway.’

‘That girl singing in the night
club, and the jazzed sky! Thank
you awfully, Mr Dornford. I shan’t
forget this play easily.’

‘Nor what I said to you?’

‘It was very sweet of you, but
the aloe only blooms once in a
hundred years.’

‘I can wait. It’s been a wonderful
evening for me.’

‘Those two!’

‘We’ll pick them up in the hall.’

‘Do you think England ever had greatness and dignity and peace?’

‘No.’

‘But “There’s a green hill far away, without a city wall.” Thank you – I’ve had this cloak three years.’

‘Charming it is!’

‘I suppose most of these people will go on to night clubs now.’

‘Not five per cent.’

‘I should like a sniff of home air tonight, and a long look at the stars....’

Clare turned her head.

‘Don’t, Tony!’

‘How then?’

‘You’ve been with me all the evening.’

‘If only I could take you home!’

‘You can’t, my dear. Squeeze my little finger, and pull yourself together.’

‘Clare!’

‘Look! They’re just in front – now vanish! Get a good long drink at the Club and dream of horses. There! Was that close enough? Good night, dear Tony!’

‘God! Good night!’

Chapter Fifteen



TIME has been compared with a stream, but it differs – you cannot cross it, grey and even-flowing, wide as the world itself, having neither ford nor bridge; and though, according to philosophers, it may flow both up and down, the calendar as yet follows it but one way.

November, then, became December, but December did not become November. Except for a cold snap or two the weather remained mild. Unemployment

decreased; the adverse balance of trade increased; seven foxes escaped for every one killed; the papers fluttered from the storms in their tea-cups; a great deal of income tax was paid; still more was not; the question: 'Why has prosperity gone to pot?' continued to bewilder every mind; the pound went up, the pound went down. In short, time flowed, but the conundrum of existence remained unsolved.

At Condaford the bakery scheme was dropped. Every penny that could be raised was to be put into pigs, poultry and potatoes. Sir

Lawrence and Michael were now deep in the 'Three P. Plan,' and Dinny had become infected. She and the General spent all their days preparing for the millennium which would follow its adoption. Eustace Dornford had expressed his adherence to the proposition. Figures had been prepared to show that in ten years one hundred millions a year could be knocked off Britain's purchasing bill by graduated prohibition of the import of these three articles of food, without increasing the cost of living. With a little organization, a fractional change in the nature of

the Briton, and the increase of wheat offals, the thing was as good as done. In the meantime, the General borrowed slightly on his life assurance policy and paid his taxes.

The new Member, visiting his constituency, spent Christmas at Condaford, talking almost exclusively of pigs, instinct telling him that they were just then the surest line of approach to Dinny's heart. Clare, too, spent Christmas at home. How, apart from secretarial duties, she had spent the intervening time, was tacitly assumed. No letter had come from

Jerry Corven, but it was known from the papers that he was back in Ceylon. During the days between Christmas and the New Year the habitable part of the old house was full: Hilary, his wife, and their daughter Monica; Adrian and Diana, with Sheila and Ronald, now recovered from the measles – no such family gathering had been held for years. Even Sir Lionel and Lady Alison drove down for lunch on New Year's Eve. With such an overwhelming Conservative majority it was felt that 1932 would be important. Dinny was run off her legs. She gave no sign

of it, but had less an air of living in the past. So much was she the party's life and soul that no one could have told she had any of her own. Dornford gazed at her in speculation. What was behind that untiring cheerful selflessness? He went so far as to ask of Adrian, who seemed to be her favourite.

‘This house wouldn't work without your niece, Mr Cherrell.’

‘It wouldn't. Dinny's a wonder.’

‘Doesn't she ever think of herself?’

Adrian looked at him sideways. The pale-brown, rather hollow-

cheeked face, with its dark hair, and hazel eyes, was sympathetic; for a lawyer and a politician, he looked sensitive. Inclined, however, to a sheepdog attitude where Dinny was concerned, he answered with caution:

‘Why no, no more than reason; indeed, not so much.’

‘She looks to me sometimes as if she’d been through something pretty bad.’

Adrian shrugged. ‘She’s twenty-seven.’

‘Would you mind awfully telling me what it was? This isn’t

curiosity. I'm – well, I'm in love with her, and terrified of butting in and hurting her through ignorance.'

Adrian took a long gurgling pull at his pipe.

'If you're in dead earnest –'

'Absolutely dead earnest.'

'It might save her a pang or two. She was terribly in love, the year before last, and it came to a tragic end.'

'Death?'

'No. I can't tell you the exact story, but the man had done something that placed him, in a

sense – or at all events he thought so – outside the pale; and he put an end to their engagement rather than involve Dinny, and went off to the Far East. It was a complete cut. Dinny has never spoken of it since, but I'm afraid she'll never forget.'

'I see. Thank you very much. You've done me a great service.'

'Sorry if it's hurt,' murmured Adrian; 'but better, perhaps, to have one's eyes open.'

'Much.'

Resuming the tune on his pipe, Adrian stole several glances at his

silent neighbour. That averted face wore an expression not exactly dashed or sad, but as if contending deeply with the future. 'He's the nearest approach,' he thought, 'to what I should like for her – sensitive, quiet, and plucky. But things are always so damnably perverse!'

'She's very different from her sister,' he said at last.

Dornford smiled.

'Ancient and modern.'

'Clare's a pretty creature, though.'

'Oh, yes, and lots of qualities.'

‘They’ve both got grit. How does she do her work?’

‘Very well; quick in the uptake’, good memory, heaps of *savoir-faire*.’

‘Pity she’s in such a position. I don’t know why things went wrong, and I don’t see how they can come right.’

‘I’ve never met Corven.’

‘Quite nice to meet; but, by the look of him, a streak of cruelty.’

‘Dinny says he’s vindictive.’

Adrian nodded. ‘I should think so. And that’s bad when it comes to divorce. But I hope it won’t – always a dirty business, and

probably the wrong person tarred. I don't remember a divorce in our family.'

'Nor in mine, but we're Catholics.'

'Judging by your experience in the Courts, should you say English morality is going downhill?'

'No. On the upgrade, if anything.'

'But surely the standard is slacker?'

'People are franker, not quite the same thing.'

'You lawyers and judges, at all events,' said Adrian, 'are

exceptionally moral men.’

‘Oh! Where did you get that from?’

‘The papers.’

Dornford laughed.

‘Well!’ said Adrian, rising. ‘Let’s have a game of billiards....’

On the Monday after New Year’s Day the party broke up. In the afternoon Dinny lay down on her bed and went to sleep. The grey light failed and darkness filled her room. She dreamed she was on the bank of a river. Wilfrid was holding her hand, pointing to the far side, and saying: ‘ “One more

river, one more river to cross!” ’
Hand in hand they went down the bank. In the water all became dark! She lost touch of his hand and cried out in terror. Losing her foothold, she drifted, reaching her hands this way and that, and his voice, further and further away, ‘ “One more river – one more river,” ’ died to a sigh. She awoke agonized. Through the window opposite was the dark sky, the elm tree brushing at the stars – no sound, no scent, no colour. And she lay quite still, drawing deep breaths to get the better of her anguish. It was long since she had

felt Wilfrid so close to her, or been so poignantly bereaved once more.

She got up, and, having bathed her face in cold water, stood at her window looking into the starry dark, still shuddering a little from the vivid misery of her dream. ‘One more river!’

Someone tapped on the door.

‘Yes?’

‘It’s old Mrs Purdy, Miss Dinny. They say she’s going fast. The doctor’s there, but –’

‘Betty! Does Mother know?’

‘Yes, miss, she’s going over.’

‘No! I’ll go. Stop her, Annie!’

‘Yes, miss. It’s a seizure – nurse sent over to say they can’t do nothing. Will you have the light on, miss?’

‘Yes, turn it up.’

Thank God they had managed to put the electric light in, at last!

‘Get me this little flask filled with brandy, and put my rubber boots in the hall. I shan’t be two minutes coming down.’

‘Yes, miss.’

Slipping on a jersey and cap, and catching up her mole-skin fur coat, she ran downstairs, stopping for a second at her mother’s door to

say she was going. Putting on her rubber boots in the hall, and taking the filled flask, she went out. It was groping dark, but not cold for January. The lane was slithery under foot, and, since she had no torch, the half mile took her nearly a quarter of an hour. The doctor's car, with its lights on, stood outside the cottage. Unlatching the door, Dinny went into the ground-floor room. There was a fire burning, and one candle alight, but the crowded homely space was deserted by all but the goldfinch in its large cage. She opened the thin door that shut the stairs off, and

went up. Pushing the feeble top door gently, she stood looking. A lamp was burning on the window-sill opposite, and the low, sagging-ceilinged room had a shadowy radiance. At the foot of the double bed were the doctor and village nurse, talking in low tones. In the window corner Dinny could see the little old husband crouched on a chair, with his hands on his knees and his crumpled, cherry-cheeked face trembling and jerking slightly. The old cottage woman lay humped in the old bed; her face was waxen, and seemed to Dinny to have lost already almost all its

wrinkles. A faint stertorous breathing came from her lips. The eyes were not quite closed, but surely were not seeing.

The doctor crossed to the door.

‘Opiate,’ he said. ‘I don’t think she’ll recover consciousness. Just as well for the poor old soul! If she does, nurse has another to give her at once. There’s nothing to be done but ease the end.’

‘I shall stay,’ said Dinny.

The doctor took her hand.

‘Happy release. Don’t fret, my dear.’

‘Poor old Benjy!’ whispered

Dinny.

The doctor pressed her hand, and went down the stairs.

Dinny entered the room; the air was close, and she left the door ajar.

‘I’ll watch, nurse, if you want to get anything.’

The nurse nodded. In her neat dark blue dress and bonnet she looked, but for a little frown, almost inhumanly impassive. They stood side by side gazing at the old woman’s waxen face.

‘Not many like her,’ whispered the nurse suddenly. ‘I’m going to

get some things I'll want – back under the half-hour. Sit down, Miss Cherrell, don't tire yourself.'

When she had gone Dinny turned and went up to the old husband in the corner.

'Benjy.'

He wobbled his pippin head, rubbing his hands on his knees. Words of comfort refused to come to Dinny. Just touching his shoulder, she went back to the bed and drew up the one hard wooden chair. She sat, silently watching old Betty's lips, whence issued that faintly stertorous breathing. It seemed to her as if the spirit of a

far-off age were dying. There might be other people as old still alive in the village, but they weren't like old Betty, with her simple sense and thrifty order, her Bible-reading and love of gentry, her pride in her eighty-three years, in the teeth that she ought long since to have parted from, and in her record; with her shrewdness and her way of treating her old husband as if he were her rather difficult son. Poor old Benjy – he was not her equal by any manner of means, but what he would do alone one couldn't think. Perhaps one of his granddaughters would find room for him. Those

two had brought up seven children in the old days when a shilling fortunately went as far as three now, and the village was full of their progeny; but how would they like little old Benjy, still argumentative and fond of a grumble and a glass, ensconced by their more modern hearths? Well, a nook would turn up for him somewhere. He could never live on here, alone. Two old age pensions for two old people made just the difference as against one for one.

‘How I wish I had money!’ she thought. He would not want the goldfinch, anyway. She would take

that, and free and feed it in the old greenhouse till it got used to its wings, and then let it go.

The old man cleared his throat in his dim corner. Dinny started and leaned forward. Absorbed in her thoughts, she had not noticed how faint the breathing had become. The pale lips of the old woman were nearly closed now, the wrinkled lids almost fast over the unseeing eyes. No noise was coming from the bed. For a few minutes she sat looking, listening; then passed round to the side and leaned over.

Gone? As if in answer the

eyelids flickered; the faintest imaginable smile appeared on the lips, and then, suddenly as a blown-out flame is dark, all was lifeless. Dinny held her breath. It was the first human death she had seen. Her eyes, glued to the old waxen face, saw it settle into its mask of release, watched it being embalmed in that still dignity which marks death off from life. With her finger she smoothed the eyelids.

Death! At its quietest and least harrowing, but yet – death! The old, the universal anodyne; the common lot! In this bed where she

had lain nightly for over fifty years under the low, sagged ceiling, a great little old lady had passed. Of what was called 'birth,' of position, wealth, and power, she had none. No plumbing had come her way, no learning, and no fashion. She had borne children, nursed, fed, and washed them, sewn, cooked, and swept, eaten little, travelled not at all in all her years, suffered much pain, never known the ease of superfluity; but her back had been straight, her ways straight, her eyes quiet, and her manners gentle. If she were not the 'great lady,' who was?

Dinny stood, with her head bowed, feeling this to the very marrow of her soul. Old Benjy in that dim corner cleared his throat again. She started, and, trembling a little, went over to him.

‘Go and look at her, Benjy; she’s asleep.’

She put her hand under his elbow to help the action of his stiffened knees. At his full height he was only up to her shoulder, a little dried-up pippin of a man. She kept at his side, moving across the room.

Together they looked down at the forehead and cheeks, slowly

uncreasing in the queer beauty of death. The little old husband's face went crimson and puffy, like that of a child who had lost its doll; he said in a sort of angered squeak:

‘Eh! She’m not asleep. She’m gone. She won’t never speak agen. Look! She an’t Mother no more! Where’s that nurse? She didn’ ought to ’ave left ’er –’

‘H’ssh! Benjy!’

‘But she’m dead. What’ll I do?’

He turned his withered apple face up to Dinny, and there came from him an unwashed odour, as of grief and snuff and old potatoes.

‘Can’t stop ’ere,’ he said, ‘with Mother like that. ’Tain’t nateral.’

‘No; go downstairs and smoke your pipe, and tell nurse when she comes.’

‘Tell ’er; I’ll tell ’er – shoulden never ’ave left ’er. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!’

Putting her hand on his shoulders, Dinny guided him to the stairway, and watched him stumbling and groping and grieving his way down. Then she went back to the bed. The smoothed-out face had an uncanny attraction for her. With every minute that passed it seemed the

more to proclaim superiority. Almost triumphant it was, as she gazed, in its slow, sweet relaxation after age and pain; character revealed in the mould of that brief interval between torturing life and corrupting death. 'Good as gold!' Those were the words they should grave on the humble stone they would put over her. Wherever she was now, or whether, indeed, she was anywhere, did not matter. She had done her bit. Betty!

She was still standing there gazing when the nurse came back.

Chapter Sixteen



SINCE her husband's departure Clare had met young Croom constantly, but always at the stipulated arm's-length. Love had made him unsociable, and to be conspicuously in his company was unwise, so she did not make him known to her friends; they met where they could eat cheaply, see films, or simply walk. To her rooms she had not invited him again, nor had he asked to come. His behaviour, indeed, was exemplary, except when he fell into tense and painful

silences, or gazed at her till her hands itched to shake him. He seemed to have paid several visits to Jack Muskham's stud farm, and to be spending hours over books which debated whether the excellence of 'Eclipse' was due to the Lister Turk, rather than to the Darley Arabian, and whether it were preferable to breed-in to Blacklock with St Simon on Speculum or with Speculum on St Simon.

When she returned from Condaford after the New Year, she had not heard from him for five consecutive days, so that he was

bulking more largely in her thoughts.

DEAR TONY, [she wrote to him at the Coffee House:]

Where and how are you? I am back. Very happy New Year!

Yours always,

CLARE

The answer did not come for three days, during which she felt at first huffy, then anxious, and finally a little scared. It was indited from the inn at Bablock Hythe:

DARLING CLARE, –

I was ever so relieved to get your note, because I'd determined not to write until I heard from you. Nothing's further from my thoughts

than to bore you with myself, and sometimes I don't know whether I am or not. So far as a person can be who is not seeing you, I'm all right; I'm overlooking the fitting up of the boxes for those mares. They (the boxes) will be prime. The difficulty is going to be acclimatization; it's supposed to be mild here, and the pasture looks as if it would be tip-top. This part of the world is quite pretty, especially the river. Thank God the inn's cheap, and I can live indefinitely on eggs and bacon. Jack Muskham has been brick enough to start my salary from the New Year, so I'm thinking of laying out my remaining sixty-odd pounds on Stapylton's old two-seater. He's just off back to India. Once I'm down here it'll be vital to have a car if I'm to see anything of you, without which life won't be worth living. I hope you had a splendid time at Condaford. Do you know I haven't seen you for sixteen days, and am absolutely starving. I'll be up on Saturday afternoon. Where can I meet you?

Your ever devoted

TONY

Clare read this letter on the sofa in her room, frowning a little as she opened, smiling a little as she finished it.

Poor dear Tony! Grabbing a telegraph form, she wrote:

Come to tea Melton Mews. – C.

and dispatched it on her way to the Temple.

The importance attaching to the meeting of two young people depends on the importance which others attach to their not meeting. Tony Croom approached Melton Mews without thinking of anyone but Clare, and failed to observe a

shortish man in horn-rimmed spectacles, black boots, and a claret-coloured tie, who looked like the secretary of a learned society. Unobtrusive and unobserved, this individual had already travelled with him from Bablock Hythe to Paddington, from Paddington to the 'Coffee House', from the 'Coffee House' to the corner of Melton Mews; had watched him enter No. 2, made an entry in a pocket-book, and with an evening paper in his hand was now waiting for him to come out again. With touching fidelity he read no news, keeping his prominent glance on that

peacock-blue door, prepared at any moment to close himself like an umbrella and vanish into the streetscape. And while he waited (which was his normal occupation) he thought, like other citizens, of the price of living, of the cup of tea which he would like, of his small daughter and her collection of foreign stamps, and of whether he would now have to pay income tax. His imagination dwelled, also, on the curves of a young woman at the tobacconist's where he obtained his 'gasps'.

His name was Chayne, and he made his living out of a remarkable

memory for faces, inexhaustible patience, careful entries in his pocket-book, the faculty of self-obliteration, and that fortunate resemblance to the secretaries of learned societies. He was, indeed, employed by the Polteed Agency, who made their living by knowing more than was good for those about whom they knew it. Having received his instruction on the day Clare returned to London, he had already been five days 'on the job', and no one knew it except his employer and himself. Spying on other people being, according to the books he read, the chief

occupation of the people of these islands, it had never occurred to him to look down on a profession conscientiously pursued for seventeen years. He took a pride in his work, and knew himself for a capable 'sleuth'. Though somewhat increasingly troubled in the bronchial regions owing to the draughts he had so often to stand in, he could not by now imagine any other way of passing his time, or any, on the whole, more knowing method of gaining a livelihood. Young Croom's address he had obtained by the simple expedient of waiting behind Clare

while she sent her telegram; but, having just failed to read the message itself, he had started at once for Bablock Hythe, since when until now he had experienced no difficulty. Shifting his position from time to time at the end of the street, he entered the Mews itself when it became dark. At half-past five the peacock door was opened and the two young people emerged. They walked, and Mr Chayne walked behind them. They walked fast, and Mr Chayne, with an acquired sense of rhythm, at exactly the same pace. He soon perceived that they were merely

going to where he had twice followed Lady Corven already – the Temple. And this gave him a sense of comfort, because of the cup of tea he pined for. Picking his way in and out among the backs of people large enough to screen him, he watched them enter Middle Temple Lane, and part at Harcourt Buildings. Having noted that Lady Corven went in, and that the young man began parading slowly between the entrance and the Embankment, he looked at his watch, doubled back into the Strand, and bolted into an A.B.C. with the words ‘Cup of tea and

Bath bun, miss, please.' While waiting for these he made a prolonged entry in his pocket-book. Then, blowing on his tea, he drank it from the saucer, ate half the bun, concealed the other half in his hand, paid, and re-entered the Strand. He had just finished the bun when he regained the entrance to the Lane. The young man was still parading slowly. Mr Chayne waited for his back view, and, assuming the air of a belated solicitor's clerk, bolted down past the entrance to Harcourt Buildings into the Inner Temple. There, in a doorway, he scrutinized names

until Clare came out. Rejoined by young Croom, she walked up towards the Strand, and Mr Chayne walked too. When, shortly, they took tickets for a cinema, he also took a ticket and entered the row behind. Accustomed to the shadowing of people on their guard, the open innocence they were displaying excited in him a slightly amused if not contemptuous compassion.

‘Regular babes in the wood’ they seemed to him. He could not tell whether their feet were touching, and passed behind to note the position of their hands. It seemed

satisfactory, and he took an empty seat nearer to the gangway. Sure of them now for a couple of hours, he settled down to smoke, feel warm, and enjoy the film. It was one of sport and travel in Africa, where the two principals were always in positions of danger, recorded by the camera of someone who must surely have been in a position of still greater danger. Mr Chayne listened to their manly American voices saying to each other: 'Gee! He's on us!' with an interest which never prevented his knowing that his two young people were listening too. When the lights went

up he could see their profiles. 'We're all young at times,' he thought, and his imagination dwelled more intensively on the young lady at his tobacconist's. They looked so settled-in that he took the opportunity to slip out for a moment. It might not occur again for a long time. In his opinion one of the chief defects in detective stories – for he was given to busmen's holidays – was that authors made their 'sleuths' like unto the angels, watching for days without, so to speak, taking their eyes off the ball. It was not so in real life.

He returned to a seat almost behind his young couple on the other side just before the lights went down. One of his favourite stars was now to be featured, and, sure that she would be placed in situations which would enable him to enjoy her to the full, he put a peppermint lozenge in his mouth and leaned back with a sigh. He had not had an evening watch so pleasant for a long time. It was not always 'beer and skittles' at this season of the year; a 'proper chilly job sometimes – no error'.

After ten minutes, during which his star had barely got into her

evening clothes, his couple rose.

‘Can’t stand any more of her voice,’ he heard Lady Corven say; and the young man answering: ‘Ghastly!’

Wounded and surprised, Mr Chayne waited for them to pass through the curtains before, with a profound sigh, he followed. In the Strand they stood debating, then walked again, but only into a restaurant across the street. Here, buying himself another paper at the door, he saw them going up the stairs. Would it be a private room? He ascended the stairs cautiously. No, it was the gallery! There they

were, nicely screened by the pillars, four tables in!

Descending to the lavatory, Mr Chayne changed his horn spectacles to pince-nez and his claret-coloured tie to a rather floppy bow of black and white. This was a device which had often served him in good stead. You put on a tie of conspicuous colour, then changed it to a quieter one of a different shape. A conspicuous tie had the special faculty of distracting attention from a face. You became 'that man with the awful tie!' and when you no longer wore the tie, you were to all

intends someone else. Going up again to a table which commanded a view, he ordered himself a mixed grill and pint of stout. They were likely to be some two hours over their meal, so he assumed a literary air, taking out a pouch to roll himself a cigarette and inviting the waiter to give him a light for it. Having in this way established a claim to a life of his own, he read his paper like any gentleman at large and examined the mural paintings. They were warm and glowing; large landscapes with blue skies, seas, palms, and villas, suggestive of pleasure in a way

that appealed to him strongly. He had never been further than Boulogne, and, so far as he could see, never would. Five hundred pounds, a lady, a suite in the sun, and gaming tables handy, was not unnaturally his idea of heaven; but, alas, as unattainable. He made no song about it, but, when confronted with allurements like these on the wall, he could not help hankering. It had often struck him as ironical that the people he watched into the Divorce Court so often went to Paradise and stayed there until their cases had blown over and they could marry and

come to earth again. Living in Finchley, with the sun once a fortnight and an income averaging perhaps five hundred a year, the vein of poetry in him was damned almost at source; and it was in some sort a relief to let his imagination play around the lives of those whom he watched. That young couple over there, 'good-lookers' both of them, would go back together in a taxi; as likely as not he'd have to wait hours for the young man to come away. The mixed grill was put before him, and he added a little red pepper in view of his probable future. This bit

of watching however, and perhaps another one or two, ought to do the trick; and on the whole 'easy money'. Slowly savouring each mouthful so that it might nourish him, and blowing the froth off his stout with the skill of a connoisseur, he watched them bending forward to talk across the table. What they were eating he could not see. To have followed their meal in detail would have given him some indication of their states of mind. Food and love! After this grill he would have cheese and coffee, and put them down to 'expenses'.

He had eaten every crumb, extracted all the information from his paper, exhausted his imagination on the mural paintings, 'placed' the scattered diners, paid his bill, and smoked three 'gaspers' before his quarry rose. He was into his overcoat and outside the entrance before they had even reached the stairs. Noting three taxis within hail, he bent his attention on the hoardings of an adjoining theatre; till he saw the porter beckon one of them, then, walking into the middle of the Strand, he took the one behind it.

'Wait till that cab starts and

follow it,' he said to the driver, 'not too close when it stops.'

Taking his seat, he looked at his watch and made an entry in his pocket-book. Having before now followed a wrong cab at some expense, he kept his eyes glued on the taxi's number, which he had noted in his book. The traffic was but thin at this hour before the theatres rose, and the procession simplicity itself. The followed cab stopped at the corner of the Mews. Mr Chayne tapped the glass and fell back on the seat. Through the window he saw them get out and the young man paying. They

walked down the Mews. Mr Chayne also paid and followed to the corner. They had reached the peacock door and stood there, talking. Then Lady Corven put her key into the lock and opened the door; the young man, glancing this way and that, followed her in. Mr Chayne experienced a sensation as mixed as his grill. It was, of course, exactly what he had hoped for and expected. At the same time it meant loitering about in the cold for goodness knew how long. He turned up his coat collar and looked for a convenient doorway. A thousand pities that he could not

wait, say half an hour, and just walk in. The Courts were very particular nowadays about conclusive evidence. He had something of the feeling that a 'sportsman' has, seeing a fox go to ground and not a spade within five miles. He stood for a few minutes, reading over the entries in his pocket-book under the lamp, and making a final note; then walked to the doorway he had selected and stood there. In half an hour or so the cars would be coming back from the theatre, and he would have to be on the move to escape attention. There was a light in the

upstairs window, but in itself, of course, that was not evidence. Too bad! Twelve shillings the return ticket, ten and six the night down there, cabs seven and six; cinema three and six, dinner six bob – he wouldn't charge the tea – thirty-nine and six – say two pounds! Mr Chayne shook his head, put a peppermint lozenge in his mouth, and changed his feet. That corn of his was beginning to shoot a bit. He thought of pleasant things: Broadstairs, his small daughter's black hair, oyster patties, his favourite 'star' in little but a corset belt, and his own nightcap of hot

whisky and lemon. All to small purpose; for he was waiting and waiting on feet that ached, and without any confidence that he was collecting anything of real value. The Courts, indeed, had got into such a habit of expecting the parties to be 'called with a cup of tea' that anything short of it was looked upon as suspect. He took out his watch again. He had been here over half an hour. And here came the first car! He must get out of the Mews! He withdrew to its far end. And then almost before he had time to turn his back there came the young man with his hands

thrust deep into his pockets, and his shoulders hunched, hurrying away. Heaving a sigh of relief, Mr Chayne noted in his pocket-book: 'Mr C. left at 11.40 p.m.'; and walked towards his Finchley bus.

Chapter Seventeen



THOUGH Dinny had no expert knowledge of pictures, she had, with Wilfrid, made an intensive examination of such as were on permanent show in London. She had also enjoyed extremely the Italian Exhibition of 1930. It was, therefore, natural to accept her Uncle Adrian's invitation to accompany him to the French Exhibition of 1932. After a syncopated lunch in Piccadilly they passed through the turnstile at one o'clock on January the 22nd, and

took stand before the Primitives. Quite a number of people were emulating their attempt to avoid the crowd, so that their progress was slow, and it was an hour before they had reached the Watteaus.

‘ “Gilles,” ’ said Adrian, resting one leg; ‘that strikes me as about the best picture yet, Dinny. It’s queer – when a genre painter of the decorative school gets hold of a subject or a type that grips him, how thoroughly he’ll stir you up. Look at the pierrot’s face – what a brooding, fateful, hiding-up expression! There’s the public

performer, with the private life, incarnate!’

Dinny remained silent.

‘Well, young woman?’

‘I was wondering whether art was so conscious. Don’t you think he just wanted to paint that white dress, and his model did the rest? It’s a marvellous expression, but perhaps he had it. People do.’

Adrian noted her face with the tail of his eye. Yes! People did. Paint her in repose, render her when she wasn’t aware of how she was looking, of keeping her end up, or whatever you might call it,

and wouldn't you have a face that stirred you with all that lay behind it? Art was unsatisfactory. When it gave you the spirit, distilled the essence, it didn't seem real; and when it gave you the gross, cross-currented, contradictory surface, it didn't seem worth while. Attitudes, fleeting expressions, tricks of light – all by way of being 'real', and nothing revealed! He said suddenly:

‘Great books and portraits are so dashed rare, because artists won't high-light the essential, or if they do, they overdo it.’

‘I don't see how that applies to

this picture, Uncle. It's not a portrait, it's a dramatic moment and a white dress.'

'Perhaps! All the same, if I could paint you, Dinny, as you truly are, people would say you weren't real.'

'How fortunate!'

'Most people can't even imagine you.'

'Forgive impertinence, Uncle, but – can *you*?'

Adrian wrinkled up his goatee.

'I like to think so.'

'Oh, look! There's the Boucher Pompadour!'

After two minutes in front of its

expanse Adrian continued:

‘Well, for a man who preferred it nude, he could paint what covers the female body pretty well, couldn’t he?’

‘Maintenon and Pompadour. I always get them mixed.’

‘The Maintenon wore blue stockings, and ministered to Louis the XIVth.’

‘Oh, yes! Let’s go straight from here to the Manets, Uncle.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t think I shall last much longer.’

Adrian, glancing round,

suddenly saw why. In front of the Gilles were standing Clare and a young man whom he did not know. He put his arm through Dinny's and they passed into the next room but one.

‘I noticed your discretion,’ he murmured, in front of the ‘Boy Blowing Bubbles’. ‘Is that young man a snake in the grass, or a worm in the bud, or –?’

‘A very nice boy.’

‘What’s his name?’

‘Tony Croom.’

‘Oh! the young man on the ship? Does Clare see much of him?’

‘I don’t ask her, Uncle. She is guaranteed to behave for a year;’ and, at the cock of Adrian’s eyebrow, added: ‘She promised Aunt Em.’

‘And after the year?’

‘I don’t know, nor does she. Aren’t these Manets good?’

They passed slowly through the room and came to the last.

‘To think that Gauguin struck me as the cream of eccentricity in 1910,’ murmured Adrian; ‘it shows how things move. I went to that post-impressionist exhibition straight from looking at the

Chinese pictures in the B. M. Cézanne, Matisse, Gauguin, Van Gogh – the last word then, hoary now. Gauguin certainly *is* a colourist. But give me the Chinese still. I fear I'm fundamentally of the old order, Dinny.'

'I can see these are good – most of them; but I couldn't live with them.'

'The French have their uses; no other country can show you the transitions of art so clearly. From the Primitives to Clouet, from Clouet to Poussin and Claude, from them to Watteau and his school, thence to Boucher and Greuze, on

to Ingres and Delacroix, to the Barbizon lot, to the Impressionists, to the Post-Impressionists; and always some bloke – Chardin, Lépicié, Fragonard, Manet, Degas, Monet, Cézanne – breaking away or breaking through towards the next.’

‘Has there ever before been such a violent break as just lately?’

‘There’s never before been such a violent break in the way people look at life; nor such complete confusion in the minds of artists as to what they exist for.’

‘And what *do* they exist for, Uncle?’

‘To give pleasure or reveal truth, or both.’

‘I can’t imagine myself enjoying what they enjoy, and – what is truth?’

Adrian turned up his thumbs.

‘Dinny, I’m tired as a dog. Let’s slip out.’

Dinny saw her sister and young Croom passing through the archway. She was not sure whether Clare had noticed them, and young Croom was clearly noticing nothing but Clare. She followed Adrian out, in her turn admiring his discretion. But neither of them

would admit uneasiness. With whom one went about was now so entirely one's own business.

They had walked up the Burlington Arcade, when Adrian was suddenly startled by the pallor of her face.

‘What’s the matter, Dinny? You look like a ghost!’

‘If you don’t mind, Uncle, I’d like a cup of coffee.’

‘There’s a place in Bond Street.’ Scared by the bloodlessness of her smiling lips, he held her arm firmly till they were seated at a little table round the corner.

‘Two coffees – extra strong,’ said Adrian, and with that instinctive consideration which caused women and children to confide in him, he made no attempt to gain her confidence.

‘Nothing so tiring as picture-gazing. I’m sorry to emulate Em and suspect you of not eating enough, my dear. That sort of sparrow-pecking we did before going in doesn’t really count.’ But colour had come back to her lips.

‘I’m very tough, Uncle; but food is rather a bore.’

‘You and I must go a little tour in France. Their grub can move

one's senses if their pictures can't move one's spirit.'

'Did you feel *that*?'

'Compared with the Italian – emphatically. It's all so beautifully thought out. They make their pictures like watches. Perfectly art-conscious and thorough workmen. Unreasonable to ask for more, and yet – perhaps fundamentally unpoetic. And that reminds me, Dinny, I do hope Clare can be kept out of the Divorce Court, for of all unpoetic places that is IT.'

Dinny shook her head.

'I'd rather she got it over. I even

think she was wrong to promise. She's not going to change her mind about Jerry. She'll be like a bird with one leg. Besides, who thinks the worse of you nowadays!'

Adrian moved uncomfortably.

'I dislike the thought of those hard-boiled fellows playing battledore with my kith and kin. If they were like Dornford – but they aren't. Seen anything more of him?'

'He was down with us for one night when he had to speak.'

He noticed that she spoke without 'batting an eyelid', as the

young men called it nowadays. And, soon after, they parted, Dinny assuring him that she had 'come over quite well again'.

He had said that she looked like a ghost; he might better have said she looked as if she had seen one. For, coming out of that Arcade, all her past in Cork Street had come fluttering like some lonely magpie towards her, beaten wings in her face and swerved away. And now, alone, she turned and walked back there. Resolutely she went to the door, climbed the stairs to Wilfrid's rooms, and rang the bell. Leaning against the window-sill on the

landing, she waited with clasped hands, thinking: 'I wish I had a muff!' Her hands felt so cold. In old pictures they stood with veils down and their hands in muffs; but 'the old order changeth,' and she had none. She was just going away when the door was opened. Stack! In slippers! His glance, dark and prominent as ever, fell to those slippers and his demeanour seemed to stammer.

'Pardon me, miss, I was just going to change 'em.'

Dinny held out her hand, and he took it with his old air, as if about to 'confess' her.

‘I was passing, and thought I’d like to ask how you were.’

‘Fine, thank you, miss! Hope you’ve been keeping well, and the dog?’

‘Quite well, both of us. Foch likes the country.’

‘Ah! Mr Desert always thought he was a country dog.’

‘Have you any news?’

‘Not to say news, miss. I understand from his bank that he’s still in Siam. They forward his letters to their branch in Bangkok. His lordship was here not long ago, and I understood him to say that

Mr Desert was up river somewhere.’

‘A river!’

‘The name escapes me, something with a “Yi” in it, and a “sang” – was it? I believe it’s very ’ot there. If I may say so, miss, you haven’t much colour considering the country. I was down home in Barnstaple at Christmas, and it did me a power of good.’

Dinny took his hand again.

‘I’m very glad to have seen you, Stack.’

‘Come in, miss. You’ll see I keep the room just as it was.’

Dinny followed to the doorway of the sitting-room.

‘Exactly the same, Stack; he might almost be there.’

‘I like to think so, miss.’

‘Perhaps he is,’ said Dinny. ‘They say we have astral bodies. Thank you.’ She touched his arm, passed him, and went down the stairs. Her face quivered and was still, and she walked rapidly away.

A river! Her dream! ‘One more river!’

In Bond Street a voice said: ‘Dinny!’ and she turned to see Fleur.

‘Whither away, my dear?
Haven’t seen you for an age. I’ve
just been to the French pictures.
Aren’t they divine? I saw Clare
there with a young man in tow.
Who is he?’

‘A shipmate – Tony Croom.’

‘More to come?’

Dinny shrugged, and, looking at
her trim companion, thought: ‘I
wish Fleur didn’t always go so
straight to the point.’

‘Any money?’

‘No. He’s got a job, but it’s very
slender – Mr Muskham’s Arab
mares.’

‘Oh! Three hundred a year – five at the outside. That’s no good at all. You know, really, she’s making a great mistake. Jerry Corven will go far.’

Dinny said drily: ‘Further than Clare, anyway.’

‘You mean it’s a complete breach?’

Dinny nodded. She had never been so near disliking Fleur.

‘Well, Clare’s not like you. She belongs to the new order, or disorder. That’s why it’s a mistake. She’d have a much better time if she stuck to Jerry, nominally at

least. I can't see her poor.'

'She doesn't care about money,' said Dinny coldly.

'Oh, nonsense! Money's only being able to do what you want to do. Clare certainly cares about that.'

Dinny, who knew that this was true, said, still more coldly:

'It's no good to try and explain.'

'My dear, there's nothing to explain. He's hurt her in some way, as, of course, he would. That's no reason in the long run. That perfectly lovely Renoir – the man and woman in the box! Those

people lived lives of their own – together. Why shouldn't Clare?'

‘Would you?’

Fleur gave a little shrug of her beautifully fitted shoulders.

‘If Michael wasn't such a dear. Besides – children.’ Again she gave that little shrug.

Dinny thawed. ‘You're a fraud, Fleur. You don't practise what you preach.’

‘My dear, my case is exceptional.’

‘So is everybody's.’

‘Well, don't let's squabble. Michael says your new Member,

Dornford, is after his own heart. They're working together on pigs, poultry, and potatoes. A great stunt, and the right end of the stick, for once.'

'Yes, we're going all out for pigs at Condaford. Is Uncle Lawrence doing anything at Lippinghall?'

'No. He invented the plan, so he thinks he's done his bit. Michael will make him do more when he's got time. Em is screamingly funny about it. How do you like Dornford?'

Asked this question twice in one morning, Dinny looked her cousin by marriage full in the face.

‘He seems to me almost a paragon.’

She felt Fleur’s hand slip suddenly under her arm.

‘I wish you’d marry him, Dinny dear. One doesn’t marry paragons, but I fancy one could “fault” him if one tried.’

It was Dinny’s turn to give a little shrug, looking straight before her.

Chapter Eighteen



THE third of February was a day so bland and of such springlike texture that the quickened blood demanded adventure.

This was why Tony Croom sent an early wire and set out at noon from Bablock Hythe in his old but newly-acquired two-seater. The car was not his 'dream,' but it could do fifty at the pinch he liked to give it. He took the nearest bridge, ran for Abingdon, and on past Benson to Henley. There he stopped to snatch a sandwich and 'fill up,' and again

on the bridge for a glimpse at the sunlit river softly naked below the bare woods. From there on he travelled by the clock, timing himself to reach Melton Mews at two o'clock.

Clare was not ready, having only just come in. He sat in the downstairs room, now furnished with three chairs, a small table, of quaint design, cheap owing to the slump in antiques, and an amethyst-coloured chased decanter containing sloe gin. Nearly half an hour he sat there before she came down the spiral stairs in fawn-coloured tweeds and hat, with a

calfskin fur coat over her arm.

‘Well, my dear! Sorry to have kept you. Where are we going?’

‘I thought you might care to have a look at Bablock Hythe. Then we might come back through Oxford, have high tea there, wander about a bit among the colleges, and be back here before eleven. That do?’

‘Perfect. And where will you sleep?’

‘I? Oh! tool along home again. I’d be there by one.’

‘Poor Tony! A hard day!’

‘Oh! Not two hundred and fifty

miles. You won't want your fur on yet, the car doesn't open – worse luck.'

They passed out at the westward mouth of the mews, narrowly missing a motor cyclist, and slid on towards the Park.

'She goes well, Tony.'

'Yes, she's an easy old thing, but I always feel she might bust at any moment. Stapylton gave her a terrible doing. And I don't like a light-coloured car.'

Clare leaned back, by the smile on her lips she was enjoying herself.

There was little conversation on that, the first long drive they had taken together. Both had the youthful love of speed, and young Croom got every ounce out of the car that the traffic would permit. They reached the last crossing of the river under two hours.

‘Here’s the inn where I dig,’ he said presently. ‘Would you like tea?’

‘Not wise, my dear. When I’ve seen the boxes and paddocks, we’ll get out of here to where you’re not known.’

‘I must just show you the river.’

Through its poplars and willow trees the white way of the river gleamed, faintly golden by the sunken sun. They got out to look. The lamb's tails on the hazels were very forward.

Clare twisted off a spray.

‘False spring. There’s a lot to come before the real spring yet.’

A current of chilly air came stealing down the river, and mist could be seen rising on the meadows beyond.

‘Only a ferry here, then, Tony?’

‘Yes, and a short cut into Oxford the other side, about five miles. I’ve

walked it once or twice: rather nice.'

'When the blossom and meadow flowers come, it'll be jolly. Come along! Just show me where the paddocks lie, and we'll get on to Oxford.'

They got back into the car.

'Won't you see the boxes?'

She shook her head.

'I'll wait till the mares are here. There's a subtle distinction between your bringing me to look at boxes and my coming to look at mares. Are they really from Nejd?'

'So Muskham swears. I shall

believe or not when I've seen the syces in charge of them.'

'What colour?'

'Two bays and a chestnut.'

The three paddocks sloped slightly towards the river and were sheltered by a long spinney.

'Ideal drainage and all the sun there is. The boxes are round that corner under the spinney. There's a good deal to do still; we're putting in a heater.'

'It's very quiet here.'

'Practically no cars on this road; motor cycles now and then – there's one now.'

A cycle came sputtering towards them, stopped, wrenched round, and went sputtering back.

‘Noisy brutes!’ murmured young Croom. ‘However, the mares will have had their baptism by the time they get here.’

‘What a change for them, poor dears!’

‘They’re all to be golden something: Golden Sand, Golden Houri, and Golden Hind, these three.’

‘I didn’t know Jack Muskham was a poet.’

‘It stops at horses, I think.’

‘Really marvellous, the stillness, Tony!’

‘Past five. The men have stopped work on my cottages – they’re converting.’

‘How many rooms?’

‘Four. Bedroom, sitting-room, kitchen, bathroom. But one could build on.’

He looked at her intently. But her face was averted.

‘Well,’ he said abruptly, ‘all aboard. We’ll get to Oxford before dark.’

Oxford – between lights, like all towns, at its worst – seemed to say:

‘Doomed to villadom, cars, and modernity, I am beyond your aid.’

To those two, hungry and connected with Cambridge, it offered little attraction till they were seated in the Mitre before anchovy sandwiches, boiled eggs, toast, muffins, scones, jam, and a large pot of tea. With every mouthful the romance of Oxford became apparent. This old inn, where they alone were eating, the shining fire, red curtains being drawn, the unexpected cosy solitude, prepared them to find it ‘marvellous’ when they should set forth. A motor cyclist in leather

overalls looked in and went away. Three undergraduates chirped in the doorway, selected a table for dinner, and passed on. Now and again a waitress renewed their toast or fiddled at some table. They were deliciously alone. Not till past seven did they rise.

‘Let’s scout,’ said Clare. ‘We’ve lots of time.’

The Oxford world was dining, and the streets were almost empty. They wandered at random, choosing the narrower ways and coming suddenly on colleges and long old walls. Nothing seemed modern now. The Past had them by

the throat. Dark towers, and old half-lit stone-work; winding, built in, glimpsy passages; the sudden spacious half-lighted gloom of a chanced-on quadrangle; chiming of clocks, and the feeling of a dark and old and empty town that was yet brimming with hidden modern life and light, kept them almost speechless; and, since they had never known their way, they were at once lost.

Young Croom had entwined her arm in his, and kept his step in time to hers. Neither of them was romantic, but both just then had a feeling as if they had wandered

into the maze of history.

‘I rather wish,’ said Clare, ‘that I’d been up here or at Cambridge.’

‘One never got a nooky feeling like this at Cambridge. In the dark this is much more medieval. There the colleges are together in a line. The “backs” lay over anything they’ve got here, but the old atmosphere here is far stronger.’

‘I believe I could have enjoyed the past. Palfreys and buff jerkins. You’d have looked divine, Tony, in a buff jerkin, and one of those caps with a long green feather.’

‘The present with you is good

enough for me. This is the longest time we've ever spent together without a break.'

'Don't get soppy. We're here to look at Oxford. Which way shall we go now?'

'All the same to me,' said his remote voice.

'Hurt? That's a big college! Let's go in.'

'They'll be coming out of hall. Past eight; we'd better stick to the streets.'

They wandered up the Cornmarket to the Broad, stood before the statues on the right, then

turned into a dim square with a circular building in the centre, a church at the end, and colleges for its side walls.

‘This must be the heart,’ said Clare. ‘Oxford certainly has its points. Whatever they do to the outside, I don’t see how they can spoil all this.’

With mysterious suddenness the town had come to life; youths were passing with short gowns over their arms, flapping free, or wound round their necks. Of one of them young Croom asked where they were.

‘That’s the Radcliffe. This is

Brasenose, and the High's down there.'

'And the Mitre?'

'To your right.'

'Thanks.'

'Not at all.'

He bent his uncapped head towards Clare and flapped on.

'Well, Tony?'

'Let's go in and have cocktails.'

A motorist, well capped and leathered, standing by his cycle, looked after them intently as they went into the hotel.

After cocktails and biscuits, they came out feeling, as young Croom

said: 'Bright and early. We'll go back over Magdalen Bridge, through Benson, Dorchester, and Henley.'

'Stop on the bridge, Tony. I want to see my name-sake.'

The bridge lights threw splashes on the Cherwell's inky stream, the loom of Magdalen lay solid on the dark, and away towards the Christchurch meadows, a few lamps shone. Whence they had come the broad, half-lighted strip of street ran between glimpsed grey frontages and doorways. And the little river over which they were at a standstill seemed to flow

with secrecy.

‘The “Char” they call it, don’t they?’

‘In the summer I shall have a punt, Clare. The upper river’s even better than this.’

‘Will you teach me to punt?’

‘Won’t I!’

‘Nearly ten! Well, I’ve enjoyed that, Tony.’

He gave her a long side-glance and started the engine. It seemed as if he must always be ‘moving on’ with her. Would there never be a long and perfect stop?

‘Sleepy, Clare?’

‘Not really. That was a mighty strong cocktail. If you’re tired I could drive.’

‘Tired? Gracious, no! I was only thinking that every mile takes me that much away from you.’

In the dark a road seems longer than by day, and so different. A hundred unremembered things appear – hedges, stacks, trees, houses, turnings. Even the villages seem different. In Dorchester they stopped to make sure of the right turning; a motor cyclist passed them, and young Croom called out: ‘To Henley?’

‘Straight on!’

They came to another village.

‘This,’ said young Croom, ‘must be Nettlebed. Nothing till Henley now, and then it’s thirty-five miles. We shall be up by twelve.’

‘Poor dear, and you’ve got to do all this back again.’

‘I shall drive like Jehu. It’s a good anodyne.’

Clare touched his coat cuff, and there was another silence.

They had reached a wood when he slackened suddenly. ‘My lights have gone!’

A motor cyclist skidded past, calling: ‘Your lights are out, sir!’

Young Croom stopped the engine.

‘That’s torn it. The battery must be used up.’

Clare laughed. He got out and moved round, examining the car. ‘I remember this wood. It’s a good five miles to Henley. We must creep on and trust to luck.’

‘Shall I get out and walk ahead?’

‘No, it’s so pitch dark. I might run over you.’

After a hundred yards or so he stopped again.

‘I’m off the road. I’ve never driven in darkness like this.’

Clare laughed again.

‘An adventure, my dear.’

‘I’ve got no torch. This wood goes on for a mile or two, if I remember.’

‘Let’s try again.’

A car whizzed past, and the driver shouted at them.

‘Follow his lights, Tony!’ But before he could start the engine the car had dipped or turned and was gone. They crept on slowly.

‘Damn!’ said young Croom, suddenly, ‘off the road again!’

‘Pull her right in off the road then, and let’s think. Isn’t there

anything at all before Henley?’

‘Not a thing. Besides, recharging a battery can’t be done just anywhere; but I expect it’s a wire gone.’

‘Shall we leave the car and walk in? She’ll be all right here in the wood.’

‘And then?’ muttered young Croom. ‘I must be back with her by daylight. I’ll tell you what; I’ll walk you in to the hotel, borrow a torch and come back to her. With a torch I could get her down, or stay with her till daylight, and then come down and pick you up at the Bridge.’

‘Ten miles walking for you! Why not both stay with her and see the sun rise? I’ve always wanted to spend a night in a car.’

In young Croom a struggle took place. A whole night with her – alone!

‘D’you mean you’d trust me?’

‘Don’t be old-fashioned, Tony. It’s much the best thing to do, and rather a lark. If a car came into us, or we were run in for driving without lights, that would be awkward if you like.’

‘There’s never a moon when you want one,’ muttered young Croom.

‘You really mean it?’

Clare touched his arm.

‘Pull her further in, among the trees. Very slow. Look out I Stop!’

There was a slight bump. Clare said:

‘We’re up against a tree, and our tail’s to the road. I’ll get out and see if anyone can see us.’

Young Croom waited, arranging the cushions and rug for her. He was thinking: ‘She can’t really love me, or she’d never take it so coolly!’ Quivering at the thought of this long dark night with her, he yet knew it was going to be

torture. Her voice said:

‘All right. I should say no one could see the car. You go and have a look. I’ll get in.’

He had to feel his way with his feet. The quality of the ground showed him when he had reached the road. It was less densely dark, but he could see no stars. The car was completely invisible. He waited, then turned to feel his way back. So lost was the car that he had to whistle and wait for her answering whistle to find it. Dark, indeed! He got in.

‘Window down or up?’

‘Half-way down, I should say.
I’m comfy, Tony.’

‘Thank God for that! D’you mind
my pipe?’

‘Of course not. Give me a
cigarette. This is almost perfect.’

‘Almost,’ he said in a small
voice.

‘I should like to see Aunt Em’s
face. Are you warm?’

‘Nothing goes through leather.
Are you?’

‘Lovely!’ There was a silence;
then she said: ‘Tony! Forgive me,
won’t you? I did promise.’

‘It’s quite all right,’ said young

Croom.

‘I can just see your nose by your pipe’s glow.’

By the light of her cigarette he, in turn, could see her teeth, her smiling lips, her face lasting just to the eyes, and fading out.

‘Take off your hat, Clare. And any time you like, here’s my shoulder.’

‘Don’t let me snore.’

‘*You* snore!’

‘Everyone snores on occasion. This will be it.’

They talked for a little. But all seemed unreal, except just being

beside her in the dark. He could hear now and again a car passing; other noises of the night there were none; too dark even for the owls. His pipe went out, and he put it away. She lay back beside him so close that he could feel her arm against his. He held his breath. Had she dropped off? Oh! He was in for a sleepless night, with this faint perfume from her egging on his senses and the warmth of her arm tingling into his. Even if this were all, it would be sheer waste to sleep. Drowsily she said:

‘If you really don’t mind, I *will* put my head on your shoulder,

Tony.'

'Mind!'

Her head snuggled down on to his scarf; and the faint perfume, which carried with it reminder of a sunny pine wood, increased. Was it credible that she was there against his shoulder, and would be for another six or seven hours? And he shuddered. So still and matter-of-fact! No sign in her of passion or disturbance; he might have been her brother. With the force of revelation he perceived that this night would be a test that he must pass; for if he did not she would recoil and drop away from him.

She *was* asleep. Oh! yes. You couldn't counterfeit that little regular cluck, as of the tiniest chicken – a perfect little sound, faintly comic, infinitely precious! Whatever happened to him now, he would have passed a night with her! He sat – still as a mouse, if mice are still. Her head grew heavier and more confiding with the deepening of her slumber. And, while he sat and listened, his feeling for her deepened too, became almost a passion of protection and of service. And the night, cold, dark, still – no cars were passing now – kept him

company; like some huge, dark, enveloping, just breathing creature, it was awake. The night did not sleep! For the first time in his life he realized that. Night was wakeful as the day. Unlighted and withdrawn, it had its sentience – neither spoke nor moved, just watched, and breathed. With stars and moon, or, as tonight, lampless and shuttered, it was a great companion.

His arm grew stiff, and, as if that reached her consciousness, she withdrew her head but did not wake. He rubbed his shoulder just in time, for almost at once her

head lolled back again. Screwing round till his lips just touched her hair, he heard again, chicklike and bland, that faint rhythmic cluck. It ceased and became the deeper breathing of far-down slumber. Then drowsiness crept on him too; he slept.

Chapter Nineteen



YOUNG CROOM awoke, stiff and unconscious of where he was. A voice said:

‘It’s just getting light, Tony, but I can’t see to read the hymn.’

He sat up. ‘Heavens! Have I been asleep?’

‘Yes, poor dear. I’ve had a perfect night, just a little achy in the legs. What’s the time?’

Young Croom looked at his watch’s illumined hands.

‘Nearly half past six. Pins and

needles. Wow!’

‘Let’s get out and stretch.’

His voice, far away, even from himself, answered: ‘And so it’s over.’

‘Was it so terrible?’

He put his hands to his head, and did not answer. The thought that next night and all the nights to come he would be apart from her again was like a blow over the heart.

She opened the door.

‘I’m going to stamp my feet a bit. Then we might have a stroll to warm ourselves. We shan’t get

breakfast anywhere till eight.'

He started the engine to warm the car. Light was creeping into the wood; he could see the beech-tree against whose trunk they had passed the night. Then he, too, got out and walked towards the road. Still grey-dark and misty, the wood on either side of its dim open streak looked mournful and mysterious. No wind, no sound! He felt as Adam might have felt, dragging towards the Park Gates of Eden without having earned the right to be expelled. Adam! That quaint, amiable, white, bearded creature. Man before he 'fell,' a

nonconformist preacher in a state of nature, with a pet snake, a prize apple, and a female secretary coy and unshingled as Lady Godiva! His blood began to flow again, and he returned to the car.

Clare was kneeling and attending to her hair with a pocket comb and mirror.

‘How are you feeling, Tony?’

‘Pretty rotten. I think we’ll shove along and have breakfast at Maidenhead or Slough.’

‘Why not at home? We could be there by eight. I make very good coffee.’

‘Fine!’ said young Croom. ‘I’ll do fifty all the way.’

On that very fast drive they spoke little. Both were too hungry.

‘While I’m getting breakfast, Tony, you can shave and have a bath. You’ll save time and feel comfy driving back. I’ll have mine later.’

‘I think,’ said young Croom, at the Marble Arch, ‘I’d better park the car. You go on in alone; it’s too conspicuous driving up at this time in the morning; the chauffeurs are sure to be working. I’ll slip along in ten minutes.’

When, at eight o'clock, he reached the Mews, she was in a blue wrapper, the little table in the downstairs room was set for breakfast, and there was already a scent of coffee.

‘I’ve turned the bath on, Tony, and you’ll find a razor.’

‘Darling!’ said young Croom. ‘Shan’t be ten minutes.’

He was back again in twelve, and sat down opposite to her. There were boiled eggs, toast, quince jam from Condaford, and real coffee. It was the most delicious meal he had ever eaten, because it was so exactly as if they

were married.

‘Aren’t you tired, darling?’

‘Not a bit. I feel thoroughly chirped up. All the same, I don’t think we must do it again – too near the hambone altogether.’

‘Well, we didn’t mean to.’

‘No, and you were an angel. Still, it’s not exactly what I promised Aunt Em. To the pure all things are not pure.’

‘No – blast them! God! How shall I live till I see you again!’

Clare stretched her hand across the little table and gave his a squeeze.

‘Now I think you’d better slip off. Just let me look out and see that the coast’s clear.’

When she had done this he kissed her hand, got back to his car, and by eleven o’clock was standing alongside a plumber in a horse box at Bablock Hythe....

Clare lay in a very hot bath. It was of the geyser type and not long enough, but it provided a good soak. She felt as when, a little girl, she had done something unpleasing to her governess, without discovery. But poor dear Tony! A pity men were so impatient. They had as little liking

for cool philandering as for shopping. They rushed into shops, said: 'Have you such and such? No?' and rushed out again. They hated trying on, being patted here and there, turning their heads to look at their back views. To savour what was fitting was to them anathema. Tony was a child. She felt herself much older by nature and experience. Though much in request before her marriage, Clare had never come into close contact with those, who, centred in London and themselves, were devoid of belief in anything but mockery, motion and enough money to have

from day to day a 'good' time. At country houses she had met them, of course, but withdrawn from their proper atmosphere into the air of sport. Essentially an open-air person, of the quick and wiry, rather than the hefty, type, she observed unconsciously the shibboleths of sport. Transplanted to Ceylon, she had kept her tastes, and spent her time in the saddle or on the tennis ground. Reading many novels, she professed, indeed, to keep abreast of the current, with all its impatience of restraint; but, lying in her bath, she was uneasy. It had not been fair to

put Tony to such strain as that of last night. The closer she allowed him to come to her, short of the contacts of love, the more she would be torturing him. Drying herself, she made good resolutions, and only with a rush did she reach the Temple by ten o'clock. She might just as well have stayed on soaking in her bath, for Dornford was busy on an important case. She finished what jobs there were, looking idly out over the Temple lawn, whence fine-weather mist was vanishing, and sunlight, brightening to winter brilliance, slanted on to her cheek. And she

thought of Ceylon, where the sun was never coolly comforting. Jerry! How, in that horrible, common phrase, was he 'keeping'? And what doing about her? All very well to determine that she would not torture Tony, would keep away from him and spare his senses, but without him – she would be dull and lonely. He had become a habit. A bad habit perhaps – but bad habits were the only ones it was painful to do without.

‘I’m naturally a light weight,’ she thought. ‘So is Tony; all the same he would never let one down!’

And the grass of the Temple lawn seemed suddenly the sea, and this window-sill the ship's bulwark, and he and she leaned there watching the flying fish spring up from the foam and flutter away above the green-blue water. Warmth and colour! Airy shining grace! And she felt melancholy.

‘A good long ride is what I want,’ she thought. ‘I’ll go down to Condaford tomorrow, and on Saturday be out all day. I’ll make Dinny come out with me; she ought to ride more.’

The clerk entered and said: ‘Mr Dornford’s going straight from the

Courts to the “House” this afternoon.’

‘Ah! Do you ever feel hipped, George?’

The clerk, whose face always amused her because it so clearly should have had mutton-chop whiskers on its rosy roundness, replied in his cushiony voice:

‘What I miss here is a dog. With my old Toby I never feel lonely.’

‘What is he, George?’

‘Bull terrier. But I can’t bring him here, Mrs Calder’d miss him; besides, if he bit a solicitor –’

‘But how perfect!’

George wheezed.

‘Ah! you can’t have high spirits in the Temple.’

‘I should have liked a dog, George, but when I’m out there’s no one in.’

‘I don’t fancy Mr Dornford’ll be residential here much longer.’

‘Why?’

‘He’s looking for a house. I’ve an idea he’d like to marry.’

‘Oh! Whom?’

George closed an eye.

‘You mean my sister?’

‘Ah!’

‘Yes. But I don’t see how you know.’

George closed the other eye.

‘A little bird, Lady Corven.’

‘He might do worse, certainly. Not that I’m a great believer in marriage.’

‘We don’t see the right side of marriage in the Law. But Mr Dornford would make a woman happy – in my opinion.’

‘In mine, too, George.’

‘He’s a very quiet man, but a fund of energy, and considerate. Solicitors like him; judges like him.’

‘And wives will like him.’

‘Of course he’s a Catholic.’

‘We all have to be something.’

‘Mrs Calder and I’ve been Anglicans ever since my old dad died. He was a Plymouth Brother – very stiff. Express an opinion of your own, and he’d jump down your throat. Many’s the time I’ve had him threaten me with fire and slaughter. All for my good, you understand. A fine religious old feller. And couldn’t bear others not to be. Good red Zummerzset blood, and never forgot it, though he did live in Peckham.’

‘Well, George, if Mr Dornford wants me again after all, would

you telephone me at five o'clock?
I'll look in at my rooms in case.'

Clare walked. The day was even more springlike than yesterday. She went by the Embankment and St James's Park. Alongside the water, clusters of daffodil spikes were pushing up, and tree-shoots swelling into bud. The gentle, warming sunlight fell on her back. It couldn't last! There would be a throwback to winter, for sure! She walked fast out under the chariot, whose horses, not too natural, worried but exhilarated her, passed the Artillery Memorial without a glance, and entered Hyde Park.

Warmed up now, she swung out along the Row. Riding was something of a passion with her, so that it always made her restive to see someone else riding a good horse. Queer animals, horses, so fiery and alive at one moment, so dull and ruminative the next!

Two or three hats were raised to her. A long man on a good-looking mare reined up after he had passed and came back.

‘I thought it was you. Lawrence told me you were over. Remember me – Jack Muskham?’

Clare – thinking: ‘Lovely seat for a tall man!’ – murmured: ‘Of

course!’ and was suddenly on her guard.

‘An acquaintance of yours is going to look after my Arab mares.’

‘Oh! yes, Tony Croom.’

‘Nice young chap, but I don’t know if he knows enough. Still, he’s keen as mustard. How’s your sister?’

‘Very well.’

‘You ought to bring her racing, Lady Corven.’

‘I don’t think Dinny cares much for horses.’

‘I could soon make her. I remember –’ he broke off,

frowning. In spite of his languid pose, his face seemed to Clare purposeful, brown, lined, ironic about the lips. She wondered how he would take the news that she had spent last night with Tony in a car.

‘When do the mares come, Mr Muskham?’

‘They’re in Egypt now. We’ll ship them in April. I might go over for it; possibly take young Croom.’

‘I’d love to see them,’ said Clare; ‘I rode an Arab in Ceylon.’

‘We must get you down.’

‘Somewhere near Oxford, isn’t

it?’

‘About six miles; nice country. I’ll remember. Good-bye!’ He raised his hat, touched the mare with his heel, and cantered off.

‘My perfect innocence!’ she thought. ‘Hope I didn’t overdo it. I wouldn’t like to “get wrong” with him. He looks as if he knew his mind terribly well. Lovely boots! He didn’t ask after Jerry!’

Her nerves felt a little shaken, and she struck away from the Row towards the Serpentine.

The sunlit water had no boats on it, but a few ducks on the far side.

Did she mind what people thought? Miller of Dee! Only, did he really care for nobody? Or was he just a philosopher? She sat down on a bench in the full sunlight, and suddenly felt sleepy. A night in a car, after all, was not quite the same as a night out of a car. Crossing her arms on her breast, she closed her eyes. Almost at once she was asleep.

Quite a number of people straggled past between her and the bright water, surprised to see one in such nice clothes asleep before lunch. Two little boys carrying toy aeroplanes stopped dead,

examining her dark eyelashes resting on her cream-coloured cheeks, and the little twitchings of her just touched-up lips. Having a French governess, they were 'well-bred' little boys without prospect of sticking pins into her or uttering a sudden whoop. But she seemed to have no hands, her feet were crossed and tucked under her chair, and her attitude was such that she had abnormally long thighs. It was interesting; and after they had passed one of them kept turning his head to see more of her.

Thus, for a full hour of elusive spring, Clare slept the sleep of one

who has spent a night in a car.

Chapter Twenty



AND three weeks passed, during which Clare saw young Croom but four times in all. She was packing for the evening train to Condaford, when the sheep bell summoned her down the spiral stairway.

Outside was a shortish man in horn spectacles, who gave her a vague impression of being connected with learning. He raised his hat.

‘Lady Corven?’

‘Yes.’

‘Pardon me, I have this for you.’
Producing from his blue overcoat a
longish document, he put it into
her hand.

Clare read the words:

In the High Court of Justice
Probate Divorce and Admiralty
Division.

The Twenty-sixth day of
February, 1932.

In the Matter of the Petition of Sir
Gerald Corven.

A weak feeling ran down the
back of her legs, and she raised her
eyes to the level of those behind
the horn-rimmed spectacles. ‘Oh!’
she said.

The shortish man made her a little bow. She had a feeling that he was sorry for her, and promptly closed the door in his face. She went up the spiral stairs, sat down on the sofa, and lit a cigarette. Then she spread the document on her lap. Her first thought was: 'But it's monstrous – I've done nothing!' Her second: 'I suppose I must read the foul thing!'

She had not read more than: 'The humble petition of Gerald Corven, K. C. B.,' when she had her fourth thought: 'But this is exactly what I want. I shall be free!'

More calmly she read on till she

came to the words: 'That your Petitioner claims from the said James Bernard Croom as damages in respect of his said adultery so committed the sum of two thousand pounds.'

Tony! If he had two thousand shillings, it was all! Beast! Revengeful brute! This sudden reduction of the issue to terms of hard cash not only rasped her feelings but brought her a sort of panic. Tony must not, should not be ruined through her! She must see him! Had they – but of course they had served it on him too.

She finished reading the

petition, took a long draw at her cigarette and got up.

She went to the telephone, asked for a trunk call and gave the number of his inn.

‘Can I speak to Mr Croom? – Gone up to London? – In his car? – When?’

An hour ago! That could only mean that he was coming to see her!

A little soothed, she made a rapid calculation. She could not now catch the train to Condaford; and she got another trunk call through to the Grange.

‘Dinny? This is Clare. I can’t possibly get down tonight – tomorrow morning instead.... No! I’m all right; a little worried. Good-bye!’

A little worried! She sat down again, and once more read the ‘foul thing’ through. They seemed to know everything, except the truth. And neither she nor Tony had ever seen a sign that they were being watched. That man with the horn ‘specs,’ for instance, evidently knew her, but she’d never seen him before! She went into the bathroom and washed her face in cold water. Miller of Dee! The part had become

extremely difficult.

‘He’ll have had nothing to eat,’ she thought.

She set the table downstairs with what she had, made some coffee, and sat down to smoke and wait. Condaford and the faces of her people came before her; the face too, of Aunt Em; and of Jack Muskham; above all the face of her husband, with its faint, hard-bitten, cat-like smile. Was she to take this lying down? Apart from the damages, was she to let him triumph without a fight? She wished now she had taken her father’s and Sir Lawrence’s advice

and ‘clapped a detective on to him.’ Too late now – he would be taking no risks till the case was over.

She was still brooding by the electric fire when she heard a car stop outside, and the bell rang.

Young Croom looked chilled and pale. He stood as if so doubtful of his welcome that she seized both his hands.

‘Well, Tony this is a pleasure!’

‘Oh! darling!’

‘You look frozen. Have some brandy!’

While he was drinking, she said:

‘Don’t let’s talk of what we ought to have done; only of what we’re going to do.’

He groaned.

‘They must have thought us terribly green. I never dreamed –’

‘Nor I. But why shouldn’t we have done exactly what we have done? There’s no law against innocence.’

He sat down and leaned his forehead on his hands. ‘God knows this is just what I want; to get you free of him; but I had no business to let you run the risk. It would be all different if you felt for me what

I feel for you.'

Clare looked down at him with a little smile.

'Now, Tony, be grown-up! It's no good talking about our feelings. And I won't have any nonsense about its being your fault. The point is we're innocent. What are we going to do about it?'

'Of course I shall do whatever you want.'

'I have a feeling,' said Clare, slowly, 'that I shall have to do what my people want me to.'

'God!' said young Croom, getting up: 'To think that if we defend and

win, you'll still be tied to him!'

'And to think,' murmured Clare, 'that if we don't defend and win, you'll be ruined.'

'Oh! Damn that – they can only make me bankrupt.'

'And your job?'

'I don't see – I don't know why –'

'I saw Jack Muskham the other day. He looks to me as if he wouldn't like a co-respondent who hadn't given notice of his intentions to the petitioner. You see I've got the jargon.'

'If we *had* been lovers, I would

have, at once.'

'Would you?'

'Of course!'

'Even if I'd said "Don't"?''

'You wouldn't have.'

'I don't know that.'

'Well, anyway, it doesn't arise.'

'Except that if we don't defend, you'll feel a cad.'

'God! What a coil!'

'Sit down and let's eat. There's only this ham, but there's nothing like ham when you feel sick.'

They sat down and made motions with their forks.

‘Your people don’t know, Clare?’

‘I only knew myself an hour ago. Did they bring you this same lovely document?’

‘Yes.’

‘Another slice?’

They ate in silence for a minute or two. Then young Croom got up.

‘I really can’t eat any more.’

‘All right. Smoke!’

She took a cigarette from him, and said:

‘Listen. I’m going down to Condaford tomorrow, and I think you’d better come over. They must see you, because whatever’s done

must be done with open eyes. Have you a solicitor?’

‘No.’

‘Nor I. I suppose we shall have to have one.’

‘I’ll see to all that. If only I had money!’

Clare winced.

‘I apologize for a husband capable of asking for damages.’

Young Croom seized her hand. ‘Darling, I was only thinking of solicitors.’

‘Do you remember my answering you on the boat: “Often more damnable, things

beginning.” ’

‘I’ll never admit that.’

‘I was thinking of my marriage, not of you.’

‘Clare, wouldn’t it be far better, really, not to defend – just let it go? Then you’d be free. And after – if you wanted me, I’d be there, and if you didn’t, I wouldn’t.’

‘Sweet of you, Tony; but I must tell my people. Besides – oh! a lot of things.’

He began walking up and down.

‘D’you suppose they’ll believe us if we do defend? *I* don’t.’

‘We shall be telling the exact

truth.'

'People never believe the exact truth. What train are you going down by?'

'Ten-fifty.'

'Shall I come too, or in the afternoon from Bablock Hythe?'

'That's best. I'll have broken it to them.'

'Will they mind frightfully?'

'They won't like it.'

'Is your sister there?'

'Yes.'

'That's something.'

'My people are not exactly old-

fashioned, Tony, but they're not modern. Very few people are when they're personally involved. The lawyers and the judge and jury won't be, anyway. You'd better go now; and promise me not to drive like Jehu.'

'May I kiss you?'

'It'll mean one more piece of exact truth, and there've been three already. Kiss my hand – that doesn't count.'

He kissed it, muttered: 'God bless you!' and, grabbing his hat, went out.

Clare turned a chair to the

unwinking warmth of the electric fire, and sat brooding. The dry heat burned her eyes till they felt as if they had no lids and no capacity for moisture; slowly and definitely she grew angrier. All the feelings she had experienced, before she made up her mind that morning in Ceylon to cut adrift, came back to her with redoubled fury. How dared he treat her as if she had been a 'light of love'? – worse than if she had been one – a light of love would never have stood it. How dared he touch her with that whip? And now how dared he have her watched, and bring this case? She

would not lie down under this!

She began methodically to wash up and put the things away. She opened the door wide and let the wind come in. A nasty night, little whirlwinds travelling up and down the narrow Mews!

‘Inside me, too,’ she thought. Slamming-to the door, she took out her little mirror. Her face seemed so natural and undefended that it gave her a shock. She powdered it and touched her lips with salve. Then, drawing deep breaths, she shrugged her shoulders, lit a cigarette, and went upstairs. A hot bath!

Chapter Twenty-one



THE atmosphere at Condaford into which she stepped next day was guarded. Her words, or the tone of her voice on the telephone, seemed to have seeped into the family consciousness, and she was aware at once that sprightliness would deceive no one. It was a horrible day, too, dank and cold, and she had to hold on to her courage with both hands.

She chose the drawing-room after lunch for disclosure. Taking the document from her bag, she

handed it to her father with the words:

‘I’ve had this, Dad.’

She heard his startled exclamation, and was conscious of Dinny and her mother going over to him.

At last he said: ‘Well? Tell us the truth.’

She took her foot off the fender and faced them.

‘*That* isn’t the truth. We’ve done nothing.’

‘Who is this man?’

‘Tony Croom? I met him on the boat coming home. He’s twenty-six,

was on a tea plantation out there, and is taking charge of Jack Muskham's Arab mares at Bablock Hythe. He has no money. I told him to come here this afternoon.'

'Are you in love with him?'

'No. I like him.'

'Is he in love with you?'

'Yes.'

. 'You say there's been nothing?'

'He's kissed my cheek twice, I think – that's all.'

'Then what do they mean by this – that you spent the night of the third with him?'

'I went down in his car to see his

place, and coming back the lights failed in a wood about five miles from Henley – pitch dark. I suggested we should stay where we were till it was light. We just slept and went on up when it was light.’

She heard her mother give a faint gasp, and a queer noise from her father’s throat.

‘And on the boat? And in your rooms? You say there was nothing, though he’s in love, with you?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Is that absolutely the truth?’

‘Yes.’

‘Of course,’ said Dinny, ‘it’s the

truth.'

'Of course,' said the General.
'And who's going to believe it?'

'We didn't know we were being
watched.'

'What time will he be here?'

'Any time now.'

'You've seen him since you had
this?'

'Yesterday evening.'

'What does he say?'

'He says he'll do whatever I
wish.'

'That, of course. Does *he* think
you'll be believed?'

‘No.’

The General took the document over to the window, as if the better to see into it. Lady Charwell sat down, her face very white. Dinny came over to Clare and took her arm.

‘When he comes,’ said the General suddenly, returning from the window, ‘I’ll see him alone. Nobody before me, please.’

‘Witnesses out of court,’ murmured Clare.

The General handed her the document. His face looked drawn and tired.

‘I’m terribly sorry, Dad. I suppose we were fools. Virtue is *not* its own reward.’

‘Wisdom is,’ said the General. He touched her shoulder and marched off to the door, followed by Dinny.

‘Does he believe me, Mother?’

‘Yes, but only because you’re his daughter. He feels he oughtn’t to.’

‘Do you feel like that, Mother?’

‘I believe you because I know you.’

Clare bent over and kissed her cheek.

‘Very pretty, Mother dear; but not cheering.’

‘You say you like this young man. Did you know him out there?’

‘I never saw him till the boat. And, Mother, I may as well tell you that I’ve not been in the mood for passion. I don’t know when I shall be again. Perhaps never!’

‘Why not?’

Clare shook her head. ‘I won’t go into my life with Jerry, not even now, when he’s been such a cad as to ask for damages. I’m really much more upset about that than I am about myself.’

‘I suppose this young man would have gone away with you, at any

moment?’

‘Yes; but I haven’t wanted to. Besides, I gave Aunt Em a promise. I sort of swore to behave for a year. And I have – so far. It’s terribly tempting not to defend, and be free.’

Lady Charwell was silent.

‘Well, Mother?’

‘Your father is bound to think of this as it affects your name and the family’s.’

‘Six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, so far as that goes. If we don’t defend, it will just go through and hardly be noticed. If we do it

will make a sensation. "Night in a car," and all that, even if we're believed. Can't you see the papers, Mummy? They'll be all over it.'

'I think,' said Lady Charwell slowly, 'it will come back in the end to the feeling your father has about that whip. I've never known him so angry as he was over that. I think he will feel you must defend.'

'I should never mention the whip in court. It's too easily denied, for one thing; and I have some pride, Mother...'

Dinny had followed to the study, or barrack-room, as it was sometimes called.

‘You know this young man, Dinny?’ burst out the General.

‘Yes, and I like him. He *is* deeply in love with Clare.’

‘What business has he to be?’

‘Be human, dear!’

‘You believe her about the car?’

‘Yes. I heard her solemnly promise Aunt Em to behave for a year.’

‘Queer sort of thing to have to promise!’

‘A mistake, if you ask me.’

‘What!’

‘The only thing that really matters is that Clare should get

free.'

The General stood with head bent, as if he had found food for thought; a slow flush had coloured his cheek-bones.

'She told you,' he said suddenly, 'what she told me, about that fellow having used a whip on her?'

Dinny nodded.

'In old days I could and would have called him out for that. I agree that she must get free, but – not this way.'

'Then you *do* believe her?'

'She wouldn't tell a lie to us like that.'

‘Good, Dad! But who else will believe them? Would you, on a jury?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the General, glumly.

Dinny shook her head. ‘You wouldn’t.’

‘Lawyers are damned clever. I suppose Dornford wouldn’t take up a case like this?’

‘He doesn’t practise in the Divorce Court. Besides, she’s his secretary.’

‘I must get to hear what Kingsons say. Lawrence believes in them. Fleur’s father was a member

there.'

'Then –' Dinny had begun, when the door was opened.

'Mr Croom, sir.'

'You needn't go, Dinny.'

Young Croom came in. After a glance at Dinny, he moved towards the General.

'Clare told me to come over, sir.'

The General nodded. His narrowed eyes were fixed steadily on his daughter's would-be lover. The young man faced that scrutiny as if on parade, his eyes replying to the General's without defiance.

'I won't beat about the bush,'

said the General suddenly. 'You seem to have got my daughter into a mess.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Kindly give me your account of it.'

Young Croom put his hat down on the table, and, squaring his shoulders, said:

'Whatever she has told you is true, sir.'

Dinny saw with relief her father's lips twitching as if with a smile.

'Very correct, Mr Croom; but not what I want. She has told me her

version; I should be glad to hear yours.'

She saw the young man moisten his lips, making a curious jerking motion of his head.

'I'm in love with her, sir: have been ever since I first saw her on the boat. We've been going about rather in London – cinemas, theatres, picture galleries, and that; and I've been to her rooms three – no, five times altogether. On February the third I drove her down to Bablock Hythe for her to see where I'm going to have my job; and coming back – I expect she told you – my lights failed, and we

were hung up in a pitch-dark wood some miles short of Henley. Well – we – we thought we'd better just stay there until it was light again, instead of risking things. I'd got off the road twice. It really was pitch-dark, and I had no torch. And so – well, we waited in the car till about half-past six, and then came up, and got to her place about eight.' He paused and moistened his lips, then straightened himself again and said with a rush: 'Whether you believe me or not, sir, I swear there was nothing whatever between us in the car; and – and there never has been, except – except that she's

let me kiss her cheek two or three times.’

The General, who had never dropped his eyes, said: ‘That’s substantially what she told us. Anything else?’

‘After I had that paper, sir, I motored up to see her at once – that was yesterday. Of course I’ll do anything she wants.’

‘You didn’t put your heads together as to what you would say to us?’

Dinny saw the young man stiffen.

‘Of course not, sir!’

‘Then I may take it that you’re ready to swear there’s been nothing, and defend the action?’

‘Certainly, if you think there’s any chance of our being believed.’

The General shrugged. ‘What’s your financial position?’

‘Four hundred a year from my job.’ A faint smile curled his lips: ‘Otherwise none sir.’

‘Do you know my daughter’s husband?’

‘No.’

‘Never met him?’

‘No sir.’

‘When did you first meet Clare?’

‘On the second day of the voyage home.’

‘What were you doing out there?’

‘Tea-planting; but they amalgamated my plantation with some others, for economy.’

‘I see. Where were you at school?’

‘Wellington, and then at Cambridge.’

‘You’ve got a job with Jack Muskham?’

‘Yes, sir, his Arab mares. They’re due in the spring.’

‘You know about horses, then?’

‘Yes. I’m terribly fond of them.’

Dinny saw the narrowed gaze withdraw from the young man’s face, and come to rest on hers.

‘You know my daughter Dinny, I think?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ll leave you to her now. I want to think this over.’

The young man bowed slightly, turned to Dinny, and then, turning back, said with a certain dignity:

‘I’m awfully sorry, sir, about this; but I can’t say I’m sorry that I’m in love with Clare. It wouldn’t be true. I love her terribly.’

He was moving towards the door, when the General said:

‘One moment. What do you mean by love?’

Involuntarily Dinny clasped her hands: An appalling question! Young Croom turned round. His face was motionless.

‘I know what you mean, sir,’ he said huskily: ‘Desire and that, or more? Well! More, or I couldn’t have stood that night in the car.’ He turned again to the door.

Dinny moved and held it open for him. She followed him into the hall, where he was frowning and

taking deep breaths. She slipped her hand through his arm and moved him across to the wood fire. They stood, looking down into the flames, till she said:

‘I’m afraid that was rather dreadful. But soldiers like to have things straight out, you know. Anyway – I know my father – you made what’s called a good impression.’

‘I felt a ghastly kind of wooden idiot. Where is Clare? Here?’

‘Yes.’

‘Can I see her, Miss Cherrell?’

‘Try calling me Dinny. You can

see her; but I think you'd better see my mother too. Let's go to the drawing-room.'

He gave her hand a squeeze.

'I've always felt you were a brick.'

Dinny grimaced. 'Even bricks yield to a certain pressure.'

'Oh! sorry! I'm always forgetting my ghastly grip. Clare dreads it. How is she?'

With a faint shrug and smile, Dinny said:

'Doing as well as can be expected.'

Tony Croom clutched his head.

‘Yes, I feel exactly like that, only worse; in those cases there’s something to look forward to and – here? D’you think she’ll ever really love me?’

‘I hope so.’

‘You people don’t think that I pursued her – I mean, you know what I mean, just to have a good time?’

‘They won’t after today. You are what *I* was once called – transparent.’

‘You? I never quite know what you’re thinking.’

‘That was a long time ago.’

Come!’

Chapter Twenty-two



WHEN young Croom had withdrawn into the sleet and wind of that discomfoting day, he left behind him a marked gloom. Clare went to her room saying her head was bad and she was going to lie down. The other three sat among the tea-things, speaking only to the dogs, sure sign of mental disturbance.

At last Dinny got up: 'Well, my dears, gloom doesn't help. Let's look on the bright side. They might have been scarlet instead of white as snow.'

The General said, more to himself than in reply:

‘They must defend. That fellow can’t have it all his own way.’

‘But Dad, to have Clare free, with a perfectly clear conscience, would be nice and ironic, and ever so much less fuss!’

‘Lie down under an accusation of that sort?’

‘Her name will go even if she wins. No one can spend a night in a car with a young man with impunity. Can they, Mother?’

Lady Charwell smiled faintly.

‘I agree with your father, Dinny.

It seems to me revolting that Clare should be divorced when she's done nothing except been a little foolish. Besides, it would be cheating the law, wouldn't it?

‘I shouldn't think the law would care, dear. However – !’ And Dinny was silent, scrutinizing their rueful faces, aware that they set some mysterious store by marriage and divorce which she did not, and that nothing she could say would alter it.

‘The young man,’ said the General, ‘seemed a decent fellow, I thought. He'll have to come up and see the lawyers when we do.’

‘I’d better go up with Clare tomorrow evening, Dad, and get Uncle Lawrence to arrange you a meeting with the lawyers for after lunch on Monday. I’ll telephone you and Tony Croom from Mount Street in the morning.’

The General nodded and got up. ‘Beast of a day!’ he said, and put his hand on his wife’s shoulder: ‘Don’t let this worry you, Liz. They can but tell the truth. I’ll go to the study and have another shot at that new pigsty. You might look in later, Dinny ..’

At all critical times Dinny felt more at home in Mount Street than

she did at Condaford. Sir Lawrence's mind was so much more lively than her father's; Aunt Em's inconsequence at once more bracing and more soothing than her mother's quiet and sensible sympathy. When a crisis was over, or if it had not begun, Condaford was perfect, but it was too quiet for nerve storms or crucial action. As country houses went, it was, indeed, old-fashioned, inhabited by the only county family who had been in the district for more than three of four generations. The Grange had an almost institutional repute. 'Condaford Grange' and

‘the Cherrells of Condaford’ were spoken of as curiosities. The week-ending or purely sporting existence of the big ‘places’ was felt to be alien to them. The many families on the smaller ‘places’ round seemed to make country life into a sort of cult, organizing tennis and bridge parties, village entertainments and looking of each other up; getting their day’s shooting here and there, supporting the nearest golf course, attending meets, hunting a bit, and so forth. The Charwells, with their much deeper roots, yet seemed to be less in evidence than almost

anyone. They would have been curiously missed, but, except to the villagers, they hardly seemed real.

In spite of her always active life at Condaford Dinny often felt there, as one does waking in the still hours of the night, nervous from the very quietude; and in such troubles as Hubert's, three years before, her own crisis of two years ago, or this of Clare's, she craved at once to be more in the swim of life.

Having dropped Clare at her Mews, she went on in the taxi, and arrived at Mount Street before dinner.

Michael and Fleur were there, and the conversation turned and turned from literature to politics. Michael was of opinion that the papers were beginning to pat the country's back too soon, and that the Government might go to sleep. Sir Lawrence was glad to hear that they were still awake.

Lady Mont said suddenly: 'The baby, Dinny?'

'Frightfully well, thank you, Aunt Em. He walks.'

'I was countin' up the pedigree, and he makes the twenty-fourth Cherrell of Condaford; and before that they were French. Is Jean

havin' any more?'

'You bet,' said Fleur. 'I never saw a young woman more like it.'

'There'll be nothin' for them.'

'Oh, she'll wangle their futures all right.'

'Such a singular word,' said Lady Mont.

'Dinny, how's Clare?'

'All right.'

'Any developments?' And Fleur's clear eyes seemed to slide into her brain.

'Yes, but –'

Michael's voice broke the silence.

‘Dornford has a very neat idea, Dad; he thinks –’

The neat idea of Dornford was lost on Dinny, wondering whether or not to take Fleur into her confidence. She knew no one of quicker brain, or of a judgement on social matters more cynically sound. Further, she could keep a secret. But it was Clare’s secret, and she decided to speak to Sir Lawrence first.

Late that night she did so. He received the news with his eyebrows.

‘All night in a car, Dinny? That’s a bit steep. I’ll get on to the

lawyers at ten o'clock tomorrow.
“Very young” Roger Forsyte,
Fleur’s cousin, is there now; I’ll get
hold of him, he’s likely to have
more credulity than the hoarier
members. You and I will go along
too, to prove our faith.’

‘I’ve never been in the City.’

‘Curious place; built upon the
ends of the earth. Romance and the
bank rate. Prepare for a mild
shock.’

‘Do you think they ought to
defend?’

Sir Lawrence’s lively eyes came
to rest on her face.

‘If you ask me whether I think they’ll be believed – no. But at least we can divide opinion on the question.’

‘You *do* believe them yourself, don’t you?’

‘I plank on you there, Dinny. Clare wouldn’t try to take you in.’

Thinking back to her sister’s face, and to young Croom’s, Dinny had a revulsion of feeling. ‘They *are* telling the truth, and they look like it. It would be wicked not to believe them.’

‘No end to that sort of wickedness in this wicked world.

You look tired, my dear; better go to bed.'

In that bedroom, where she had spent so many nights at the time of her own trouble, Dinny had again that half-waking nightmare, the sense of being close to Wilfrid and unable to reach him, and the refrain: 'One more river, one more river to cross,' kept running in her tired head....

In that quiet and yellow backwater, the Old Jewry, the offices of Kingson, Cuthcott and Forsyte were tribally invaded at four o'clock next day.

'What's become of old Gradman,

Mr Forsyte?’ Dinny heard her uncle say. ‘Still here?’

‘Very young’ Roger Forsyte, who was forty-two, answered, in a voice which seemed to contradict his jaw: ‘I believe he’s still living at Pinner, or Highgate, or wherever it was.’

‘I should be glad to think so,’ murmured Sir Lawrence. ‘Old For – er, your cousin thought a lot of him. A regular Victorian piece.’

‘Very young’ Roger smiled. ‘Won’t you all sit down?’

Dinny, who had never yet been in a lawyer’s office, looked at the law books along the walls, the

bundles of papers, the yellowish blind, the repellent black fireplace with its little coal fire that seemed to warm nothing, the map of an estate hanging unrolled behind the door, the low wicker basket on the table, the pens and sealing-wax, and 'very young' Roger, and thought of an album of seaweed, compiled by her first governess. She saw her father rise and place a document in the solicitor's hands.

'We've come about this.'

'Very young' Roger glanced at the heading of the paper and over it at Clare.

'How does he know which of us

it is?’ thought Dinny.

‘There’s no truth in the allegations,’ said the General.

‘Very young’ Roger caressed his jaw and began reading.

Dinny, from the side, could see that a sharp and rather bird-like look had come on his face.

Noticing that Dinny could see him, he lowered the paper and said: ‘They seem in a hurry. The petitioner signed the affidavit in Egypt, I see. He must have come over there to save time. Mr Croom?’

‘Yes.’

‘You wish us to represent you as well?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then Lady Corven and you. Later, perhaps, Sir Conway, you’d come in again.’

‘Do you mind if my sister stays?’ said Clare.

Dinny met the solicitor’s eyes. ‘Not at all.’ She did not know if he meant it.

The General and Sir Lawrence went out, and there was silence. ‘Very young’ Roger leaned against the fireplace, and most unexpectedly took a pinch of snuff.

Dinny saw that he was lean and rather tall, and that his jaw jutted. There was a faintly sandy tinge in his hair, and in the ruddiness of his hollowed cheeks.

‘Your father, Lady Corven, said there was no truth in these – er – allegations.’

‘The facts are as stated, the inferences are wrong. There’s been nothing between Mr Croom and myself, except three kisses on my cheek.’

‘I see. About this night in the car, now?’

‘Nothing,’ said Clare: ‘Not even

one of those kisses.'

'Nothing,' repeated young Croom; 'absolutely nothing.'

'Very young' Roger passed his tongue over his lips.

'If you don't mind, I think I should like to understand your feelings for each other – if any.'

'We are speaking,' said Clare, in a clear voice, 'the absolute truth, as we've told it to my people; that's why I asked my sister to stay. Tony?'

'Very young' Roger's mouth twitched. To Dinny he did not seem to be taking it quite as a lawyer

should; something in his dress, indeed, was a little unexpected – his waistcoat was it, or his tie? That snuff, too – as if a dash of the artist had been suppressed in him. He said:

‘Yes, Mr Croom?’

Young Croom, who had gone very red, looked at Clare almost angrily.

‘I’m in love with her.’

‘Quite!’ said ‘very young’ Roger, reopening the snuff-box. ‘And you, Lady Corven, regard him as a friend?’

Clare nodded – a faint surprise

on her face.

Dinny felt a sudden gratitude towards the questioner, who was applying a bandana to his nose.

‘The car was an accident,’ added Clare quickly; ‘it was pitch dark in the wood, our lights had failed, and we didn’t want to run any risk of people seeing us together so late at night.’

‘Exactly! Excuse my asking, but you’re both prepared to go into Court and swear there was absolutely nothing that night or on the other occasions, except – did you say – three kisses?’

‘On my cheek,’ said Clare; ‘one out of doors, when I was in a car and he wasn’t, and the others – when were the others, Tony?’

Young Croom said between his clenched teeth: ‘In your rooms when I hadn’t seen you for over a fortnight.’

‘You neither of you knew you were being – er – shadowed?’

‘I knew my husband had threatened it, but we’d neither of us noticed anything.’

‘About leaving your husband, Lady Corven; any reason you’d care to give me?’

Clare shook her head.

‘I’m not going into my life with him, either here or anywhere. And I’m not going back to him.’

‘Incompatibility, or worse?’

‘I think worse.’

‘But no definite charge. You realize the importance?’

‘Yes. But I’m not going into it, even privately.’

Young Croom burst out: ‘He was a brute to her, of course.’

‘You knew him, Mr Croom?’

‘Never seen him in my life.’

‘Then –’

‘He just thinks it because I left Jerry suddenly. He knows nothing.’

Dinny saw ‘very young’ Roger’s eyes rest on herself. ‘But you do,’ they seemed to say; and she thought: ‘He’s no fool!’

He had returned from the fireplace, walking with a slight limp; sitting down again, he took up the document, narrowed his eyes, and said:

‘This isn’t the sort of evidence the Court likes; in fact I’m not sure it’s evidence at all. All the same it’s not a very bright prospect. If you could show strong cause for leaving your husband, and we could get

over that night in the car –’ He looked, bird-like, first at Clare and then at young Croom. ‘Still, you can’t let damages and costs like that go by default, when – er – you’ve done nothing.’ His eyes fell; and Dinny thought:

‘Not conspicuous – his credulity!’

‘Very young’ Roger lifted a paper-knife.

‘We might possibly get the damages agreed at a comparatively nominal sum, if you put in a defence and then didn’t appear. May I ask your monetary position, Mr Croom?’

‘I haven’t a bean, but that doesn’t matter.’

‘What exactly will “defending” mean?’ asked Clare.

‘You’d both go into the box and deny the charges. You’d be cross-examined, and we should cross-examine the petitioner and the inquiry agents. Candidly, unless you can give good reason for having left your husband, you’re almost bound to have the judge against you. And,’ he added, in a somewhat human manner, ‘a night is a night, especially to the divorce court, even in a car; though, as I say, it’s not the sort of evidence

generally required.'

'My Uncle thinks,' said Dinny quietly, 'that some of the jury, at all events, might believe them, and that the damages, in any case, would be reduced.'

'Very young' Roger nodded.

'We'll see what Mr Kingson says. I should like to see your father and Sir Lawrence again.'

Dinny went to the door and held it open for her sister and young Croom. Glancing back she saw 'very young' Roger's face. It was as if someone had asked him not to be a realist. He caught her eye, gave a

funny little cock of his head, and took out his snuff-box. She shut the door and went up to him.

‘You’ll make a mistake if you don’t believe them. They’re speaking the absolute truth.’

‘Why did she leave her husband, Miss Cherrell?’

‘If she won’t tell you, I can’t. But I’m sure she was right.’

He considered her for a moment with that sharp glance.

‘Somehow,’ he said suddenly, ‘I wish it were you.’ And, taking snuff, he turned to the General and Sir Lawrence.

‘Well?’ said the General.

‘Very young’ Roger looked suddenly more sandy.

‘If she had good reason for leaving her husband –’

‘She had.’

‘Father!’

‘It appears she isn’t prepared to speak of it.’

‘Nor should I be,’ said Dinny quietly.

‘Very young’ Roger murmured: ‘It might make all the difference, though.’

‘Serious thing for young Croom, Mr Forsyte,’ put in Sir Lawrence.

‘Serious, whether they defend or not, Sir Lawrence. I’d better see them both separately. Then I’ll get Mr Kingson’s view, and let you know tomorrow. Will that do, General?’

‘It revolts me,’ said the General, ‘to think of that fellow Corven!’

‘Quite!’ said ‘very young’ Roger, and Dinny thought she had never heard a more doubtful sound.

Chapter Twenty-three



DINNY sat in the little bare waiting-room turning over *The Times*.
Young Croom stood at the window.

‘Dinny,’ he said, turning, ‘can you think of any way in which I can make this less beastly for her? It’s all my fault in a sense, but I have tried to keep myself in hand.’

Dinny looked at his troubled face. ‘I can’t; except by sticking to the exact truth.’

‘Do you believe in that chap in there?’

‘I rather do. I like his taking snuff.’

‘I don’t believe in defending. Why should she be ragged in the witness-box for nothing? What does it matter if they bankrupt me?’

‘We must prevent that somehow.’

‘D’you think I’d let –’

‘We won’t discuss it, Tony. Sufficient unto the day! Isn’t this a dingy place? Dentists try much harder – Marcus Stone on the walls, all the old *Bystanders*, and you can bring a dog.’

‘Could we smoke?’

‘Surely.’

‘These are only stinkers.’

Dinny took one, and they puffed for a minute in silence.

‘It’s too foul!’ he said, suddenly. ‘That fellow will have to come over, won’t he? He never can really have cared a scrap for her.’

‘Oh! yes he did. “*Souvent homme varie, folle est qui s’y fie!*” ’

‘Well,’ said young Croom grimly, ‘I’d better be kept from him.’ He went back to the window and stood looking out. Dinny sat thinking of that scene, when two men had not been kept apart, so pitifully like a

dog fight and rending to her in its sequel.

Then Clare came in. There were spots of red in her pale cheeks. 'Your turn, Tony.'

Young Croom came from the window, looked hard into her face, and passed into the lawyer's room. Dinny felt very sorry for him.

'Ugh!' said Clare: 'Let's get out of this!'

On the pavement, she went on:

'I wish now we had been lovers, Dinny, instead of in this mock-pretty state that no one believes in.'

‘We *do* believe.’

‘Oh! you and Dad. But that snuffy rabbit doesn’t, and no one else will. Still, I shall go through with it. I won’t let Tony down, and I won’t give Jerry an inch that I can help giving.’

‘Let’s have tea,’ said Dinny.
‘There must be tea somewhere in the City.’

In a crowded thoroughfare they soon saw an A.B.C.

‘Then you didn’t like “very young” Roger?’ asked Dinny from across the small round table.

‘Oh! he’s all right – rather

decent, really. I suppose lawyers simply can't believe. But nothing will shake me, Dinny, about not going into my married life. I will not, and that's flat.'

'I see his point. You start with the battle half won against you.'

'I won't allow the lawyers to work it in. We employ them, and they must do what we want. I'm going straight from here to the Temple, by the bye, and perhaps on to the House.'

'Excuse my reverting for a moment; but what are you going to do about Tony Croom till this comes on?'

‘Go on just as we were, except for nights in cars. Though what the difference between day and night – in a car, or anywhere else – is, I don’t know.’

‘I suppose they go by human nature as a whole.’ And Dinny leaned back. So many girls, so many young men, snatching their teas and rolls and buns and cocoa; chatter and silence and a stale effluvium, little tables, and the attendant spirits. What was human nature as a whole? Didn’t they say that it had to be changed? The stuffy past wiped out! And yet this A.B.C. was just like the A.B.C. she

went into with her mother before the war, and thought so thrilling because the bread was aerated. And the Divorce Court – into which she had never been yet – was that any different?

‘Have you finished, old thing?’ said Clare.

‘Yes. I’ll come with you as far as the Temple.’

As they paused to part at Middle Temple Lane, a rather high and pleasant voice said:

‘What luck!’ and a light momentary grip was laid on her arm.

‘If you’re going straight to the House,’ said Clare, ‘I’ll run on and get my things and join you here.’

‘Tactful,’ said Dornford. ‘Let’s stand against this “portal”. When I don’t see you for so long, Dinny, I feel lost. Jacob served for Rachel fourteen years – longevity is not what it was, so every month I serve is equal to one of his years.’

‘Rachel and he were walking out.’

‘I know. Well, I must just wait and hope. I just *have* to wait.’

Leaning against the yellow ‘portal’ she looked at him. His face

was quivering. Suddenly sorry, she said:

‘Some day, perhaps, I shall come to life again. I won’t wait any more now. Good-bye, and thank you!...’

This sudden intrusion of herself was no comfort to her in her homing bus. The sight of his quivering face made her restless and uneasy. She did not want to cause him unhappiness – a nice man, considerate to Clare, a pleasant voice, an attractive face; and in range of interest nearer to her than Wilfrid had ever been. Only, where was that wild, sweet

yearning, transmuting every value, turning the world into a single being, the one longed-for, dreamed-of mate? She sat very still in the bus, looking over the head of the woman on the opposite side, who, with fingers crisped on the satchel in her lap, wore the expression of a sportsman about to try a new field or spinney. The lights were coming up in Regent Street of a cold, just not snowy evening. There used to be the low curving roof-line, the rather nice, bilious yellow of the Quadrant. She remembered how on the top of a bus she had differed from the girl

Millicent Pole about old Regent Street. Changing, changing, everything changing! And before her suddenly closed eyes came Wilfrid's face, with its lips drawn back, as she had seen it last passing her in the Green Park.

Someone trod on her toe. She opened her eyes, and said: 'I beg your pardon.'

'Granted, I'm sure.'

Very polite! People were more polite every year!

The bus had stopped. Dinny hurried from it. She went down Conduit Street, passing her father's

tailors. Poor darling, he never went there now. Clothes were so dear; and, of course, he loathed new clothes! She came to Bond Street.

The traffic staggered to a standstill, the whole street seemed one long line of held-up cars. And England ruined! She crossed into Bruton Street. And then, in front of her, she saw a familiar figure, walking slowly with his head down! She came up with him.

‘Stack!’

He raised his head; tears were trickling down his cheeks. He blinked his large dark prominent eyes, and passed his hand over his

face.

‘You miss? I was just coming to you.’ And he held out a telegram.

Holding it up in the dim light, she read:

Henry Stack, 50a Cork Street, London. Very sorry to inform you Honourable Wilfrid Desert drowned on expedition up-country some weeks ago. Body recovered and buried on spot. Report only just come in. No possible doubt. Condolences. British Consulate, Bangkok.

Stonily she stood, seeing nothing. Stack’s fingers came up and detached the telegram.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Thank you. Show it to Mr Mont, Stack. Don’t grieve.’

‘Oh, miss!’

Dinny laid her fingers on his sleeve, gave it a little pull, and walked swiftly on.

Don't grieve! Sleet was falling now. She raised her face to feel the tingling touch of those small flakes. No more dead to her than he had already been. But – *dead!* Away over there – utterly far! Lying in the earth by the river that had drowned him, in forest silence, where no one would ever see his grave. Every memory she had of him came to life with an intensity that seemed to take all strength from her limbs, so that she nearly collapsed in the snowy street. She

stood for a minute with her gloved hand on the railing of a house. An evening postman stopped and looked round at her. Perhaps some tiny flame of hope – that some day he would come back – had flickered deep down within her; perhaps only the snowy cold was creeping into her bones; but she felt deadly cold and numb.

She reached Mount Street at last and let herself in. And there a sudden horror of betraying that anything had happened to awaken pity for her, interest in her, any sort of feeling, beset her, and she fled to her room. What was it to

anyone but her? And pride so moved within her that even her heart felt cold as stone.

A hot bath revived her a little. She dressed for dinner early and went down.

The evening was one of silences more tolerable than the spasmodic spurts of conversation. Dinny felt ill. When she went up to bed her Aunt came to her room.

‘Dinny, you look like a ghost.’

‘I got chilled, Auntie.’

‘Lawyers! – they do. I’ve brought you a posset.’

‘Ah! I’ve always longed to know

what a posset is.'

'Well, drink it.'

Dinny drank, and gasped.

'Frightfully strong.'

'Yes. Your Uncle made it.

Michael rang up.' And taking the glass, Lady Mont bent forward and kissed her cheek. 'That's all,' she said. 'Now go to bed, or you'll be ill.'

Dinny smiled. 'I'm not going to be ill, Aunt Em.'

In pursuance of that resolve she went down to breakfast next morning.

The oracle, it seemed, had

spoken in a typewritten letter signed Kingson, Cuthcott and Forsyte. It recommended putting in a defence, and had so advised Lady Corven and Mr Croom. When it had taken the necessary proceedings it would advise further.

And that coldness in the pit of the stomach which follows the receipt of lawyers' letters was felt even by Dinny, the pit of whose stomach was already deadly cold.

She went back to Condaford with her father by the morning train, repeating to her Aunt the formula: 'I'm not going to be ill.'

Chapter Twenty-four



BUT she *was* ill, and for a month in her conventual room at Condaford often wished she were dead and done with. She might, indeed, quite easily have died if such belief as she had in a future life had grown instead of declining as her strength ebbed. To rejoin Wilfrid, where this world's pain and judgements were not, had fatal attraction. To fade out into the sleep of nothingness was not hard, but had no active enticement; and, as the tide of health turned back within her,

seemed less and less natural. The solicitude of people had a subtle, pervasive healing influence. The village required a daily bulletin, her mother had been writing or 'phoning almost daily to a dozen people. Clare had been down every week-end, bringing flowers from Dornford. Aunt Em had been sending twice a week the products of Boswell and Johnson; Fleur bombarding her with the products of Piccadilly. Adrian had come down three times without warning. Hilary began sending funny little notes the moment she had turned the corner.

On March the thirtieth, spring visited her room with south-west airs, a small bowl of the first spring flowers, some pussy willows and a sprig of gorse. She was picking up rapidly now, and three days later was out of doors. For everything in nature she felt a zest such as she had not known for a long time. Crocuses, daffodil clumps, swelling buds, sun on the fantails' wings, shapes and colour of the clouds, scent of the wind, all affected her with an almost painful emotion. Yet she had no desire to do anything or see anybody. In this queer apathy she accepted an

invitation from Adrian to go abroad with him on his short holiday.

The memorable things about their fortnight's stay at Argelès in the Pyrenees, were the walks they took, the flowers they picked, the Pyrenean sheep-dogs, the almond blossom they saw, the conversations they held. They were out all day, taking lunch with them, and the opportunities for talk were unlimited. Adrian became eloquent on mountains. He had never got over his climbing days. Dinny suspected him of trying to rouse her from the

lethargy in which she was sunk.

‘When I went up “the little Sinner” in the Dolomites with Hilary before the war,’ he said one day, ‘I got as near to God as I ever shall. Nineteen years ago – dash it! What’s the nearest to God you ever got, Dinny?’

She did not answer.

‘Look here, my dear, what are you now – twenty-seven?’

‘Nearly twenty-eight.’

‘On the threshold still. I suppose talking it out wouldn’t help?’

‘You ought to know, Uncle, that talking one’s heart out is not in the

family.'

'True! The more we're hurt the silenter we get. But one mustn't inbreed to sorrow, Dinny.'

Dinny said suddenly: 'I understand perfectly how women go into convents, or give themselves up to good works. I always used to think it showed a lack of humour.'

'It can show a lack of courage, or too much courage, of the sort fanatical.'

'Or broken springs.'

Adrian looked at her.

'Yours are not broken, Dinny –

badly bent, not broken.'

'Let's hope so, Uncle; but they ought to be straightening by now.'

'You're beginning to look fine.'

'Yes, I'm eating enough even for Aunt Em. It's taking interest in oneself that's the trouble.'

'I agree. I wonder if –'

'Not iron, darling. It sews me up inside.'

Adrian smiled. 'I was thinking more of children.'

'They're not synthetic, yet. I'm all right, and very lucky, as things go. Did I tell you old Betty died?'

'Good old soul! She used to give

me bulls'-eyes.'

'*She* was the real thing. We read too many books, Uncle.'

'Indubitably. Walk more, read less! Let's have our lunch.'

On the way back to England they stayed two nights in Paris at a little hotel over a restaurant near the Gare St Lazare. They had wood fires, and their beds were comfortable.

'Only the French know what a bed should be,' said Adrian.

The cooking down below was intended for racing men and such as go where they can appreciate

food. The waiters, who wore aprons, looked, as Adrian expressed it, 'like monks doing a spot of work,' pouring the wine and mixing the salads with reverence. He and Dinny were the only foreigners in either hotel or restaurant, not far from being the only foreigners in Paris.

‘Marvellous town, Dinny. Except for cars in place of *fiacres* and the Eiffel Tower, I don't see any real change by daylight since I was first here in '88, when your grandfather was Minister at Copenhagen. There's the same tang of coffee and wood smoke in the air; people have

the same breadth of back, the same red buttons in their coats; there are the same tables outside the same cafés, the same *affiches*, the same funny little stalls for selling books, the same violently miraculous driving, the same pervading French grey, even in the sky; and the same rather ill-tempered look of not giving a damn for anything outside Paris. Paris leads fashion, and yet it's the most conservative place in the world. They say the advanced literary crowd here regard the world as having begun in 1914 at earliest, have scrapped everything that came before the war, despise

anything that lasts, are mostly Jews, Poles and Irishmen, and yet have chosen this changeless town to function in. The same with the painters and musicians, and every other extremist. Here they gather and chatter and experiment themselves to death. And good old Paris laughs and carries on, as concerned with, reality and flavours and the past as it ever was. Paris produces anarchy exactly as stout produces froth.'

Dinny pressed his arm.

'That was a good effort, Uncle. I must say I feel more alive here than I have for ages.'

‘Ah! Paris pets the senses. Let’s go in here – too cold to sit out. What’ll you have, tea or – absinthe?’

‘Absinthe.’

‘You won’t like it.’

‘All right – tea with lemon.’

Waiting for her tea in the quiet hurly-burly of the Café de la Paix, Dinny watched her Uncle’s thin, bearded form, and thought that he looked quite ‘in his plate,’ but with a queer, interested contentment that identified him with the life around.

To be interested in life and not

pet oneself! And she looked about her. Her neighbours were neither remarkable nor demonstrative, but they gave an impression of doing what they liked, not of being on the way to somewhere else.

‘They dig into the moment, don’t they?’ said Adrian suddenly.

‘Yes, I was thinking that.’

‘The French make an art of living. We hope for the future or regret the past. Precious little “present” about the English!’

‘Why are these so different?’

‘Less northern blood, more wine and oil; their heads are rounder

than ours, their bodies more stocky, and their eyes are mainly brown.'

'Those are things we can't alter, anyway.'

'The French are essentially the medium people. They've brought equilibrium to a high point. Their senses and intellects balance.'

'But they get fat, Uncle.'

'Yes, but all over; they don't jut, and they hold themselves up. I'd rather be English, of course; but if I weren't, I'd rather be French.'

'Isn't there anything in having an itch for something better than you've got?'

‘Ah! Ever noticed, Dinny, that when we say “Be good!” they say “*Soyez sage!*”? There’s a lot in that. I’ve heard Frenchmen put our unease down to the Puritan tradition. But that’s to mistake effect for cause, symptoms for roots. I admit we’ve got an urge towards the promised land, but Puritanism was part of that urge, so’s our wanderlust and colonizing quality; so’s our Protestantism, Scandinavian blood, the sea and the climate. None of that helps us in the art of living. Look at our industrialism, our old maids, cranks, humanitarianisms, poetry!

We jut in every direction. We've got one or two highly mediumizing institutions – the public schools, 'cricket' in its various forms – but as a people we're chock-full of extremism. The average Briton is naturally exceptional, and underneath his dread of being conspicuous, he's really proud of it. Where, on earth, will you see more diverse bone formation than in England, and all of it peculiar? We do our level best to be average, but, by George, we jut!

‘You're inspired, Uncle.’

‘Well, you look about you when you get home.’

‘I will,’ said Dinny.

They had a good crossing the next day, and Adrian dropped her at Mount Street.

In kissing him good-bye, she squeezed his little finger.

‘You’re done me a tremendous amount of good, Uncle.’

During those six weeks she had scarcely thought at all about Clare’s troubles, and she asked at once for the latest news. A defence had been delivered and issue joined; the case would probably be on in a few weeks.

‘I’ve not seen either Clare or

young Croom,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘but I gathered from Dornford that they go about as before. “Very young” Roger still harps on the need for getting her to speak about her life out there. Lawyers seem to regard the Court as confessional boxes in which to confess the sins of your opponent.’

‘Well, aren’t they?’

‘Judging by the papers, yes.’

‘Well, Clare can’t and won’t. They’ll make a great mistake if they try to force her. Has anything been heard of Jerry?’

‘He must have started, if he’s to

be here in time.'

'Suppose they lose, what is to be done about Tony Croom?'

'Put yourself in his place, Dinny. Whatever happens, he'll probably come in for a slating from the judge. He won't be in a mood to accept favours. If he can't pay up I don't quite know what they can do to him; something unpleasant, no doubt. And there's the question of Jack Muskham's attitude – he's queer.'

'Yes,' said Dinny under her breath.

Sir Lawrence dropped his

monocle.

‘Your Aunt suggests that young Croom should go gold-digging, come back rich, and marry Clare.’

‘But Clare?’

‘Isn’t she in love with him?’

Dinny shook her head. ‘She might be if he’s ruined.’

‘H’m! And how are *you*, my dear? Really yourself again?’

‘Oh, yes!’

‘Michael would like to see you some time.’

‘I’ll go round tomorrow.’

And that, meaning much, was all that was said about the news that

had caused her illness.

Chapter Twenty-five



DINNY made the effort needed to go round to South Square next morning. Except with Clare on her arrival from Ceylon, she had not been there since the day of Wilfrid's departure to Siam.

‘Up in his workroom, miss.’

‘Thank you, Coaker, I’ll go up.’

Michael did not hear her come in, and she stood for a moment looking at the caricature-covered walls. It always seemed to her so odd that Michael, inclined to over-

estimate human virtues, should surround himself with the efforts of those who live by exaggerating human defects.

‘Am I interrupting, Michael?’

‘Dinny! You’re looking a treat! You gave us a bad turn, old thing. Sit down! I was only looking into potatoes – their figures are so puzzling.’

They talked for some time, and then, the knowledge of what she had come for invading both, fell silent.

‘You’ve something to give or tell me, Michael.’

He went to a drawer, and took out a little packet. Dinny unwrapped it in her lap. There was a letter, a little photograph, a badge.

‘It’s his passport photo, and D.S.O. ribbon. In the letter there’s something for you; in fact, the whole letter is really for you. They’re all for you. Excuse me, I have to see Fleur before she goes out.’

Dinny sat motionless, looking at the photograph. Yellowed with damp and heat, it had the uncompromising reality that characterizes passport

photographs. 'Wilfrid Desert' was written across it, and he looked straight at her out of the paste-board. She turned it face down on her lap, and smoothed the ribbon, which was stained and crushed. Then, nerving herself, she opened the letter. From it dropped a folded sheet, which she set apart. The letter was to Michael.

New Year's Day.

DEAR OLD M. M., –

Greetings to you and Fleur, and many good years! I'm far up north in a very wild part of this country with an objective that I may reach or not – the habitation of a tribe quite definitely pre-Siamese and non-Mongolian. Adrian Charwell would be interested. I've often meant to let you

know my news, but, when it came to writing, didn't – partly because if you don't know this part of the world description's no use, and partly because it's difficult for me to believe that anybody can be interested. I'm writing now really to ask you to tell Dinny that I am at peace with myself at last. I don't know whether it's the strength and remoteness of the atmosphere out here, or whether I've gained some of the Eastern conviction that the world of other men does not matter; one's alone from birth to death, except for that fine old companion, the Universe – of which one is the microcosm. It's a kind of queer peace, and I often wonder how I could have been so torn and tortured. Dinny, I think, will be glad to know this; just as I would be truly glad to know that she, too, is at peace.

I've written a little, and, if I come back from this business, shall try and produce some account of it. In three days from now we reach the river, cross it, and follow up a western tributary towards the Himalayas.

Faint echoes of the crisis you've been having

trickle out here. Poor old England! I don't suppose I shall ever see her again; but she's a game old bird when put to it, and I can't see her being beaten; in fact, properly moulted, I expect her to fly better than ever.

Good-bye, old man, my love to you both; and to Dinny my special love.

WILFRID

Peace! And she? She rewrapped the ribbon, photograph, and letter and thrust them into her bag. Making no noise, she opened the door, went down the stairs, and out into the sunshine.

Alone by the river, she unfolded the sheet she had taken from the letter, and, under a plane tree as yet bare of leaves, read these

verses:

Lie Still!

The sun, who brings all earth to
bloom,
Corrupts and makes corruption
flower,
Is just a flame that thro' the gloom
Of heaven burns a little hour;

And, figured on the chart of night
—

A somewhat negligible star —
Is but a pinpricked point of light
As million-million others are;

And, though it be the all in all
Of my existence and decay,
It has as simple rise and fall
As I have, and as short a day.

But that no unction to my heart

Will lay; the smallest germ in me
Plays just as passionate a part
As I do, in eternity.

The germ and I and sun, we rise,
Fulfil our little lives, and die;
And to all question God replies:
‘Lie still! I cannot tell you why!’

Lie still! The Embankment was nearly empty of people and of traffic. She walked on, crossing the main lines of the traffic, and came to Kensington Gardens. There on the Round Pond were many small boats, and many children interested in their vagaries. A bright-haired little boy, something like Kit Mont, was guiding his boat

with a stick to a fresh attempt to cross the pond. What blissful unconsciousness of all else! Was that the secret of happiness? To be lost in the moment – to be out of oneself, like a child! He said suddenly:

‘It’s going! Look!’

The sails filled, the little boat floated away. The small boy stood with arms akimbo, and, quickly looking up at her, said:

‘Ha! I must run!’

Dinny watched him stop now and again with a jerk to calculate the landing of his boat.

So one ran through life,
watching each venture coming to
shore, and at the end lay still! Like
birds who uttered their songs,
hunted for worms, preened their
feathers, flew without seeming
cause, unless for joy; mated, built
nests and fed their young, and
when all was over became little
stiffened bundles of feathers, and
passed into corruption, and dust.

She followed slowly round the
pond, saw him again guiding the
boat with his stick, and said: 'What
do you call your boat?'

'A cutter. I had a schooner, but
our dog ate the rigging.'

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, ‘dogs like rigging – very succulent.’

‘Very what?’

‘Like asparagus.’

‘I’m not allowed asparagus, it’s too expensive.’

‘But you’ve tasted it?’

‘Yes. See, the wind’s catching it again!’

Off went the boat, and off went the small bright-haired boy.

Adrian’s words came into her head. ‘I was thinking more of children.’

She walked into what in old days would have been called a

glade. The ground was covered with crocuses, yellow, violet, white, and with daffodils; the trees had eagerness in every twig, stretching their buds upward to the sun's warmth; the blackbirds were in song. And as she walked she thought: 'Peace! There is no peace. There is life, and there is death!'

And those who saw her thought: 'Nice-looking girl!' 'These little hats!' 'Where's she goin', I wonder, with her head in the air?' or, again, just: 'Coo!' She crossed the road and came to the Hudson Memorial. It was supposed to be a home for birds; but beyond a sparrow or two

and a fat pigeon, there were none; nor were more than three people looking at it. She, who had seen it with Wilfrid, glanced at it for a moment and walked on.

‘Poor Hudson! Poor Rima!’ he had said.

She went down to the Serpentine and walked along it; the sun was bright on the water, and beyond it the grass was springy and dry. The papers were already talking of drought! The sound currents from north and south and west joined in a mild continuous roaring. Where he was lying it would be silent; strange birds and little creatures

would be the only visitors, and odd-shaped leaves would drop on his grave. There came into her mind the pastoral scenes in some film pictures of the Normandy home of Briand, that she had seen at Argelès. ‘A pity we have to leave all this!’ she had said.

An aeroplane droned its way over to the north, a high, silvery, small, noisy shape. *He* had hated them ever since the war. ‘Disturbers of whatever Gods there be!’

Brave new world! God no longer in His heaven!

She turned a little north to avoid

the place where she used to meet him. The roofless tabernacle of oratory close to the Marble Arch was deserted. She left the Park and went towards Melton Mews. It was over! With a queer little smile on her lips she turned into the Mews and stopped at her sister's door.

Chapter Twenty-six



SHE found Clare in. For the first few minutes they avoided each other's troubles, then Dinny said: 'Well?'

'Not at all well. I've split with Tony – my nerves are in rags and his in tatters.'

'But do you mean that he –?'

'No. Only I've told him I can't go on seeing him till this is over. We meet meaning not to talk about the thing; then it crops up, and we get all anyhow.'

'He must be awfully unhappy.'

‘He is. But it’s only for another three or four weeks.’

‘And then?’

Clare laughed – no joyful sound.

‘But seriously, Clare?’

‘We shan’t win, and then nothing will matter. If Tony wants me I suppose I shall let him. He’ll be ruined, so I shall owe him that.’

‘I think,’ said Dinny slowly, ‘that I wouldn’t let the result affect me.’

Clare stared up at her from the sofa.

‘That sounds almost too sensible.’

‘It wasn’t worth while to plead

innocence unless you meant to carry it through, however the case goes. If you win, wait till you can divorce Jerry. If you don't win, wait till you're divorced. It won't do Tony any real harm to wait; and it'll certainly do you no harm to know for certain how you feel.'

'Jerry is quite clever enough to prevent my ever getting evidence against him, if he sets his mind to it.'

'Then we must hope you'll lose. Your friends will still believe in you.'

Clare shrugged. 'Will they?'

‘I’ll see to that,’ said Dinny.

‘Dornford has advised telling Jack Muskhams before the case comes on. What do you say?’

‘I should like to see Tony Croom first.’

‘Well, if you come round again this evening, you’ll see him. He comes and stares up at me at seven o’clock on Saturday and Sunday evenings. Quaint!’

‘No. Very natural. What are you doing this afternoon?’

‘Riding with Dornford in Richmond Park. I ride with him in the Row early every morning now.

I wish you'd come, Dinny.'

'No things, and no muscles.'

'Darling,' said Clare, springing up, 'it really was awful while you were ill. We felt ever so bad. Dornford was quite potty. You look better now than you did before.'

'Yes, I'm more pneumatic.'

'Oh! you've read that book?'

Dinny nodded. 'I'll come round this evening. Good-bye; bless you!'

It was almost seven when she slipped out of Mount Street and walked rapidly towards the Mews. A full moon was up with the

evening star in a not yet darkened sky. Coming to the west corner of the deserted Mews, she at once saw young Croom standing below No. 2. Waiting till he began to move away, she ran down the Mews and round the far corner to catch him.

‘Dinny! How wonderful!’

‘I was told I should catch you looking at the Queen.’

‘Yes, that’s what the cat has come to.’

‘It might be worse.’

‘Are you all right again? You must have got a chill in the City that foul day.’

‘Let’s walk as far as the Park. I wanted to ask you about Jack Muskham.’

‘I funk telling him.’

‘Shall I do it for you?’

‘But why?’

Dinny took his arm.

‘He’s a connexion, through Uncle Lawrence. Besides, I’ve had occasion to know him. Mr Dornford is perfectly right; it will depend very much on when and what he’s told. Let me!’

‘I don’t know really – I really don’t know.’

‘I want to see him again,

anyway.'

Young Croom looked at her.

'Somehow I don't believe that.'

'Honest Injun.'

'It's terribly sweet of you; of course you can do it much better than I, but –'

'That's enough then.'

They had reached the Park, and were walking along the rails towards Mount Street.

'Have you been seeing the lawyers much?'

'Yes, our evidence is all taped out. It's the cross-examination.'

'I think I might enjoy that, if I

were going to tell the truth.’

‘They twist and turn what you say so, and their tones of voice – ! I went into that court and listened one day. Dornford told Clare he wouldn’t practise in that court for all the gold in France. He’s a sound fellow, Dinny.’

‘Yes,’ said Dinny, looking round at his ingenuous face.

‘I don’t think our lawyers care about the job either. It’s not in their line. “Very young” Roger is a bit of a sportsman. He believes we’re telling the truth, because he realizes I’m sorry we are. That’s your turning. I shall go and bat

round the Park, or I shan't sleep.
Wonderful moon!'

Dinny pressed his hand.

When she reached her door, he was still standing there, and raised his hat to her – or to the moon, she could not be quite sure which...

According to Sir Lawrence, Jack Muskham would be up in Town over the week-end; he now had rooms in Ryder Street. She had not thought twice about going all the way to Royston to see him concerning Wilfrid; but he might well think twice about her going to see him in Ryder Street concerning young Croom. She telephoned,

therefore, to Burton's Club at lunch-time the next day.

His voice brought back the shock of the last time she had heard it, close to the York Column.

'Dinny Cherrell. Could I see you some time today?'

The answer came slowly.

'Er – of course. When?'

'Any time that suits you.'

'Are you at Mount Street?'

'Yes, but I would rather come to you.'

'Well – er – would –? How about tea at my rooms in Ryder Street? You know the number?'

‘Yes, thank you. Five o’clock?’

Approaching those rooms she needed all her pluck. She had last seen him reeling in the thick of that fight with Wilfrid. Besides, he symbolized to her the rock on which her love for Wilfrid had gone aground. She only did not hate him, because she could not help remembering that this bitterness towards Wilfrid had been due to his queer appreciation of herself. Only by fast walking, and slow thinking, did she arrive.

The door was opened to her by one who obviously bettered his declining days by letting rooms to

such as he had valeted in the past. He took her up to the second floor.

‘Miss – er – Cherwell, sir.’

Tall, lean, languid, neatly dressed as ever, Jack Muskham was standing by the open window of a not unpleasant room. ‘Tea, please, Rodney.’ He came towards her, holding out his hand.

‘Like a slow-motion picture,’ thought Dinny. However surprised at her wanting to see him, he was showing no sign of it.

‘Been racing at all since I saw you at Blenheim’s Derby?’

‘No.’

‘You backed him, I remember. Clearest case of beginner’s luck I ever knew.’ His smile brought out all the wrinkles on his brown face, and Dinny perceived that there were plenty of them.

‘Do sit down. Here’s tea. Will you make it?’

She gave him his cup, took her own and said:

‘Are the Arab mares over yet, Mr Muskham?’

‘I expect them the end of next month.’

‘You have young Tony Croom to look after them.’

‘Oh! Do you know him?’

‘Through my sister.’

‘Nice boy.’

‘He is,’ said Dinny. ‘It’s about him I’ve come.’

‘Oh!’

The thought ‘He owes me too much,’ darted through her. He could not refuse her this! Leaning back and crossing her knees, she looked him full in the face.

‘I wanted to tell you, in confidence, that Jerry Corven is bringing a divorce suit against my sister, and Tony Croom is cited as the co-respondent.’

Jack Muskham moved the hand that held his cup.

‘He *is* in love with her, and they *have* been going about together, but there is no truth in the charges.’

‘I see,’ said Muskham.

‘The case is coming on quite soon. I persuaded Tony Croom to let me tell you of it; it would be so awkward for him to talk about himself.’

Muskham was looking at her with unmoved face.

‘But,’ he said, ‘I know Jerry Corven. I didn’t realize your sister had left him.’

‘We keep it to ourselves.’

‘Was her leaving him young Croom’s doing?’

‘No. They only met on the boat coming over. Clare left Jerry for quite another reason. She and Tony Croom have been indiscreet, of course; they’ve been watched and seen together in what are known, I believe, as “compromising circumstances.” ’

‘How do you mean exactly?’

‘Driving back from Oxford late one evening their lights failed and they spent the rest of the night in the car together.’

Jack Muskham raised his shoulders slightly. Dinny leaned forward with her eyes on his.

‘I told you there was no truth in the charges; there is *none*.’

‘But, my dear Miss Cherrell, a man never admits –’

‘That is why *I* came to you instead of Tony. My sister would not tell me a lie.’

Again Muskham made the slight movement of his shoulders.

‘I don’t quite see –’ he began.

‘What it has to do with you? This: I don’t suppose they’ll be believed.’

‘You mean if I just read the case it would put me off young Croom?’

‘Yes, I think you would feel he had not “played the game.” ’ She could not quite keep irony out of her voice.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘has he?’

‘I think so. He’s deeply in love with my sister, and yet he’s kept himself in hand. One can’t help falling in love, you know.’ With those words all the feelings of the past rose up within her, and she looked down so as not to see that impassive face and the provocative set of its lips. Suddenly, by a sort of inspiration, she said:

‘My brother-in-law has asked for damages.’

‘Oh!’ said Jack Muskham, ‘I didn’t know that was done now.’

‘Two thousand, and Tony Croom has nothing. He professes not to care, but if they lose, of course, it’s ruin.’

After that there was silence. Jack Muskham went back to the window. He sat on the sill and said:

‘Well, I don’t know what I can do?’

‘You needn’t take his job from him – that’s all.’

‘The man was in Ceylon and his wife here. It’s not –’

Dinny rose, took two steps towards him and stood very still.

‘Has it ever struck you, Mr Muskham, that you owe me anything? Do you remember that you took my lover from me? Do you know that he is dead out there, where he went because of you?’

‘Of me?’

‘You and what you stand for made him give me up. I ask you now, however this case goes, not to sack Tony Croom! Good-bye!’ And before he could answer she was

gone.

She almost ran towards the Green Park. How far from what she had intended! How fatal – perhaps! But her feelings had been too strong – the old revolt against the dead wall of ‘form’ and those impalpable inexorable forces of tradition which had wrecked her love life! It could not have been otherwise. The sight of his long, dandified figure, the sound of his voice, had brought it all back too strongly. Ah, well! It was a relief; an escape of old bitterness pent within her spirit!

The next morning she received

this note:

Ryder Street.
Sunday.

DEAR MISS CHARWELL, —

You may rely on me in that matter. With
sincere regard,

Yours very faithfully,

JOHN MUSKHAM

Chapter Twenty-seven



WITH that promise to her credit she went back to Condaford the following day and gave herself to mitigation of the atmosphere she found there. Her father and mother, living their ordinary lives, were obviously haunted and harassed. Her mother, sensitive and secluded, was just shrinking from publicity discreditable to Clare. Her father seemed to feel that, however the case went, most people would think his daughter a light woman and a liar; young Croom would be

excused more or less, but a woman who allowed circumstance to take such turns would find no one to excuse her. He was clearly feeling, too, a vindictive anger against Jerry Corven, and a determination that the fellow should not be successful if he could help it. Faintly amused at an attitude so male, Dinny felt a sort of admiration at the painful integrity with which he was grasping the shadow and letting the substance go. To her father's generation divorce still seemed the outward and visible sign of inner and spiritual disgrace. To herself love

was love and, when it became aversion, ceased to justify sexual relationship. She had, in fact, been more shocked by Clare's yielding to Jerry Corven in her rooms than by her leaving him in Ceylon. The divorce suits she had occasionally followed in the papers had done nothing to help her believe that marriages were made in heaven. But she recognized the feelings of those brought up in an older atmosphere, and avoided adding to the confusion and trouble in her people's minds. The line she took was more practical: The thing would soon be over one way or the

other, and probably the other!
People paid very little attention to
other people's affairs nowadays!

‘What!’ said the General
sardonically. ‘ “Night in a car” – it’s
the perfect headline. Sets
everybody thinking at once how
they themselves would have
behaved.’

She had no answer, but: ‘They’ll
make a symposium of it, darling:
The Home Secretary, the Dean of St
Paul’s, the Princess Elizabeth.’

She was disturbed when told that
Dornford had been asked to
Condaford for Easter.

‘I hope you don’t mind, Dinny; we didn’t know whether you’d be here or not.’

‘I can’t use the expression “I’m agreeable” even to you, Mother.’

‘Well, darling, one of these days you must go down into the battle again.’

Dinny bit her lip and did not answer. It was true, and the more disquieting. Coming from her gentle and unmanaging mother, the words stung.

Battle! Life, then, was like the war. It struck you down into hospital, turned you out therefrom

into the ranks again. Her mother and father would hate 'to lose her,' but they clearly wanted her 'to go.' And this with Clare's failure written on the wall!

Easter came with a wind 'fresh to strong.' Clare arrived by train on the Saturday morning, Dornford by car in the afternoon. He greeted Dinny as if doubtful of his welcome.

He had found himself a house. It was on Campden Hill. He had been terribly anxious to know Clare's opinion of it, and she had spent a Sunday afternoon going over it with him.

‘ “Eminently desirable,” Dinny. “South aspect; garage and stabling for two horses; good garden; all the usual offices, centrally heated,” and otherwise well-bred. He thinks of going in towards the end of May. It has an old tiled roof, so I put him on to French grey for shutters. Really, it’s rather nice, and roomy.’

‘It sounds “marvellous.” I suppose you’ll be going there instead of to the Temple?’

‘Yes, he’s moving into Pump Court, or Brick Buildings – I can’t remember. When you think of it, Dinny, why shouldn’t he have been

made co-respondent instead of Tony? I see much more of him.'

Otherwise allusion to 'the case' was foregone. It would be one of the first after the undefended suits were disposed of, and calm before the storm was reigning.

Dornford, indeed, referred to it after lunch on Sunday.

'Shall you be in court during your sister's case, Dinny?'

'I must.'

'I'm afraid it may make you very wild. They've briefed Brough, and he's particularly exasperating when he likes with a simple denial like

this; that's what they'll rely on.
Clare must try and keep cool.'

Dinny remembered 'very young' Roger's wishing it had been herself and not Clare.

'I hope you'll tell her that.'

'I'll take her through her evidence, and cross-examine her on it. But one can't tell the line Brough will take.'

'Shall you be in court yourself?'

'If I can, but the odds are I shan't be free.'

'How long will it last?'

'More than a day, I'm afraid.'

Dinny sighed.

‘Poor Dad! Has Clare got a good man?’

‘Yes – Instone, very much hampered by her refusal to talk about Ceylon.’

‘That’s definite, you know. She won’t.’

‘I like her for it, but I’m afraid it’s fatal.’

‘So be it!’ said Dinny: ‘I want her free. The person most to be pitied is Tony Croom.’

‘Why?’

‘He’s the only one of the three in love.’

‘I see,’ said Dornford, and was

silent. Dinny felt sorry.

‘Would you care for a walk?’

‘Simply love it!’

‘We’ll go up through the woods, and I’ll show you where the Cherrell killed the boar and won the de Campfort – our heraldic myth. Had you any family legend in Shropshire?’

‘Yes, but the place has gone – sold when my father died; six of us and no money.’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny, ‘horrible when families are uprooted.’

Dornford smiled.

‘Live donkeys are better than

dead lions.’

While they were going up through the coverts he talked about his new house, subtly ‘pumping’ her for expressions of her taste.

They came out into a sunken roadway leading on to a thorn-bush-covered down.

‘Here’s the place. Virgin forest then, no doubt. We used to picnic here as children.’

Dornford took a deep breath. ‘Real English view – nothing spectacular, but no end good.’

‘Lovable.’

‘That’s the word.’

He spread his raincoat on the bank. 'Sit down and let's have a smoke.'

Dinny sat down.

'Come on part of it yourself, the ground's not too dry.'

While he sat there, with his hands hugging his knees and his pipe fuming gently, she thought: 'The most self-controlled man I ever came across, and the gentlest, except Uncle Adrian.'

'If only a boar would come along,' he said, 'it would be prime!'

'Member of Parliament kills boar on spur of Chilterns,' murmured

Dinny, but did not add: 'Wins lady.'

'Wind's off the gorse. Another three weeks and it'll be green down there. Pick of the year – this, or the Indian summer, I never know. And yours, Dinny?'

'Blossom time.'

'Um; and harvest. This ought to be glorious then – quite a lot of cornland.'

'It was just ripe when the war broke out. We came up picnicking two days before, and stayed till the moon rose. How much do you think people really fought for England, Mr Dornford?'

‘Practically all – for some nook or other of it; many just for the streets, and buses, and smell of fried fish. I fought mainly, I think, for Shrewsbury and Oxford. But Eustace is my name.’

‘I’ll remember. We’d better go down now, or we shall be late for tea.’

And, all the way home, they contended with birds’ songs and the names of plants.

‘Thanks for my treat,’ he said.

‘I’ve enjoyed it, too.’

That walk had, indeed, a curiously soothing effect on Dinny.

So, she could talk with him without question of love-making.

Bank holiday was sou'-westerly. Dornford spent a quiet hour with Clare over her evidence, and then went riding with her in the rain. Dinny's morning went in arranging for spring cleaning and the chintzing of the furniture while the family were up in town. Her mother and father were to stay at Mount Street, she and Clare with Fleur. In the afternoon she pottered with the General round the new pigsties, progressing as slowly as a local builder, anxious to keep his men in work, could make them.

She was not alone again with Dornford until after tea.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I think your sister will do, if she keeps her temper.’

‘Clare can be very cutting.’

‘Yes, and there’s an underlying sentiment among lawyers against being cut up by outsiders in each other’s presence; even judges have it.’

‘They won’t find her a “butterfly on the wheel.” ’

‘It’s no good getting up against institutions, you know; they carry too many guns.’

‘Oh! well,’ said Dinny, with a sigh, ‘it’s on the knees of the gods.’

‘Which are deuced slippery. Could I have a photograph of you, preferably as a little girl?’

‘I’ll see what we’ve got – I’m afraid only snaps; but I think there’s one where my nose doesn’t turn up too much.’

She went to a cabinet, took a drawer out bodily, and put it on the covered billiard table.

‘The family snap-board – choose!’

He stood at her side and they turned them over.

‘I took most of them, so there aren’t many of me.’

‘Is that your brother?’

‘Yes, and this – just before he went to the war. This is Clare the week before she was married. Here’s one of me, with some hair. Dad took that when he came home, the spring after the war.’

‘When you were thirteen?’

‘Fourteen nearly. It’s supposed to be like Joan of Arc being taken in by voices.’

‘It’s lovely. I shall get it enlarged.’

He held it to the light. The figure

was turned three quarters, and the face lifted to the branches of a fruit tree in blossom. The whole of the little picture was very much alive; the sun having fallen on the blossom and on Dinny's hair, which hung to her waist.

‘Mark the rapt look,’ she said; ‘there must have been a cat up the tree.’

He put it into his pocket and returned to the table.

‘And this?’ he said: ‘Could I have this too?’

The snap was one of her a little older, but still with her hair uncut,

full face, hands clasped in front, head a little down and eyes looking up.

‘No, I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was there.’ It was the counterpart of one she had sent to Wilfrid.

Dornford nodded; and she realized that in some uncanny way he knew why. Seized with compunction, she said:

‘Oh! yes, you can. It doesn’t matter, now.’ And she put it into his hand....

After Dornford and Clare had left on Tuesday morning, Dinny studied a map, took the car and set

out for Bablock Hythe. She did not care for driving, but she was moved by the thought of Tony Croom deprived of his week-end glimpse of Clare. The twenty-five miles took her well over an hour. At the inn she was told that he would be at his cottage, and, leaving the car, she walked over. He was in shirt-sleeves distempering the walls of the low, timbered sitting-room. From the doorway she could see the pipe wobble in his mouth.

‘Anything wrong with Clare?’ he said at once.

‘Nothing whatever. I just thought

I'd like to have a look at your habitat.'

'How terribly nice of you! I'm doing a job of work.'

'Clearly.'

'Clare likes duck's-egg green; this is the nearest I can get to it.'

'It goes splendidly with the beams.'

Young Croom said, looking straight before him, 'I can't believe I'll ever get her here, but I can't help pretending; otherwise the sand would be clean out of my dolly.'

Dinny put her hand on his

sleeve.

‘You’re not going to lose your job. I’ve seen Jack Muskham.’

‘Already? You’re marvellous. I’ll just wash off and get my coat on, and show you round.’

Dinny waited in the doorway where a streak of sunlight fell. The two cottages, knocked into one, still had their ramblers, wistaria, and thatched roof. It would be very pretty.

‘Now,’ said young Croom. ‘The boxes are all finished, and the paddocks have got their water. In fact, we only want the animals; but

they're not to be here till May. Taking no risks. Well, I'd rather have this case over first. You've come from Condaford?'

'Yes. Clare went back this morning. She would have sent her love, but she didn't know I was coming.'

'Why *did* you come?' said young Croom bluntly.

'Fellow feeling.'

He thrust his arm within hers.

'Yes. So sorry! Do you find,' he added suddenly, 'that thinking of other people suffering helps?'

'Not much.'

‘No. Wanting someone is like tooth or ear ache. You can’t get away from it.’

Dinny nodded.

‘This time of year, too,’ said young Croom, with a laugh. ‘The difference between being “fond of” and “loving”! I’m getting desperate, Dinny. I don’t see how Clare can ever change. If she were ever going to love me, she would by now. If she’s not going to love me, I couldn’t stick it here. I’d have to get away to Kenya or somewhere.’

Looking at his eyes, ingenuously hanging on her answer, her nerve

went. It was her own sister; but what did she know of her, when it came to the depths?

‘You never know. I wouldn’t give up.’

Young Croom pressed her arm.

‘Sorry to be talking of my mania. Only, when one longs day and night –’

‘I know.’

‘I must buy a goat or two. Horses don’t like donkeys; and as a rule they shy at goats; but I want to make these paddocks feel homey. I’ve got two cats for the boxes. What do you think?’

‘I only know about dogs, and – pigs theoretically.’

‘Come and have lunch. They’ve got a rather good ham.’

He did not again speak of Clare; and, after partaking together of the rather good ham, he put Dinny into her car and drove her the first five miles of the way home, saying that he wanted a walk.

‘I think no end of you for coming,’ he said, squeezing her hand hard: ‘It was most frightfully sporting. Give my love to Clare,’ and he went off, waving his hand, as he turned into a field-path.

She was absent-minded during the rest of the drive. The day, though still south-westerly, had gleams of sunlight, and sharp showers of hail. Putting the car away she got the spaniel Foch and went out to the new pigsties. Her father was there, brooding over their construction like the Lieutenant-General he was, very neat, resourceful, faddy. Doubtful whether they would ever contain pigs, Dinny slipped her arm through his.

‘How’s the battle of Pigsville?’

‘One of the bricklayers was run down yesterday, and that

carpenter there has cut his thumb. I've been talking to old Bellows, but – dash it! – you can't blame him for wanting to keep his men in work. I sympathize with a chap who sticks by his own men, and won't have union labour. He says he'll be finished by the end of next month, but he won't.'

'No,' said Dinny, 'he's already said that twice.'

'Where have you been?'

'Over to see Tony Croom.'

'Any development?'

'No. I just wanted to tell him that I've seen Mr Muskham, and he

won't lose his job.'

'Glad of that. He's got grit, that boy. Pity he didn't go into the army.'

'I'm very sorry for him, Dad; he really is in love.'

'Still a common complaint,' said the General drily: 'Did you see they've more than balanced the Budget? It's an hysterical age, with these European crises for breakfast every other morning.'

'That's the papers. The French papers, where the print is so much smaller, don't excite one half so much. I couldn't get the wind up at

all when I was reading them.’

‘Papers, and wireless; everything known before it happens; and headlines twice the size of the events. You’d think, to judge from the speeches and the “leaders,” that the world had never been in a hole before. The world’s always in a hole, only in old days people didn’t make a song about it.’

‘But without the song would they have balanced the Budget, dear?’

‘No, it’s the way we do things nowadays. But it’s not English.’

‘Do we know what’s English and what isn’t, Dad?’

The General wrinkled up his weathered face, and a smile crept about the wrinkles. He pointed at the pigsties.

‘Those are. Done in the end, but not before they must be.’

‘Do you like that?’

‘No; but I like this hysterical way of trying to cure it even less. You’d think we’d never been short of money before. Why, Edward the Third owed money all over Europe. The Stuarts were always bankrupt. And after Napoleon we had years to which these last years have been nothing, but they didn’t have it for breakfast every morning.’

‘When ignorance was bliss!’

‘Well, I dislike the mixture of hysteria and bluff we’ve got now.’

‘Would you suppress the voice that breathes o’er Eden?’

‘Wireless? “The old order changeth, yielding place to new. And God fulfils himself in many ways,” ’ quoted the General, ‘ “lest one good custom should corrupt the world.” I remember a sermon of old Butler’s at Harrow on that text – one of his best, too. I’m not hidebound, Dinny, at least I hope not. Only I think everything’s talked out too much. It’s talked out so much that it’s not felt.’

‘I believe in the Age, Dad. It’s dropped its superfluous clothes. Look at those old pictures in *The Times* lately. You smelt dogma and flannel petticoat.’

‘Not flannel,’ said the General, ‘in my day.’

‘You should know, dear.’

‘As a matter of fact, Dinny, I believe *mine* was the really revolutionary generation. You saw that play about Browning? There you had it; but that was all gone before I went to Sandhurst. We thought as we liked, and we acted as we thought, but we still didn’t talk. Now they talk before they

think, and when it comes to action, they act much as we did, if they act at all. In fact, the chief difference between now and fifty years ago is the freedom of expression; it's so free now, that it takes the salt out of things.'

'That's profound, Dad.'

'But not new; I've read it a dozen times.'

' "You don't think the war had any great influence, then, sir?" They always ask that in interviews.'

'The war? Its influence is pretty well over by now. Besides, the

people of my generation were already too set. The next generation was wiped or knocked out –’

‘Not the females.’

‘No, they ran riot a bit, but they weren’t really in the thing. As for your generation, the war’s a word.’

‘Well, thank you dear,’ said Dinny. ‘It’s been very instructive, but it’s going to hail. Come along, Foch!’

The General turned up the collar of his coat and crossed over to the carpenter who had cut his thumb. Dinny saw him examining the

bandage. She saw the carpenter smile, and her father pat him on the shoulder.

‘His men must have liked him,’ she thought. ‘He may be an old buffer, but he’s a nice one.’

Chapter Twenty-eight



IF Art is long, Law is longer. The words *Corven v. Corven* and *Croom* rewarded no eye scanning the Cause List in *The Times* newspaper. Undefended suits in vast numbers occupied the attention of Mr Justice Covell. At Dornford's invitation Dinny and Clare came to the entrance of his court, and stood for five minutes just inside, as members of a cricket team will go and inspect a pitch before playing in a match. The judge sat so low that little but his face could be

seen; but Dinny noticed that above Clare's head in the witness-box would be a sort of canopy, or protection from rain.

‘If,’ said Dornford, as they came out, ‘you stand well back, Clare, your face will be hardly visible. But your voice you should pitch so that it always carries to the judge. He gets grumpy if he can't hear.’

It was on the day after this that Dinny received a note delivered by hand at South Square.

Burton's Club: 13.iv.32.

DEAR DINNY

I should be very glad if I could see you for a

few minutes. Name your own time and place and I will be there. Needless to say it concerns Clare.

Sincerely yours,

GERALD CORVEN

Michael was out, but she consulted Fleur.

‘I should certainly see him, Dinny. It may be a death-bed repentance. Let him come here when you know Clare will be out.’

‘I don’t think I’ll risk his seeing her. I’d rather meet him somewhere in the open.’

‘Well, there’s the Achilles, or the Rima.’

‘The Rima,’ said Dinny. ‘We can

walk away from it.'

She appointed the following afternoon at three o'clock, and continued to wonder what he wanted.

The day was an oasis of warmth in that bleak April. Arriving at the Rima, she saw him at once, leaning against the railing with his back to that work of art. He was smoking a cigarette through a short well-coloured holder in meerschaum, and looked so exactly as when she had seen him last that, for no reason, she received a sort of shock.

He did not offer to take her

hand.

‘Very good of you to come, Dinny. Shall we stroll and talk as we go?’

They walked towards the Serpentine.

‘About this case,’ said Corven, suddenly, ‘I don’t want to bring it a bit, you know.’

She stole a look at him.

‘Why *do* you, then? The charges are not true.’

‘I’m advised that they are.’

‘The premises may be; the conclusions, no.’

‘If I withdraw the thing, will

Clare come back to me, on her own terms?’

‘I can ask her, but I don’t think so. I shouldn’t myself.’

‘What an implacable family!’

Dinny did not answer.

‘Is she in love with this young Croom?’

‘I can’t discuss their feelings, if they have any.’

‘Can’t we speak frankly, Dinny? There’s no one to hear us except those ducks.’

‘Claiming damages has not improved our feelings towards you.’

‘Oh! that! I’m willing to withdraw everything, and risk her having kicked over if she’ll come back.’

‘In other words,’ said Dinny, gazing straight before her, ‘the case you have framed – I believe that is the word – is a sort of blackmailing device.’

He looked at her through narrowed eyes.

‘Ingenious notion. It didn’t occur to me. No, the fact is, knowing Clare better than my solicitors and the inquiry agents, I’m not too convinced that the evidence means what it seems to.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Yes, but I told you before, or Clare anyway, that I can’t and won’t go on with nothing settled, one way or the other. If she’ll come back I’ll wipe the whole thing out. If she won’t, it must take its chance. That’s not wholly unreasonable, and it’s not blackmail.’

‘And suppose she wins, will you be any further on?’

‘No.’

‘You could free yourself and her at any time, if you liked.’

‘At a price I don’t choose to pay.’

Besides, that sounds extremely like collusion – another awkward word, Dinny.’

Dinny stood still.

‘Well, I know what you want, and I’ll ask Clare. And now I’ll say good-bye. I don’t see that talking further will do any good.’

He stood looking at her, and she was moved by the expression on his face. Pain and puzzlement were peering through its hardwood browned mask.

‘I’m sorry things are as they are,’ she said, impulsively.

‘One’s nature is a hell of a thing,

Dinny, and one's never free from it. Well good-bye and good luck!’

She put out her hand. He gave it a squeeze, turned and walked off.

Dinny stood for some unhappy moments beside a little birch tree whose budding leaves seemed to tremble up towards the sunshine. Queer! To be sorry for him, for Clare, for young Croom, and be able to do nothing to help!

She walked back to South Square as fast as she could.

Fleur met her with: ‘Well?’

‘I’m afraid I can only talk to Clare about it.’

‘I suppose it’s an offer to drop it if Clare will go back. If she’s wise she will.’

Dinny closed her lips resolutely.

She waited till bed-time, and then went to Clare’s room. Her sister had just got into bed, on the foot of which Dinny sat down, and began at once:

‘Jerry asked me to see him. We met in Hyde Park. He says he’ll drop the case if you’ll go back – on your own terms.’

Clare raised her knees and clasped them with her hands.

‘Oh! And what did you say?’

‘That I’d ask you.’

‘Did you gather why?’

‘Partly, I think he really wants you; partly, he doesn’t much believe in the evidence.’

‘Ah!’ said Clare, drily: ‘Nor do I. But I’m not going back.’

‘I told him I didn’t think you would. He said we were “implacable.” ’

Clare uttered a little laugh.

‘No, Dinny. I’ve been through all the horrors of this case. I feel quite stony, don’t care whether we win or lose. In fact, I believe I’d rather we lost.’

Dinny grasped one of her sister's feet through the bed-clothes. She was in two minds whether to speak of the feeling Corven's face had roused in her.

Clare said uncannily:

‘I'm always amused when people think they know how husbands and wives ought to behave towards each other. Fleur was telling me about her father and his first wife; she seemed to think the woman made a great fuss for nothing much. All I can say is that to think you can judge anybody else's case is just self-righteous idiocy. There's never any evidence to judge from,

and until cine-cameras are installed in bedrooms,' she added, 'there never will be. You might let him know, Dinny, that there's nothing doing.'

Dinny got up.

'I will. If only the thing were over!'

'Yes,' said Clare, tossing back her hair, 'if only – ! But whether we shall be any further on, when it is, I don't know. God bless the Courts of Law.'

That bitter invocation went up daily from Dinny, too, during the next fortnight, while the

undefended causes, of which her sister's might have been one, were softly and almost silently vanishing away. Her note to Corven said simply that her sister had answered: 'No.' No reply came to it.

At Dornford's request she went with Clare to see his new house on Campden Hill. To know that he had taken it with the view of having a home for her, if she would consent to share it, kept her expressionless, except to say that it was all very nice, and to recommend a bird shelter in the garden. It was roomy, secluded,

airy, and the garden sloped towards the south. Distressed at being so colourless, she was glad to come away; but the dashed and baffled look on his face when she said: 'Good-bye' hurt her. In their bus, going home, Clare said:

'The more I see of Dornford, Dinny, the more I believe you could put up with him. He's got very light hands; he lets your mouth alone. He really is a bit of an angel.'

'I'm sure he is.' And through Dinny's mind, in the jaunting bus, passed and passed four lines of verse:

‘The bank is steep and wide the
river flows –
Are there fair pastures on the
farther shore?
And shall the halting kine
adventure those
Or wander barren pastures
evermore?’

But on her face was that
withdrawn expression which Clare
knew better than to try and
penetrate.

Waiting for an event, even when
it primarily concerns others, is a
process little desirable. For Dinny it
had the advantage of taking her
thoughts off her own existence and
concentrating them on her

people's. The family name, for the first time in her experience, was confronted with a really besmirching publicity, and she the chief recipient of her clan's reaction. She felt thankful that Hubert was not in England. He would have been so impatient and upset. In the publicity attendant on his own trouble, four years ago, there had been much more danger of disaster, but much less danger of disgrace. For however one might say that divorce was nothing in these days, a traditional stigma still clung to it in a country far from being as modern as it supposed

itself to be. The Charwells of Condaford, at all events, had their pride and their prejudices, above all they loathed publicity.

When Dinny, for instance, went to lunch at St Augustine's-in-the-Meads, she found a very peculiar atmosphere. It was as if her Uncle and Aunt had said to each other: 'This thing has to be, we suppose, but we can't pretend either to understand or to approve of it.' With no bluff matter-of-fact condemnation, nor anything churchy or shocked about their attitude, they conveyed to Dinny the thought that Clare might have

been better occupied than in getting into such a position.

Walking away with Hilary to see a party of youths off to Canada from Euston Station, Dinny was ill at ease, for she had true affection and regard for her overworked unparsonical Uncle. Of all the members of her duty-bound family, he most embodied the principle of uncomplaining service, and however she might doubt whether the people he worked for were not happier than he was himself, she instinctively believed that he lived a real life in a world where not very much was 'real.' Alone with

her he voiced his feelings more precisely.

‘What I don’t like, Dinny, about this business of Clare’s is the way it will reduce her in the public eye to the level of the idle young woman who has nothing better to do than to get into matrimonial scrapes. Honestly, I’d prefer her passionately in love and flinging her cap over the windmill.’

‘Cheer up, Uncle,’ murmured Dinny, ‘and give her time. That may yet come.’

Hilary smiled.

‘Well! Well! But you see what I

mean. The public eye is a mean, cold, parrotty thing; it loves to see the worst of everything. Where there's real love I can accept most things; but I don't like messing about with sex. It's unpleasant.'

'I don't think you're being just to Clare,' said Dinny with a sigh; 'she cut loose for real reasons; and *you* ought to know, Uncle, that attractive young women can't remain entirely un-followed.'

'Well,' said Hilary shrewdly, 'I perceive that you're sitting on a tale you could unfold. Here we are. If you knew the bother I've had to get these youths to consent to go,

and the authorities to consent to take them, you'd realize why I wish I were a mushroom, springing up over-night and being eaten fresh for breakfast.'

Whereon, they entered the station, and proceeded towards the Liverpool train. A little party of seven youths in cloth caps, half in and half out of a third-class carriage, were keeping up their spirits in truly English fashion, by passing remarks on each other's appearance and saying at intervals: 'Are we daown'earted? Naoo!'

They greeted Hilary with the

words:

‘Ello, Padre! ... Zero hour! Over the top! ... ’ Ave a fag, sir?’

Hilary took the ‘fag’. And Dinny, who stood a little apart, admired the way in which he became at once an integral part of the group.

‘Wish you was comin’ too, sir!’

‘Wish I were, Jack.’

‘Leavin’ old England for ever!’

‘Good old England!’

‘Sir?’

‘Yes, Tommy?’

She lost the next remarks, slightly embarrassed by the obvious interest she was arousing.

‘Dinny!’

She moved up to the carriage.

‘Shake hands with these young men. My niece.’

In the midst of a queer hush she shook the seven hands of the seven capless youths, and seven times said: ‘Good luck!’

There was a rush to get into the carriage, a burst of noise from uncouth mouths, a ragged cheer, and the train moved. She stood by Hilary’s side, with a slight choke in her throat, waving her hand to the caps and faces stretched through the window.

‘They’ll all be seasick tonight,’ muttered Hilary, ‘that’s one comfort. Nothing like it to prevent you from thinking of the future or the past.’

She went into Adrian’s after leaving him, and was rather disconcerted to find her Uncle Lionel there. They stopped dead in their discussion. Then the Judge said:

‘Perhaps you can tell us, Dinny: Is there any chance at all of mediating between those two before this unpleasant business comes on?’

‘None, Uncle.’

‘Oh! Then seeing as I do rather much of the law, I should suggest Clare’s not appearing and letting the thing go undefended. If there’s no chance of their coming together again, what is the use of prolonging a state of stalemate?’

‘That’s what I think, Uncle Lionel; but, of course, you know the charges aren’t true.’

The Judge grimaced.

‘I’m speaking as a man, Dinny. The publicity will be lamentable for Clare, win or lose; whereas, if she and this young man didn’t defend, there’d be very little. Adrian says she would refuse any

support from Corven, so that element doesn't come in. What *is* all the trouble about? You know, of course.'

'Very vaguely, and in confidence.'

'Great pity!' said the Judge: 'If they knew as much as I do, people would never fight these things.'

'There *is* that claim for damages.'

'Yes, Adrian was telling me – pretty medieval, that.'

'Is revenge medieval, Uncle Lionel?'

'Not altogether,' said the Judge,

with his wry smile; 'but I shouldn't have thought a man in Corven's position could afford such luxuries. To put his wife into the scales! Thoroughly unpleasant.'

Adrian put his arm round Dinny's shoulders.

'Nobody feels that more than Dinny.'

'I suppose,' murmured the Judge, 'Corven will at least have them settled on her.'

'Clare wouldn't take them. But, why shouldn't they win? I thought the law existed to administer justice, Uncle Lionel.'

‘I don’t like juries,’ said the Judge abruptly.

Dinny looked at him with curiosity – surprisingly frank! He added:

‘Tell Clare to keep her voice up and her answers short. And don’t let her try to be clever. Any laughter in court should be raised by the judge.’

So saying, he again smiled wryly, shook her hand, and took himself away.

‘Is Uncle Lionel a good judge?’

‘Impartial and polite, they say. I’ve never seen him in court, but

from what I know of him as a brother, he'd be conscientious and thorough; a bit sarcastic at times. He's quite right about this case, Dinny.'

'I've felt that all along. It's Father, and that claim for damages.'

'I expect they regret that claim now. His lawyers must be bunglers. Angling for position!'

'Isn't that what lawyers are for?' Adrian laughed.

'Here's tea! Let's drown our sorrows, and go and see a film. There's a German thing they say is

really magnanimous. *Real*
magnanimity on the screen, Dinny,
think of it!’

Chapter Twenty-nine



OVER was the shuffling of seats and papers, which marks the succession of one human drama by another, and ‘very young’ Roger said:

‘We’ll go into the well of the court.’

There, with her sister and her father, Dinny sat down, bastioned from Jerry Corven by ‘very young’ Roger and his rival in the law.

‘Is this,’ she whispered, ‘the well at the bottom of which truth lies, or *lies?*’

Unable to see the rising 'body' of the court behind her, she knew by instinct and the sense of hearing that it was filling up. The public's unerring sense of value had scented out a fight, if not a title. The Judge, too, seemed to have smelt something, for he was shrouded in a large bandana handkerchief. Dinny gazed upward. Impressively high, and vaguely Gothic, the court seemed. Above where the Judge sat red curtains were drawn across, surprisingly beyond the reach of man. Her eyes fell to the jury filing into their two-ranked 'box'. The foreman fascinated her at once by

his egg-shaped face and head, little hair of any sort, red cheeks, light eyes, and an expression so subtly blended between that of a codfish and a sheep that it reminded her of neither. His face recalled rather one of the two gentlemen of South Molton Street, and she felt almost sure that he was a jeweller. Three women sat at the end of the front row, no one of whom, surely, could ever have spent a night in a car. The first was stout and had the pleasant flattish face of a superior housekeeper. The second, thin, dark, and rather gaunt, was perhaps a writer. The third's bird-

like look was disguised in an obvious cold. The other eight male members of the jury tired her eyes, so diverse and difficult to place. A voice said:

‘Corven versus Corven and Croom – husband’s petition,’ and she gave Clare’s arm a convulsive squeeze.

‘If your Lordship pleases –’

Out of the tail of her eye she could see a handsome, small-whiskered visage, winy under its wig.

The Judge’s face, folded and far away, as of a priest or of a

tortoise, was poked forward suddenly. His gaze, knowing and impersonal, seemed taking her in, and she felt curiously small. He drew his head back, as suddenly.

The slow rich voice behind her began retailing the names and positions of the 'parties,' the places of their marriage and cohabitation; it paused a moment and then went on:

'In the middle of September of last year, while the petitioner was up-country in discharge of official duty, the respondent, without a word of warning, left her home and sailed for England. On board

the ship was the co-respondent. It is said by the defence, I believe, that these two had not met before. I shall suggest that they had met, or at all events had had every opportunity of so meeting.'

Dinny saw her sister's little disdainful shrug.

'However that may be,' proceeded the slow voice, 'there is no question that they were always together on the ship, and I shall show that towards the end of the voyage the co-respondent was seen coming out of the respondent's stateroom.' On and on the voice drooled till it reached the words : 'I

will not dwell, members of the jury, on the details of the watch kept on the respondent's and co-respondent's movements; you will have these from the mouths of expert and reputable witnesses. Sir Gerald Corven.'

When Dinny raised her eyes he was already in the box, his face carved out of an even harder wood than she had thought. She was conscious of the resentment on her father's face, of the Judge taking up his pen, of Clare clenching her hands on her lap; of 'very young' Roger's narrowed eyes; of the foreman's slightly opening mouth,

and the third jurywoman's smothered sneeze; conscious of the brownness in this place – it oozed brownness as if designed to dinge all that was rose, blue, silver, gold or even green in human life.

The slow voice began its questioning, ceased its questioning; the personable owner of it closed, as it were, black wings; and a different voice behind her said:

‘You thought it your duty, sir, to institute these proceedings?’

‘Yes.’

‘No animus?’

‘None.’

‘This claim for damages – not very usual, is it, nowadays among men of honour?’

‘They will be settled on my wife.’

‘Has your wife indicated in any way that she wishes you to support her?’

‘No.’

‘Would it surprise you to hear that she would not take a penny from you, whether it came from the co-respondent or not?’

Dinny saw the cat-like smile beneath the cut moustache.

‘Nothing would surprise me.’

‘It did not even surprise you that she left you?’

She looked round at the questioner. So this was Instone, whom Dornford had said was ‘very handicapped’! He seemed to her to have one of those faces, with dominant noses, that nothing could handicap.

‘Yes that did surprise me.’

‘Now, why?... Perhaps you would translate that movement into words, sir?’

‘Do wives generally leave their husbands without reason given?’

‘Not unless the reason is too

obvious to require statement. Was that the case?’

‘No.’

‘What should you say, then, was the reason? You are the person best able to form an opinion.’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Who then?’

‘My wife herself.’

‘Still you must have some suspicion. Would you mind saying what it was?’

‘I should.’

‘Now, sir, you are on your oath. Did you or did you not ill-treat your wife in any way?’

‘I admit one incident which I regret and for which I have apologized.’

‘What was that incident?’

Dinny, sitting taut between her father and her sister, feeling in her whole being the vibration of their pride and her own, heard the slow rich voice strike in behind her.

‘My Lord, I submit that my friend is not entitled to ask that question.’

‘My Lord –’

‘I must stop you, Mr Instone.’

‘I bow to your Lordship’s ruling.... Are you a hot-tempered

man, sir?’

‘No.’

‘There would be a certain deliberation about your actions, at all times?’

‘I hope so.’

‘Even when those actions were not – shall we say – benevolent?’

‘Yes.’

‘I see; and I am sure the jury also does. Now, sir, let me take you to another point. You suggest that your wife and Mr Croom had met in Ceylon?’

‘I have no idea whether they had or not.’

‘Have you any personal knowledge that they did?’

‘No.’

‘We have been told by my friend that he will bring evidence to show that they had met –’

The slow rich voice interposed:

‘That they had had opportunity of meeting.’

‘We will take it at that. Were you aware, sir, that they had enjoyed such opportunity?’

‘I was not.’

‘Had you ever seen or heard of Mr Croom in Ceylon?’

‘No.’

‘When did you first know of the existence of this gentleman?’

‘I saw him in London in November last, coming out of a house where my wife was staying, and I asked her his name.’

‘Did she make any concealment of it?’

‘None.’

‘Is that the only time you have seen this gentleman?’

‘Yes.’

‘What made you pitch on him as a possible means of securing a divorce from your wife?’

‘I object to that way of putting

it.'

'Very well. What drew your attention to this gentleman as a possible co-respondent?'

'What I heard on the ship by which I returned from Port Said to Ceylon in November. It was the same ship as that in which my wife and the co-respondent came to England.'

'And what *did* you hear?'

'That they were always together.'

'Not unusual on board ship, is it?'

'In reason – no.'

‘Even in your own experience?’

‘Perhaps not.’

‘What else, if anything, did you hear to make you so suspicious?’

‘A stewardess told me that she had seen him coming out of my wife’s stateroom.’

‘At what time of day or night was that?’

‘Shortly before dinner.’

‘You have travelled by sea a good deal, I suppose, in the course of your professional duties?’

‘A great deal.’

‘And have you noticed that people frequently go to each

other's staterooms?'

'Yes, quite a lot.'

'Does it always arouse your suspicions?'

'No.'

'May I go further and suggest that it never did before?'

'You may not.'

'Are you naturally a suspicious man?'

'I don't think so.'

'Not what would be called jealous?'

'I should say not.'

'Your wife is a good deal

younger than yourself?’

‘Seventeen years.’

‘Still, you are not so old as to be unable to appreciate the fact that young men and women in these days treat each other with very little ceremony and consciousness of sex?’

‘If you want my age, I am forty-one.’

‘Practically post-war.’

‘I was through the war.’

‘Then you know that much which before the war might have been regarded as suspicious has long lost that character?’

‘I know that things are all very free and easy.’

‘Thank you. Had you ever, before she left you, had occasion to be suspicious of your wife?’

Dinny looked up.

‘Never.’

‘But this little incident of his coming out of her cabin was enough to cause you to have her watched?’

‘That, and the fact that they were always together on the ship, and my having seen him coming out of the house in London.’

‘When you were in London you

told her that she must come back to you or take the consequences?’

‘I don’t think I used those words.’

‘What words did you use?’

‘I think I said she had the misfortune to be my wife, and that she couldn’t be a perpetual grass widow.’

‘Not a very elegant expression, was it?’

‘Perhaps not.’

‘You were, in fact, eager to seize on anybody or anything to free yourself?’

‘No, I was eager for her to come

back.’

‘In spite of your suspicions?’

‘I had no suspicions in London.’

‘I suggest that you had ill-treated her, and wished to be free of an association that hurt your pride.’

The slow rich voice said:

‘My Lord, I object.’

‘My Lord, the petitioner having admitted –’

‘Yes, but most husbands, Mr Instone, have done something for which they have been glad to apologize.’

‘As your Lordship pleases.... In any case, you gave instructions to

have your wife watched. When exactly did you do that?’

‘When I got back to Ceylon.’

‘Immediately?’

‘Almost.’

‘That did not show great eagerness to have her back, did it?’

‘My view was entirely changed by what I was told on the ship.’

‘On the ship. Not very nice, was it, listening to gossip about your wife?’

‘No, but she had refused to come back, and I had to make up my mind.’

‘Within two months of her

leaving your house?’

‘More than two months.’

‘Well, not three. I suggest, you know, that you practically forced her to leave you; and then took the earliest opportunity open to you to ensure that she shouldn’t come back?’

‘No.’

‘So you say. Very well. These inquiry agents you employed – had you seen them before you left England to return to Ceylon?’

‘No.’

‘Will you swear that?’

‘Yes.’

‘How did you come to hit upon them?’

‘I left it to my solicitors.’

‘Oh! then you had seen your solicitors before you left?’

‘Yes.’

‘In spite of your having no suspicions?’

‘A man going so far away naturally sees his solicitors before he starts.’

‘You saw them in relation to your wife?’

‘And other matters.’

‘What did you say to them about your wife?’

Again Dinny looked up. In her was growing the distaste of one seeing even an opponent badgered.

‘I think I simply said that she was staying behind with her people.’

‘Only that?’

‘I probably said that things were difficult.’

‘Only that?’

‘I remember saying: “I don’t quite know what’s going to happen.” ’

‘Will you swear you did not say: “I may be wanting you to have her watched”?’

‘I will.’

‘Will you swear that you said nothing which conveyed to them the idea that you had a divorce in your mind?’

‘I can’t tell you what was conveyed to them by what I said.’

‘Don’t quibble, sir. Was the word divorce mentioned?’

‘I don’t remember it.’

‘You don’t remember it? Did you or did you not leave them with the impression that you might be wanting to take proceedings?’

‘I don’t know. I told them that things were difficult.’

‘So you have said before. That is not an answer to my question.’

Dinny saw the Judge’s head poked forward.

‘The petitioner has said, Mr Instone, that he does not know the impression left on his lawyers’ minds. What are you driving at?’

‘My Lord, the essence of my case – and I am glad to have this opportunity of stating it succinctly – is that from the moment the petitioner had acted in such a way – whatever it was – as caused his wife to leave him, he was determined to divorce her, and ready to snatch at anything that

came along to secure that divorce.'

'Well, you can call his solicitor.'

'My Lord!'

Those simple words were like a shrug of the shoulders put into sound.

'Well, go on!'

With a sigh of relief Dinny caught the sound of finality in the voice of the 'handicapped' Instone.

'You wish to suggest to the jury that although you instituted these proceedings on the first and only gossip you heard, and although you added a claim for damages against a man you have never spoken to –

that in spite of all this you are a forbearing and judicious husband, whose only desire was that his wife should come back to him?’

Her eyes went for the last time to the face up there, more hidden by its mask than ever.

‘I wish to suggest nothing to the jury.’

‘Very well!’

There was a rustling of silk behind her.

‘My Lord,’ the slow, rich voice intoned, ‘since my friend has made so much of the point, I will call the petitioner’s solicitor.’

‘Very young’ Roger, leaning across, said:

‘Dornford wants you all to lunch with him...’

Dinny could eat practically nothing, afflicted by a sort of nausea. Though more alarmed and distraught during Hubert’s case, and at the inquest on Ferse, she had not felt like this. It was her first experience of the virulence inherent in the conduct of actions between private individuals. The continual suggestion that the opponent was mean, malicious and untruthful, which underlay every cross-examining question, had

affected her nerves.

On their way back to the court, Dornford said:

‘I know what you’re feeling. But remember, it’s a sort of game; both sides play according to the same rules, and the Judge is there to discount exaggeration. When I try to see how it could be worked otherwise, I can’t.’

‘It makes one feel nothing’s ever quite clean.’

‘I wonder if anything ever is.’

‘The Cheshire cat’s grin did fade at last,’ she murmured.

‘It never does in the Law Courts,

Dinny. They should have it graven over the doors.'

Whether owing to that short conversation, or because she was getting used to it, she did not feel so sick during the afternoon session, devoted to examination and cross-examination of the stewardess and inquiry agents. At four o'clock the petitioner's case was closed, and 'very young' Roger cocked his eye at her, as who should say: 'The Court will now rise, and I shall be able to take snuff.'

Chapter Thirty



IN the taxi, on the way back to South Square, Clare was silent, till, opposite Big Ben, she said suddenly:

‘Imagine his peering in at us in the car when we were asleep! Or did he just invent that, Dinny?’

‘If he’d invented it, he would surely have made it more convincing still.’

‘Of course, my head *was* on Tony’s shoulder. And why not? You try sleeping in a two-seater.’

‘I wonder the man’s torch didn’t wake you.’

‘I daresay it did; I woke a lot of times with cramp. No; the stupidest thing I did, Dinny, was asking Tony in for a drink that night after we went to the film and dined. We were extraordinarily green not to realize we were being shadowed. Were there a frightful lot of people in Court?’

‘Yes, and there’ll be more tomorrow.’

‘Did you see Tony?’

‘Just a glimpse.’

‘I wish I’d taken your advice and

let it go. If only I were really in love with him!’

Dinny did not answer.

Aunt Em was in Fleur’s ‘parlour’. She came towards Clare, opened her mouth, seemed to remember that she shouldn’t, scrutinized her niece, and said suddenly:

‘Not so good! I do dislike that expression; who taught it me? Tell me about the Judge, Dinny; was his nose long?’

‘No, but he sits very low and shoots his neck out.’

‘Why?’

‘I didn’t ask him, dear.’

Lady Mont turned to Fleur.

‘Can Clare have her dinner in bed? Go and have a long bath, my dear, and don’t get up till tomorrow. Then you’ll be fresh for that Judge. Fleur, you go with her, I want to talk to Dinny.’

When they had gone, she moved across to where the wood fire burned.

‘Dinny, comfort me. Why do we have these things in our family? So unlike – except your great-grandfather; and he was older than Queen Victoria when he was born.’

‘You mean he was naturally

rakish?’

‘Yes, gamblin’, and enjoyin’ himself and others. His wife was long-sufferin’. Scottish. So odd!’

‘That, I suppose,’ murmured Dinny, ‘is why we’ve all been so good ever since.’

‘What is why?’

‘The combination.’

‘It’s more the money,’ said Lady Mont; ‘he spent it all.’

‘Was there much?’

‘Yes. The price of corn.’

‘Ill-gotten.’

‘His father couldn’t help Napoleon. There were six thousand

acres then, and your great-grandfather only left eleven hundred.'

'Mostly woods.'

'That was the woodcock shootin'. Will the case be in the evenin' papers?'

'Certain to be. Jerry's a public man.'

'Not her dress, I hope. Did you like the jury?'

Dinny shrugged. 'I can't ever tell what people are really thinking.'

'Like dogs' noses, when they feel hot and aren't. What about that young man?'

‘He’s the one I’m truly sorry for.’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Mont. ‘Every man commits adultery in his heart, but not in cars.’

‘It’s not truth but appearances that matter, Aunt Em.’

‘Circumstantial, Lawrence says – provin’ they did when they didn’t. More reliable that way, he thinks; otherwise, he says, when they didn’t you could prove they did. Is that right, Dinny?’

‘No, dear.’

‘Well, I must go home to your mother. She doesn’t eat a thing – sits and reads and looks pale. And

Con won't go near his Club. Fleur wants us and them to go to Monte Carlo in her car when it's over. She says we shall be in our element, and that Riggs *can* drive on the right-hand side of the road when he remembers.'

Dinny shook her head.

'Nothing like one's own hole, Auntie.'

'I don't like creepin',' said Lady Mont. 'Kiss me. And get married soon.'

When she had swayed out of the room, Dinny stood looking out into the Square.

How incorrigible was that prepossession! Aunt Em and Uncle Adrian, her father and her mother, Fleur, yes and even Clare herself – all anxious that she should marry Dornford and be done with it!

And what good would it do any of them? Whence came this instinct for pressing people into each other's arms? If she had any use in the world, would that increase it? 'For the procreation of children', went the words of the old order. The world had to be carried on! Why had the world to be carried on? Everybody used the word 'hell' in connexion with it nowadays.

Nothing to look forward to but
brave new world!

‘Or the Catholic church,’ she
thought, ‘and I don’t believe in
either.’

She opened the window, and
leaned against its frame. A fly
buzzed at her; she blew it away,
and it instantly came back. Flies!
They fulfilled a purpose. What
purpose? While they were alive
they were alive; when they were
dead they were dead. ‘But not half-
alive,’ she thought. She blew again,
and this time the fly did not come
back.

Fleur’s voice behind her said:

‘Isn’t it cold enough for you in here, my dear? Did you ever know such a year? I say that every May. Come and have tea. Clare’s in her bath, and very nice she looks, with a cup of tea in one hand and cigarette in the other. I suppose they’ll get to the end tomorrow?’

‘Your cousin says so.’

‘He’s coming to dinner. Luckily his wife’s at Droitwich.’

‘Why “luckily”?’

‘Oh! well, she’s a wife. If there’s anything he wants to say to Clare, I shall send him up to her; she’ll be out of her bath by then. But he can

say it to you just as well. How do you think Clare will do in the box?’

‘Can anyone do well in the box?’

‘My father said I did, but he was partial; and the Coroner complimented you, didn’t he, at the Ferse inquest?’

‘There was no cross-examination. Clare’s not patient, Fleur.’

‘Tell her to count five before she answers, and lift her eyebrows. The thing is to get Brough rattled.’

‘His voice would madden me,’ said Dinny, ‘and he has a way of pausing as if he had all day before

him.'

'Yes, quite a common trick. The whole thing's extraordinarily like the Inquisition. What do you think of Clare's counsel?'

'I should hate him if I were on the other side.'

'Then he's good. Well, Dinny, what's the moral of all this?'

'Don't marry.'

'Bit sweeping, till we can grow babies in bottles. Hasn't it ever struck you that civilization's built on the maternal instinct?'

'I thought it was built on agriculture.'

‘By “civilization” I meant everything that isn’t just force.’

Dinny looked at her cynical and often flippant cousin, who stood so poised and trim and well-manicured before her, and she felt ashamed. Fleur said, unexpectedly:

‘You’re rather a darling.’

Dinner, Clare having it in bed and the only guest being ‘very young’ Roger, was decidedly vocal. Starting with an account of how his family felt about taxation, ‘very young’ Roger waxed amusing. His Uncle Thomas Forsyte, it appeared, had gone to live in Jersey, and returned indignantly when Jersey

began to talk about taxation of its own. He had then written to *The Times* under the *nom de guerre* of 'Individualist', sold all his investments, and reinvested them in tax-free securities, which brought him in slightly less revenue than he had been receiving net from his taxed securities. He had voted for the Nationalists at the last election, and, since this new budget, was looking out for a party that he could conscientiously vote for at the next election. He was living at Bournemouth.

'Extremely well-preserved,' concluded 'very young' Roger. 'Do

you know anything about bees, Fleur?’

‘I once sat on one.’

‘Do you, Miss Cherrell?’

‘We keep them.’

‘If you were me, would you go in for them?’

‘Where do you live?’

‘A little beyond Hatfield. There are some quite nice clover crops round. Bees appeal to me in theory. They feed on other people’s flowers and clover; and if you find a swarm you can stick to it. What are the drawbacks?’

‘Well, if they swarm on other

people's ground, ten to one you lose them; and you have to feed them all the winter. Otherwise it's only a question of time, trouble, and stings.'

'I don't know that I should mind that,' murmured 'very young' Roger; 'my wife would take them on.' He cocked his eye slightly: 'She has rheumatism. Apic acid, they say, is the best cure.'

'Better make sure first,' murmured Dinny, 'that they'll sting her. You can't get bees to sting people they like.'

'You can always sit on them,' murmured Fleur.

‘Seriously,’ said ‘very young’ Roger, ‘half-a-dozen stings would be well worth it, poor thing.’

‘What made you take up law, Forsyte?’ struck in Michael.

‘Well, I got a “blighty” one in the war and had to get something sedentary. I rather like it, you know, in a way, and in a way I think it’s –’

‘Quite!’ said Michael; ‘Hadn’t you an Uncle George?’

‘Old George! Rather! Always gave me ten bob at school, and tipped me the name of a horse to put it on.’

‘Did it ever win?’

‘No.’

‘Well, tell us, frankly: What’s going to win tomorrow?’

‘Frankly,’ said the solicitor, looking at Dinny, ‘it depends on your sister, Miss Cherrell. Corven’s witnesses have done well. They didn’t claim too much, and they weren’t shaken; but if Lady Corven keeps her head and her temper, we may pull through. If her veracity is whittled away at any point, then –!’ he shrugged, and looked – Dinny thought – older. ‘There are one or two birds on the jury I don’t like the look of. The foreman’s one.

The average man, you know, is dead against wives leaving without notice. I'd feel much happier if your sister would open up on her married life. It's not too late.'

Dinny shook her head.

'Well, then, it's very much a case of the personal appeal. But there's a prejudice against mice playing when the cat's away.'

Dinny went to bed with the sick feeling of one who knows she has again to watch some form of torture.

Chapter Thirty-one



DAY by day the Courts of Law are stony and unchanged. The same gestures are made, the same seats taken; the same effluvium prevails, not too strong, but just strong enough.

Clare was in black on this second day, with a slim green feather in a close-fitting black hat. Pale, her lips barely touched with salve, she sat so still that one could not speak to her. The words ‘Society Divorce Suit,’ and the ‘perfect’ headline, ‘Night in a Car,’

had produced their effect; there was hardly standing room. Dinny noticed young Croom seated just behind his counsel. She noticed, too, that the birdlike jurywoman's cold was better, and the foreman's parrot eyes fixed on Clare. The Judge seemed to be sitting lower than ever. He raised himself slightly at the sound of Instone's voice.

‘If it please your Lordship, and members of the jury – the answer to the allegation of misconduct between the respondent and co-respondent will be a simple and complete denial. I call the

respondent.'

With a sensation of seeing her sister for the first time, Dinny looked up. Clare, as Dornford had recommended, stood rather far back in the box, and the shade from the canopy gave her a withdrawn and mysterious air. Her voice, however, was clear, and perhaps only Dinny could have told that it was more clipped than usual.

'Is it true, Lady Corven, that you have been unfaithful to your husband?'

'It is not.'

‘You swear that?’

‘I do.’

‘There have been no love passages between you and Mr Croom?’

‘None.’

‘You swear that?’

‘I do.’

‘Now it is said –’

To question on question on question Dinny sat listening, her eyes not moving from her sister, marvelling at the even distinctness of her speech and the motionless calm of her face and figure. Instone’s voice today was so

different that she hardly recognized it.

‘Now, Lady Corven, I have one more question to ask, and, before you answer it, I beg you to consider that very much depends on that answer. Why did you leave your husband?’

Dinny saw her sister’s head tilt slightly backwards.

‘I left because I did not feel I could remain and keep my self-respect.’

‘Quite! But can you not tell us why that was? You had done nothing that you were ashamed

of?’

‘No.’

‘Your husband has admitted that he had, and that he had apologized?’

‘Yes.’

‘What had he done?’

‘Forgive me. It’s instinct with me not to talk about my married life.’

Dinny caught her father’s whisper: ‘By Gad! she’s right!’ She saw the Judge’s neck poked forward, his face turned towards the box, his lips open.

‘I understand you to say you felt you could not remain with your

husband and keep your self-respect?’

‘Yes, my Lord.’

‘Did you feel you could leave him like that and keep your self-respect?’

‘Yes, my Lord.’

Dinny saw the Judge’s body raise itself slightly, and his face moving from side to side, as if carefully avoiding any recipient of his words: ‘Well, there it is, Mr Instone. I don’t think you can usefully pursue the point. The respondent has evidently made up her mind on it.’ His eyes under

drooped lids continued to survey what was unseen.

‘If your Lordship pleases. Once more, Lady Corven, there is no truth in these allegations of misconduct with Mr Croom?’

‘No truth whatever.’

‘Thank you.’

Dinny drew a long breath and braced herself against the pause and the slow rich voice to the right behind her.

‘You, a married woman, would not call inviting a young man to your cabin, entertaining him alone in your room at half-past eleven at

night, spending a night with him in a car, and going about with him continually in the absence of your husband, misconduct?’

‘Not in itself.’

‘Very well. You have said that until you saw him on the ship you had never seen the co-respondent. Could you explain how it was that from, I think, the second day at sea you were so thick with him?’

‘I was not thick with him at first.’

‘Oh, come! Always together, weren’t you?’

‘Often, not always.’

‘Often, not always – from the second day?’

‘Yes, a ship is a ship.’

‘Quite true, Lady Corven. And you had never seen him before?’

‘Not to my knowledge.’

‘Ceylon is not a large place, is it, from a society point of view?’

‘It is not.’

‘Lots of polo matches, cricket matches, other functions where you are constantly meeting the same people.’

‘Yes.’

‘And yet you never met Mr Croom? Odd, wasn’t it?’

‘Not at all. Mr Croom was on a plantation.’

‘But he played polo, I think?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you are a horsewoman, very interested in all that sort of thing?’

‘Yes.’

‘And yet you never met Mr Croom?’

‘I have said I never did. If you ask me till tomorrow I shall say the same.’

Dinny drew in her breath. Before her sprang up a mental snapshot of Clare as a little girl being

questioned about Oliver Cromwell.

The slow rich voice went on:

‘You never missed a polo match at Kandy, did you?’

‘Never, if I could help it.’

‘And on one occasion you entertained the players?’

Dinny could see a frown on her sister’s brow.

‘Yes.’

‘When was that?’

‘I believe it was last June.’

‘Mr Croom was one of the players, wasn’t he?’

‘If he was, I didn’t see him.’

‘You entertained him but you did not see him?’

‘I did not.’

‘Is that usual with hostesses in Kandy?’

‘There were quite a lot of people, if I remember.’

‘Come now, Lady Corven, here is the programme of the match – just take a look at it to refresh your memory.’

‘I remember the match perfectly.’

‘But you don’t remember Mr Croom, either on the ground, or afterwards at your house?’

‘I don’t. I was interested in the play of the Kandy team, and afterwards there too many people. If I remembered him I should say so at once.’

It seemed to Dinny an immense time before the next question came.

‘I am suggesting, you know, that you did not meet as strangers on the boat?’

‘You may suggest what you like, but we did.’

‘So you say.’

Catching her father’s muttered: ‘Damn the fellow!’ Dinny touched his arm with her own.

‘You heard the stewardess give her evidence? Was that the only time the co-respondent came to your state-room?’

‘The only time he came for more than a minute.’

‘Oh! He did come at other times?’

‘Once or twice to borrow or return a book.’

‘On the occasion when he came and spent – what was it? – half an hour there –’

‘Twenty minutes, I should say.’

‘Twenty minutes – what were you doing?’

‘Showing him photographs.’

‘Oh! Why not on deck?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Didn’t it occur to you that it was indiscreet?’

‘I didn’t think about it. There were a lot of photos – snapshots and photos of my family.’

‘But nothing that you couldn’t have shown him perfectly in the saloon or on deck?’

‘I suppose not.’

‘I take it you imagined he wouldn’t be seen?’

‘I tell you I didn’t think about it.’

‘Who proposed that he should

come?’

‘*I did.*’

‘You knew you were in a very dubious position?’

‘Yes, but other people didn’t.’

‘You could have shown him those photographs anywhere? Looking back on it, don’t you think it was singular of you to do such a compromising thing for no reason at all?’

‘It was less trouble to show them to him in the cabin; besides, they were private photos.’

‘Now, Lady Corven, do you mean to say that nothing whatever

took place between you during those twenty minutes?’

‘He kissed my hand before he went out.’

‘That is something, but not quite an answer to my question.’

‘Nothing else that could give you satisfaction.’

‘How were you dressed?’

‘I regret to have to inform you that I was fully dressed.’

‘My Lord, may I ask to be protected from these sarcasms?’

Dinny admired the stilly way in which the Judge said:

‘Answer the questions simply,

please.'

'Yes, my Lord.'

Clare had moved out from under the shadow of the canopy and was standing with her hands on the rail of the box; spots of red had come into her cheeks.

'I suggest that you were lovers before you left the ship?'

'We were not, and we never have been.'

'When did you first see the correspondent again after you left him on the dock?'

'I think about a week later.'

'Where?'

‘Down near my people’s at Condaford.’

‘What were you doing?’

‘I was in a car.’

‘Alone?’

‘Yes, I had been canvassing and was going home to tea.’

‘And the co-respondent?’

‘He was in a car, too.’

‘Sprang up in it, I suppose, quite naturally?’

‘My Lord, I ask to be protected from these sarcasms.’

Dinny heard a tittering, and heard the Judge’s voice addressing nobody:

‘What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, Mr Brough.’

The tittering deepened. Dinny could not resist stealing a glance. The handsome face was inimitably wine-coloured. Beside her, ‘very young’ Roger wore an expression of enjoyment tintured by anxiety.

‘How came the co-respondent to be on this country road fifty miles from London?’

‘He had come to see me.’

‘You admit that?’

‘He said so.’

‘Perhaps you could tell us the exact words he used.’

‘I could not, but I remember that he asked if he might kiss me.’

‘And you let him?’

‘Yes. I put my cheek out of the car, and he kissed it, and went back to his car and drove away.’

‘And yet you say you were not lovers before you left the ship?’

‘Not in your sense. I did not say that he was not in love with me. He was; at least he told me so.’

‘Do you suggest that you were not in love with him?’

‘I’m afraid I do.’

‘But you let him kiss you?’

‘I was sorry for him.’

‘You think that is proper conduct for a married woman?’

‘Perhaps not. But after I left my husband I did not regard myself as a married woman.’

‘Oh!’

Dinny had a feeling as if the whole Court had said that word. ‘Very young’ Roger’s hand emerged from his side pocket; he looked at what it contained intently, and put it back. A rueful frown had come on the pleasant broad face of the jurywoman who resembled a housekeeper.

‘And what did you do after you

had been kissed?’

‘Went home to tea.’

‘Feeling none the worse?’

‘No; better if anything.’

Again the titter rose. The Judge’s face went round towards the box.

‘Are you speaking seriously?’

‘Yes, my Lord. I wish to be absolutely truthful. Even when they are not in love, women are grateful for being loved.’

The Judge’s face came round again to gaze at the unseen above Dinny’s head.

‘Go on, Mr Brough.’

‘When was the next occasion on

which you saw the co-respondent?’

‘At my aunt’s house in London where I was staying.’

‘Did he come to see your aunt?’

‘No, to see my uncle.’

‘Did he kiss you on that occasion?’

‘No. I told him that if we were to meet, it must be platonically.’

‘A very convenient word.’

‘What other should I have used?’

‘You are not standing there to ask me questions, madam. What did he say to that?’

‘That he would do anything I wished.’

‘Did he see your uncle?’

‘No.’

‘Was that the occasion on which your husband said he saw him leaving the house?’

‘I imagine so.’

‘Your husband came directly he had gone?’

‘Yes.’

‘He saw you, and asked who that young man was?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you tell him?’

‘Yes.’

‘I think you called the co-

respondent Tony?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was that his name?’

‘No.’

‘It was your pet name for him?’

‘Not at all. Everybody calls him that.’

‘And he called you Clare, or darling, I suppose?’

‘One or the other.’

Dinny saw the Judge’s eyes lifted to the unseen.

‘Young people nowadays call each other darling on very little provocation, Mr Brough.’

‘I am aware of that, my Lord....
Did you call *him* darling?’

‘I may have, but I don’t think
so.’

‘You saw your husband alone on
that occasion?’

‘Yes.’

‘How did you receive him?’

‘Coldly.’

‘Having just parted from the co-
respondent?’

‘That had nothing to do with it.’

‘Did your husband ask you to go
back to him?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you refused?’

‘Yes.’

‘And that had nothing to do with the co-respondent?’

‘No.’

‘Do you seriously tell the jury, Lady Corven, that your relations with the co-respondent, or if you like it better, your feelings for the co-respondent, played no part in your refusal to go back to your husband?’

‘None.’

‘I’ll put it at your own valuation: You had spent three weeks in the close company of this young man.

You had allowed him to kiss you, and felt better for it. You had just parted from him. You knew of his feelings for you. And you tell the jury that he counted for nothing in the equation?’

Clare bowed her head.

‘Answer, please.’

‘I don’t think he did.’

‘Not very human, was it?’

‘I don’t know what you mean by that.’

‘I mean, Lady Corven, that it’s going to be a little difficult for the jury to believe you.’

‘I can’t help what they believe, I

can only speak the truth.'

'Very well! When did you next see the co-respondent?'

'On the following evening, and the evening after that he came to the unfurnished rooms I was going into and helped me to distemper the walls.'

'Oh! A little unusual, wasn't it?'

'Perhaps. I had no money to spare, and he had done his own bungalow in Ceylon.'

'I see. Just a friendly office on his part. And during the hours he spent with you there no passages took place between you?'

‘No passages have ever taken place between us.’

‘At what time did he leave?’

‘We left together both evenings about nine o’clock and went and had some food.’

‘And after that?’

‘I went back to my aunt’s house.’

‘Nowhere in between?’

‘Nowhere.’

‘Very well! You saw your husband again before he was compelled to go back to Ceylon?’

‘Yes, twice.’

‘Where was the first time?’

‘At my rooms. I had got into them by then.’

‘Did you tell him that the correspondent had helped you distemper the walls?’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘Why should I? I told my husband nothing, except that I wasn’t going back to him. I regarded my life with him as finished.’

‘Did he on that occasion again ask you to go back to him?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you refused?’

‘Yes.’

‘With contumely?’

‘I beg your pardon.’

‘Insultingly?’

‘No. Simply.’

‘Had your husband given you any reason to suppose that he wished to divorce you?’

‘No. But I don’t know what was in his mind.’

‘And, apparently, you gave him no chance to know what was in yours?’

‘As little as possible.’

‘A stormy meeting?’

Dinny held her breath. The flush had died out of Clare's cheeks; her face looked pale and peaked.

‘No; disturbed and unhappy. I did not want to see him.’

‘You heard your counsel say that from the time of your leaving him in Ceylon, your husband in his wounded pride had conceived the idea of divorcing you the moment he got the chance? Was that your impression?’

‘I had and have no impression. It is possible. I don't pretend to know the workings of his mind.’

‘Though you lived with him for

nearly eighteen months?’

‘Yes.’

‘But, anyway, you again refused definitely to go back to him?’

‘I have said so.’

‘Did you believe he meant it when he asked you to go back?’

‘At the moment, yes.’

‘Did you see him again before he went?’

‘Yes, for a minute or two, but not alone.’

‘Who was present?’

‘My father.’

‘Did he ask you again to go back

to him on that occasion?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you refused?’

‘Yes.’

‘And after that you had a message from your husband before he left London, asking you once more to change your mind and accompany him?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you did not?’

‘No.’

‘Now let me take you to the date of January the – er – third’ – Dinny breathed again – ‘that is the day which you spent, from five in the

afternoon till nearly midnight, with the correspondent. You admit doing that?’

‘Yes.’

‘No passages between you?’

‘Only one. He hadn’t seen me for nearly three weeks, and he kissed my cheek when he first came in to have tea.’

‘Oh! the cheek again? Only the cheek?’

‘Yes. I am sorry.’

‘So I am sure was he.’

‘Possibly.’

‘You first spent half an hour alone, after this separation, having

– tea?’

‘Yes.’

‘Your rooms, I think, are in the old mews – a room below, a staircase, a room above – where you sleep?’

‘Yes.’

‘And a bathroom? Besides the tea I suppose you had a chat?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where?’

‘In the ground-floor room.’

‘And then did you walk together, chatting, to the Temple, and afterwards to a film and to dinner at a restaurant, during which you

chatted, I suppose, and then took a cab back to your rooms, chatting?’

‘Quite correct.’

‘And then you thought that having been with him nearly six hours, you had still a good deal to say and it was necessary that he should come in, and he came?’

‘Yes.’

‘That would be past eleven, wouldn’t it?’

‘Just past, I think.’

‘How long did he stay on that occasion?’

‘About half an hour.’

‘No passages?’

‘None.’

‘Just a drink and a cigarette or two, and a little more chat?’

‘Precisely.’

‘What had you to talk about for so many hours with this young man who was privileged to kiss your cheek?’

‘What has anyone to talk about at any time?’

‘I am asking you that question.’

‘We talked about everything and nothing.’

‘A little more explicit, please.’

‘Horses, films, my people, his people, theatres – I really don’t

remember.'

'Carefully barring the subject of love?'

'Yes.'

'Strictly platonic from beginning to end?'

'I should say so.'

'Come, Lady Corven, do you mean to tell us that this young man, who on your own admission was in love with you, and who hadn't seen you for nearly three weeks, never once during all those hours yielded to his feelings?'

'I think he told me he loved me once or twice; but he always stuck

splendidly to his promise.'

'What promise?'

'Not to make love to me. To love a person is not a crime, it is only a misfortune.'

'You speak feelingly – from you own experience?'

Clare did not answer.

'Do you seriously tell us that you have not been and are not in love with this young man?'

'I am very fond of him, but not in your sense.'

In Dinny flamed up compassion for young Croom listening to all this. Her cheeks went hot, and she

fixed her blue eyes on the Judge. He had just finished taking down Clare's answer; and suddenly she saw him yawn. It was an old man's yawn, and lasted so long that it seemed never going to end. It changed her mood, and filled her with a sort of pity. He, too, had to listen day after day to long-drawn-out attempts to hurt people, and make them stultify themselves.

‘You have heard the inquiry agent's evidence that there was a light in the upstairs room after you returned with the correspondent from the restaurant. What do you say to that?’

‘There would be. We sat there.’

‘Why there, and not downstairs?’

‘Because it’s much warmer and more comfortable.’

‘That is your bedroom?’

‘No, it’s a sitting-room. I have no bedroom. I just sleep on the sofa.’

‘I see. And there you spent the time from soon after eleven to nearly midnight with the correspondent?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you think there was no harm in that?’

‘No harm, but I think it was extremely foolish.’

‘You mean that you would not have done so if you had known you were being watched?’

‘We certainly shouldn’t.’

‘What made you take these particular rooms?’

‘Their cheapness.’

‘Very inconvenient, wasn’t it, having no bedroom, and nowhere for a servant, and no porter?’

‘Those are luxuries for which one has to pay.’

‘Do you say that you did not take these particular rooms because there was no one of any kind on the premises?’

‘I do. I have only just enough money to live on.’

‘No thought of the correspondent, when you took them?’

‘None.’

‘Not even just a sidelong thought of him?’

‘My Lord, I have answered.’

‘I think she has, Mr Brough.’

‘After this you saw the correspondent constantly?’

‘No. Occasionally. He was living in the country.’

‘I see, and came up to see you?’

‘He always saw me when he did come up, perhaps twice a week.’

‘And when you saw him what did you do?’

‘Went to a picture gallery or a film; once to a theatre, I think. We used to dine together.’

‘Did you know you were being watched?’

‘No.’

‘Did he come to your rooms?’

‘Not again till February the third.’

‘Yes, that is the day I am coming to.’

‘I thought so.’

‘You thought so. It is a day and night indelibly fixed in your mind?’

‘I remember it very well.’

‘My friend has taken you at length through the events of that day, and except for the hours at Oxford, it seems to have been spent almost entirely in the car. Is that so?’

‘Yes.’

‘And this car was a two-seater, with what, my Lord, is called a “dicky.” ’

The Judge stirred.

‘I have never been in a “dicky,” Mr Brough, but I know what they are.’

‘Was it a roomy, comfortable

little car?’

‘Quite.’

‘Closed, I think?’

‘Yes. It didn’t open.’

‘Mr Croom drove and you were seated beside him?’

‘Yes.’

‘Now when you were driving back from Oxford you have said that this car’s lights went out about half-past ten, four miles or so short of Henley, in a wood?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was that an accident?’

‘Of course.’

‘Did you examine the battery?’

‘No.’

‘Did you know when or how it was last charged?’

‘No.’

‘Did you see it when it was recharged?’

‘No.’

‘Then why – of course?’

‘If you are suggesting that Mr Croom tampered with the battery –’

‘Just answer my question, please.’

‘I *am* answering. Mr Croom is incapable of any such dirty trick.’

‘It was a dark night?’

‘Very.’

‘And a large wood?’

‘Yes.’

‘Just the spot one would choose on the whole of that journey from Oxford to London?’

‘Choose?’

‘If one had designed to spend the night in the car.’

‘Yes, but the suggestion is monstrous.’

‘Never mind that, Lady Corven. You regarded it as a pure coincidence?’

‘Of course.’

‘Just tell us what Mr Croom said when the lights went out.’

‘I think he said: “Hallo! My lights are gone!” And he got out and examined the battery.’

‘Had he a torch?’

‘No.’

‘And it was pitch dark. I wonder how he did it. Didn’t you wonder too?’

‘No. He used a match.’

‘And what *was* wrong?’

‘I think he said a wire must have gone.’

‘Then – you have told us that he tried to drive on, and twice got off

the road. It must have been *very* dark?’

‘It was, fearfully.’

‘I think you said it was *your* suggestion that you should spend the night in the car?’

‘I did.’

‘After Mr Croom had proposed one or two alternatives?’

‘Yes; he proposed that we should walk into Henley, and that he should come back to the car with a torch.’

‘Did he seem keen on that?’

‘Keen? Not particularly.’

‘Didn’t press it?’

‘N – no.’

‘Do you think he ever meant it?’

‘Of course I do.’

‘In fact, you have the utmost confidence in Mr Croom?’

‘The utmost.’

‘Quite! You have heard of the expression “palming the cards”?’

‘Yes.’

‘You know what it means?’

‘It means forcing a person to take a card that you wish him to take.’

‘Precisely.’

‘If you are suggesting that Mr

Croom was trying to force me to propose that we should spend the night in the car, you are wholly wrong; and it's a base suggestion.'

'What made you think I was going to make that suggestion, Lady Corven? Had the idea been present to your mind?'

'No. When I suggested that we should spend the night in the car, Mr Croom was taken aback.'

'Oh! How did he show that?'

'He asked me if I could trust him. I had to tell him not to be old-fashioned. Of course, I could trust him.'

‘Trust him to act exactly as you wished?’

‘Trust him not to make love to me. I was trusting him every time I saw him.’

‘You had not spent a night with him before?’

‘Of course I had not.’

‘You use the expression “of course” rather freely, and it seems to me with very little reason. You had plenty of opportunities of passing a night with him, hadn’t you – on the ship, and in your rooms where there was nobody but yourself?’

‘Plenty, and I did not avail myself of them.’

‘So you say; and if you did not, doesn’t it seem to you rather singular that you suggested it on this occasion?’

‘No. I thought it would be rather fun.’

‘Rather fun? Yet you knew this young man was passionately in love with you?’

‘I regretted it afterwards. It wasn’t fair to him.’

‘Really, Lady Corven, do you ask us to believe that you, a married woman of experience, didn’t

realize the ordeal by fire through which you were putting him?’

‘I did afterwards, and I was extremely sorry.’

‘Oh, afterwards! I am speaking of before.’

‘I’m afraid I didn’t before.’

‘You are on your oath. Do you persist in swearing that nothing took place between you in or out of the car on the night of February the third in that dark wood?’

‘I do.’

‘You heard the inquiry agent’s evidence that, when about two in the morning he stole up to the car

and looked into it, he saw by the light of his torch that you were both asleep and that your head was on the co-respondent's shoulder?’

‘Yes, I heard that.’

‘Is it true?’

‘If I was asleep how can I say, but I think it's quite likely. I had put my head there early on.’

‘Oh! You admit that?’

‘Certainly. It was more comfortable. I had asked him if he minded.’

‘And, of course, he didn't?’

‘I thought you didn't like the expression “of course,” but anyway

he said he didn't.'

'He had marvellous control, hadn't he, this young man, who was in love with you?'

'Yes, I've thought since that he had.'

'You knew then that he must have, if your story is true. But is it true, Lady Corven; isn't it entirely fantastic?'

Dinny saw her sister's hands clenching on the rail, and a flood of crimson coming up into her cheeks and ebbing again before she answered:

'It may be fantastic, but it's

entirely true. Everything I've said in this box is true.'

'And then in the morning you woke up as if nothing had happened, and said: "Now we can go home and have breakfast!" And you went? To your rooms?'

'Yes.'

'How long did he stay on that occasion?'

'About half an hour or a little more.'

'The same perfect innocence in your relations?'

'The same.'

'And the day after that you were

served with this petition?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did it surprise you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Conscious of perfect innocence, you were quite hurt in your feelings?’

‘Not when I thought about things.’

‘Oh, not when you thought about things? What exactly do you mean by that?’

‘I remembered that my husband had said I must look out for myself; and I realized how silly I was not to know that I was being watched.’

‘Tell me, Lady Corven, why did you defend this action?’

‘Because I knew that, however appearances were against us, we had done nothing.’

Dinny saw the Judge look towards Clare, take down her answer, hold up his pen, and speak.

‘On that night in the car you were on a main road. What was to prevent your stopping another car and asking them to give you a lead into Henley?’

‘I don’t think we thought of it, my Lord; I did ask Mr Croom to try

and follow one, but they went by too quickly.’

‘In any case, what was there to prevent your walking into Henley and leaving the car in the wood?’

‘I suppose nothing really, only it would have been midnight before we got to Henley; and I thought it would be more awkward than just staying in the car; and I always had wanted to try sleeping in a car.’

‘And do you still want to?’

‘No, my Lord, it’s overrated.’

‘Mr Brough, I’ll break for luncheon.’

Chapter Thirty-two



DINNY refused all solicitations to lunch, and, taking her sister's arm, walked her out into Carey Street. They circled Lincoln's Inn Fields in silence.

‘Nearly over, darling,’ she said at last. ‘You’ve done wonderfully. He hasn’t really shaken you at all, and I believe the Judge feels that. I like the Judge much better than the jury.’

‘Oh! Dinny, I’m so tired. That perpetual suggestion that one’s lying screws me up till I could

scream.'

'That's what he does it for. Don't gratify him!'

'And poor Tony. I do feel a beast.'

'What about a "nice hot" cup of tea? We've just time.'

They walked down Chancery Lane into the Strand.

'Nothing with it, dearest. I couldn't eat.'

Neither of them could eat. They stirred the pot, drank their tea as strong as they could get it, and made their way silently back to the Court. Clare, not acknowledging

even her father's anxious glance, resumed her old position on the front bench, her hands in her lap and her eyes cast down.

Dinny was conscious of Jerry Corven sitting deep in confabulation with his solicitor and counsel. 'Very young' Roger, passing to his seat, said:

'They're going to recall Corven.'

'Why?'

'I don't know.'

As if walking in his sleep, the Judge came in, bowed slightly to the Court's presence, and sat down. 'Lower than ever,' thought Dinny.

‘My Lord, before resuming my cross-examination of the respondent, I should be glad, with your permission, to recall the petitioner in connexion with the point of which my friend made so much. Your Lordship will recollect that in his cross-examination of the petitioner he imputed to him the intention of securing a divorce from the moment of his wife’s departure. The petitioner has some additional evidence to give in regard to that point, and it will be more convenient for me to recall him now. I shall be very short, my Lord.’

Dinny saw Clare's face raised suddenly to the Judge, and the expression on it made her heart beat furiously.

‘Very well, Mr Brough.’

‘Sir Gerald Corven.’

Watching that contained figure step again into the box, Dinny saw that Clare too was watching, almost as if she wished to catch his eye.

‘You have told us, Sir Gerald, that on the last occasion but one on which you saw your wife before you returned to Ceylon – the first of November, that is – you saw her

at her rooms in Melton Mews?’

‘Yes.’

Dinny gasped. It had come!

‘Now on that occasion, besides any conversation that took place between you, what else occurred?’

‘We were husband and wife.’

‘You mean that the marital relationship between you was re-established?’

‘Yes, my Lord.’

‘Thank you, Sir Gerald; I think that disposes finally of my friend’s point; and it is all I wanted to ask.’

Instone was speaking.

‘Why did you not say that when

you were first examined?’

‘I did not see its relevance until after your cross-examination.’

‘Do you swear that you have not invented it?’

‘Most certainly I do.’

And still Dinny sat braced against the woodwork with her eyes shut, thinking of the young man three rows behind her.

Atrocious! But who would see it, here? People’s innermost nerves were torn out of them, examined coldly, almost with enjoyment, and put back lacerated.

‘Now, Lady Corven, will you go

back to the box?’

When Dinny opened her eyes Clare was standing close up to the rail with her head held high and her gaze fixed on her questioner.

‘Now, Lady Corven,’ said the slow rich voice, ‘you heard that piece of evidence.’

‘Yes.’

‘Is it true?’

‘I do not wish to answer.’

‘Why?’

Dinny saw that she had turned to the Judge.

‘My Lord, when my counsel asked me about my married life, I

refused to go into it, and I do not wish to go into it now.'

For a moment the Judge's eyes were turned towards the box; then strayed from it to stare at the unseen.

'This question arises out of evidence given in rebuttal of a suggestion made by your own counsel. You must answer it.'

No answer came.

'Ask the question again, Mr Brough.'

'Is it true that on the occasion of which your husband spoke the marital relationship was re-

established between you?’

‘No. It is not true.’

Dinny, who knew that it was, looked up. The Judge’s eyes were still fixed above her head, but she saw the slight pouting of his lips. He did not believe the answer.

The slow rich voice was speaking, and she caught in it a peculiar veiled triumph.

‘You swear that?’

‘Yes.’

‘So your husband has gone out of his way to commit perjury in making that statement?’

‘It is his word against mine.’

‘And I think I know which will be taken. Is it not true that you have made the answer you have in order to save the feelings of the correspondent?’

‘It is not.’

‘From first to last, can we attach any more importance to the truth in any of your answers than to the truth in that last?’

‘I don’t think that is a fair question, Mr Brough. The witness does not know what importance we attach.’

‘Very good, my Lord. I’ll put it another way. *Throughout* have you

told the truth, Lady Corven, and nothing but the truth?’

‘I have.’

‘*Very* well. I have no more to ask you.’

During the few questions put to her sister, in a re-examination which carefully avoided the last point, Dinny could think only of young Croom. At heart she felt the case was lost, and longed to take Clare and creep away. If only that man behind with the hooked nose had not tried to blacken Corven and prove too much, this last mine would not have been sprung! And yet – to blacken the other side –

what was it but the essence of procedure!

When Clare was back in her seat, white and exhausted, she whispered:

‘Would you like to come away, darling?’

Clare shook her head.

‘James Bernard Croom.’

For the first time since the case began Dinny had a full view, and hardly knew him. His tanned face was parched and drawn; he looked excessively thin. His grey eyes seemed hiding under their brows, and his lips were bitter and

compressed. He looked at least five years older, and she knew at once that Clare's denial had not deceived him.

'Your name is James Bernard Croom, you live at Bablock Hythe, and are in charge of a horse-breeding establishment there? Have you any private means?'

'None whatever.'

It was not Instone who was examining, but a younger man with a sharper nose, seated just behind him.

'Up to September last year you were superintending a tea

plantation in Ceylon? Did you ever meet the respondent in Ceylon?’

‘Never.’

‘You were never at her house?’

‘No.’

‘You have heard of a certain polo match in which you played, and after which she entertained the players?’

‘Yes, but I didn’t go. I had to get back.’

‘Was it on the boat, then, that you first met her?’

‘Yes.’

‘You make no secret of the fact that you fell in love with her?’

‘None.’

‘In spite of that, is there any truth in these allegations of misconduct between you?’

‘None whatever.’

And as the evidence he gave to the Court went on and on, Dinny’s eyes never left his face, as if fascinated by its constrained but bitter unhappiness.

‘Now, Mr Croom, this is my last question: You are aware that if these allegations of misconduct were true, you would be in the position of a man who has seduced a wife in her husband’s absence.

What have you to say to that?’

‘I have to say that if Lady Corven had felt for me what I feel for her, I should have written to her husband at once to tell him the state of things.’

‘You mean that you would have given him warning before anything took place between you?’

‘I don’t say that, but as soon as possible.’

‘But she did *not* feel for you what you felt for her?’

‘I am sorry to say, no.’

‘So that in fact no occasion to inform the husband ever arose?’

‘No.’

‘Thank you.’

A slight stiffening of young Croom’s figure heralded Brough’s rich slow voice, saying with peculiar deliberation:

‘In your experience, sir, are the feelings of lovers towards each other ever the same?’

‘I have no experience.’

‘No experience? You know the French proverb as to there being always one who kisses and the other who offers the cheek to the kiss?’

‘I’ve heard it.’

‘Don’t you think it’s true?’

‘About as true as any proverb.’

‘According to the stories you both tell, you were pursuing in her husband’s absence a married woman who didn’t want you to pursue her? Not a very honourable position – yours – was it? Not exactly what is called “playing the game”?’

‘I suppose not.’

‘But I suggest, Mr Croom, that your position was not as dishonourable as all that, and that in spite of the French proverb she *did* want you to pursue her?’

‘She did not.’

‘You say that in face of the cabin incident; in face of her getting you in to distemper her walls; in face of the invitation to tea and to spend over half an hour with her at nearly midnight in those convenient rooms of hers; in face of the suggestion that you should spend the night with her in a car, and come to breakfast the morning after? Come, Mr Croom, isn’t that carrying your chivalry rather far? What you say has to convince men and women of the world, you know.’

‘I can only say that, if her

feelings for me had been what mine were for her, we should have gone away together at once. The blame is entirely mine, and she has only treated me kindly because she was sorry for me.'

'If what you both say is true, she gave you hell – I beg your pardon, my Lord – in the car, didn't she? Was that kind?'

'When a person is not in love I don't think they realize the feelings of one who is.'

'Are you a cold-blooded person?'

'No.'

'But she is?'

‘How is the witness to know that Mr Brough?’

‘My Lord, I should have put it: But you think she is?’

‘I do not think so.’

‘And yet you would have us think that she was kind in letting you pass the night with her head on your shoulder? Well, well! You say if her feelings had been yours, you would have gone away at once. What would you have gone away on? Had you any money?’

‘Two hundred pounds.’

‘And she?’

‘Two hundred a year, apart from

her job.'

'Flown away and lived on air, eh?'

'I should have got some job.'

'Not your present one?'

'Probably not.'

'I suggest that both of you felt it would be mad to fling your caps over the windmill like that?'

'I never felt so.'

'What made you defend this action?'

'I wish we hadn't.'

'Then why did you?'

'She thought, and her people

thought, that as we had done nothing we ought to defend.'

'But *you* didn't think so?'

'I didn't think we should be believed, and I wanted her free.'

'Her honour didn't occur to you?'

'Of course it did; but I thought for her to stay tied was too heavy a price to pay for it.'

'You say you didn't think you'd be believed? Altogether too improbable a story?'

'No; but the more one speaks the truth, the less one expects to be believed.'

Dinny saw the Judge turn and

look at him.

‘Are you speaking generally?’

‘No, my Lord, I meant here.’

The Judge’s face came round again and his eyes studied the unseen above Dinny’s head.

‘I am considering, you know, whether I should commit you for contempt of Court.’

‘I am sorry, my Lord; what I meant was that anything one says is turned against one.’

‘You speak out of inexperience. I will let it pass this time, but you mustn’t say things of that sort again. Go on, Mr Brough.’

‘The question of damages, of course, didn’t affect you in making up your mind to defend this action?’

‘No.’

‘You have said that you have no private means. Is that true?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then how do you mean that it didn’t affect you?’

‘I was thinking so much of other things that bankruptcy didn’t seem to matter.’

‘Now, you have said in examination that you were not aware of Lady Corven’s existence

until you were on this ship coming home. Do you know a place in Ceylon called Neurāl̥ya?’

‘No.’

‘What?’

Dinny saw a faint smile creep out among the Judge’s folds and wrinkles.

‘Put the question another way, Mr Brough; we generally call it Neurāl̥ya.’

‘I know Neurāl̥ya, my Lord.’

‘Were you there in June last?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was Lady Corven there?’

‘She may have been.’

‘Wasn’t she in the same hotel as you?’

‘No. I wasn’t in an hotel. I was staying with a friend.’

‘And you did not meet her playing golf or tennis, or out riding?’

‘I did not.’

‘Or anywhere?’

‘No.’

‘Not a large place, is it?’

‘Not very.’

‘And she’s a conspicuous person, isn’t she?’

‘*I think so.*’

‘So you never met her till you were both on this ship?’

‘No.’

‘When did you first become conscious that you were in love with her?’

‘About the second or third day out.’

‘Love almost at first sight, in fact?’

‘Yes.’

‘And it didn’t occur to you, knowing that she was a married woman, to avoid her?’

‘I knew I ought to, but I wasn’t able.’

‘You would have been able to if she had discouraged you?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Did she in fact discourage you?’

‘N-no. I don’t think she was aware of my feelings for some time.’

‘Women are very quick in such matters, Mr Croom. Do you seriously suggest that she was unaware?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Did you trouble to conceal your feelings?’

‘If you mean did I make love to her on the ship – I did not.’

‘When did you first make love to her?’

‘I told her my feelings just before we left the ship.’

‘Was there any real reason why you should have gone to her state-room to see those photographs?’

‘I suppose not.’

‘Did you look at any photographs at all?’

‘Certainly.’

‘What else did you do?’

‘I think we talked.’

‘Don’t you know? This was an occasion for you, wasn’t it? Or was it only one of several occasions of

which we have not been told?’

‘It was the only time I was inside her state-room.’

‘In that case surely you remember?’

‘We just sat and talked.’

‘Beginning to remember, eh?
Where did you sit?’

‘In the chair.’

‘And where did she sit?’

‘On her bed. It was a small cabin – there was no other chair.’

‘An outside cabin?’

‘Yes.’

‘No chance of being overlooked?’

‘No, but there was nothing to overlook.’

‘So you both say. I suppose it gave you something of a thrill, didn’t it?’

Dinny saw the Judge’s face poked forward.

‘I don’t want to interrupt you, Mr Brough, but the witness has made no secret of his feelings.’

‘Very well, my Lord. I will put it to him bluntly. I suggest, sir, that on that occasion there was misconduct between you?’

‘There was none.’

‘H’m! Tell the jury why it was

that when Sir Gerald Corven came to London you did not go to him and frankly avow your relations with his wife.'

'What relations?'

'Come, sir! The fact, on your own showing, that you were seeing all you could of his wife; the fact that you were in love with her, and wanted her to go away with you.'

'She did not want to go away with me. I would willingly have gone to her husband, but I had no right to without her permission.'

'Did you ask for that permission?'

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because she had told me we could only meet as friends.’

‘I suggest she told you nothing of the sort?’

‘My Lord, that is asking me if I am a liar.’

‘Answer the question.’

‘I am not a liar.’

‘That is the answer, I think, Mr Brough.’

‘Tell me, sir; you heard the respondent’s evidence, did it strike you as entirely truthful?’

Dinny saw, and hoped that no

one else saw, the quivering of his face.

‘Yes, so far as I could judge.’

‘It was perhaps not quite a fair question. But I may put it this way: If the respondent were to say that she had done, or not done, this or that, you would feel bound in honour to corroborate her statement, where you could, and to believe it where you could not?’

‘I am not sure that is quite fair, Mr Brough.’

‘My Lord, I submit that it is vital to my case to establish to the jury what the state of the co-

respondent's mind has been throughout this business.'

'Well, I won't stop the question, but there is a limit, you know, to these generalities.'

Dinny saw the first flicker of a smile on young Croom's face.

'My Lord, I don't at all mind answering the question. I do not know what I should feel bound in honour to do, generally speaking.'

'Well, let us come to the particular. Lady Corven has said that she could trust you not to make love to her. Would you say that was true?'

Dinny saw his face darken.

‘Not quite true. But she knew I did my best not to.’

‘But now and then you couldn’t help it?’

‘I don’t know what you mean by the expression “making love”; but now and then I know I showed my feelings.’

‘Now and then? Mr Croom, didn’t you always show your feelings?’

‘If you mean did I always show that I was in love with her – of course I did, you can’t hide a thing like that.’

‘That is a fair admission. I don’t want to catch you. I mean more than just showing by your face and eyes that you were in love. I mean downright physical expression.’

‘Then, no, except –’

‘Yes?’

‘Kissing her cheek three times altogether, and holding her hand sometimes.’

‘So much she has admitted, and it is all you are prepared to swear to?’

‘I will swear there was no more.’

‘Tell me, did you sleep at all during that night in the car, when

her head was on your shoulder?’

‘Yes.’

‘Considering the state of your feelings, wasn’t that singular?’

‘Yes. But I was up at five that morning and I’d driven a hundred and fifty miles.’

‘You seriously expect us to believe that after nearly five months of longing you took no advantage of that marvellous opportunity, but just went to sleep?’

‘I took no advantage. But I have told you that I do not expect to be believed.’

‘I don’t wonder.’

For a long time the slow rich voice went on asking questions, and for a long time Dinny’s eyes remained fixed on that bitterly unhappy face, till a sort of numbness came over her. She was roused by:

‘I suggest to you, sir, that from beginning to end of your evidence you have been actuated by the feeling that you must do everything you can for this lady without regard to your own consciousness of what is true? That your attitude, in fact, has been one of distorted chivalry?’

‘No.’

‘Very well. That is all.’

Then came the re-examination, and the Judge’s releasing remark.

Dinny and Clare arose and, followed by their father, walked out into the corridor, and, as quickly as might be, to open air.

The General said:

‘Instone’s made a mess of it with that quite unnecessary point of his.’

Clare did not answer.

‘I am glad,’ said Dinny. ‘You’ll get your divorce.’

Chapter Thirty-three



THE speeches were over, and the judge was summing up. From beside her father, on one of the back benches now, Dinny could see Jerry Corven still sitting in front beside his solicitors, and ‘very young’ Roger sitting alone. Clare was not in Court. Neither was young Croom.

The Judge’s voice came slowly, as if struggling past his teeth. It seemed to Dinny marvellous how he remembered everything, for he looked but little at his notes; nor

could she detect anything that was not fair in his review of the evidence. Now and again his eyes, turned towards the jury, seemed to close, but his voice never stopped. Now and again he poked his neck forward, priest and tortoise for a moment coalescing; then he would draw it back and speak as it were to himself.

‘The evidence not being of the conclusive nature which we expect of evidence tendered to this Court’ – (No ‘calling with a cup of tea,’ she thought), ‘counsel for the petitioner in his able speech laid great stress, and rightly, upon

credibility. He directed your attention especially to the respondent's denial that there was any renewal of the marital relationship between the petitioner and herself on the occasion when he went to her rooms. He suggested that there was reason for her denial in her desire to spare the feelings of the co-respondent. But you must consider whether a woman who, as she says, was not in love with the co-respondent, had not encouraged him, or been intimate with him in any way, would go so far as to perjure herself to save his feelings.

According to her account, he was from the beginning of their acquaintanceship in the nature of a friend to her and nothing more. On the other hand, if you believe the petitioner on that point – and there seems no sufficient reason for his volunteering perjury – it follows that you disbelieve the respondent, and she has deliberately denied evidence which was in her favour rather than against her. It seems difficult to believe that she would do that unless she had feelings for the co-respondent warmer than those of mere friendship. This is, in fact, a very crucial point, and the

decision you come to as to which is true – the husband's statement or the wife's denial of it – seems to me a cardinal factor in your consideration of whether or not to accept the respondent's evidence in the rest of the case. You have only what is called circumstantial evidence to go upon; and in such cases the credibility of the parties is a very important factor. If on one point you are satisfied that one of the parties is not speaking the truth, then the whole of his or her evidence is tinged with doubt. In regard to the co-respondent, though he conveyed an impression

of candour, you must remember that there is a traditional belief in this country, regrettable or not, that a man whose attentions have involved a married woman in a situation of this kind must not, in vulgar parlance, “give her away.” You must ask yourselves how far you can treat this young man, who is quite obviously, and by his own admission, deeply in love, as a free, independent, truthful witness.

. ‘On the other hand, and apart from this question of general credibility, you must not let appearances run away with your judgement. In these days young

people are free and easy in their association with each other. What might have seemed conclusive indication in the days of my youth is now by no means conclusive. In regard to the night, however, that was spent in the car, you may think it well to pay particular attention to the answer the respondent gave to my question: Why, when the lights went out, they did not simply stop a passing car, tell the occupants what had happened, and request to be given a lead into Henley. Her answer was: "I don't think we thought of it, my Lord. I did ask Mr Croom to

follow a car, but it was going too fast.” It is for you to consider, in the light of that answer, whether the respondent really wanted that simple solution of the difficulty they were in, namely, a lead into Henley, where no doubt the damage could have been repaired; or whence at least she could have returned to London by train. It is said by her counsel that to have gone into Henley at that time with a damaged car would have made them too conspicuous. But you will remember that she has said she was not aware that she was being watched. If that was so, you will

consider whether the question of conspicuity would have been present to her mind.'

Dinny's gaze by now had left the Judge's face and was fixed upon the jury. And, while she searched the lack of expression on those twelve faces, a 'cardinal factor' was uppermost in her mind: It was easier to disbelieve than to believe. Remove whatever tempering influence there might be from a witness's voice and face, and would not the spicier version of events prevail? The word 'damages' took her eyes back to the Judge's face.

'Because,' he was saying, 'if you

should come to a decision in favour of the petitioner, the question of the damages he claims will arise. And in regard to that I must draw your attention to one or two salient considerations. It cannot be said that claims for damages in divorce suits are common in these days, or indeed looked on with any great favour in this Court. It has become disagreeable to think of women in terms of money. Not much more than a hundred years ago it was actually not unknown – though illegal even then – for a man to offer his wife for sale. Such days – thank God! – are long past.

Though damages can still be asked for in this Court, they must not be what is called “vindictive,” and they must bear reasonable relation to the co-respondent’s means. In this case the petitioner has stated that if any damages are awarded him, they will be settled on the respondent. That is, one may say, the usual practice nowadays where damages are claimed. In regard to the co-respondent’s means, if it should become necessary for you to consider the question of damages, I would remind you that his counsel stated that he has no private means, and offered to provide

evidence of the fact. One has never known counsel to make a statement of that sort without being sure of his ground, and I think you may take the correspondent's word for it that his only means of subsistence are derived from his – er – “job,” which appears to carry a salary of four hundred pounds a year. Those, then, are the considerations which should guide you if you should have to consider the amount, if any, of damages to be awarded. Now, members of the jury, I send you to your task. The issues are grave for the future of these people, and I

am sure that I can trust you to give them your best attention. You may retire if you wish to do so.'

Dinny was startled by the way he withdrew almost at once into contemplation of a document which he raised from the desk in front

'He really is an old ducky,' she thought, and her gaze went back to the jury rising from their seats. Now that the ordeals of her sister and Tony Croom were over, she felt very little interest. Even the Court today was but sparsely filled.

'They only came to enjoy the suffering,' was her bitter thought.

A voice said:

‘Clare is still in the Admiralty Court when you want her.’

Dornford, in wig and gown, was sitting down beside her. ‘How did the Judge sum up?’

‘Very fairly.’

‘He *is* fair.’

‘But barristers, I think, might wear: “Fairness is a virtue, a little more won’t hurt you,” nicely printed on their collars.’

‘You might as well print it round the necks of hounds on a scent. Still, even this Court isn’t as bad in that way as it used to be.’

‘I’m so glad.’

He sat quite still, looking at her.
And she thought:

‘His wig suits the colour of his face.’

Her father leaned across her.

‘How long do they give you to pay costs in, Dornford?’

‘A fortnight is the usual order, but you can get it extended.’

‘It’s a foregone conclusion,’ said the General glumly. ‘Well, she’ll be free of him.’

‘Where is Tony Croom?’ asked Dinny.

‘I saw him as I came in. At the

corridor window – quite, close. You can't miss him. Shall I go and tell him to wait?’

‘If you would.’

‘Then will you all come to my chambers when it's over?’

Receiving their nods, he went out and did not come back.

Dinny and her father sat on. An usher brought the Judge a written communication; he wrote upon it, and the usher took it back to the jury. Almost immediately they came in.

The broad and pleasant face of her who looked like a housekeeper

had a mortified expression as if she had been overridden; and, instantly, Dinny knew what was coming.

‘Members of the jury, are you agreed on your verdict?’

The foreman rose.

‘We are.’

‘Do you find the respondent guilty of adultery with the co-respondent?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you find the co-respondent guilty of adultery with the respondent?’

‘Isn’t that the same?’ thought

Dinny.

‘Yes.’

‘And what damages do you say the co-respondent should be ordered to pay?’

‘We think that he should pay the costs of all the parties to the action.’

Through Dinny passed the thought: ‘The more one loves the more one pays.’ Barely listening to the Judge’s words, she whispered to her father, and slipped away.

Young Croom was leaning against the stone that framed the window, and she thought she had

never seen so desolate a figure.

‘Well, Dinny?’

‘Lost. No damages, just all the costs. Come out, I want to talk to you.’

They went in silence.

‘Let’s go and sit on the Embankment.’

Young Croom laughed. ‘The Embankment! Marvellous!’

No other word passed between them till they were seated under a plane tree whose leaves were not yet fully unfurled in that cold spring.

‘Rotten!’ said Dinny.

‘I’ve been a complete fool all through, and there’s an end of it.’

‘Have you had anything to eat these last two days?’

‘I suppose so. I’ve drunk quite a lot, anyway.’

‘What are you going to do now, dear boy?’

‘See Jack Muskham, and try and get another job somewhere out of England.’

Dinny felt as if she had grasped a stick by the wrong end. She could only be helpful if she knew Clare’s feelings.

‘No one takes advice,’ she said,

‘but couldn’t you manage to do nothing at all for a month or so?’

‘I don’t know, Dinny.’

‘Have those mares come?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Surely you won’t give that job up before it’s even begun?’

‘It seems to me I’ve only got one job at the moment – to keep going somehow, somewhere.’

‘Don’t I know that feeling? But don’t do anything desperate! Promise! Good-bye, my dear, I must hurry back.’

She stood up and pressed his hand hard.

When she reached Dornford's chambers, her father and Clare were already there, and 'very young' Roger with them.

Clare's face looked as though the whole thing had happened to someone else.

The General was saying:

'What will the total costs come to, Mr Forsyte?'

'Not far short of a thousand, I should say.'

'A thousand pounds for speaking the truth! We can't possibly let young Croom pay more than his own share. He hasn't a bob.'

‘Very young’ Roger took snuff.

‘Well,’ said the General, ‘I must go and put my wife out of her misery. We’re going back to Condaford this afternoon, Dinny. Coming?’

Dinny nodded.

‘Good! Many thanks, Mr Forsyte. Early in November, then – the decree? Good-bye!’

When he had gone Dinny said in a low voice:

‘Now that it’s over, what do you really think?’

‘As I did at first: If you’d been your sister we should have won.’

‘I want,’ said Dinny coldly, ‘to know whether you believe them or not?’

‘On the whole – yes.’

‘Is it impossible for a lawyer to go further than that?’

‘Very young’ Roger smiled.

‘No one tells the truth without mental reservations of some kind.’

‘Perfectly true,’ thought Dinny.
‘Could we have a taxi?’

In the cab Clare said: ‘Do something for me, Dinny. Bring me my things to the Mews.’

‘Of course.’

‘I don’t feel like Condaford. Did

you see Tony?’

‘Yes.’

‘How is he?’

‘Rotten.’

‘Rotten!’ repeated Clare, bitterly. ‘How could I help what they sprung on me? I lied for him, anyway.’

Dinny, looking straight before her, said:

‘When you can, tell me exactly what your feeling towards him is.’

‘When I know myself, I will.’

‘You’ll want something to eat, darling.’

‘Yes, I’m hungry. I’ll stop here in

Oxford Street. I shall be cleaning up when you come with my things. I feel as if I could sleep the clock round, and probably I shan't sleep a wink. When you're divorced, Dinny, don't defend – you keep on thinking of better answers.'

Dinny squeezed her arm, and took the taxi on to South Square.

Chapter Thirty-four



MORE deadly than the atmosphere during a fight is that when it is over. You ‘keep on thinking of better answers,’ and you feel that life is not worth living. The primary law of existence having been followed to its logical and – win or lose – unsatisfying conclusion, the sand is out of your dolly, you loll and droop. Such were the sensations of Dinny, who had but understudied. Unable to feel that she could be of any real help, she fell back on pigs, and had

been for a good week in this posture when she received a letter headed:

Kingson Cuthcott & Forsyte,
Old Jewry.

May 17th, 1932.

MY DEAR MISS CHARWELL, —

I write to tell you that we have succeeded in coming to an arrangement by which the costs of the action will be met without making any call upon either Mr Croom or your sister. I shall be grateful if you could take an opportunity of relieving their minds and also your father's mind in the matter.

Believe me, my dear Miss Charwell,
Very faithfully yours,

ROGER FORSYTE

Reaching her on a really warm

morning, to sound of mowing machine and to scent of grass, it would have 'intrigued' her if she had not detested the word. She turned from the window and said:

'The lawyers say we need none of us worry any more about those costs dad; they've come to an arrangement.'

'How?'

'They don't say, but they want your mind relieved.'

'I don't understand lawyers,' muttered the General, 'but if they say it's all right, I'm very glad. I've been worrying.'

‘Yes, dear. Coffee?’

But she resumed her meditations on that cryptic letter. Did something in Jerry Corven’s conduct force him to agree to this ‘arrangement’? Was there not someone called ‘The King’s Proctor’ who could stop decrees being granted? Or – what?

Abandoning her first idea of driving over to Tony Croom because of the questions he might ask, she wrote to him and to Clare instead. The more, however, she pondered over the wording of the solicitor’s letter, the more convinced she became that she

must see 'very young' Roger. There was that at the back of her mind which refused quietus. She, therefore, arranged to see him at a teashop near the British Museum on his way homeward from the City, and went there direct from her train. The place was an 'artifact,' designed, so far as a Regency edifice could be, to reproduce such a 'coffee house' as Boswell and Johnson might have frequented. Its floor was not sanded, but looked as if it should be. There were no long clay pipes, but there were long cardboard cigarette-holders. The furniture was

wooden, the light dim. No record having been discovered of what the 'staff' should look like, they looked sea-green. Prints of old coaching inns were hung on walls panelled by the Tottenham Court Road. Quite a few patrons were drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. None of them used the long cardboard holders. 'Very young' Roger, limping slightly, and with his customary air of not being quite what he ought to be, uncovered his sandyish head and smiled above his chin.

'China or Indian?' said Dinny.
'Whatever you're having.'

‘Then two coffees, please, and muffins.’

‘Muffins! This *is* a treat, dear papa. Those are quite good old copper bed-warmers, Miss Cherrell. I wonder if they’d sell them.’

‘Do you collect?’

‘Pick things up. No use having a Queen Anne house unless you can do something for it.’

‘Does your wife sympathize?’

‘No, she’s all for the T.C.R., bridge, golf, and the modernities. *I* never can keep my hands off old silver.’

‘*I have* to,’ murmured Dinny.

‘Your letter was a very pleasant relief. Did you really mean that we should none of us have to pay?’

‘I did.’

She considered her next question, scrutinizing him through her lashes. With all his æsthetic leanings, he looked uncommonly spry.

‘In confidence, Mr Forsyte, how did you manage to make that arrangement? Had it to do with my brother-in-law?’

‘Very young’ Roger laid his hand on his heart.

‘ “The tongue of Forsyte is his

own,” *cf.* Marmion. But you needn’t worry.’

‘I need, or shall, unless I know it wasn’t that.’

‘Make your mind easy, then; it had nothing to do with Corven.’

Dinny ate a muffin in complete silence, then spoke of period silver. ‘Very young’ Roger gave an erudite dissertation on its mark – if she would come down for a weekend, he would turn her into a connoisseur.

They parted cordially, and Dinny went towards her Uncle Adrian’s. That uneasiness was still

at the back of her mind. The trees had leaved enticingly these last warm days; the Square wherein he dwelled had an air quiet and green, as if inhabited by minds. Nobody was at home. 'But,' said the maid, 'Mr Cherrell is sure to be in about six, miss.'

Dinny waited in a small panelled room full of books and pipes and photographs of Diana and the two Ferse children. An old collie kept her company, and through the opened window seeped the sounds of London streets. She was crumpling the dog's ears when Adrian came in.

‘Well, Dinny, so it’s over. I hope you feel better.’

Dinny handed him the letter.

‘I know it’s nothing to do with Jerry Corven. You know Eustace Dornford, Uncle. I want you to find out from him quietly whether it’s he who is paying these costs.’

Adrian pulled at his beard.

‘I don’t suppose he’d tell me.’

‘Somebody must have paid them, and I can only think of him. I don’t want to go to him myself.’

Adrian looked at her intently. Her face was concerned and brooding.

‘Not easy, Dinny; but I’ll try. What’s going to happen to those two?’

‘I don’t know, they don’t know; nobody knows.’

‘How are your people taking it?’

‘Terribly glad it’s over, and don’t care much now it is. You’ll let me know soon, won’t you, Uncle dear?’

‘I will, my dear; but I shall probably draw blank.’

Dinny made for Melton Mews, and met her sister on the doorstep. Clare’s cheeks were flushed; there was febrility in her whole manner

and appearance.

‘I’ve asked Tony Croom here this evening,’ she said, when Dinny was leaving to catch her train. ‘One must pay one’s debts.’

‘Oh!’ murmured Dinny, and for the life of her could say no more.

The words haunted her in the bus to Paddington, in the refreshment room while she ate a sandwich, in the railway carriage going home. Pay one’s debts! The first canon of self-respect! Suppose Dornford had paid those costs! Was she as precious as all that? Wilfrid had had all of her according to her heart and her hope and her desire.

If Dornford wanted what was left over – why not? She dropped thinking of herself and went back to thought of Clare. Had she paid her debt by now? Transgressors by law – ought to transgress! And yet – so much future could be compromised in so few minutes!

She sat very still. And the train rattled on in the dying twilight.

Chapter Thirty-five



TONY CROOM had spent a miserable week in his converted cottages at Bablock Hythe. The evidence given by Corven on his recall to the box had seared him, nor had Clare's denial anointed the burn. In this young man was an old-fashioned capacity for jealousy. That a wife should accept her husband's embrace was not, of course, unknown; but, in the special circumstances and states of feeling, it had seemed to him improper, if not monstrous, and the giving of

his own evidence, directly after such a thrust at his vitals, had but inflamed the wound. A sad unreason governs sex; to be aware that he had no right to be suffering brought no relief. And now, a week after the trial, receiving her note of invitation, he had the impulse not to answer, to answer and upbraid, to answer 'like a gentleman' – and, all the time, he knew he would just go up.

With nothing clear in his mind and that bruise still in his heart, he reached the Mews an hour after Dinny had gone. Clare let him in, and they stood looking at each

other for a minute without speaking. At last she said with a laugh:

‘Well, Tony! Funny business – the whole thing, wasn’t it?’

‘Exquisitely humorous.’

‘You look ill.’

‘You look fine.’

And she did, in a red frock open at the neck, and without sleeves.

‘Sorry I’m not dressed, Clare. I didn’t know you’d want to go out.’

‘I don’t. We’re going to dine in. You can leave the car out there, and stay as long as you like, and nobody the worse. Isn’t it nice?’

‘Clare!’

‘Put your hat down and come upstairs. I’ve made a new cocktail.’

‘I take this chance to say I’m bitterly sorry.’

‘Don’t be an idiot, Tony.’ She began to mount the spiral stairway, turning at the top.

‘Come!’

Dropping his hat and driving gloves, he followed her.

To the eyes of one throbbing and distraught, the room above had an air of preparation, as if for ceremony, or – was it sacrifice? The little table was set out daintily

with flowers, a narrow-necked bottle, green glasses – the couch covered with some jade-green stuff and heaped with bright cushions. The windows were open, for it was hot, but the curtains were nearly drawn across and the light turned on. He went straight across to the window, stifled by the violent confusion within him.

‘In spite of the Law’s blessing, better close the curtains,’ said Clare. ‘Would you like a wash?’

He shook his head, drew the curtains close, and sat on the sill. Clare had dropped on to the sofa.

‘I couldn’t bear to see you in the

box, Tony. I owe you a lot.'

'Owe! You owe me nothing. It's I –!'

'No! I am the debtor.'

With her bare arms crossed behind her neck, her body so graceful, her face a little tilted up – there was all he had dreamed about and longed for all these months! There she was, infinitely desirable, seeming to say: 'Here I am! Take me!' and he sat staring at her. The moment he had yearned and yearned for, and he could not seize it!

'Why so far off, Tony?'

He got up, his lips trembling, every limb trembling, came as far as the table, and stood gripping the back of a chair. His eyes fixed on her eyes, searched and searched. What was behind those dark eyes looking up at him? Not love! The welcome of duty? The payment of a debt? The toleration of a pal? The invitation of one who would have it over and done with? But not love, with its soft gleam. And, suddenly, there came before his eyes the image of her and Corven – *there!* He covered his face with his arm, rushed headlong down those twisting iron stairs, seized hat and

gloves, and dashed out into his car. His mind did not really work again till he was far along the Uxbridge Road; and how he had got there without disaster he could not conceive. He had behaved like a perfect fool ! He had behaved exactly as he had to ! The startled look on her face! To be treated as a creditor! To be paid! *There!* On that sofa ! No! He drove again with a sort of frenzy, and was brought up sharply by a lorry lumbering along in front. The night was just beginning, moonlit and warm. He turned the car into a gateway and got out. Leaning against the gate,

he filled and lit his pipe. Where was he going? Home? What use? What use going anywhere? His brain cleared suddenly. Drive to Jack Muskharm's, release himself, and – Kenya! He had money enough for that. A job would turn up. But stay here? No! Lucky those mares hadn't come! He got over the gate and sat down on the grass. Relaxed against the bank he looked up. Lot of stars! What had he – fifty pounds – sixty – nothing owing! An East African boat – go steerage! Anything – any where away! Close to him on the bank were ox-eyed daisies slowly brightening in the

moonlight; the air was scented by ripening grass. If in her eyes there had been one look of love! He let his head fall back on the grass. Not her fault she didn't love him! His misfortune! Home – get his kit together, lock up, straight to Muskhams! It would take all the night! See those lawyers – Dinny, too, if possible ! But Clare? No! His pipe ceased to draw; the moon and stars, the ox-eyed daisies, the grassy scent, the shadows creeping out, the feel of the bank, lost all power to soothe. Get on, do something, go on doing something, till he was again on shipboard and

away. He got up, climbed back over the gate, and started his engine. He kept straight on, instinctively avoiding the route through Maidenhead and Henley. He passed through High Wycombe and approached Oxford from the north. The old town was lit up and in evening feather when he dropped down on it from Headington and threaded into the quiet Cumnor road. On the little old New Bridge over the Upper Thames he stopped. Something special about this upper river, quiet and winding, and withdrawn from human blatancy! In full moonlight

now the reeds glistened and the willows seemed to drip silver into the water, dark below their branches. Some windows in the inn beyond were lamp-lit, but no sound of gramophone came forth. With the moon riding so high, the stars now were but a pricking of the grape-coloured sky; the scent from the reedy banks and the river fields, after a whole week of warmth, mounted to his nostrils, sweet and a little rank. It brought a sudden wave of sheer sex-longing – so often and so long had he dreamed of Clare and himself in love on this winding field-scented

stream. He started the car with a jerk, and turned past the inn down the narrowed road. In twenty minutes he stood in the doorway of his cottage, looking into the moonlit room he had left sunlit seven hours before. There was the novel he had been trying to read, tipped on to the floor; the remains of his cheese and fruit lunch not cleared away; a pair of brown shoes which he had been going to shine up. The big black beams across the low ceiling and around the big old fireplace rescued from Victorian enclosure and brown varnish, the copper fire-dogs and

pewter plates and jugs and bowls he had hardly collected, hoping they would appeal to Clare, all his *res angusta domi*, welcomed him dimly. He felt suddenly exhausted, drank half a tumbler of whisky and water, ate some biscuits, and sank into his long wicker armchair.

Almost at once he fell asleep, and awoke in daylight. He woke remembering that he had meant to spend the night in action. Level sunlight was slanting in at the window. He finished the water in the jug, and looked at his watch. Five o'clock. He threw open the door. Early haze was bright over

the fields. He went out past the mares' boxes and their meadows. A track, sloping down towards the river, led over grass broken by bushy scoops and green banks covered with hazel and alders. No dew had fallen, but the grass and every shrub smelled new.

About fifty yards from the river he threw himself down in a little hollow. Rabbits and bees and birds – nothing else as yet awake. He lay on his back staring at the grass and the bushes and the early sky, blue and lightly fleeced. Perhaps because he could see so little from that hollow all England seemed to

be with him. A wild bee close to his hand was digging into a flower, there was a faint scent, as of daisy-chains; but chiefly it was the quality of the grass – its close freshness, its true greenness.

‘Greatness and dignity and peace!’ That play! Those words had given him a choke. Other people had laughed, Clare had laughed.

‘Sentimental!’ she had said. ‘No country ever had, or will have “Greatness and dignity and peace.” ’ Probably not, certainly not – a country, even one’s own, was a mish-mash of beauties and monstrosities, a vague

generalization that betrayed dramatists into over-writing, journalists into blurb. All the same, you couldn't anywhere else in the world get just such a spot, or just such grass to feel and see, a scent that was well-nigh none, a tender fleecy sky, tiny flowers, birds' songs, age and youth at once! Let people laugh – you couldn't! Leave grass like this! He remembered the thrill he had felt six months ago, seeing again English grass! Leave his job before it had begun; chuck it back at Muskham, who had been so really decent to him! He turned over on to his face and laid his

cheek to that grass. There he got the scent better – not sweet, not bitter, but fresh, intimate and delighting, a scent apprehended from his earliest childhood – the scent of England. If only those mares would come, and he could get at it! He sat up again, and listened. No sound of train or car or airplane, no human sound, no sound of any four-footed thing; just birds' songs, and those indistinguishable and a little far – a long meandering tune wide above the grass. Well! No use making a song! If one couldn't have a thing, one couldn't!

Chapter Thirty-six



THE moment Dinny had left, Adrian made the not uncommon discovery that he had promised what would need performance. To get one of His Majesty's Counsel to commit himself – how? Too pointed to go to him! Impossible to pump a guest! Em, if he prompted her, would ask them both to dinner, especially if made to understand that the matter concerned Dinny; but even then –? He waited to consult Diana, and, after dining, went round to Mount Street. He

found them playing piquet.

‘Four kings,’ said Lady Mont. ‘So old-fashioned – Lawrence and I and Mussolini. Have you come for something, Adrian?’

‘Naturally, Em. I want you to ask Eustace Dornford to dinner, and me to meet him.’

‘That’ll be Dinny. I can’t get Lawrence to be chivalrous; when I have four kings he always has four aces. When?’

‘The sooner the better.’

‘Ring, dear.’

Adrian rang.

‘Blore, call up Mr Dornford and

ask him to dinner – black tie.’

‘When, my lady?’

‘The first evenin’ not in my book. Like dentists,’ she added, as Blore withdrew. ‘Tell me about Dinny. She hasn’t been near us since the case.’

‘The case,’ repeated Sir Lawrence, ‘went much as one expected, didn’t you think, Adrian? Any repercussions?’

‘Someone has settled the costs, and Dinny suspects Dornford.’

Sir Lawrence laid down his cards. ‘Bit too like a bid for her, that!’

‘Oh, he won’t admit it, but she wants me to find out.’

‘If he won’t admit it, why should he do it?’

‘Knights,’ murmured Lady Mont, ‘wearin’ a glove, and gettin’ killed, and nobody knowin’ whose glove. Yes, Blore?’

‘Mr Dornford will be happy to dine on Monday, my lady.’

‘Put him in my book, then, and Mr Adrian.’

‘Go away with him after dinner, Adrian,’ said Sir Lawrence, ‘and do it then – not so pointed; and, Em, not a hint, not even a sigh or a

groan.'

'He's a nice creature,' said Lady Mont, 'so pale-brown...'

With the 'nice creature so pale-brown' Adrian walked away the following Monday night. Their directions were more or less the same, since Dornford was not yet in his new house. To Adrian's relief, his companion seemed as glad of the opportunity as himself, for he began at once to talk of Dinny.

'Am I right in thinking something's happened to Dinny lately – I don't mean that case – but when she was ill and you went

abroad together?’

‘Yes. The man I told you of that she was in love with two years ago was drowned out in Siam.’

‘Oh!’

Adrian stole a look. What should Dornford’s face express – concern, relief, hope, sympathy? It only wore a little frown.

‘There was a question I wanted to ask you, Dornford. Someone had settled the costs granted against young Croom in that case.’ The eyebrows were raised now, but the face said nothing. ‘I thought you might have known who. The

lawyers will only say that it wasn't the other side.'

'I've no idea.'

'So!' thought Adrian. 'No nearer, except that, if a liar, he's a good one!'

'I like young Croom,' said Dornford; 'he's behaved decently, and had hard luck. That'll save him from bankruptcy.'

'Bit mysterious, though,' murmured Adrian.

'It is.'

'On the whole,' Adrian thought, 'I believe he did. But what a poker face!' He said, however:

‘How do you find Clare since the case?’

‘A little more cynical. She expressed her views on my profession rather freely when we were riding this morning.’

‘Do you think she’ll marry young Croom?’

Dornford shook his head.

‘I doubt it, especially if what you say about those costs is true. She might have out of a sense of obligation, but otherwise I think the case has worked against his chance. She’s no real feeling for him – at least that’s my view.’

‘Corven disillusioned her thoroughly.’

‘I’ve certainly seldom seen a more disillusioning face than his,’ murmured Dornford. ‘But she seems to me headed for quite an amusing life on her own. She’s got pluck and, like all these young women now, she’s essentially independent.’

‘Yes, I can’t see Clare being domestic.’

Dornford was silent. ‘Would you say that of Dinny, too?’ he asked suddenly.

‘Well, I can’t see Clare as a

mother; Dinny I can. I can't see Dinny here, there and everywhere; Clare I can. All the same – “domestic” of Dinny! It's not the word.'

‘No!’ said Dornford fervently. ‘I don't know what it is. You believe very much in her, don't you?’

Adrian nodded.

‘Enormously.’

‘It's been tremendous for me,’ said Dornford, very low, ‘to have come across her; but I'm afraid so far it's been nothing to her.’

‘Much to allow for,’ suggested Adrian. ‘“Patience is a virtue,” or

so it used to be before the world went up in that blue flame and never came down again.'

'But I'm rising forty.'

'Well, Dinny's rising twenty-nine.'

'What you told me just now makes a difference, or – doesn't it?'

'About Siam? I think it does – a great difference.'

'Well thank you.'

They parted with a firm clasp, and Adrian branched off northwards. He walked slowly, thinking of the balance-sheet that confronts each lover's unlimited

liability. No waterings of capital nor any insurance could square or guarantee that shifting lifelong document. By love was man flung into the world; with love was he in business nearly all his days, making debts or profit; and when he died was by the results of love, if not by the parish, buried and forgotten. In this swarming London not a creature but was deeply in account with a Force so whimsical, inexorable, and strong, that none, man or woman, in their proper senses would choose to do business with it. 'Good match', 'happy marriage', 'ideal partnership', 'life-

long union', ledgered against 'don't get on', 'just a flare up', 'tragic state of things', 'misfit'! All his other activities man could insure, modify, foresee, provide against (save the inconvenient activity of death); love he could not. It stepped to him out of the night, into the night returned. It stayed, it fled. On one side or the other of the balance sheet it scored an entry, leaving him to cast up and wait for the next entry. It mocked dictators, parliaments, judges, bishops, police, and even good intentions; it maddened with joy and grief; wantoned, procreated, thieved, and

murdered; was devoted, faithful, fickle. It had no shame, and owned no master; built homes and gutted them; passed by on the other side; and now and again made of two hearts one heart till death. To think of London, Manchester, Glasgow without love appeared to Adrian, walking up the Charing Cross Road, to be easy; and yet without love not one of these passing citizens would be sniffing the petrol of this night air, not one grimy brick would have been laid upon brick, not one bus be droning past, no street musician would wail, nor lamp light up the

firmament. A somewhat primary concern! And he, whose primary concern was with the bones of ancient men, who but for love would have had no bones to be dug up, classified and kept under glass, thought of Dornford and Dinny, and whether they would 'click'...

And Dornford, on his way to Harcourt Buildings, thought even more intensively of himself and her. Rising forty! This overmastering wish of his – for its fulfilment it was now or never with him! If he were not to become set in the groove of a 'getter-on', he must marry and have children. Life

had become a half-baked thing without Dinny to give it meaning and savour. She had become – what had she not become? And, passing through the narrow portals of Middle Temple Lane, he said to a learned brother, also moving towards his bed:

‘What’s going to win the Derby, Stubbs?’

‘God knows!’ said his learned brother, wondering why he had played that last trump when he did, instead of when he didn’t...

And in Mount Street Sir Lawrence, coming into her room to say ‘Good night’, found his wife

sitting up in bed in the lace cap which always made her look so young, and, on the edge of the bed, in his black silk dressing-gown, sat down.

‘Well, Em?’

‘Dinny will have two boys and a girl.’

‘Deuce she will! That’s counting her chickens rather fast.’

‘Somebody must. Give me a nice kiss.’

Sir Lawrence stooped over and complied.

‘When she marries,’ said Lady Mont, shutting her eyes, ‘she’ll only

be half there for a long time.'

'Better half there at the beginning than not at all at the end. But what makes you think she'll take him?'

'My bones. We don't like being left out when it comes to the point, Lawrence.'

'Continuation of the species. H'm!'

'If he'd get into a scrape, or break his leg.'

'Better give him a hint.'

'His liver's sound.'

'How do you know that?'

'The whites of his eyes are blue.'

Those brown men often have livers.'

Sir Lawrence stood up.

'My trouble,' he said, 'is to see Dinny sufficiently interested in herself again to get married. After all, it is a personal activity.'

'Harridge's for beds,' murmured Lady Mont.

Sir Lawrence's eyebrow rose. Em was inexhaustible!

Chapter Thirty-seven



SHE whose abstinence from interest in herself was interesting so many people, received three letters on Wednesday morning. That which she opened first said:

DINNY DARLING, –

I tried to pay, but Tony would have none of it, and went off like a rocket; so I'm a wholly unattached female again. If you hear any news of him, let me have it.

Dornford gets more 'interesting-looking' every day. We only talk of you, and he's raising my salary to three hundred as compensation.

Love to you and all,

CLARE

That which she opened second said:

MY DEAR DINNY, –

I'm going to stick it here. The mare arrives on Monday. I had Muskham down yesterday, and he was jolly decent, didn't say a word about the case. I'm trying to take up birds. There is one thing you could do for me if you would – find out who paid those costs. It's badly on my mind.

Ever so many thanks for always being so nice to me.

Yours ever,

TONY CROOM

That which she read last said:

DINNY, MY DEAR, –

Nothing doing. He either didn't, or else played 'possum,' but if so it was very good 'possum.' All the same, I wouldn't put it past him that it *was*

‘possum.’ If you really set store by knowing, I think I should ask him point-blank. I don’t believe he would tell *you* a lie, even ‘a little one.’ As you know, I like him. In my avuncular opinion he is still on the gold standard.

Your ever devoted

ADRIAN

So! She felt a vague irritation. And this feeling, which she had thought momentary, she found to be recurrent. Her state of mind, indeed, like the weather, turned cold again and torpid. She wrote to Clare what Tony Croom had written of himself, and that he had not mentioned her. She wrote to Tony Croom, and neither mentioned Clare nor answered his

question about the costs; she concentrated on birds – they seemed safe, and to lead nowhere. She wrote to Adrian: ‘I’m feeling I ought to be wound-up, only there’d be no dividend for the shareholders. It’s very cold and dull, my consolation is that little “Cuffs” is beginning to “sit up and take real notice” of me.’

And then, as if by arrangement with the clerk of the course at Ascot, the weather changed to ‘set warm’; and, suddenly, she wrote to Dornford. She wrote on pigs, their breeds and sties, the Government and the farmers. She ended with

these words:

‘We are all very worried by not knowing who had settled the costs in my sister’s case. It is so disquieting to be under an obligation to an unknown person. Could you by any means find out for us?’ She debated some time how to sign herself in this her first letter to him, and finally wrote ‘Yours always, Dinny Charwell.’

His answer came very quickly:

MY DEAR DINNY, –

I was delighted to get a letter from you. To answer your last question first. I will do my best to get the lawyers to ‘come clean,’ but if they won’t tell *you*, I can’t imagine their telling me.

Still, I can try. Though I fancy that if your sister or young Croom insisted they'd have to tell. Now about pigs – [there followed certain information, and a lamentation that agriculture was still not being properly tackled.] If only they would realize that all the needed pigs, poultry, and potatoes, nearly all the vegetables, much of the fruits, and much more than the present dairy produce, can really be produced at home, and by a graduated prohibition of foreign produce encourage, and indeed force, our home growers to supply the home market, we should, within ten years, have a living and profitable native agriculture once more, no rise to speak of in the cost of living, and a huge saving in our imports bill. You see how new I am to politics! Wheat and meat are the red herrings across the trail. Wheat and meat from the Dominions, and the rest (bar hot climate fruits and vegetables) home-grown, is my motto. I hope your father agrees. Clare is becoming restive, and I'm wondering if she wouldn't be happier in a more active job than this. If I can come across a good one, I shall

advise her to take it. Would you ask your mother whether I should be in the way if I came down for the last weekend this month? She was good enough to tell me to let her know any time I was coming to the constituency. I was again at *Cavalcade* the other night. It wears well, but I missed you. I can't even begin to tell you how I missed you.

Your ever faithful

EUSTACE DORNFORD

Missed her! After the faint warmth those wistful words aroused, she thought almost at once of Clare. Restive! Who would be otherwise in her anomalous position? She had not been down at Condaford since the case. And that seemed to Dinny very natural. However one might say it didn't

matter what people thought, it did, especially in a place where one had grown up, and belonged, as it were, to the blood royal of the neighbourhood. And Dinny thought, unhappily: 'I don't know what I want for her – and that's lucky, because one day she'll see exactly what she wants for herself.' How nice to see exactly what one wanted for oneself! She read Dornford's letter again, and suddenly faced her own feelings for the first time. Was she or was she not ever going to marry? If so, she would as soon marry Eustace Dornford as anyone – she liked,

admired, could talk to him. But her – past! How funny it sounded! Her ‘past’, strangled almost from birth, yet the deepest thing she would ever know! ‘One of these days you’ll have to go down into the battle again.’ Unpleasant to be thought a shirker by one’s own mother! But it wasn’t shirking! Spots of colour rose in her cheeks. It was something no one would understand – a horror of being unfaithful to him to whom she had belonged in soul if not in body. Of being unfaithful to that utter surrender, which she knew could never be repeated.

‘I am not in love with Eustace,’ she thought; ‘he knows it, he knows I can’t even pretend it. If he wants me on those terms, what is it fair for me – what is it possible for me to do?’ She went out into the old yew-hedged rose garden, where the first burst of roses had begun, and wandered round, smelling at this and that, followed half-heartedly by the spaniel Foch, who had no feeling for flowers.

‘Whatever I do,’ she thought, ‘I ought to do now. I can’t keep him on tenterhooks.’

She stood by the sundial, where the shadow was an hour behind its

time, and looked into the eye of the sun over the fruit trees beyond the yew hedges. If she married him, there would be children – without them it would not be possible. She saw frankly – or thought she did – where she stood in the matter of sex. What she could not see was how it would all turn for herself and for him in the recesses of the spirit. Restless, she wandered from rose-bush to rose-bush, extinguishing the few greenfly between her gloved fingers. And, in a corner, with a sort of despair, the spaniel Foch sat down unnoticed and ate a quantity of coarse grass.

She wrote to Dornford the same evening. Her mother would be delighted if he would come for that weekend. Her father quite agreed with his views on agriculture, but was not sure that anyone else did, except Michael, who, after listening to him carefully one evening in London, had said: 'Yes. What's wanted is a lead, and where's it coming from?' She hoped that when he came down he would be able to tell her about those costs. It must have been thrilling to see *Cavalcade* again. Did he know a flower called meconopsis, if that was the way to spell it, a sort of

poppy of a most lovely colour? It came from the Himalayas, and so would be suitable for Campden Hill, which she believed had much the same climate. If he could induce Clare to come down it would rejoice the hearts of the aborigines. This time she signed herself 'always yours', a distinction too subtle to explain even to herself.

Telling her mother that he was coming, she added:

'I'll try and get Clare; and don't you think, mother, that we ought to ask Michael and Fleur? They were very sweet to put us up so long.'

Lady Charwell sighed.

‘One gets into a way of just going on. But do, dear.’

‘They’ll talk tennis, and that’ll be so nice and useful.’

Lady Charwell looked at her daughter, in whose voice something recalled the Dinny of two years back.

When Dinny knew that Clare was coming, as well as Michael and Fleur, she debated whether to tell Tony Croom. In the end she decided not to, sorrowfully, for she had for him the fellow feeling of one who had been through the

same mill.

The camouflage above her father's and mother's feelings touched her. Dornford – high time, of course, he was down in the constituency again! Pity he hadn't a place of his own – didn't do to get out of touch with the electors! Presumably he'd come by car, and bring Clare; or Michael and Fleur could call for her! By such remarks they hid their nervousness about Clare and about herself.

She had just put the last flower in the last bedroom when the first car slid up the driveway; and she came down the stairs to see

Dornford standing in the hall.

‘This place has a soul, Dinny. It may be the fantails on the stone roof, or perhaps the deep way it’s settled in, but you catch it at once.’

She left her hand in his longer than she had meant to.

‘It’s being so overgrown. There’s the smell, too – old hay and flowering verbena, and perhaps the mullions being crumbled.’

‘You look well, Dinny.’

‘I am, thank you. You haven’t had time for Wimbledon, I suppose?’

‘No. But Clare’s been going –

she's coming straight from it with the young Monts.'

'What did you mean in your letter by "restive"?'

'Well, as I see Clare, she must be in the picture, and just now she isn't.'

Dinny nodded.

'Has she said anything to you about Tony Croom?'

'Yes. She laughed and said he'd dropped her like a hot potato.'

Dinny took his hat and hung it up.

'About those costs?' she said, without turning.

‘Well, I went to see Forsyte specially, but I got nothing out of him.’

‘Oh! Would you like a wash, or would you rather go straight up? Dinner’s at quarter-past eight. It’s half-past seven now.’

‘Straight up, if I may.’

‘You’re in a different room; I’ll show you.’

She preceded him to the foot of the little stairway leading to the priest’s room.

‘That’s your bathroom. Up here, now.’

‘The priest’s room?’

‘Yes. There’s no ghost.’ She crossed to the window. ‘See! He was fed here at night from the roof. Do you like the view? Better in the spring when the blossom’s out, of course.’

‘Lovely!’ He stood beside her at the window, and she could see his hands clenched so hard on the stone sill that the knuckles showed white. A bitter wind swept through her being. Here she had dreamed of standing with Wilfrid beside her. She leaned against the side of the embrasured window and closed her eyes. When she opened them he was facing her, she could see his

lips trembling, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes fixed on her face. She moved across to the door.

‘I’ll have your things brought up and unpacked at once. Would you answer me one question: Did you pay those costs yourself?’

He gave a start and a little laugh, as if he had been suddenly switched from tragedy to comedy.

‘I? No. Never even thought of it.’

‘Oh!’ said Dinny again. ‘You’ve lots of time.’ And she went down the little stairway.

Did she believe him? Whether she believed him or not, did it

make any difference? The question would be asked and must be answered. ‘One more river – one more river to cross!’ And at the sound of the second car she went hurrying down the stairs.

Chapter Thirty-eight



DURING that strange week-end, with only Michael and Fleur at ease, Dinny received one piece of enlightenment as she strolled in the garden.

‘Em tells me,’ said Fleur, ‘you’re all worked up about those costs – she says *you* think Dornford paid them, and that it’s giving you a feeling of obligation?’

‘Oh? Well, it *is* worrying, like finding you owe nothing to your dressmaker.’

‘My dear,’ said Fleur, ‘for your strictly private ear, *I* paid them. Roger came to dinner and made a song about hating to send in such a bill to people who had no money to spare, so I talked it over with Michael and sent Roger a cheque. My Dad made his money out of the Law, so it seemed appropriate.’

Dinny stared.

‘You see,’ continued Fleur, taking her arm, ‘thanks to the Government converting that loan, all my beautiful gilt-edgeds have gone up about ten points, so that, even after paying that nine hundred-odd, I’m still about fifteen

thousand richer than I was, and they're still going up. I've only told *you*, in confidence, because I was afraid it would weigh with you in making up your mind about Dornford. Tell me: Would it?',

'I don't know,' said Dinny dully; and she didn't.

'Michael says Dornford's the freshest egg he's come across for a long time; and Michael is very sensitive to freshness in eggs. You know,' said Fleur, stopping suddenly, and letting go her arm, 'you puzzle me, Dinny. Everybody can see what you're cut out for – wife and mother. Of course, I know

what you've been through, but the past buries its dead. It is so, I've been through it, too. It's the present and the future that matter, and we're the present, and our children are the future. And you specially – because you're so stuck on tradition and continuity and that – ought to carry on. Anybody who lets a memory spoil her life – forgive me, old thing, but it's rather obviously now or never with you. And to think of you with “never” chalked against you is too bleak. I've precious little *moral* sense,’ continued Fleur, sniffing at a rose, ‘but I’ve a lot of the

commoner article, and I simply hate to see waste.'

Dinny, touched by the look in those hazel eyes with the extraordinarily clear whites, stood very still, and said quietly:

'If I were a Catholic, like him, I shouldn't have any doubt.'

'The cloister?' said Fleur sharply: 'No! My mother's a Catholic, but – No! Anyway, you're not a Catholic. No, my dear – the hearth. That title was wrong, you know. It can't be both.'

Dinny smiled. 'I do apologize for worrying people so. Do you like

these *Angèle Pernets*?’

She had no talk with Dornford all that Saturday, preoccupied as he was with the convictions of the neighbouring farmers. But after dinner, when she was scoring for the four who were playing Russian pool, he came and stood beside her.

‘Hilarity in the home,’ she said, adding nine presented by Fleur to the side on which she was not playing: ‘How did you find the farmers?’

‘Confident.’

‘Con –?’

‘That whatever’s done will make

things worse.'

'Oh! Ah! They're so used to that, you see.'

'And what have *you* been doing all day, Dinny?'

'Picked flowers, walked with Fleur, played with "Cuffs", and dallied with the pigs.... Five on to your side, Michael, and seven on to the other. This is a very Christian game – doing unto others as you would they should do unto you.'

'Russian pool!' murmured Dornford: 'Curious name nowadays for anything so infected with religion.'

‘*Apropos*, if you want to go to Mass tomorrow, there’s Oxford.’

‘You wouldn’t come with me?’

‘Oh! Yes. I love Oxford, and I’ve only once heard a Mass. It takes about three-quarters of an hour to drive over.’

His look at her was much as the spaniel Foch gave when she returned to him after absence.

‘Quarter past nine, then, in my car...’

When next day they were seated side by side, he said:

‘Shall we slide the roof back?’

‘Please.’

‘Dinny, this is like a dream.’

‘I wish my dreams had such a smooth action.’

‘Do you dream much?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nice or nasty?’

‘Oh! like all dreams, a little of both.’

‘Any recurrent ones?’

‘One. A river I can’t cross.’

‘Ah! like an examination one can’t pass. Dreams are ruthlessly revealing. If you could cross that river in your dream, would you be happier?’

‘I don’t know.’

There was a silence, till he said:

‘This car is a new make. You don’t have to change gears in the old way. But you don’t care for driving, do you?’

‘I’m an idiot at it.’

‘You’re not modern, you see, Dinny.’

‘No. I’m much less efficient than most people.’

‘In your own way I don’t know anybody so efficient.’

‘You mean I can arrange flowers.’

‘And see a joke; and be – a darling.’

It seemed to Dinny the last thing she had been able to be for nearly two years, so she merely replied:

‘What was your college at Oxford?’

‘Oriel.’

And the conversation lapsed.

Some hay was stacked and some still lying out, and the mid-summer air was full of its scent.

‘I’m afraid,’ said Dornford suddenly, ‘I don’t want to go to Mass. I don’t get so many chances to be with you, Dinny. Let’s make for Clifton and sit in a boat.’

‘Well, it is rather lovely for

indoors.’

They turned off to the left, and, passing through Dorchester, came to the river by the bend and bluffs at Clifton. Leaving the car, they procured a punt and after drifting a little, moored it to the bank.

‘This,’ said Dinny, ‘is a nice exhibition of high purpose, I don’t think. “Something done” isn’t always what was attempted is it?’

‘No, but it’s often better.’

‘I wish we’d brought Foch; he likes any kind of vehicle where he can sit on one’s feet and get a nice sick feeling.’

But in that hour and more on the river they hardly talked at all. It was as if he understood – which, as a fact, he did not – how, in that drowsing summer silence, on water half in sunlight, half in shade, she was coming closer to him than ever before. There was, indeed, to Dinny something really restful and reassuring in those long lazing minutes, when she need not talk, but just take summer in at every pore – its scent, and hum, and quiet movement, the careless and untroubled hovering of its green spirit, the vague sway of the bulrushes, and the clucking of the

water, and always that distant calling of the wood pigeons from far trees. She was finding, indeed, the truth of Clare's words, that he could 'let one's mouth alone'.

By the time they were back at the Grange, it had been one of the most silent and satisfactory mornings she had ever known. But between his: 'Thank you, Dinny, a heavenly time,' and his real feelings, she could tell from his eyes there was a great gap fixed. It was unnatural the way he kept his feelings in check! And, as became a woman, compassion soon changed in her to irritation. Anything better

than his eternal repression, perfect consideration, patience, and long waiting! And all that afternoon she saw as little of him as she had seen much all the morning. His eyes, fixed on her with longing and a sort of reproach, became an added source of vexation, and she carefully refrained from seeming to notice them. 'Verra pavairse,' her old Scottish nurse would have said.

Bidding him 'Good night' at the foot of the stairs, she felt a keen pleasure at the dashed look on his face, and an equally keen sense that she was 'a beast'. She entered her bedroom in a curious turmoil,

at odds with herself, and him, and all the world.

‘Damn!’ she muttered, feeling for the switch.

A low laugh startled her. Clare, in her pyjamas, was perched on the window-seat, smoking a cigarette.

‘Don’t turn up, Dinny; come and sit here with me, and let’s puff out of the window together.’

Three wide-opened casements laid bare the night under a teazle-blue heaven trembling with stars. Dinny, looking out at it, said:

‘Where have you been ever since lunch? I didn’t even know you

were back.'

'Have a gasper? You seem to want soothing.'

Dinny expelled a puff of smoke.

'I do. I'm sick of myself.'

'So was I,' murmured Clare, 'but I feel better.'

'What have you been doing, then?'

Again Clare laughed, and in the sound was something that made Dinny say:

'Seeing Tony Croom?'

Clare leaned back and her throat showed pale.

'Yes, my dear. The Ford and I

went over. Dinny, we've justified the law. Tony no longer looks like a bereaved orphan.'

'Oh!' said Dinny, and again: 'Oh!'

Her sister's voice, warm and languid, and satisfied, made her cheeks go hot and her breath come quickly.

'Yes, I prefer him as lover to a friend. How sane is the law – it knew what we ought to have been! And I like his converted cottages. Only there's a fireplace upstairs that still wants opening up.'

'Are you going to get married,

then?’

‘My dear, how can we? No, we shall live in sin. Later, I suppose, we shall see. I think this “nisi” period is very thoughtful. Tony will come up in the middle of the week, and I shall go down at the week-end. And all so legal.’

Dinny laughed. Clare sat up, suddenly, clasping her knees.

‘I’m happier than I’ve been for ever so long. It doesn’t do to make other people wretched. Also, women ought to be loved, it suits them somehow. Men, too.’

Dinny leaned out of the window,

and the night slowly cooled her cheeks. Beautiful and deep it was, out there, the shapes unstirring, dark and as if brooding. Through the tense stillness came a far drone, swelling to the rightful sound of a passing car, and, between the trees, she could see its travelling light burnish up the hedgerows for flying moments, and die beyond the angle of vision. Then the drone grew faint and fainter, and stillness recommenced. A moth flew by, and a little white feather from a fantail on the roof floated down, turning over in the quiet air. She felt Clare's arm come

round her waist.

‘Good night, old thing! Rub noses.’

Withdrawing from the night, Dinny clasped that slim pyjamaed body. Their cheeks touched, and to each the warmth of the other’s skin was moving – to Clare a blessing, to Dinny an infection, as though the lingered glow from many kisses was passing into her.

When her sister had gone, she moved restlessly up and down her dark room.

‘It doesn’t do to make people wretched!... Women ought to be

loved.... Men, too.' Quite a minor prophet! Converted by lightning, like Paul on his way to wherever it was. Up and down, up and down, till at last, quite tired, she turned on the light, threw off her clothes, and sat down in a wrapper to brush her hair. Brushing away at it, she stared at her image in the glass with fascination, as if she had not seen herself for a long time. The fever with which she had been infected seemed still in her cheeks and eyes and hair, she looked unnaturally vivid to herself; or was it that the sun, while she and Dornford were sitting in that punt,

had left her with this hot feeling in the veins? She finished brushing, shook back her hair, and got into bed. She had left the casements open, the curtains undrawn; and the starry night confronted her lying on her back in the darkness of her narrow room. The hall clock struck midnight faintly – only three hours or so before it would be light! She thought of Clare sunk in beauty sleep close by. She thought of Tony Croom, deep-drugged with happiness, in his converted cottages, and the old tag from *The Beggars' Opera* ran in her mind: 'With bliss her kisses dissolve us in

pleasure and soft repose.' But she! She could not sleep! She felt, as sometimes when a little girl, that she must roam about, explore the strangeness of the dead of night, sit on the stairs, peep into rooms, curl up in some armchair. And, getting up, she put on her dressing-gown and slippers and stole out. She sat on the top stair, clasping her knees and listening. Not a sound in the old dark house, except a little scraping noise, where some mouse was at work. She rose, clutched the banister, and crept downstairs. The hall smelled musty already, too much old wood and furniture to

stand enclosure by the night. She groped across to the drawing-room door and opened it. Here flowers and last year's pot-pourri and stale cigarette smoke scented the air with a heavy reek. She made her way to one of the French windows, drew the curtains back, and opened it. She stood there a minute taking deep breaths. Very dark, very still, very warm. By starlight she could just see the sheen on the magnolia leaves. Leaving the window open, she sought her favourite old armchair, and curled up in it with her feet tucked under her. There, hugging herself, she tried to

recapture the feeling that she was a child again. The night air came in, the clock ticked, and the hot feeling in her veins seemed to cool away in measure with its rhythm. She shut her eyes fast, and the sort of cosiness she used to feel in that old chair, as if she were all clasped and protected, stole upon her; but still she did not sleep. Behind her from the window with the rising of the moon a presence had stolen in, a sort of fingering uncanny light, slowly lifting each familiar object into ghostly semblance of itself. It was as if the room had come awake to keep her company; and the

feeling she had sometimes had, that the old house had a life of its own, felt, saw, knew its spells of wakefulness and of slumber, tingled once more within her. Suddenly, she heard footsteps on the terrace and sat up startled.

Someone said: 'Who is that! Is anyone there?'

A figure stood in the open window; by the voice she knew that it was Dornford, and said:

'Only me.'

'Only you!'

She saw him come in and stand beside the chair, looking down. He

was still in his evening clothes, and, with his back to the faint light, she could hardly see his face at all.

‘Anything the matter, Dinny?’

‘Just couldn’t sleep. And you?’

‘I’ve been finishing a bit of work in the library. I went out on the terrace for a breath, and saw this window open.’

‘Which of us is going to say: “How marvellous”?’

Neither of them said anything. But Dinny unclasped herself and let her feet seek the ground.

Suddenly, Dornford put his

hands to his head and turned his back on her.

‘Forgive my being like this,’ she murmured, ‘I naturally didn’t expect –’

He turned round again, and dropped on his knees besides her. ‘Dinny, it’s the end of the world unless –’

She put her hands on his hair and said quietly: ‘– it’s the Beginning.’

Chapter Thirty-nine



ADRIAN sat writing to his wife.

Condaford: August 10.

MY VERY DEAR, –

I promised to give you a true and particular account of how Dinny went off. Look in *The Lantern* for their conception of ‘the bride and bridegroom leaving the church.’ Fortunately, the lens of that inquiring organ caught them just before they pushed off – except in movies the camera simply cannot record movement; it always get the sole of one foot cocked towards the eye, flannelizes the knee of the other leg, and upsets the set of the trousers. Dornford looked quite good value – in this style, fourteen-and-six; and Dinny – bless her! – without the ‘bride’s smile,’ almost as if she saw the joke. Ever since the engagement, I’ve wondered what she’s really

feeling. Love such as she gave Desert it certainly is not, but I don't believe there's any physical reluctance. When, yesterday, I said to her: 'In good heart?' her answer was: 'No half heart, anyway.' We both of us have reason to know that she can go all out in what she does for other people. But she's really doing this for herself. She'll be carrying on – she'll have children – and she'll count. That's as it should be, and so I believe she feels. If she hasn't what hopeful youth calls 'a crush on' Dornford, she admires and respects him, and I think quite rightly. Besides, he knows from me, if not from her, what she's capable of, and won't expect more until he gets it. The weather held up all right, and the church – wherein, by the way, your special correspondent was baptized – in the word of Verdant Green never looked 'berrer.' The congregation was perhaps a trifle Early English, though it seemed to me you could have got most of the faces at Woolworth's.

At the top of the nave, in the more holy positions, came our own gang, County and

would-be County. The more I looked at County the more I thought how merciful that the states of life into which it has pleased God to call us have prevented the Charwells of our generation from looking County. Even Con and Liz, who have to stick down here all the time, haven't got quite the hang of it. Remarkable, if you think, that there is such a thing as 'County' left; but I suppose it'll last while there's 'huntin' and shootin' '. I remember, as a boy, out hunting (when I could screw a mount out of our stables or somebody else's), I used to lurk out of reach of people for fear of having to talk to them, their words and music were so trying. Better to be human than County or even would-be County. I must say that Clare, after all her jollification in the courts, carried it off amazingly, and so far as I could see, nobody had the nerve to show any of the feelings which, as a fact, at this time of day, they probably hadn't got. Then, a little less holy, came the village in force – Dinny's a great favourite with them – quite a show of oldest inhabitants. Some real faces; an old chap called

Downer, in a Bath chair, all ‘Whitechapel’ whiskers and beard, and shrewd remaining brown spaces. He perfectly remembered Hilary and me falling off a hay-cart we oughtn’t to have been on. And old Mrs Tibwhite – a sweet old witch of a thing, who always let me eat her raspberries. The schoolchildren had a special holiday. Liz tells me not one in twenty of them has ever seen London, or indeed been ten miles out of the village, even now. But there’s a real difference in the young men and maidens. The girls have most excellent legs and stockings and quite tasteful dresses; and the youths good flannel suits and collars and ties – all done by the motor bike and the film. Lots of flowers in the church, and a good deal of bell-ringing and blowy organ-playing. Hilary did the swearing in with his usual rapidity, and the old rector, who held the sponge, looked blue at the pace he went and the things he left out. Well, you want, of course, to hear about those dresses. The general effect, as they stood in the aisle, was what you might call delphinian. Dinny, even in white, has that look,

and, consciously or not, the bridesmaids were toggled up according; and what with Monica and Joan and two young Dornford nieces being slim and tall, they really looked like a planting of blue delphiniums, preceded by four blue tots, sweet, but none as pretty as Sheila. Really, that chickenpox was very perverse; you and your two were terribly missed, and Ronald as a page would just have topped everything up. I walked back to the Grange with Lawrence and Em, an imposing steel-grey presence slightly marred where 'tears had got mixed with her powder sometimes.' In fact, I had to stop her under a stricken tree and do some good work with one of those silk handkerchiefs you gave me. Lawrence was in feather – thought the whole show the least gimcrack thing he had seen for a long time, and had now more hope of the pound going still lower. Em had been to see the house on Campden Hill; she predicted that Dinny would be in love with Dornford within a year, which started another tear, so I called her attention to the tree which had in fact been struck by lightning while

she and I and Hilary were standing under it. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you were squits – so providential; and the butler made a penholder out of the wood; it wouldn’t hold nibs, so I gave it to Con for school, and he cursed me. Lawrence, I’m old.’ Whereon Lawrence took her hand, and they walked hand in hand the rest of the way.

The reception was held on the terrace and lawn; everybody came, schoolchildren and all, a quaint mix-up, but jolly, it seemed to me. I didn’t know I was so fond of the old place. However much one may believe in levelling-up chances, there’s something about old places. They can’t be re-created if they’re once let slip, and they focus landscape in a queer kind of way. Some villages and landscapes seem to have no core – you can’t explain why, but they feel hollow, and shallow and flat. A real old place puts heart into a neighbourhood. If the people who live in it are not just selfish pigs, it means a lot in a quiet way to people who have no actual ownership in it. The Grange is a sort of anchor to this neighbourhood. I doubt if you’d find a single

villager, however poor, who grudged its existence, or wouldn't feel the worse for its ruination. Generations of love and trouble, and goodness knows not too much money, have been spent on it, and the result is something very hand-made and special. Everything's changing, and has got to change, no doubt, and how to save the old that's worth saving, whether in landscape, houses, manners, institutions, or human types, is one of our greatest problems, and the one that we bother least about. We save our works of art, our old furniture, we have our cult – and a strong one – of 'antiques,' and not even the most go-ahead modern thought objects to that. Why not the same throughout our social life? 'The old order changeth' – yes, but we ought to be able to preserve beauty and dignity, and the sense of service, and manners – things that have come very slowly, and can be made to vanish very fast if we aren't set on preserving them somehow. Human nature being what it is, nothing seems to me more futile than to level to the

ground and start again. The old order had many excrescences, and was by no means 'all worry capital,' but, now that the housebreakers are in, one does see that you can smash in an hour what has taken centuries to produce; and that, unless you can see your way pretty clearly to replace what admittedly wasn't perfect with something more perfect, you're throwing human life back instead of advancing it. The thing is to pick on what's worth preserving, though I don't say there's very much that is. Well, that's all very portentous! To come back to Dinny – they're going to spend their honeymoon in Shropshire, round about where Dornford comes from. Then they come back here for a bit, then settle in on Campden Hill. I hope this weather will last for them. Honeymooning in wet weather, especially when one is keener on the other than the other is on the one, should be very trying. Dinny's 'going away' frock, you may like to know, was blue, and suited her not quite down to the ground. We had a minute together. I gave her your love, and she sent you hers, and said: 'Well, I'm very nearly

over, Uncle dear. Wish me luck!' I felt like piping my eye. Over what? Well, anyway, if wishes for luck will help, she goes wreathed with them; but all that kissing business is hard to get through. Con and Liz took theirs down at the car. I felt rather a brute, looking at their faces when she'd gone. They went away in Dornford's car, with himself driving. After that I confess that I slunk off. They're all right, I know, but it didn't feel like it. There's such cursed finality about a wedding, however easy divorce is or may become; besides, Dinny is not the sort who would take someone who loved her and then let him down; it's the old-fashioned 'for better for worse' there, but I think it'll be 'for better' – in the long run, anyway. I sneaked out of sight into the orchard and then up through the fields to the woods. I hope it was as gorgeous a day with you as it was here. These beechwoods on the slopes are more beautiful than the careful beech-clumps they plant on downs, though even those have a sort of temple-like effect, in spite of being meant as landmarks or to give shade to sheep. I can

assure you that wood about half-past five was enchanted. I went up the slope and sat down and just enjoyed it. Great shifting shafts of sunlight coming in below and splashing the trunks; and ever-so-green cool spaces between – only one word for it, holy. The trees, many of them, go up branchless for a long way, and some of the trunks looked almost white. Not much undergrowth and very little ‘life’ except jays and a brown squirrel. When you’re in a wood as lovely as that, and think of death duties and timber, your heart turns over and over as if you’d supped entirely off Spanish onions. Two hundred years in His sight may be as yesterday, but in mine I confess

they’re like eternity. These woods are no longer ‘shot,’ and anybody can come into them. I suppose the young folk do – what a place to wander about in, lovering! I lay down in a patch of sunlight and thought of you; and two small grey wood-doves perched about fifty yards off and talked cosily to each other, so that I could have done with my field-glasses. Willow-herb and tansy were out where trees have come down

and been cleared away – foxgloves don't seem to flourish round here. It was very restful, except that one ached a bit because it was green and beautiful. Queer, that 'beauty' ache! Lurking consciousness of mortality, perhaps knowledge that all things must slip away from one in time, and the greater their beauty the greater the loss in store! Mistake in our make-up, that. We ought to feel: The greater the earth's beauty, the more marvellous the screen of light and wind and foliage, the lovelier nature, in fact – the deeper and sweeter our rest in her will be. All very puzzling! I know the sight of a dead rabbit out in a wood like that affects me more than it does in a poulterer's shop. I passed one as I was going back – killed by a weasel; its soft limpness seemed saying: 'Pity I'm dead!' Death may be a good thing, but life's a better. A dead shape that's still a shape moves one horribly. Shape is life, and when life's gone one can't see why shape should remain even for the little time it does. I'd have liked to stay and see the moon come up and peer about in there, and slowly fill it all up with

ghostly glistening; then I might have caught the feeling that shape lives on in rarefied form, and all of us, even the dead rabbits and birds and moths, still move and have their being – which may be the truth, for all I know or ever shall. But dinner was at eight, so I had to come away with the light still green and golden – there flows alliteration again like a twopenny brook! Outside, on the terrace, I met Dinny's spaniel, Foch. Knowing his history, it was like meeting a banshee – not that he was howling; but it reminded me sharply of what Dinny has been through. He was sitting on his haunches and looking down at nothing, as dogs – especially spaniels – will when things are beyond them, and the one and only scent is no more, for the time being. He'll go with them, of course, to Campden Hill when they come back. I went up and had a bath, and dressed, and stood at my window, listening to the drone of a tractor still cutting corn, and getting a little drunk on whiffs from the honeysuckle that climbs and flowers round my window. I see now what Dinny meant by: 'Over.'

Over the river that she used to dream she couldn't cross. Well, all life is crossing rivers, or getting drowned on the way. I hope – I believe – she's touching shore. Dinner was just like dinner always is – we didn't talk of her, or mention our feelings in any way. I played Clare

a game of billiards – she struck me as softer and more attractive than I've ever seen her. And then I sat up till past midnight with Con, in order, apparently, that we might say nothing. They'll miss her a lot, I'm afraid.

The silence in my room, when I got up here at last, was stunning, and the moonlight almost yellow. The moon's hiding, now, behind one of the elms, and the evening star shining above a dead branch. A few other stars are out, but very dim. It's a night far from our time, far even from our world. Not an owl hooting, but the honeysuckle still sweet. And so, my most dear, here endeth the tale! Good night!

Your ever loving

ADRIAN