

**HUMMING  
BIRD**

**Eleanor Farjeon**

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By

ELEANOR FARJEON

*A Nursery in the 'Nineties*  
*Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard*  
*The Fair of St. James*  
*etc.*

HUMMING  
BIRD

by  
*Eleanor Farjeon*

MICHAEL



JOSEPH

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1936

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*To*  
DEAR LISETTE PYETT



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(*Garden Under Rain*)

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PART  
ONE

THE  
COUNTESS'S  
FAN

(Garden Under  
Rain)

When I was a child, I often went to stay with my Aunt Charlotte Pye, who kept a Bric-à-Brac shop in Hounsbury, once a rural hamlet, and now a patch on London's many-coloured quilt. As I was a country child, a visit to London was always a high-light; and at my Aunt Charlotte's, while enjoying the thrills of being in town, I did not feel myself quite a fish out of water. For one thing, Hounsbury had kept itself very much of a village, in spite of the great avenues uniting it with the horse-bus-routes to Charing Cross. And for another thing, Hounsbury Heath itself was almost untouched country, a great expanse of hillocks and glades, dips into sudden valleys where water shone, sandpits and natural lawns, copses of birch, gorse-thickets, and knots of may and crab-apple, looking, on transparent summer evenings, so like the old prints of itself in the bookshops, that it was difficult not to think that ladies in sacks and gentlemen in kneebreeches still promenaded in the shade, or loitered to take the waters in Spring Walk, one of the fashionable wells of the period. Squirrels, owls, and cuckoos were here as common as in my Kentish home, and across the Heath, as fine as my Lord Mannington's Park, which I knew and loved so well, was Baxwood, the wonderful estate with its Charles the Second mansion, which the last Earl of Baxwood had left unoccupied. He preferred his estates in Shropshire or the Highlands for country life, and his establishment in Belgravia when in town. Baxwood he considered neither one thing nor the other, and it was only opened for an occasional gala night, when the Earl entertained society with a Fête Champêtre during the Season. Then the broughams rolled out from London to rural Hounsbury. You cannot call Hounsbury rural now.

But even to-day, neither the big square blocks of flats reared on the sites of demolished Georgian gardens, nor the glazed tiles of the Tube Station, nor the chain-store shops in the High Street, can affect the character of this London suburb. It has never been cheap or convenient to widen the twisty hilly streets that once were lanes, or to bring the tramlines to the crest of the Heath, where cart-horses used to wade through the pond on the top, dragging behind them their waggon-loads of timber and hay. Even to-day, Hounsbury holds her own against the times, continuing to exist in the Eighteenth Century; and I, remember, am writing of forty years ago.

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I was rather a delicate child, and in my ninth year became a puzzle as well as a trouble to my parents. I began to suffer from what they called "fits," of a sort they could not understand. I did not faint, or suffer in any way, and they

had no need to push the knife-handle between my teeth; I merely came over in a kind of trance, and after that “talked queerly,” said my Mother. At first my parents were cautious of questioning me much, thinking it better to pass the matter over, lest I grew frightened. But it was they, not I, who took fright on these occasions. I was not aware of any loss of consciousness; indeed, it seemed to me instead that consciousness had been for awhile intensified; so that, while not losing sight or sense of my usual surroundings, I had heightened perceptions of the most vivid nature as to scenes and sounds, persons and sensations. Not that I so explained it to myself or them. I was not an expressive child. But children, in the early years at least, take for granted such conditions as life provides for them; and I accepted these rare yet familiar states with as little surprise as when, on going into a dim room and lighting a candle, I saw better, or heard better by taking a plug of wool out of my ears. Did the sharpening of my senses by such acts alarm me? Neither was I alarmed when they were sharpened by phenomena which I took equally for granted. But as what I accepted lay outside their experience, my parents were made uneasy by the “queer talk” which issued from me at these times, random remarks, or inconsequential speeches.

It was after one such fit that I was brought up to Hounsbury for the first time. My Mother believed in physic; but my Father unexpectedly announced that a change of scene would be better than doctors’ rubbish. “And it’s time Lizzie made her Aunt Charlotte’s acquaintance,” he said.

“Will Charlotte understand the care of a peculiar child?” asked my Mother.

“Better than the care of an ordinary one,” said my Father. “A thorough change, that’s what Lizzie wants, to brush the cobwebs out of her little noddle.”

I could hardly have had a greater change from the hop-gardens and cherry-orchards of Chalkstones than my Aunt Charlotte’s Bric-à-Brac shop in Hounsbury.

The shop was kept in an Eighteenth-century house in the High Street. My paternal grandfather had been a gentleman of property. From his mother he had inherited this Queen Anne corner house with its walled garden and seven acres of wooded meadowland on the outskirts of London, from his father, the Jacobean fruit-farm in mid-Kent. On his death the properties parted company again, the farm going to my father, John Pye, the Hounsbury house to his younger brother Richard, who had town tastes. In the middle of the Nineteenth Century Hounsbury was still a pleasure-haunt of the fashionable. Richard enjoyed his residence, dashing into London for his urban “larks,” and sharing freely in whatever local entertainment Hounsbury afforded. The Springs had been some time closed, but the Spring House was still used for exhibitions and lantern-talks, and, reached by pleasant paths across the Heath, Baxwood House

reigned on its velvet terrace sloping down to the lake, its long, flat, beautiful façade divided by the tall delicate windows of the Orangery. Behind the Orangery, at either end, the great Ball and Music Rooms ran out in separate wings. These were thrown open, once or twice in a summer, for dances or concerts on the Earl's gala nights. The ornamental fountains were illuminated, there was concealed music in the boscaje, and the lake reflected, amongst its swans and lilies, the rise and fall of fireworks. It was on one such occasion in the 'fifties, that my Uncle Richard was first attracted by the fair skin and bright eyes of Miss Charlotte Lambert, whose mother was installed in the housekeeper's apartments. Charlotte was then nineteen, her mother past fifty. Mr. Lambert had held some post of trust with a branch of the Baxwoods, who, on his death, had arranged this provision for his widow and young daughter. Charlotte had cleverly contrived to get herself born in the year of Victoria's accession, and still more cleverly avoided being named after her. Though Madam Lambert had been born and reared in England, and had married an Englishman, her parents were French refugees from the Revolution, and the French tradition persisted in her to the end. For her own child she chose a family name, that of her own great-aunt, a person of particular distinction.

Perhaps her French strain rendered pretty Charlotte Lambert more interesting to Richard Pye than the other maidens of Hounsbury. He was an impetuous young man. He had caught sight of her once in Hounsbury High Street, pursued her to Baxwood, got a smile at the door, and found it shut in his face. One of the summer receptions was just due. A total stranger to Lord and Lady Baxwood, young Richard scaled the palings in evening dress, strolled half a mile of meadowland and garden, and met his innamorata on the terrace, bearing a tray laden with claret cup. He bade her set it down and come with him to look for swans on the lake. "Pardon, sir," said Charlotte, "I have to look after the guests." "Look after me," said Richard, "I am one of them." He drank five glasses, scarcely drawing breath, tossed the sixth over the roses, sent the tray spinning along the gravel, and led Charlotte down to the lake. There they sat in a bower, watching sky-rockets and falling in love. Next day her mother reprimanded her, not for the escapade (Madam Lambert left prudery to the Bourgeoisie), but for breach of service to the Earl and his Lady, who never knew anything at all about it.

Charlotte was not turned twenty when Richard married her, hastily and privately, before his father could ride up from Kent to stop him. In those days parental approval was indispensable to marriage, and was never bestowed on social inequality. How could the caretaker's child of Baxwood House equal the cadet of the Pyes of Chalkstones? Mr. Pye arrived by coach from Kent, with thunder on his brow and lightning in his eye; to be confronted, not by a rash son and unwelcome daughter-in-law, but by a handsome elderly woman, so

fine of feature, so aristocratic of bearing, that at sight he did not guess who she was. This lady might well have been Mistress of some Royal Bedchamber.

“Well, sir?” said Madam Lambert (the *Madam* was her own interpretation of the title due to a married Englishwoman of French extraction). “Well, sir? What is your objection to my daughter as a wife to your son?”

“The match is unequal, ma’am!”

The lady retorted swiftly, “I have not objected to it.”

“You!” spluttered the irate yeoman. “Do you not know that I am Henry Pye of Chalkstones in Kent? The Pyes have been Kentish squires for two hundred years and more!”

“And you,” said Madam drily, “do you know that my daughter is a great-grand-niece to the Comtesse de Marignan-Croissy, née De La Rivière, of the Courts of Louis the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth? The Marignan-Croissys have held royal appointments since the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The De La Rivières supported the Ninth Louis on his Crusades.”

To this the Yeoman of Kent said blankly “Oh.”

The great-niece of a Countess maintained silence. The yeoman scratched his head.

“Ye don’t tell me!”

“I do. However, I have overlooked the discrepancy in this alliance, and you may meet your younger son’s wife with equanimity.”

That was the end of the thunder which never crashed, the lightning which never darted. Not wholly reconciled to the match, my grandfather, Henry Pye, avoided overt trouble. I dare say my Aunt Charlotte made a winsome daughter-in-law; with the English complexion and build of her father’s race, she combined the dancing eyes and vivacity of her mother’s. Small wonder that Richard found her very taking. But alas, they had no children, a marital lapse in those unrestricted days.

“I wanted them badly, dear heart,” Aunt Charlotte told me, “but whose fault it was you mustn’t ask *me*. Le bon Dieu, n’est-ce pas? At first I used to cry my eyes out, but there, I settled down to it. And now I have my dear little Lisette!” She patted my cheek.

“And Rosabella too, Aunt,” I suggested.

“True, dear heart! she’s almost a daughter to me. But I must not count on her. Rosabella may vanish at any moment.”

I could not grasp this. Wasn’t Rosabella as much a part of the establishment as any other?

Well, if my Aunt Charlotte cried for the children the good God had denied her, Henry Pye did not live long enough to point an accusing finger, and cry to the impetuous Richard, “I told you so!” My grandfather died in the hunting-field a year after the marriage. Then, as I said, the Hounsbury house, with its

seven acres, came to Richard, and Chalkstones was inherited by my father, who remained a bachelor till he was sixty, surprisingly married his dairymaid, and still more surprisingly produced me from his loins in the October of 1884. By then the Pyes had come down. Through bad luck, losses, and poor farming, Chalkstones was reduced to a cherry-orchard and a small dairy. My father felt his years, and, except for occasional outbursts, allowed my mother to do as she pleased; which was to work hard and bring me up unpretentiously. Meanwhile my Uncle Richard was deceased, having in twenty years played ducks and drakes with most of his property. The Jews had the best part of his seven acres in Hounsbury, and two-thirds of the house. New streets had been built on the land, creating a bad Victorian patch in the Georgian suburb. I know no place like Hounsbury for air-pockets of recent tastelessness occurring in the air of past perfection. One street you may walk from end to end with delight; at the turn of a corner you enter dingy respectability; turn another, and hey presto! once more the magic of delicate porticoes and elegant fanlights, slender balconies and fluted pilasters, bow-fronts faintly curved, wistful lawns seen through weeping ash, mellow brick walls that were raw before Queen Anne died, tilted roofs still sheltering the life of nine generations, oblong windows divided perfectly into oblong panes, windows that are eyes into another century. Of all this my Aunt preserved a portion of the house in the High Street, two-thirds of it having been remodelled into shops, and ruined by the way. Her third soared unimpaired from basement to attics, two rooms and a powder-closet to each floor. The front door on the street level was shop-door now, with my Aunt's little parlour along the passage behind it. The first floor was given up to Madam Lambert. Above was my Aunt's bedroom; and as the small second-floor room had another occupant, I slept in the back attic under the roof. Sloping down behind the column of house-front, ran half an acre of sweet neglected garden, closed out of sight behind a high rust-coloured wall, with a small green door inset towards the lower end. Aunt Charlotte hadn't time to keep the garden trim, but she had a green thumb—all that she planted grew and multiplied, whether a carefully set slip, or seed strewn carelessly. Everything bloomed and burgeoned and overran its borders. Paths were lost in grass, alleys were submerged in sprawling roses. You pushed a way through apple-trees choked with lupins.

Aunt Charlotte's shop-window was very like her garden.

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The window of the Bric-à-Brac shop was, for a child, an endless source of wonder. It had neither shelves nor counters, but a window-seat ran across from end to end, and here Aunt Charlotte started her window-dressing. She littered it with medleys of silver and trinkets and china, lace and embroideries, beadwork, ornaments, and small curios of all descriptions. Some were in trays,

some in vaguely assorted heaps, that were always getting mixed up with one another. You never quite knew what was good and what was only pretty trash on the long window-seat, where fine things took their chance in the higgledy-piggledy. Behind this vanguard came the chairs and tabourets, the small period tables, consoles, and what-nots, and these too were laden indiscriminately with snuffboxes, shawls, punch-ladles, miniatures, fans, waxen or majolica fruits, objects in tortoiseshell, ivory, cloisonné, shagreen, and china, china, china. Hard on their ranks came an Empire sofa and a Louis Quinze settee, loaded with lacquer trays, and inlaid workboxes, old dolls, bright green glass door-stops, magically filled with frosted flowers and teardrops; pictures leaned against them; a Baxter-print chess-table was piled with books and engravings. Then came a small clearance where, amid a muddle of rugs, customers stood on arrival—till they began penetrating to the outskirts and recesses, where dressers and cabinets were charged perilously with Chelsea, Sèvres, and Bristol, and incredible ships in bottles. The back of the shop was dusky, for the lustre and Venetian chandeliers cast no light on treasures concealed in shadow, or on the Adams fireplace at the far end. Only reflected gleams from hanging bunches of witchballs beckoned you on to Abanazar's cave.

Yes, an entrancing litter for a child to live with. I never exhausted its promise, or the charm of the room that harboured it. It was years before I realized the beauty of the panelled walls, or even saw exquisite mouldings on the ceiling. The contents shifted slowly, old friends vanished, new ones crept in to become familiar with years, or disappear in a day. But even among the permanent old-timers, whom nobody was ever going to buy, I constantly made fresh discoveries. My Aunt let me poke and pry to my heart's content about the big dim room, and the dimmer underground cellar crammed with unsorted or discarded junk. If I broke anything, she never fussed. "Nothing lasts for ever," she said cheerfully. "Wipe up the mess, child—but first, wipe your eyes." For her, life and business had to go hand in hand—business uncoloured by life would have had no charm for her, and there spoke her Gallic ancestry. In France, too, life and business go hand in hand; but agree, in general, to be shrewd and practical. Aunt Charlotte's business had to agree with her haphazard impulses, fostered no doubt by my impetuous Uncle Richard. Excited by a notion, he acted on it instantly; as once when, having bought out the old woman who sat at the foot of Cowslip Hill, he appeared in the High Street in a smother of penny balloons. He had gathered a mile of children at his heels. The noise they made brought Aunt Charlotte and Madam Lambert to the door. Madam wrinkled her nose, but Charlotte, when her husband nipped out his knife to cut the strings, laughed till she ached, and ran round wiping green and purple powder from the burst balloons off little fingertips. She always related this tale with glee, adding, "My husband was fantastic, but that was

why I loved him.” He taught her to take extremes lightly, whether they were of luxury or deprivation; and so she never scolded my accidents among the bric-à-brac, preferring breakages to rules of any sort. In the same temper she allowed her family of cats, whom she idolized, to sun themselves on the brocaded chairs, while the kittens patted their way along the foreshore of the window-seat, among the silver snuffers, the Mechlin ruffles, and the Saxony porcelain. “Careful, pet!” said my Aunt, when the golden kit her tortoiseshell included regularly in each family, rolled off the ledge an oval miniature frame, twinkling with diamonds.

“Look, Aunt! he’s broken it!” I picked up the frame and the little picture which had rattled out of its setting.

“It has only come loose, dear heart. Now isn’t that *funny!*”

Aunt Charlotte was considering the oval painting, while I considered the frame, which I thought still prettier; for the jewelled circlet was surmounted by a dainty shepherdess-hat wreathed with gold roses. The heart of each rose held a tiny diamond, and the hat-ribbons fluted out on either side, knotting themselves into a bow about a pair of crossed music-pipes.

“What’s funny, Aunt?” I asked, out of my absorption.

“I always *thought* it was funny that frame should hold this painting, and I was right, you see! Just look at this.” She held up the oval picture, backed with faded blue velvet. The front showed a miniature flower-piece, a gay mixed posy on a dark blue mug, prettily executed on a scrap of material. But now that the unframed edges were exposed, it was evident that the velvet backed, and the material was mounted on, a third substance still, sandwiched between them. I was too ignorant to take in the problem.

“Look at what, Aunt?”

“This picture, lovey. The flower-piece has been stuck on top of a slip of ivory.”

“Has it?”

“Yes, and why, do you suppose?” Aunt Charlotte looked at me triumphantly. “Nobody uses ivory for a backing, but ivory is the natural ground for a miniature.”

“Is it?”

“Cela va sans dire! And the miniature is *here*, under the flower-piece.”

“How pretty!” I said, staring at the flowers.

“I wager the one underneath is prettier though!”

“Then why did they cover it up?”

“That’s what *I* say,” said my Aunt. “Don’t stare so hard, child.” She picked at the edges of the stuff with her thumbnail. “It isn’t even canvas. It isn’t silk. Some poor sort of stuff. I can’t think *what* it is! Oh well, never mind! I’ll only spoil it if I play about with it. One day I’ll get Mr. Lunette to take it off.”

But she never did. The flower-piece was pressed back into the frame, the frame dropped back upon the window-ledge, and my Aunt drew me into the plain little parlour behind the shop and told me to set the tea-table. "How about a pot of bloater paste?" she demanded, very gay and matter-of-fact all of a sudden. And this was because she had seen the "stare" in my eyes which my Mother had warned her to dispel, if possible, before it had "set in." In the pleasure of opening the new pot of paste, with a view of Pegwell Bay upon the lid, I soon forgot that through the flowers painted on stuff, I had seen a boy's face painted on ivory.

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The beauty of both the garden and the shop was this: almost everything in their disorder had worth or charm. The garden treasures were overrun with weeds, and those in the shop took their chance among heaps of trifles; but the weeds only added to the green profusion, and what my Aunt called "shop-trash" was never ugly. In and out of doors, nothing repelled, everything excited. What, in a Bric-à-Brac shop, may be the equivalent of a "green thumb" in the garden, I do not know; but my Aunt Charlotte's eye and instinct were quick, and her fanciful tastes were, after a time, backed up by knowledge of what was choice, or interesting, or simply attractive. She bid in lots at auctions because, among much junk, she had spied "a perfect gem, dear heart!" It was great fun to rummage the assortments when they came home, while she cooed over her find, sniffed at the rubbish relegated to the cellar, and flung odds and ends of "pretty trash" into the window. In selling it again, she never pretended it was other than it was. "As you know, that's not *good*," she informed the mistaken customer who admired it; or "Merely a copy, of course!" And she let go at a shilling or so what another would have turned to undue profit. Then the customer, stooping, might rout out some trifle from the window-seat—"And this, Mrs. Pye?"—ignorantly putting its worth at a couple of florins. And my aunt's eye would grow liquid, her tones loving, as she simply uttered: "Georgian!" or "Empire!" or "Louis Quinze, naturally!" in tones that made you a present of the period complete. I really believed I acquired my first living sense of history from her; the Georges and the Louis took on positive atmospheres; for a long time I imagined Hepplewhite and Sheraton to be European dynasties, and when my aunt said "Ming!" an æolian harp tinkled me into the Chinese Paradise. She never haggled, and was not exorbitant; but she could be prohibitive on purpose. There were certain pieces that she never intended to sell, and she made it impossible for her customers to buy them. On the other hand, she would lower her profits unasked, if she took a fancy to the purchaser. And she was so kind, and so amusing, that customers came again and again for the pleasure of her. She knew to a T the tastes of all her "regulars;" which one had a passion for fine needle-work, which lusted

after teapots, which had an insatiable love of pinchbeck. She would hurry in to one she had kept waiting, a priceless ragged shawl thrown over the shoulders of her shabby dress, a cheap scrag of mutton in her soft hand covered with rings (“Sorry to keep you waiting, dear, I just ran out to buy a bit of dinner”), down-at-heel slippers adorned with antique shoe-buckles, and barbaric emerald pendants weighing her tiny earlobes, and not a penny of change for the half-sovereign on a six-shilling sale—“The meat took my very last, dear heart! Lisette! run to Mr. Archer, *he’ll* oblige me! So sorry to inconvenience you, sit down till the child comes back and have one of these!” “These” were sugar-plums, the finest, proffered in a golden bonbonnière—“This box? Not for sale! It belonged to Marie Antoinette.” (The lid, in fact, showed a crown and monogram in sapphires and enamel.) Then, the change brought, the customer departed—“Six shillings, Lisette! isn’t that *wonderful*! My first to-day. We’ll celebrate. Run along to Mrs. Pawling’s for a nice punnet of strawberries. Come back, child!” (She summoned me with a Georgian silver cream-jug.) “And get this filled at the dairy!”

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To this day, I don’t know how she managed. Her lean times were strewn thick with little luxuries. When she had taken a few shillings, she would almost instantly dissipate them on some special treat, or run two hundred yards down the street after Hurdy-Gurdy Carlo with his monkey; because Carlo and Jacko had looked perished, all through the *Miserere* five minutes ago, when she had not got a copper in her pocket.

It must have seemed incredible, to those who were only acquainted with her, that on the one hand Aunt Charlotte lived with zest on the fringe of perpetual hard times, and owned on the other hand a shopful of treasures. But to those who knew her, nothing was incredible. For the treasures, there were three explanations. One, her swift instinct as a buyer, of which I have spoken already; another, the capital from the last sale of property after my Uncle Richard’s death in 1880, when it was evident that, to live, she must support herself by some means—and this was what appealed to her romantic, variegated nature. And the third thing, which (so I came to learn) accounted both for her taste and for her surprising stock-in-trade, was old Madam Lambert. Old Madam was also responsible for the name by which her daughter went in Hounsbury. She always addressed her as “Chérie,” and once put her head out of the first floor window, to speak to my Aunt Charlotte in the street. “C PYE” was written large over the shop front. Hounsbury children put two and two together, and began to call my Aunt Charlotte “Cherry Pie.” Rosabella never called her anything else.

I did not know my Aunt Charlotte till I was eight. My Uncle Richard I never knew at all, except through hearsay of his erratic actions. He finished with the world two years before I tried it, and the next ten were a hard struggle for my Aunt. In the course of them, my Father married and my Mother bore me, and our own affairs were failing. Once or twice in my infancy Charlotte ran down to Kent to see her brother-in-law at Chalkstones. My Mother, who had little sense of humour, "took to" her. She was incapable of understanding my Aunt's mixture of frolic and good sense, but was not aware of the limitation. We can only, after all, penetrate into another's being as far as our own tether. Cherry Pie was quite content to be taken at other folks' valuation, as long as she and they hit it off together, and she and my Mother got along very nicely.

These early visits ceased before I was weaned. Each family became immersed in its own affairs; getting about was more of a job in those days; the week-end attitude of mind was still unborn; a journey was a journey, involving complications of effort and pre-arrangement. Wherever you went, you took a sole-leather trunk, or a large wooden one, or a double-sided cowhide bag that was as cumbersome as either. Light-weight luggage, that could be managed for oneself, changed all that; and before it could occur we had, of course, to change our clothes. No fibre suitcase would have accommodated our layers of starched and stuff petticoats, our solid skirts and stockings, our boned bodices. It was not till the December of 1892, when I was five years old, that my Mother and I, with a wooden trunk, a tin hatbox, and a carpet-bag, were bundled one day into my Father's dog-cart, and driven seven cold miles to Canterbury, to make my first railway journey. That chilly, cheerless, unluxurious journey, through gloomy stations and tunnels tasting of stale smoke, how often I took it, how well I remember it! It always left me feeling rather sick, and I cannot make it to-day without the childish sensations re-asserting themselves. These Kentish stations have kept their associations for me; the junctions on the journey to Canterbury connect with the past, the railway tunnels lead to infancy. I used to find these junctions dank and awful. The journey had the size of an experience, there was fear in the black tunnels where I had clutched my Mother's hand, and pain on the platforms as the expresses rushed through, with a whistling that tortured my ear-drums. I had an overpowering sense that these Juggernauts would crush me if they could, and the misery of my sick headache was intensified. This culminated in heartache at London Bridge, where, because of all the luggage, we were

obliged to take a cab, and long before we had reached Hounsbury (it took an hour to get there) some white-faced man in rags began to pant in our wake, in the hope that the desperate run might end in a few pence for helping with the luggage. The breed of cabbies, with their perpetual grouch, threw open this odd-job to the down-and-outs, willing-spirited cabmen being rare. When asked to help with the luggage, "I can't leave me 'oss," was the growl.

To make such a trip for the first time, beset with all the fears of the unknown and the discomforts of the actual, on a cold December afternoon that pinched my dangling toes in their button boots: to discover London in a drizzling rain, blank, monotonous, and unalluring: did not appear an ideal alternative to a country child who had been "taken so queer" that her parents thought she needed a change of scene. But as soon as we reached Hounsbury matters improved. My Aunt Charlotte was standing at the door, wrapped against the weather in an oriental tablecloth which she had snatched up from a heap of draperies. Her fair-skinned face smiled out from under the arabesques of gold and purple, and she looked like some figure in a Bible-story—Queen Esther perhaps, a person at once familiar and exotic. Life became rich and romantic the moment she lifted me out of the cab, muffling me to her among the gorgeous folds which smelled of spice.

"Poor little frozen lamb! So this is Lisette! And May! dear heart, you haven't changed an atom. Now what are *you* grumbling about?" (This to the cabman.) "Of *course* that's the fare, my good man! No need to use all that language. Could you do with a cup of tea?"

The growler grudgingly desisted he could.

"I'll bring you out one. You too, when you've taken up the box," she said to the shivering consumptive who was trying to fetch his breath after a cruel run.

"Do we need him to?" asked my prudent Mother. "I think we can manage it between us, Lottie."

"Not up all those stairs. Lisette is to be in the attic." Cuddling me still in one arm, she took a handle of the wooden box and helped to hoist it on the man's thin shoulders (my own cracked with the weight of it across his bent back). "This way—be careful of the gas, and don't tread on the pussies." In a few minutes the trunk was deposited, the men had been supplied with big cups of hot sweet tea and thick slices of bread-and-jam, the cabby had driven off, aggrieved to the last, the poor wretch had shuffled away, comforted by the shilling my Aunt pulled out of her pocket while my Mother was searching hers for a third penny, and I was lying on the green buttoned sofa in the back room, in front of a bright fire, playing with Tibby and the gold kit of the moment. (Cherry Pie never called these precious morsels ginger.) Meanwhile, Aunt Charlotte bustled behind me about the tea-table, handling crockery, kettles, and

fryingpans all at once, while my Mother undid her things, cut bread-and-butter, and told my Aunt the story of my “fit” in the undertone elders adopt when they talk about what children aren’t to hear. Odd that the tone is never quite far enough under.

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“You never saw anything like it, Lottie! It’s frightening, that’s what it is! She came over so sudden there was no accounting for it. She’d run out getting holly-berries to stick round the house, because she thought it would make Christmas come sooner, and like children will she’d picked more than she could find vases for, so without my knowing she’d run to the pantry to see what she could find, and the next thing I heard Susan calling ‘Ma’am! Ma’am!’ and I knew by the tones of her voice something was wrong, and when I got into the pantry the child was sitting on the floor with the berries round her, and both hands clasping the middle of that painted cup you brought me for a present the first time you came to see me at Chalkstones, remember?”

“The Sèvres chocolatière, yes, go on,” prompted Aunt Charlotte.

“That’s the one I mean, well, she’d routed it out from the back of the bottom shelf, and she was sitting on the floor staring with that funny look in her eyes that used to worry me as a baby before she could talk, and she was whispering, ‘Yes, this will do, this will do, this will do’ over and over till I lost patience. ‘Very well, Lizzie,’ I said, ‘if that will do, put your berries in it and say no more about it.’ Was I *right*? But she took no notice of me, and cried out loud, ‘We’ll bury the King’s son under a patch!’—and then all of a sudden she began to sing.”

“What did she sing?”

“That was the queerest of all, it was a French tune.”

“What French tune?”

“I couldn’t tell you, I never heard it before.”

“Then how did you know it was a French tune?”

“Because the words were French. She sang it in French.”

“*Lizzie* sang in French?”

“Just as I tell you.”

“How did the tune go?”

“As if I could remember!”

“Or the words?”

“Don’t ask *me*. All the French I know is Wee and Nong and Seevooplay, and Lizzie doesn’t know as much as that.”

“Who taught her the song then?”

“Nobody did. That’s what upset me so. I fetched her father to her, and he shook her shoulder rather sharply, and she came to so suddenly that she dropped the cup, I’m sorry, Lottie, it got broken into eight or nine bits.”

“Never mind, dear heart, they can be mended, or did you throw them away?”

“I wouldn’t do that, not with a thing you’d given me. I wrapped them up and put them back in the cupboard. I daresay I could do them myself if I tried.”

“Don’t! It was a nice old cup, worth doing properly.”

“I’ll bring them next time I come. Where was I? Oh yes! Well, when she saw what she’d done she began to cry, afraid of a scolding, though it was her father’s doing quite as much as hers. He said as much too, when he saw how she was taking on, but she didn’t heed, she just went on looking at the bits, sobbing, ‘Don’t let him die, old friend, don’t let him die!’ And then—this was the worst—she stopped crying and smiled a funny sort of smile, and said *in quite another voice*, ‘He shall not die! leave it to me, and he shall live for ever.’ After that I put her to bed with a good big dose, but, Lottie, it gave me the creeps. All next day she was quiet as a mouse, and really I didn’t know what to make of her and Jack insisted a change might do her good, so I said ‘I’ll take her to Charlotte’s’—was I *right*?”

“We’ll look after her,” said my Aunt Charlotte.

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So began my first visit.

Perhaps I would have righted myself at home, but my Mother couldn’t help fussing, and that kept me fretful. Then my Father came down with ultimatums to which my Mother objected on principle. Sometimes one was in the right, sometimes the other, but both were convinced the other was in the wrong, and when I was the subject of a disagreement I felt pulled to pieces between them. But I found myself all of a piece in the go-as-you-please, take-things-as-they-come air at Aunt Charlotte’s. It was like going into a fairy-tale. It would have been so to any child, but to me more than to most. Like a fairy-tale, life in the Bric-à-Brac shop was composed of fantastic externals which were accepted as normal; and like a fairy-tale they were redolent of some other life, some other condition, bewitched just beyond the reach of common sight or sense. Merely to touch or look passingly at these things created tiny thrills of expectation; my under-sense stirred in its sleep, a shut door in a high wall shook, and seemed about to open. More often than not it remained closed; but sometimes it swung back quietly, and I had a glimpse of the hidden garden, or chamber, beyond. I learned my own concealments; I kept secret the queer visions I extracted from the treasures in the shop, the second life I lived in dim corners. I did not want it to end in my Aunt sending me to bed with a dose of licorice powder (a thick draught I abhorred), or, worse still, returning me to Chalkstones and my Mother’s fussy care. But as other children steal sugar, I stole my sweets. When I knew Aunt Charlotte was busy, I would slip away, choosing any object that had seized my fancy, and sit for an hour warming it between my tiny palms,

absorbing from it some virtue akin to second sight. I grew adept in evolving these “second” moods in myself, though I knew they were “naughty,” because my elders would have checked them most severely. A child’s chief test of naughtiness lies in the forbidden. After indulging myself, I came back cheerfully to cocoa and bread and treacle in Aunt Charlotte’s parlour, doing my best not to encourage awareness of the old Sèvres plate off which I ate it, the thin silver spoon with which I stirred my mug. It would have bothered my Aunt to know that as I stirred I felt a delicate lace ruffle brush my hand; and saw on the plate a pat of yellow butter that had never been left by the milkman. A pat stamped with a crown.

But I never felt I need try to conceal even these things from Rosabella or Old Madam. Rosabella would have understood, I felt sure; and whether Old Madam did or not, she wouldn’t have minded. I have often wondered how much Old Madam knew.

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Madam Lambert occupied two rooms on the first floor. The front and much larger room only was entered from the landing, the smaller one at the back opening out of it. The back windows faced south, tall windows which were, in fact, doors to the graceful balcony that led down to the garden. The front room, called “The Louis Quinze” by my Aunt, was Old Madam’s bedchamber. Gilt furniture, screens, and mirrors, an elegant gold bed like a couch, old brocade hangings, a faded Aubusson carpet, a clock and ornaments in turquoise enamel painted with cupids, a laughing lady in an oval frame with a gauze scarf and tilted wreath (called by my Aunt “The Fragonard”), some miniatures, some pictures in silk needlework, hanging on the pale green satiny walls: the room broke on me like a revelation, the morning after my arrival, when I was taken in by my Aunt and Mother to be presented to Old Madam.

She was seated on a large gold armchair, so broad that no one person could fill it now, though doubtless hooped skirts had once done so. It was upholstered in grey satin brocaded with yellow roses. Although she was nearly ninety years old, Old Madam did not loll, but sat upright, reading her book through a lorgnette. Her plentiful white hair, dressed in rolls on the top of her head, glistened like silk. Her eyes were very dark, her nose fine cut, her fingers very elegant. She wore a loose grey silk taffeta gown with a blue and black stripe in it. Tucked in front, an old handkerchief with a deep fall of lace. On her right forefinger an astonishing opal. Her eyes pierced me when she turned them on me, but her manner, though extremely dignified, was affable.

“So this is the child, Chérie?” she said.

“Yes, Maman, my new baby!” Aunt Charlotte patted my head.

Old Madam turned her eyes on my Mother. “How do you do, Mrs. Pye. Is your husband in health?”

“Fairly, Madam, thank you. He’s not so young as he was.”

“He’s the further removed from the ailments of youth,” remarked Old Madam. “My Great-Aunt the Countess was as spry at a hundred and six as most gells of sixteen. A good deal spryer, I dare say, for many gells grow lackadaisical at that age. Come here, child, and let’s have a look at you.”

She held out her blue-veined hand with the fire-opal gleaming from her finger, and I went to her, making an instinctive little bob when I stood by the chair. As her hand touched mine, the fire of the stone bewitched me. It may have been this which for a moment confused my sense of her, for she leaned her withered cheek to be kissed, and I seemed to be kissing a brilliant young skin, and to smell an intoxicating perfume. It evaporated instantly, but not before I had given vent to a rapturous sniff.

“Use your handkerchief, Lizzie,” my Mother admonished me. I obeyed, a little abashed. Aunt Charlotte laughed. “She was smelling Maman’s old handkerchief, weren’t you, Lisette? Maman always keeps her laces in lavender.”

Old Madam lifted a corner of the lace and put it to my nose. I sniffed again, as genteely as I could, and said shyly, “It’s lovely.” I smelt the lavender distinctly, just like our lavender walk at Chalkstones—but it wasn’t lavender I had smelt before.

Old Madam said placidly, “Be a good child and you can sit with me now and then. I’ll teach you to net a bead purse, and there are some pretty things in there for you to look at.” She nodded towards the inner room, of which the glass-panelled door stood slightly ajar. I looked expectantly towards a place of such good promise, and was instantly rewarded by a glimpse of the prettiest young lady I had ever set eyes on; she flitted across the opening for one bright moment, and left the chink clear. I could not see what else was in the room, but I had a view of the French window on to the balcony, with its delicate blue-iron rail, and the twisting stair down to the garden which I had not yet explored. The old oblong window-panes afforded a picture of sunshine and green leaves, and the slender rise and fall of a fountain, and I could not help squeezing Old Madam’s fingers as I asked eagerly, “Can I go into the garden?”

“Not unless you want to catch your death of cold!” said my Mother.

I glanced at her in surprise. Madam Lambert had withdrawn her hand (had I squeezed it too hard?), and picking up her lorgnette resumed her reading. My Aunt beckoned me away. “Wait till it’s fine, Lisette, then you can see all there is to be seen, but at this time of year it’s not much.”

I followed her glance towards the two long bedroom windows, and saw that it was indeed a grey and dismal day; a persistent rain fell down their narrow panes like a veil through which I could perceive neither sunlight, leaves, nor fountain. And the pretty young lady, had I fancied her too?

Evidently not, for at that moment the closet door was pushed a little further ajar, and she came through it.

Although it was the middle of December, the young lady was dressed in white. True, she wore cashmere, not muslin, but her frock was such as in my childhood was considered neither sensible nor suitable for morningwear in winter. Impulse, individuality, fancy, in thought, speech, conduct, and appearance, did not get free reign then as now, but it was plain at first sight that Miss Rosabella ran in no rut of any time or fashion. Her soft skirt was very full, and just cleared her ankles; her stockings were white, and her low black sandals were tied with a criss-cross of ribbon over the instep. Her bodice was tight-fitting, with open sleeves and square-cut neck. Corsage, sleeves, and hem, were trimmed with two or three rows of rose-coloured velvet baby-ribbon, and a line of little pink buttons fastened the bodice from top to point, confining closely her slender waist and bust. The neck was filled in with a frill of soft cambric. She entered with a quick light step, holding what I first took to be a little bouquet of flowers, and then saw as a feather duster made up of pink and blue feathers. Her chestnut ringlets clustered like a cap about her small and charming head, her brown eyes danced under arched brows, her mouth was very rosy, her nose very pert. Under her fair transparent skin her cheekbones showed the faintest flush, less like colour than the reflection of colour on cloud in the east at sunset. Her hands were plump and pretty. I fell in love with her at first sight. On seeing us she paused, almost on tiptoe, and said in a silvery, rather remote tone, "Madam has visitors."

"Come along, Bella, these aren't visitors," cried my Aunt. "This is my sister May, and this is my little niece Lisette. Lisette is going to stay with us over Christmas."

"Oh! then we will have a party." The pretty young lady skipped forward and dropped on one knee beside me. "Do you adore parties, Lisette?"

"Yes," I said shyly.

"So do I. We'll eat lots of nice things, dance, play kiss-in-the-ring, and pull bonbons——"

"I don't like the snaps."

"We won't snap them, we'll open them carefully and find the mottoes."

"I like toys best."

"You shall keep the toys, and I will keep the mottoes. We'll all wear the paper caps. You shall wear a blue paper bonnet, and I'll wear a pink paper crown." The pretty young lady sprang up lightly as thistledown, fluttering her feather duster under my nose, and turned to my Mother. "How nice, how *nice* of you to lend us your little girl for Christmas."

“Well, don’t spoil her,” said my Mother, “and not too many sweets, mind.” Bella laughed. “Oh, she’ll have to work for her sweets, like me.”

“You!” scoffed my Aunt.

“Me! I work very hard, don’t I, Madam?” She appealed to Madam Lambert, but did not wait for an answer. “I dust, dust, dust! All Madam’s pretty things in there. One needs to be very particular, and very careful. Can you be careful, Lisette? If you can, you shall come and help me dust the pretty things.”

I thought of my last accident at home, blushed, and stammered, “I break things sometimes.”

“Oh well, you are very little. You will learn. I used to break things once, but now I never do.”

“No?” teased my Aunt, “not even young gentlemen’s hearts?” She winked at my Mother as she said this.

“Boo!” cried the pretty young lady. The faintest shadow chased across her forehead, like a wrinkle on a pool. It blew away with a shake of her head. The next moment she was gone.

“She’s very peculiar,” said my Mother drily.

“Is she not?” agreed my Aunt with warmth.

“I always say,” said old Madam, “that Rosabella has still one foot in Paradise.” She began to set a solitaire board with marbles.

We heard Rosabella humming on the stairs.

“Well I never!” ejaculated my Mother.

“What is it?” asked my Aunt.

“That’s the song!”

“What song?”

“The very song Lizzie——” My Mother stopped herself and made significant faces at my Aunt, faces that shouted for secrecy. “The song I was telling you about last night.”

“Dear me,” said Aunt Charlotte. She beckoned me to her. “Are you fond of singing, Lisette?”

“Yes, Aunt Charlotte.”

“Can you sing me something?”

I hung my head shyly.

“You needn’t be afraid of *me*,” laughed my Aunt. “Come along, sing me that pretty song Bella is singing.”

“I don’t know that one,” I murmured.

“Don’t you? Didn’t anybody ever sing it to you before?”

I shook my head.

“We must ask Rosabella what it’s about,” said my Aunt. “Perhaps she’ll teach it to you, eh?”

My Mother made a few more violent faces. Old Madam was intent on her game, so we too left the room.

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One morning in June when my Aunt Charlotte came down the garden to take in the milk, she found Rosabella sitting on the mounting-stone outside. Beside her stood a young gentleman, in evening dress, cape, and opera hat. He held in his hand the milkcan, open, and empty—no, not entirely empty, for as he offered it to my Aunt, it rattled. She picked out of it a golden sovereign, and held it up between finger and thumb.

“Now what’s all this about?” asked my Aunt, looking from the sovereign to the young gentleman, and from him to the young lady.

“Must you ask questions?” said the young gentleman.

“Not at all,” said my Aunt.

The young lady volunteered an explanation. “I was thirsty, you see, and there was the milkcan, waiting.”

“Naturally, dear heart,” said my Aunt.

The young lady sprang up and kissed her on the spot. “Have you a spare room?”

“Two or three.”

“I only want one.”

“Well, let me think.”

“For a week.”

“And you?” Aunt Charlotte turned to the young gentleman.

“Not for me. We only need a room for Miss Rosabella, while——”

“While?”

“While she makes up her mind,” said the young gentleman.

“Just for the week?”

Miss Rosabella broke in. “Oh, I *think* so!” She looked anxiously at the young gentleman. “Will it take me more than a week to make up my mind, Frederick?”

“I hope not, Rosabella. I hoped you had made it up at one o’clock this morning.”

“Yes, but then the moon was out,” said the young lady. Now she addressed my Aunt again. “At five o’clock, when the moon has gone in, things look so very different.”

“True, dear heart.”

“Then I may come in? For I’ve nowhere else to go.”

“That is not so!” cried the young gentleman.

“Yes, yes, it is so—until my mind is made up. Only, I haven’t any money, you know. Unless——” She tinkled with her finger on the milkcan. “Will that do for a week?”

“Nicely,” agreed my Aunt.

“Oh,” cried Rosabella, “what a delicious garden!”

As she stepped into the garden, crowded with roses, lupins, and columbines, her blue cloak flew open, and revealed her dressed in tulle festooned with pointed leaves—the costume of a Taglione. On her head was a tilted wreath of laurel, in front of the tight green bodice a diamond butterfly. She went up the path like the butterfly in motion.

“Has she any baggage?” asked my Aunt.

“None,” replied the young gentleman. He gazed after her in agitation. “She has not even said goodbye to me!”

“Now don’t take on,” said my Aunt Charlotte cheerfully. “It will be all ups and downs till her mind is made up, and you’ll just have to put up with it.”

“I shall come once a day,” said Frederick.

“Twice a week,” amended my Aunt, “or you’ll keep her all of a dither.”

“Wednesday and Saturday evenings,” said the young man. (It was then Wednesday morning.)

“Tuesdays and Fridays,” said my Aunt Charlotte firmly.

“At seven o’clock, at this door.”

“I’ll give you a key,” said Aunt Charlotte. “Then you’ll disturb nobody, and nobody will disturb you.” She fumbled in her placquet, and produced a key. The young gentleman seized it and her hand in both his, pressed his lips to her fingers, and cried, with tears in his eyes, “You are goodness itself! Tell her—oh, tell her money is not everything!”

“I should think not indeed! Does she suppose it is?”

“She lets it come between us. Is it my fault if I have fifty thousand a year?”

“Perhaps,” said my Aunt, seeing a little clearer, “it is your misfortune.”

“It will be, if she lets it outweigh love.”

“Does she love you?”

“She says it is difficult to tell, while I have all that money.”

“Can’t you get rid of it?” suggested my Aunt.

“It goes with the title,” said poor Frederick gloomily. Then he took his leave. He was twenty years old; Rosabella seventeen.

On Tuesday and Friday evenings she stole down the garden, and what took place my Aunt never inquired. On Wednesday mornings the milkcan at the garden door was topped with a gold sovereign. The young lady’s name shortened itself to Bella, she acquired with my Aunt’s help a sufficient stock of odd but delightful clothing, she took on all the pretty duties of the house. She flirted with the policeman, the postman, the dustman, and the butcher’s boy, and she ate sweets between meals. Old Madam and Aunt Charlotte cherished her as they cherished any other charming object in the establishment. That was how my Aunt Charlotte came by her young lady lodger.

When I first saw her, Rosabella had been making up her mind for no less than six-and-seventy weeks.

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“But who *is* she?” demanded my Mother.

“She is Bella,” said my Aunt.

“That’s hardly enough.”

“Rosabella then.”

“Now Lottie, you know perfectly well what I mean. Who *is* she?”

“I don’t know, May, and I don’t care,” declared my Aunt. “Anybody you have known a couple of years doesn’t have to be explained.”

“Did she never try to explain?”

“Bella explain anything? Oh mon Dieu! you might as well ask an explanation of a bird or a butterfly. She lets things drop now and then, that is all.”

“Ah!” My Mother leaned forward. “What sort of things?”

“Now May, if I started telling you what sort of things, you’d only go and say ‘I told you so!’ ”

“You don’t mean to tell me there was a ba——?” My Mother checked herself, glanced at me, and formed a last syllable with a soft popping sound of her lips.

“There you go at once!” said my Aunt, in a vexed tone of voice. “No, there was *not* a baby!”

“Hush, Lottie!”

“Very well, May, who began it?—There, don’t let’s quarrel, dear heart. Bella is Bella, and I and Maman are very fond of her. I can’t tell you her other name, because she doesn’t know it herself.”

“Where does she come from?”

“The Ballet, at the Opera.”

“Ah! A *corrifee*! The Ballet explains everything.”

“She dances like Grisi.”

“Why did she give it up?”

“There was some horrid man involved.”

“This Lord Frederick?—if he *is* one!”

“Not at all. Some older man. I expect he had money in it, for he had the right to come behind the scenes and pester the girls. She calls him The Satyr, and makes a face when she speaks of him. She says Lord Frederick saved her from him, all of a sudden in a hansom cab.”

“What *do* you mean by that, Lottie?”

“Well, really, it’s hard to say. You know what the world is!” My Mother did not, and took a severe view of it; my Aunt Charlotte, who did, made every allowance for it. “I suppose the Satyr was trying to seduce her, and Lord

Frederick got ahead of him.”

“Eh?” My Mother glanced at me, but discretion succumbed to curiosity. Her favourite reading was *The Family Herald*. Shifting her chair so that she couldn’t see me, she whispered, “Do you mean this Lord F *h’m-h’med* her first?”

“Pas du tout! You do jump so at conclusions.”

“Well, Lottie, you *said*——”

“Now, May, I said nothing of the kind!”

“Who is this Lord Frederick?”

“I’ve never asked.”

“Then you *should* ask!”

“Why?”

My Mother threw up her hands. “What did he want with her?”

“He was in love with her.”

“Then why did he bring her here?”

“In the cab he offered her all he possessed——”

“A Church Wedding?”

“That I can’t say.”

“He may be married.”

“He may be.”

“Not that a corrie is expected to take *that* into account. Wasn’t she tempted?”

“When she heard he had two castles, dozens of footmen, and fifty thousand a year, she took fright and jumped out of the cab. Frederick jumped out after her. Then, she said, they walked and walked, and argued and argued, till she got thirsty. Then they saw the milk on the doorstep, and next thing they saw me. There’s all I know.”

“I must say, Lottie, I’d want to know a good deal more than that, if I was you.”

“That’s where we differ, May. I don’t doubt I’d want to know a good deal more than that if I was *you*.”

“Who pays that pound?”

“Lord Frederick, naturally.”

“She is beholden to him, then.”

“You can’t call it to any great extent.”

“A pound a week for nothing is a good deal to a corrie. What does he tell *you*?”

“I haven’t seen him since.”

My Mother stared at her. “Not since that night?”

“Not once.”

“But when they meet on Tuesdays and Fridays?”

“I keep out of the way.”

“But surely—accidentally—now and then——”

“I don’t interfere.”

This was beyond my Mother. I daresay she thought Aunt Charlotte *knew* what happened at those meetings in the garden, and wouldn’t tell. She shrugged. “I only hope it pays you.”

“Lord bless you, Bella doesn’t eat sixpence a day. I feed and dress the child out of that pound, and that leaves a shilling or two of pocket-money. Now May, don’t fuss. Bella is Bella, and I wouldn’t have her any different. If she wasn’t a good girl, she needn’t have come here. And when she goes, we’ll miss her sadly.”

“But *will* she go?”

“When she’s made up her mind.”

“She doesn’t strike me,” said my Mother, “as having a mind to make up. Am I *right*?”

It may seem incredible that, with a houseful of treasures, money straits of any sort could beset my Aunt, or that Old Madam should ever go short while she wore on her finger a stone that might have been pledged for a small fortune. As a matter of fact, she never did go short—my Aunt saw to that, however short she might go herself; and if the ring had been worth a king’s ransom, Old Madam would no more have thought of selling it than of selling the finger it adorned. The ring was no pecuniary asset; the ring was “Family”. What has to be understood is that when my Aunt set up in business, she lived on the business alone; if things sold quickly and profitably, all to the good! if slowly and poorly, well never mind, dear heart! better luck to-morrow. But long before she took to business, her keynote had been struck; partly by the conditions of her life in the old house and garden her husband had brought her to; but still more by conditions dating before her birth. In these my Aunt existed with her mother, these they wore as they wore their clothes. These were the air they breathed. What! the settee on which “My Great-Aunt the Countess” entertained Count Cagliostro—the miniature of “My Great-Aunt the Countess” in the hey-day of her beauty, painted by Lancret in the hey-day of his fame—above all, the ring which “My Great-Aunt the Countess” declared had once belonged to Le Grand Monarque—sell that ring because there happened to be no meat for dinner to-day? Pooh! there would be meat to-morrow, or next day, or next week, and where then would be the King’s ring? What! snap that sparkling link with the past for the sake of a leg of mutton? In the dazzling past their imaginations moved as familiarly as their bodies in the present; my Aunt Charlotte ever prized the treasures of imagination above the comforts of the body. Nothing would have induced her to break precious and irreplaceable links.

When I came into their world, where one used casually objects that had served kings and queens in their glory, I accepted it all. Children aren’t puzzled by discrepancies. Bit by bit, things let fall by my Aunt, and still more by Old Madam with whom I often sat, pieced together a story which began to live for me as vividly as for them.

I remember clearly my first sight of the features of the Countess Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy. It was perhaps two days after my arrival that I first began to sit with Old Madam for an hour in the afternoons. She had beside her, I remember, a large polished workbox inlaid with mother-of-pearl; the tray, divided into numberless compartments, was fitted with exquisite ivory implements, bobbins, needle-cases, spools, bodkins, acorns for beeswax, and I

forget what. The deep compartment below contained a tiny musical box, which tinkled the sweetest tunes in a voice like spun-glass. This compartment also held a marvellous assortment of beads and pearls in little boxes, and Old Madam, true to her word, began to instruct me in beadwork. My small fingers were not very apt, I daresay, but while I fumbled the musical box tinkled, the pretty beads twinkled, and my senses were charmed beyond the tedium which besets all clumsy workmen. Presently Old Madam began to nod.

“Now I shall take my nap, child. Can you sit as quiet as a mouse?”

I nodded; the old lady sat back in her chair and dozed. I tried to get on with my beads, but it was difficult; they were often too small for the needle-point, the thread caught and knotted, and the musical box ran down. For a few moments I did sit as quiet as a mouse, on my little worsted tabouret at Old Madam’s feet, but it was very dull. I wondered if I durst creep out of the room, but the door to the landing was shut and I was afraid to jar her slumbers by turning the painted china knob. Then I noticed that the panelled door to the back room was, as before, ajar, and holding my breath I got off the stool and ventured towards it. Old Madam did not stir, so I slipped through into the little world of wonders. It had not a great deal in it. The room was an octagon, with four main walls connected by four narrower panels. One of the main walls had the folding doors in it, facing it were the glass windows to the balcony; on the wall to the left stood a small settee, and a tiny writing desk of painted china and ormolu, mounted on slender fluted legs; a Chinese cabinet, reaching from floor to ceiling, occupied almost the breadth of the wall to the right of the doors. From the centre of the ceiling hung an entrancing chandelier of gilt and glass; the glass was not cut in lustres, but formed clusters of grapes, green, white, and amethyst, heavy bunches below, and lighter ones festooning the twisted vine-stem that attached the chandelier to the ceiling. On the lowest bunches of grapes rested a coronet of gold vine leaves, out of which the candle sconces rose. The room contained nothing more, except a miniature over the settee.

This it was that drew me to it first. I longed to inspect everything at once—to look out of the window through which I had seen the summer garden, to examine the chandelier with its goblin fruits, above all to *begin* to explore that Chinese lacquer palace of drawers and doors and staircase openings. Its many panels were of dark egg-shell blue, ornamented with birds and flowers in gold and pearl and ivory. It would take me days to absorb their details, to feel my way in fancy in and out of this marvellous structure. As to what was concealed behind the little doors, I would never dare turn, without permission, one of their pendant handles, shaped like cranes and toads and lotus-flowers. Nor must I touch the goblin chandelier, or go alone into the sunny garden. Besides—one glance at the French windows showed me the veil of rain which had

persisted since my arrival at London Bridge, except for the single lifting which had shown me a glimpse of fountains and green leaves. So it was that I went straight to what I might see without touching, and kneeling carefully on the settee looked into the face of Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy.

It was the face of a brilliant beauty whose age was unguessable. The white hair was drawn in a tower off the forehead; some rolls of curls were visible at the neck. The eyes were bright as those of a bird, the expression of the aristocratic face was amused, daring, and *impregnable*. I can find no better word to convey the haughty confidence of that remarkable face. The complexion was dazzling, the very slender neck white as a lily, and so was the lovely bust, swelling designedly above the low-cut bodice. The dress, as far as it could be seen, consisted of a green and gold sacque, falling open in front to show an under-dress patterned with gleaming hints of rose and turquoise-blue; but this was partly hidden by a fan, spread diagonally across the bosom, the upper point displacing, with careless intention, the lace below one white billow. So precise was the painting that even the picture on the fan was discernible—a garden, where the tiny blindfold figure of a girl ran with outstretched hands in front of an arbour. The Countess held the fan in her right hand, and with a thrill of delight I recognised, on the exquisite forefinger, the opal ring Old Madam wore on hers.

I don't know how long I knelt gazing into the bright eyes that seemed to move under mine—to twinkle with mirth, to dart fire and scorn, to fascinate, to sparkle, but never once to soften. I could not tear myself away from it, I felt myself on the brink of an alluring adventure which would not quite *come*, when a soft voice fell upon my ear—"Lisette!"—I held my breath, and did not stir. If I kept "still as a little mouse," would the lady in the picture speak again?

"Lisette! are you there, child?" It was Old Madam speaking from the outer room. Slowly, reluctantly I "undid" my posture—my knees were so stiff that I could hardly move them, and my fingers were gripping the settee-back so hard that the knuckles ached. I must have been kneeling so for ages and ages. I was like a person coming back to life, and I did not want to come. But compliance was too strong in me; I got down from the settee, and went back to Old Madam.

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"Where had you vanished, child?"

"In there." I pointed to the boudoir, and became uncomfortably conscious of three little sins which my Mother would decidedly have "told me of": curiosity, pointing, and an abrupt answer. Madame, however, merely said, "You've been looking into the cabinet, I suppose. But we can't have you disappearing like that. One day you might go in and never come back. That would never do, would it?"

“No, madam,” I said meekly, without the least understanding how such a thing could be possible. There was not a door or a compartment of the cabinet into which I could have inserted my small frame. After a little pause I took courage to add, “I didn’t go into the cabinet, I couldn’t, could I? I just looked, and then I looked at the picture of the lady.”

“My Great-Aunt the Countess,” said Madam. “Well, and what did you think of her?”

“I don’t know.” (Not that I hadn’t thought—or felt—a very great deal; but children cannot, or do not, tell what they think on demand.)

“You don’t know, eh? Neither did most, so I understand from those that knew her.”

“Didn’t you know her yourself, ma’am?”

“Bless me, child, how could I? I was born ten years later.”

“Later than what, ma’am?” (“Don’t be so *prying*, Lizzie!” I could almost hear my Mother saying; “it’s not for you to carry on a conversation.” But I knew by instinct that Old Madam, nearing ninety, did not at all mind being prompted with little questions that loosened her recollections, and, like all the old, she loved an audience before whom she could re-live moments of the past.) “Later than what, ma’am?”

“Than the end of the Revolution. My honoured parents were refugees, as of course you know. Many a time I heard my father talk of his remarkable aunt, the Countess de Marignan-Croissy, who refused to fly with them in Ninety-Three.”

“It’s Ninety-Three now. First it was the Eighties, and now it’s the Nineties,” I said, pleased to air my little piece of knowledge.

“True, it has come round to the Nineties again,” said Old Madam, “but it was in the Nineties of a hundred years ago that my father and grandfather fled from their estates to England. My father was the Vicomte de la Rivière, child. On that side we come from Auvergne, and date back to Saint Louis. Besides my father and grandfather, the only remaining member of the family was the Marquis’s sister, my Great-Aunt the Countess de Marignan-Croissy. She was her brother’s senior by thirty-two years, yes, she was more than a hundred years old when King Louis went to the guillotine. But she refused to leave France. ‘I was born during the glory of the Bourbons,’ she said, ‘and now they are falling I will see the line through.’ She had always been intimate at Court, and was a particular friend of Marie Antoinette. When my father and grandfather continued to urge her, ‘Tais-toi, petit frère, don’t pester me, nephew,’ she said; ‘I’m too old. Besides, nothing will happen to me that I don’t choose to happen.’ The two gentlemen, however, were resolved to carry her away by force. On the night of their flight they ordered Louise Boutin, her maid, who was devoted to them all, to pack a small bundle of what was

necessary, and be prepared to assist them with her mistress. When the coach was at the door, they went to her apartments. 'She's sleeping,' Louise informed them. 'So much the better,' said my grandfather. They entered her room; she was not there. They sought high and low. No sign of her anywhere. The coachman, actually a young aristocrat, Charles de Bazaine, in disguise, hurried in to say that the mob had got wind of their intentions, and was on its way. 'Take my son, and go without me,' said the old Marquis. 'No, Sir,' said my father, 'if you stay, I stay.' The pseudo-coachman laughed, 'Very well, let them gather the whole bouquet!' and flung himself down on the Countess Charlotte's settee. 'Dog of a lackey!' cried my father; 'has it come to this, that the servants sit while the masters stand?' Charles sprang to his feet with mock humility, and as he did so disturbed a scented note which had been lying on the seat. It was inscribed in my Great-Aunt's fine unfaltering hand. '*Go at once, my children. If you stripped the château you would not discover me. Neither will the rabble. Save yourselves.*' They stared at each other. 'Whence came this?' demanded my father of his friend. 'I did not observe it when you sat down.' 'Nor I.' 'What shall we do?' 'Obey her,' said my grandfather. 'If she says they will not find her, they will not. Come.' They saved themselves by the skin of their teeth. Ten minutes later, and the English ship, waiting for them and others at the coast, would have sailed with the tide. My mother, a young girl, was among the refugees. Her parents had been massacred. Her lot fell in with those on the ship. In England, three years afterwards, my father married her; I was born at the turn of the century. France I never saw till the Bourbons were restored. Yet so much I heard of our family, of the rich estates of my Great-Aunt the Countess, and of the aristocratic life before the Revolution, that nothing was a surprise to me when my father returned to Paris in 1820, taking me with him, a young girl in her teens. Our property in Auvergne was impoverished, and it was a question what we could claim in Normandy, in Marignan-Croissy, that is. The line had died out, my Great-Aunt had no children, and my father, Camille de la Rivière, was her heir. But the latter Bourbons needed all they could get, and Louis the Eighteenth was disposed to claim the estates. I accompanied my father to Normandy. You can imagine my feelings in wandering, for the first time, about the grounds and the apartments. Some things were destroyed, much was decayed; but certain parts of the château were intact, and particularly the rooms of my Great-Aunt. Her miniature by Lancret came from there—I recognized it as soon as I set eyes on it. For a short period there was question of our settling in France. My father could have obtained some post under Louis the Eighteenth, but nearly thirty years in England had established my parents with ties they did not wish to break. And when Louis Égalité's son held fast by the lands of Marignan-Croissy, while allowing my father a liberal choice of the Countess Charlotte's

personal property, the family fortunes were really not equal to the scale of life in France we would have been obliged to maintain. I, of course, wished ardently to remain; especially after journeying to Paris, where I was presented by my father to the King, and fell in love at sight with a certain monsieur of the Court. As it transpired, he had already been to the altar. Pending his own decisions, my father, who saw which way the wind blew, placed me in the care of the nuns at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. I appeared no more at court, and have not the least doubt that this little affair influenced my parents' resolve to return to England. To console me they gave me one of my most precious possessions."

I had listened to the old lady's narration in a sort of dream, only comprehending a quarter of what she said. But now I could put a question.

"What is it, madam, your most precious possession?"

"It was a fan, my dear, painted by Antoine Watteau, the very fan that appears in Lancret's picture of my Great-Aunt. When, to my disappointment, we returned to England, the fan and the picture came with us, most of this furniture, and the china and silver which Chérie and I prefer to use; also the Chinese cabinet you have been examining, with its contents."

"I just looked, madam, I didn't open it."

"No? Well, we will open it together. You shall see the fans, of which my Great-Aunt had a unique collection, and the little box that sings."

"The little box that sings!"

Old Madam nodded a mysterious head. "There's a humming-bird inside." Suddenly, as was her habit, she fell asleep, leaving me thrilled and bewildered.

A fortnight went by before Old Madam began to fulfil her promise to show me the hidden wonders of the cabinet. She had taken a slight chill which kept her in bed over Christmas, while Aunt Charlotte trotted up at all hours with little trays of chicken jelly, milk toast, and hot black currant wine. Bella flitted in and out of the sickroom, and sometimes even I was permitted to carry a bowl of arrowroot or a plate of fruit to the invalid, with injunctions to put it down quietly and not to stay and talk. During this time I became at my ease with my Aunt and Bella. My Aunt's happy-go-lucky attitude towards life, and Bella's lack of any attitude whatever, gave me insensibly a feeling of freedom I had never enjoyed before. There were no more rules or restrictions for children than for kittens in the Bric-à-Brac shop. Meals occurred at odd hours. If you didn't want to wait, you could cut a hunk of bread-and-butter, add to it anything syrupy or savoury that happened to be in the larder, and be off—outside or inside—to the Heath sparkling with snow, or to some dark corner of the shop, where, arranging your own household of “Period Pieces” and draperies, you might crouch and munch and dream as you pleased, with a cat for company. If, on the other hand, you came in late for a meal, something would be “keeping hot” for you in the oven.

The weather had cleared, and some bright days of frost and snow had come. I was allowed at last to go into the garden. Bella showed me round the barren flowerbeds, the orchard-plot, the “windy-walky” paths in the shrubbery, leading from a rose-arbour at one end to a rustic summerhouse at the other.

“Is that where you see Lord Frederick?” I asked innocently.

“Who told you about Frederick?” asked Bella.

“Aunt Charlotte told Mother.”

“What did she say?”

“Only that he comes on Tuesday and Friday. Is he nice?”

“He is charming,” said Bella.

“Isn't it cold sitting here?”

“We only use the garden in the summer. In winter he comes in his carriage, with two chestnut horses. I sit in it like Cinderella going to the ball, and we ride round and round and round.”

“Don't you ever get anywhere?”

“Nowhere at all. Shall I marry him, Lisette?”

She asked me this very seriously, and I considered my reply.

“Would you go away if you did?”

“Far away.”

“Then don’t.”

“Sometimes I think I won’t. And then I think, why not?”

“No, don’t.”

“Because?”

“I wouldn’t see you any more.”

“You could come and stay with me.”

“Where?”

“I’ve never asked him.”

“Don’t marry him!” I urged.

“But then, the Satyr!”

“Who?”

“He’s too fat to talk about. I’d better have Frederick.”

“No.”

“But then, what?”

“Where’s the fountain?” I asked suddenly.

“What fountain, little thing?”

“The fountain in the garden.”

“There isn’t one.”

“I saw it.”

“When?”

“The first time. I saw it through the window when I came.”

“But it was dark and raining when you came.”

“I did see it, through Madam’s window, I did, really.”

“Yes? How lucky for you. Was it under the window?”

“No, it was more at the end, with bushes behind, I think the arbour was there. The garden——” I looked around me, puzzled. “It wasn’t this shape a bit.”

“There’s Cherry Pie calling. She says you must have your galoshes on.”

This was the happiest Christmas-time I had ever known. It was like a chapter out of a fairy-tale. Both Aunt Charlotte and Bella had a fantastic way with decorations, and the shop and parlour, already like something out of Perrault and the *Arabian Nights*, now took on a touch of Andersen. Three days before Christmas a tree had arrived, and was installed in the powder-closet at the back of the shop. The door was then closed, and over the glass panels was hung a white shawl studded with silver stars. I was told not to open the door, and nothing would have induced me to. But many times I crept through the dark treasure-laden cavern of the shop, and listened at the keyhole. Sometimes all was still; but sometimes I heard a rustling within; and once, wakened at night by the Waits in the High Street, I heard a small clear trumpet blown in the garden far below my attic window. I did not venture to peep out, but had no doubt who had blown the little trumpet, coming to dress the tree in the

powder-closet. On Christmas Eve, after the hanging of my stocking in the fireplace, I could scarcely sleep. Oh lovely, lovely time! would it ever be morning? All of a sudden it was. Bella in her nightgown was crying "Merry Christmas!" in my ear. She carried in her hand a lumpy stocking; my own stocking lurched drunkenly against the fireguard. It was stuffed with goodies, fruit, fascinating knick-knacks, beads, a Turkish scarf, a scented sachet, a Dresden milk-maid, a thimble studded with amethysts, and twelve gold pennies in a red-and-white leather purse like a jockey's cap. Bella's stocking was as rich. She sat on my bed, and we exclaimed together, until my Aunt ran in in her dressing-gown, with a wreath of paper flowers round her head, tooting on a tin horn. "Ta-ra!" she chanted; and stood on one leg. While we were still laughing she pirouetted out of the room, returned with a tray of hot chocolate, and told us to drink it and get up and dress.

The breakfast-table was laden with parcels from home, and Christmas-cards from everywhere. My Aunt's card to Bella unfolded miraculously, till, out of layers of gilt lace paper, rose up a cardboard urn laden with flowers. My card was more wondrous still. It represented a bedroom with a child asleep in a cot under a window. Beneath the cot this legend:

"Hold this Card up to the Light  
And you will see an Angel Bright."

I held up the card, and a hovering angel, a creature of supreme loveliness, appeared through the window, surrounded by a deep blue night of stars. From home my Father had sent me Kate Greenaway's *Marigold Garden*, and my Mother a box containing a cardboard doll with six complete outfits of clothes and accessories, to be cut out of six stiff sheets of paper. From my Aunt Charlotte a tiny ring, a flower with five pearl petals and a ruby heart ("Georgian, dear heart! fine gold and pearls"); also a globe of snow, containing a world of its own—a castle on a hill, two trees on either side, and three people of indeterminate sex and purpose. I raised the storm about them, and stared, absorbed, into the crystal world.

"Come." Bella tapped me on the shoulder. She stood there in her white cashmere coat, and round white fur cap and tippet. She pulled on my mittens, tied my muffler round my neck, buttoned my boots, stuffed my arms into the thick sleeves of my jacket, and danced me over the pure white dells and hillocks of Hounsbury Heath to Baxwood. It was the first time I had seen it.

"What do you think of it?" asked Bella.

"It's as nice as Mannington," I said.

"What's that?"

"The house in the park near Chalkstones."

“Who lives there?”

“Nobody now. He, the lord who’s got it, is too poor. It’s all bluebells. I play there. Joe Gander doesn’t mind.”

“Why should he?”

“He’s the keeper. He doesn’t like gipsies but he doesn’t mind me. Who lives here?”

“Nobody now.” We stood on the south terrace above the lake, and peered into the windows of the Orangery.

“What can you see?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing at all?”

“Just some furniture and some pictures; I can’t see them very well.”

“If you can’t see them very well, there may be other things there.”

“What?”

“People.”

“There aren’t any people.” Of this I was positive, but as she continued to gaze through the panes I couldn’t help asking, “Can *you* see any?”

“I thought perhaps there might be someone,” she said. “But no. You are right. There is never anybody.” She sighed and turned away. “Lovely ladies danced there once, like this!”

With airy stateliness she danced from end to end of the terrace, stepping, as no lady had ever done, upon her points. At the far end she cried “Catch me! catch me!” and floated swiftly down the slopes to the silent lake, locked under ice within an ivory grove. I shuffled after her, following the tiny dotted line of her toes in the virgin snow. The white veil she had tied over her face and hat streamed out behind her. She paused like a marble nymph on the edge of the lake, her hands held out to steady me as I came stumbling down. “Can you skate?” she cried.

“I can slide.”

“I’ll teach you how to skate.”

“I haven’t got any.”

“Merry Christmas!” cried Bella, and produced from her reticule two unsuspected pairs of skates, the smaller pair brand-new. “My present,” she laughed, “to you. Did you think I had forgotten you?”

She fitted the skates to my boots. I thought I should never stand upright, but when she took my hands, saying “Come!” I found myself gliding beside her like a bird. “Oh, it’s easy!” I screamed with delight. Bella uncrossed our hands and let me go, and in a moment I was spread-eagled on the ice, where I squealed still louder with laughter, and she wheeled round me, uttering little silvery screeches, her arms outspread, her motions as light and swift as those of the seagulls wheeling overhead. Winter always drove some of these

refugees inland to the Hounsbury waters. From the covert of the snow-burdened boscage, four unhappy swans regarded us. Bella picked me up, and again I was moving beside her in a snowlit dream. "Now run alone!" she breathed, and released me lightly; I balanced dangerously, recovered, and glided on a little way before I fell. But in less than an hour she had taught me how to be sure of myself.

"How rosy you look, Lisette! Your Mother ought to see you. Am I rosy?"

"Yes, very."

"Do you mean my nose is red?" She glanced in the direction of the boscage.

"Just a little."

"Is it horribly ugly?"

"You aren't ugly," I declared.

"I hope not. But my nose, is that ugly? am I fit to be seen?"

"There's nobody to see," I said, surprised at her earnestness.

"How do you know?" she said. "Somebody may be prying. Who knows who is hidden behind those laurels, Lisette?"

"But who *could* be?" I asked.

She moved her head pensively. "I cannot say. I cannot say." Then, with a tiny shake of her shoulders, "Look, here's some bread. Let us feed those miserable swans."

She produced from her reticule two thick slices, and gave me one. For the next few minutes we stood on the brink of the lake, throwing bread upon the ice. The swans waddled out of cover, the gulls made silver swoops out of the air. When all was gone, Bella brushed the crumbs from her hands, re-tied her veil, glanced once more at the boscage, and sighed, "Come!" This "Come" was a favourite word with her; she spoke it in a tone which seemed to promise something, some little adventure which her light sigh hinted had not yet been fulfilled.

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In the afternoon I was allowed to go and see Old Madam for a few minutes. She was sitting upright in her bed, propped by large luxurious pillows. She beckoned me to her, wished me a Happy Christmas, kissed my forehead, and told Bella, who was already with her, to fetch from the boudoir the lower left-hand drawer of the cabinet. It was packed with layers of tissue-paper from which she produced a number of fans, some in boxes, some without, many intact, and still more slightly broken or in some way damaged. There were sticks of ivory, tortoiseshell, wood, and horn; carved and painted, or inlaid with stars and sequins of looking-glass; there were mounts of silk and gauze and vellum, paper, and "chicken-skin", there were paintings of ravishing delicacy and romance, and lacework of incredible fineness. It seemed

impossible that Madame Lambert could design one of these treasures for me, but though she held her heirlooms too precious for sale, she was a royal giver. A peach-coloured fan box she opened, shut, and laid aside at once, as though that was out of the question. She chose for me at last a little fan with tortoiseshell sticks latticed with gold; the mount was of black and white lace, the white lace motifs forming, to my delight, little groups of gardener's implements, rake and spade surmounted with a beribboned hat. The whole was sewn with silver sequins that sparkled like drops of dew.

"There, my dear!" she said, and put it into my hands, with a kiss on my forehead. "Take care of it. It has cooled the cheek of a queen."

"Oh Madam!" I breathed shyly. Nothing was so sweetly embarrassing as to receive a gift and not know what to say.

"Now one for Bella," smiled Old Madam kindly; and she gave Bella the fan she had evidently intended for her. It had sticks of pearl decorated with butterflies, and the mount was of lace and gauze. The lace, like yellow ivory, formed groves of flowers and ferns and butterflies, in which three heart-shaped black gauze motifs were enmeshed; the two outer ones held beautifully painted cupids in attitudes of despondency, the central heart held a perfect rose. Bella and I opened our fans to examine their beauties. "My poor little cupids! their bows are broken," she said. "Look, my fan's crying!" I said, fluttering the sequined sticks.

"You would like to know all your fans know, I suppose," said Old Madam. "Ah, so would I. But that's what we shall never know, my dears. Now what's all this about?"

I had laid "this" awkwardly upon her coverlet, a little parcel wrapped in pink tissue-paper. In it was a handkerchief sachet, worked laboriously and, I am afraid, imperfectly, in silk cross-stitch on canvas.

"Why, that's very pretty, child. Did you work this yourself?"

"Yes, madam. Happy Christmas," I said in a small voice.

"So useful too. I shall keep my handkerchiefs in it. Thank you, my dear. Now you may help Bella put back the drawer, and I will rest."

The ordeal was over. I slipped through to the boudoir after Bella. "Bella! wait a minute!"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Do let me look in the drawer just once before you shut it up."

"Haven't you seen enough fans for to-day?"

But there was one of which I wanted to see a little more, the one in the box of peach-coloured brocade. "Do you think we might look at it?" I asked.

"Oh, I dare say. She only shut it up," said Bella, "because it is damaged. But I have handled it often. Here it is, look, actually signed 'A. Watteau.'"

The signature meant nothing to me; but I was sure I had not been mistaken;

here was the very fan in the picture on the wall. “It *is!*” I exclaimed delightedly.

“It is what, funny child?”

I pointed from the open fan to the miniature of Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy.

“Lisette, how quick you are! To think I never noticed it before. This fan, of course, was painted before the picture. Perhaps it was of all her favourite fan; and it is certainly the most beautiful. What a pity the centre piece has broken away—here it is, done up in tissue paper. Cherry Pie is always going to have it mended, but it needs an expert not to ruin it. I’ll open the tissue-paper carefully—look, Lisette! It is the blindfold girl that has come out. Ah, darling little Watteau! He *could* paint! Though I must say the arbour isn’t quite up to his mark. But the little blindfold dancer is a dream! See how beautifully she stands on her points. Watteau must have known all about dancing to paint her like that. Exactly as she ought to be, to her fingertips. Don’t you wonder who she is, Lisette, and what she is like under her bandage, and why she was playing blindman’s buff all by herself in that entrancing garden? Who was she trying to catch before she fell out?”

I stared at the fan and said, “She was trying to catch the boy.”

“What boy?”

“The boy behind the bushes.”

Bella laughed lightly. “Of course she was! I hope he is a nice one.”

“He’s very nice,” I said.

“Why! how do you know?”

I was silent.

“Tell me, Lisette!”

“I don’t know,” I said foolishly.

“And the girl under the handkerchief—is she nice too?”

“Oh yes. She——”

“Go on.”

“I don’t know,” I said again.

“Well!” exclaimed Bella. “I can make up a better story than that. The girl is trying to catch a prince. She has been allowed into the prince’s garden on condition that she finds him blindfold. Only when she catches him, and guesses his name, will the handkerchief fall from her eyes. Now, isn’t that a nice story, Lisette?”

“Yes.”

“And all the time the prince is hiding behind the bushes, or peeping through the fountain.”

“He is not a prince,” I said, “he’s a sort of gardener.”

“Nonsense! If you go spoiling my story I shall slap you. I say he’s to be a

prince.”

“All right.” I did not mind. But the boy I saw through the bushes was in peasant clothes. And I had seen him before, though now he was more grown up. He was the boy behind the flower-painting in the Bric-à-Brac shop. And the garden was the garden I had seen through the French window, on the day of my arrival. And the girl, behind her handkerchief, was Bella.

*Solo in the Shade: Alto*  
*Duet in a Boudoir: Mezzo and Barytone*  
*Recitative in a Theatre: Mezzo and Basso-Profundo*  
*Scena in an Atelier: Mezzo and Basso*  
*Duet in a Garret: Mezzo and Alto.*

The day ended with the revelation of the candle-lit tree in the powder-closet. My Aunt had invited a few children to make a little party. Nobody loved a party more than she did; the party-spirit was so spontaneous in her, that in recollection, it seems to me she lived in the heart of one from morning till night. Passers-by to whom she nodded from behind her window, droppers-in for two minutes on some errand, were enveloped instantly by a sense of the festive. Cherry Pie's face wreathed with smiles, her bright eyes danced and twinkled, as she beckoned them into the parlour behind the shop. "What, is it *you*? Isn't that *won-derful*! Do come in and sit down for a minute. Go right through to the parlour and taste my sherry. Bella and I were just sipping a glass together. The dry biscuits, Bella—or there's a cake on the table. Help yourself to these dragées—and what do you think of my flowers? Aren't they a picture? Mrs. Jennings sent three basketfuls over from Baxwood. (She took Maman's place there, you know.) You shall take some home with you, but *of course*, dear heart. Bella, another of the green Bristols! Now what do you think of *that* for a wine? Quite right, you've guessed it! my Birthday!"

But you came away feeling it was yours.

Christmas without a little party of children was unthinkable.

After a light supper we were told to amuse ourselves until a trumpet blew; when we were to proceed at once to the back of the shop, and see what we should see. My Aunt and Bella then disappeared, and we played Cobbler-Cobbler and Nuts-in-May until the mystery had prolonged itself beyond endurance. We were about to persuade ourselves that the trumpet *must* have sounded, and been lost amid our shrieking and hopping, when it really did sound, and we flew to the bidden spot. The door of the powder-closet stood open at last, and in the recess glittered the little tree, all white and silver, dotted with dozens of golden drops of light. Gay-feathered birds, sparkling festoons of beads, and toys of spun-glass, shimmered between the lights in the green recesses, and round the highest layer of scented branches dangled a company of puppets: Harlequin, Scaramouch, Pierrot, Beatrice, the Moor and the Doctor. On the very tip-top perched a Columbine, her gauzy skirts rosetted and

festooned. She was crowned with tiny green leaves, and in front of her bodice was a spangled butterfly.

No traditional Santa Claus was there to dispense the gifts; on either side two smiling figures posed, a delicious Columbine à la Carmago (the doll on the treetop was her exact replica, but Bella's butterfly was of sparkling stones), and her Dresden-figure partner in white wig, flowered waistcoat, and knee-buckles. I was seized with a panic of shyness till their faces dimpled into smiles, and I recognized Bella and my Aunt. Cherry Pie made a very saucy "breeches-figure." The next moment, amid laughter and exclamations, they were snipping gifts freely from the tree, and handing them about. The dancer on the top fell to my share. I thought it was the crowning-point of the day.

But something still more marvellous was to come. While we compared our treasures, lolling on the gilt and brocade settees and eating the last of our sugar-plums, my Aunt miraculously cleared a space in the middle, crying: "Madame ma Mère sends you her compliments, and her Court Musician to sing the Overture!"

In one hand she carried Old Madam's musical workbox; on the palm of her other hand a much smaller box. It was of gold fretwork, set with turquoise, rubies, and emeralds. Round the enamelled sides danced a painted rout of little ladies and gentlemen. My Aunt paraded among us, so that we might all see it for ourselves, but forbade us to lay a finger on it. It was the most wonderful box I had ever seen—but where was the Court Musician?

She set the box down on a console under a crystal candelabra, and touched a spring. I caught my breath as a tiny trap in the lid sprang open, and a bird flew up, a glittering morsel of gold and emerald, turquoise and rose. It quivered restlessly from side to side, the feathered throat palpitated, the gilded beak opened and shut, and from it issued a cascade of notes, fairy roulades and elfin trills, sweet, shrill, and liquid as my Kentish nightingales. I sat enraptured. I did not know whether the song had lasted for a moment or an eternity when the tiny bird completed its final trill, and disappeared like magic under the trap.

I heard the children round me cry: "Again! Do make it sing again!"

"Silence for Mamzelle Carmago!" fluted my Aunt.

Instead of the Humming-Bird, she set the musical box playing its thin strains of old France and Italy. Into the clearing among the furniture fluttered Bella, on her points. She danced. She was Bella no more, she was air, fire, and water, she was a swallow, a swan, a rose on its stem. She was tender, she was teasing, she was timid, pettish, capricious, suppliant. She drooped like a flower out of water, she floated like a lily on the stream. She was all these things in a world we had no part in, under the lustres among relics of the past, and we who looked on entranced were the ghosts in the shadows. For whom did this

Columbine dance? For whom did she droop? Whom did she tease? whom beckon? from whom did she fly? To whom did she open those slender silver arms? Not, I was sure, to Frederick.

Scarcely breathing, I leaned forward to gaze into this other world. My fingers pressed the cold marble-top of the console. Did they by chance touch and release the spring of the golden box? Something had started the magic again, the trap sprang open, the fairy bird reappeared, the miraculous song twittered an obligato to the musical box. But now, the song had words as well as notes . . .

*Solo in the Shade:*  
*Alto*

Isn't it a shame he never loved, this Monsieur Watteau? He who painted such sensitive palpitations, such tremulous sentiments, such delicate courtships, such ideal flirtations, never to have a love-affair of his own!

Is it as strange as it appears to be? His brush revealed and concealed his own desires. He painted flirtations that cross no borderlines, courtships that are never consummated, palpitations that never come to the touch, sentiments that shimmer like dragonflies on the heat, and dart away before they can be discerned. Watteau's desires resisted satisfaction.

Ah, he dreamed, of course he dreamed! What artist does not? Why else is he endowed with imagination? But even in his dreams, did Watteau clasp his mistress to his heart? In life, he never did. And why, do you think?

Well, had he resembled the lovers in his pictures——

But he did not. Handsome? He was insignificant. Gay? He was a hypochondriac. Elegant? He was as poor as a church mouse. Those radiant little figures of men and women, listening, half-reclined, to some musician in the shadow—you will look among them in vain for Watteau's own image. He had no pair among the little ladies. He was at most the singer in the shade, plain-coated as the nightingale, wistful and tender, creating the amours of others. No! Antoine Watteau, sick, neglected, indigent, *dared* not love. His passion was to paint, and his years were numbered. He knew he had only so many more to live. Well then, as many pictures as he could crowd into them! a gallery of the dreams of one who has never enjoyed. Come! a new canvas!

But how pay for it?

Monsieur, take my last picture for two new canvases; thus, to the very end, I can go on painting. . . . What, madame, the rent? Two quarters for my garret are overdue? How forgetful of me! And the soup you bring me daily still unpaid for? So forgetful, that often I let the soup grow cold. It goes though,

eh? Well, but Finette is famished. Let's see—six months' rent, and sixty bowls of soup—madame, choose a few pictures. . . . Very ill, doctor? Yes, I know that I am ill. I crossed to England to be told so by you. In Paris they said, Go to the great English Doctor in London, there is not his equal in prognosticating the day of one's death. Only, I hoped you might postpone mine a little. A year, six months. No? Then one month, or a week. If you could but stretch my lungs by a week! Much can be accomplished in seven days, if one works from daylight to candlelight. No? It must be July? You cannot grant me my eight-and-thirtieth birthday? Thank you, doctor; and your fee? I am sorry. What can I do? Accept this picture.

Such, on the face of it, was Watteau's life.

The price of that life? Posterity, take my pictures!

But who, pray, was Finette?

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*"Again! again! make Bella dance again!"*

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*Duet in a Boudoir:  
Mezzo and Barytone*

You never precisely knew what Mademoiselle Charlotte de la Rivière was thinking—of you, of the world, of herself. Two-score men would have bestowed their fortunes on her, for the right to find out. Well for them that, as yet, Mademoiselle de la Rivière was interested in nobody's fortune but her own; not even in that of the Comte de Marignan-Croissy, reputed to be greater than once M. Fouquet's. When in the course of events she accepted it, the discovery of her thoughts did not flatter him. It would have flattered as little any of her suitors.

The singular young person appeared in Court in the dawn of the Eighteenth Century. She was sixteen years old, and those sixteen years had been spent in Auvergne. What will the little Provincial be like? was the question asked by ladies and gentlemen.—Our rustic aristocracy is so gauche! (said the ladies). How pleasant to tutor its daughters! (thought the gentlemen).

Auvergne has its legends. One doesn't precisely expect milk to flow out of it. The little Provincial appeared, a provoking enigma.

Louis, not yet a wreck, found her rosy and sparkling. The country mouse appeared as artless as a child; but either, she wasn't a child, or children aren't artless. She had whims, and indulged them. She was indifferent to opinion. So indifferent, that the gentlemen could neither capture, nor the ladies crush her. The little Provincial was quite undefeatable. What had she learnt in Auvergne?

Whatever it was, it kept even the King at bay. For three months Louis assailed her. Charlotte was made to dazzle, not to be dazzled. She held him at arm's length. It amused her not to succumb to her royal suitor. When he stormed, she said: "You should be grateful."

"For what, adorable wretch?"

"For prolonging an entertainment," said Mademoiselle Charlotte. "After the final tableau, one goes home yawning."

"Mademoiselle! do you know that I am your king?"

"Only too well, sire." She clasped her ten delicate fingers like a suppliant, and each fingertip seemed pointed with derision. "I resist you just because I cannot forget it."

"If you really remembered it, you would not resist me."

"If I cease to resist the king, I shall be obliged to remember he is a man."

"Charlotte! I am a man."

"Like any other?"

"Of course, my charming child, like any other."

She sighed extravagantly. "That is just the disillusionment I feared! Sire, I prefer to remember you are the King."

"Charlotte, you drive me mad. What do you want?"

"What do I want?"

"Name it! A diamond parure?"

She opened her eyes like saucers. "Whatever for?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all!" he shouted enraged, and snatched at her. She dodged him nimbly, and ran away.

That evening, the Court danced. During a figure, in which the ladies curtsied deeply to their partners, Charlotte's shrill chattering became audible: "What do you think, M. le Duc? His Majesty has offered me a diamond necklace!" She rose, paced sideways, and sank into a second reverence. "And all for nothing, for nothing at all!" she said. The music and the movement covered her remarks from all but the nearest; soon after the dance had ended, they were repeated to everybody.

Louis signaled his offence by ignoring her for a week—but it is difficult, even for a king, to ignore the absent. Charlotte seemed to have become invisible. And one cannot ignore one's own fever. Louis's increased. One day he was constrained to ask carelessly: "Where, by the way, is Mademoiselle de la Rivière?"

"She absents herself to visit M. Métayer," he was informed.

"The scene-painter at the Opera? With what object?"

"She gives out that she wants to learn painting."

The King thought it beneath his dignity to indulge his curiosity further. But he grew fretful. One day he managed to waylay her in a corridor.

"I hear you are becoming quite a painter, mademoiselle."

"How hard it is to keep one's light under a bushel," said she.

"And you find M. Métayer an attractive teacher?" asked Louis insolently.

"Not so much that as a very hard master, sire."

"What do you mean by that?" He glared at her.

"Exactly what I say, Your Majesty. He drives me severely, and excuses none of my faults. I have learned already that I shall never be a *grand maître*. Only——"

"What then?"

"A *petite maîtresse*," said she.

"Mademoiselle! I will have Métayer banished."

"Do, do! you will be doing art a service."

"Explain yourself."

"Métayer has one pupil who is really a genius. With Métayer out of the way, my fellow-student can take the place he deserves."

"Ha! the name of this genius?"

"Watteau, sire."

"A very handsome young fellow, I suppose."

"Oh! do you want to banish Watteau too?"

"I want to banish everybody you talk to."

"When does Your Majesty think of leaving France?"

He stamped his foot. She took a crayon out of her reticule, and pulled aside the arras on the wall. "Pray hold that back for me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Draw you a portrait of Métayer's genius." With a few rapid strokes she produced a sketch of an insignificant youth no woman would look at twice. Louis considered it, and, smiling slightly, asked: "Is it a likeness?"

"My gift is for portraiture, Your Majesty."

"This sketch has merit," said Louis affably.

"You know what Métayer looks like?" Charlotte inquired. "Well, here he is!"

She produced an unprepossessing portrait of middle-age, permitting herself one touch of caricature.

"Métayer to the life!" cried Louis, delighted.

"And next?" She pressed her crayon to her lips.

"I should like to see," he whispered, "how the King appears to the eyes of a fair young artist."

Charlotte described on the wall an all-conquering likeness of Louis, with a dozen years left out of his reckoning.

"Charlotte!" He dropped the arras to seize her hand. "Would you like a château in Touraine?"

She shook her curls.

“Would you like to be created duchess?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh speak, speak, speak!” he breathed. “What would you like?”

“I would like——” she faltered, casting down her eyes.

“Yes, yes! You shall have anything you ask for.”

“Your humming-bird.”

“My humming-bird!” He looked at her in amazement.

“The darling little bird that comes out of a box, and sings.”

“Only my humming-bird? You ask no more than that!”

“But it is the very prettiest toy in the world,” said she.

“You infant! If I had dreamed——”

“You did, but you dreamed wrong. You dreamed everybody’s dream, Your Majesty. You dreamed of diamond necklaces, castles, and titles—pho! these are common as peas. There is only one humming-bird like yours in France. They say it was taught to sing by your grandmother.”

“Marguerite de Valois was *not* my grandmother.”

“Oh no, of course! she was only your grandfather’s wife. But it’s true, then? the humming-bird *was* Madame Marguerite’s? and she *did* receive it from that Italian magician, from whom, it is said, she learned witchcraft and other things? Well, I want that humming-bird so that I can make it sing to me whenever I please. May I?”

“As often as you like, enchantress!”

“Really and truly? Wherever, whenever I like? That is a promise?”

“On the word of the King.”

“I am not asking too much?”

“You are asking nothing.”

“Louis! bring me the humming-bird to-night!”

Her eyes sparkled with glee, and his with rapture, because she had called him Louis.

A little after midnight, Mademoiselle de la Rivière sat in her boudoir, awaiting the gift and the giver. She was in her most attractive déshabille. The door opened softly, and the King came in. He bore on his palm a box of gold fretwork. The top was jewelled, and the sides were enamelled. Round the enamel danced a bevy of courtiers, painted minutely in a rustic scene. Their fashions were a hundred and fifty years old. At the sight of the box, Charlotte clapped her hands.

Louis dropped on one knee beside the settee, and offered her the box as though he were laying France in her lap. At that moment he would have done so, had she asked it. She contented herself with transferring the box from his palm to hers, and touching the spring.

“Be prudent!” he whispered, half an instant too late. Up sprang the humming-bird, gleaming in the candlelight, fluttering its wings of green and gold, turning its quivering throat of rose and blue. Out of the gilded beak leapt a fountain of song, of trills and runs and liquid piping notes. Louis stretched out his hand to smother it.

“You’ll break it, sire!” cried Charlotte, pushing him off.

“Crazy child! stop it! do not speak so loud!”

“Why not?” She answered his whispers in her usual tones. “Just listen! how delicious! I shall play it all night.”

“Mademoiselle! any passer in the corridor will hear it!”

“Why should not pleasures be shared?” asked Charlotte innocently.

“Mademoiselle! every soul in the Louvre knows my humming-bird’s song!”

“How proud I shall be then, if everyone comes to the keyhole.”

The song reached its end. The humming-bird vanished. The King drew a breath of relief. Mademoiselle de la Rivière touched the spring again.

“Good God!” cried Louis. “What are you going to do?”

“I am going to make my humming-bird play all night.”

He gripped her wrist, muttering furiously, “I forbid it!”

“You cannot forbid it without breaking the King’s word.”

“How so, mademoiselle?”

She arched her brows at him reproachfully. “Did you not make me a promise? I asked nothing of you but the right to make this sweet little bird sing whenever I pleased. And now you hint that I have asked too much.”

“There is a limit!”

“To the King’s word?” She touched the spring a third time.

“Charlotte! Little devil! Have you forgotten Madame de Maintenon?”

“I hope Madame will come to the keyhole too,” said Charlotte coolly; and as the song ceased, she touched the spring for the fourth time.

The King strode out of her room, and went to his own, summoned a servant, ordered lights and cards, and sent for some gentlemen to play with him.

They played all night. So did the humming-bird.

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*“Please, Cherry Pie! make Bella dance again!”*

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*Recitative in a Theatre:  
Mezzo and Basso-Profundo*

“Good morning, monsieur.”

“Good morning, mademoiselle.”

“You are M. Métayer, scene-painter to the Opera?”

“And you?”

“Mademoiselle de la Rivière, waiting-maid from the Court.”

“What brings you into the theatre?”

“To peep behind the scenes.”

“For frivolity?”

“For curiosity. Perhaps not frivolous.”

“Lucky for you.”

“Because?”

“I’ve no time for frivolity, I have my work to do.”

“I have seen it from the other side of the footlights.”

“What did you think of it?”

“Glamorous, M. Métayer. Sometimes a violin in the orchestra jars. Sometimes a tenor fails to reach his note. Sometimes a ballerina loses her balance. Sometimes a buffo cracks a joke that falls flat. When these things happen, I fix my eyes on your scene, which is never at fault.”

“You are fastidious, Mademoiselle de la Rivière.”

“Exceedingly so, M. Métayer. But——”

“But?”

“I make certain allowances. Violin, singer, dancer, comedian, must exhibit their art in its moment of inspiration. Inspiration is subject to accidents. When they occur in full view, the unlucky performer must suffer the world’s disapproval. But the painter’s accidents occur in the atelier. His audience need not see them unrectified. Who knows what mistakes M. Métayer made, before our eyes were ravished from afar by his grottoes and groves?”

“Well, now you behold the grottoes and groves at close quarters, what do you think of them? Are they still glamorous?”

“Not quite so glamorous. You owe something to distance, M. Métayer.”

“Pardon me, young lady. What I owe to distance was also my affair, when I painted at brush-length.”

“Yes! that perhaps makes your brushwork even more subtle. Are you a sorcerer, M. Métayer?”

“You do not say that by chance, Mademoiselle de la Rivière. You have guided our topic to an intended goal.”

“M. Métayer, you *are* a sorcerer!”

“Come to your point, young lady. What do you want?”

“To be your pupil.”

“Of painting?”

“Also of painting.”

“Have you a talent?”

“Sufficient for an excuse.”

“And what will they say at Court, if an attractive young waiting-maid dares to seclude herself regularly with a painter not past his prime?”

“Who dares, is daring; the daring care not a whit what they will say at Court.”

“Suppose the painter——”

“Who is not past his prime?”

“Asked more for his lessons than the waiting-maid was prepared to pay?”

“He could but ask.”

“And she?”

“Would see what she could afford.”

“Who makes love to Mademoiselle de la Rivière at Court?”

“Precisely one-half of it.”

“How many enjoy the result?”

“Precisely the other half. I don’t take other women’s lovers seriously.”

“Be careful then, for I am no woman’s lover, and you may have to take me seriously.”

“I am not afraid. You will make an interesting master, if *you* are not afraid.”

“You will make an interesting pupil.”

“You take me, then, for your pupil?”

“In magic?”

“Also in magic.”

“What is your first name?”

“Charlotte.”

“Charlotte, I’ll take you for pupil. You’ll pay——”

“What the lessons are worth. Must I bring materials?”

“I’ll supply everything, from paint-brush to glamour.”

“M. Métayer!”

“Well, Charlotte, what now?”

“I was wrong when I said your painting lost glamour at close quarters. Here is a fountain that only a genius could paint! You are a great painter, and a true magician!”

“And you—have an eye. A magician did paint that particular fountain, my dear, but it was not I.”

“Who was it then?”

“A young man from Valenciennes, to whom I give jobs.”

“What is the name of this jobbing genius?”

“Antoine Watteau. He imagines he is my pupil.”

“You give him lessons?”

“And bread, in return for—this fountain.”

“Then he and I will soon be fellow-pupils.”

“Of the brush only.”

“You don’t teach him magic too?”

“Watteau’s magic is not to be taught by anybody. Not even by his master. Come to-morrow.”

“Good morning, M. Métayer.”

“Good morning, Charlotte.”

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“Another! Another!”

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*Scena in an Atelier:*

*Mezzo and Basso*

She stripped him of his arts, this clever Charlotte.

Witchcraft and painting, she learned them side by side.

“You are quicker than any pupil I ever had,” he exclaimed in admiration.

“What other woman have you instructed in black magic?”

“Never mind.”

“Was she as beautiful as I am?”

“More so.”

“I didn’t suspect you were as old as Helen of Troy.”

“You think a lot of yourself, my little peacock! You should have seen the Montespan in her prime.”

“Oh, so it was the Montespan.”

“Bah! as if your knowing it mattered!” muttered Métayer.

“And what did she pay for her lessons?” asked Charlotte demurely.

“You’d like to know? I’ll tell you. She paid me with one of her hairs.”

“No more?”

“No more.”

“What did you do with the hair?”

“I hid it inside a paint-brush.”

Charlotte laughed. “I’d give the world for that paint-brush!”

“No doubt you would. I never used it.”

“Why not?”

“It was too dangerous.”

“And you, Métayer, are too mysterious. I don’t believe in your paint-brush. Let me paint with it.”

“I have destroyed it,” said Métayer darkly.

After a pause, Charlotte observed: "The Montespan could not have thought much of your lessons, if she valued them at a hair, my dear Métayer."

The elderly painter flushed and pulled open a cupboard. From its recesses he rummaged an ancient paintbox, and from under the tubes of colour produced a ring.

"Heavens!" cried Charlotte. "What a magnificent opal!"

"Worth a king's ransom, mademoiselle."

"Or a woman's damnation, monsieur. Was it the Montespan's?"

"It was the Montespan's."

"And whose, before it was hers?"

"A family heirloom, she said, of His Majesty's."

"Oh, oh!" cried Charlotte gleefully. "What fun it would be to go to Court with it on!"

"You propose that I should part with my opal for nothing?"

"What did the Montespan part with it for, I wonder? You told me she paid you nothing but a hair."

"For my lessons in witchcraft."

"And this opal was for——?"

"Time is passing. Get on with your brush."

She applied herself to the fan she was painting. She was an adept in executing likenesses, flowers, and fanciful scenes in miniature. She never chose to work on a broad scale, leaving her master to his vast theatrical canvases, his big wooden panels, while she painted only on chicken-skin, china, or silk. Her results were so deft that when the court ladies observed: "It is evident why she frequents Métayer's atelier!" the gentlemen thought it was not quite so evident. Perhaps her reason was no excuse, but the truth. Perhaps she was merely cultivating her gift. For had the young lady not played with and baffled them all? Even the King! The morning a chambermaid started the rumour of His Majesty's humming-bird heard in La Rivière's apartment, a yawning footman had told the tale of the King's all-night sitting at cards. A dozen aristocrats stood witness to that. Charlotte produced no witness, for or against. She went about her duties with her cool supercilious smile; Louis attended to his in a very glum humour. The repulse was taken for granted.

How then, and why then, should this enigmatic young person succumb to a middle-aged scene-painter out of the theatre? Her visits to him were perhaps for the given purpose. When she began to present her friends with patch-boxes, cups, plates, fans, and miniatures, executed by herself to admiration, her purpose ceased to be doubted. As usual, Charlotte achieved it without paying the price.

One day a superb opal ring was remarked on her finger. Comment was rife. How came Mademoiselle de la Rivière by such an opal? "A family heirloom,"

said Mademoiselle demurely. The King changed colour. Mademoiselle left unsaid whose family.

It was only Métayer, the dealer in magic, who paid. He yielded his secrets, one after another, to his pupil, and finally yielded himself. In less than a year, Charlotte was his destruction. His vision was blurred when he had to design a set, his right hand trembled, and the scene was blemished. After he left the atelier, Watteau stayed on, and more than rectified his master's accidents. The opera scenes, in consequence, increased in beauty, and Métayer's fame was enhanced. Nobody knew of the insignificant young man from Valenciennes, to whom Métayer was throwing jobs for a living. Watteau had no standing in the theatre. Only the contemptuous young aristocrat from Auvergne, who sometimes worked in the atelier when he did, knew that a sickly, meanly-dressed provincial enchanted thousands of bright eyes every night.

It was then a shock to the theatre when Métayer, in the plenitude of his achievements, sent in his resignation; and it deprived Watteau of his livelihood. If Charlotte de la Rivière had only consented——

But the gentlemen of the Court were in the right of it, and it was Métayer who paid.

“Charlotte! for the last time, I entreat you!”

“Have you kept count, Métayer, of your final entreaties? How many does this make?”

“I curse the day when I took you for my pupil!”

“Magicians should be able to curse to effect.”

“You have filched my potency.”

“Luckily, or I should not be immune. I haven't been unobservant. It has amused me to counter sundry efforts of yours. Last week you tried to deprive me of my beauty. Look in my eyes, my master. Did you succeed? In five minutes you are going to invite me to drink chocolate with you, from these very pretty cups of pink and gold. The chocolate will be poured out of that little pot boiling on the fire, quite equally divided between you and me. You will sip your cup carelessly, oh so careful not to watch me sipping mine! Whether mine will contain poison or a love-philtre I do not know—nor shall I ever know.”

“You do not love me?”

“Heavens! have I ever pretended to?”

“Pretend to now!”

“Certainly, if you like,” said she surprisingly.

“Charlotte!”

“But not, of course, for nothing.”

“I have given you all.”

“Oh no, Métayer, not quite.”

"I have given you my opal."

"You had a kiss for it. It wasn't quite worth damnation."

"I have given you my knowledge of colour and shape, I have given you my technique, I have given you my most unnatural secrets, I have given you my health, my sleep, and my hopes. You have given me nothing, not even gratitude. What do you want of me now?"

"A paint-brush," said she.

Métayer glared at her, and flung in a frenzy his budget of brushes at her. "Take them all, all, all!" he cried. "But don't take me in by pretending that you will damn yourself for these hogshairs."

Charlotte picked them up, and examined them swiftly. "For none of these but for one other I give you my bond I will."

"What other?"

"The one that hides the hair of the dog that bit you."

"Silence, Charlotte!"

"And you once told me you were no woman's lover! You were mad for the Montespan, were you not, Métayer?"

"Silence!"

"Who, when she had done with you, dismissed you with—a hair."

"Be silent, be silent."

"A hair you hid in a brush which you charged with a spell. But you had not the courage to paint with it, or the heart to destroy it."

"Will you be silent?"

"Or else too much heart to."

He groaned.

"Métayer, you are a third-rate painter and a second-rate sorcerer. Magicians should divest themselves of their hearts."

Métayer glowered.

"Because you forget to, I have the whip hand of you. So had the Montespan. And because of that, I know you have lied to me."

"When?"

"When you told me the brush was destroyed. Confess now! is it destroyed?"

"No."

A gleam of triumph passed over her finely-cut features. "Very well! for that paint-brush I will pretend to love you."

"Why?" he asked hoarsely.

"Because it has powers I want to test," said she.

"Charlotte," he stammered, "wait here a little while."

"Where are you going?"

"To fetch the brush."

“Good. Go.”

He headed so fast for a mean street in the neighbourhood, that her following patter never fell on his ear. But when he laid his hand on a shabby door, she laid hers on his arm.

“I told you to wait for me!”

“I preferred to follow. This isn’t your house. Who lives here?”

“Watteau.”

“Watteau!” A mischievous smile played over her face. “Ah! so it is Watteau who has the paint-brush! Very well. Now it’s your turn to wait for me.”

“Where are you going?”

“Upstairs, to Watteau, Métayer. If I *must* pay for the brush—Antoine is nearer my age than you.”

“Devil!” he shouted.

She laughed, pushed open the door, and ran up the stairs.

---

“*Just one more!*”

---

*Duet in a Garret:  
Mezzo and Alto*

“Good evening, Antoine.”

“Please don’t stand in the light.—Oh, it is you, Mlle de la Rivière. Excuse me for being abrupt. But don’t stand in the light. There isn’t enough to go round.”

“What are you painting?”

“That’s my affair. Must you disturb me?”

“*Can* I disturb you, Antoine?”

“Yes, very much, as long as you eat up the light.”

“You don’t look as though you eat up anything. I’ve often wondered what you exist on, Watteau. This is the first time I have seen where you live. What a very miserable attic.”

“The light isn’t bad—if only you’d get out of it.”

“Bah! the light’s almost gone. You will ruin your eyes.”

“Perhaps.”

“Lay down your brushes. That’s better. What sort do you work with?”

“Mademoiselle, kindly leave my brushes alone.”

“This one? or this one?”

“Be good enough not to meddle!”

“Oh, hasn’t this one a hair on it? No, after all. Are these *all* your brushes?”

“There are some more about, somewhere or other.”

“Antoine, I want you to give me your paint-brushes.”

“You want me to——Mademoiselle de la Rivière, have you gone mad?”

“What a lot of breath you waste, dear fellow-student. My name is Charlotte.”

“Is it?”

“We’ve worked more or less together for a year—and you never knew my name was Charlotte?”

“No.”

“Really, Antoine!”

“No, really, mademoiselle.”

“Charlotte.”

“It is a pity they gave you that name.”

“And why?”

“It is a name I happen to dislike.”

“Then I hope you don’t think it fits me when you look at me.”

“No, it does not seem beautiful enough.”

“My dear little Antoine!”

“I am not your dear little Antoine, mademoiselle, because I happen to think you are beautiful. Heavens! where would one be in such a case? There are dozens of beautiful girls in Valenciennes, there are hundreds in Paris, and in France there are thousands. One wouldn’t have time.”

“Never mind the dozens, and hundreds, and thousands. Have time for me.”

“I’ve some drawings to do.”

“You can’t do them to-night. I will stay with you all night for your paint-brushes.”

“They are my means.”

“I’ll give you new ones, better ones, Antoine. I’ll give you myself for one of your paint-brushes. But, of course, you must let me choose it. It is dark, Antoine, the stars are filling the skylight. There’s a black-and-silver pattern on the floor. Did I say this attic was wretched? It is enchanted. It is made for whispering in, it is made for silence. Look! I lie down in the black-and-silver pattern, I am lying on the bed of night and the moon. Come, Antoine!——

“Oh, you are leaning down! you are lifting me up! Antoine, Antoine, you are carrying me to—the door! My God, you are stupid! stupider than I thought. You don’t know much about love, fellow-student, do you? You’ll never succeed in life, never, I tell you! He can’t succeed who pushes love through the door!”

“Get out of my light, Mademoiselle de la Rivière.”

---

Next day, Métayer had disappeared from Paris.

Next day, Watteau began to starve again.

Next day, in a fit of fury, Charlotte de la Rivière agreed to become the Comtesse de Marignan-Croissy. The Count chanced to be the first man she encountered that morning. He was stupefied.

---

“Again! Oh, make the little bird sing again!”

“Time to go home,” said Cherry Pie to the children.

Protesting and pleading, they were bundled into their jackets by my Aunt, while Bella flitted about, extinguishing candles, setting things straight, humming to herself, and dancing still. Once she hovered near my chair, and paused.

“What are you thinking of, you little mouse?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

It was well on into February before I returned to Chalkstones. Aunt Charlotte took me back to Kent herself. I said goodbye to Madam Lambert with regret, and to Bella with tears, and felt I was leaving a charmed life behind me. My box was stuffed with trifles of the sort that become a child's treasures, and linger on into middle life and old age, charged with associations. My Aunt had added many odd and pretty things to my Christmas haul, but though they would give me secret joys in days to come at home, they were of small comfort to me when the cab was standing at the door of the Bric-à-Brac shop, and I was kissing the kittens for the last time, before turning to climb miserably into my seat.

When I was ensconced, waiting for my Aunt to finish doing half-a-dozen last things at once, Bella popped out of the shop, put her head through the cab-window, and cried, "Summer's coming!"

"Not for ever so long," I choked.

"Ever-so-long is never-so-long!" said Bella. "It comes again at last, and so will you."

"How do you know?"

"Cherry Pie says so."

"Oh."

"Then we'll have fun. Not skating, summer fun."

"What sort?"

"Blind-man's-buff in the garden."

"Like on Watteau's fan? Will you be there, though?"

"Why not, Lisette?"

"You might have made up your mind, and gone away you don't know where with Lord Frederick."

Bella reflected. "Yes, so I might. Shall I promise not to?"

"Do, do, do!"

"I'd better not, though. I mightn't keep my promise, Lisette. That is the worst of being fickle."

"What's fickle?"

"Delighting in more than one at a time."

"More than one what?"

"Never mind, never mind. But listen to this, Lisette. As long as I have my butterfly, I won't marry Frederick."

"Do you mean the sparkly butterfly in your fairy dress?"

"That is the one."

“Oh, keep it *very* safe!” I implored.

Bella gave a little laugh, an April laugh, light as a feather, made up of a sigh and a smile. But all she said was, “Have you stopped crying?”

“I think so.”

“Not quite sure? Now listen, I am going to sing to you, and you must sing it with me, because nobody can cry and sing at the same time.”

She began to hum the tune I had heard her singing on the day of my arrival. It went like this—yes, I remember it still:



I sang it over with her. “Oh Lisette, your lovely little voice! Why haven’t I made you sing and sing and sing to me? When you come back, I will make you sing all night.”

We went over the tune two or three times.

“Do you know it now, Lisette?”

“Yes, but what——”

“Bless me, we’ll be late!” cried Aunt Charlotte, trotting out of the shop with her bonnet-strings untied, a kitten hanging on to a long tape that trailed below her skirt, and chocolate-drops bursting through the corner of a paper bag. “London Bridge, double-quick!” she cried to the cabby, tumbled in beside me, and handed the kitten through the window to Bella. “Take Marigold! look after Maman for me!”

“What are the words?” I shouted.

“Git up!” bawled the cabby.

“Naughty pets! Yes, Cherry Pie! I’ve forgotten them, Lisette!”

The hack “got up,” and ambled away at its own idea of double-quick to London Bridge Station, and the porters, and the engines, and the smoke in the tunnels.

---

February was warm, and spring was sending early hints of herself to the hedges. In a day or two I ceased to hanker for the delights I had left behind me, as I rediscovered my white violets and budding primroses in Mannington Park. I had with me, for playmate, my Christmas doll. Of course I had called her Bella—Dollabella (it was Rosabella’s own distinction)—and she formed the strongest link between me and Hounsbury. Dolls were persons to me. While I was showing her my favourite haunts, I felt I was taking Bella herself round the garden, byre, and orchard, into the smithy and the carpenter’s. I kept the woods of Mannington for the best and last. I propped Dollabella on the bole of an oak while I crouched digging my fingers into the loose rich leaf-mould, to get at violet and primrose roots. Presently a voice above me said, “Make the most of it, Liz! This is the last time I can let you come primrosing here.”

I looked up at the stocky shape of my friend, Joe Gander. “Why?” I asked.

The keeper shook his head. “Didn’t your ma tell you Mannington’s been took?”

“Who took it?”

“Mr. Lewis Sonnenschein.”

“Is he going to live there?”

“He *is* there.”

“Is he nice?”

“He’s rich.”

“Can’t I come here for bluebells neither?”

“Mr. Sonnenschein don’t like little girls in his woods.”

“He’s *not* nice!” I said with conviction.

“He’s master now. He’s got the right to say. Anyways, as to some things. Others has to be proven.”

“What?”

“Right o’ way through Longmead.”

Longmead was the best field for cowslips, also for mushrooms. I asked anxiously, “Can’t I go in Longmead too any more?”

“Maybe you can,” said Joe Gander cautiously, “but don’t you say I said so. You’d better not come here, though. Plenty more primroses in Kent, Liz, see?”

“There’s none as good as these ones,” I pouted.

I went home feeling life was badly spoiled. In childhood changes are all to the good, or all to the bad. I had been robbed of something by Mr. Sonnenschein. At dinner I fiddled discontentedly with my food, not because I was off my appetite, but because I wanted “them” to see that something was

amiss. My Mother said sharply, "Don't mess your plate about, eat it right up like a good little girl. What's the matter with you?"

"I don't like Mr. Lewis Sunshine," I mumbled.

"That's it, is it?" said my Mother. "What do you know about Mr. Sonnenschein, then?"

"He's taken Mannington, and I can't go in the Park, and I don't like him."

"Neither do I," said my Father, from his end of the table.

"And I can't go in Longmead, Joe says," I grieved.

"Yes, you can, by George!" said my Father.

"Now, now, John!" said my Mother.

"Now-now yourself, my dear. If Mr. Levi Sonnenschein supposes he can keep an honest Englishman out of Longmead because he happens to own a diamond-field in South Africa, he's damwell mistaken!"

"Language, John!"

"A diamond-field, dad?"

"Yes, Miss Saucer-Eyes, a diamond-field. All the blades of grass are tipped with little diamonds, and all the hazel-bushes grow diamonds as big as nuts."

"Don't stuff the child's mind with nonsense, she's bad enough as it is. Your father's joking, Lizzie. Mr. Sonnenschein's diamonds are all underground, and now eat up your meat like a good child, or you shan't have any pudding."

But after dinner I lingered by my Father's chair till my Mother had left the room; and then I asked, "Can I *really* go in Longmead then, dad?"

"Certainly," he said curtly. I turned away with relief. As I left the room, he called after me, "But if you do, mind you keep to the footpath."

---

It was not, however, until cowslip time that I and Dollabella went to Longmead. There wasn't much in it for me till then. We had a rainy March, and I played about the house. Sometimes I stood making a flat button of my nose against the window-pane, wondering when the sky would stop weeping over the earth. The notion brought something else to my mind, and I ran to my treasure-box, and got out the fan Old Madam had given me at Christmas. I fluttered it at the window and the sequins out-glinted the drops clinging to the other side. "The queen is crying, crying," I said softly, and saw on the glass, between the sparkle of rain and the sparkle of sequins, a small proud face peep out. A hat, like the shepherdess-hat in the lace of my fan, was tilted on its puffs of hair, and its cheeks were bedewed with tears that ran out of its eyes—yet its look was still proud. When I closed the fan, it faded away.

Then I had chickenpox, and a wasted April.

One bright May morning I woke up thinking of cowslips and cowslip-balls. I waited till my Mother was busy in the dairy, and then, with Bella under my

arm, I trotted off to the big sunny meadow, which stretched between two roads with a stile at either end. The footpath saved the natives a good mile-and-a-half, and was a particularly popular short-cut in the mushroom months. But I preferred the cowslips. Remembering my Father's warning not to stray from the path, I gathered a pinaforefull along the edges, and sat down on the farther stile to make my ball. The sun was not good for Bella's waxen complexion, so I put her under my pinny.

"Vell, liddle girl, and don't you know you're trespassing?"

The voice was too oily to be as pleasant as it pretended. I looked up into the face of Mr. Sunshine (who else could it be?) and shook my head.

"You don't, eh? Vell, you are trespassing, and don't you know vot is done to liddle girls who come trespassing?"

"I haven't, I've come cowslipping," I said.

Mr. Sunshine smiled, a smile of gold and ivory. I had never before seen so much gold in anybody's mouth, and it did not improve the smile. It made me want to run away at once, but I couldn't without spilling my pinafore.

"Cowslipping is trespassing in Longmead," explained Mr. Sunshine smoothly. "Have you a fader and a moder, liddle girl?"

"Yes."

"And hasn't your moder told you that you can't pick cowslips in Longmead now, because they are *my* cowslips, and that is stealing! And hasn't your fader told you you can't walk on the footpath, because it is *my* footpath, and that is trespassing!"

I gathered my pinafore-corners carefully, and prepared for flight. "Daddy said I *could*."

"Oh!" Mr. Sunshine did not smile any more, he snarled. "Daddy said you *could*, did he? And you did. I'm afraid I shall have to make an example of you, liddle girl!"

I was struck cold. To be Made an Example Of by Mr. Sunshine seemed to me the worst possible fate for anybody. My teeth chattered. Mr. Sunshine loomed over me like an Ogre. His eyebrows were very black, and his chins—he had two—were very blue.

"Vot's your name?" he asked sharply.

"Lizzie Pye."

"Pye. Aha. You live at Chalkstones."

I nodded.

"And John Pye is your fader."

I nodded again.

"Then go home and tell your fader, vid my compliments, that if he sends his liddle girl stealing and trespassing in Longmead again, *I'll-hound-him-out-of-his-house!*"

I started up, he said it in such an ugly way. There was something about Mr. Sunshine that made you feel he could do what he said he would. Personal force was his gift. It had put him where he was, and kept him there. I had a vision of myself and my parents driven out of our home, to beg our way in rags along the road. Oh no, I wouldn't come through Longmead ever again. I made a hasty effort to clamber over the stile, but I shook so that I let go of my pinafore; my cowslips fell to the ground, and my doll among them.

Mr. Sunshine stooped before I could retrieve her. "Anoder trespasser, eh?"

I stayed in my flight. I couldn't abandon Dollabella, I couldn't bear to see his fat hands fumbling her. I held out mine, hanging my head.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Sunshine. The threat in his voice was drowned in oil again. "And is this your dolly?"

"Yes."

"Vot a very pretty dolly, to be sure. Vere did you get it?"

"Off the Christmas-tree."

"And did your mammy dress this very pretty dolly for you?"

"No."

"Who did then?"

I did not know if Aunt Charlotte had or not. Without answering, I held out an entreating hand again.

"Oh no, she's not your dolly now, she's mine. Suppose I keep her as a punishment for stealing my cowslips? Eh?"

"No, *no*, NO!" I screamed. For a moment I stopped being afraid of him, the sight of my darling in his power was too much for me. "Give her to me! Give Bella back to me!"

"Bella!"

Mr. Sunshine looked at me narrowly. His eyes were like pigs' eyes. Suddenly the gold-and-ivory grin split his face again. "Vot a silly liddle girl, to be sure! Vot a silly girl! Here's your dolly. All liddle girls must take a bit of tease. There!"

I clutched Dollabella to my heart, and mounted the stile.

"You've left your cowslips," said Mr. Sunshine amiably.

"They're yours," I whispered.

"Yes, liddle girl, they are mine, but *you* may have them. *You* may come and pick them whenever you like. It isn't a precedent, mind. You must tell everybody that nobody but you may come into Longmead, but I've given you leave, because we are such great friends. Eh, Lizzie? Hold out your pinny."

He filled it with the bruised and muddy cowslips, and lifted me over the stile. I scampered away as fast as my legs would carry me, letting my poor flowers tumble where they would. I did not want them. Mr. Sunshine's fingers had spoiled them for me, the fat diamonded fingers that had even spoiled

Dollabella while they touched her.

---

I kept mum about my adventure at home, and nothing on earth would have induced me to go again into Longmead or Mannington Park. It was not merely fear of offending Mr. Sunshine, who had the power to hound us out of Chalkstones. (I dreamed of him doing it.) Instinct told me that it would be worse to be friends with him, than enemies. I shivered at the thought of him, and then avoided him in thought and fact. I did not speak of him. I shut him out.

No wonder my Mother was astonished when the postman brought a gilt-edged envelope for me, which she herself opened at the breakfast-table.

“Well, I never!” she exclaimed, “just listen to this!” She read aloud impressively, “Mr. Lewis Sonnenschein requests the pleasure of Miss Lizzie and Miss Bella Pye’s Company at Tea, on Saturday, May the Twelfth, at Four O’Clock.”

“*What’s that?*” ejaculated my Father, making a long arm across the toast-rack.

“One of his own gold-printed invitation-cards,” said my Mother, yielding it, “with Lizzie’s name written in in violet ink.”

“Faugh!” said my Father. “Gilt and violet! He’s no gentleman.”

My Mother looked nettled. “That needn’t be against him.”

My Father flapped his hand intolerantly.

“We can’t *all* be gentry,” said my Mother.

“Don’t be touchy, my dear. Your dad was a lord compared with this fellow.”

“He can’t help his birth.”

“He’s helped himself ever since,” chuckled my Father.

“Well, I say bygones should be bygones. Am I right? After all, Mannington is the best house in the neighbourhood.”

“I see. You’d like Liz to be seen going there. Come here, Liz.” My Father set me on his knee. “How would you like to go to tea with Mr. Gilt-Edged Sonnenschein? He’ll pour the tea out of a gold teapot, and you’ll drink out of a gold cup, and eat off a gold plate. After tea you’ll play Beggar-my-Neighbour. It’s Mr. Levi Sonnenschein’s favourite game.”

“Don’t talk rubbish!” said my Mother. “I daresay Lizzie’d have a very nice time.”

“Let the child speak for herself. What d’ye say, Liz?”

“I don’t want to go,” I whispered.

“Really!” exclaimed my Mother.

“And I don’t want her to,” said my Father abruptly. “And you’ll write this morning and decline with thanks.”

My Mother looked annoyed. "I dare say you're right," she said. And she wrote the letter.

And there, I hoped it would end.

But it did not, quite. One day, when I was buying licorice shoe-strings in the post office, I heard the tinkle and rattle of Mr. Sunshine's phaeton. It stopped outside, and he came in to send a telegram. I made myself as little as I could, but he saw me out of the corner of his eye, and when he had filled in the form gave me his attention, while Miss Humphreys gave hers to the wire.

"Liddle Lizzie Pye. Good morning, my dear. Why wouldn't you come to tea with me, eh? Did you think it would disagree with your pretty dolly? Where is your pretty dolly?"

"At home," I murmured, wishing Mrs. Humphreys would hurry up with my farthing change. She had gone into the back parlour to look for one.

"And how is your pretty dolly, eh?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"Quite well, thank you. You never told me who dressed her for you, did you?"

I looked Mr. Sunshine in the eye, and lied to him. "Nobody did. She came out of a toyshop." I hadn't a notion I was going to say it, I hadn't a notion why I *had* to say it; but if Mr. Sunshine wanted to know, as much as that, who had dressed Dollabella, I wasn't going to tell him, that was all. He looked nonplussed, and I felt in some obscure way I had beaten him. "Out of a toyshop, eh?" he repeated thoughtfully. Then Miss Humphreys said, "That will be one-and-fourpence-ha'penny, sir," and Mrs. Humphreys came out of the back parlour with my farthing.

But now I loitered, for if I went out first Mr. Sunshine might come after me. I felt convinced he wanted to ask, *What* toyshop? I fingered the farthing, and began to reconsider the sweet-bottles. Mr. Sunshine glanced at me. "Look sharp about that telegram," he said, and went out. His phaeton rattled and tinkled up the street.

Nell Humphreys said, "Come over here, ma," and Mrs. Humphreys went and looked over her shoulder. "Doesn't count the cost, does he?" was her comment.

"It's Gatti's again, ma."

"Half-past eleven. That'll be another supper," said Mrs. Humphreys.

"It's another name, too, ma. Miss Flossie Darrell. The last one was Tottie Barnes. But it's the same theatre, look, The *Galar*, Stage Door, the Strand, London, West-Centre. And signed Louie!"

"They say he's got an interest in the *Galar*," said Mrs. Humphreys.

"Well, I should rather think he *has*," sniffed her daughter.

"Send it off, and don't think so much about it.—Now then, Lizzie, haven't

you made up your mind yet?”

---

In June came a note from Aunt Charlotte. “Do spare us Lisette for a little holiday. It’s Somebody’s Jour de Fête on Midsummer Day.”

“What’s a Judy Fate, Mama?”

My Father answered for her. “Somebody’s birthday.”

“Old Madam’s, I expect,” said my Mother. “Charlotte’s comes in October.”

About *this* invitation I had no doubts whatever. I began embroidering a butterfly-penwiper for Old Madam, with pink and blue wings and a fat yellow body. The markings were pricked out in white on dark red felt, and it was stiff work pushing the needle in and out. The floss silk was apt to catch, and the result was fluffy. I was dissatisfied with it when it was done. Meanwhile my Mother finished my new sunbonnet, ran up two gingham frocks on her sewing-machine, and packed my little box. At the last moment, after it was strapped, she undid it again to lay among the soft things some small parcels of tissue-paper.

“Is it presents for them?” I asked.

“No, child, it’s just the pieces of that old cup your Aunt told me she’d get riveted next time we came. Leave them alone!” she cried with sudden sharpness, “*and stop humming that song!*”

I stared at her. “It’s pretty, don’t you like it? Bella taught it me.”

“Oh, if it was *taught* you!” said my Mother.

“Yes.” And I began to sing it softly over again.

“Finette ma mie,  
Oiselle jolie,  
Chante moi d’amour  
De nuit et de jour.  
Même quand la vie  
Dans l’ombre s’enfuit,  
De jour et de nuit,  
Chante moi d’amour,  
Finette ma mie.”

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the central text.

PART  
TWO

A MASQUE  
FOR  
THE KING

We took an early train on Midsummer Eve, so that my Mother could return to Kent the same day. I was beside myself with excitement, which I managed to suppress till we reached Hounsbury. As soon as my Mother had gone up to the attic, to unpack and settle my things before a quick cup of tea, I flew out-of-doors to find Bella. The garden was blue and white and pink; tall lupins, columbines, and love-in-a-mist, clusters of roses, beds of frilly pinks. I found Bella hiding fairy lamps among the flowers.

“Lisette, my sweet!”

“Oo, Bella!—what are you doing?”

“You aren’t supposed to see.”

“Are they going to be lighted?”

“Not till to-morrow.”

“For Madam’s birthday?”

“No, mine. I shall be twenty. Out of my teens. So old! Would you like to put some of the lamps?”

I hid a lamp under a big white rose. “Is there going to be a tea-party?”

“A supper-party.”

“Who’s coming to it?”

“The Girls.”

“What girls?”

“Friends of mine,” said Bella carelessly. “Cherry Pie told me to ask who I liked, and she’s asked who *she* likes.”

“Who has she asked?”

“I don’t know. It’s to be a surprise. Like these lamps. Do you see that wire frame on the top of the arbour?”

“It looks like the shape of a heart,” I said.

“Cherry Pie made it. She’s going to hang pink lamps all over it.”

“How pretty!”

“I think she’s got something up her sleeve,” said Bella. “Hark! she’s calling. Come along, and don’t say what you’ve seen.”

“Where are the kittens?”

“They’re not. They’re little cats. Tibby’s going to have some new ones soon.”

My Mother was blowing on her saucer. On the tablecloth lay the fragments of the chocolate-cup, and she was saying, “Don’t bother if it’s going to cost a lot. If there hadn’t been so many pieces I’d have given them a touch of glue myself.”

“Glue!” Aunt Charlotte shuddered, unwrapping the bits tenderly. “Sacrilege!” She laid the fine china out on the tablecloth. “Dear me, I’d forgotten what a pretty thing it was. Is it all here? I’ve a little man up my sleeve who’s a wonder at this job, when I can get hold of him. If none of the

edges are chipped, you'll never know it happened."

"I must catch that bus," said my Mother. She drank off her saucer. "Say goodbye to Madam for me, I won't run up again. Goodbye, Miss——" She glanced at Bella, and paused, pointedly.

"Bella," said Bella.

"You *have* another name, I suppose," said my Mother, with a slightly acid smile.

"Dear knows," said Bella lightly.

"Goodbye, Lizzie. Try not to be a nuisance to your Aunt." My Mother kissed me, and went; Aunt Charlotte walked with her to the omnibus. Bella and I, left alone with the broken cup, began to piece it together.

"She doesn't like me," said Bella.

"Oh no," I said awkwardly, wondering if I ought to have said "Oh yes."

"She doesn't," repeated Bella, "but there, you can't be everybody's favourite, can you? Where's the rest of this rose?"

I searched for it. I was grateful to the cup; its breakage had brought me to Hounsbury. But I had never really looked at it before. It had been relegated to the odd bits in the china-closet before I was born. My Mother's taste in parlour ornaments ran to fluted ruby glass with white-glass leaves, or biscuit-coloured vases daubed with pansies. I don't know if it dawned on me at the time that my Mother didn't like the very prettiest things; Bella for instance. I handled the fragments as carefully as I could; some were of fine blue glaze, some were exquisitely painted with flowers. The puzzle was not a hard one; I found the right bits quickly, because although the cup was unfamiliar, I knew I had seen the painting on it elsewhere.

"Yes," I said triumphantly, "it *is*!"

"What is?" asked Bella.

"It is the picture in the little frame—the very same flowers, Bella!"

"The oval frame with the posy, do you mean?"

"Oh, I do hope it isn't sold!" I cried.

"It's one of the things Cherry Pie will never sell. I'll see if I can find it."

She went into the shop, and soon returned holding the jewelled miniature frame, with the shepherdess-hat on top. "Here it is, Lisette. You are quite right. It's not only the same posy, it's the same cup!"

Yes, so it was. Whoever had executed that oval painting had used this very chocolate-cup for a model. There was the dark blue glaze, the two delicate handles, the lid topped with a strawberry, and there on the face of the pictured mug was a perfect miniature of the flowers on our broken fragments. The artist must have used the finest of brushes, and held it in the most delicate control.

While we were comparing the two, Aunt Charlotte came back. She took it all in at a glance. "Now isn't that *interesting*!" she exclaimed.

“It’s funny, Aunt, isn’t it?”

“Not when you come to think of it, dear heart. After all, both of these things came out of our Château. Somebody there must have had a fancy to copy the cup. No, what puzzles *me*, and always has, is not why they copied the cup, but why they put the copy in a frame fit for a queen.”

“Or a prince,” said Bella.

I began to laugh slyly, though I didn’t know why. “Bury the King’s Son under a patch!” I said softly.

“What king’s son, little thing?”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

I noticed Aunt Charlotte’s quick look at me, and away. She began to wrap up the broken china in tissue-paper, saying lightly, “Put the picture back where you found it, Bella—or no! take it up to Maman’s cabinet, and ask her to lend us her Humming-Bird, in honour of Lisette’s coming. I know she’s dying to hear it sing again, aren’t you?”

“Oh, yes, please!”

I was allowed to play with the little box all the evening; but if she thought the Humming-Bird lured me off dangerous ground, Aunt Charlotte was much less observant than usual. . . .

## A MASQUE FOR THE KING

SCENE I: *Watteau,*  
*Comte de Caylus,*  
*later The Landlady.*

One summer evening, in the second decade of the Eighteenth Century, Antoine Watteau, in his wretched garret by Pont Nôtre-Dame, was putting the last touches to a little picture. There was a knock at the door, to which he did not reply; so intent was he upon his execution, so absorbed in that condition of the artist—utter forgetfulness or intense awareness—which is either his heaven or his hell: which he could hardly say, even when he emerges from it, and looking on his work beholds the result. The knock was not repeated; but the door was opened quietly, and a gentleman entered, as elegant as Watteau was shabby, as careful in his appointments as Watteau was negligent. He came and stood behind the painter, watching for a few moments the unerring hand that held the brush.

The painter paused, considering his work, and the gentleman spoke.

“A little masterpiece, Watteau. Is it completed?”

“I have just made the last stroke, M. le Comte. I think.”

“You think?” The Comte de Caylus, who was Watteau’s one influential admirer, laughed; then fell to contemplation of the tiny canvas, whereon a young man in rose and blue satin stepped alone, in an attitude of detached perfection: the flower’s perfection, which is its sole reason for being. Ask not the rose to be concerned with the sorrows, or even with the pleasures, of existence. “Behold me!” the young exquisite seemed to say. “Or behold me not. I walk alone. Sighs cannot conquer or praise attract me. Love cannot move, or life affect me. Ladies, delight in me—but keep your distance!”

The Count asked, “Does the artist not *know*, Watteau, when he has made the last stroke?”

“Oh yes, the artist knows.” Watteau laid down his palette. “It is we others who hesitate, and make one stroke too few or one too many.”

“Which was the last stroke?” asked the Count.

“I have already forgotten.”

“You are right. No stroke there can be called either the first or the last. The picture is born complete. What shall you call it?”

Watteau shrugged his shoulders. “‘L’Indifférent’?”

“I want a pendant for ‘Finette,’ ” said the Count. “I’ll buy it.”

“Let me give it to you.”

“Give away this triumph fresh from your brush! It is you who should be called the Indifferent. Be less neglectful of your affairs, Watteau.”

“At the worst they will land me in the Hospital, M. le Comte. Nobody is refused admittance there.”

“Until then,” said De Caylus, “you are sometimes hungry, I suppose. I’ll give you three thousand livres for this picture.”

“It is too much.”

“What do you ask?”

“The price of half-a-wig.”

“Do you require half-a-wig?”

“Last week I required a whole wig. I had been told that my old one was no longer disgraceful, but comic. The wig-maker restored my dignity for a couple of pictures. By that reckoning, one picture is worth half-a-wig.”

De Caylus laughed, but his laughter was tinged with impatience. He was unsympathetic to the painter’s negligence of his own interests. When genius cannot be persuaded that it is worth while to exploit itself, it is placed beyond the reach of those who would exploit it. Not that the Comte de Caylus was precisely one of these; he appreciated, if he did not fully understand, the young man’s gifts, and had a genuine desire to further his fortunes. But pushing a mule that won’t walk is heavy work. Knitting his brows, the Count attacked Watteau with a direct question.

“Are you quite indifferent to fortune, Watteau?”

“Yes.”

“And to fame?”

“Yes.”

“And to love?”

Antoine Watteau began to clean his brushes.

“And to love?” repeated De Caylus.

“Yes.”

“*And to love?*”

“How dare I not be indifferent to love?” said Watteau.

De Caylus clapped his friend upon the shoulder. “Come, what is this bee in your bonnet? Will you plead that you are poor, obscure, and less than six foot high? My friend, it is not unknown in the world’s history for rich women to choose poor men, great ladies to choose obscure men, and beautiful girls to choose ugly men, for their lovers. And do you know why? Because poor, obscure, and ugly though they were, they possessed for their mistresses the unique merit of not being a woman. It is a merit you also happen to exhibit.”

“M. le Comte,” said Watteau, “if I shrink from love it is not because I am either poor, obscure, or insignificant. It is because I have only a few years to offer to the woman who would condescend to love me. I shall not complete another decade.”

“You are the *Malade Imaginaire*, my friend. But granting you’re right, a woman in love will take her man, even at the risk of losing him in a decade. Possibly, even because of it.”

“She?” Watteau stared. “It is *I* would take the risk! I can’t afford to give my last ten years to a woman. Why, I have hardly begun to paint. Oh my God, when I think of the lifetime of pictures I must press into these few years!”

“Ah, at last!” cried De Caylus. “You are not indifferent to painting.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the painter.

“Yet you squander your pictures on wig-makers——”

“I needed the wig——”

“I should like to know who told you so——”

“—and once it is finished——”

“—and induced you to take advice——”

“—I am indifferent to the picture. Take this. I don’t want it. I am tired of it already.”

“Is there anything, strange creature, you never tire of?”

“My next picture.”

“But the next picture,” said De Caylus, “is only a dream.”

“Yes,” said Watteau, “the next picture is always a dream.”

At this moment the door was banged open, and Watteau’s landlady cluttered in with a tray bearing a steaming bowl, and a hunk of coarse bread.

“Your soup!” said the woman, and slapped the tray down on the table.

“Curse the soup!” said Watteau.

“There’s a thing to say!” The creature set her hands upon her hips, and wagged her bulk at her lodger. “The man who curses good soup doesn’t deserve it, M. Watteau, no, nor the man who doesn’t pay for it, neither.”

“Take it away,” said Watteau angrily, “and take yourself away. Cannot you see I have a visitor?”

“I should like him better,” grumbled the woman, “if he was a customer.” However, she flounced out of the room, after a glance at the cut of the visitor’s coat. De Caylus took out his purse and laid some gold pieces on the table.

“Send me your ‘Indifferent’ when he is dry,” said he; then, laying his hand on Watteau’s shoulder, “Young man, you fritter your genius. Leave this soup-making harpy, change this wretched lodging of yours.”

Watteau glanced around the peeling walls, the poor and meagre furniture, the stains on floor and ceiling, of which he was generally unaware. “The light isn’t bad,” he remarked.

“You can dream here?”

“One can dream anywhere.”

“No better on bare boards than on a Persian carpet.”

“I can’t afford a Persian carpet.”

“But you will soon, I hope, be able to afford something better than bare boards,” said the Count. “Attend to me, Watteau. I am petitioning the King for a pension for you.”

“For me?” repeated Watteau in astonishment. “But I am not even a member of the Academy. The King has never heard of me.”

“It would make little difference if he had. The King has no longer a memory. He forgets. He fades. He dodders. Louis the Glorious is extinguished before he is extinct. He should have died in his magnificence.”

“Yes,” murmured Watteau; “to die in the plenitude of one’s powers. It is, after all, the fate most to be desired.”

“The King should not have insisted on being the Sun,” laughed De Caylus. “Suns must set in their twilight, not in their noon. And he should not have made the mistake of marrying a pious widow. Not only is the Sun-King’s lustre dimmed, but religion flits like a black crow over the land. One after another she has banished the pleasures from France. No more gallantries! No more plays and pageants! This century is a dull one for the Court of France.”

“That, M. de Caylus,” said a light voice behind them, “depends entirely upon the courtier.”

*De Caylus, Charlotte  
de Marignan-Croissy.*

The two men turned their eyes upon the door. The speaker was a lady of perhaps twenty-five years old. She had a dazzling complexion, a neck white as a lily, a glance quick as a bird's. Her smile was finely mocking, and her features aristocratic.

"Good day, Countess," said M. de Caylus.

"Good day, Count. Good day, Antoine—or doesn't one know whether it is day or night?"

"One knows," said Watteau, "because by day and night one does differently."

"Oh, entirely," agreed the lady.

"Such as?" hinted the gentleman. (So his protégé was called Antoine by La Marignan-Croissy! Was it she who had induced him to buy a new wig?)

"By day," said Watteau, "one paints. By night, one designs."

The Countess took up the theme. "I am glad to hear it. Because, Antoine, I want you to paint me a fan by day, with which I can design by night."

"I don't paint fans," said Watteau. "Ask Lancret."

"He would paint them to perfection; you would paint them even better. Fans are your métier, Watteau. Why don't you paint them?"

"I must paint pictures, madame."

"A mere excuse. You have been painting harpsichord-lids and Chinoiseries for others. Paint me my fan."

"I haven't time for trifles."

"What do you call this then?" asked Charlotte, studying the tiny canvas on the easel.

"Trifles, Countess, are not a question of size," said De Caylus. "This is all the difference between art and artifice."

"No doubt," shrugged the Countess de Marignan-Croissy. "Still, this charming little gentleman would go prettily on a fan, and when I am put to the blush, I should like to hide behind him."

"You don't blush," said Watteau. He took his "Indifferent" off the stand, and replaced it with another little canvas.

"Don't I? I ought to—for Métayer taught me to lay on the carmine to a nicety. And much besides, but not blushing. A pity. It has its uses. So you won't paint me my fan, my little Antoine?"

"No, madame. Ask Lancret."

"I would pay you your price—and treble it if you engaged never to paint another for anybody else. You look as though you could do with some money, Watteau."

“The point is,” said De Caylus, “would he know *what* to do with it?”

“I have set my heart on a fan from you,” persisted the Countess.

“I haven’t time,” said Watteau. “Why not ask Lancret? He paints quite well, you know.”

“Perhaps he won’t have time, either.”

“As far as I know, Lancret has a lifetime. And he is rather in love with you, he won’t refuse.”

“While you,” said Charlotte tartly, “have always refused. One of these days, Antoine, I’ll *oblige* you to oblige me. Oh yes, my dear, I’ll get that fan out of you yet. As for Lancret—if he paints anything, it will be my miniature. He pesters me by day and night.”

“And night?” echoed De Caylus.

“To sit to him, Count.”

“To sit?”

“Bless me!” cried Charlotte. “This is the moment when I need that fan. You won’t, Watteau?”

“No.”

“For a thousand Louis d’Ors?”

“No.”

“For a thousand kisses?”

“No.”

“Good-bye, you little brute.” The lady retired, disdainful, vexed, and laughing.

(Oh no! decidedly, the wig was not on account of the Comtesse de Marignan-Croissy.)

SCENE III: *Watteau,*

*De Caylus, later*

*Finette.*

De Caylus commented: “One wonders why the Court is dull with Charlotte in it. But she is clever enough to keep her larks to herself. She manages to hover on the Maintenon’s borderline. Sometimes I think Madame Prude suspects her, and we prepare ourselves to see our Charlotte disappear; for just at present the Maintenon has only to lift a finger to banish whom she pleases. But Charlotte is like a trout who has snapped at her fly for the fun of the thing. It is she who plays the fisher on the bank. She never means to be landed. Just when the Maintenon seems to have her, she appears in chapel in black, and gives herself up to devotions, or she flatters the King’s wife, in time, but only just, to save her skin. Then down-stream she darts on her own game again. I

don't think she will ever suffer banishment. You are not attending to a word I say, Watteau."

"I hear you talking," said Watteau, dipping a brush in a bottle of thick oil.

"But you aren't interested in the Maintenon's manœuvres. Then it is useless to tell you the last report, I suppose."

Watteau shook his head impatiently; nevertheless De Caylus, watching him narrowly, proceeded—"The report that the Italian Comedians are to be driven out of the country."

"What is that?" cried the painter.

"And all because the Widow Scarron is a pious woman."

"The Italian Comedians! My friends of the Opera?"

"The King's wife means to put them down with a firm hand."

"This is abominable!" Watteau looked more moved than De Caylus had ever seen him.

"It upsets you, eh, my Indifferent?"

Watteau asked abruptly, "The woman's reason?"

"She declares they are coarse."

"Coarse!" Watteau stared.

De Caylus laughed. "And she is right. Oh, the Comedians are very droll, very robust, very enjoyable, and, alas, they are the last pleasure left us by the Maintenon's piety. But they are undoubtedly coarse."

"I don't understand you," cried Watteau irritably. "The Comedians are enchanting."

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He had been touched upon the quick, our Monsieur Watteau. In the whole of Paris, the Comte de Caylus excepted, he counted only the Italian Comedians of the Opera his friends. More closely his friends, perhaps, than De Caylus was; for the Count, a man of the world, combined art-patronage with an axe to grind for the artist. Now these merry fellows, these jolly buffoons, these good-humoured ladies who minced on the boards of the theatre, ground no axes. They lived in the moment, as Watteau did himself. If they were hurt, they yelped; if they were praised, they swaggered; if hungry, they groaned; when replenished, they warbled. Like children, they laughed for happiness and wept for grief, sharpened their knives when they were injured, took to their heels when they were terrified, and did not run away when they were loved. These tatterdemalion rascals, these strutting rogues, these saucy wenches, bright-eyed and nimble-footed, with their buxom bosoms and their slender waists—how much they meant to Watteau! He had opened his arms to them from the moment when, a poor youth burning to paint, he had made his way from Valenciennes to Paris, and found odd jobs in Métayer's atelier. Here, daubing the backcloths in front of which these lively foreigners enacted their flirtations,

jokes, and trickeries, he saw the fantastic troupe in his own setting. He surrounded them with scenes of glamour, with glades and parks and marble terraces, with fountains and dark waters, with gardens veiled in sunlight, and vistas opening between moonlit groves. It was not enough to provide their magic world; he must do more, paint the fantastic troupe itself. For his private joy, Watteau soon began to transfer the Comedians to his hard-paid-for canvases, presenting them as they had never been shown before. They loved being painted. Gilles, the Venetian Pierrot, a lad of primitive longings, who chewed garlic in the wings before he made sad eyes at the audience: Mezzetino, who played the lute and the knave with equal skill: Finette, his young sister, who snatched a taste of the Venetian's clove, before she took the stage like a butterfly: Scaramouch, Arlecchino, Flaminia, Lelio, Beatrice—came sweating from the greenroom to sit to him. He could not pay his models, they could not buy his pictures; but what then? His needs and theirs were one, the need to present. Like Watteau, they had been born to labour and poverty, like him they squeezed delight out of their labours. Who should understand him, if not they? Painter and actors might find it hard to live; but between them they achieved immortality.

You see now, perhaps, why Watteau, to whom these folk had sat for hours without expecting a reward, through whom he had expressed again and again his own emotions, uttered his protest: "The Comedians are not coarse!"

"Admit them to have a certain ribaldry," said De Caylus.

"Oh ribaldry, that is quite another matter. Would you have them banned for ribaldry?"

"I would not have them banned for anything. I would allow whatever is relished by the taste of the populace, which is gross, and that of the artist, which is sensitive. In other words, I would allow everything. But alas! we are under the dominion of the prudish, who have neither nerves nor appetites."

"If the Comedians go, I shall go too!" fumed Watteau.

"Stay to enjoy your pension."

"I have no pension."

"Build your next dream on one. It will materialize. I did better than praise you to Louis—I showed him one of your pictures."

"What picture?"

"'La Finette'."

"You let the King see my portrait of Finette?"

"I took it to Court in my portfolio. He saw it; he was struck. I seized the opportunity to mention your name. He said, 'I will make inquiries, I will certainly make inquiries!' I have hopes of this pension."

"You let those bleary eyes gloat on Finette?"

"Heavens, young man!" cried De Caylus, "what's wrong with you now?"

“You let that old lecher ogle me——”

But before Watteau could finish his sentence there was a tap on the door, which, at the same moment, opened just enough to admit the head of a young girl, whose saucy charming face peeped into the garret as though sure of its welcome. De Caylus recognized in those features the subject of the picture under discussion; he and Watteau exclaimed in one breath: “Finette!”

“Ah, pardon!” said the delicious little person. “You’re engaged, Watteau. Shall I come later?”

“No, no,” said the painter. “The Count was just going.”

“Was I?” De Caylus laughed and resumed his hat. But he paused before the intruder, studied her face with a familiar smile, and said, “So this is Finette. I’ve seen you at the Opera, my dear. You play Columbine.”

“Columbine, Arabella, Rosaura, whatever’s needed.”

“A gay life, eh?”

“A hard life.”

“You dance like a butterfly.”

“And ache like Sisyphus.”

De Caylus lifted his eyebrows. “What know you of Sisyphus?”

“Nothing, except that he had to keep the ball rolling, like we do, me and my family. We had him in one of our acts. The ball was a bladder. Scaramouch rolled it. You’d have died of laughing, just to hear him groan. When he sat down on it, the public held its sides. Scaramouch is my papa—so Bice says. Bice is my mamma.”

“I have your picture.”

“Which one?”

“Not as Colombina. You are playing a theorbo.”

“Oh, the little one. Yes, that’s me. But it isn’t really like me.”

“What is it like then?”

“Watteau’s fancy of me.” The pretty creature’s eyes dwelled on the painter, who was busy preparing a fresh canvas for the easel. “If Watteau had ever painted you,” she whispered, “you’d know he doesn’t see us like we really are.”

“What am I really like, pretty Finette?”

“Nay, I don’t know, I’m sure.” She tossed her head.

“Then make a guess.” The Count leaned down, but at that moment Watteau called over his shoulder.

“Don’t keep M. de Caylus any longer, child. He is busy. Your theorbo is in the corner. Take the pose.”

“Which pose,” asked Finette.

“The same as before. The dress is hanging up behind the curtain.”

“What! are you going to paint that picture all over again?”

“Yes.”

“The painter repeats himself,” observed De Caylus. “Why?”

Watteau muttered, “The first picture has been spoilt.”

De Caylus laughed. Finette demanded “How?”

“Smearred.”

“Who by?”

“Hush, my dear,” said the Count, “unless you wish Watteau to be condemned for lèse-majesté.”

“The pose, Finette!” cried Watteau fretfully.

Finette, who had donned a long robe and a little hat, arranged herself on a chair, with the instrument in her hand.

“Farewell,” said the Count. “Is Watteau going to paint you as you really are?”

Her glance was roguish. “What am I really like, Count?”

“Dare I guess?”

She thrummed her theorbo. “I’ll wager my virtue you think you can.”

“The stake is too easy, my pretty dear,” said the Count. He stooped again, but she was too swift for him; his kiss was implanted on her theorbo. He laughed, and so did she. About to leave, he made his parting shot. “I congratulate you!”

“On?”

“Watteau’s improved coiffure.”

“Oh, that?” Finette said naïvely. “He really did need a new wig, you know.”

“His old one was a disgrace?”

“No longer even a disgrace—it was comic.”

De Caylus made a triumphant exit, after all.

SCENE IV: *Watteau,*  
*Finette.*

As soon as the door shut behind him, Finette started chattering.

“Did you expect me to-day? I’m sure you didn’t. I came for two reasons. Guess one of them if you can.”

“You were hungry,” said Watteau.

“Bravo! Is that soup on the table? Do you want it? Can I have it, then? I haven’t eaten since yesterday at supper. Ah! ah, how good it is!”

“Don’t spoil the pose,” said Watteau.

“I’ll sup it when you turn your head away. It isn’t nice to be hungry.”

“I suppose not.”

“If you knew what it was to have a hole in your stomach, you wouldn’t suppose, Watteau, you’d weep.”

“My tears wouldn’t fill the hole,” said Watteau, whose stomach had never been full since he was weaned.

Finette tilted the basin till it touched her eyebrows. Then she rolled it away, licked her lips, wiped the last drop of soup off her pert nose, and sucked her forefinger. “Yesterday,” she said blissfully, “I had a beautiful supper.”

“What was it?”

“A pig’s foot!” She clasped her hands.

“Get back to the pose,” said the painter.

“I won’t stir again. What had you for supper?”

“I forget.”

“Forget your supper? I could never forget my food! Food is so beautiful.”

“Yes?” Watteau paused. “Food might be beautiful. I’ll try to remember my supper for you, Finette.—I assisted,” he reflected, “at a picnic.”

“Where?”

“Anywhere you like. Say a park on the shores of a lake. Two bowers of dark green trees framed water and sky. The trees went up like fountains of leaves to the night. The sky was serene; the water was serene; the light of the moon lay on both.”

“Were you alone?” asked Finette.

“A marble nymph stood on her pedestal beside the lake. She held in her arm a cornucopia of fruit.”

“You couldn’t eat marble grapes for supper, Watteau.”

“Hush! can you hear a sound of flutes and viols? A quintet comes in procession through the trees. Two ladies in silk, two gallants in satin, a musician in brown cloth. The lovers group themselves beside the lake. Their laughter is light as a breeze, they chatter in whispers.”

“What do they say to each other?”

Watteau held up his hand. “The lute-player stood a little apart, and sang. The pairs of lovers did not seem to listen. Two were caressing, two were joking softly. But had the music stopped, they would have stopped. After an hour a little coach rolled up. The ladies and the gallants got inside, and the coachman flicked his whip like the crick of a spark. The coach drove off around the water’s edge. The musician vanished into the deepest shade. Long after he had gone, I saw the speck of the coach on the distant landscape. It disappeared. I was once more alone.”

“Except,” Finette observed, “for the marble nymph.”

“Except for the nymph.” Watteau began to apply his brush again. “How do you like my picnic?”

“Very pretty, only you’ve forgotten——”

“What?”

“The food,” said Finette.

Watteau burst out laughing. His laughter was actually gay. Finette’s was unbridled. “Don’t you ever remember the food?”

He moved to her side, and took the empty soup-bowl, which she had tucked between her knees. “And the second thing?” he smiled, settling her with a touch in her pose again, before he placed the bowl on the table and returned to his canvas.

“The second thing?” inquired Finette, sitting immobile.

“You said you came for two reasons.”

“So I did. One, to eat. Two, to say goodbye.”

Watteau laid down his brush. “And why goodbye?”

“Didn’t you know? Haven’t you heard? We’re banished.”

“It can’t be true!”

“It is true.”

“I don’t believe it!”

“That’s you all over. You don’t want to believe it.”

“They haven’t banished *you*?”

Finette said, deliberately and emphatically: “Me, my father, my mother, Mezzetino, Gilles, the whole troupe of us. That skinny prude won’t have us in France any longer. She says we’re improper. Well, and if we are!”

“But Finette!” Watteau was staring at her desperately. “If you leave France, what shall I do? what shall I do?”

She sprang off her chair. “What shall you do, Watteau? What do you mean by that?”

“What shall I do without you?”

“Without me?” Finette repeated softly, eagerly.

“My best model!” groaned Watteau. “I shall lose my best model, and my work will suffer.”

She made a peevish moue. “There are lots of other things to paint besides me. There are your picnics without any food. There are your precious dreams.”

“But if you were the most precious——” stammered Watteau.

“If I were,” shrugged Finette, “it’s still the one you’ll have to do without.”

Watteau picked up his brushes feverishly. “Back to your pose!” he cried. She obeyed, looking as though she would have liked to slap him.

SCENE V: *Watteau,  
Finette, The Italian  
Comedians.*

But Watteau was to do no more painting that day. There was a commotion on the stairs, as though an army had come to storm the garret. And in a sense it had; for the crazy door flew open, and in tumbled, pell-mell, the entire company of Comedians from the Opera: Scaramouch, Finette's rascal of a father, Beatrice, her bawd of a mother, Mezzetino, her sly and specious brother, Flaminia, her self-conceited sister, Gilles the white Pierrot they had picked up in Venice, and all the other motley of the troupe: Lelio and Sylvia the lovers, the doddering Pantaleone, the pedantic Doctor, the blustering Moor, Scapino and Arlecchino, the good-for-naught lackeys. With one accord, they launched themselves into the room and fell at Watteau's feet.

"Protect us!" they cried.

"What has brought you all here?" said Finette, put out.

The company was in very great disorder; some of them continued to bleat and babble "Protect us!" some clung to Watteau's skirts, some ran to shut the door and lean against it, some thrust their heads out of the window, others pulled them back again by their tails.

Finette, exasperated by her own concerns, screamed, "Will you tell, or won't you?"

Scaramouch pulled himself together, and gasped, finger to lip, "It is the Prude."

"In Heaven's name," ejaculated Watteau, "do let us stop talking about that woman."

"If we only could!" interpolated Beatrice. And Mezzetino fetched a breath to explain, "We are flying from her envoys."

"We were in rehearsal at the opera," said Scaramouch——

"All but Finette," scowled Gilles. On the stage, the Venetian was plaintive and poetical; off it, he was morose and sensual. He liked it when their friend Watteau painted him in the middle of a picture, but he wasn't pleased when Watteau gave Finette a picture all to herself. Vanity and jealousy make a bitter mixture. "All but Finette, the little bitch," he snarled.

"Hold your tongue!" she spat, and put out hers at him.

"Hold both your tongues," said Mezzetino sharply. "The rumours of the past week have eventuated. We are the next victims of Madam Virtue. Look here, Monsieur Watteau, our living has been torn from us—well, we are used to that, we know what it is to live from hand to mouth. And anyhow, who lives beyond the moment? Neither the rich man with his coffers full, nor the beggar with his pockets empty. The careless man spending his day's wages, the careful man hoarding for the year-after-next, have no more than the passing moment to live in. If it pinches, *ohé!* if it blesses, *aha!*"

"Come to the point, Mezzetino," said Watteau. "This isn't one of your stage improvisations."

“Unluckily, no! it would have been a good one. To be brief, Monsieur Watteau, while our hearts are gay, they *are* gay. Good! They were gay until ten minutes ago.”

“What were you doing here, all by yourself?” growled Gilles in his Columbine’s ear.

“I wasn’t all by myself, you see,” minced she.

“And ten minutes ago?” said Watteau impatiently.

“A messenger in the King’s livery appeared.”

“I should say so!” shrilled Beatrice. “The King has sent one of his own Generals to arrest us!”

Watteau said, “Nonsense, my dear.”

The troupe began to clamour again. “It’s true, it’s true, it’s perfectly true! it was a General, nothing less than a General!”

“With gold on his sleeve!” said Flaminia.

“And feathers in his hat!” said Sylvia.

“And a sash round his stomach!” said Lelio.

“And spurs on his boots!” said Scaramouch.

“And a sword at his side,” said the Doctor.

“And a regiment behind him!” said Mezzetino. “He stormed the stage door. He challenged the stage door keeper. He announced: ‘I have come to make inquiries.’ He advanced upon us O. P.—”

“And we,” said Arlecchino, “disappeared—Prompt!” He twirled across the garret in pantomime flight.

“Like this!” cried the troupe, and followed him.

“What use was that?” laughed Watteau.

“What use was anything?” countered Mezzetino. “In the moment of disaster, who acts like a philosopher? Our Theatre had been bombarded, our lodgings would be. We had one friend left in France, and we come to throw ourselves on his mercy.”

“Protect us!” they cried in chorus for the third time.

Watteau threw up his hands. “My dearest friends! I am nobody. I am as poor as yourselves, and in the eyes of France of even less account. You at least have entertained a public. I have not yet discovered one.”

“So much the better for you,” said Scaramouch. “A public does not only laugh at you, it bawls at you.”

“Not only claps its hands,” Lelio took up the theme, “but spits with its lips.”

“Not only tosses you pennies, but rotten apples!” said Pantaleone.

“Enough of improvisation,” said Mezzetino grandly. “Life made us tough enough to take the kicks with the halfpence. If Watteau our dear friend cannot protect us, we must prepare for our fate.”

“What fate?” asked Watteau.

“The fate of all those the Prude frowns on. Yesterday she had a down on the Protestants. Where are they now? To-day she has a down on the Actors. Where will they be to-morrow? She has the King under her thumb.”

“Do you wonder,” asked Scapino, “that we fear the King’s Generals? We prefer not to be beaten by a brutal soldiery.”

“Or massacred,” said Sylvia.

“Or tortured,” said Flaminia.

“Or even raped,” said Beatrice.

“What were you up to here?” muttered Gilles, at Finette’s elbow. She shoved it mercilessly in his ribs.

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Watteau was powerless to protect his friends. All he could do, since the parting seemed inevitable, was to part from them *en fête*. He was in funds. On the table lay the gold pieces left there by De Caylus. He offered them to the Italian Comedians, but Scaramouch said, “What is the good of that? We’d only spend them. Let’s jollify, and part with round bellies instead of with long faces.”

One and all agreed; and as none of them dared show his nose in the streets, Watteau went out, and before very long returned with a heavy basket, topped with a rose. He delivered the basket to Beatrice, tossing the rose to Finette. “You see, Finette, I don’t always forget the food.” She caught the flower between her teeth. Gilles snatched it out, and trampled on it. She pushed him over, rescued it, and cherished it in her bosom. He went into a corner, and sulked.

Meanwhile, the troupe was crowding round Beatrice, helping her to lighten the basket of pies and sausages, tarts and cheeses, plums and nectarines, red wine, white wine, and several yards of bread.

“God save us, what bounty!” shouted Scaramouch.

“Oh for a knife!” Flaminia brandished a chicken.

“What’s the matter with your fingers?” said Lelio. “This wing tears off quite easy.”

“Give me the other wing!” said Sylvia.

“That’s right, snatch all the titbits,” mumbled Beatrice, her mouth full of cheese.

“Don’t keep all the bread, Mezzetino! Throw me a tart! Change this white wine for some red! Look, Finette, you’re wasting a pint of good nectarine-juice—it’s running down your fingers, I’ll suck them for you!”

The greedy comedians forgot their imminent woes in their immediate joys. They fell on the viands with greed and appetite, and every gesture, every look, every line was expressive. Only Watteau did not eat, but sat with pencil and

sketchbook, drawing hungrily.

Finette approached him with a greasy paperful of food. She was eating as busily as any. She perched on the arm of his chair with her chin on his shoulder.

“Does Flaminia’s mouth really look like that when it’s open? Have something too, Watteau.”

“I have all I want.”

“Don’t you ever put that pencil down?”

“Not while Flaminia is eating grapes.”

“Open your mouth!”

He obeyed, and she popped in a plum, then carried her lapful of good things into a corner. Gilles, the prowling cat, pounced on his mouse. “Give *me* a plum too!”

She spat out a stone at him. “There!”

He gripped her wrist brutally. “What were you doing here before we turned up?”

“Now then, jealousy!” Finette bit into a pâté.

“*What were you doing, I say?*”

“What I’ve done a dozen times before. Sitting for my picture.”

“Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes! How did Monsieur Watteau recompense you, hey? What did he pay you with, hey? How many kisses? And what else?”

“Keep your nasty temper to yourself,” said Finette.

Watteau had his eye on them, but he could not hear what they were saying. He sketched the gross Venetian rapidly, no other pencil could have described those blown-out lips, as the tormented lover leaned to his girl. It was the very divinity of grossness, exonerated by the pleading eye. Of Finette he drew no more than the curve of a shoulder, within breath but not touch of the clown’s moist lustful mouth.

Mezzetino approached, gnawing a chicken-leg.

“M. Watteau!”

“My good Tino?”

“Something occurs to me.”

“Yes.”

“If we must go, we must go. We cannot disband, our unity is our living; and we can make it elsewhere, in Spain, or Italy. You’ll miss us?”

“As I would my palette.”

“Attend. There is one who might remain unknown to Mother Maintenon. Why shouldn’t my sister continue to inspire your palette?”

“Finette?”

“She’s your favourite, we all know that. Well, Monsieur Watteau, I will sell you my sister. For fifty crowns she’s yours.”

“How droll you are, Tino!” No wonder Watteau loved the Italian Comedians. They could make him smile.

Gilles was not smiling. He had passed from rage to pathos.

“Why do you make me so miserable, Finette?”

“Cry-baby!” scoffed she.

“You know you like me!”

“But of course I do.”

“There, there! I knew it! When will you marry me?”

“Some day or other.”

“That’s what you always say. You put me off! You go on putting me off. I won’t be put off. When a man is as miserable as I am, something is bound to happen.”

“What?” asked Finette.

“I don’t know what. But just take care!” he bluffed.

“Ha, ha! you do look funny when you cry.”

“Give me a kiss!”

“My mouth’s full.”

“A kiss, Finette.”

The moist open mouth hung over her; she pushed a sausage into it, and forced him to swallow it inch by inch. “There’s your kiss!”

This Watteau drew too, the dainty fingers squeezing the sausage, the clown half-choked, but happy.

“I will abate my terms,” said Mezzetino. “You shall have Finette for thirty crowns.”

“And what would the troupe do without its Columbine?”

“Columbines are cheap enough. Therefore I will part with my sister for, shall we say, twenty?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“No, no, Monsieur Watteau, it is no laughing matter. I’m serious. We’re poor people, worse than poor, penniless. In our profession we get little and save less. We cannot pay our way to Italy with brass buttons. A dozen crowns will serve us better than a dozen Columbines—I’ll take a dozen crowns for my sister Finette.”

“You absurd fellow!” said Watteau. “What would I do with a woman to keep?”

“What does any man do with the woman he keeps?”

“Marry her, you mean?”

“Oh—as you prefer.”

“I shouldn’t prefer,” said Watteau.

“Nor I,” said Mezzetino.

In his corner, Gilles had begun to brag.

“Do you know where I come from? Venice! Do you know what I am? A Venetian!”

“Give me a Neapolitan any day,” said Finette.

“We can love, we Venetians!” Gilles gobbled in her ear.

“Nobody else knows how, I suppose,” she yawned.

“And when we’re thwarted,” he shouted, “we don’t think once before we use the knife!”

“Hi, hi, desperado! how you frighten me!” She began to rub a grease-spot on her bodice. “Go back to your filthy Venice!”

“Dare to insult her! She’s the fairest city on earth.”

“And the foulest.” Finette held her nose.

“Men call her the Bride of the Sea.”

“Go to bed with her, then!”——

“I thought you fancied my sister,” said Mezzetino.

“Why, so I have, in twenty ways, on canvas.”

“There are twenty-one ways of fancying a woman—and you’ve missed the first and foremost, M. Watteau. Well, if you won’t, you won’t. I must offer Finette elsewhere.”

“Always the mountebank!” laughed Watteau.

“Never the man!” laughed Mezzetino.

And both thought: “What a droll!”

Gilles had stopped bragging, and turned masterful.

“When you’re my wife, my girl——”

“Ho, not so fast!”

“Turn me down,” said Gilles, with red in his eyes, “and I’ll stick a knife in your guts, and your painter’s too.”

“Jealous of Watteau!” Finette began to laugh shrilly. “You couldn’t stick Watteau’s guts if you tried, Venetian!”

“Why not?”

“He hasn’t got any.” And she muttered, “Don’t I wish he had.”

“So he could make love with you, hey?”

“Yes,” she teased, “so he could make love with me. But he hasn’t, Venetian.” (She squeezed his cheeks between her fists.) “And he doesn’t, Venetian.” (She pursed his mouth for him.) “And you can keep your big knife in your sheath, Venetian.” (She pressed her pursed mouth on his.)

“Little bitch!” The Venetian laughed amorously and pulled her rudely across him on the floor. Even so, he did it with a blowsy grace; and Watteau’s hungry pencil made a flower of him.

SCENE VI: *Watteau*,

*Finette, The Italian  
Comedians, General  
Feuillade.*

And then! *Taran-tara!* the King's General arrived.

Yes, really! M. le Générale de la Feuillade, with gold on his sleeve, and feathers in his hat, and a sash round his stomach, and spurs on his boots, and a sword at his side, and—no, not a regiment behind him, but at least what might be called an escort: marched into the garret, demanding to know if this was the domicile of Antoine Watteau, a painter.

They heard him coming! they looked down from the high window, and saw him coming. Crying—"What did we tell you?"—they concealed themselves as best they could (for the house was already stormed, the staircase invaded) under the table, behind the easel and the flimsy curtain, among the scanty bed-clothes—and even so, heels, knees and elbows stuck out. Watteau's poor attic was no place for an ambushade.

But M. le Générale de la Feuillade, laced in his dignities, glanced not to right or left, and certainly did not stoop to look under the table, as he faced the only soul in evidence, and demanded: "Is this the domicile of Antoine Watteau, a painter?"

"I am he," said Watteau.

"The painter of the portrait of the lady known as Finette?"

(Agitation among the knees and elbows.)

Watteau said, "What concern is that of yours?"

"My concerns," said the General, "are those of the King of France. The King of France has sent me to make inquiries."

"About the painter of the picture?" asked Watteau.

"About the lady of the picture," amended the General.

"The lady!"

"The lady. The King of France understands that she belongs to the Opera. She was not at the Opera. We opened fire upon the lady's lodging. The fortress was vacated."

"Why come here?"

"The painter of the portrait of Finette," said the General, "should know where Finette is ambushed."

"And if he did," said Watteau, looking with distaste on this ambassador, "why should he betray her?"

Feuillade smiled significantly. "The King of France is interested."

Mezzetino crawled from under the bed.

TABLEAU:

The King of France was interested! That doesn't happen every day in the year; and to a poor little, hard-working Columbine, it may not happen once in a blue moon. Mezzetino, who kept a look-out for blue moons, saw one in the offing. They took themselves to market, these Comedians. Their talents and their persons were for sale. And if a handsome purchaser appeared, well! Monsieur Watteau couldn't say he hadn't been made the first offer.

Mezzetino unveiled his sister, who had wrapped herself up in the window-curtain. "Play your cards well, my girl," he whispered, "and you may save us all." He elevated her, with a dancer's skill, and dropping on his knee before Feuillade, presented to him the subject of the King's interest.

"Ah," said the General.

SCENE VII: *Madame de Maintenon, Chamillart.*

Perhaps a word or two should be said of him. He was one of the fops of Louis's declining Court. He had the King's ear—or rather, the King had his. For Louis's counsels now were all in the past. He recounted ancient triumphs he could not repeat in the present; and if Feuillade was bored, he did not show it. There were still pickings for the King's favourite. The Maintenon's more potent favour he couldn't aspire to; but at least this mayfly had her toleration. Why did she tolerate him? Because her royal husband bored her to death. She confessed as much to Chamillart, her minister, the man who backed up her purification of France.

She was too old. Her charms and her health had failed, but not her wits; she was tasting the dust of realised ambitions, whose pleasures are so brief. Therefore, push on, push on! Ambition never looks back. But those who push on from a pinnacle, can only proceed by a descent. The Maintenon took the downward path of tyranny, and took it unaccompanied; Louis's only function was to ratify her acts, and he did what she demanded, under her thumb. But still, he was the King; by his position, she secured her own; and linked with the King, she had to suffer the dotard. He had come to fear her a little, dislike her a little, but he clung to her as we cling at the last to what has shared our disappearing life. He was subject to moods and tremors which he unloaded on her, seeking her boudoir at uncertain hours.

"Oh Chamillart! the old man wearies me. He pesters me day and night to give him ear. He makes me suffer his sorrows, his silence, his vapourings. Sometimes he is taken with weeping-fits which he cannot master, sometimes

he feels unwell, and relates his symptoms. He relates them for hours on end. He has no conversation.”

“He has no longer enough to occupy him, madame.”

“If he had,” she said gloomily, “he has no longer a mind to give to it.”

“Then,” suggested the Minister, “something to amuse him——”

“I cannot make the effort to amuse him. I am worn out.”

“You have got what you wanted,” he reminded her.

“And suffer for it. I tell you, Chamillart, he has tired me out. When Louis seeks my closet, and starts his threadbare reminiscences, I could scream with despair. He has grown old, and I have grown old too.”

“The trouble is not that you have grown old,” said Chamillart. “The trouble is that in growing old you have kept your faculties, and he——”

“All gone,” she said, “all gone.”

There, Madame suffered Feuillade gladly—and did not mistake him for anything but a fool. A cleverer man would have caused her misgivings; but what could an old dodderer like Louis achieve at his time of life with such a confidant? The combination did not menace her. If Feuillade, instead of being a middle-aged fop, had been a designing, captivating young girl—But no! all that was surely over and done with. Le Roi Soleil had had his day, and was setting. There should be no more experiments like that with La Fontanges. Let Louis babble of her and the rest as often and as tediously as he pleased—as long as he did not babble of them to her. Feuillade was her safety-valve; while the King babbled, and he listened, she could rest.

SCENE VIII: *Feuillade,*  
*Finette, Watteau,*  
*Mezzetino.*

“The lady appears to be charming,” said the General. He examined Finette’s points with the air of a connoisseur. “The arch of the instep is exquisite. The ankle—one could snap it between finger and thumb. The calf—delicious! The bosom—curves of Hebe! Permit me, mademoiselle, to take your hand.”

Finette permitted Feuillade.

“Small and dimpled. A satin palm. Nails like the shell from which Venus stepped ashore. A delicate wrist. An intoxicating forearm. A neck—a neck like Leda’s!”

“Psha!” said Watteau. These courtiers, with their fuddled classicism! He glanced angrily from Feuillade to Finette, from Finette to Mezzetino. Finette was demure, Mezzetino fawning.

“And her cheek?” He indicated it to the General. “Touch it!”

Feuillade caressed it. “Peach-skin!”

“*Mezzetino!*” Watteau breathed.

“And her eyes?” Mezzetino winked his at the General. “Gaze into them!”

Feuillade gazed into them. “Stars in a pool!”

“*Mezzetino!*”

“And her hair?” Mezzetino guided the General’s fingers. “Feel it.”

Feuillade felt it. “Cupid’s network!”

“*Mezzetino!*”

“And her lips?” Mezzetino turned his shoulder, and brought Finette’s face within touch of the General’s. “Sample them!”

Feuillade sampled them. “The King of France will be interested,” he simpered.

“Ah, *Mezzetino!*”

But of what use to sigh, “Ah, *Mezzetino?*” The Italian rogue had found his customer.

SCENE IX: *Maintenon,*  
*Chamillart.*

“Have you prepared those papers, Chamillart?”

“Here they are, madame.”

“‘Owing to Our resolve to purify the theatre, and purge it of offensive elements,’—Hum! hum!” She rustled through them. “Yes, very good. That should sweep the vermin off the boards. I will get Louis’s signature to-day.”

“Will he raise no objection?”

“Why should he object? The theatre doesn’t entertain him any more. I doubt if he will even ask what this is.” The prude rapped the document with contemptuous knuckles; a gesture to make actors fall like ninepins. “If we *must* have a theatre, let it at least be pure.”

“You would prefer none at all?”

“Decidedly.”

“Yet I was wondering——” said Chamillart.

“Do not be tentative,” said the Maintenon drily. “You know my mind on most things. Speak out yours.”

“If you find His Majesty so tedious,” said Chamillart, “and if you favour your old methods of diverting him——”

“Which?”

“You were once not averse from introducing fresh young persons at Court, to keep His Majesty in a good humour.”

“Young persons were useful,” she admitted, “but Fontanges was the last. It was just as well she died. I should be foolhardy to risk another now.”

“You have less to fear now than formerly,” reflected Chamillart. “The King is no match for your cleverness.”

“When was he? But it was a match between us, which I could win nine times out of ten. When one of the players becomes impotent, there is no longer a match to be either won or lost. No, Chamillart,” said she, “Louis is freer of me in his senility than he was in the days of his intelligence. If he began to dote on a young creature, I should not know how to play him. He has forgotten the moves. There must be a degree of reason in your adversary.”

“You may be right.”

“I am right. A young person would endanger my supremacy.”

“Still ambitious,” observed Chamillart.

“One follows one’s bent.”

“Domination?”

She shrugged.

“And jealousy?”

She laughed.

“Well, as I was saying. You decline to use your one-time method of amusing the King. If not a person, then, try something else.”

“What else?”

“You might inaugurate some Court Diversion.”

“No!” said the prude harshly.

“The Church does not debar the pleasures, madame,” Chamillart reminded her.

“No, I repeat! What, do you imagine, is the meaning of *this*?” Again she rapped the document that banished the Comedians. “Shall I sweep frivolity out of the theatre, to admit it into the Court?”

“As a means to an end,” suggested the politician.

“Not even as a means to an end! I will have no more frivolities in France.”

It was Chamillart’s turn to shrug. “See where your lust for domination leads you. Once you were jealous of a monarch’s pleasures. Now you begrudge a nation’s.”

She repeated gloomily, “I will have no more frivolities in France.”

SCENE X: *The King,*  
*Feuillade, De Caylus.*

“And is the lady like the picture, Feuillade?”

Louis while listening to Feuillade’s report, had sent for De Caylus and his

little picture, that his eye might hold the lineaments of Finette, while his ear drank in their description by his emissary. A tinge of colour mounted to his cheek. An old man, who has had his way in all things, takes long in knowing the way has come to an end.

“And is the lady like the picture, Feuillade?”

“No, sire.”

“Not like the picture. We are disappointed.”

“Would you not say that she is something like?” said De Caylus.

Louis turned from the General to the Count. “You’ve seen the original too?”

“Both on and off the stage.”

“Ah, she’s an actress?”

“A dancer. She is delicious.”

“Delicious! There you have it!” agreed Feuillade. “The painting is a dim piece of work beside her.”

“The painting is perfect,” said De Caylus quickly, his mind on Watteau’s pension.

“Oh, as a painting! The dress is done admirably. And I grant you some indefinable charm in its wearer. But consider, Count, what the painter has omitted!”

“What,” asked Louis, “has the painter omitted?”

“The very definable charms,” simpered Feuillade.

The King said, “We are revived. Describe them precisely.”

The General became exceedingly precise.

“She’ll make me feel young again,” chuckled the old King.

“She is a second Fontanges,” Feuillade assured him.

The King’s brow grew peevish. “Fontanges became very trying.”

“At the end, perhaps. But do you remember her first appearance at Court?”

“She shouldn’t have asked me to visit her on her death-bed.”

“You need not visit La Finette on her *death-bed*,” hinted Feuillade.

“When shall I see her?” asked the King eagerly.

“In a day or so, sire.”

“Why a day or so?”

“She seemed a little anxious about her toilette. She feared it would not do her justice, sire.”

“Her toilette? Bah! She shall have fifty toilettes! I’ll smother her in toilettes! She shall have whatever she wants. Bright colours—jewels—there aren’t enough bright colours about me nowadays. The old days shall come back! What do you say, Count? Yes, General, we’ll bring splendour to life again. Do you remember when men began to call me Louis the Magnificent? The Great Monarch, le Roi Soleil. I once played Phœbus Apollo in a Ballet.

Louise fell in love with me afterwards. Sweet creature! How good she was! She'd have held me longer, if she hadn't been so good. Goodness is very tedious, Feuillade. Did you say this little Finette was a dancer?"

"A Colombina from the Opera, sire," said De Caylus.

"We'll have a new Court Ballet for Finette. Pluto and Proserpine, Pluto and Proserpine! She decked like a flower, myself in all the riches of the Underworld. But no! I do not like the Underworld. Phœbus and Daphne, that's it, Phœbus and Daphne. She young and tender, and myself resplendent as the sun at noon!"

"Bravo!" said De Caylus. "And at the end of the Ballet, Phœbus is crowned by Daphne."

"Finette," simpered Feuillade, "is crowned by the King."

"I am inspired," said Louis. "The thought of Finette inspires me. Who says I have no ideas? I am full of ideas."

"Your Majesty is fecundity itself."

"Yes, to-day I am fecund, Feuillade," said Louis. "We'll have a Diversion, a Masque, a Classical Representation. We'll inaugurate a fête at Fontainebleau, something to outshine even the old ones."

De Caylus seized his chance. "Excellent, sire. You are indeed inspired. And for the designer of this supreme Masque, I know the very man. Scene, costume, composition, he has them all at his fingertips."

"Who is he, De Caylus?"

"The painter of this picture. Watteau, who has designed for the Opera, Watteau to whom Your Majesty promised a pension."

"Did I, De Caylus? Very well, he shall have it. If he designs a dress that will set me off, he shall have it. He had better come and take a look at me."

"I'll bring him myself, sire. And by the way! who else, besides Your Majesty and Finette, will take part in the Ballet?"

"In the old days," said Louis, "we formed our company out of the talents of the Court. Our Court teemed with talent. Do you remember Madame Henriette? M. de Guiche was second to me only as a dancer—and shall I ever forget the Montespan as Juno? Glorious creature! How wicked she was, and how opulent! She'd have held me longer, if she hadn't been so wicked. Tantrums can become very tedious, Feuillade. Still, she was opulent. The Maintenon is not opulent."

"What part shall you assign *her* in the Masque, sire?"

"In the Masque—she?" The old King looked uneasy. "I don't see the talents of Our present Court engaged upon a Masque."

"As I was thinking, sire. But fortunately——" De Caylus glanced at Feuillade, "the charming Finette can supply you with an entire company. The Italian Comedians are her brothers and sisters, her fathers and mothers. Say the

word, and a ready-made troupe will support you in your character of Phoebus Apollo.”

“Very well, very well.” The King’s uneasiness passed. “We will receive them, and discuss the matter. I am all in favour of the Italian Comedians.”

A servant appeared. “Madame de Maintenon requests the honour of Your Majesty’s company, as soon as Your Majesty is disengaged.”

“Well, well! Announce me to her.—I think there is no more to say at the moment, gentlemen. M. de Caylus, I look to you to produce your M. Watteau,—and to you, my General, to produce La Finette. Enjoin the Italian Comedians to await our pleasure.” The King straightened himself, and went to the door. “What does that old woman want of me now, I wonder?”

It occurred to both De Caylus and Feuillade that the King had dropped twenty years off his age in as many minutes.

SCENE XI: *Finette*,  
*Beatrice*.

“Now, Finette, attend to what I say, for I know more of the big world than you do.”

“Yes, Mamma Bice!”

“And keep your needle busy, for we’ve little enough time, and we’ll have to sit up all night as it is. You can’t go to Court in that old dress of yours. Here’s the pink satin petticoat I wore in *The Tricks of Pepita*, and Flaminia’s black lace flounce from *The Bolognese Harlot*. Bind the flounce round the skirt with the length of silver braid Gilles filched in the market—it’s new, and unfrayed, if it is a little tarnished. There’ll be some left over for your bodice, but first I’ll cut that down a bit, my girl. No need to hide yourself, when you’re visiting a King. You understand?”

“Yes, Mamma Bice!”

“*Bene!* When you come face to face with him, keep yourself in hand. Wait, before you behave. Don’t be in a hurry to behave freely, as you would with Gilles. He may like that later, but not so much to begin with. And don’t be too pert with him, as you are with the gentlemen behind the scenes. That’s what they’ve come for, a pistole’s worth of pertness. There’s more than a pistole in this, remember. The King is no mere gentleman, I hope. Don’t be too soft with him neither, as you are with little Watteau. It’s safe enough with Watteau, he doesn’t take an inch when you offer it; but offer the King an inch, and he’ll take his ell. And mind, my girl, the King’s ell has got to be paid for—everything depends on when he gets his ell. If he gets it too soon, you’ve nothing left to bargain with. You understand?”

“Yes, Mamma Bice!”

“*Bene!* Be simple, be timid, and innocent as you please. He’s old, and that’s what he’ll like. Smile a little, shrink a little, flutter a little, flatter a little. And then say *No-no-no!* what’s the use of it all? *Oh-oh-oh!* you and your family are being driven out of France. Doesn’t he know it’s so-so-so? Why must you kiss and go-go-go!

“No-no-no!  
Oh-oh-oh!  
Let me go, sir,  
No-no-no!

“You remember my improvisation in *The Artful Simpleton*? It brought the house down. Well, that’s the line you must take, you understand?”

“Yes, Mamma Bice.”

“*Bene!* Then, watch him. Perhaps he’ll plead, perhaps he’ll threaten, perhaps he’ll pet you. Don’t trust that last, they pet you to get their own way, and more. If he threatens, use your tongue a little, show your temper, say a poor girl’s virtue is her only jewel, and if he means to have it by force, very well then, very well! he’ll find himself wearing a jewel without lustre; and say that your family’s honour is dear to you as your own, and if he rates us no higher than the Prude does, very well, then, very well! let us return to the land that loves and laughs with us, and let the King of France forget the little Columbine of the Italian Comedians. But if he pleads, *Finette*, then say to him—ah, say exactly the same things, but instead of stamping your foot clasp your two hands, instead of fire in your eye squeeze out a tear, instead of the top of your voice, speak in a whisper, bringing your lips within tickling-range of his ear. ‘Forget, Your Majesty, poor little Colombina of the Italian Comedians!’ Like that. You understand?”

“Yes, Mamma Bice.”

“*Bene!* Then, when he offers you this, and offers you that, to get what he wants of you, you’ll say you want one thing only of him: the Comedians’ safety, on the word of the King. If he refuses it, come back as you went—if you can. It won’t be the last scene in the comedy you’ll find! But if he consents, get it in writing, child. And then, ring down the curtain. You understand?”

“Yes, Mamma Bice.”

“*Bene!*”

SCENE XII: *The Comte*

*de Caylus, Charlotte de  
Marignan-Croissy.*

“Good day, M. le Comte.”

“Good day, Madame la Comtesse.”

“Is it true, what they are saying?”

“They have been saying so many things, have they not?”

“Always, always! They have been saying that Madame de Maintenon is the King’s mistress. They have been saying she is his wife. They have been saying that she is so much his wife that she has never been his mistress. They have been saying she is so much his mistress that she need never be his wife. And now they are saying that what she has been, and what she hasn’t been, is no longer of the least consequence—for she will never be again what she has been, and what she hasn’t been cannot hope to be. They are saying, in short, that Madame de Maintenon is soon to be supplanted.”

“By whom?” asked De Caylus blandly.

“My dear Count! if you must pretend to be stupid, pretend with art.”

“Why!” said De Caylus. “Is it true—what they are saying—that the Comtesse de Marignan-Croissy is about to smile on His Majesty, at last?”

Charlotte laughed slyly. “That is a little better. Yes, quite a pretty turn, M. de Caylus. And do they still say I *never* smiled on His Majesty? But there, that’s too old a tale to revive at this date. Come, now, cards on the table, if you please! Isn’t it true that the Maintenon’s in a temper?”

“You score a point.”

“Because His Majesty has refused to ratify her latest decree?”

“And a second point.”

“The decree which would banish the Italian Comedians?”

“Point three.”

“All on account of their pretty Colombina?”

“And if it were so?”

“Our little Watteau wouldn’t be best pleased.”

“On the contrary, it will assure his pension.”

“Which will please him, you think? You don’t know him better than that?”

“I think a good deal of nonsense is talked in garrets which considerably modifies itself in Courts. I think unrecognised genius despises the fruits of success, in self-defence. I think, when royal patronage bestows on our little Watteau the power to paint as much as ever he pleases, our little Watteau won’t despise royal patronage.”

“Oh, so Watteau is to become Court Painter, is he? And then he can paint whenever he pleases, yes! But will he be able to paint whatever he pleases? That’s what matters to your Wateaus, who won’t even paint a fan to please a

friend. The patronage of the great is a terrible drawback. Vanity pluming itself, with genius in tow.”

“Well, we shall see.” The Count looked slightly piqued. He too was a patron.

“We shall. But *if* Watteau is fonder of the subject of his picture than of its price——”

“What then, Madame la Comtesse?”

“I may get my fan out of him yet, M. le Comte.”

### SCENE XIII: *Ensemble.*

“Oh!” said Finette.

“What is it now?” asked Watteau rather crossly. “You have been saying *Oh* ten times a minute, child.”

“It’s all so grand,” said Finette.

They were waiting in a cabinet of the Louvre. De Caylus had convoyed and left them there, to await, they didn’t know what. Neither, to confess the truth, did he.

The manner of Finette’s presentation had been much discussed. There were possible difficulties to provide for. Twenty or thirty years ago, the King might have visited by night, in her own lodging, the little lady so well reported-on. But the old King could not go abroad like the young one. It would have been imprudent, even had his health allowed of it; gossip had better not become rife before the Maintenon’s downfall was secured. That couldn’t be until Louis had seen Finette. But under whose auspices?

Not Feuillade’s. The General saw that with half-an-eye. The Maintenon suffered him as the King’s confidant, but not as his Pandar. If he were seen conducting a delectable little *fille du peuple* to the King’s apartments, only one construction would be placed upon it, none the less comfortable because it was the true one.

Not her mother. Mamma Bice put forward vociferous claims, which Mezzetino was the first to squash. “No, Mammina, no! You wouldn’t do. You wouldn’t know your place. You’re not a lady. Finette’s no lady either, but she’s young and pretty enough to discount that. She can make her mistakes and be loved for them; but you would only make yourself ridiculous. Better me than you, and not even me. None of the Comedians dare let his shadow fall within a mile of the King, until Finette has saved the day for us.”

“But His Majesty wants us to act with him! Didn’t you say he did, M. de Caylus?”

“All that,” said Mezzetino, “hangs on my sister. We mustn’t queer the

position in advance. Why shouldn't M. le Comte here take Finette to the King?"

The discussion was carried on in Watteau's garret. The women were tittivating Finette in her newly-garnished finery, trying a ribbon here, a flower there. De Caylus was not enamoured of the last suggestion. The King had commanded him to bring Watteau to Court; some kudos might attach to him, later, for that. Finette was another matter. The first move had been played in a game not yet won—and the King was on their side. But the King might be disappointed, and change his colours—and whoever had made the second move adverse to the Maintenon, might find his neck in a noose. He stroked his chin.

"Why not?" said Mezzetino.

"No, not at all!" said Watteau suddenly. "I'll take Finette myself."

"You!" she exclaimed. Her voice was joyous.

"You, M. Watteau!" cried the Comedians.

"You, Watteau?" queried De Caylus.

"I understand the King wants to look at my work. Finette is my picture," he said obstinately. "It is my picture that is to be on show, is it not? Well, if it must be so. But I won't have my picture spoiled for anybody."

"I see," said De Caylus.

"Dear Watteau." Finette softly touched his hand. He withdrew it nervously.

"This young painting," he said to De Caylus, "is not dry. The canvas is still fresh. Finette is scarcely finished. Nobody must touch her yet but me. She is my work."

"The artist loves his work," observed Mezzetino.

"Naturally," said Watteau.

A butterfly brushed his cheek; Finette had passed her own beside it lightly and quickly, before he could repulse her. Gilles gnawed his knuckle and spat on the floor.

"It is a good idea," said De Caylus. "I, Watteau, on the strength of His Majesty's interest in you, introduce you to Court myself, for your advancement, and you insist on bringing your model with you, that His Majesty may the better judge of your quality."

"And if any unfortunate contretemps occurs," said Mezzetino, "for instance, if the prude intrudes before her time, Watteau can always say Finette is his little wife."

"Ha-ha!" laughed De Caylus.

"Ho-ho!" guffawed the Comedians.

"He-he!" giggled Finette.

Even Watteau smiled, a trifle wanly, but still, she noticed, he smiled, he did not frown.

Only Gilles bit his knuckles, and drew blood.

SCENE XIV: *Watteau,*  
*Finette.*

“Oh!” gasped Finette.

“What is it *now*?” said Watteau.

“That marble lady in the golden niche!”

“The right place for her.”

“Who is she?”

“Just a marble lady. Not very good.”

“Why?” asked Finette. “Was she one of the King’s mistresses?”

“I don’t know who she was,” said Watteau indifferently. “I mean, she’s not a very good piece of work.”

“I think she’s beautiful!” pouted Finette. “Oh! Look at these chairs! look at these tapestries! Look at this elegant table in coloured stones! What lovely candlesticks! What a splendid mirror! What a thick carpet! What luxurious cushions! What a bright ceiling—I wonder who painted it.” She ran about, touching, looking, trying everything. She flung herself down among the luxurious cushions, and then sprang up in terror. “Look what I’ve done! I’ve crumpled the King’s cushions! I’m frightened!”

“Why?” asked Watteau. “That marble lady up there isn’t frightened.”

“I’m not a marble lady,” said Finette shortly.

“If you’re not careful, you’ll turn into one. In a golden niche.”

“Bah!”

“I thought you wanted a golden niche,” said Watteau.

“I want a lot of things! You needn’t sneer. *You* don’t give me anything I want.”

“I can’t give you a golden niche,” said Watteau.

“I don’t want golden niches from you,” said Finette.

To this he made no reply.

“Well!” she cried. “Why don’t you ask me what I want from you? Haven’t you any curiosity? Do you know what? If I am frightened, you are still more frightened. And if you aren’t, Watteau, if you aren’t——!” she stamped her foot angrily, “it’s *you* who have a marble heart, not me!”

He turned from her. “You don’t know what you’re saying.”

“You haven’t a marble heart after all?” she asked. She stole behind and joined her two hands round his breast. “It’s actually beating! I can feel it. Now feel mine.” He shook himself free of her. “Oh Watteau! do you never love?” she cried.

"I always love," he said under his breath.

"Whom do you love?"

"Everything."

"Bah, everything!"

"Everything that is beautiful."

"Me too!"

"Of course, you too."

"I would rather you left off loving everything, and loved only me," said Finette.

"Then something would suffer."

"I shouldn't mind suffering!"

"I mean my work would suffer, my child," said Watteau.

She buried herself among the cushions again. "When you call me your child," she said in muffled tones, "I could cry."

"But you are a child. Seventeen?"

"Eighteen at midsummer."

"And I am thirty. Twelve whole years between us."

"A very precocious father!" Finette sat up. Her cheeks were slightly tear-stained, she looked at him winningly. "You are not in the least like my father, Watteau. You are my dear friend."

He sat beside her, and took her hand, and she knew that it was not her lover who pressed it. In a fury with herself and him she flung her arms round his neck and cried: "No, you are not my friend, you are something else. Why did you bring me here if you weren't afraid the King would spoil what you love?"

"Finette!"

Was it fortunate or unfortunate for him, was it fortunate or unfortunate for her, that at this moment the door opened, and the Comte de Caylus reappeared with Feuillade?

SCENE XV: *Watteau,*  
*Finette, De Caylus,*  
*Feuillade.*

It was Finette who disengaged herself before their embrace was observed. So rapid are women in readjusting a situation, that what the two courtiers saw was Watteau, looking worried on the couch, and Finette coquetting at the looking-glass. She leaned so close that her lashes almost touched their own reflection, while she applied her fingertips to them. Feuillade thought she was employing her cosmetic, but she was removing her teardrops. He smiled at her in the glass, came close behind her, and whispered in her ear, "That's right!

your matter marches. The salient is all but gained.”

Meanwhile De Caylus was saying to the painter, “Your affair is in train. The pension is practically secure. Come with me.”

“To the King?” muttered Watteau, out of sorts with everything.

“His Majesty will receive you a little later.” De Caylus drew him discreetly towards the door, where Watteau hesitated.

“But Finette——”

“Will be in good hands.”

Watteau had no choice. He went with De Caylus. If genius wants its own way, it must stay in its garret.

Finette hardly saw him go. She confided to Feuillade, “I’m all of a twitter!”

“Compose yourself,” said the General reassuringly. “Or no, do not compose yourself. There are attractions in a twitter.”

He too went to the door. She followed him. “No, no, my dear! You are to remain here.”

“I thought you were going to take me to see the King.”

“All in due course,” smiled Feuillade.

Finette put her hand on her bosom. If little Columbines would keep their self-assurance, they should stay behind their footlights. “Oh, pray don’t go!” she pleaded.

“I have my orders.”

“And mine?” she asked.

“Are to await events.” The door closed behind him.

SCENE XVI: *Finette,*  
*sola.*

Finette was alone. Her heart beat stifflingly. She was indeed, as she said, all of a twitter, and which of her many emotions was uppermost she hardly knew. Alas, what it is to be fickle! Or rather, to be made in three parts, if not more. One part demanded Gilles, her Venetian lover. He was gross, he was sensual, but wasn’t she too? He had some fun in him, when he wasn’t sulky. And Finette loved her fun, wherever she could find it. He was teasing, he was her kind, her class, her profession; she knew what he was up to, and wasn’t afraid of him, or abashed by it. Of course, he was common, but then, for all her prettiness, so was she. Only—pretty things like Finette sometimes get their chance. Gilles would never rise out of the ranks; she might. If she saw her chance, she’d be a fool not to take it.

But then, Watteau! Watteau was her problem. She had never met anyone like him. He was common-born, like herself—but how unlike herself. He

disdained the good things of life. But while he disdained them, he created things better than life. He didn't want what she knew herself to be. But while he rejected it, he endowed her with what she hadn't known she possessed. He took some living up to—but he was worth it; he infuriated her—yet she worshipped him; he was nothing to look at—and she dreamed about him; he made no demands on her—she would have offered him anything; he offered her nothing—but gave her a life worth living. If he had only lifted his little finger! She knew he never would. Well then, the King!

The King was her chance. She was greedy, pleasure-loving, fond of finery. How often did little Columbines find their way into palaces? She had seen Columbines grow old, their daintiness wiped out by time, their talents threadbare, their joints turned to wood. Their end was melancholy, often frightful, because they'd never had a chance to grab a fortune, while they were young, and saucy, and desirable. The King was her chance—she'd be a fool not to take it.

The waiting which began by increasing her nervousness, ended by dissipating it. The minutes passed. She pictured herself installed at Court, in some private pleasure-box. She considered how to comport herself. She took possession of the little cabinet; she preened herself; tried walking this way and that, now languid, now haughty, always elegantly; she sat in various postures on the chairs, she practised curtsies to herself in the glass—and suddenly she flung herself on the couch, loosened her bodice, stretched her arms above her head, shut her eyes—and snored. First a tiny, impish, feminine snore—then a masculine and sonorous snore. Turn and turn about, alto and basso, now *piano* now *forte*.

The duet became a trio. A tenor chortle insinuated itself between the alto and basso.

SCENE XVII: *Finette*,  
*The King*.

A very old man was leaning on the back of the couch, looking down at her. He was superbly attired; his vast curled wig concealed a good deal of his age. But the wrinkled eyes that feasted on the pretty thing's disarray were those of a very old man. Finette uttered a tiny scream, and sat up. The old eyes wandered higher and met hers. He laughed. She laughed.

"Oh, how you frightened me, monsieur!" she cried. "I thought you were the King."

"Ah?" he said. "Why?" He waited for her answer with amusement.

"I've come to see him—that is, to be seen by him. I thought whoever came

would be the King.”

“Well, and why not?” he smiled.

“Ha-ha, old gentleman!”

“No, my dear, no!” He spoke as though she had struck him, but she was too much concerned with her own case to care about his. In the company, Pantaleone would have been cast for him. She always knew how to deal with Pantaleone. She pretended to smooth her hair and arrange her bodice, and beckoned him round the couch with a crooked forefinger. When he was sitting beside her, she straightened the finger, put the tip to her lip, and asked confidentially, “Tell me, old gentleman! how does one behave?”

“Behave?” he repeated. (If he could persuade himself this charming child was teasing him!)

“Yes, to the King. You must excuse me,” she wheedled, “but the mere thought of him frightens me out of my wits.”

“Any why, my pretty dear?”

“Well, monsieur, the King! Louis the Magnificent! The splendid Louis! Wouldn’t *you* be afraid?”

“I’ve never been afraid of him until now.”

“What are you afraid of in him now?”

“His age,” said the old man in a quavering voice.

“Oh, a king’s never old!” Finette tossed her head at him. (No doubt she’s teasing?) “But if he were,” she added, “why should you mind? You must be older still.” (Pray heaven she’s teasing!)

“Do I look so old to you, my pretty dear?”

“To be sure, and I’m glad of it,” she answered stoutly. “I’m not afraid of you. I can ask you everything I ought to know.”

“What do you want to know?” The old voice was flat.

“To begin with, when the King comes, what do I do?”

“You don’t remain seated in His Majesty’s presence.” The old voice was dry.

“A slap in the eye for a start!” Finette sprang up merrily. “Well then, I rise. And next, do I curtsy, do I kiss his hand? Do I speak first, or does he? Do I look him in the face, or hang my head? Do I pretend, to fine manners, or do I use those I’ve got?”

“Be only your sweet self.”

“But will he like me like that?” she asked anxiously.

“I suspect so.”

“Is he not very terrifying?”

“How do you picture him?” asked the old gentleman.

“Oh, the King!” Finette put her forefinger into one of her dimples. “He is past his prime, of course; but Royalty is always royal. There may be a

crowsfoot or so about his eye; but his eye will flash. He may not have the full vigour of youth; but he will bear himself majestically. He is the King! Why should he even notice a little slut like me? Ah, the thought of him terrifies me!”

“Suppose,” said the man on the couch, “the thought of the little slut terrifies him?”

“Now you are making game of me. How could it?”

“Suppose the King had seen your picture, Finette, had heard delicious reports of you from those who had seen yourself? Suppose the King had staked all, not upon liking you, but upon your liking him? Suppose the King was aware of the crowsfeet and the stoop in his back, and had forgotten that kings stand erect with flashing eyes? Suppose the King, whose favours you aspire to, fears lest he fail to win the favour of Finette?”

“The King aspire to my favour?” Finette burst out laughing. “He who has commanded the loves of queens and duchesses? Why, he could crush me with one hand, if I disobeyed him.”

“What good would that do the King? How would that revive for him youth and delight? It would be but a sign of the power which has grown joyless with use. No, no, Finette. The King of old was a compelling lover; the old King knows himself a lover who sues. And that is why he trembles.” The old man wiped his palms with his handkerchief, and leaned back on the cushions, looking older than ever.

“Then when he does come——” said Finette doubtfully.

“Treat him as confidently as you treat—me.”

“Like this?” She flung off doubt, and perched on his knee. He was enchanted. “And this?” She plumped a saucy kiss on his mouth. He was enslaved.

“Like that, you bewitching child!”

“No, no, I dare not!” She flung a careless arm about his neck. “It’s all very well,” she explained, “to make fun with a nice old chap like you, but when I see King Louis in his glory, I know I shall tremble. Unless——”

“Unless?”

“He *isn’t* in his glory, and then, perhaps, I shall not—like it much.”

The old man put her off his knee, and stood up. He stood up straighter than he had before, and his eye, she thought, seemed brighter, as he said, “You *shall* see Louis in his glory, Finette! My little charmer, you shall bewitch him out of himself. Love him, and he will be the lover he was. Give him your youth, and he will grow young for you. Give him your beauty, and pride will return to his body. Love him, Finette, and he will raise you higher than——”

“The Queen of France?” she asked.

“There *is* no Queen of France!”

“The Maintenon?”

“A morganatic wife.”

“But she is powerful,” whispered Finette, “and she hates me.”

“Why? She knows nothing about you.”

“Not as myself, but as part of something she intends to destroy. Don’t you know who I am? Finette, the Columbine. My father leads the Comedians at the Opera——”

“The Italians?”

“Whom Madame Prude is chasing out of France.”

“Never!” cried the old gentleman.

“What?” Finette stared.

“Never, I say! The Comedians, your father, *you* shall remain in France.”

“Who says so?”

“The King will say so. Plead for them, Finette, and the King of France will say so.”

“But the Maintenon is more powerful than the King.”

His eye flashed so that Finette began to quail. “That is not true!”

“It is she the people fear,” faltered Finette.

“Fear that old woman? My child, the King is the King.”

“They say he is in her power.”

“Love him, Finette, and render her powerless!”

“I?”

“Love him, and render him powerful!”

“I?”

He seized her hands, and drew her close to him. “Together,” he cried, “we will defy the Maintenon. Madame Prude shall be deposed, the marriage annulled! The King will make Finette the Queen of France! Give him your youth, your youth! Love him, Finette!”

She trembled in his arms. “The King—when is he coming?”

“The King has come.”

His voice rang. She looked up. Her eyes were dazzled. He wasn’t an old gentleman any more.

SCENE XVIII: *Finette,*  
*Beatrice.*

“And did you play your cards well, Colombina?”

“Yes, Mamma Bice.”

“*Bene, benissimo!*”

SCENE XIX: *Charlotte,*  
*Monologue.*

Messieurs-mesdames! put off your blacks and greys! Put on your yellows, sapphire-blues, and scarlets. Put off your sober mien, put on your smiles. Put off your disapprovals, approve of everything! What, don't you know? Haven't you heard the news? The Maintenon's packing her boxes. A change has come over the King, the Court, Paris, the whole of France! Such inaugurations are taking place! Music-masters, singing-masters, dancing-masters, wig-makers, shoe-makers, tailors! There is to be a Fête at Fontainebleau; a Masque, in which the King himself will appear; actually, with the Comedians from the Opera! He had them presented to him the other day—privately, of course! but some were present that weren't wanted there. Ask Madame de Marignan-Croissy; she was there, she knows the whole story.

"True? To be sure it's true," laughed Charlotte, questioned. "Yes, I was there, dressed in a domino. I mingled with the troupe—I've cultivated Il Lelio a trifle, and he managed it for me, for really, who wouldn't be curious just now? The King had arranged a private audience. Feuillade was present, De Caylus, and the new Court Painter—his name? Antoine Watteau. His appointment isn't official yet; but they say there's no doubt of it. He is designing the scenes for Apollo and Daphne, the forthcoming representation; afterwards, he is positive to receive his guerdon. Besides, the King wishes him to paint his portrait, in conjunction with that of a lady; and has commissioned him, too, to paint a ceiling for his new bed-chamber—a wreath of cupidons gambolling round the Sun, with Hebe in his heart. Oh I assure you the little painter's made! But to our story.

"We—I identify myself with the Comedians—were ushered into an ante-room, where we waited His Majesty's pleasure. Two of us only were absent, the Columbine Finette, and her brother Mezzetino. A rascal, my friends, with a voice of honey, and a touch on the lute to rival Orpheus. These two were closeted with the King in advance. Mezzetino had composed a song for the Masque, which the King was to sing, or else to have sung for him; His Majesty had to hear the tune, and give his final approval to the words. And Columbine was there, because—ta-ta! don't ask me why Columbine was there. However, our turn came in time; the door was opened, and Mezzetino beckoned us to advance. We entered the presence with a certain grace, but naturally, our hearts were in our mouths. We weren't accustomed to such high society. The clever Mezzetino divined our mood; he whispered to us one last stage direction: 'Comport yourselves as though you were in the theatre!' It was excellent advice.

"Well, we went in! There was His Majesty, looking, upon my word,

another man! Something has come over Louis lately. But I forgot! I was La Cassandra, who had never set eyes on him before. I was, like my companions, immensely impressed. Behind him stood the few favoured courtiers who at present enjoy his confidence. Before him was a table, with M. Watteau's designs littered over it; M. Watteau himself stood, rather moodily I must admit, on His Majesty's left; and on his right, perched jauntily on the corner of the table, sat La Finette, our little Columbine. Mezzetino, lute in hand, stood midway between His Majesty's group and ours. His attitude was that of a Major-Domo—he was about to introduce us all in style. The scene is set—I hope you visualise it?

“Before the act could proceed, a climax was launched! The door opposite ourselves was flung open violently, and the Maintenon, in black, stood there like Fate. There were three Fates, were there not? Madame was Atropos. The hearts that were in our mouths dropped into our boots. Her voice, harsh as the death-rattle, sounded our doom.

“‘Louis! Your Majesty! What is going on here?’

“La Finette jumped off the table, and ran a few steps towards Mezzetino, but that basilisk eye fell on her, and she stopped paralysed, like a rabbit that has seen a rattlesnake. Everything now depended upon Louis. And we felt there was very little to depend on, when Madame demanded, ‘What have you been doing?’

“But we were wrong. His Majesty answered her frigidly, across the table. ‘Are we accountable to you, madame, for what we choose to do?’

“She glared at him; it must have been years since he had countered her question with one of his own. But she hadn't grasped the full position yet. ‘Who are these people, Louis?’ she asked sourly.

“The King stood his ground. ‘Are we accountable to you, madame, for whom we choose to have about us?’

“Mezzetino, feeling the strain ease, moved, unwisely. His lute-strings jarred, and the Maintenon wheeled upon him. ‘Who is this man?’ Mezzetino wilted like a pricked bladder; he bowed, subservient, ingratiating, uneasy. The Maintenon swiftly followed up her advantage. ‘And who’—she rounded on Columbine—‘is this creature?’

“Poor little Finette whispered under her breath, ‘Oh, Mezzetino! let us go! we'll go——’

“‘Answer me, girl!’ commanded the Maintenon.

“She faltered, ‘If you please, madame, I am Colombina——’

“‘Ha!’ You should have heard the Maintenon's *Ha!* You should have seen the baleful look she gave the King! ‘And you,’ she said, ‘knowing my intentions, choose to contaminate my Court with this riff-raff!’ She withered us with a gesture, him with a glance. We were suitably withered; but strangely

His Majesty wasn't. He answered, imperturbably, 'We choose, madame!'

" 'Louis!' she screamed at him.

" 'Silence! The King chooses!'

"She was furious, but she was frightened at last.

" 'You forget yourself, madame,' continued Louis. 'You announce your intentions. Be flattered that We sometimes permit them to be second to Our own. You speak of your Court. Be satisfied if We continue to allow you sometimes about Our person. You forget your position, madame. Never again presume to forget Ours.'

" 'What has come over him?' she murmured aghast.

" 'Approach, Finette.' The King beckoned our Columbine. She glanced from the Maintenon to His Majesty, and gained confidence enough to flutter towards him. He rose, took her hand, and whispering, 'Do not tremble,' led her himself to the defeated lady. 'We present to you, madame, Mlle. Finette, the flower of the Italian Comedians, who will shortly transplant her bloom from the Opera to the Court.'

" 'Sire!' Ignoring her affront, the King beckoned Mezzetino.

" 'We present to you her brother, M. Mezzetino, who will henceforth provide music for our chamber.'

"What a change of front in Mezzetino! How uneasiness turned to jauntiness! Servility, of course, is in the rogue's grain. It only made his obeisance more impudent.

" 'We present to you,' continued Louis, 'M. Watteau, our Court Painter, who is designing our forthcoming Diversion at Fontainebleau—a Classical Ballet, in which We, madame, shall enact the part of Phœbus Apollo.'

" 'A classical ballet! Old fool!' muttered the Maintenon. She completely ignored M. Watteau, who, on his part, paid her the same compliment. Turning on the King, she exclaimed harshly, 'Do you want to make yourself ridiculous? I forbid this ballet, Louis!'

"But she had gone too far. The King drew himself up haughtily: there was a momentary battle for supremacy, a battle in which she was beaten. The King turned his back on her, and addressed his Court Painter. 'These designs of yours are admirable, M. Watteau. We will adapt them to the borders of our lake at Fontainebleau. There are still the costumes to consider. Design me something resplendent for the Sun-God. And something surpassingly beautiful for Daphne.' He beamed upon Finette.

" 'That's me!' exclaimed Finette excitedly. The Maintenon seemed less and less to exist. 'But who was Daphne, please, Your Majesty?'

" 'The Sun-God's love,' said Louis tenderly. 'The Ballet will conclude with an abduction.'

" 'Daphne,' said Watteau distastefully, 'was not abducted.'

“‘We need not be too literal,’ said the King. ‘This time, Daphne *shall* be abducted, by means of an embarkment.’

“‘An embarkment?’ Watteau seemed bent on being stupid.

“‘For Cythera, the Isle of Love. Cythera shall be represented by an ornamental barge on the bosom of the lake. Design me a barge, M. Watteau, fit for amorous delights.’ He kissed Finette’s hand.

“‘Sire!’ It was Maintenon, livid, not quite cowed. ‘And who is to assist in this infamous celebration?’

“Before the King could answer, Mezzetino hopped forward, and sweeping us into the scene with a single gesture, ‘The Italian Comedians!’ he announced extravagantly.

“By instinct, we assume appropriate attitudes. Finette rises on her points, and twirls three times. The King applauds; the courtiers follow suit. Finette, now a little outside herself, winks at Watteau, and jerking a dainty thumb over her shoulder at the defeated figure of the Maintenon, she imitates it, still on her points. Watteau remains completely unresponsive, on which La Finette looks at him angrily, and then laughs louder than is necessary.

“‘Brava, Mezzetino!’ cried His Majesty. ‘Madame, you are answered!’

“But this was not the end of the comedy. On the contrary, it was only just beginning. These Italians are children, making the most of their momentary triumphs; they can never resist showing off, like peacocks. As if the lady’s humiliation was not complete, it must needs please M. Mezzetino to announce us, one by one, bringing us, as it were, before the curtain, to make our bows to a delighted audience. And we made them, first to His Majesty, who *was* delighted, and then, with a touch of exaggeration, to Madame, who was not.

“‘Scaramouch!’ shouted Mezzetino, thrusting forward the father of the troupe.

“Scaramouch made the salute of a buffoon.

“‘Beatrice!’

“Hers was stately to a degree.

“‘Flaminia!’

“Flaminia was all grace.

“‘Lelio!’

“Lelio was all elegance.

“‘Cassandra!’

“I achieved something mournful and sinister.

“‘The Doctor!’

“Dignified, if a thought pedantic.

“‘Pantaleone!’

“He doddered his very best.

“‘Arlecchino!’

“He made three leaps across the room.

“ ‘Gilles!’

“Messieurs-mesdames! the White Pierrot staggered forward like one heart-broken, saluted the King, and—drew his knife! Imagine it!

“Everyone present made some sort of movement and the King exclaimed ‘What is this man about?’

“But it was all right, of course, it was all in the play. Lelio and Mezzetino caught the wretch each by a wrist, while Colombina threw herself between Gilles and the King in an amusing posture of defence.

“ ‘He is about to kill himself, Your Majesty, for love of Colombina, because——’ You should have seen the glance our minx treated the King to. ‘Because he is supplanted!’

“And as the actors disarmed the heart-broken Pierrot, I heard His Majesty breathe in Columbine’s ear——

“ ‘What did you hear, Countess, what did you hear?’

“Messieurs-mesdames, I wasn’t supposed to hear it. The curtain rang down on the comedy. The company dispersed. We made one exit, the Maintenon another. But whether she has made her exit for good——”

SCENE XX:

*The Maintenon, Gilles.*

No! not if she could help it. She had risen from penury and obscurity with too many pains to return to them, disgraced, without a struggle. But the means, the means?

None of her old weapons could serve her now. Her influence with Louis had vanished like smoke. With a last unforeseen flicker of vitality, he had ranged himself against everything she stood for. And because he *was* the King, his will was paramount. What if it was the will of senility?—while she could sway him, that had been her strength. Senile or sane, the King’s will was the King’s.

She read her defeat in the mien of those about her. No voice rang true, no smile but held something in reserve. Everything said, looked, done under constraint, now that misfortune was supplanting fortune. They knew it! and waiting for her downfall, her friends suppressed their sympathy, her enemies their triumph. Unless she could remove La Finette from her path, the Maintenon *must* make her exit for ever. Oh, never! But, the means!

That white-faced, black-eyed clown, with a knife in his fist. He had frightened them all. Was he as good an actor as all that? Her intelligence said no. Such an actor would not remain submerged in a company full of indifferent

talents. If the clown startled them, it was because he was not acting.  
She wrote and dispatched a note.

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“What do you call yourself?”

“Gilles the Venetian.”

“What part are you to play in the King’s Masque?”

“I am a Cloud that seeks to obscure the Sun.”

“Do you like your part?”

“No, for I fail to obscure him. But perhaps——”

“Perhaps?”

“Perhaps I shan’t fail!”

“You mean?”

“I do mean!”

“To kill the King?”

“Ha!”

“How?”

His hand went to his girdle.

“The knife again. Put it away, you fool.”

“Why?”

“Because you could never get within an inch of the King. He will be hemmed about with his toadies and his lemans. At most you’ll slash his sleeve and graze his skin. Is that worth the penalty that would follow? Drawing-and-quartering is only fun for the onlookers.”

“But he shall not have Finette! He *shall* not have Finette!”

“He need not have Finette.”

“You’ll help me to her? Eh? You’ll help me to her?”

“I can’t do the impossible. She despises you.”

“Ahi!” He groaned.

“Jeers at you.”

“Ahi!”

“Makes game before the world of you and your passion.”

“Ahi!”

“Finette cannot be forced into your arms. She can only be kept out of the arms of the King.”

“You mean?”

“I do mean! It may be hard for you to get near the King, but very easy to get near the girl.”

“I can’t get near her! They keep her to themselves, or else she’s with *him*, practising songs and steps and I don’t know what!”

“Make the rehearsals at Fontainebleau your occasion. Approach her then.”

“Yes, yes! with—this!”

“Always the knife! Don’t trust to it. *This* is the surer way.”

“What is that phial?”

“A knife may be turned aside, a knife may miss. Poison goes home.”

“Poison Finette!”

“And save her from the King.”

“Poison—Finette!”

“It won’t be difficult. Find her, smile, be friendly, say that all is well; that your sulks were due to wounded pride, not love; that you are not such a fool as to stand in her light; and that when she is the King’s mistress, you know she won’t forget old friends.”

“Old friends. I’ll remember.”

“Suggest a pledge of friendship. Offer her wine and ask her to drink forgiveness.”

“Forgiveness. I’ll remember.”

“When she has drunk it, make good your escape. Finette will not follow you.”

“Finette—will—not—follow—me. *But—poison Finette?*”

“Or spare her, for the King.”

“Give me the phial!”

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“Lisette!”

(Oh, no, no, no! I *must* hear the end of it!)

“Come along! you’ll tire the little bird out.”

“No, Aunt. It *likes* to sing, really it does.”

“Of course, dear heart, or you wouldn’t like to hear it. But enough is as good as a feast.”

Bella called from the other room, “That’s a stupid proverb, Cherry Pie.”

“So it is,” agreed Charlotte, “but Lisette has had a long day and must go to bed. As for you, you’ll have your feast to-morrow.”

There seemed to be no help for it, and I went; up to the old attic under the roof. Aunt Charlotte began to brush my hair, and unbutton me. I temporised, dancing about the floor in my chemise, and hanging out of the window, to look down on the garden under the moon, with its tall lupins, and its bushes covered with roses. How far away they looked, as the scent mounted.

“Come in with you!” said my Aunt. “Don’t you know it’s dangerous?”

“Oh Aunt! it’s such a hot night, I *couldn’t* catch cold!”

“I don’t mean catching cold, it’s Midsummer Eve. You might see what you aren’t supposed to see.”

“What?”

“Never mind what!”

“Have you ever seen anything, Aunt?”

“No,” said Aunt Charlotte, regretfully, “I haven’t. I’ve tried, but I’ve never managed to manage it. It comes of not being born on a Sunday.”

“I was born on a Sunday,” I mentioned.

“Then pop into bed at once!” commanded my Aunt.

She tucked me up, turned out the gas, lit the nightlight in the little china château on the mantelpiece, kissed me good night, and stole away so softly that I did not hear her shut the door. . . .

So softly, so softly they came through the quiet shadows, the flickering lights, through the warm June air, the moonlight on the floor, the silhouettes of leaves, the movement of fountains.

*“Hi! hi! hi! hi! hi! hi! hi!”*

Was it a flock of little owlets hooting? Or little people laughing long ago? Down in the garden (I was kneeling on a chair, and leaning in my nightdress over the window-sill), were those blue lupins standing in the moonlight, and big white roses with their skirts blown out? Or were they ranks of slender men, and girls in billowing skirts? The sky was a pallid green, so was the water, framed in poplar-groves so dark as to seem black. Far below me, lights twinkled among the groves and in the grass, and a barge, lit with lamps of gold, lay at the end of the vista on the lake. I pressed my chin into my two clenched palms, and looked and listened, every sense alert. The owlish laughter of the little people, like flowers in movement, tinkled on my ears, they flitted across my vision doing this and that, nothing for long, nothing that mattered much. A string of girls, holding each other’s hands, drifted by like a line of foam on a moonlit sea. Then three fluttered separately, like pearly moths. Then one, like a walking lily. Six little men with flambeaux leaped out of one black shadow into another. A man and a girl, holding hoops of golden leaves, two more bearing branches hung with silver pears. Some of the little people were dressed elaborately, and some so scantily that their limbs shimmered through wisps of gauze. A rococo Eros met a rococo Psyche.

“What a night, sweet soul!”

“Fair Love! what a night!”

“Heavenly moment! when the eyes first light on the object of desire!”

“When the mind knows nothing!”

“And the heart knows everything!”

“Eros!”

“Psyche!”

“Love me!”

“For ever!”

“For ever!”

“I’ll love you forever!” fluted the little couple.

*“Hi! hi! hi! hi! hi! hi! hi!”*

Eros and Psyche, Lelio and Sylvia, leapt into the shadows, out of earshot of the elfin laughter.

A middle-aged Mars pursued a youthful Venus.

“Not so fast, Lady Aphrodite! not so fast!”

“Faster, Lord Ares! faster!”

“I cannot keep pace with you, Goddess of Beauty.”

“Then you’re no match for me, God of Battles.”

“Beauty! perch here!” Mars dropped upon his knee.

“It is a trap!”

“I will bait it for you.”

Mars took off his ring, and laid it on his leg.

“Ha! what a ruby!” Venus entered the trap.

“Thus Atalanta was caught!” But his arms circled air. She darted away, the red stone on her finger winking at him.

“Not so fast! not so fast!”

“Faster, faster, faster!”

Mars and Venus, Feuillade and Flaminia, vanished to a shrill chorus of “*Hi! hi! hi!*”

The owlet accompaniment gave place to a dove’s.

“*Croo! croo! croo!*” Finette fluttered out of the shade. The King, in gold panoply, tottered after her. She hid in an arbour crooning, “*Croo! croo! croo!*”

“My cushat dove! Where? where?”

“Here! here!”

“Come! come!”

“Anon! anon!”

“When? when?”

“When you have blinded me, God of the Sun!”

“And then? and then?”

“*Croo! croo! croo!*” She floated out of her arbour. He failed to grasp her, crying, “Be mine! be mine!”

“Not yet! not yet!”

“Love me, love me!”

“Never! for ever!” she mocked. And the elfin laughter echoed her mockery. “Never, for ever! for ever, never! *Hi, hi, hi, hi, hi, hi, hi!*”

Before the King could pursue her, Mezzetino, with his lute.

“Your Majesty’s song.”

“That song! it is too difficult.”

“Let us rehearse it. I’ll follow you with the tune.”

“I can’t remember the words.”

“I’ll sing them with Apollo. They are quite simple. Begin!”

“Finette ma mie,  
Oiselle jolie,  
Chante moi d’amour—”

The old cracked voice, supported by Mezzetino’s dulcet baritone, went through the song.

“On the night it will be sung from a golden car. How can I sing it without my golden car? Where’s M. Watteau? M. Watteau ought to have brought my golden car.”

The King tottered through the moonshine and the gloom, calling for Watteau. The tiny voices echoed him like owls and nightingales, answering the call of their kind from far away. “*Watteau! Watteau! Watteau!*”

How futile to call for Watteau. Wasn’t he here in the garret, with me, his head in his hands, his brushes on the floor?

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Down there, Finette alone. She was crowned with tiny green leaves. Her slender waist, her little head, rose like a stem with its flower out of a bed of snow. The white billows of her skirt were festooned, resettled. She swayed on the points of her green shoes as though she stood poised upon two pointed leaves. She held a wreath of laurel in the air, each dark green leaf tipped with a crystal drop: a pseudo-Daphne, a classic Columbine. She looked frightened, and uncertain, and adrift. The faintest breeze wafted her over the lawn. She seemed not eager for her approaching triumph. She listened timorously, and peered into a bush, whispering: “*Watteau!*” She cast her eyes up to the sparkling crown of laurel, threw it from her, hung her head, and wept.

“Good evening, Queen of France!”

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It was the Venetian. His face had never been so white, his eyes so black. He bore a salver on his broad coarse palm, and on the salver goblets and a bottle. He accosted her with a ghastly jocularity.

“Good evening, Queen of France!”

“Pah!” She dashed her white hands over her wet eyes, and spat at him.

He shuddered convulsively. “Why, what’s the matter, girl? You think I come in anger or jealousy? Not I! I come full of goodwill and felicitations.”

“What for?”

“Your rise in life. Oh, I don’t grudge it you, my girl.”

“You’ve changed a lot since yesterday, then!”

“Yesterday was yesterday. To-night I’ve come to my senses.”

“Oh!” she scoffed. “You’ll pretend you were never jealous?”

“To be sure I was jealous. I wanted you for myself. But what’s that? A woman is only a woman, after all. A little time to cool one’s blood, and one

gets over it, and wants somebody else.”

“Pah!” She spat again.

“No need for temper between us, Finette. I’d be the last to stand in your light. Besides——”

“Besides what?”

“Shouldn’t I be standing in my own? For when you’ve got the King’s ear—when you lie in his arms—*in his arms*—ahi! you can get what you like out of him then, and you won’t forget your old friends, eh, Finette?”

Finette stared at him. Was this Gilles? Was all the world failing her? Watteau had hidden himself away for days, and Gilles was abandoning her to a fate she shrank from. “If he is not in his glory, then perhaps I shall not—like it much.” She had seen the King in his glory, for many days. She had had a foretaste of the burden of luxury. She did not like it much. Gold dust weighs heavy on Columbine’s butterfly wings. Life in a garden, that was all she asked. Life in a garden, playing with somebody young.

“So you want your pickings, do you?” she answered Gilles. “What shall I get out of the King for you, when I lie in his arms?”

“Oh, a little farmstead, with a piggery—or better still a tavern, where I can play host, and stand treat to a customer now and then—like this” (He poured out wine into the dark red goblets)—“and ask him to drink to my prosperity—as I ask you, Finette.”

“With all my heart!” she cried, and snatched the glass. “I’ll drink to your prosperity, Venetian! I’ll drink good riddance to you, you pig, you wineskin!”

She raised the dark red goblet to her lips.

*A cloud went over the moon. I drew in my head.*

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“Antoine!”

“Madame?”

“I am going to put my cards on the table, my friend, and you, if you value your dreams, will for once come out of them. None of your sulks just now, the case is serious. I have driven all the way from Fontainebleau to tell you so. The rehearsal is over. Why were you not there? They were all asking for you.”

“I have nothing to do with them or with Fontainebleau. I have nothing to do with the life that goes on among them. I have nothing to do with you, Madame de Marignan-Croissy. Drive back to where you belong.”

“Yet you and I have a common meeting-ground. Are we not both provincials, after all?”

“I was a peasant of my province, and you a demoiselle of yours. If we had met, where was our common ground?”

“We both left our provinces to conquer Paris.”

“Well, I haven’t conquered Paris. Have you?”

“For a moment. As long as I live, my conquests will be for the moment. Yours, when you are dead, will be for all time. Don’t shake your head, I know it. I am prophetic. You see, Antoine, we *did* meet on common ground; we left our provinces to meet in the studio where I discovered my master.”

“Métayer.”

“No, Watteau.”

“Oh, if you merely mean I paint better than you do!”

“Watteau, your humility amounts to a conceit I have never seen surpassed in your inferiors. Listen to me. Under Métayer I learned a little painting, and a lot of sorcery. I am going to relate you a story, and you need not ask me how I know what I know.

“As a youth, Métayer was first a student, then a master, of black magic. *He* would have conquered Paris; he had the power. He lacked one thing only, courage. He was always afraid to exercise his own gifts. And if this seems unnatural to you, consider. Each one of us is born with a gift we might exercise. The gift of life. How many of us have the courage to exercise it? It is those who penetrate into it the deepest, those who think most about it and understand it best, who exercise it least. They know too much about it, and are afraid. Métayer knew too much, and was afraid. Yet he desired deeply one thing he had not, and could not gain by nature: beauty. He found that black magic inspires neither immortal love nor immortal art. He was like a man with a stolen treasure he dared not spend, when Athenais de Montespan sought him out.

“Her beauty was devastating, as I need not tell you. She had used it to supplant the meek La Vallière in the King’s affections; but her want of meekness was her own undoing, and she saw herself being supplanted by a woman whose beauty could not hold a candle to hers, for whose wits hers were no match. She began to turn to sorcery to help her. How she scented out Métayer does not signify; she did scent him out, and determined to make him serve her. But his fears were her stumbling-blocks, as they were his own. They couldn’t be bought for gold. She had to overcome them, and she pretended to love him. Beauty! No one knows better than I how he longed for it even in his advanced years.” Charlotte smiled slyly. “When Athenais attacked him with her beauties, Métayer was still a young man. Are young men or old men easier to play? I’ve never decided. Anyhow, Athenais found Métayer easy prey.

“He wasn’t a fool you know. Métayer was free of most follies but that of love, like all men. Before long he knew that Athenais was using him. And, like all men, he was willing to be used—at a price. That is the last and lowest of love’s follies. As though I need tell you, Antoine! you, who hold love too priceless even for its own fulfilment. And then, having got what she wanted (the charm to restore and preserve a waning love), beautiful Athenais refused

the price. When Métayer kept a promised assignation, he found in the bed, not the lady, but her ring. An opal worth a king's ransom. It had *been* a King's. Examine it, if you like, here it is on my hand. It cost me a kiss. It doesn't interest you? Very soon, if I am not mistaken, it will.

"What did Métayer do? He was humiliated, despairing. He abandoned desire for revenge. To attain this, he conceived a charm of a very original character. Really, I can't help admiring the man's invention. The opal, you know, is a stone of peculiar properties. He determined to turn her stone upon herself, and while he invested this ring with certain powers, he wrote the Montespan a cunning letter. Something to this effect——"

"Must I hear it?"

"You had better. You won't be sorry later. 'Madame' (*he wrote*) 'you have recompensed me as I deserve. It would pay you a poor compliment to suggest that the value of your gift is your own equivalent. I would rather have worn you for one night, madame, than your ring for life. Nevertheless, I agree it is a handsome price for what you got of me. Unfortunately, I am by nature suspicious; and from the love-charm you required of me I reserved one detail which renders it impotent. Had I been the recipient of your favours, you should have been the recipient of my secret. Had you failed me entirely, I would have failed you as fully. But since you have appealed to my cupidity with your costliest jewel (save one) I will not withhold from you the detail on which the success of the charm depends. I will only ask a last sign of you, in exchange; something so personal, yet so insignificant, that what means all to me will mean nothing to you. Give me, madame, a single hair from your head, and I will repair my omission instantly.'

"As he knew she would, Athenaïs came in person; masked, by night, to his door, which she would not enter. He did not press her. She handed him a hair, in a sealed paper. He opened it in her presence.

"'How am I to know this is yours?' he asked.

"'How indeed?' she shrugged, and held out her hand for the packet he had promised her.

"'Permit me, madame, to extract a hair for myself.'

"She smiled contemptuously, and slightly shifted the hood of her domino, drawing forward a rich curl above her ear. He separated one fine long hair from the ringlet, and snapped it off; then, smiling drily, handed her the packet containing the 'detail' necessary to the sorcery she wished to employ. She broke the seal, examined the contents, and the enclosed instructions.

"'Have you any honour in you, Métayer?' she asked.

"'Enough to balance yours,' he answered.

"'Then it is useless to ask if I can trust to this.' She leaned to him, and put her lips to his. 'Métayer,' she whispered, '*can* I trust to this? *Will* this ensure

me the King's love for ever?"

"He shook like a man in a fever, withdrew the packet he had given her, and replaced it with another. 'I meant to deceive you,' he muttered. 'I suspected it,' she said, and went away, scorn curling her mouth under her mask. He watched her go with smouldering eyes, unsmiling. So for the last time they parted, she to put her charm into execution, he to twine her hair into a certain fine paint-brush, which, like the opal, was specially prepared."

"I don't care how Métayer prepared his brushes," said Watteau. "What is your point in telling me this story? When will you leave me in peace?"

"Antoine," said the Comtesse, "you will care a great deal how Métayer prepared that paint-brush, and will welcome my story's point when I come to it. If I left you now, you would not be in peace. You would continue to torment yourself with thoughts of Finette. Deny it and I'll go."

He made a restless movement, but said nothing.

"The original charm, conceived by Métayer," said she, "was this: the opal ring gave the employer of the brush a unique power—the power *to paint out of existence* anyone whose hair was combined with the hairs of the brush. The painter must, of course, have enough talent to paint a tolerable portrait of his subject. Métayer had tested his combination with the hair of a rat he had found caught in a trap. With one of the creature's whiskers bound in his brush, and the opal on his right forefinger, he painted Monsieur le Rat on a scrap of canvas. When he had done, the rat was no longer in the trap."

"You are talking moonshine," said Watteau.

"What is moonshine but magic, dear fellow-student? Here is the ring on my forefinger; give me a hair of your head, and the choice of your brushes, and I will paint you out of existence like a dream."

"The choice of *my* brushes?"

"Métayer's paint-brush happens to be among them."

"How?"

"He gave it to you—or you picked it up by chance—and he perhaps was glad to be quit of it. He remained to the last afraid of his own powers. You have doubtless used the brush a hundred times, but divorced from the opal the brush expressed your magic, not Métayer's. Have I your permission to look for it?"

"If it is really here, how will you know it?"

"By the hair of Athenaïs," answered Charlotte.

"Métayer did *that*?"

She laughed. "He ventured as far as setting it in the brush."

"But he never used it. Or else, his magic failed."

"It does not matter whether he used it or not. The hair he pulled from her head came from a false ringlet. She sent him the curl with her compliments

next day. He would have done better to keep the first hair she gave him. She had played fair, for once. However, he was able to cry quits. He also had come prepared to play true or false. When she allowed him to pull a hair from her head, he gave her the true recipe, after all. But she wasn't sure. She made her mistake when she kissed him. The thought of those same lips kissed by the King maddened him, and he seized his chance to substitute the false packet. Vanity of woman! We think we can get the truth out of our lovers, by kissing them. How often are our kisses worth the truth? Men find them worth deception far more often."

Watteau was not listening. He broke out: "If the abominable tale is true—if it *could* be true—I'll burn that brush to-night!"

"No," said Charlotte, "you will use it to-night." She swept up Watteau's brushes from the floor, and began to examine them excitedly. "Not this, or this. It is, I know, a very fine one."

"I'll never touch the accursed thing again!"

"The other face of a curse is a blessing, Antoine. Nor this—nor this—nor this."

"What blessing could ever come of such a brush?"

"Finette's salvation?" suggested Charlotte slyly. "Ah yes! this must be it." She washed a slender paint-brush clean in oil, and held it under a candle. One hair was of a different fibre from the others. She laughed. "I wonder what little grisette's head this grew on?"

"What do you mean by Finette's salvation?" asked Watteau hoarsely.

"What would you give to save Finette?"

"My soul."

Somebody sobbed in the passage. He wasn't used to hearing Finette sob, and did not know it was she till he opened the door.

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She ran into his arms. "Watteau! you'll save me!"

"From what am I to save you, child?" he asked sadly.

"From what? You should say, from whom? What will become of me? These weeks have been the worst I ever knew. There was always enough to eat, and pretty things to wear in quantities, and presents every day, and baskets of flowers, and the angry looks of the proud high-born ladies—I liked all that, just for a day or two. There was the rehearsing for the ballet—well, that's my work. Dances and songs to learn, dresses to try, but everything spoiled because of the old, old King. All my acts were with him, he cannot dance, he cannot sing, and he was ridiculous. And in between he took me on his knees, and made me eat too many sugar-plums, and his kisses may have been exciting twenty, thirty, forty years ago, but now they are not, and the things he says are not suitable for his mouth—oh, I feel as though chains were on my ankles and

wrists, when I want to run I cannot, when I want to lift my arms I cannot, when I want to do anything all of a sudden, for no other reason than that I want to do it, I cannot, cannot, cannot! Oh Watteau, save me from the King of France!" She buried her tear-soiled face in his old soiled shirt; then lifted it again, her childish eyes full of fear, yet an odd little smile crinkling her wet cheeks. "And save me from Gilles."

"Gilles too? What has *he* been doing?"

"Trying to kill me."

Watteau uttered a cry.

"Well, you can't blame him, really, Watteau, can you? After all, I am his promised sweetheart. If we had always stayed in Italy—if we had never been brought to Paris to play—if we had never known you, or seen the King—I suppose I'd have married Gilles, some time or other. You know what Venetians are. I've treated him badly, so he gave me poison to drink. It's only natural."

"Don't chatter so. What happened? Did you drink it?"

"Only a very little passed my lips. Then Madame Charlotte knocked it out of my hand."

Watteau cast a quick look at the Countess.

"The first agreeable expression I've seen on your face to-night," observed Charlotte. "La Finette is right, Gilles is not all to blame. He was a tool in the hands of a certain person. In the kindness of my heart, it has been my custom to relieve her lady-in-waiting now and then of her duties, and the other day I exceeded mine at the keyhole. The poisoned wine was not decanted in Venice. I began to attend rehearsals in my character of Cassandra, in order to keep a guardian eye on our Daphne. But the movements, during rehearsal, have been complicated. Human intrigues were confused with those of the ballet. I could not keep my eye on Daphne as closely as I wished; unfortunately. If I had, when I bundled her into my coach, she wouldn't have been so sick."

"Have I spoiled the brocade, madame?" Finette asked humbly.

"It could not be helped. If you are going to become the King's mistress, I shall, of course, be flattered, and exhibit it. If you are not, I must have the coach re-upholstered."

"It will have to be re-upholstered," said Finette.

Watteau pressed her hands.

"Well, that's the predicament," continued Charlotte lightly. "Finette has lost her footing in the world. She flouts the King, and the advantage lies once more with the Maintenon, who will drive it home. If the Maintenon fails, the Venetian's knife awaits her. No use to expect protection from her family—she might have saved them, but she has let them down. Who else is there for her?"

Finette said, "Watteau."

“Is there?” smiled Charlotte. “What are you going to do about it, Antoine? I think you offered your soul to save Finette. I don’t remember hearing you mention your body.”

“That is useless.” He spoke in a tone so low as to be almost inaudible.

“Why do you say so, my dear, dear friend?” cried Finette. She threw herself on her knees beside his chair, and he took her head in his hands and looked into her eyes. But she knew it was not her lover who looked into them.

“Would it trouble you, Finette, to know that your friend——”

“My dear friend,” she amended.

“When he looks into the time ahead of him, sees only a very little of it left?”

“A little of time?” She opened her eyes in surprise. “But time never comes to an end.”

“Time is always ending.”

“Then what do you see,” she asked, “beyond the little bit of time ahead of you?”

“Eternity,” answered Watteau.

Finette turned white. “That is a word I have only learned to say in one syllable.”

“You call it death,” said Watteau tenderly, “because you are a child.”

“Is that why you won’t love me?” cried Finette. She clung to him weeping. “Because of death? I don’t believe all this. I love you, and I know you love me, Watteau. I’m not such a child, you see. Love is a word of one syllable too!”

“Yes,” he said, “I love you. As long as I cannot possess you, Finette, I shall love you. That is not what you want.”

“No,” she whispered, “it is not.”

“You want someone young and gay, your equal in health and spirits, to play and dance with. You love me, Finette, because I know what you want better than he will—but I am not he.”

She dried her eyes on his sleeve. “You are perfectly right. But what is to be the end of me, Watteau? The streets?”

“Not if you don’t wish,” said Charlotte, whom they had both forgotten. She laid a small portfolio on the table, and took from it a carefully cut material.

“What’s that?” said Watteau.

“Chicken-skin. For my fan.”

Their eyes held each other.

“I wish,” said Charlotte, “the subject to be Finette—Finette at play in one of your beautiful settings. I wish it painted, Antoine, with this old brush—if it needs reinforcing, Finette will lend you a hair. And *I* will lend you my opal to wear while you paint. For which, when the painting is done, you will give me the brush.”

His eyes fell.

“What are you saying to one another?” Finette asked, bewildered.

“The only thing that remains to be said,” answered the Comtesse de Marignan-Croissy, “after what you two have said to one another.” She went to the ragged curtains Finette had once hid in. “Dawn,” she said, parting them. “A possible painting-light. Don’t delay, Watteau. By night, it will be too late.”

He held out his hand, without looking at her. She gave him her ring, and he began hunting for the necessary colours. “Finette, stand there. Lend me your kerchief, madame.”

Charlotte gave him her handkerchief edged with deep, lace. Finette asked wonderingly, “What are you going to do?”

“Bandage your eyes.”

“Paint me blindfold?”

“Yes, on the Countess’s fan. How would you like to live in a garden for ever?”

“If it were one of your gardens, Watteau, what could be better?”

Watteau, about to knot the kerchief, let his hands fall. “I feel like an assassin. I cannot do it.”

“What is it, Watteau? Madame, what is the matter? Is somebody going to stab me, when I am blindfold? What does it mean? There is something between you that you aren’t telling me!”

“Shall she be told, Antoine?”

“She ought to know,” he answered.

It was Charlotte who told her. She ended the tale by asking, “Can you believe it?”

“I can believe anything nobody else does!”

“And you are not afraid?”

“Afraid? Not I? Why should I be?” Finette laughed gleefully, like the child Watteau had called her. “Think what a trick I’ll be playing them. What an artful escape! Gilles, Mezzetino, Louis, all seeking me, calling me. ‘Finette, where are you, my girl?—come here, little bitch!’ ‘Colombina, the stage is waiting—you’ll get the stick!’ ‘Finette! ma mie Finette! petite oiselle’—Can you not hear them?” She mimicked them, high and low. “‘Finette! Colombina!’ And all the time I shall dance on your fan, madame! You and I will split the joke between us. All the time I shall live among the trees and the flowers and the fountains in Watteau’s garden. The flowers will not fade, the leaves will not fall, the fountains will never run dry. There will be music for ever among the trees. And I shall never be hungry, and never grow old; I shall always be prettier than I really am, Finette as Watteau sees her, and nobody else. Afraid? Not me!” But suddenly she gasped, and said, “*For ever?*”

“For a delightful eternity,” Charlotte assured her. “An eternity in one

syllable. Life—not death.”

“But I shall be lonely, even in Watteau’s garden. I shall have nobody to dance and play with.”

“Whom do you want?” asked Watteau.

“That gay young fellow you spoke of, my match in spirits. But not in birth, I’d like him to be a prince.”

“Another Louis?”

“Not *that* Louis, no! not any Louis that ever was born, please, Watteau. A youthful prince, about whom there is a mystery. Have you read M. Perrault’s pretty tale, *La Belle au Bois Dormant*? Very well! I want *Un Beau au Jardin Dormant*. Paint him into my fan, behind the boscage, where no one but me can find him. If I have to wait a hundred years to find him, let him be there. Make him exceedingly handsome—and not too grand.”

“I’ll see. Stand still now. Take the pose.”

“Not yet! Not yet! Oh, wait, wait, wait a little.”

“You haven’t much time to lose,” said Charlotte warningly.

Watteau approached again with the handkerchief. “Bend your head, Finette. I want one of your hairs.”

“Pick out a nice one, Watteau. Ee! Let me look at it.”

“Look quickly, for I am going to bind your eyes.”

“Oh, not so tight! Let me see a little, Watteau.”

“Not the breadth of an eyelash. Up on your points, Finette.”

He went back to the table, and twisted the precious hair into the brush. Across the chicken-skin fan of the Countess Charlotte, he gazed at the tremulous shape of Finette with eyes that saw her other than she was. She flung out her arms with a gesture so spontaneous, so appealing, that he was nearly lost. He seized Métayer’s brush, and painted the fan for dear life—for Finette’s dear life—never lifting his eyes to the sweet shape again. It was painted on Watteau’s vision, Finette on her points, with her laughing mouth, and her arms outflung to catch—whom?

She was done. He began to surround her with the most lovely of gardens. He arranged an arbour for the playmate she asked for, sketching him lightly and leaving his face a blank. He had not decided yet whom he should give her; meanwhile he gave her such groves and fountains, such moonlight and urns of flowers, as must delight her delicate moth-like senses.

There was a stir in the street. He did not hear it. Charlotte over his shoulder whispered: “Finish!”

There was a scuffle on the stair. He did not heed it. He painted the winsome garments of Finette’s playmate, a gardener who was no gardener, a prince in disguise. But whose should the face be?

If he had gone to the door, he would have seen a scurry of buffoons upon

the staircase, if to the window, a coach with the royal arms, lumbering magnificently to his door. He did neither, but poised his brush, trying to see a face that Finette could love.

“Enough!” whispered Charlotte.

“No, it’s not done!”

“Quickly, you fool! give it to me!”

“Leave it alone! Do you want to ruin it?”

“The youth is no matter—didn’t she ask you to hide him?”

“I can’t leave him featureless. Don’t touch it, I tell you!”

But Charlotte had snatched the brush, and hidden the little blank head of the dainty gardener under a shower of leaves. “Sign it!” she muttered.

He obeyed mechanically, as the door burst open, and Mezzetino and Scaramouch fell into the room.

“Where is Finette, M. Watteau? For God’s sake, where is Finette?”

(Charlotte was pulling the ring off his nerveless hand.)

“Wake up, wake up!” Mezzetino was shaking his shoulder. “The girl has gone, and we’re done for, she’s gone, I tell you.”

(Charlotte was pushing a paint-brush into her reticule.)

Watteau’s head sank on the table, heavily. There were sounds of authority below, in the well of the house.

(Charlotte was snatching a kerchief from the floor. She vanished into the attic opposite, and from its shelter heard royal footsteps mounting the uncertain stair.)

“The King, in a fury!” whispered Mezzetino.

“Come Tino, let’s be off!” rejoined Scaramouch.

They went through the trapdoor that gave on to the roofs.

Le Roi Soleil appeared on Watteau’s threshold. Louis had come in search of Finette himself. Her disappearance had shaken him to the core. She had been his final stake for youth and power. He saw his age close down on him without her. He had listened to no advice as he ordered his coach, to make his last assertion in life’s teeth. Frightened attendants crowded up the stair and landing.

“Where is she, Watteau? Where is La Finette?”

For the first time for hours Watteau lifted his eyes. He looked round slowly. He and his King were alone in the wretched room.

“She is—not here, Your Majesty.”

(Not there! What had Charlotte, the on-looker, seen, while Watteau applied eyes and brush to the fan?)

“She *must* be here!” cried Louis. “She’s nowhere else!” He strode to the painter’s table. “What have you been doing?” he demanded.

“Painting a memory,” said Watteau wanly.

Louis stared at the figure on the fan. "It is Finette," he whispered.  
"It was," said Watteau.  
As he looked, the King's years became his doom again.

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The ballet was cancelled, but the fête went forward. The Maintenon herself insisted on it. It was too late to stop the preparations without making a stir; but the character of the evening was greatly changed. It became her evening. Divines and Savants replaced Buffoons and Comedians. There was music, and a certain amount of decorous dancing. In the intervals, Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy cooled herself with the only fan ever painted by Watteau.

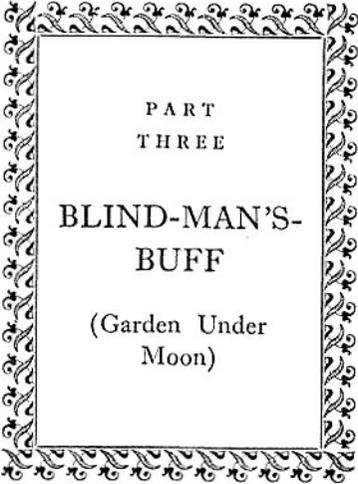
Antoine Watteau never received his pension.

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A cock crowed. My window was pale, but not with midsummer moonlight. As I leaned out of it, for one last long look, did I not hear behind the seeding lupins, a lute spun to an echo, and a voice, tuneless with time, singing:

"Finette ma mie,  
Oiselle jolie,  
Chante moi d'amour  
De nuit et de jour. . . ."

I crept between my sheets, back into bed.

A decorative rectangular border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the central text.

PART  
THREE

BLIND-MAN'S-  
BUFF

(Garden Under  
Moon)

Midsummer Day fell upon a Sunday. This was fortunate, as it allowed Aunt Charlotte to devote the morning to preparations for the party. She enjoyed her kitchen as a vehicle for her imagination, and she did not mind me picking and prying among her preparations, a thing my competent Mother never allowed. “Do it or leave it,” she used to say, “don’t mess it.” Aunt Charlotte’s partiality for messes was among the qualities that made her one with a child. She found as irresistible as I did the litter of cinnamon, sugared roseleaves, and blanched almonds which strewed the kitchen table.

“What are you going to have, Aunt?” I asked, chewing the length of an angelica strip.

“Lobster salad, chicken patties, shrimp aspics, fruit jellies, trifles, and the Birthday Cake. All right?”

“Um-mm!”

“And cup. The Girls’ll expect cup at the very least.”

“What’s cup? Tea or cocoa?”

Cherry Pie laughed. “Neither. Claret. It won’t run to champagne. Though I’ve a bottle of *that* in reserve, if a little plot of mine comes to anything. Don’t go asking what. It’s to be a surprise.”

“For Bella?”

“For Bella. Cela se comprend.”

“Can I sit up for the party and the surprise?”

“I didn’t have you fetched here for anything else. Where’s that cucumber got to? A scrap for the cup, and the rest for Monsieur Homard.”

“Will the Girls drink cucumber?”

“No, dear heart! Just a soupçon for flavouring. Cup’s nothing without a slice of cucumber.”

“Who are the Girls, Aunt?”

“Bella’s friends from the theatre where she used to dance.”

I was disappointed. I’d hoped for *little* girls.

“There’s a theatre in the Strand called the Galar,” I aired my knowledge.

“That’s the very identical one.” My Aunt laid aside the first stage of the cup, and turned her attention to the trifles as she ran on. “Of course, if it hadn’t been a Sunday, the party would have been in Queer Street. The Girls can’t get off any other night.”

“Shall I be shy of them?”

“Not with me and Bella to hold your hands.”

“Are the Girls nice?”

“Sure to be.”

“Don’t you know them then?”

“I know their sort. They’ll be up to no end of larks. Hand me the egg-whisk, pet.”

“What’s their names?”

“There’s Gerty this, and Katie that——”

“And Tottie Barnes and Flossie Darrell,” I said.

“I shouldn’t be surprised.”

“Can I have a glassy cherry?”

“Two.”

Lunch was a picnic. We ate it at odd moments, sitting or standing, between the kitchen, the back parlour, and the garden. Except for Old Madam’s (which went upstairs on a tray—she was ailing again), lunch consisted of oddments left over from the morning’s preparations. Bella and I strolled by the garden-wall, and sat in the broken-down summerhouse at the far end, looking at her presents. From Cherry Pie a string of pale pink corals, and a cream silk net ruffle edged with black satin baby-ribbon. “These are Quite The Thing!” said Bella perkily, and put it on. It made her saucy face look like a little pierrette’s. Madam Lambert, whose gifts were always chosen from her old treasures, had given her a china patch-box, painted in magenta, with a tender young gentleman offering a coy young lady his heart under a willow. The motto: “Accept This Trifle”, was printed over their heads. Inside it was the fine frail handkerchief with the lace fall, the scent of which had gone to my head at our first meeting. I sniffed the old perfume again, and did not wonder that Bella seemed to prefer the kerchief even to the fringed shoulder-shawl of thick white Chinese silk, which had appeared, with no name attached, at Bella’s place at breakfast. It was beautifully embroidered with blue flowers. Aunt Charlotte had said archly, “Now who can *that* be from I wonder!” Bella had not hazarded a guess. Her last present was from me, a pair of coral earrings to match the necklet, but Aunt Charlotte had given them to me to give her, because I had come unprepared. True, I had come prepared for Old Madam’s birthday, but the penwiper butterfly wasn’t nearly dainty enough for Bella, and anyhow I couldn’t see Bella writing letters. I had confessed my predicament to my Aunt, and she produced the earrings on the spot. But now, when I saw Bella trying them in her ears, I felt a fraud, and blurted out, “I think Aunt Charlotte was going to give them to you, but I hadn’t got anything you see.”

“If they are from you *and* Cherry Pie,” said Bella, “I’ll like them twice as much.”

Still feeling that I hadn’t given Bella a *real* birthday present, I plucked at the long blue fringes of the shawl. “Will you wear this at the party, Bella?”

“It wouldn’t go with my frock.”

“Have you got a new frock?”

“I’m going to wear the Columbine dress I wore at Christmas.”

“Like Dollabella’s?”

“*She* ought to be at the party,” said Bella. “Why didn’t you bring her?”

“I did, she’s up in the attic.”

“Well, she never gave me a present,” pouted Bella.

I laughed, and secretly decided that my doll should give Bella the butterfly-penwiper. Its clumsiness wouldn’t matter, if I pretended Dollabella had made it. Bella was saying, “Mind you bring her down to-night, it will be fun for the Girls to see us both together.”

“Why?”

“Once they all had frocks just like ours, you see.”

“Oh.” I looked at the blue-embroidered shawl which wouldn’t “go” with the green-garlanded frock. “Do you know who *did* send this to you, Bella?”

She smiled, stooped, and picked up the butt-end of a cigar off the floor of the summerhouse. “*He* did!”

“That cigar?”

“Frederick smokes them.”

“Oh. Do you sit here, then?”

“Just when it rains.”

“The arbour at the other end is prettier.”

“And nearer the house.”

“Did it rain last Friday?”

“It rained last Tuesday.”

“What did you do on Friday then?”

“We didn’t.”

“But he comes Tuesdays *and* Fridays.”

“On Tuesday——” Bella flicked the butt from her fingertips——“we tiffed.”

“What about?”

“My diamond butterfly. I don’t suppose he’s coming any more. There! aren’t you glad? Now I shan’t go far, far away.”

I wasn’t perfectly sure that I was glad. The pattern seemed disturbed with Frederick out of it. “Are *you* glad, Bella?”

“Ask me another!” answered Bella lightly. She rose, gathering her trinkets up in the shawl, and still with the ruffle round her slender neck went back along the path towards the house. As we were passing the door in the garden, a dry cough greeted us, and a voice said, “Excuse me, I am trying to make somebody hear.”

Bella opened the door to a rather seedy-looking individual, with a shabby black bag. I hoped he was not an early-comer to the party. Then I saw that he and Bella were unknown to each other.

"It's never any use going round to the front," he said, fixing his eye on Bella and her ruffle, "on a Sunday."

"What did you want?" asked Bella.

"Mrs. Pye at home?"

"She's very busy."

"Well, I can't keep calling."

"Have you called before?"

"When I'm round this way. She knows. She expects me to. You go and tell her Mr. Lunette is here, and has she anything for him?"

Bella went off, leaving me to do my best with the situation, until she should come back with, I supposed, a parcel of food, or an old coat, or some money. Mr. Lunette looked very down on his luck. He followed Bella with his eyes, till the roses and apple-trees swallowed her, and said, "A pretty thing. Mrs. Pye's young lady lodger?"

I murmured assent.

"Told me she had one, last time I came round. Seen her before. Third from the left, front row."

"What?" I said stupidly.

"Never forget a face."

I didn't know what he meant, and thought it an odd injunction, but said, "I'll try not to," just to keep things going.

"No good trying," said Mr. Lunette. "You do or you don't. I don't."

"Oh."

"Why did she leave the Gala?" he pursued.

"I don't know."

"How would a child like you? I am merely communing."

To this I discovered no reply at all, and allowed Mr. Lunette to commune till Aunt Charlotte herself bustled into sight. She flapped a pair of floury hands at him.

"Mr. Lunette! Now isn't that *wonderful*! It must be nearly a twelvemonth since I set eyes on you. It quite makes one believe in second sight. Tell me, did your ears burn yesterday? I was saying only at tea-time what a genius you were, and how I hoped to get hold of you before long—and here you are!"

"You've something for me then," said the seedy man.

"An exceedingly precious bit I wouldn't trust to anybody else in the world. Come along in, Mr. Lunette." She drew him on while she talked, to the back parlour; I followed them as far as the French window under the shadow of the upstairs balcony, and lingered. I was both alarmed and attracted by Mr. Lunette. I saw Aunt Charlotte make him take a seat, and pour him out a glass of cup, remarking, "You're an expert, see how you like *that*." While he was drinking it, she laid before him the fragments of the china chocolatière.

“There!” she exclaimed.

“A nasty smash,” commented Mr. Lunette.

“Go along with you,” said Aunt Charlotte. “You’d mend the Portland Vase, if you had to do it. A little thing like this won’t trouble you.”

“A royal piece,” said Mr. Lunette sourly. “Louis Quinze. Made in the year of the reconstruction of the factory at Sèvres.”

My Aunt’s eyes glistened. “Priceless!” she breathed.

“It was.”

“Just look at the painting of that rose!”

“A sin, that’s what I call it.”

(I hung my head.)

“An accident,” corrected my kind Aunt, and I knew she had her eye on me at the window.

“I’d rather commit some sins than some accidents. Accidents like this are worse than sins.”

“Tell that to the marines.”

“One of your precious cats broke it?”

“Never you mind who broke it. I’ll tell you this much, if accidents are sins, nobody in *our* line of business’ll go to heaven. Can you or can you not, Mr. Lunette? That’s all I want to know.”

“You know I can.” He began to wrap up the fragments delicately. “Anything else, Mrs. Pye?”

“No, I don’t think so. Yes there is, though. Now what is in my mind?” She clapped her hand to her head. “I’ll lose my name next!” Running to the door she shouted, “Bella!”

Bella’s answer floated down the stairs. “Yes, Cherry Pie?”

“Come here a minute—what was it I said needed mending some day?”

Bella appeared in the doorway.

“Mr. Lunette, ma chère—oh, but you’ve both met in the garden, haven’t you? There’s nothing he can’t do with those clever fingers of his, lace, china, ivory, French extraction naturally.”

“Waste of breath, Mrs. Pye.”

“What is, Mr. Lunette?”

“Flattery.”

My Aunt answered promptly, her smiling face on one side, “Nobody’s the worse for a touch of flattery, and I never flatter the wrong objects, comprenez? Take Bella here, she’s as clever with her toes as you with your fingers. You ought to see her dance.”

“I have,” said Mr. Lunette.

“Then you’re one of the lucky ones! She hasn’t danced in public for two years.”

“Just about that,” agreed Mr. Lunette. I saw he was communing again, his eye on Bella.

She turned her shoulder to him. “What did you call me down for, Cherry Pie?”

“Now what? Dear me! Oh yes. Mr. Lunette’s going to mend the Sèvres chocolatière for me, the one Tibby broke, *you* know!” She winked at me. “See if you can put your mind to the other thing I wanted mended.”

“There are heaps of other things.”

“Junk. I mean something I’d only dare trust to an artist.”

“There you go again,” said Mr. Lunette. My Aunt slapped his hand.

Bella appeared to put her mind to it. “Was it quite lately?”

“That’s just it. I can’t remember for the life of me. Now isn’t that vexatious! *You* know! I mean that—There! it’s gone again. I’m sure you know the thing I mean.”

Aunt Charlotte was “sure Bella knew” without any conviction; but I looked at Bella, whose eyes were on the ceiling, and knew she *did* know the thing Aunt Charlotte meant. I glanced from her to Mr. Lunette communing, and saw that he also knew that Bella knew. He tapped his long lean fingers on the table. Bella shook her head.

“I can’t think,” she said slowly.

“This will be all then.” Mr. Lunette took up his old black bag, in which he had stored the cup.

“When shall I have it?” asked Aunt Charlotte.

“Next time I’m passing,” said Mr. Lunette.

“Don’t make it another twelvemonth!”

“You want it soon?”

“Well, when you can. There isn’t really any tearing hurry.”

“In that case,” he shrugged, and picked up his hat.

“Don’t be too long!” said Bella suddenly.

“It is your cup?” inquired Mr. Lunette.

“The cup has nothing to do with me whatever. But I *might* remember the other thing, that only an artist can mend.”

“Which might concern you?”

It was Bella’s turn to shrug.

“And suppose he never turns up any more!” laughed my Aunt. “I haven’t the faintest notion of his address,” she told us.

“It varies,” said Mr. Lunette. “Good day, young lady. And good day to *you*, child!” He wheeled so sharply on me, still at the garden door, that I had no time to retreat. As he strode past me, he muttered, “Don’t see too much. One suffers, in the long run.” Then he was gone.

“So that is Mr. Lunette,” said Bella thoughtfully.

“Odd creature, isn’t he?” admitted Aunt Charlotte. “But what an artist! Nothing his fingers can’t do. He’d have been at the top of the tree, if he hadn’t queered his own pitch.”

Bella glanced at the empty glass on the table.

“Nothing of that sort,” said Aunt Charlotte, “second sight, or mesmerism, or something. He upset himself with his own experiments, that’s why he sometimes doesn’t turn up for ever so long. Mais quel artiste! *what* an artist, my dears! Poor Mr. Lunette!”

The Girls began to arrive soon after six, while Aunt Charlotte, always up to the eyes till the last minute, was hastily spreading her trestle table in the garden with a long white damask cloth, before piling it with plates, food, and glasses. "I can't leave this," she cried, "take 'em upstairs, Bella, and show 'em where. Run and help her, Lisette."

"Come along," said Bella.

Shyness seized me. By way of excuse I murmured, "I must go and get Dollabella."

"Be quick then."

"Her spangles are coming off."

Bella pulled off her own diamond butterfly, and thrust it impulsively into my hand. "Pin this in her dress then, and *won't* she look grand!" She flew to the front door, and I fled up to the attic.

When I had fastened the butterfly on Dollabella's bodice, I lingered on the top landing, to look down in safety on the fluffy frocks mounting on a tide of talk and laughter. The frocks, though I thought them too wonderful for words, were not what I expected. I had imagined that all the Girls would be dressed like Bella, piloting them in her tulle Columbine dress with the crown of pointed leaves on her bright hair. Instead, the Girls were wearing embroidered grass lawns, lacey French muslins, elaborate foulards, which rustled over their glacé petticoats. The hats were as wonderful, flowerbeds perched on piles of frizzled hair, crinolines trimmed with wreaths of banksia roses, Tuscan straws with long black velvet streamers, Leghorns with marguerites crushed under the brim, or sheaves of poppies, cornflowers, and wheat on top. Some of the Girls wore feather boas, others wore ruffles after the fashion of Bella's. Some came in white kid gloves, and some in silk mittens. They jangled with bangles and gold chain bracelets, and most of them carried Dorothy bags with satin cords. One had a silver-chain bag, and all the rest wanted to know who had given it her. The air was thick with Ess Bouquet and Jockey Club.

"Hi-tiddley-hi-ti! Bella!—Hello, pet! give us a good old kiss!—Why didn't you tell us it was fancy dress? I say, Tilly, see what she's got on! It's the one we wore in *Daphne-up-to-Date*. How nice you've kept it, Belle. Ours were in tatters at the end of the run—but then *you* cleared out half-way through in a jiffy, didn't you? I suppose you know that dress is the property of the Management, dearie? You ought to see what we're wearin' in *Under the Rose*. What we ain't wearin' Gerty means, eh what?—Many Happy Returns, duckie, I hope you've got a pongshong for French bongbongs? The box'll come in for

your gloves and garters afterwards. Hand-painted satin.—Oh, let's have a peek at it, Bella! How Fin-de-siècle! Lock and key too—she can keep her billy-doo in it! Oh thanks, darling, may I?—I'll try a lilac fondong.—Happy buffday, darling! fought you might fancy a scent-spray, violette-de-parme, silver-mounted, see the hall-mark?—I say, Girls, who did Flossie borrow the dibs for that from?—Kitty, you've no call to be a cat! People who live in glass houses—What are you hintin' at, Miss Flossie Darrell?—Wouldn't you like to know! I could tell tales out of school! I saw you gettin' out of somebody's hansom at Gatti's last night—And what were you doin' there, eh?—Who was Flo with *this* time, come on, Kitty! Bet you pair of gloves it was Louie Lar-di-dar! vosn't it, liddle girl?—Oh I say, Bella! Somebody's been askin' after you very particular lately, but mum's the word, and so I told him, see? Wants your address, but no you don't, I said, *I'm* not one to give a pal away.—You needn't be so stuck-up, Miss Soul-of-Honour, we've none of us *had* Bella's address till this week. Why've you kept yourself so dark, Bella, eh? When are you comin' back to the footlights, eh?—Bella, don't you want to know who Somebody was? Give you three guesses!—My chee-ild! I shall bust if I don't loosen my corsettes! I thought I'd expire draggin' up that hill. Here's something for a good little girl. Don't open it in the presence of ladies, *please*. Pair of Honny-Soies to keep your stockin's up. I do hope you like rose-colour.—My word, just look at me perspirin', will you? My noo blooze too! Forgot to put in dress-preservers—that's goodbye to *me* under the arms! Where's your old lady keep her powder-puff? Lawks! this one's Fuller's earth. Don't she go in for pink Pooder-dee-REE?"

"I'll get you some out of my room," said Bella gaily. Hers was too modest a chamber to accommodate the furbelows of the Girls, and Cherry Pie's toilette-table did not supply the necessities expected by the Coryfées of the Gala.

I was still hanging half-way down the bannister, fascinated by the buzz that issued from my Aunt's bedroom, and the scraps of chatter that here and there pieced themselves into my own affairs. (*Gatti's. Louie. Flossie. "Liddle girl!"*) Bella, her two hands crowded (none of the Girls had forgotten her), glanced up from the landing. She dropped one or two trifles and I descended to help her.

"Oh Lisette! don't be shy, come in and see them all." Before I knew it, she had pushed me into the bedroom, and crying, "Girls, this is Lisette!" she sped in search of powder. I found myself the centre of attention, I felt like a rose beset by a swarm of bees. I was smothered in scented hands and hair and lips. Every one of the Girls seemed determined to kiss me.

"What's your name, ducky? Lisette? All right, Lisette, give us a good old smack! Got one for me too? That'll do, Tottie Barnes, it's my turn now." (*Tottie Barnes.*) "Who's your Mamma, Lisette? She doesn't look a bit like

Bella, does she? Are you Bella's little sister, or what? Oh, look, her doll has got a dress like we wore in *'Daphne-up-to-Date.'* Did Bella dress your dolly for you, eh? My word, hasn't she got a bee-yu-tiful brooch on! Dimonds like peas! did you get it out of a cracker? How'd you like to go on the stage, Lisette?"

They didn't expect any answers to their questions. I found myself breathless, but kissing and being kissed quite at my ease. They were so loud, so jolly, so full of themselves.

A Tilly asked, "Can you skirt-dance?"—but only to pick up her own skirts and twirl.

"I'm sure Lisette can sing," asserted a Hattie—and burst forth (with gesture): "Come, my Love, the Stars are shining! Come, my Love I wait for Thee!"

"Meow! mee-ow! mee-ow-wow!" chorused the Girls, drowning her.

"Oh, what a row in Old Madrid!" laughed Bella, once more in our midst, still with her hands full. "Lisette has a voice like a little dicky-bird. She can knock you all into cocked hats."

"Give us a song, Lisette!" cried the Girls, and without waiting for it, they snatched at Bella's rice powder, carmine lipsalve, and Bloom of Roses. They pirouetted, made messes, pretended to quarrel, and quarrelled. I had never seen ladies use such things on their faces before. I didn't know Bella had them. I was startled; and when Flossie took a silver cigarette-case out of her silver bag, and struck a vesta on a silver match-box, I was shocked.

Tottie said spitefully, "Doesn't she fancy herself!"

"Louie likes to see me do it," said Flossie winking.

"*That's* where the silver etceteras come from, is it! I said as much, didn't I, Girls? Well, make hay while the sun shines. It won't last."

"You ought to know, I'm sure," retorted Flossie, and blew a cloud.

"I wish I could do it," said Tilly repiningly, "but it always makes me coff so."

"It wants practice," Flossie explained, and coughed.

"She's goin' to have a fit now," said Kitty calmly. "Send for a stretcher! I'll plant a little flow-werr on your grave. Isn't it about time we all went down, and said how-de-do to Bella's old lady?"

"Will she mind this?" Flossie twiddled her cigarette.

"She's very broad-minded," said Bella doubtfully.

"Then p'raps I'd better not." Flossie threw the cigarette out of the window. "Oh Lor! It's landed all among the cakes."

"Who's wasting the Best Havana?" cried my Aunt. She waved her hand at the Girls' heads thronging the windows, and they gave her three cheers when she put the cigarette between her lips, stuck a poppy in her hair, and trolled the

*Habanero*, arms akimbo.

“Good old sort!” cried Flossie; and having made love to my Aunt out of the window, rustled downstairs, with the others foaming after her. In the garden Aunt Charlotte embraced them all, and they called her Cherry Pie by request. The refreshment table was what my Aunt called “a picture.” The viands rivalled the coloured plates in Mrs. Beeton. Big Japanese lanterns hung like gourds above it. La Grace Sticks and battledores were stacked to one side.

“Eat what you like, go where you like, and do what you like,” said my Aunt.

The Girls began to eat and drink and walk about, hunt the weed-grown strawberry bed for strawberries, explore the grounds from summerhouse to arbour, pick bunches of flowers, hit shuttlecocks at each other, and send the leather-bound La Grace hoops through the air. Their own movements concerned them more than the destination of the sailing hoops. They posed the whole time, with their bodies, their voices, their looks. Whether they were stooping for a gooseberry, or stretching for a rose, whether they were toasting or sporting, walking or reclining, their attitudes, like their spirits and their talk, were extravagant. In spite of what they had done to their faces upstairs, I adored them all; except, perhaps, Tottie. I was too young to know that deposed favourites are never quite at their best.

Outside the garden, a hurdy-gurdy started playing “*Santa Lucia*.” Aunt Charlotte flew to the door, and had man and monkey inside in the twinkling of an eye. She clapped her hands—“Play up, Carlo!”—and I saw it was pre-arranged between her and the grinning Italian. He played up, and the Girls kicked up their heels. Hats flew askew, flounces were torn, seams split, and they didn’t care. Hattie pounced on the organ, and Gerty on Carlo. “Now for a little bit of Gay Paree!” she screamed and bumped him, back to back. He shook with sunny, delighted, amorous laughter. They caught each other round the waist and danced. He was bandied about from one girl to another, and Hattie was ousted from her post at the organ. The Girls made unsuccessful efforts in turns, the tunes grew jerky, and the dancers indulged in absurd and unseemly movements, till they abandoned the instrument to Carlo again, and turned their attention on Jacko, the wee wizened monkey.

“Her lik-a da cake!” said Carlo.

The Girls fed him gingerly, pretending to be bold. Carlo was plied with lobster salad and cup.

“Don’t get squiffy, Car-loh Mee-oh!” shouted Gerty.

Flossie had an inspiration. “Let’s make Jacko squiffy!” She gave him the lees of her cup. He drank it and blinked. “Isn’t he just like Louie Lar-di-dar!” cried Tottie Barnes. Flossie remarked, “I can’t say I see it, my dear.” “Don’t tell *me* you’ve never seen Louie tight,” said Tottie sweetly, and offered Jacko

her glass. I ran and snatched the little creature up.

“No, don’t! He doesn’t like it! It’s unkind of you! And he isn’t *in the very least* like Mr. Sunshine. See how thin he is. Mr. Sunshine’s fat.”

“Mr. Sunshine! oh, isn’t that *good!* isn’t that too scrumptious for anything!” Shrill laughter turned the garden into a parrot-house. “I say, Girls, did you hear that? Lisette knows our Louie. Oh I say, Lisette!” I was grabbed at, and ran for shelter to the hurdy-gurdy. I saw Bella staring at me in a strange distressed way. Jacko ran up Carlo’s trouser-leg to his shoulder. Carlo was swaying and smiling. The hurdy-gurdy had come round again to *Santa Lucia*. The cup took effect, and as Carlo turned, he sang. His throaty emotional tenor swelled the garden. His dark skin glistened, he rolled his big black eyes, he was bursting with love. Dusk was falling, the stocks and the roses were heavy with scent, Aunt Charlotte flitted up and down, in and out, putting a taper to the fairy lamps. Chains of light glimmered along the edges of the paths, swung from the lowest boughs of the old trees, and dotted the grass like multi-coloured glowworms. The pink heart shone forth on the arbour. The paper gourds above the feast bloomed softly. The air throbbled with beauty. The Girls stood perfectly still while Carlo sang. When the song came to an end, they broke into applause. It was perhaps the crest of the little Italian’s life.

Then Hattie called, “Lisette! it’s your turn now!”

I tried to run away, but they held me fast.

“Just a little bit, ducky,” wheedled Flossie.

My eyes sought Bella’s; she met my look still with that puzzled air, as though she were hovering between two moods, and couldn’t settle on either one or the other.

“Up with her!” cried someone, and I found myself on the table under the glow of the lanterns, just as Aunt Charlotte emerged from the house with Bella’s birthday-cake, crowned with spots of flame. Seeing what was happening, she paused. Bedazzled with that gold crown I opened my lips.

“Finette ma mie,  
Oiselle jolie,  
Chante moi d’amour  
De nuit et de jour.  
Même quand la vie  
Dans l’ombre s’enfuit,  
De jour et de nuit,  
Chante moi d’amour,  
Finette ma mie.”

The clamour was for me now.

“How sweet! You pet! All in French, too, clever little girl! What does it mean, Lisette! Something awfully saucy? I say, girls, she’d make a fortune on the stage! Give us a good old hug, ducky!”

“Bella bellissima!” sighed Carlo. Tears rolled down his cheeks. Tears were on Bella’s too. Aunt Charlotte couldn’t clap, because of the cake, but she called out, “Bravo, petite! Jump down and make room for the cake.”

Three cheers went up from the Girls for the birthday-cake. The midsummer night grew noisy again, and Bella was dragged forward and given a knife. She was smiling, and pale. In the confusion, I slipped along the path, into the little arbour at the end. Outside it was fruitful with lights, inside it was dark. I heard Bella saying, “Where is Lisette?” but I stayed where I was. I didn’t want her to ask me questions about Mr. Sunshine, about the words of the song. For a moment or two the garden rang with my name. “Lisette! Lisette! she’s shy! Wait till we catch her! I can see you, Lisette!” Bravado on Flossie’s part, this.

“Of course, dear!” drawled Tottie. “Cats can see in the dark.”

“Thanks for the compliment I’m sure!” tossed Flossie.

“Never mind Lisette” (this was Aunt Charlotte). “Bella must cut her own cake. Come along, Girls! fill up glasses for a toast!”

Now it was Bella’s name the garden rang with. “Health and happiness, Bella! Happiness! happiness!” “Bonheur!” from Cherry Pie.

“*A la bonheur. . .*”

Crouched in the arbour, hugging Dollabella, was it I who had whispered that?

Far away, Gerty screamed, “Blow out the candles!”

“The lanterns have burned down.” Aunt Charlotte’s voice. “Wait till I get some more nightlights.”

She called too late. The Girls had turned their breath upon the cake, and everything at the end by the house grew dark. I heard Bella complain, “I can’t see to cut. It’s all your fault if the slices aren’t ladylike. I might as well be blind.”

The cry went up, “Blind-Man’s-Buff! Let’s play Blind-Man’s-Buff!” “Who’ll be He?” “Bella, of course! it’s her birthday!” “Here’s a handkerchief!” “It isn’t big enough—Bella, let’s have yours.” “Be careful, then. It’s old, and very fragile.” “How’ll that do, eh?” “Too tight, too tight!” wailed Bella. Shadows twirled and tweaked her, as she fluttered forward, with her arms outflung. The Girls scattered, with little shrieks. I saw Aunt Charlotte come out of the house with a light. She took Bella’s shoulders, and ran her straight into the arbour. I shrank into my corner. I had the immense desire of all children not to be caught, *never to be caught*. There wouldn’t be much escape for me, penned up here.

“In with you!” whispered Aunt Charlotte at the entrance. “Never-Mind-

Who is waiting for you in there.” Bella groped her way in, with hands outspread. Outside the hurdy-gurdy had stopped playing, but Carlo’s voice somewhere far away in the garden was offering the night another ancient love-song of his Italy.

“At last!” breathed Bella. “At last, my darling! *Who are you?*”

She had caught, not me, but the young man in the arbour. I hadn’t noticed he was there before.

*Duet in an Arbour: Soprano and Tenor.*

“Who are you?”

“Do you not know?”

“Only that you are He.”

“That is the rule of the game. Who is caught must be He. But Blindman has to know, not ask, who He is. Name me, Blindwoman.”

“Suppose I cannot?”

“The game goes on. Sweet, do your best to name me.”

“I am afraid of failing.”

“You will be given a second chance. And if you fail twice, a third chance.”

“And if I fail thrice?”

“Then Blindwoman must run and catch another.”

“That’s what I fear, my darling, to catch Another, one that I *could* name. Who knows if you and I will ever come together again? Or if we do, how shall I recognize you? I have never seen you.”

“You wouldn’t turn your head.”

“I wasn’t sure you were there.”

“Is that the truth?”

“Perhaps, perhaps not. Truth is so difficult, I don’t always try. But at least, my darling, you are not always there. How long have you waited for me to turn my head?”

“Exactly a hundred years, wondering, all the time, when the kerchief would fall from your eyes.”

“Somebody knotted it too tight for that.”

“Who?”

“One who wished to save me from myself.”

“A woman? It is a woman’s handkerchief.”

“It was a woman who lent it, a man who knotted it.”

“It is charming. The lace falls like a mask to your upper lip.”

“It belonged to Madame de Marignan-Croissy.”

“The Countess. I can just remember her.”

“She was a clever and beautiful young lady.”

“I only recall her as a clever old one. I did not think her beautiful, she was so old, but then I was a child of a few years only.”

“How many years are you now?”

“How old do I sound?”

“Voices deceive. May I touch your features?”

“It is all in the game. Let me guide your fingers. Where would they like to begin?”

“At your brow. It is pleasant, and smooth. Not too clever. I like it.”

“You don’t want me clever?”

“Not much cleverer than I am. I will allow you a thimbleful more of brains, because I shall be cleverer on my toes. Now for your hair. Silky and curly. Nice. I hope it is fair.”

“It is. Like my mother’s.”

“Good. Your eyelids—rather heavy, but with long lashes. Blue?”

“If you like blue eyes.”

“But are they?”

“Yes.”

“Can you open your heavy lids wide?”

“When they’ve something pretty to look at.”

“Your nose—not straight.”

“Surely not crooked?”

“Curved. Not too much. Aristocratic. I hope you will not prove haughty.”

“Me? A poor gardener?”

“These clothes are hardly a gardener’s, they’re only pretending. And yet, they are reassuring, because, if you pretend, so will I. It’s my art, and I can keep it up as long as you can. Your clothes are enchanting, an artist must have designed them. But come! let’s get back to your face. Your mouth is charming. What a short upper lip! I’d like to kiss it.”

“Wait till the handkerchief falls.”

“Your cheek is as smooth as your brow. You can hardly be twenty.”

“Nineteen, perhaps, though of that I cannot be sure.”

“How comical!”

“No, for I took a leap in the dark.”

“Ah, you never know where that will land you. Perhaps down a trap.”

“Perhaps in Paradise.”

“Did it?”

“If you had turned your head. But instead, you weren’t there.”

“When?”

“A few years ago, all of a sudden. Even the garden ceased to be Paradise then. Won’t you come back to it?”

“Can I?”

“Sweet, it is time for you to guess my name. Don’t hesitate. Say what comes into your mind.”

“Antoine?”

“Why does Antoine come into your mind?”

“I don’t know. I am guessing at random.”

“Antoine is not my name. There goes your first chance. Try again. Be sure only to say a name you have liked.”

“Frederick?”

“Why do you like the name of Frederick?”

“I have to say something!”

“Do not be petulant. Our case is too precarious.”

“Then you aren’t Frederick?”

“Whoever Frederick may be, I am not he.”

“It might be better for me if you were. That’s what I can’t decide.”

“Fate will decide. Your second chance is gone. Think hard for your third.”

“I can’t think hard. Help me.”

“A name that has perhaps meant something to you at some time.”

“Can’t you say more than that?”

“It isn’t allowed in the game of Blind-Man’s-Buff.”

“If you whispered it very softly in my ear, so that they can’t overhear?”

“They are not to be cheated.”

“Then I shall have to guess you by inspiration.”

“Oh, do your best to name me! Don’t miss the third chance!”

“The third is the one that proves right in the fairy-tale. Do you like fairy-tales?”

“The only sort of tale I ever knew.”

“I’ll tell you one, then, to delay the time a little. There was once a little dancer, who had to work hard for her living. Her people were rogues and vagabonds of the theatre. Yet fine artists painted her, great kings applauded her, and rich men offered her——”

“What?”

“Every jewel under the sun, but a plain gold ring.”

“Did she want a plain gold ring?”

“No, I don’t think she cared. A diamond butterfly was enough to please her for a moment or two. But the pleasure did not last for very long. There was always something else she was looking for, and she didn’t know exactly what it was. It had been promised to her so long ago.”

“In her cradle?”

“Even longer ago than that.”

“Who promised it her?”

“Someone who loved her dearly.”

“A man or a woman?”

“A man, but he didn’t know it. It doesn’t matter who had promised the dancer what she wanted for ever and ever. But she knew it wasn’t diamond butterflies. So she vanished.”

“She vanished?”

“Just vanished. A gentleman helped her.”

“What did *he* offer her?”

“A plain gold ring.”

“Did she want it?”

“I’ve told you no already. All the same something will have to be done about it. Because of the Satyr.”

“What Satyr?”

“Didn’t I tell you there was a Satyr?”

“His name?”

“One that will never be my third guess now. His name was Louie. Why do you sigh, my darling?”

“For fear of the end of your fairy-tale.”

“It hasn’t ended. And yet—Have you ever felt doom in the air? So that the end of the world seemed very near? Heavens! how cold your fingers have turned. Like ice.”

“Doom. I had forgotten it. Yes, long ago I felt doom in the air. It descended on all I loved, when I was that child.”

“That child?”

“Who took a leap in the dark.”

“What happened?”

“Sweet, I can’t even speak of it. But the end of the world descended on all of us. And then—one evening——”

“Is this a fairy-tale too?”

“One evening, when I was in a childish terror, I felt as though I were being put to sleep. I thought I heard a laughing voice say softly, ‘Bury the King’s Son, under a patch!’—and I opened my eyes, long afterwards, in a garden.”

“What garden?”

“One as beautiful as Paradise.”

“Then you didn’t go down the trap. Were you alone?”

“No.”

“Who else?”

“A girl.”

“Pretty?”

“Her eyes were bandaged. Blindwoman, tell me if that girl was pretty!”

“What was she doing?”

“Playing at Blind-Man’s-Buff.”

“Who was she trying to catch?”

“Oh tell me, tell me,” pleaded the boy in the bower, “tell me whom the girl was trying to catch!”

“Le Beau au Jardin Dormant!”

“But his name!”

“But if my third guess is wrong!”

“But it must not be!”

“Then was he——”

“Bella, be quick!” I cried. “They’re coming back!”

“Was he—was he——”

### BELLA’S BIRTHDAY (*concluded*)

I did not see the young man slip away. Too much was happening. The Girls were surging into the harbour, while Bella, startled, began to grope for me. In a moment she had me—“Lisette, is it you?” she asked, bewildered.

“That’s right! It’s Lisette! She’s He. Tie up her eyes. Come on, Lisette, she’s guessed you, you’re Blindman now!” The Girls all spoke at once.

I had to submit to the handkerchief. I was pulled by the laughing throng out of the harbour. One of them lifted me bodily and ran with me, setting me down I hadn’t a notion where. I was twirled three times. “Come along! catch me, catch me!” The Girls did not fly, they tweaked and twitted me till I was giddy, and let me grab them, then spoke in deep or high falsetto voices, so that I could not guess who anyone was. They changed hats and ornaments with one another, blew out their cheeks, pulled faces, and were unrecognisable. I was a desperate helpless little girl, trying to play the grown-ups’ game with them. It was like a bad dream. I was lost in an unseen world, and beset by it. Then silence fell, in which I heard them tiptoe away from me, tittering. I was alone. “Where are you?” I called aloud. No answer. I grew frightened and unhappy. It never occurred to me to take off the handkerchief. That wasn’t “all in the game.”

A firm arm tightened suddenly round my waist, and swept me along. I was alone with my captor, and wished I was alone again by myself. A gruff voice growled in my ear, “What do you know about Mr. Sunshine?”

“Let me go,” I stammered.

“Not till you’ve told me all this about Mr. Sunshine.”

“All what?”

“You know perfectly well what I mean, and I’ll never, *never*, NEVER let you go till you’ve told me what you know.”

I shivered. “I don’t know *anything* about him.”

The gruff voice said, “Little girls who tell tarradiddles go to Hell. Shut up! don’t be a little goose, Lisette. You’re such a good little girl, *you* won’t go to Hell—unless you pretend you don’t know Mr. Sunshine.”

“He lives in Mannington Park,” I whispered, “near Chalkstones, where I live.”

“Go on. Tell me some more. Tell me everything. Because if you don’t, you’ll have to be Blindman for-ever-and-ever-Amen!”

“Not if I guess who you are?”

“Guess away, and much good may it do you!”

I put up my hand to feel—puffed cheeks, a tongue put out, a wrinkled nose. Higher, a frizz of hair—but they all had frizzes. The hat had cherries on it. I said, “You’re Katie!”

“One!”

“You’re Tottie then!”

“Two!”

“You’re—are you Flossie?”

“*Flossie!*” The gruff voice rose two octaves, then dropped back. “That’s your third guess. Now you’ve got to tell.”

The grip on my waist tightened, till I wanted to scream. Why *could* big people do these things to little ones with impunity? I mumbled, “Mr. Sunshine doesn’t let people go to his woods and meadows, he’s fat, he has three diamond rings and two chins, and his nose is full of little dots like a strawberry.”

“Haw-haw! that’s a nasty one!” My captor laughed coarsely. “Go on.”

“He sent Flossie a telegraph to go to supper with him at Gatts.”

“I thought as much! When?”

“I forget, last month I think it was. He called himself Louie in the telegraph.”

“How do you know that?”

“I was in the shop. He asked me to go to tea with him, but I didn’t.”

“Why not?”

“I didn’t want to.”

“Don’t you like Mr. Sunshine?”

“No,” I whispered.

“So much the better for you. Mr. Sunshine’s not good for good little girls. Did Mr. Sunshine like *you*?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Then why did he want you to go to tea with him?”

“I think because of Bella.”

“Bella! I thought as much! It’s the same old game. All right, Miss Darrell! You see if I don’t put a spoke in your wheel with Louie.”

It was Tottie's voice. I cried in deep distress, "I guessed you! It isn't fair!"

"That'll do!" said Tottie. She pushed me off so roughly that I stumbled, and I heard her swishing angrily up the garden. I put out my hands to save myself from falling, and they were grasped by two warm friendly ones; a man's. So I too was to talk with the boy in the bower; perhaps I too could save Bella from herself.

"Please!" I gasped. "Please, quickly, before anyone comes. Tell me your name, so that I can tell Bella. You see, if she doesn't know, it will be dreadful!"

The hands had tightened on mine. "What will be dreadful? You are Lisette, aren't you?"

I had made a mistake. The voice was not the voice of the boy in the arbour. But the young man, who had dropped my hands to fumble with the knot of the handkerchief, had a voice I liked, all the same; and when the handkerchief fell, I liked his face. I blinked, and said, "Oh." He was kneeling beside me near the summerhouse in which Bella and I had looked at her presents that morning.

"What," he repeated anxiously, "will be dreadful for Bella if she doesn't know?"

"The Satyr will get her," I stammered.

"Does she still call him that? But he doesn't know where she is."

"She might write and tell him."

"She promised me she wouldn't. Why do you think he will get her?"

"Because she said she felt doom in the air." I put my hand to my head. I was fearfully confused. Had Bella said that about doom *Now* or *Then*? Had she said it *Here* or *There*? "Are you Frederick?" I asked.

"Yes, Lisette, I'm Frederick. Bella has talked to me so often about you, that I know who you are."

"She talks to me about you."

Frederick opened his lips, and shut them again. He was a gentleman.

"She says you are charming but she doesn't know if to marry you or not, but if she doesn't most likely the Satyr will get her. I think Mr. Sunshine's the Satyr."

Frederick's brow darkened.

"She says if she marries you she will go far away, but as long as she has her diamond butterfly brooch she won't. So I wanted her to keep it, but I hadn't seen you or Mr. Sunshine then."

"My God!" said Frederick, and added mechanically, "I beg your pardon, Lisette."

"You see," I went on, "it isn't her fault if she's fickle."

"Did she tell you she was?"

"She can't help delighting in more than one at a time."

"I know," he agreed gloomily. "But I ask you, who could delight in Lewis Sonnenschein? If diamond butterflies are what she wants, I'll give her a flock of diamond butterflies."

"They aren't what she wants *most*," I said confidently.

"If you know so much about her, Lisette, tell me what Bella wants most?"

"She's always looking for someone who isn't there."

"Somebody *else!*" shouted Frederick.

I tried to be lucid. "But he isn't there, you know, he only *might* be."

"Where?"

"In the garden."

"This garden?"

"No—not exactly—only sometimes—and then not quite—but *nearly*—when——"

"When?"

"When she's *nearest*," I said helplessly.

"For God's sake, what do you mean?" cried Frederick in desperation, and this time he forgot to beg my pardon.

I cried as desperately, "People *never* seem to understand!"

He stared at me, trying to understand.

Aunt Charlotte came through the bushes. "Why, there you are all the time!" she cried reproachfully. "I couldn't think where you had got to." She took my hand, but she was speaking to Frederick. "Lord or no Lord, I'm going to give you a scolding. What did you say to set Bella off crying her eyes out?"

Frederick was looking dazed. "Is she crying? Let me go to her."

"Not if you can't promise not to upset her. It's really too bad of you, on her birthday too. To go and spoil my little plot like that. I thought a rendez-vous on midsummer night in the arbour would be just the thing. It would have been for me, when I was a girl. In fact, it was."

"There hasn't been a rendez-vous yet," muttered Frederick.

"Don't tell me! Then why is she crying her eyes out?"

"If only," he cried, "she was crying them out for me! You said if I waited here you'd send her to me. I've waited three-quarters of an hour, in vain."

"You've waited in the wrong spot then," said my Aunt. "I told you the arbour."

"Isn't this the arbour?"

"This is the summerhouse."

"It is where we always sit."

"That doesn't make it the arbour," said my Aunt, very vexed. "To tell you the truth, I never gave the summerhouse a thought. It doesn't lend itself to illuminations. I've done the arbour-lights in the shape of a heart. Oh well, it's no use crying over spilt milk." She could never stay vexed for long, and patted

his arm. "If it wasn't you that upset her, all may be well. Come along, least said soonest mended, n'est-ce-pas?"

We trailed up the garden, all at cross purposes. The fairy lamps were burning irregularly. Many of the chains had dropped a bead. One of the paper lanterns near the house had caught, ashes strewed the wreckage of the feast, and the long white damask cloth was stained with cup. The garden was empty, except for Carlo and Jacko. Carlo was strapping on his hurdy-gurdy, and the little monkey strained at the end of its leash, to seek and nibble cake-crumbs in the grass. Up in Aunt Charlotte's bedroom the lighted blind showed a stencil of lace curtains, and silhouettes of heads and arms and busts. A subdued hum swam out through the open sash. The last of the Girls were resuming their furbelows.

"I must run up and see to them," murmured my Aunt to herself. "Bella's quite hors de combat as a hostess." She pointed along the other path to the arbour, where the illuminated heart was hanging askew. "She's in there," she told Frederick, and set him going with a tiny push. "Wait a moment, Carlo!" She felt in her pocket for her fat shabby purse, and shook some silver into the Italian's palm. "You ought to sing in the Garden, that you ought! I wonder Harris hasn't snapped you up long ago! *O Santa Lucia!* Jacko, you little rascal, you'll be sick. Still, I daresay it's worth it." She wandered into the house.

I loitered on, forgotten by everybody. Frederick's disappearance into the arbour gave me a throb of anxiety. *That* wouldn't do. Much as I liked him, he was second-best. Carlo limped off, singing the *Miserere* under his breath; Jacko trailed after him unwillingly, dragged by his tether from the desirable feast.

I crept half-way up the path to the rendez-vous. I heard Bella say fretfully, "What would I *do* with fifty diamond butterflies? As if one wasn't more than enough!"

"Then give it back, oh Bella, give it back!"

"Why *should* I give it back, just to please you? It's pretty," came her petulant reply. "Why can't you have more sense?"

"More sense? But you won't tell me what you *want!*"

"You needn't shout."

"Don't cry, for God's sake! My darling, if only you'd tell me what you're crying for!"

"The Queen is crying, crying for the King's Son," I said to myself, and stole away unhappily to my attic. I wished I knew what would save Bella from herself.

Then I remembered that in all the excitement, Dollabella hadn't given Bella her birthday present. I got the butterfly-penwiper out of my box, and looked around for my doll. She wasn't there; I must have left her somewhere

in the garden. Where had I had her last? I remembered having her in the arbour, while they were drinking Bella's health, I remembered clutching her when they were binding my eyes. After that I remembered nothing about her. I must have dropped her in the confusion of the game. The night was fine, it wasn't going to rain. I'd have to go and find her in the morning.

I scrawled on a bit of paper, "With love from Dollabella, she made it"—and, when the front door had shut on the last of the Girls, and I knew the coast was clear, I slipped downstairs, and laid my butterfly on Bella's pillow.

Next morning the house was what Aunt Charlotte called *délinqué*. I was pale and “moony”, Bella had pink rims round her eyes, Aunt Charlotte was just a little inclined to scold. I had got up early, and gone into the garden in my nightdress to look for Dollabella. I hadn’t been able to find her anywhere. Nobody else had been in the garden at all, but I hunted in vain. When I heard sounds in the house I went back to it, and got my clothes on without washing or brushing my hair. Then I went down to search the arbour for a second time, because that was *really* where I remembered having Dollabella last. As I was poking fruitlessly under the seat, Aunt Charlotte rang a Swiss cowbell from the back parlour door. “Come on, petite, you mustn’t miss your breakfast.”

I came haltingly. Aunt Charlotte served me with scrambled egg, and was pouring out my tea when Bella appeared. She sat down saying, “I don’t want any egg.”

“More don’t I,” I said, pushing my plate away.

“Well!” said Aunt Charlotte.

“I don’t feel like breakfast,” I mumbled.

“Don’t feel like yourself, you mean, don’t you? How do you know what breakfast feels like till you’ve been a boiled egg or a pot of marmalade?”

I would not help her out with her little joke. Bella buttered a bit of toast, and left it.

“For pity’s sake!” cried Aunt Charlotte. “What’s the matter with you both? Thank goodness Maman’s feeling better to-day. *She’s* got a smile on her face, at any rate. Couple of cross-patches, that is what you are this morning.” She picked up a dish of fruit and stalked out of the room, in search, as her gesture hinted, of better company. At the door she turned, pursed her lips comically, and put up her eyebrows at me, but failed to draw a smile. She closed the door with a tiny slam, saying, “Too much party!”

Bella stirred her tea in a listless way. “I suppose it’s ungrateful, after the trouble she went to.”

“Bella.”

“What?”

“Why did you invite the Girls to the party?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Because they didn’t know where you were till yesterday.”

“Why shouldn’t they know where I was?”

“Then why didn’t they know before?”

“Why-why-why-why-why!” mocked Bella, and burst out crying.

I copied her.

“What have *you* got to cry about, silly?”

“I’ve lost Dollabella.”

“Is that all?” Bella wiped her eyes on the tablecloth, and then came round and wiped mine on the other end. “There! I feel better. Don’t you?”

“Lots.”

“Look at the tablecloth! I don’t believe you washed your face this morning.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“More did I. You know,” said Bella confidentially, drew me to her, and whispered in my ear, like a big secret: “*I—don’t—really—and—truly—like—washing—very—much.*”

And now instead of crying we were laughing.

“We’ll soon find Dollabella,” she promised gaily.

“I’ve looked and looked, and I can’t. Your butterfly was on her.”

“I found a *much* nicer one on my pillow last night.”

“Did you?” I felt myself get as red as a cherry. “I’m afraid Dollabella didn’t make it very well.”

“I think she made it beautifully.”

“It’s a penwiper.”

“Is it? I love it because it is a butterfly. I love it better than my diamond one.”

“Bella! You *couldn’t*.”

“Easily,” said Bella. “I don’t love that one any more, a bit. Dollabella’s welcome to it.”

“But it’s real diamonds!”

“It’s trash. Dollabella won’t know. Let’s go and find her.”

We went out into the garden, Bella asking, “Where did you have her last?”

“I can’t remember, after I was He.”

“You were with me in the arbour when they tied up your eyes.”

“I know, but I’ve looked there again and again.”

“Third time’s lucky,” said Bella, but it did not prove so. “Well, she’s either in the garden or in the house.”

“She’s not in the house. I didn’t go in till I went up to bed, and I didn’t have her then.”

“Then she’s in the garden, and we’re bound to find her if we look thoroughly.”

I gazed at the midsummer jungle of half-an-acre, and thought it might well be autumn before Dollabella was found.

“Which way did you run first, when you were He.”

“They lifted me up, you see, and muddled me. When Frederick undid the

handkerchief——”

“Did *you* see Frederick?”

“Yes, after Tottie didn’t play fair.”

Bella dismissed Tottie’s unfairness as unimportant. “Did you like him?” she asked.

“Yes, awfully. But not as much as——”

“As who, Lisette?”

I was silent.

“You don’t mean not as much as Mr. Sunshine?”

“I *hate* Mr. Sunshine!” I cried.

“I didn’t know you knew him till last night.”

“I didn’t know *you* did.”

“It was too long ago to matter,” said Bella, “and there were nicer things to talk about.”

“Then you don’t like him either. I’m glad,” I said.

“No, I don’t *like* him,” said Bella reflectively. “But of course, you know, there are other things than *liking*.”

“I *don’t* know!” I affirmed stoutly.

“Of course not. And you’re right. I wish I was nine instead of nineteen!” said Bella suddenly. “But it’s all right now. I’ve given up the diamond butterfly.”

“I shan’t let Dollabella keep it—need I?”

“You can do what you like with it,” said Bella carelessly. We could see the summerhouse now, past the apple-trees. “What did you talk about?” she asked. I knew she meant Frederick.

“You.”

“Was he nice or nasty?”

“He couldn’t be nasty, could he?”

“Only when he tiffs. I never expected him to come again, after last Tuesday. He was horrid then.”

“Didn’t he come on Friday?”

“I never went to see if he came or not.”

“What did you tiff about?”

“He wanted to take me to Richmond on my birthday, and turned cross when I told him I’d got a party coming. He wanted to know who was coming to it. I said, the Girls—and then he got just like you.”

“How?”

“He wanted to know what my object was—that’s what he said—in letting them know where I was, all of a sudden. He said I’d done it on purpose, behind his back. Yes, Lisette, he *can* be simply horrid.”

“But what would you do it on purpose for?”

“A hint to Somebody Else.”

“The Satyr?”

“That’s what he said. He wanted to know if I’d asked the Satyr too, and I said gents weren’t allowed, that’s why *he* needn’t expect to be asked.” Bella looked extremely disdainful. “Then he went on to say I might as well have asked the Satyr as the Girls, because once they knew where I was *he’d* soon find out, and well I knew it! And perhaps,” added Bella, looking even more disdainful, “perhaps he was right—so I *had* to tiff with him, just in case he was.”

“Was he?”

“It makes no difference now if he was or not. I’ve done with the Satyr.”

“Won’t the Girls tell him though?”

“They promised me on their word of honour not to, and anyhow, why should they? It wouldn’t do *them* any good! They want Mr. Sunshine to notice them, not me.”

“How can they!” I exclaimed.

“It’s only natural,” said Bella simply. “He owns the Gala, you see. It is a temptation. But after last night I don’t ever want to see Mr. Sunshine again.”

“Because of Frederick?”

“No.”

“Because of who?”

“Look, Lisette, look!” Bella pointed into the deep grass by the summerhouse.

“Is it Dollabella?” I cried eagerly.

“No, it’s her wreath.”

I stooped for the crumpled circlet of green leaves. “Then I *did* have her when Tottie was being unfair!”

“How you do go on about Tottie being unfair.”

“Well, people oughtn’t to be.”

We searched the grass without any result, and then the summerhouse.

“You must have taken her back with you,” Bella insisted.

But I was quite certain I hadn’t. “You see, I was falling, and Frederick caught me by both of my hands. I know I never picked her up after that.”

Bella began to laugh. “Then Frederick’s got her.”

“Would he?”

“Of course. She’s me. It’s like stealing a person’s portrait you’re awfully fond of. That’s it, Lisette. We’ll make him give her up. To-morrow is Tuesday. I’ll write him a note, and tell him to bring her with him.”

She seemed so convinced that there was no more to be said. But if Bella was right, I felt it might be almost better to lose Dollabella for ever, than let Frederick come back before I had found out the name of the boy in the bower.

To make sure, however, before she wrote her note, she asked Aunt Charlotte, "Cherry Pie! did you find Lisette's doll in the garden last night, and bring her in?"

"No, love," said Aunt Charlotte, without a trace of her annoyance of an hour ago. "What about some milk and a slice of birthday-cake, you two?"

"As soon as I've written my note," said Bella importantly. She rummaged for notepaper in Aunt Charlotte's bureau, and found something mauve and scented.

"Well I declare!" said Aunt Charlotte. "I do believe that's the first time I've seen Bella with a pen in her hand."

We looked on while Bella scribbled three airy lines. While they were wet she handed them to us to read, looking pleased with herself.

She had written: "Bring me back to-morrow like a gentleman. You can give the butterfly to the Waifs and Strays."

"And what does *that* mean?" asked Charlotte.

"Frederick will know."

"Oh, it's to him, eh? Then I'll stand you the stamp. Run to the pillar-box, Lisette, before she changes her mind."

When I came back they were eating birthday-cake, and Cherry Pie was toasting Bella again in the last of the cup. "We must do justice to the occasion!" she beamed.

"How flat it's gone," said Bella.

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The rest of the day passed peacefully. Bella was infectiously merry, I took colour from her, as I always did, and Cherry Pie forgot she had ever been "short" with us. After lunch I was allowed to go and see Old Madam for a little while. She had the surprising vitality of the old, and her ups and downs were decisive. When she was ailing, you feared the end must be near. When she was better, her spirits deceived you into feeling she must live for ever. She asked me various kind questions, and when they came to an end I tried to think of things to say. "I've still got the fan you gave me at Christmas," I told her.

"Did you bring it with you, child?"

"Mamma has put it away for me in a drawer."

"Perhaps," agreed Madam, "it *is* a little old for you. I confess I prefer pretty things to be used. You must save your fan till you go to Court, my child. Though I understand it's all ostrich feathers now. But that fan wouldn't be out of place in Buckingham Palace. It belonged to a Queen, who gave it to my Great-Aunt the Countess. They were friends."

She patted my hand, and the shifting fires in her opal held my eye.

"The Queen is crying," I said under my breath.

"She had full cause to cry," nodded Old Madam, "a hundred years ago."

Aunt Charlotte came in, with Bella behind her. "The child isn't tiring you, Maman?"

"Not in the least. She's a nice little gell, and I'm as fit as a fiddle. To my mind, Lisette has rather less colour than I have. Have you had your airing to-day, child? Get Mademoiselle Bella to take you for a walk on the Heath."

"Bravo, Maman! they've lolled and lounged quite long enough."

"We might go to Baxwood," said Bella.

"It's rather far before tea."

"Mrs. Jennings," said Old Madam, "will be charmed to give them tea, if I write her a word."

"Are you up to it, Maman?"

"Chérie, don't be absurd!"

"I've always longed to go into the house!" cried Bella, delighted.

"Then we could see the pictures in the Orangery quite close," I said.

So armed with Old Madam's "word," we went over Hounsbury Heath, arriving there in suitable time for tea. Mrs. Jennings, the caretaker, gave us the welcome Old Madam had assured us of. Madame Lambert's name had a cachet for her successors. After tea Mrs. Jennings showed us over the beautiful shut-up rooms, lifting the covers of the gilt and brocade chairs in the music-room, opening drawers to show us laid-away dresses.

Presently I asked, "Can we go in the Orangery?"

"To see the pictures," added Bella.

"We have some exceedingly fine ones," said Mrs. Jennings, leading the way to the long narrow room Bella and I had looked at through wintry windows. The sun poured into it now through the tall glass panes, and where it was brightest the pictures were shielded with white curtains. Mrs. Jennings began drawing them aside.

"This is the Zoffany, these are the Lawrences. The Raeburn has been queried by the Know-alls. They like to come showing themselves off, and saying this picture or that isn't all it should be, but *I* say a grain of faith is better than mustard-seed. Our Romney—Emma, Lady Hamilton, as an Oread. The Dishabil, by Fragonard. The Picnic, by Watteau."

"Oh, sweet!" sighed Bella.

I knew what she felt, as she stood entranced before the picture, where two pairs of little lovers, in silks and satins, leaned to each other on the brink of a moonlit lake. The water shone stilly between the groves of tall dark trees. On one side a marble nymph stood coldly forth, on the other, half-hidden in shadow, shrank a man in brown cloth. He was playing a small viol, and seemed to be singing. The silken folds of the ladies' skirts and the gentleman's sleeves gleamed here with silvery moonlight, there with ruddy torchlight from a flambeau, held by a lackey in the background. The whole thing was only

about eighteen inches by twelve.

“Why is it called the Picnic?” asked Bella.

“Because that,” explained Mrs. Jennings, “is its title.”

“But I don’t see any food.”

“No doubt they have eaten it.”

“Oh well, the food doesn’t matter,” said Bella softly. “Painting like this is its own food, isn’t it?”

“Quite so,” agreed Mrs. Jennings. “Yet this is one of the pictures the Know-alls throw doubts on. They say, for some reason or other, best known to themselves, that it couldn’t have been painted in Watteau’s lifetime. Something to do with what it is painted on, I think. One of them though, admits, that it might have been done at the very end of his life, but if so, he says, it is probably the last picture of a dying man. The others say it’s most likely a copy of something earlier, done by one of his pupils after his death.”

“But *of course* Watteau painted it!” Bella and I cried heatedly, in one breath.

Mrs. Jennings looked slightly surprised, and entirely approving. “Yes, to be sure. What *I* always say is, who’d go to the trouble of copying anything this size? If you’ve got to fake pictures, you give more for your money by faking large ones, like the Rubens.”

Bella and I looked round for the Rubens.

“It’s hardly a piece for the Orangery,” said Mrs. Jennings. “It is hung in the smoking-room. However,” she glanced down at me, “perhaps this little lady has seen quite enough for one day.”

Hounsbury Heath seemed unusually peaceful as we strolled back in the lowering sunlight. The grass was high, the wild roses were out, and it seemed as though nothing could ever again disturb the serenity of life.

But next afternoon, while I was making my cautious way along the shop window-seat, to retrieve Romeo; Tibby’s latest gold kitten, from a trayful of Waterford, a hansom crawled up the High Street. It stopped at our door, and Mr. Sunshine got out.

He was in tails and a topper, and from one fat forefinger a parcel dangled. While his other hand was diving for silver for the cabman, our eyes met through the window-pane, and his face expanded into gold and ivory. I clutched Romeo to me, paralysed. I dared not move hastily, for fear of breaking something; but when I tried to escape before the cabman was paid, I found I could not move at all.

Mr. Sunshine pulled out his hand full of florins, and his eyes left mine to travel higher up the house-front. I saw the gold-and-ivory narrow, without disappearing. This was the horriddest smile yet. He stuffed the money back in his trouser-pocket, lifted his hat, and made a little bow. Then he said one word to the cabman—"Vait!" I read plainly—and came straight into the shop, closing the door very carefully behind him.

"Vell, vell, vell!" He advanced towards me in the window, and found himself baulked by Cherry Pie's generous litter. If I couldn't get out, he couldn't get in. He continued speaking across the china and old silver. "So here's the liddle runaway, vot? Why did you run away from Chalkstones, Lizzie, eh? And is that your liddle kitty? Pretty kitty!" He wagged an enticing forefinger at me and Romeo. "Let me have a look at kitty, won't you? Vot is Kitty's name? Ginger?" (*Ginger*, indeed!) "Lizzie seems to have lost her tongue, vot?" said Mr. Sunshine.

The door at the back of the shop stood open, and to my intense relief I saw Aunt Charlotte appear from the back parlour in the passage. Scenting a customer, she bustled in. Her presence released me, and while she accosted Mr. Sunshine smilingly, I found myself able to creep out of the window. I did not creep away entirely, however. Partly fascinated, partly watchful, I took cover behind my Aunt, touching her dress.

"Well, sir?" said Aunt Charlotte amiably.

"My card." He tendered her one.

"Not *the* Lewis Sonnenschein!"

"The same," said he.

"Well, I *am* flattered!" She indicated the slightest of stage salaams.

This was frightful. What was Aunt Charlotte about, making the enemy welcome in our midst? Then I remembered that she didn't *know*. Nobody had told her anything. Bella had merely spoken of the Satyr, and Mr. Sunshine's name hadn't crossed my lips. But all the same, why didn't she turn him out? Could she *see*? Of course she couldn't!—or if she could, one didn't turn customers out. And Mr. Sonnenschein, it seemed, was a Name. My Aunt

adored a Name, till she had cause not to. When Mr. Sunshine beamed upon her, she beamed upon him. Behind her skirts, I felt the fort had fallen.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Sonnenschein? Has anything in the place taken your fancy, or did you just want to look round?”

“A great many things in the place have taken my fancy,” Mr. Sunshine assured her. “But I did not come here as a purchaser, I came as a friend.”

“Honoured!”

“I want a liddle talk with you—Cherry Pie.”

“Wherever did you get *that* from, dear heart!” ejaculated my Aunt.

“My Gala Girls,” said Mr. Sunshine good-humouredly. “They vos telling me last night vot a magnificent party you gave them. I hope you’ll ask *me* to your next one, Cherry Pie, if I may call you so?”

“It’s like your impudence,” laughed Charlotte, “but you may. Come into the parlour.”

“Vill you walk into my parlour said the Spider to the fly!” sang Mr. Sunshine, following her as she moved to the door. “Come along, liddle Lizzie!”

“What, you know *her* name too?”

“Oh, Lizzie Pye and me are very old friends! We live next door to each other down in Kent, don’t we, liddle Lizzie?” He propelled me through the passage, in front of him. I cast a frantic eye on the staircase, but he pushed me past that channel of escape into the parlour, where Aunt Charlotte was putting out the sherry.

“You’ll have a glass, and a biscuit?” It took more than Names to overwhelm my Aunt. She was prepared to love them as she loved Organ-Grinders.

Mr. Sunshine seemed about to refuse. No doubt the grocer’s sherry of a vendor of bric-à-brac gave him pause. Then his eye fell on the decanter. “Dear me!” he murmured. He took it up, and handled it with an eye.

“Queen Anne, naturally,” said my Aunt.

Mr. Sunshine agreed to take sherry with Queen Anne—if Cherry Pie would join him? She would. “And a liddle teeny-weeny sip for Lizzie?” Mr. Sunshine, holding me imprisoned between his knees, was almost arch.

I shook my head. Aunt Charlotte glanced at me.

“Run upstairs, Lisette, while Mr. Sunshine and I have our little talk.” Whatever the talk was to be about, she couldn’t suppose it concerned me.

But Mr. Sunshine’s knees tightened on me. “Oh, but our liddle girl mustn’t run away! I’ve got something here she vill like to see very much.” He undid the parcel he had brought, and produced Dollabella.

“Well I never!” exclaimed my Aunt. “How ever did you come to get hold of Lisette’s doll?”

“All in good time,” said Mr. Sunshine blandly, and I felt the time was going from bad to worse. “We must do things quite correct. Does Lizzie Pye identify her property?”

I looked at my Aunt for help. She merely thought I did not understand. “You’ve got to tell Mr. Sonnenschein if it’s yours.”

I nodded.

“Good!” said Mr. Sonnenschein. “But whose——” He tapped the diamond butterfly—“is *this*?”

I held my tongue. Wild horses wouldn’t have made me identify *that* for him. But Aunt Charlotte was saying, “That’s my young lady lodger’s brooch. How pleased she’ll be! Lisette, run up, and tell Bella to come down.”

Mr. Sunshine loosened his knees at last. “Yes,” he beamed, “run along Lizzie, and tell Rosiebella to come down.”

I flew upstairs to the second floor. Bella wasn't in her room, or in my Aunt's. I went up to my attic—nor was she there. Then I came down again, slower, and hesitated before Old Madam's door. To enter her rooms unbidden was taboo. Before I found courage to tap, the door opened a crack, and Bella's pale face peered out. "Has he gone?" she whispered.

I shook my head.

"I was afraid he hadn't. His hansom's still outside. Oh, Lisette, what am I going to do?"

"He wants you to come down."

"I won't!"

"Aunt Charlotte sent me to tell you."

"Cherry Pie?"

"She doesn't know."

"Lisette, Lisette, what am I going to do?"

"Don't stand whispering at the door, children," called Old Madam. "Go out or come in."

We went in. Madam Lambert looked up from her solitaire board. "White as two ghosts," she remarked. "What's all the fuss about?"

Where could we begin? There was too much to tell.

"Speak up, one of you. When anything goes wrong, never lose your head. Lisette, you look the more sensible of the two. Come, child!"

She spoke in the tone of one who commands obedience. In our tottering world, this ancient dame of nearly ninety years appeared like a tower of strength.

"It's Mr. Sunshine." I began my story anywhere. "He's downstairs. He's got the Gala Theatre, that's where Bella was before she came here so he wouldn't know where she was, because he's the Satyr. But the Gala Girls knew where she was after the party, and Tottie told him."

Bella asked quickly, "Did he say Tottie told him?"

"No, but she doesn't play fair. She did it to put a spoke in Flossie's wheel." It was as plain as a pikestaff; I spoke with certainty. "He's got Dollabella," I went on, "it was Tottie who took her—you know, Bella, like stealing a person's portrait,—to show him, so he'd know it was you. He knew it was you when he saw her at Chalkstones, in Longmead I mean, but she hadn't got the diamond butterfly then. He wants you to go down and idy—and say the butterfly's yours. Aunt Charlotte sent me upstairs for you."

"Chérie," said Old Madam drily, "has more heart than head."

Bella knelt by her, and buried her face in her lap. “Oh Madam! if you could understand——!”

“What do you mean, mademoiselle? *if I could understand!* The child’s been telling me. I’m not a simpleton. I don’t need the t’s to be crossed and the i’s dotted to know you’ve been hiding from unwelcome proposals. The whole point is, now that you’ve been found out, *are* the proposals unwelcome, or are they *not*?”

“They are,” said Bella.

“Very well then, no more need be said. Go up to your room.” Old Madam laid her solitaire aside. “And you, child, go down to your Aunt and tell her to bring this Satyr up to me.”

“Madam!”

“Tush, mademoiselle! it needn’t be put like that. Give Mr. What-d’ye-call-him Madam Lambert’s compliments, Lisette, and she will be pleased to receive him.”

“But Madam!”

“Do as I tell you, mesdemoiselles!”

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Returning to the parlour, I saw that in my absence my Aunt had “got on to” Mr. Sunshine. Her manner was flustered, while he, unsuspecting, had maintained his bonhomie. They looked round at the door with different degrees of expectancy, and my Aunt concealed relief, and Mr. Sunshine annoyance, when I alone appeared.

I delivered my message to her, not to him. “Madam sends her compliments,” I stammered, “and will he come up and see her?”

“Maman!” exclaimed my Aunt. She was more astonished than I and Bella had been.

Mr. Sunshine rose promptly. In his ignorance, he thought the message was from Bella.

“Lisette!” murmured my Aunt, much worried.

“She said so, really she did.”

Mr. Sunshine at the door stood aside for my Aunt. As he followed her out, still carrying Dollabella, I stole away by the French window into the garden. But once there I did not run to cover. I climbed the blue-iron staircase to the balcony, and crept into the powder-closet behind Madam’s room. I knew it was eavesdropping, but I couldn’t help myself.

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Madam Lambert was not partial to fresh air. She did not like the windows open “on” her, and when she had been ailing the balcony door was left open, and the glass-panelled door of the closet stood ajar, so that fresh air could reach her room without her “feeling” it. By standing to one side of the closet

door I could hear everything that was going on in the bedroom, and see a good deal of it. I was in time to hear Old Madam's "Entrez!" when my Aunt tapped, and to see Mr. Sunshine's change of expression when he found himself face to face with an unfamiliar old lady, instead of a familiar young one.

Old Madam had arranged herself a little. She was sitting with great dignity on her broad-seated brocade chair, her cheek supported slightly by her left hand, her right, with the opal, resting on the chair-arm. On the table beside her lay the Watteau fan, unopened. Her shoulders were draped with a three-cornered lace shawl, to whose beauty the carriage of her old thin shoulders gave elegance; she held her head, on her long shrivelled neck, like a queen. She might have been posed for a picture.

I saw that, from the first glance, the Diamond Magnate from South Africa knew himself at a disadvantage. He couldn't have called Old Madam "Cherry Pie." Aunt Charlotte was saying, "My mother, Mr. Sonnenschein. Maman, allow me to present Mr. Lewis Sonnenschein."

Old Madam inclined her head. "Mr. Sonnenschein will excuse my rising. I have not been in health lately."

"Certainly, *cer-tainly!*" said Mr. Sunshine. He bowed clumsily over the outstretched blue-veined hand. "Dear me! vot a superb stone!"

"The Fourteenth Louis gave it to one of his mistresses, who gave it to one of her lovers."

"Aha!" Mr. Sunshine was slightly embarrassed, perhaps slightly shocked; as one used to be, when the sayers of such things couldn't be winked at. It was inconceivable that Mr. Sunshine should wink at Old Madam.

"He does not appear to have been her paramour, however. She was one of the unscrupulous ones, who get what they want without paying for it. The tale is told in the diary of my Great-Aunt the Countess de Marignan-Croissy, but the old French is not too easy to read, and much of it is blotched. But you have not come here to listen to old memoirs. Be seated. (*Chérie*, relieve our guest of his hat.) You have come, if I am not misinformed, monsieur, out of interest in my ward."

"Your vard, Mrs.—Mrs.—?"

"Lambert. Yes, Mademoiselle Bella is my ward."

"Where is she?"

"I represent her. It is more suitable."

"It'd suit me better to speak to her myself."

"However," said Old Madam, "she is not here."

Mr. Sunshine gathered himself for battle. He had allowed himself to be baffled quite long enough by the setting of the scene, and its protagonist. "Excuse me for contradicting a lady, Mrs. Lambert, but I saw the young person at the window with my own eyes when I arrived." He surveyed the room

rapidly, as though suspecting that Bella was hidden in it. “At *this* window, I think.”

“She was there,” admitted Old Madam tranquilly, “and she saw you. She was naturally reluctant to receive your addresses in person. We need not beat about the bush, Mr. Sonnenschein. You *are* here to pay your addresses to my ward?”

Mr. Sunshine mumbled indistinctly.

“Correct me if I am in error. If mademoiselle is the object of your visit, I cannot imagine what else you have come about.”

“She *is* the object, ma’am. But——”

“Let us come to the point. I have other plans for my ward.”

“*You* have other plans for Rosiebella?” spluttered Mr. Sunshine. He began to bluster. “This is all tommy-rot. The girl’s quite old enough to speak for herself. I demand to see her.”

“Monsieur forgets himself!” Old Madam’s inflection actually made Mr. Sunshine flush. “Nobody can demand of *us*, Mr. Sonnenschein, and no gentleman presses unwelcome attentions on a lady.”

“Suppose we leave the lady and gentleman out of it! I dessay I’m not quite as much of a gentleman as you take me for.”

“Quite as much, believe me.”

“And the little miss is no lady, let me tell you! My attentions weren’t so unwelcome when she danced at the Gala.” He pulled the diamond butterfly off Dollabella, tearing the fragile bodice. “See that, ma’am? She vos ready enough to give me a kiss for that!”

“You surprise me.”

“Vot! you’re surprised that a liddle girl in the Corps-de-Bally counts her kisses ven she gets the chance of a bit of joolery? Diamonds! the only stone vorth looking at twice! Don’t I know?” Old Madam moved her hand. The ring upon it gleamed. “There’s nothing in opals,” said Mr. Sonnenschein insolently.

“No? I would not change mine for the Koh-i-Noor.”

Mr. Sunshine reverted to the butterfly. “These ain’t the Koh-i-Noor, but they’re genuine diamonds.”

“Not the first water.” Old Madam’s glance reduced the butterfly to a grub.

“Good enough for a tart!” growled Mr. Sunshine.

Old Madam sat bolt upright, and rapped the floor smartly with her ebony stick. Her eyes glistened. “You are talking of my ward, Mr. Sonnenschein. You are also, be good enough to remember, talking to *me*. What happened two years ago is of no consequence. God bless me! do we carry the affairs of eighteen through our lives with us? I regret the turn our interview has taken. The tone is unamicable—a pity when one has come to make proposals of marriage, even if they should not prove acceptable.”

“Marriage!” shouted Mr. Sonnenschein. Madam held up her hand. The opal gleamed. He moderated his pitch. “Who said anything about marriage?”

“Not marriage?”

Mr. Sunshine gave vent to a snort that passed for a laugh.

“In that case,” said Madam Lambert, “we can’t entertain your proposals. Mademoiselle is not cut out for a triumphant mistress. You can see for yourself she’s no Pompadour.”

“Vell!” Mr. Sunshine looked scandalized.

“Her type is the butterfly that is bruised in the net. No, we cannot consider your offer of a mistress-ship.”

“I’d like you to tell me,” said Mr. Sunshine coarsely, “who’ll offer the little baggage anything else!”

“At the moment,” said Old Madam serenely, “we are considering whether she shall marry into the Peerage. Personally, I should not be sorry to see her as Lady Baxwood. She might re-open the house, and make it her town seat.”

“Vot’s that? Baxwood? The young cub used to hang around her a bit, but he must have hung around a dozen others in the last two years.”

“In the last two years his attentions have been assiduous.”

“He knew all the time vere she vos, eh? *I see!*” Mr. Sunshine got up, grinning and glaring. “Don’t you make any mistake, ma’am. Baxwood won’t marry her!”

“Quite possibly not. His title is only two hundred years old, after all. The new aristocracy.”

“Vot the devil,” snarled Mr. Sunshine, “*would* you consider, if the aristocracy ain’t good enough?”

Old Madam took up her fan. “Royalty?” she said reflectively. She opened the fan and used it languidly. “Chérie, our guest is looking for his hat.”

She did not extend her hand.

The door had banged, the hansom had rattled away. I had slipped into Old Madam’s room to see it go. I wanted to make quite certain of Mr. Sunshine’s departure. Behind the curtain I followed it down the High Street out of sight. My Aunt came hurrying up from below again, as Bella flew down from above.

“Maman! you were wonderful! What a fool I was! But you were wonderful! You must be simply exhausted. Let me put you to bed.”

“What happened? What did he say?” asked Bella excitedly. “I couldn’t hear a thing.”

“Come here, mademoiselle.”

“Maman, you’ve had enough for one day,” said Charlotte.

“I am told,” said Old Madam, disregarding her daughter, “this trinket belongs to you.”

Bella made a moue at the butterfly. “I gave it to Lisette—to her doll, rather.”

“Dollabella doesn’t want it!” I called from the window-curtain.

“Good gracious me!” said my Aunt. “Has that child been there all the time?”

I came out, shaking my head. “I wanted to see him go.” I did not think it necessary to say where I had been before Mr. Sunshine went.

“I saw him go too,” said Bella. “Pouf! that’s the last of him.”

“It may be the last of him, and it may not,” said Madam Lambert. “With creatures of his type one never can be sure. We must put on our thinking-caps—”

“Nightcaps for you, Maman!” said Charlotte resolutely.

“It’s not quite tea-time, Chérie.”

My Aunt glanced at the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece. “As late as that already? I hadn’t a notion! I’ll bring you your tea in bed, Maman. Run along, children. Why Bella—it’s Tuesday! Off with you to the summerhouse.”

“It’s too early.”

“I daresay he’ll *be* early, after getting your note. And after what we’ve been through to-day, it’s time you made up your mind.”

“Yes, Cherry Pie.” Bella looked pensive, smiled a little, sighed a little. Suddenly she ran and kneeled by Old Madam’s chair. “Would you be glad if Baxwood House was re-opened?”

“I shouldn’t be sorry, my dear. Great houses need their *châtelaines*, not their caretakers.”

“Baxwood *had* a *châtelaine* for a caretaker,” said Bella, “once.”

Madam Lambert patted her head. "It is two generations since its owners lived there."

"When Frederick came into it, he was only twenty," said Bella. "He didn't want that sort of place all by himself. It wasn't town, and it wasn't country, he said. But I could make it my town place, and be near you still and go to Shropshire or the Scotch one for the holidays. Lisette should come and stay with me in them all. How'd you like that, Lisette?"

I did not answer. I was very near tears. Something, I didn't know what, was going wrong. To cover my wet eyes, I stooped to pick up something that had fluttered under the table, and stayed there a moment, rubbing my tears away.

"Now, Maman, to bed! Run along with you, Lady Baxwood! Come out from under that table, Lisette!"

I came out. Aunt Charlotte was taking off Old Madam's shawl, and saying, "Go down to the garden through the closet, and put the Watteau fan away in the cabinet. I suppose you brought it out for the occasion, Maman! Had you forgotten the centre medallion is loose?"

"Is this it?" I held out what I had found on the floor—the little blindfold dancer on her points.

"Heavens alive! if only it isn't damaged!" Aunt Charlotte examined it anxiously, and breathed with relief. "It mustn't be touched again till Mr. Lunette comes. Why, of course!" she laughed. "*That* was the second thing, Bella, we couldn't remember, when he was here the day before yesterday. Mind you don't let me forget it, next time he comes. Oh, but I daresay you'll be in Shropshire by then! Kiss Maman good night. I shan't let her be disturbed again to-day."

"Good night, Madam." Bella stooped and kissed her. "Good night, Cherry Pie."

"I'm not going to bed, you silly!" laughed my Aunt.

"Never mind—here's a kiss for you too. Thank you both for being so kind to me. Thank you for looking after me so long."

"It's been our pleasure," said Charlotte smilingly, "and now it is going to be Frederick's."

Bella and I went through to the little room, closing the door behind us. "Poor little dancer!" she sighed. "Come, put her away."

She opened the drawer that held the Countess's fans, found the peach-coloured fan-case, and tenderly laid in the fan, with the medallion on top. When she had shut up the drawer she turned to me. "Good night, Lisette."

"I'm not going to bed yet either, Bella."

"I know. But it's going to be a beautiful night, and if Frederick wants to take me to Richmond, I'll go."

I lifted my face to hers.

“It’s been fun,” she said, “hasn’t it?”

Then she ran down to the garden—to the summerhouse. Of what use to run to the arbour? Le Beau au Jardin Dormant had no name.

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I did not dare to follow her at once. I could not intrude again upon the bedroom. I wandered round the little octagon closet, knelt on the settee as I had done the first time, and looked at Lancret’s miniature of Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy. The sidelong glance of the bright clever eyes seemed to be directed on the cabinet. “If you’re so miserable,” they suggested, “why not amuse yourself with the Humming-Bird?”

I went to the cabinet and got it out. I put it carefully down on the settee, and touched the spring. Out popped the little bird, whose colourings, as I saw for the first time, were precisely those of the dress of the Countess Charlotte.

*Solo in a Château:  
for an Old Diva*

I wonder if my hand has lost its cunning. It is a long time since I tried to exercise my art and my arts. When one is youthful, both seem of such importance. When one is old, nothing is important except preservation. First of the body, then of the soul. Tell me the age when a woman has turned *dévoté*, and I'll tell you the age when she laid down her looking-glass. Fetch me my mirror, Louise. Hum! not so bad for a hundred-and-seven years. I shan't begin on my soul for a long time yet.

As well, perhaps. I'm never quite certain that *Métayer* didn't make off with three-fourths of it, after all. Can one creep into heaven on the quarter of a soul? One thing at least is intact. My wits.

The Queen has asked for them. Well, she shall have them, poor little Antoinette. How long is it since I was saying *Poor little Antoine*? Louise, fetch me my fan.

What's the matter, woman? Why do you tremble so? You're always in a palsy nowadays. Aren't you ashamed, a young thing of seventy-five like you? Look at my hand, as steady as a rock. The movement in the opal comes from itself, and not from any tremor in its wearer. Yes, I've no fear that I cannot control my brush. All will be well—if that packet is smuggled in time. Fetch me my paints. We'll hope they are still moist. Good. They will serve.

I'll sit prepared. Minutes count in these days. Here in Normandy one doesn't know what is happening in Paris from moment to moment. One only knows what is happening all the time. And if they fail to get the boy out of the Temple, my brush may have to race the tumbril. My brushes, Louise! This little one will do. Take the others away.

What are you listening for? You're always listening. You'll crick your neck if you keep it cocked on one side. What's that? For mercy's sake speak up, you fool! They're beginning to get restive down in the village? My good girl, I know it. I told my brother it was nonsense coming here to save one's skin. France is in conflagration. The blaze is in Paris; in the heart of danger, one knows where one is with it. But here, where it smoulders unseen under a haycock, the flame shoots out while one flatters oneself one is safe. Rely on one's own people? Fiddle-faddle! One's people aren't one's own, since the Bastille fell. *You* know that don't you, Louise Boutin? You're one of our people, you were born on these estates—how do I know you're not my step-

daughter? Your mother passed for a very pretty woman. Such attachment as you have shown to us all, Louise! Not only to the Count's family, but to mine. You were so proud, when my little brother came here as a child, to be allowed to let him pull your hair. I was near forty then, you and he—six? seven? Of course he pulled too hard, and made you cry. We all of us pulled our people's hair too hard; it is our turn to cry. The difference is, that we don't. Bring me the miniature of the little Dauphin, the one the Queen gave me, in the oval frame. A pretty boy. Perhaps, when none look on, the Queen is crying.

And how proud you were, when I chose you ten years later for my maid! When you were clumsy, I beat you with my hairbrush. You adored me for it, didn't you Louise?

Proudest of all when, ten years later still, my brother brought his young wife here, and you were permitted to wet-nurse their first baby. I always suspected you liked to fancy yourself its mother. Tell me, Louise, did my brother never seduce you? No? As it happened.

You wet-nursed most of his children, one after another. All except Count Camille. You'd given it up when he came into the world, and his mother went out of it. Yet you were only a chit of forty-four, and I was then the age that you are now. Though I wasn't half as old as you are now. I shall never be as old as you are now. Do you understand me, child? No, of course you don't. Stupid people like you count time on their fingers.

Only my brother and Camille remain. My family appears to have been unlucky. I shall have no descendants, while you, Louise, teem with them. How many great-grandchildren have you now? An army! enough to sack Marignan-Croissy. A proud great-grandmother you'll be that day.

Pray don't imagine I envy you your litter. Marital life never appealed to me. I'm content to leave our line to my nephew Camille, if he ever contemplates legitimacy. Past thirty, and not married. Has he seduced one of your granddaughters yet?

*What is that?*

A man below in the courtyard? Ha! perhaps the messenger I am expecting. Go, Louise! and if he is asking for me, bring him at once. Why do you hesitate?—He's dirty? in rags? he has a patch over one eye? Bah, woman! do as I tell you.—

Charles de Bazaine! come here, you handsome young rascal, and let me see what you've done with your good looks. Excellent! what an actor you would have made. *Well? have you got it?*

Inside your eye-patch? Ha, ha! Where's my châtelaine? You'll need my scissors. Be very careful as you snip the stitches—give 'em to me boy, you may injure it. I see! she has wrapped it in a strip of fine linen, torn, if I'm not mistaken, from her fichu. Words on it—Go away boy, I can read; I'll stake my

eyes against yours, even to-day. ‘*My trust is in you, old friend. Don’t let him die. You say you can save him, God alone knows how. A.*’ No, Antoinette, not God. Métayer as an egoist had his limit. He may have fancied himself the Devil sometimes—but he wasn’t even that. This flat fair curl, you’re sure it is the Dauphin’s? Yes, I could swear to it, too. Dry your tears, my poor friend. He shall not die. Leave it to me, and he shall live for ever.

Charles, you must leave me. I have the work of my lifetime to do to-night. All I have been and done was prepared for this. Louise! see that the Count de Bazaine is fed. Then give him the livery of that ruffianly coachman who decamped in a hurry yesterday. And let no one set eyes on the Count until he is washed—our beggar in the black patch must not be recognized. You’ll make a pretty coachman, my dear Charles. I hope you can drive as well as you can ride.

What is it, Louise? Do I want anything? Nothing, only to be left alone. I haven’t taken nourishment since—when? My good fool, how do you know what nourishes me? Well, *well?* you hope——? out with it! what do you hope? You hope I trust you, you hope I did not mean the things I said? I never mean the things I say, Louise; and haven’t I trusted you with the Count de Bazaine? That ought to pacify you. Now be off.——

Here they all are: the paints, the brush, the picture, the hair of the Dauphin, Métayer’s opal ring. And Watteau’s fan. How near the long-ago seems. Now!

Ah, little Antoine Watteau! you *could* paint. With your heart, you painted Finette out of existence. If you neither enamel your heart nor use your heart, you’re bound to suffer, Antoine. We are the gainers.

And you, Finette? One never knew where your heart was. You didn’t yourself. What was it you said you wanted? “Not any Louis that ever was born,” I think. “A youthful prince, about whom there is a mystery. Un Beau au Jardin Dormant.” You wanted him gay, young, handsome, not too grand. “If I have to wait a hundred years to find him, let him be there!” Eh bien, La Finette! but Watteau hadn’t quite time to give you your Prince.

When the King had gone, and I came out of my attic, Antoine was ill. He looked fit only to die (but that was his habit the last ten years of his life). His head was sunk in his arms upon the table. Yet when I put out my hand to the fan, he knew, and said, “Leave it, it isn’t finished.” “Do you *want* to finish La Finette’s lover?” I asked. “You’ve denied her her lover once, so why not twice?” “I only denied her myself. I couldn’t have loved her, or she have wanted it, for long.” “And me,” I taunted him, “couldn’t you have loved me?” “You did not want it, any more than Finette. What you and she wanted of me, heaven knows. You do not see me as I really am.” Was that true, Antoine? If there was one brittle spot in my heart’s enamel—but perhaps at this distance of time I delude myself, and like to think that I loved the little genius. I probably

didn't. He was nothing at all to look at.

His hand wandered vaguely. "Where is that brush?" he asked. I told him that brush was my perquisite, I had it safe. "Besides," I said, "you can do no more to-night." He rejoined, "It is true, I think I am in a fever. I'll go to an apothecary for a draught, and finish the fan to-morrow." "No, Antoine, this is our farewell. The fan goes with me. One day I will give Finette's prince a face she will like." "You only paint so-so, Mademoiselle de la Rivière," he said crossly. I knew, by his calling me that, he was near a delirium. I'd a care for my health, so I picked up the fan and left him. When I had brought it carefully into safety, I set about completing the green bough that concealed the featureless face of Finette's prince. It is time that the face had features. Come, little prince. I'll copy them from the portrait your mother gave me.

But really, mon petit! you're much too young, you know. When Finette at last finds her Beau au Jardin Dormant, she won't want a child, at least, not one as young as you are. Surely I can do better for her than that! Why shouldn't we try to take a leap in the dark? You Bourbons! I know you by heart, from brow to—chin! The Fourteenth Louis was so, and the Fifteenth so. I saw him grow up from a child, the prettiest boy! When he was thirteen, he tried to make love to me. I slapped him well when I found him in my bed. Louis Bien-Aimé, Louis Bien-Amant! and you are not unlike him. I think I can make a guess at you at nineteen. The Bourbon nose, but the short proud Hapsburg lip. What do you think, Métayer, can I do it? Set the hair in the brush, and I know I can do it! Your opal glows red to-day.

Out with the leaves I scattered over his face! In with the blue eye, and the short upper lip. Don't turn your head, Finette, or peep under your handkerchief. Keep the pose, on your points.—

A success! I swear, a success! A charming youth! Not too clever, but light of heart, and young, with his mother's charm, and sufficient of her frivolity. The Seventeenth Louis, a child who will never reign now.

Ah to be in the Temple at this moment! I wonder how they will account for the child's disappearance! I have kept my promise, poor weeping Antoinette. He will not die. And now, I suppose, I must hide him again in the boscage. If this fan is found while France is furious, if this Bourbon is seen by those who destroy Bourbons, Finette and her Louis may never find each other. I'll do my best not to disgrace you, Watteau. I think I can manage a little green bush in your manner, even if Charlotte de la Rivière only paints so-so.

He is hidden. Is there anything else to be done? The miniature? Should that be painted out too? It is all that is left of the little boy in the Temple. Hum! if, as I suspect from Louis Boutin's manner, Marignan-Croissy is to be given short shrift to-night, this relic will not outlast us. A pity not to preserve it for Camille's great-grandchildren. Let me see, where's that patch? My scissors,

and my paste.—

That fits to perfection. I can't say it suits to perfection the Trianon Shepherdess's hat and crook; but the canaille won't know. It would take one of *Us* to discover that. A layer of body-colour will improve it, and then, some design painted on top of all. Now, what?

Qui est là? Entrez, Louise! tu m'apportes, quoi donc? Du chocolat? n'ai-je pas te dis que je n'en veux rien? Take it away. No, wait! Is not that Louis Bien-Aimé's chocolatière? Turn it so that I can see the bouquet. Exquisite, really! they had artists in Sèvres. I always meant to copy it some day. Put it down on the table there, Louise, I'll sip it when it is cool, and amuse myself meanwhile painting the posy of flowers. . . .

Bury the King's Son under a patch . . .

So his name was Louis!

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How long was it since Finette—since Bella, had left me alone with the past in the powder-closet? A hundred minutes, or a hundred years? A hundred minutes might be too late, if she and Frederick were on the way to Richmond. I flew down to the garden with one thought only, to tell her that the boy in the arbour was called Louis.

A dry cough greeted me at the foot of the blue-iron staircase. Mr. Lunette, with his shabby black bag, was standing under the portico by the back parlour window. "You're in a great hurry, little miss," he observed.

"Yes, I am. Where's Bella?"

"The dancing-girl?"

"Have you seen her?"

"Often."

"I mean just now."

"I have come through the shop, little miss. As usual, there was nobody in attendance. I walked on to the parlour. Nobody was there either. For all I know there's nobody in the garden—nobody anywhere in space or time but you and me."

"I've got to find her!" I cried distractedly. I fled through the garden calling softly, "Bella! it's Louis! the boy's name is Louis! You must say Louis for your third guess, Bella! the name of the boy in the arbour is called Louis!"

I caught no glimpse of her, but I hoped she heard me. I went back miserably to the house. Mr. Lunette was no longer at the French window, but in the parlour with my Aunt, who beckoned me in.

"Come here and look at this, Lisette! Mr. Lunette has mended your chocolate-cup. Nobody would ever know you'd broken it. There! isn't it wonderful what Mr. Lunette can do with those clever fingers of his!" The chocolate-cup stood amid its soft wrappings on the table, intact to the eye as when the Countess de Marignan-Croissy had copied it in a little jewelled frame. "So quick too!" said my Aunt admiringly. "How good of you to be so quick about it! I don't know when I've seen you twice in one week, Mr. Lunette."

"There seemed to be a hurry for it," said Mr. Lunette.

"Will it hold water?" asked my Aunt.

"It will hold chocolate," said Mr. Lunette.

"Not really? You're a wonder! I'd just come down to make a cup for

Maman. Excuse me—I can hear the kettle boiling.” She popped down to the kitchen, and popped up again. “Lisette! don’t let Mr. Lunette go before I’ve given him the fan.”

“The fan?” queried Mr. Lunette.

“Yes, Maman’s Watteau fan—you’ve never seen it.”

“I did not know Watteau had ever painted one.”

“I should have thought he’d painted dozens in his time,” said Charlotte. “Fans would be Watteau’s *métier*, Mr. Lunette.”

“You know a good deal, Mrs. Pye, but you don’t know everything.” But my Aunt had popped down again without listening. “I’d like to see,” said Mr. Lunette, “what that boy could make of a fan.”

“I’ll get it for you,” I said. “It’s in Madam’s powder-closet. The door on the balcony’s open.”

I went up quickly, as eager for Mr. Lunette to see the Watteau fan as Mr. Lunette himself. The room was as I had left it, with the Humming-Bird on the settee, and Countess Charlotte still smiling brilliantly above it. I pulled at a drawer of the cabinet—the wrong drawer. It was empty. But no, not quite. Something had got stuck in the top at the back, so that it only came part of the way. I could neither open nor shut it now, till the obstacle was removed. I slid in my hand, and felt the object delicately, in case it was something breakable and priceless. It felt like a pencil. But when it came at last, it was a paint-brush. A fine, very old paint-brush, clogged with ancient colour. How long had it lain unseen at the back of that drawer?

I put it down by the Humming-Bird, and pulled out the drawer with the peach-coloured fan-case in it—the right drawer, this time. I did not open the case, for fear of something happening to the little dancer. I put it carefully in my upturned pinafore, and into the bag made by the gathered ends I put the paint-brush and the Humming-Bird too. I fancied Mr. Lunette would like to see them. As I re-entered the parlour from the garden, my Aunt was going out by the passage-door, with the covered chocolatière on a little tray.

I set my pinny-ful down by the table, in front of Mr. Lunette, who said, “What’s all this?”

“It’s the fan,” I said, “and the paint-brush and the Humming-Bird.”

“The paint-brush,” said Mr. Lunette. He looked at it without touching it. “That’s not much use to me.”

“I know,” I said. It wasn’t much use to anyone without the opal. “The Humming-Bird is inside the box. You touch a spring, and it sings.”

“I know the sort.” But Mr. Lunette did not offer to touch the box. He drew the peach-coloured fan-case to him, and opened it. There on top lay the blindfold girl on her points. He looked at the scrap for a full minute in silence; then, “Yes,” he said.

With his long sensitive fingers he moved it aside, lifted the fan out, and opened it as though it were gossamer. He examined more intently the magical garden, from which the little dancer had escaped. "Yes," he repeated, "yes. He could do it. I wonder what vandal cut the little lady out of the picture."

"Was she cut out? I thought she fell out," I said.

He shook his head. "There was some purpose behind it. The chicken-skin, little miss, is all of a piece. *This*," he picked up the scrap, "has come out too neatly for accident. See, it has been pricked out with a fine needle. Look at the edge, then look at the edge of the fan."

I saw what he meant. It had been done so minutely that the blindfold girl had dropped out of place without a blemish.

"Can you put her back?" I asked suddenly.

"I can."

"So that nobody will know she ever came out?"

"She won't know it herself."

"Can you do it quick?"

"Quicker than anyone else."

"Do it quick, *quick!*" I cried.

Mr. Lunette reached down for his shabby black bag, which he had set on the carpet by his chair. About to open it, he paused, and looked at me.

"Don't you like people there when you do things?" I asked.

"Not much, little miss."

"Shall I go away then?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lunette, and he touched the Humming-Bird's spring.

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"Louis!"

"Finette!"

"Then I've guessed right, my darling!"

"You have guessed right, and now I can take off the handkerchief, and see what you look like."

"And if you don't like what you see?"

"I *must* like it."

"Why?"

"Are we not living in a fairy-tale? Have you ever read one in which the lovers did not like what they saw when their eyes met? I have waited a hundred years for you to look round at me in the Jardin Dormant."

"I waited almost as long before you were there."

"The moment has come, Finette! How tight this knot is."

"You know my name. Who told you my name?"

"Once when I was a child the Countess Charlotte showed you to me on her fan. 'Who is she?' I asked. 'That is Finette,' she said. 'What does she do?'

‘Break people’s hearts.’ ‘Is that why she’s put in a fan?’ ‘No,’ said the Countess, ‘she is put in the fan in case she should break her own. She has to be saved from herself, petit prince.’ ‘When I’m grown up,’ I boasted, ‘I will save her!’—see, the knot’s loosing now!”

“Louis—ah Louis!”

“Turn round your head, Finette. . . .”

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“. . . *Come out of it!*”

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“What did you say?” I blinked my eyes.

Aunt Charlotte was coming back into the room, with the empty chocolate-cup. Mr. Lunette was packing up his black bag. The box that sang was shut, the fan lay open.

“You’ve never mended it *already!*” exclaimed my Aunt.

“Don’t touch it!” said Mr. Lunette sharply, “unless you want to ruin it.”

“But what have you *done* to it!” cried my astounded Aunt.

I came to stand beside her, and share her wonder. There was the fan, made whole like the chocolate-cup. You could not see a sign of any repair. He had given the Watteau fan a touch of paint—more than a touch! The boy in the boscage was no longer hidden, the eyes of the dancer were no longer blinded.

“I regret to say,” Mr. Lunette explained, “that while I was mending it I had a slight accident. I was obliged to touch up the join a little, and in doing so damaged the painting of the handkerchief. A scrap flaked off, and I suspected that Watteau had painted it over a face. If so, it would be not only more charming, but more valuable. I ventured to take a risk, and removed the handkerchief—a delicate operation, Mrs. Pye.”

“And this,” cried my delighted Aunt, “was revealed!—But, dear heart! it is Bella.”

“It is,” admitted Mr. Lunette, “not entirely unlike your young lady lodger, Mrs. Pye. In the case of the youth I had merely to remove some of the boscage. It was very much less well-painted than the rest.” His hand accidentally touched the Humming-Bird’s box. A slight jar whirred within, a petulant sound. “However,” he added, with a scanty smile, “the young man’s face is not so very ill-done—though, if you ask me, it was not done by Watteau.”

“I’ll take the word of an expert,” said my Aunt. “Imagine restoring a fan like an old master!”

“Watteau,” said Mr. Lunette, “experimented as perhaps you know, in very thick colour. That’s how he got his high-lights on silk and satin.”

“What you’ve revealed with those clever fingers of yours!” My Aunt was poring over the joyous little faces, smiling as though they would never know tears again. She shut the fan softly, saying, “What do I owe you?”

“Another day,” said Mr. Lunette. “I haven’t time to make my account out now. It’s not always simple to square one’s debit and credit.” He began to move out to the shop.

“You’ve left one of your brushes,” said my Aunt.

“The little girl can have it to play with. Good day.”

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As Mr. Lunette vanished through the shop, Frederick appeared from the garden, in great agitation.

“Mrs. Pye! Mrs. Pye!”

“What are you doing here? Oh!” my Aunt beamed, “have you something pleasant to tell me?”

“Mrs. Pye! where’s Bella?”

“What do you mean, where’s Bella? She went out to wait for you in the garden, half an hour at least before you were due.”

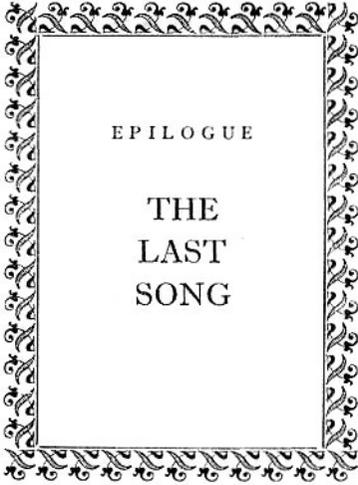
“I came before I was due. She is not in the garden.”

“Are you sure?”

“There wasn’t a sign of her but this, in the arbour.” Frederick threw a handkerchief on the table. “I know it is hers, it has a scent like hers.”

“It was a present from Maman. Come, Lord Baxwood! you’re making a fuss about nothing.” My Aunt nodded, and whispered meaningly, “*She’s going to take you!* I expect she is hiding—come along! we’ll all go and find her.”

My Aunt and Frederick hastened back into the garden. I did not trouble to follow them.

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the central text.

EPILOGUE

THE  
LAST  
SONG

All this, as I said, was forty years ago.

I have come to the years when childhood's details stand out, tiny and clear, like one's own feet seen through the wrong end of the opera glasses. If, as one looks, one tries to walk on those minute far-away feet, one totters. But standing still, they are more distinct than much in the middle distance.

Within a few years my life was greatly changed. Nine months after that strangest of summers, my Mother died, unexpectedly; I think, of what we now call blood-pressure. My Father, so much older than she, and never very capable, let things go more and more to pieces; and I always suspected that a sequence of mishaps in his affairs emanated, in a roundabout way, from Mannington. At all events, when Chalkstones had to be sold, I remembered Mr. Sunshine's threat of hounding us out, and put it down to him. Unfairly, perhaps, but I was still only eleven, and convinced of his enmity. Since that last painful scene in Hounsbury, he had practically dropped out of my life. He was unpopular in the village, and when in Kent rarely left Mannington. On the few occasions when we came within sight of one another, I avoided him, and he did not attempt to speak to me. He was no less sinister on that account. It wasn't a mere question of right-of-way footpaths now; the day we left Chalkstones, I knew that Mr. Sunshine felt himself avenged on Madam Lambert, and Bella.

We went to live in the Bric-à-Brac shop in Hounsbury. Aunt Charlotte insisted, and my Father appeared to have enough left to pay our way. He occupied the attics, which appealed to him, and I Bella's little room next to "Cherry Pie's." I had not been often to Hounsbury since Bella vanished. Our troubled affairs had claimed and kept me in Kent. When the shop in the High Street became our home, I found that Frederick too had dropped out of the story. Once Aunt Charlotte mentioned that he had gone abroad, and hadn't come back again. "Heartbroken, naturally!" she sighed. She had not the least doubt that Bella might, had she pleased, have become the mistress of Baxwood. In those days, little dancers didn't marry so frequently into society as they do now, but Frederick was very young, and Bella was Bella. We talked of them now and then. When my Aunt started wondering whether Frederick was now shooting lions and tigers, I wondered with her, and offered polar bears as an alternative. But when she expressed a wonder as to what *had* happened to her young lady lodger, I did not add my conjecture to hers. It would have been wilder than any of her guesses.

Once I asked, "Did Mr. Lunette ever send in his bill?"

“I’ve never seen him from that day to this.”

My father only enjoyed the attics for two years, during which time I showed real signs of “having a voice.”

“Too soon for training,” said my Aunt.

My Father agreed. “When Lizzie’s sixteen we’ll start turning her into a Patti.”

Before I was sixteen, he died of pneumonia caught while salving one of Tibby’s fifteenth family from a tree on a March night in his nightshirt. Only then we found that he had been living on an annuity. He had put his all into one, after the sale of Chalkstones, completely ignoring my future. He had always been hazy about money matters. Perhaps he thought vaguely that the annuity would go on. Perhaps he thought nothing about it. Or perhaps he knew, what was indeed the truth, that as long as Cherry Pie lived I would have a home.

But her affairs were not what they had been. Old Madam failed, and took five years a-dying. During that time, Aunt Charlotte spent recklessly, on doctors, on treatments, on luxuries that were necessities, and on still more luxuries that weren’t. She neglected sales, and stock and custom, and it told, imperceptibly at first, on her business.

Slowly I began to notice that while the “junk” still lumbered the place, some of the less personal treasures from the Château of Marignan-Croissy disappeared, one by one. There was a burglary, in which the jewelled miniature and other things were stolen. The burglars had not entered the bedrooms, confining themselves to the shop, and to Madam’s closet, which they entered from the balcony. They had started rifling the Chinese cabinet, and had evidently taken alarm before they had done; some of the treasures in it were preserved, many were gone, and still more had suffered damage. Of course, my Aunt was not insured—“What use?” was her line. “No company would ever pay us the worth of these things.” All the same, a few hundreds would have been useful to her during the next year or so.

So, in one way or another, the old links disappeared. The chocolatière, which had not gone back with me to Kent after being repaired, was broken one day by Tibby, in an attempt to have her twentieth family in one of the cabinet drawers. My Aunt lifted her out, Tibby resisted, and sprang to the open compartment where the cup always stood. “It was my fault entirely,” Aunt Charlotte said. “Let her alone, and she wouldn’t injure a cobweb.” The chocolatière was reduced to shards and splinters; and Mr. Lunette was—where?

What with one thing and another, by the time I was ready to be turned into a Patti there was nothing to do it with. “Paris or nothing,” was Aunt Charlotte’s motto. “You’d better keep your own sweet natural voice than have

it ruined by second-best training, Lisette.” And Paris was out of the question.

About this time, I found my Aunt considering “pieces” she would not have dreamed of parting with in other days. She turned over the contents of the cabinet, and then considered the cabinet itself. “What would *that* fetch, I wonder?” It had been wantonly damaged, and she shook her head and sighed for its impaired value, and still more for its impaired beauty. Most of the old fans were broken and torn; they had been rummaged, and roughly handled, a few had evidently been chosen as loot, and bundled in a miscellaneous parcel which had been dropped in the garden during the retreat over the wall. Fortunately, the Watteau fan, always kept now in Old Madam’s bedroom, was not among them, for nothing in the parcel escaped injury; the Humming-Bird box among them. The spring was broken. The bird no longer responded to a touch, and its repair was always a matter for the future, a thing to be done “some day”. It was a job for an expert, and Charlotte could not afford it; this was not one of the luxurious necessities.

As for the “property,” the house and garden, it was heavily mortgaged. The payments of interest, I learned, were among the things that kept my Aunt so straitened. There was nothing that could guarantee my four years in Paris under Marchesi, when Old Madam’s heart failed.

That evening stands out. I had stepped into the street to close the iron gate that, since the burglary, guarded the Queen Anne door, when a gentleman came slowly down the street, looking at each window as he passed—a “very perfect” gentleman indeed. Catching sight of me, he quickened his step and raised his hat. I blushed with surprise—I was still a very shy maiden; then our eyes met, and without thinking, I exclaimed, “Frederick!”

Lord Baxwood smiled. “I wasn’t mistaken, then—it is Lisette. I shouldn’t have known you anywhere else than here. Do you know, for the moment I took you for—— You’ve grown.”

Naturally I had. Eight years had gone over our heads. *He* hadn’t grown, of course; but he had changed.

We shook hands, and he asked if “they” were all here still. My Aunt and Madam, I said. Bella’s name remained unspoken. Wouldn’t he come in and see my Aunt? He would be delighted. He hadn’t been to Hounsbury for years. Finding himself in our vicinity, he felt he could not go by without looking up old friends. As I led him through the shop to the parlour, he mentioned, “I’m thinking of opening Baxwood House, Lisette.”

“To live in?”

“Certainly.”

He smiled, with meaning. I began to feel embarrassed. After the instant of recognition had vanquished the eight dead years, they came to life again. We were not really Frederick and Lisette, we were strangers.

"I'll tell my Aunt you're here," I murmured, but the door flew open before I had touched the handle. Aunt Charlotte appeared, looking startled.

"Maman!" she gasped. "Run, child, run for the doctor."

When I returned with Doctor Everard, Lord Baxwood took his leave. Old Madam had already taken hers.

The day after the funeral, my Aunt called me into her room. She was at her dressing-table, on which were gathered the remnant of her treasures. She held out her hand to me as I came in, and smiled, forcing back the tears that had welled her eyes for a week. "It's you and me now, Lisette, and I don't matter. I'm going to do whatever I can for you. We'll go to Paris, I've made up my mind to it. It's another life entirely, but what of that? The life here has run out. After all, the half of me has always belonged to France. We'll go."

"But how?"

"Sell," said my Aunt.

"But what?"

She pointed to the objects on the dressing-table. "One of these." The Fan, the Humming-Bird, the Opal Ring, the Lancret Miniature. I laid my hand protectingly on the fan. "Oh, Cherry Pie, you simply *can't* sell Bella!"

"You feel that too, *chérie*?"

"And you can't sell your Great-Aunt the Countess."

"No," said my Aunt. "I can't. I don't think she'd let me. But a Lancret really might fetch something useful."

We looked in the disdainful eye of Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy. "*Pardon, Madame la Comtesse!*" said my Aunt ceremoniously. "What about this, then?" She picked up the Humming-Bird box.

"Oh, *not* 'the little bird that sings!'" I implored.

"If need be," she said slowly. "But to tell you the truth, I don't think it would fetch much. Fine gold and gems—but the jewels are very small, and the gold is thin. The value of this was in its craftsmanship. The works are done for, and see how chipped the enamel is. A crying shame! Look, only this one side unhurt—*that's* funny!"

"What's funny, Aunt?"

"I never examined it very closely before. Look at this little figure—do you see?"

I looked. A rout of tiny folk disported themselves round three of the enamelled sides of the box, cracked and imperfect. On the fourth side, quite undamaged, a little lady sat à la bergère under a tree. I stared.

"This box," continued my Aunt, "is very old—it is said to have belonged to Marguerite de Valois. And by the period of the costumes, it might have done so. But *this* little lady is of a later fashion—her dress is quite two hundred years later, Lisette. Madame Marguerite could never have set eyes on her."

“No,” I stammered—*that* wasn’t what excited me. “But don’t you see who the little lady *is*?”

“Bless me!” cried my Aunt, and looked from the bergère to the Lancret miniature. “Fetch me the magnifying glass, Lisette. My eyes aren’t what they were.” She examined the midget figure under the glass. “A perfect likeness!” she ejaculated. “It’s most mysterious! Well, it’s a mystery that will never be solved, we won’t bother our noddles about it. The real point is, the little bird that sings wouldn’t fetch a dozen singing-lessons for you. So it comes to this.” She touched the opal ring.

“Madam’s ring? Oh no!”

“It’s no good clinging to the past, petite, when the present makes its own demands. My Great-Aunt wore this ring, and Maman wore it. I never have, and now I never shall. If it had even once been on my finger—but there! it hasn’t, and need not become a part of my life. When they are throwing you bouquets in Paris and Milan, I shan’t regret that Maman’s ring brought them to you. No, chérie, I’ll rejoice.”

I hugged her hard. She put the ring away, and never told me how she disposed of it.

Two months later I found myself in Paris, with the small boxful of relics that meant most to us both. My Aunt crossed the Channel with me, managed all the preliminaries, stayed half-a-year, went back, and sold up the house. Debts swallowed most of the proceeds. Then she returned to the Boulevard Raspail, and saw me through the next four hard-working years. We had a tiny apartment off the Boulevard. My Aunt, always in character, turned herself into an excellent French housewife. She delighted in her markets and her kitchen, I in my music. We were very happy.

I made my *début* when I was twenty-two.

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This year, when Lord Baxwood’s heir, a charming youth, came of age, they made a great affair of it at Baxwood House on the Heath. London had crept up Cowslip Hill to the High Street, and onwards; but a respectable mile of grassy hill and dale still guards the frontiers of Baxwood from the town. The grounds were gorgeously illuminated. The finest music was provided. Frederick had written to me, “I shall never forgive you, Lisette, if you do not sing for my boy on June the Twenty-Third.”

June the Twenty-Third—Bella’s birthday eve. She ought, I felt, to go with me. She adored parties. When I was dressed, I sat a long time over the secret drawer where I keep the things that meant most to me in my childhood. The broken Humming-Bird, a paint-brush, a doll. I unwrapped from its tissues my columbine, old, faded, with her torn bodice that had never been mended. I shook my head, and put her away again. I couldn’t take *this* Bella to

Frederick's party; but I would take her there on the fan of Antoine Watteau. I would carry the Countess's lace handkerchief too. I told my maid to be sure to put the delicate thing in a part of my bag where my gold cigarette-case could not catch on it.

That night, when my share of the music was ended, and the young things had done exclaiming over me and gone back to their jazz, I went to the Orangery to find a picture I never failed to look at when I visited Baxwood. To-night the Orangery was a cocktail bar, a table of delicious-looking snacks stood under "The Picnic"—"How Finette would have enjoyed them, Antoine! She wouldn't have said you'd forgotten the food this time." But he hadn't very much to say to me to-night, little M. Watteau, *his Fêtes Champêtres* were not like monkey-houses. I fluttered his own fan at the brown-coated musician in the shade, and stepped out on to the terrace, where my Uncle Richard had taken pretty Charlotte Lambert by storm. The young things were here too, all over the place, their hair gleaming like satin and bronze under the lights, their new fashion in old-fashioned dresses frou-frouing everywhere. Daphne Allingham rushed up adoringly. "Oh madame! you were simply super!" she cried. "Won't you sing again to us, just once more?"

I glanced at the noisy crowd, whose frocks and fard would have shocked Flossie and Tottie—and scandalised Flaminia and Sylvia—and held up my hand.

"If you young parrots can keep perfectly quiet for a minute-and-a-half," I said, "I'll sing you one of the oldest songs I know."

Daphne screamed to those near her, "Be quiet, you morons! Madame Pietà is going to sing for us again!" Then she and they became as still as statues. Silence, like clamour, is catching. The terrace might have been a painted picture, even the brilliantly-lighted Orangery behind us grew still; from the distant reception rooms, only a murmur flowed. In front of me, the dark gardens fell to the flood-lit lake, where Bella and I once skated, and a swan, in white spreading skirts, now floated.

I sang, "Finette ma Mie."

As I finished, Frederick came out of the throng, drew my arm through his, and bore me off the terrace, down to the shadows and gold drops of light. Behind us, the clamour again, clapping hands, cheers, shouts. "Elizabeth Pietà! Elizabeth Pietà!"

"They want you to go back, Lizzie Pye," said Frederick.

I shook my head. "That is the last song to-night. Take me down to the lake where those swans are behaving like ballet-girls. There is an arbour on the far side in which my Uncle Richard proposed to my Aunt Charlotte."

"I never saw your Uncle Richard, I think."

"He died before I was born."

“Your Aunt was a darling.”

“Everybody thought so.”

“I have a present for you from her,” said Lord Baxwood.

“You have? From Aunt Charlotte?”

We sat down in the arbour.

“I can’t thank you enough, Lisette, for consenting to give my friends a joy to-night. To me it was more than that. It brought back a time which at my age one yearns for.”

“And at mine.” I felt in my bag for my cigarettes.

“Yours? Rubbish!”

“Fifty next year. I shall stop singing then.”

“It would be criminal.” Frederick was searching his pocket, for a lighter, I thought. “Others go on singing at sixty and seventy.”

I heard myself say, “Or at one hundred-and-seven years old.” I had not heard my own voice like that for years. I had fished out the fine old handkerchief, with its fall of lace, and with it, the Humming-Bird box. I must have left it out by accident on my dressing-table, and my maid by accident have put it in my bag in place of my gold cigarette-case.

By accident?

I let it lie in my lap, covering it with my left hand.

“Give me your handkerchief,” I heard Frederick say.

“What are you going to do?”

“Blindfold you, while I give you Cherry Pie’s present.”

I laughed, not too steadily. “Very well.”

He tied the kerchief over my eyes. The lace fell to my lips, and I smelt again that exquisite smell from the past, which I first smelt in Old Madam’s room forty years ago.

“Hold out your hand, Lisette.”

I put out my right hand obediently. As I did so—what happened? Had my left touched the broken spring of the Humming-Bird—and was the spring not broken, after all? . . .

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Nonsense, brother! Nonsense, my dear nephew! Leave Marignan-Croissy for fear of the *canaille*?

Go, by all means! You will save yourselves with my entire approval. You have your lives before you. But before and behind me, my life lies here, in France. If ever I see England, it won’t be as an old woman.

They’ll tear me to pieces, like they did poor Lamballe? Bah! my children! they’ll do nothing of the sort. I know how to save myself. They won’t touch a hair of my head—or one hair, at the most. I was born during the glory of the Bourbons, and now the line is falling I’ll see it through.

*Tais-toi, petit frère!* don't pester me, nephew! I am too old. Besides, nothing will happen to me that I don't choose to happen.

*Entrez!* Ah, ah! good evening, M. Charles! Upon my word you make a pretty lackey. Here is my cheek. I am not the first great lady to be kissed by her coachman. When do you think of starting? In an hour you will be too late for the tide? *Bon voyage!*

Why? Because I am not going with you.

Brother! *that is enough.* Nobody ever compelled me to do what I did not wish to do. Come back, gentlemen, to embrace me before you depart. . . .

Louise! quickly, Louise! I've barely an hour. My paints, my brushes, and the Humming-Bird box; also a fine needle, and the Watteau fan. Now go, girl. I shall try for a little nap. When you come to wake me, put everything you find on the table in the secret drawer of the cabinet. *Everything,* you understand me? Go.

Good! She's in it with them, of course, the fool! She would do anything my brother asked her. When they come to take leave of me, they will attempt an—*enlèvement!* They will not find me. They will never discover the end of Charlotte de Marignan-Croissy. But your affairs first, Finette.

Yes, your young prince has hidden himself nicely. But we must give him a little time to grow up. You were born one hundred years in advance of him. We'll give him a hundred years to find you in. Le Beau au Jardin Dormant! That, I believe, was what you asked of fate eighty-two years ago in Watteau's attic. Eh bien! prick, needle, prick.

Voilà, Finette! A girdle of needle-pricks holds you from your Beau, as the Belle au Bois Dormant was held from her prince by a barrier of thorns. He will not be able to overstep this circle, and you will never turn your head till he does. Time will wear these holes till the medallion falls out—and you? What will happen to *you*, child, I don't quite know. You'll re-enter the world it may be, just as you are, till somebody's clever fingers restore you to your place. By then your Prince will be old enough to play with you.

*A la bonheur, Finette!* the fan is closed. I will hide the box in the secret drawer of the cabinet. Lie there till somebody finds you.

*My affair next!*

First, a note, to project when these well-meaning fellows come back to abduct me. Else, they may be fools enough to remain, and lose their heads. "*Go at once, my children. If you stripped Marignan-Croissy you would not find me. Neither will the rabble. Save your skins.*"

And now, is my opal firm? Ah, Métayer! how it glows to-night!

Here is the paint-brush, and here a hair from my head. I'll copy myself from Lancret's miniature. I was then at my very best. He tried his utmost to flatter me, but he couldn't.

You remember it, Lancret?

When I consented to let you paint me for love, and you asked what colours I would be painted in, "These!" I said. I touched the spring of the box Le Grand Monarque gave me that night—*ha, ha, that night!*—and made you design my dress from the humming-bird's hues. A delicious gown. I'll restore it to its source of inspiration, here on the box. Where shall I place myself?

Under this tree. Here in the shade and the sun, I'll enjoy myself; and when the bird sings, who but I shall inspire the theme of the song? Has my hand lost its cunning? No, not a whit!

The first of the strokes—what a brush, Métayer! what a brush, Antoine! The last stroke of all is near. Then, fall bird, fall brush, fall ring, till somebody finds you.

And then——?

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The handkerchief fell.

My eyes saw only the opal ring on my outstretched hand. The arbour was dark, but the flood-lighting outside caught the stone worth a king's ransom, and it glowed as I had not seen it glow before.

I looked my question.

"Your Aunt asked me to buy it. She needed the money for your singing-lessons, and of course did not suggest one-half of its value."

*(Of course, dear heart.)*

"I did not want it. I tried to persuade her to let me finance your training, but she refused. 'We could not think of it,' she said proudly."

*(A touch of Old Madam.)*

"Then I told her I would hold the ring in trust for you. She said, 'Don't give it back to Lisette till she has earned it.' " Frederick kissed my hand. "May I say, Lisette, that you more than earned it to-night?"

He dropped my hand and leaned a little towards me, but I had opened my fan to hide my tears, and it was Bella's face that met his lips.

THE END

## Transcriber's Notes

A few changes to spelling and punctuation have been made silently to achieve consistency.

[The end of *Humming Bird* by Eleanor Farjeon]