Little Hearts

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LITTLE HEARTS

By

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"All might, all vastness, and all glory
Being Mine, I must descend and make
Out of My Heart a song, a story
Of little hearts that burn and break."

NOYES: *Creation*.

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Little Hearts

Chap. I
How Mr. Sampson Wrote His Philosophy

In a certain well-known year after the saving of the world, there was a young man, of a fair face, newly fled to France; and there was a young man, of a fair fame, made Treasurer of Ireland and Paymaster of His Majesty's Forces. There was yet a third young man, not conspicuously fair of face and unknown to any fame, fair or otherwise, who thought very little about the other two. And that was Michael Sampson.

Mr. Sampson sat writing at his open window, and the subject ready to his hand was Poverty, daughter of Wisdom and Wayfarer with Saints. "Many have chosen Death," wrote Mr. Sampson, "thinking to find therein cessation of their Pains at the Least, and at the Most, the Crown of their Desires. But only the few have chosen Poverty, shielded her as a Child, worshipped her as a Bride, and in Loneliness clung to her as to a faithful Wife. The last is the greatest Test. For the Child may be shielded for a Phantasy, the Bride worshipped before Men in the vainglory of the Flesh. But he who clings to her in Secret clings to that Comrade who alone followed God in the World, and in her Sisterhood becomes as the Brother of God. Yea, it is to be doubted if at any time he will know greater Happiness, since it is hard to conceive how Poverty may endure in Heaven. We, who have followed far in the pursuit of that divine Denial, that immortal Loss"—Mr. Sampson hesitated, and then, for he was honest, added, "by Virtue of Necessity" in the margin—"we who have adventured hand-in-hand with her who went once hand-in-hand with God. . ."

Mr. Sampson laid down his pen and shivered, for he wrote perforce in his shirt-sleeves. Then he rose and called to Malachi Bright, who was brushing his coat in the garden, and the volume of his voice, coming from so slight and pale a man, reached the height of a phenomenon of nature.

"Don't shake it."

Malachi lifted his benevolent shock of silver hair and showed his little red eyes.

"I'm only a-shaking the dust out of it."

"Then cease," thundered Mr. Sampson; "can't you see it's the dust holds it together, you fool?"

Malachi retired sourly with the coat, and Mr. Sampson, wrapping the tail of the window-curtain about his shoulders, applied himself once more to his writing. But the mirror of his reflection was clouded by the dust in an old coat, and his worship disturbed as the worship of any ritualist might be by a passing inability to buy candles. "We who have drunk that sacramental Wine," he continued, "who having nothing, content with nothing, do remain possessed of All. . ."

He paused again, looked with temporary discontent at his philosophy, and wrote again in the margin. "*Mem*. Make inquiry if the Tails, properly cut off, would supply a Tippet for Malachi." Then he slipped his book into his pocket and went out into the garden.

Moss surged through the cracks of the little paved court where the well was, as though the stones had been laid on velvet. Moss clung to the rotten roofs in great rolls of golden-green. Every wall was blotched with lichen, every window blinded with ivy. There was no living thing to be seen but one white pigeon that fluttered about the empty cote like a memory. From the greenish hollows of the stables came a monotonous hissing noise, which made one listen by instinct for the cheerful tramp of hoofs in golden straw. But no horse had been there for many a long day. It was only old Malachi, who gingerly curried his master's coat.

Mr. Sampson was fond of cucumbers; he was fond of violets. Therefore, under the warm wall where old espalier'd pears from France spread a thin grey leafage, there were two cold-frames, curiously covered in with leaded glass from the attic windows. The cover of the violet bed was raised. Mr. Sampson, meditating if violets flowering at that season could most properly be termed late or early, sat himself on the edge of the frame and pulled out his book.

The day was sunless, yet generous of silver light. It was a light that flooded all hollows, soaked all shadows, ran everywhere like water, and like water was sweet and chill. The dark thatched house lay drenched in it, looking as immaterial as a shell at the bottom of some luminous sea of air. It seemed that in any wind the house must have loosed its moorings slowly and drifted to a happier anchorage among the trees that rolled all around it, softly as clouds or their shadows. Somewhere at the top of the air-pool a bird sang; all about was stillness and the scent of violets, rich enough to make Mr. Sampson imagine himself warm.

"We who would follow and hold fast to Poverty," he meditated, continuing his philosophy, "are greatly hindered by God, who hath set such liberal Possessions in

His World that no man may wholly escape a Share of them. If it were not that Remembrance may weight the wing of a bird and Sorrow lie so heavy on a Violet's leaf'—he leaned for a moment over the bed—"how Hardly should we enter into the Kingdom of the Poor."

Malachi came slowly out of the stables with the coat, a mouldy brush of equine aspect under his arm. Mr. Sampson rose and introduced one arm into the garment with the air of a man who knew not what to expect of fresh departures in the lining. He stood so, listening. There was a far-off sound in the woods as if a gust of wind had suddenly been born; but all the trees were still. Malachi, to hurry him, said, "Ponies."

Mr. Sampson still stood listening at his leisure, not loath to remind Malachi in some such negative way who was master. The sound rolled nearer, could be told for the quick drumming of small hoofs. Malachi again said, "Ponies. They're galloping down the beech-ride. They'll pass close under the wall," and jerked at the coat.

"Then you're wrong," said Mr. Sampson, with some complacence; "there's a heavier beast there. And I heard the ring of a shod hoof on a stone."

"Tinker's. Turned out to grass," said Malachi, with contempt.

Mr. Sampson still stood listening. The whole world seemed to be at its leisure and he a part of it. The drumming of the little hoofs grew closer. Malachi fidgeted, any sound or smell of horses being to him as nettles on the flesh. Mr. Sampson wondered if it were worth his while to go and look over the wall at the stampede of a few ponies, and decided it wasn't.

The ponies swerved and shot thundering down the length of the wall. That quick dull beat of hoofs on grass is one of the wildest sounds in the world, and something not born of philosophy stung in Mr. Sampson's veins. He had not moved. He was still standing with one arm in the sleeve of his only coat, when——

Just outside the wall there was an oath, flung suddenly as a stone in a puddle—an oath, a snort, a scramble, a break in the verse of the galloping. Then the hoofs swept on, and in an instant the trees had taken them again, hidden them, muffled them to an echo, to a dream, to silence. And over the wall shot the body of a man, as though he had been fired from a siege-gun. He fell very neatly into the nearer cold-frame, and lay there motionless—a huddle of soiled claret cloth and a wisp of draggled lace, one long leg in a muddy riding-boot trailing across the edge. And the scent of crushed violets wrapped him like a garment as he lay.

Chap. II
And Added Greatly Thereto

Mr. Sampson might have written in his philosophy book of the effect of suddenness on the human understanding. Does a man get married suddenly? His friends are sure of a romance. Does he inherit money suddenly? They foretell ruin. And he who suddenly dies is given a breathless sort of interest, a tiptoeing hush in the crowd; as when a small boy on the outskirts of a circus, fated or heroic, crawls under the canvas and is seen of his fellows no more. One moment, the machine; the next, the god made actual. And being thrown over a wall is as good a way of attaining actuality as any other.

Mr. Sampson stood as one stunned, staring at the man in the violet bed. The first thing he said was, "Praise heaven the cover was up or he'd have broke it to bits." The next, "Where did he come *from*?"

Malachi did not answer. He was over at the garden door, peeping through a crack. He returned rapidly to his master, who said again, "Where did he *come* from?"

"Never you mind that," returned Malachi crisply, as if he knew; "you've got to decide what you're a-going to do."

"Pull him off the violets," suggested Mr. Sampson hopefully.

Malachi spat and jerked his head in the direction of the wall. His master became aware of a sound of pounding feet and hard breathing, not of horses but of men. Then came a thump.

"Do you listen to them at the door," said Malachi composedly, "and think what you're about."

"Who are 'them at the door'?" demanded Mr. Sampson, with irritation.

"Sojers."

"Sojers?"

"Ay, two on 'em. Winded like bullocks. You can hear 'em, puff, puff, and their bellows a-creaking."

"But why? Why here?. . ."

Malachi nodded at the motionless guest in the cold-frame. "Arter him, in course. We'll have to let 'em in when they gets their wind to shout. They're kicking now. You'll have to come to making your mind up."

Michael Sampson stared. "What about, pray?"

"Him. If so be they're to get him and hang him. Likely he's a tobyman, master."

"What do I care?" roared Mr. Sampson. No man so hot as your scholar jerked untimely from his dreams. "I do not know him. What does it matter to me if they hang the creature? And he's ruined the violets. He is—"

"Younger than you be," grunted Malachi.

In a warm rage with circumstances, and the suddenness of them in particular, Mr. Sampson stooped above the cold-frame, and the breath of dying violets rose in his face as pitifully as a prayer. Perhaps it all lay with the violets; there would have been no such appeal to him in crushed cucumbers. . . He had no more than a minute. Of all the builded moments of his life, perhaps no more than this one was laid in his hands to do with as he would. He saw no more than the aforesaid sprawl of stained claret cloth, dark hair loose and unpowdered, a straight olive nose, and a triangle of lighter forehead with a deep cut on it. One brown hand, ungloved, curled with a curious innocence among white violet buds. And in the time Malachi hobbled round the bed that contained hope of spring carrots, if the mice didn't eat the seed, the thing took Michael Sampson.

It can be told best in words used long ago:

And he looked on him, and loved him.

"H'open—in the name of's Most Gracious Maj'sty—the King."

The enemy—he had no time for astonishment that in the twinkling of an eye he should have come to regard the pipe-clayed pillars of law and order as the enemy—the enemy were become articulate. He looked up with a light in his eyes.

"Open the door."

"But——"

"Open that door, curse you," said Mr. Sampson savagely, "or I'll throw you over it."

He seized the inert leg trailing outside the frame, thrust it inside, lowered the cover, sat himself upon it, and pulled out his book.

"God grant," he heard himself muttering rapidly in a sort of delirium—"God grant he don't wake up and kick. O, God send he don't wake up and kick. . ."

With a grinding of ancient bolts, Malachi opened the door.

Mr. Sampson sat rigid as an angel on a tomb, reading in his philosophy book.

There dawns now in the sad-coloured courtyard of the old house a flame of scarlet, arrestive as the flare of trumpets or the roll of drums. True, it was a little stained with moss and mud, but it clothed in dignity the persons of two soldiers, a corporal and a private, rarely seen in those quiet parts—real soldiers who had even

been in the Low Countries and doubtless learned much there besides swearing. They were still somewhat winded and they entered the garden so suddenly they must have been leaning against the door. Malachi was effaced behind it, and the corporal at once addressed himself to the one shabby shirt-sleeved figure in full view.

"Hi, you there. . ."

Mr. Sampson, his heart beating somewhere in the roof of his mouth, looked up slowly from his book and raised his eyebrows.

The corporal stiffened automatically. "I ask your pardon, sir, but——" His hand was at the salute.

Mr. Sampson flicked a dry violet leaf from his book, and said, "Why, a good day to you. It is not often we see the military here. What may you want of me, my man?"

The corporal's hand fell with a sharp smack. "Why, sir, some information, if you'll be so good. There's a man passed along there nigh under your wall, we've reason to believe——"

"Ah? Yes, corporal?"

"—a-riding on hoss-back, sir. We thought you might have clapped eyes on him."

Mr. Sampson pulled out an ancient snuff-box, finely set with crystal, opened it, gazed remotely at the contents, and returned it to his pocket. The crystals impressed the corporal, who could not know that the box contained but the dry brown dust of poppy-heads—an excellent thing, Mr. Sampson found, for making the eyes water.

"Never an eye," said that gentleman, "have I clapped on any man a-riding past my wall. I heard, as I thought, a few forest ponies. But I do assure you that hereabouts we take small note of such."

"There was more than that, your Honour. The man I speak of, he was riding with them—curse his cunning tricks!—riding a lean brown mare with three white stockings and a white star, as your Honour can see for yourself by looking at the tracks outside."

He on the cold-frame smiled, wondering why his lips were so stiff. "I vow I'll take your word for it, corporal, since I fear I have scarce enough skill to read so much from the mark of a hoof. And who's the man, if I may inquire?"

"We've reason to believe——"

"You seem to have a good many reasons to believe," put in Mr. Sampson. "I wish I had as many."

"—that he's one who'll make little for His Majesty's peace or your Honour's if he's in this neighbourhood," finished the corporal gruffly, "and have received orders according. And which orders I endeavour to act up to, now and hence-forward."

"You speak above your station, corporal," commented Mr. Sampson quietly, and a fleeting expression showed for a moment on the face of the private. "But who is the man? And what has he done?"

The corporal here became involved in a fog of phrases, from which nothing emerged clearly but one Ensign Weatherly. The fog of Time has in its turn so involved Ensign Weatherly that of him, his deeds, his opinions, all the innumerous small interlacings of cause and effect that go to make up a life, nothing is left but this:—He sat on horseback before the Old Bull at Burnley one wet day, drinking strong ale out of a tankard, when there came a stranger riding by, splashed to the saddle, on a lank bay mare. To him the Ensign took instant antipathy and called out, bidding him come drink to the King, and adding words of a provocative nature concerning the stranger's past. "I'll drink," says the man on the bay mare, riding close up to the Ensign, who handed him the dregs of the tankard with a grin and a reference to His Highness of Cumberland. He on the mare took the tankard; he also took the Ensign under the near knee and heaved him out of the saddle into a puddle as deep as a duckpond which stood handy. ("A dirty trick," thought the corporal. But the private thought, "Not near so dirty as the Ensign when he crawled out of it.") Then, standing his mare over the Ensign in the deeps of the puddle, who was afraid to move for a hoof in his face, the stranger drank the health of his king delicately in the last of the beer. "It's a health I never refuse," he explained to Weatherly, "or I'd think twice before I set my lips where your dirty mouth's been, Butcher's Boy." Then the Ensign had his breath, and roared to his men in the tavern-yard, and the stranger rode for it, laughing into the rain. "But the odds of it is, we're to get him, or——"

"Or?. . ." Mr. Sampson spoke with a certain haste.

"Get him one way or another," finished the corporal.

Mr. Sampson rose, picked up his coat, which had fallen to the ground, shook it, and spread it carefully on the cold-frame as if to air. The corporal set him down as an eccentric young gent who was fond of gardening. "We saw him to-day," the corporal went on, "while me and Bill Rattray was a-drinking of a little ale at the Leaf and Acorn by Betsworth"—(Mr. Sampson said something about a singular unanimity of custom amongst His Majesty's forces)—"we saw him, on the edge of the trees, a-foot——"

"And give chase," put in the private hoarsely, "leaving of all the ale. . ."

"You be still, Bill, till you're ordered to speak, though you are my own first cousin."

"I will," muttered the private darkly, "till I gets out of my uniform."

"We saw him a-foot and give chase a-foot," continued the corporal, with dignity,

"but he had his horse somewhere about, and so he's diddled us. Come a good few miles from Betsworth, I lay we have, and all for nought. Damn all Jacobites and fly-by-nights."

"By all means," assented Mr. Sampson cordially, "though I trouble little about politics so long as I have my poets, my philosophers. Kings may be very well in their places, but I dare assure you there is better company. Shakespeare, for an instance. How charmingly hath he writ of—of violets. 'Violets dim, but sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes. . .' Ah, corporal, there's a sweet poet, finer as I venture to think than any of your Dryden, your Corneille. What is your Calprenède, your Scudéry, in the comparison of the delicate devices that took flesh in Arden? What is there in the pace of the 'Astræa Redux' to move the heart like the fire, the gallop——" Mr. Sampson lost his countenance, stopped, and said, "Malachi, go and fetch some ale. These gentlemen will doubtless refresh themselves before they go."

So the threatening flame of scarlet dies out again; stayed with speech, comforted with good ale—there was no more in the barrel—and swearing that the gentleman in the shirt-sleeves was a real gentleman for all his wild talk. And Mr. Sampson put on his coat and lifted the cover of the violet frame with a fine sense that he was letting into his world more than ever Madam Pandora did.

He propped the cover up with a stick, and said, "Do you think he is. . . dead?"

"Lord bless ye, no." Malachi was very busy. "No more than what you be, only cracked on the head. Saw your great-uncle, Sir Gregory, carried home so on a gate, and fine they screeched. Now then, Master Michael. . ."

Mr. Sampson—he had dropped his book and stood unconsciously with one foot on it—looked hard at his servant. "You presume, Malachi," was all he said. He himself took the head, Malachi, all astare, attached himself to the booted legs. Between them they got the unknown to the house, and a much bigger job it was than they had looked to find it. They put him to bed in the master's own room, there being no spare mattresses. The philosophy book lay all day in the garden with a snail walking on it. And Mr. Sampson, feeling of his own pulses and the heat of his head, went into the kitchen and brewed himself a drink of camomile flowers against the fever.

Chap. III
How Mr. Sampson Was Awake All Night

Mr. Sampson was wandering about his house in the small hours of the morning; he found himself unable to sleep, having indeed no bed to sleep in.

He carried a lanthorn in his hand, which he swung dolefully, and he moved with caution in his stockinged feet. Yet the old boards, muffled as they were with dust and rot, found voice to creak complainingly. His restlessness of soul drove him into rooms he had not entered for years—black hollows of imprisoned air. There was the big front room where his mother had died—nothing left in it but the gaunt four-poster, above which a few rags of rosed chintz fluttered at his entering. The windows were as blind with ivy as the windows of some harem of memories; only here and there the moonlight pierced it, and lay on the floor as white as rose leaves—petals of pity. At the end of the corridor was another large room, his cousin's, who had died also when very young, and while Michael was still a child. The small estate had come to him, but never so much as a silver shilling with it. Michael wondered how it would have been if that unknown cousin had lived. He entered this room softly, with a sense of breaking in on someone's privacy; for of all the rooms in the house, this one alone was furnished and intact as the young owner had left it. The commissariat, mysteriously managed by Malachi, had year by year demanded the sacrifice of a chair here, a sideboard there. . . Mr. Sampson never made inquiries. But nothing had gone from this room, and Mr. Sampson, though he rarely entered it, was somehow aware that Malachi dusted it every day.

He turned the dim light on the walls. They were stained with rain. A half-burned candle stood on a table; it was much nibbled by mice, but the power that guards little things, while breaking hearts and worlds, had kept it there for twenty years. A sheathed sword lay on the table; a chair, half-turned, stood by it. Michael Sampson looked long at the chair—so long that at last it seemed to be filled by some friendly shadow—supposedly the cousin—who happened to appear in a claret-coloured coat, with his dark hair unpowdered, and who looked round with a welcoming smile. . . Mr. Sampson lowered the lanthorn and said, "Refrain, if you can, from being entirely a fool." As he closed the door he said for the two-hundredth time in the past few hours, "I wonder why I did it. . ."

At the door of his own room he paused with purpose. But Malachi, sitting in the

doorway and mending stockings, showed not the least inclination to move.

"You had better go to bed, Malachi."

"No, I thank you, sir."

"You had better go," persisted Mr. Sampson, in a grinding whisper.

"Why?"

"Why?" Mr. Sampson reddened in a gust of irritation, caused by the necessity of quarrelling with his man in a whisper. "Why? You're a fool, fellow. How can we both go to bed when there is only one bed? And besides, I am awake."

"So be I," Malachi pointed out.

"Malachi. . ."

"Now, what be you about, sir?" Malachi eyed his master grimly. "I've business, come morning. You can take on then, if you're so set on it. You go and sleep, instead of wandering and roving and peeping. Above that, you disturve him."

"I do not," hissed Mr. Sampson.

"You does. You're like all your kind, you walk heavy from the knees—carrying so much weight o' bookishness about with you."

"Malachi, I insist."

"Insist away." Malachi moved his chair to intercept an undignified impulse on the part of his master to peep over his shoulder. "You're not to go disturving of him when he's sleeping so beautiful. Don't you worrit. Your uncle, they thought he was dead with a dent in his brain like a bad apple; he slep' the clock round and called for 'ysters. And this un'll be the same. That kind's terrible hard to kill. I'll lay," finished Malachi, with a vicious snap of his eyes, "that he don't walk heavy from the knees when he's about. . ."

Mr. Sampson turned away, smiling, with that sense of humour which became him as a shield. But when he came back he was grave. "Malachi," he said gently, "I have been thinking of many things this night, I do not know why—things of which we never speak. But now it is in my mind to ask you why you despise me so. Is it because of my past father, or of my present poverty?"

Malachi raised his old face, worn thin and red as a leaf. He was silent while the mean dip flickered and the stillness of the rotting house stood round them.

"Is it for my poverty?"

Something blazed in the old eyes. "By God, no. But because you're content with it. . ."

Mr. Sampson went downstairs without a word. He greatly desired his philosophy book, but failed to find it until he took the lanthorn and explored the garden. He found it then, somewhat the worse for a too close contact with the Real,

and took it unto himself jealously. A few chill stars and the late moon watched him, and the hollows beneath them were empty of everything but a little lost wind that seemed houseless as a lost bird. He returned indoors, and was minded, at three o'clock of the morning, to write on Peace.

"Peace," he wrote by the light of the smoky lanthorn set on the table, and splashing passionately in the ink, "is one of the few Fardels wherewith the follower of Poverty may ease his Travels on the Highroad that leadeth at last to Heaven. Youth, Love—these be too Burdensome for that Road, as if a man set to climb mountains should carry upon his back the Compass of a Star or the Weight of a Sea. But Peace, being of slight Compass, no larger indeed than a man's Heart, will go well in any Scrip or Wallet, and will not prove in the least Burdensome to any ordinary Capacity. It is best carried in the Pack called Contentment, so that this be well mended and in good Repair. For if there be a hole in the Corner of that heavenly Poke, Bag, Sack, Scrip, or Wallet, then will Peace escape because of its small Size and the thinness of its Humour, and the poor Traveller will have much Ado to find it again. . ."

He stopped, having a strong suspicion that he was writing nonsense. The lanthorn light flickered, casting waves of dull gold over a face usually colourless, and worn, in spite of its youth, as if the mould that formed it had been used too many times.

"As for Love," wrote the philosopher, and stopped, scenting violets. It was fitting; for he was one of those few men to whom the misused word called one image and one only—a girl with a torn stocking, sitting on a wall and eating little knobs of sugar wrapped up in violet petals. The fragrance, however, did not come from the vision, but from a riding-coat of claret cloth hung over the back of his chair. He turned and fingered it, shyly almost as a girl might have done. He was young. He was lonely. And the coat, hung comradely on his chair, seemed to speak of some intimacy he had never known.

He took the coat on his knee. It was of a fine fashion, but had seen hard wear. Through one cuff was a small round hole, scorched at the edges; on one shoulder a clean cut, neatly mended. He found some things in the pockets after a hesitating exploration. They were, to be precise, six chestnuts, a handful of corn in a screw of paper, some twine, a coil of wire, two links of a silver chain, a rusty key, a little worn manuscript book dealing with the whole art and practice of farriery, and an indeterminate squash that may have been blackberries.

He laid these things on the table and looked at them. They told him much and nothing, but he was content to wait. He was used to sit of evenings and feel himself

shrink and grow old as the empty silence of the moulding rooms closed round him with the dark. Now those hollow rooms, where the mice lived and the rain ran, were filled with a fine echo of adventure, and all because a stunned stranger was asleep in his bed upstairs. Here was something that would not fit in any philosophy. His pen, thrown down, had made a great blot after "Love." He did not take it up again. Malachi, stealing through the room a little before dawn, found his master asleep, his head on the book and the coat still across his knees.

Chap. IV
And Malachi Followed His Love in the Forest

The light, as Malachi shut the door in the wall behind him, hung between day and night. In the west was an old moon, delicate as youth; in the east that fragile forerunner of the dawn which has no duplicate in all the processional of the hours. The stale grasses were bowed with rime as if with the pressure of feet, the trees were shadows shrouded in stillness. From the tangle above the ditch two late blackberry blossoms, ragged and washed with frost, took all the light to themselves, fluttered in it as with silvered wings. It was an April light astray, a light that made everything young, and of a youth cold and mysterious, before growth and bloom. It touched Malachi's sere body, and as he moved into the shadows, he seemed to move like youth.

He paused under the wall, where the hoofprints were sharp in the moist soil, each one rimmed with a glimmer of rime. It was easy to pick out the mark of the shoes—one loose—the long-drawn scrape of the stumble where the moss was rucked up like fur, the deep-cut recover, the lengthened stride of fright. He took up the line and followed.

A feather of mist lay over every rut and puddle. The wet huge trunks of the beeches shone like mist. The silence of these bare trees was deeper than any silence of summer. Now and then, where it was darker, Malachi stooped and felt the hoof-marks with his shaking red fingers; once he almost laid his hand on a hare crouched in the bracken, her coat pearled with wet, her eyes a golden fire of fear. He let her be. Once a white feather floated past his face; he looked up and saw an owl drifting like a cloud among the twigs. He smiled at it. These two silent things of savagery and fear were all his company. And presently he began to sing. The hare shrank away, the owl clung to a tree, shook itself huge, and vanished; nothing else heard the thin old voice, rambling on three notes like a lame donkey:

"Some has breeches and some has beer,
And a pipe for to fill their jaw, O.
But look about and you'll find us yere,
A-sleeping in the straw, O. . .

"And here you was a-going slower, my pretty, and getting tired of your own way, like they all does. And a-wondering where he might be as rode you. . .

"Some has apples and some has cakes,
And ale for to sup if able,
But we'll lie hid till the mavish wakes,
A-sleeping in the stable. . .

"And here the stirrup caught in a bush, my lady, and give you a fresh start, though I'll lay you be not gone far with that loose shoe. The man as set it had better 'a' been a wood-louse and curl hisself up come winter. . .

"A-sleeping in the sta-ble——"

He came out in a sudden clear space like a common, rough and grown with furze. He did not cross it. He went painfully round the edge till he picked up the tracks again. The last star had blown out like a faint candle-flame when he found them.

"Some has fardens——"

("Drat the briers, there's a bit gone out o' my sleeved weskit.")

"Some has fardens and some has pence
And a shillin' to pay the law, O.
And some they hasn't a grain o' sense,
A-kissin' in the straw, O. . .

"And there 'tis. You won't 'a' gone far, my pretty."

Malachi stooped with a groan and picked up a horseshoe. He brushed it free from moss and mire on the sleeve of the aforesaid waistcoat—brushed it until it shone like silver.

"You won't 'a' gone far, my pretty. Them ponies, they're low company for the likes of you. Always up to their tricks they are, and fallen off to graze. . . Yet I wonder you didn't bide with 'em, just for company. . .

"Some they takes their 'ysters cooked,
And some they takes 'em raw, O,
And I can't work for the way you looked,
A-smilin' in the straw, O. . . ."

The quavering song went on. A robin flashed from a holm oak with one startled whistle, and flew to the top of a taller tree—flew from darkness into light, for quietly the day had come. The tide of dawn, having trembled against the barrier, broke it, and flooded the world. The robin began his song; the brown leaves around him

glowed as red as he, and shook as if towards flight. But only one voice came down from that still place. He ceased. And from far off in the forest answered the wistful whinny of a horse.

Malachi shook as he stood. He turned sharp to the left, following a dim track. It led him at last to a smaller clearing, where was a little upturned cart, a shelter thatched with bracken, and another old man, twisted and hairy as an ancient faun, who was somewhat mysteriously engaged in sorting a pile of yellowed winter cabbage. Him Malachi approached familiarly, heralded by a reedy music.

"Some they're churched and some they're hung,
And some says grace at table,
And some they're nothing but fools and young,
A-kissing in the stable. . .

"And good day to you, Henry Hobb. Is your rheums better?"

Henry Hobb balanced a particularly solid and ill-favoured cabbage on the top of his little pile. Then he said, "Is you come early into the forest to ask me that, Malachi Bright, or is it a young rabbit you're after for Master Sampson's dinner? I've no rabbits for'n. Didn't pay me fair for the last."

Malachi winced at the word "Sampson." He always did, and Henry Hobb had been watching for it. He took up another cabbage, repeating over and over again viciously, "And he didn't pay me fair for it, didn't pay me fair for it. . ."

"I want none of thy mangy rabbits. I can feed the young master more fit. He lives well, if he does like the savour of good ale better than French wines."

"I'll lay he does," said Henry, with an evil wink.

Malachi, with a blink of his little eyes, changed the subject.

"You've been gave a fine new horse, I hear."

"Hey?"

"I hear tell you've a fine new horse."

"Me? Where'd I get a horse?"

"Gave you, I heard tell. Black, only blind in one eye, and good for two years' work——"

Henry swung round. "Good for two years? Two years? Rising four, I tell you, and a mouth like a silk purse. She'll be worth——" He bit off his words suddenly and stared at Malachi like a fish. Malachi came a step nearer. The shaking took him again, and for a moment he loathed his own flesh, his years, his body that like a treacherous mount betrayed the mastering soul. He steadied his voice with an effort, but it came thin and shrill.

"I be come for that horse, Henry Hobb."

"You be mad, Malachi Bright. Nought here but my old pony. There he be and there he bides."

"I be come for that horse, Henry. 'Tis for the young master. . ."

A wicked mirth took and possessed the ancient faun. "He, he, he! Master Sampson a-riding on a horse. Master Sampson a-going to London to see the King. Set'n' astride a yardstick——"

Malachi fetched out the horseshoe and threw it at him. It went wide. Instantly the faun began to throw cabbages.

Malachi stood for a few seconds in a storm of cabbage. They bounded off him. They trundled over the grass like cannon-balls at a siege. He sheltered himself with his arms, watched his opportunity, ran in, and took Henry in the wind with his silken white head. They fell together.

There was murder in Malachi's heart at the moment, as Henry's earth-smelling hands battered at his face. He felt the blind rage that wraps the world in a heat, and was glad in it. Henry's face, a cabbage leaf stuck on the forehead, wavered before him in a mist. He strove to reach it, to crush it into the grass, to stamp it out of its likeness. His soul was winged with swift destruction. But one would have seen no more than two old men, rolling and clawing feebly in a litter of bracken.

Weariness took them together. They rolled apart and lay trembling and futile, with open mouths. Malachi found his breath first.

"You fool!" he gasped. "You old fool! . . . 'Tis a hanging matter."

He jerked his thumb northwards with an intent meaning. Henry stared, the earthy tuft on his chin quivering.

"Don't you meddle, don't you meddle, Henry Hobb, with this. 'Tis like to be too high for you, like a beam to hang you on. Leave it to your betters, like me and the young master. . . Where be that mare?"

The ancient faun began to weep. He rocked himself to and fro, and the tears washed his face; they could not wash it clean. He wiped his eyes with the back of one hairy hand, and pointed feebly with the other.

Malachi went round the shed, and stopped. His fingers worked. His lips moved.

"My pretty!"

The mare was tethered at the back of the shed. She stood with one leg drawn up, and the damp gleamed on her lean sides. A heap of stale greens and grass lay beside her. She raised a contemptuous nose from it and stared at Malachi with great eyes soft as jewels in her bony young head. He stepped towards her and she jerked back to the end of her halter, ears pricked. This was not he for whom she had

looked and listened the night through.

"My pretty."

His voice shook, but not with age. He held his hand to her. She came forward two steps, limping, and her eyes asked of him. Her velvet nostrils sank toward his hand, sniffing; at last, with a faint whinny, rested there. But her eyes still questioned, and he answered her.

"We'll go, my pretty, we'll go to 'm."

He found the saddle and holsters in the shed, and burdened his own back with them—not hers. He untied her gently and led her round; even on that soft ground she went crippling. Henry was still lying and staring dolefully among the littered cabbage. Malachi paused, and the mare's head came over his shoulder as he spoke.

"You're a low beast, Henry Hobb, a low beast, more kin to a vole than a man. All night long, and never a hand have you laid to that off-fore, and the nails drove in. . . And if ever you open your mouth about the mare or me or the young master"—he jerked the holsters forward and showed the butt of a pistol—"I'll shoot you sitting, Henry Hobb, and I'll stretch your hide on an oak, like a kestrel, and the owls'll take your messy beard for to build their little nesteses."

The faun's chin-tuft waggled horribly.

Malachi's rage was spent; he took no more interest in Henry Hobb. How should he, with that desired life limping behind him? His hands hovered on her thin flanks; he drank in the kindly smell of horse, and it went to his starved heart like wine. The sun had filled the glade before him, drawn the mists, set them adrift like webs of gold. He moved in brightness, singing, and felt the weight of the saddle no more than if he had been young. Once there was a thin screaming behind them, and something hurtled at their heels. It was the last cabbage. . . Malachi looked back, saw Henry Hobb, a strange and twisted figure, dancing among his scattered crops. He placidly picked up the cabbage and added it to his load. It was certain to come in useful.

"Some they likes—their vittles—cooked,
And some they likes them raw, O.
And I can't work—for the way—you looked,
A-smiling in the straw, O. . .

"Come, my pretty. . ."

He led her back to the lonely stables, as he had somehow known he would do. Her welcome was ready prepared for her—cool water; hay cut, the god of dreams knew why, from the little paddock, sweet with the late year's melilot; a bed of deep bracken, soft to a hurt hoof. He coaxed her, handled her, waited on her. Mr.

Sampson, rushing in an hour later with the news that the stranger was waking and murmuring thickly of breakfast, found them so: Malachi sitting on the edge of the crumbling manger, one arm about her neck, she eating fitfully from his other hand. The old man raised a face his master did not know, and pointed vaguely through the door.

There was a coming and going about the leaning dovecot, a heavenly business of wings; the solitary white pigeon, magnificently misled by the soft weather, had found him a grey mate in the forest and brought her home.

Chap. V
Breakfasts

Mr. Sampson was breakfasting in seclusion in the small arbour. His table was an empty box upturned, and he consoled himself with his book. He had some need of consolation, in that his breakfast consisted of the heel of a loaf, a bowl of thin chocolate, and a sallet of small herbs in a silver dish. There was also an inkpot before him. Sometimes he dipped his quill into the inkpot, sometimes into the chocolate, and decided that Malachi had been lamentably careless with the soot. There was an unusual flush upon his face; his hair—the sun showed it to be very bright and comely—was powdered with the seeds of grass. He had indeed been sleeping in the loft the last nights, and Malachi had not yet appeared to tie his master's queue.

Mr. Sampson liked the loft very well, though somewhat shaken by spiders in the small hours. Malachi had, as in duty bound, offered his pallet. Which offer, after inspection, Mr. Sampson had delicately refused. Malachi thought it just as well, and said so; someone was needed in the stable to scare away the rats, or the mare would have but broken nights of it.

"It may be considered," wrote Mr. Sampson earnestly, "that the truly Poor are by their Poverty denied the highest spiritual Happiness, which is thought by the Holy of Heart to consist in Sacrifice. How, it may be inquired, shall they who do possess Nothing deny themselves Anything, either for the Profit of their Fellows or of their own Souls? But he who would earnestly seek an Answer shall find one to his Mind. For the very Poor do possess that strange crown, the Denial of Denial, the Sacrifice of Sacrifice. There may well be a richer Gift than even the Widow's Mite in that superfluous Treasury, coming from a quite empty Hand, but not unregarded of God. Yea, it is to be also Questioned if God Himself, when that He was a Jew, did not many Times, with bitter Longings, desire to give Himself an Offering for His Beloved, when it would have most readily served them and Himself. But that also was denied Him until the Hour beyond Remedy. And then He went empty save of a Heart broke by His World. Nor could He of His Poverty offer anything even to that dear Robber of His but a Promise; in that Sweat and Agony, He might not give His Companions so much as a cup of cold Water, nor so Little as He had refused of the Roman pity. He might only offer them a Word; but for one that Word was the Enfranchisement of

Paradise."

Mr. Sampson laid a sprig of sorrel upon his bread and lifted it to his mouth: but paused, discerning a little slug. He removed both leaf and slug, yet with mercy. "For that little slug," he considered, "is seeking his meat from God no less than if he had been a lion." The implied conceit was pleasant and he lingered on it, to the immediate detriment of his content. It lay in the word "meat." He was well used to riding his appetite upon a curb. But for the last few days he had been conscious of a yearning that defied philosophy and made a mock of the consolations of religion. When he would lock his door and read shyly in his Bible, the great book had of late opened as by habit at the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew:

"And they did all eat, and were filled."

But Michael Sampson was very hungry.

His guest ate everything.

He had lain these four days, unknown still and nameless, in the bed in Mr. Sampson's room; waking only to eat, like a ravenous baby, from Malachi's hand. He was no more than the husk, the animal envelope, of a man; and Mr. Sampson, stealing in a dozen times a day to gaze at the dark head helpless on his best linen pillow-case, wondered when and in what fashion the soul would return. He asked of Malachi, but the old man shook his head; he couldn't tell. Maybe hours, maybe days. But at the end of it, when he'd slep' his fill, he'd shake hisself like a dog and be well again. . . He knew that kind.

So he lay in his dead drowse—caused, as they guessed, less by the fall than by some heavy strain preceding it—and with a wisdom out of their time they let him lie. They dared not call a physician, so he was neither bled nor posseted. They did no more than set a balsam of peachwort upon his head, where at least it did no harm. Sometimes his eyes—they were of a clear light grey, curious in so dark a face—rested on them, but without knowledge or inquiry; all his movements, all his rare words, came wavering from the very pit of sleep: were like birds blown into momentary light ashore from the darkness of the sea. Once he remarked on a smell of rosemary; once that the broth was too thin; once he flung out a hand and said clearly: "Belle." . . Mr. Sampson, touched to a tingling of the eyes, rushed out to the stable and called the mare by that name, being much dashed when she did not answer to it. Otherwise he slept, and Malachi fed him. Which explains why Michael Sampson, in the interests of hospitality, went hungry.

"There is this also to be observed about the common Sacrifices of our souls," continued Mr. Sampson, removing his pen from the chocolate, "that, owing to the

Shame of our Nature, we do earnestly Desire to make and keep them in Privacy. This is a Weakness, that yet to the Gentle must ever appear Respectable. Even that Sacrifice of a Cross on a Hill was, as I think, scarcely gazed at by the veiled Eyes of Heaven, but rather by the curious Vulgar of the City. And we, whose daily Denials be too little for any Dignity, would at least never have them Publick. A great crop of little Crosses, both of Thorn and Rosemary, may be nourished up in our spiritual Gardens; but only One besides ourselves hath the Key to these walled Plots. There is a decency to be Encouraged in Things spiritual no less than in Things fleshly; and the Skeleton in many a man's Closet may be no more and no less than a gaunt Cross of the very Pattern of Calvary."

"And how," asked Mr. Sampson suddenly of nobody in particular, "how, in God's name, am I to keep it from him when he's about? Plague on it. Malachi had better bleed him and keep him abed."

The misguided white pigeon minced in at the door on rose-red feet, seeking crumbs. "Here, at least," thought Mr. Sampson, "I am not too poor for denial," and he gave liberally from the soft of the loaf. Malachi, coming in with the tray, caught him in the act, yet tempered judgment with a new indulgence.

"A loose hand," said Malachi quite kindly, "makes a light purse. And he's finished everything but the stale rabbit pasty."

He set the tray, which bore yellowed damask and chipped porcelain, on the box between them. "And, Master Michael——"

"Well?"

"He's a-coming to his right mind."

"Hey?"

"I say, he's a-coming to his right mind. His sleep's over. . . I set the tray at the bedside, and went to shut the casement. When I turned he was a-leaning on his elbow, and a-fingering of the chaney. His eyes was fixed on me very sharp, and was clear and bright as—as bright water."

"Go on, man."

"'Where may I be now?' he asks, and I tells him. 'Do you mind me at all, sir?' I says. And he says yes, he minds me well enough, running about like the devil in a gale of wind, but was too tired like to heed at the time. . . A real one, he is. . . 'And well you may be, sir,' I says, and wished I'd thought to put a white ribbon in my buttonhole just to hearten him a bit, though it's little enough I care who's king in England as long as I don't have to go on the roads when I be old. And with that he gave me a glance like a gimblet, but I met it straight and he looked away again. 'Yes,' he says, 'many's the thing I've seen in a dream. . . And who's he,' he says,

'with the face of a gentleman and the hands——'"

"Well?"

"That was all he said, Master Michael. And I gave him your name. And then he wants to know how he come in the gentleman's house. And——"

"Yes, Malachi?"

"I told him that."

"And he said?"

"Nought to the point. He was still a bit, and then said we had healed him of his hurts and he would rise later, but if you'd add to his debt and go speak with him first, he'd be glad. Them was his words, Master Michael."

Mr. Sampson leaned his head on his hands and looked down the valley of his humiliation—a far view—while the white pigeon fluttered at his feet.

"And after all," said Malachi suddenly, as if his master had spoken, "we don't know him for so much as an honest man."

Mr. Sampson looked up, with a thought of the Ensign. "We know him," he said, "for a very gay and gallant gentleman," and laughed aloud, a laugh that was very young. But in a moment his head went down in his hands again and the laughter caught in his throat.

"Malachi." His voice came muffled as from a distance.

"What be you about now, Master Michael?"

"Malachi, he mustn't get up—not yet."

"And how to prevent it, sir?"

"Take his clothes away," said Mr. Sampson, with an energy that shocked himself when he had time to think of it.

"Ye-e-es." Malachi was doubtful. "That might do it——"

"Why, devil take the idiot," roared Mr. Sampson indignantly, "he can't get up without his clothes, can he? And he'll not find any of mine, will he?—and me wearing all I have but my one spare shirt, which is on his back at this very moment."

"Yes, 'tis all very fine, Master Michael, but it don't go far enough. You don't know that kind. If he wanted to get up and you had took his clothes, sir——"

"Well?"

"He'd come without 'em, master."

"Preposterous, Malachi. Don't tell me."

Malachi smiled grimly and let it pass. "And, for a fact, he can't get his clothes without me, for I have 'em all in the coach-house for to brush and mend."

"Then keep them there."

"Yes. That's very well, master, but it won't hold, not for long. He's bound to

come down, bound to see——"

"Be silent," said Mr. Sampson with a sudden thunder, "and govern your tongue, fellow. Do you fancy," he went on after a moment, rather piteously, "that I have no thought of what he'll see? Why, look you, Malachi, he steps out of my door, and the rot of the old carpet trips him. He goes down the stairs, and there is no balustrade; we burned it in the hard winter. He opens the door of the withdrawing-room and it's empty but for one rag of tapestry on the walls—Paris carrying Helen to the ships, and the moths have eaten her gold hair, and his hungry arms are fouled with damps. . . He opens the door of the library, and he sees the grey marks of shelves and the sleek bust of some immortal most villainously carven in Carrara——" ("And with the nose broke off where you threw your bootjack at it in a spasm of philosophy," put in Malachi.) "He says, 'What kennel am I come to?' and tries another door. 'Tis the little parlour looking on the herb garden, and 'tis modishly furnished with a broken chair and a stringless harp. . . 'I feel chilled after my weakness,' says he to you, 'and would be glad of a fire of evenings.' 'I'm sorry,' you answer, 'but there's no fuel used in this house save on Mondays, when I do my bit of cooking with a French recipe-book.' 'And what's for dinner?' 'Cabbage soup and hard bread, and little enough of it. . .' And—for oh, he's a gentleman, Malachi, I don't doubt he's a gentleman!—'Have I been living on these poor wretches a week of seven full days?' says he to himself. 'I must contrive to repay them with more than thanks,' and he'll finger his gold, Malachi, and wonder how he's to do it—under this roof. And he'll try it, oh, so delicately, as a gift to you. . . And if you take it, Malachi," finished Mr. Sampson, with a blind movement of his hands, "I shall probably murder you and bury you under the muck-heap." He essayed a laugh, but it broke, and he hid his face again.

"Meanwhile, Master Michael," suggested Malachi, with a curious mildness, "here's the stale pasty."

Mr. Sampson looked up drearily. "What of it?"

"You may so well have it. 'Twill be bad come morning."

Mr. Sampson looked, and felt sick with emptiness. He looked also at his servant, and said: "Indeed, I do not care for it. I have breakfasted so recently. . . You take it."

"Don't you be a liar, sir," returned Malachi almost with tenderness; "you take and eat it, or—or I'll toss it on the garden for the hedge birds."

Mr. Sampson pulled out his knife. "I will take half, Malachi, and you will take half. And we will eat together."

He strove to eat his half lingeringly, with a delicate appreciation of a flavour full

indeed, but not yet too superlative. But nature was too strong for him, and they made a sort of race of it, Malachi being handicapped by no manners, but a lack of teeth. Only on the last mouthful Mr. Sampson contrived to pause, and give philosophy, as it were, an innings.

"It is interesting and not irreverent to suppose," said Mr. Sampson, "how a perfect faith might reasonably assist us at this present pass. By this I am not to be considered as meaning the invocation of Deity to the furnishing of our houses or the setting of our boards. But human hospitality hath ever been esteemed so sacred a thing that angels have not disdained to partake in it. And if an Hebrew encampment in the desert might be led of God, might feed on the food of angels and pluck quail as plenty as—as blackbeetles in our bake-oven, might not we, Malachi (if our faith were but perfect), ask and receive far less of Him? When made holy by human need, is a cask of small beer or a fresh rabbit pasty less worthy of heaven—?"

He stopped, for Malachi had suddenly clapped the remaining crumbs into his mouth as if it had been a box, and risen to his feet. A shadow fell on him. He turned with a little sick jump of the heart.

His guest stood just behind him.

He leaned rather weakly in the doorway, his back being to the light, and Mr. Sampson not fitted at the moment to see clearly; he was apparently stockingless, and wearing the coverlet as a cloak. But the light that failed to reveal him shone with an aching clarity on the upturned box, the heel of the loaf on Mr. Sampson's plate, the remnant of the pasty in his hand, and the crumbs on Malachi's chin. It was that damning bit of pie-crust in his hand that seemed to focus the sun like a burning-glass until he was scorched to the heart. It shrivelled to rags all his shifts and subterfuges, and left him bared in his sordid and shuddering poverty. He tried to stand and speak, but could not for the hot shaking of his heart.

"I became impatient for my clothes—heard voices—followed."

The words had been spoken, so the stranger must have spoken them. Mr. Sampson tried to put some sort of face upon it, but that fatal crust ridged with healthy teeth-marks was too much for him. His tongue spoke independently of anything but his misery.

"Then you are like to have both heard—and seen—enough——"

"Yes."

"We—we are not—misers, sir."

"Could I suppose it?"

Mr. Sampson waited—for the apologetic withdrawal, the shamefaced sympathy that should leave him writhing.

He had neither.

"I do not know what I have ever done to have gained so much honour."

The voice shook a little. Michael Sampson looked up with a gasp into the eyes "bright like bright water"—the eyes of his first friend.

He did not see very clearly for a moment. Then their hands, which had met nearly as swiftly as their eyes, fell apart. The stranger took a long breath, a keen glance around, drew away till he had the wall at his back, and said: "Sir, why did you do it?"

Mr. Sampson did not ask him to what he referred, but answered confusedly something about violets.

"You had never seen me—had not so much as my name——"

Mr. Sampson held up his hand. "I do not seek it, sir. If there were—any inquiry ——It would be even better not to give it to me."

"Anthony Oakshott," said the other quickly: if there had been any hesitation, it was imperceptible. Mr. Sampson got upon his legs—they were steadier by now—and bowed gravely. He in the coverlet also bowed. They looked at each other.

"Sir. . ."

"Sir. . ."

"I have held no keen political views," Mr. Sampson was cautious and a little ashamed of his confession, a little on the defensive. "If, while heroic deeds were being done, I have lived more in the republic of Plato than the troubled kingdom of our England, blame my circumstance for it rather than myself. You have seen. . . Sir, I will say no more. But at the least I am not robbed of my taste for brave deeds and splendid losses." He kindled, and felt unconsciously for his quill. "Mr. Oakshott, I thank you for your trust, which you shall not regret. You will doubtless be advised to take ship for France. . . Till then, this sad house is yours for just so long——"

"Yes?"

"—as it is safe for you," finished Mr. Sampson gravely.

They looked at each other, Michael Sampson on the edge of a flushed smile, the other with an intent, bright stare which held a long time. At last he moved forward and leaned above the box whereon lay the remains of the loaf and the sallet of small herbs.

He looked up, smiling into the older man's face.

"This air makes one hungry, and that fleecy old devil of yours hath taken my tray. . . Cut me a slice of that bread, and give me leave to sit here and eat it with you."

They sat and ate gravely, and to one at least that stale loaf was the food of

sacrament. Afterwards he had time to wonder if gratitude had ever been so delicately shown.

Chap. VI
Mr. Sampson Begins His Education

After any sacrament there should surely follow a time of well-being, a quiet time, when the soul walks beside still waters in green pastures of comfort; and when the body, poor brute, too little counted on in such heavenly seasons, may at least share in these profits like a dog at the shepherd's heel. And that some such spiritual spring followed for Mr. Sampson, against all reason, on Anthony Oakshott's coming, the entries in the philosophy book seem to show. Friendship means more to young men than to any other age or state of humanity, and it must needs mean more to Michael Sampson than to the rest of his kind.

"It may be questioned," he wrote about this time, "by such as do carry Inquiry to the very Sill of Impiety, if the high path of earthly Poverty does not lead, by any Alley or Byway, to the Stews of spiritual Poverty. For at the Extremest, that path is so narrow there is scarce room to tread it in Company, and that is an evil in the teeth of the Law. For man is not a Solitary but a Kindly Soul. Kind—kin—he needs, and so hath been provisioned for in the comfortable Reason of God. Let none despair if he seem locked for ever in Loneliness. For as God reminds us that nothing may sever us from His Regard, so neither War, nor Separateness, nor Death may sever us from those lesser Loves which partake of His Nature and flourish up in His care like Posies in the Shadow of a Rock. Is the heart that answered mine Dust? I live. Do the eyes of a friend forget me? Mine remember. Is he gone from my hand? My hand is yet filled of him, and I may answer 'All's well' to the Watchman of Souls. For Love of any righteous sort is Singular in that it may be broken, yet keep the Whole to every Part. It is the best Thing God gives, and perhaps the one Thing even He may not take away."

There is something here in the margin about "a Cravat newly starched, for which I owe a Penny to Alison Sweetly." So the thoughts of this gentle season were not all spiritual. He goes on:

"Where it is held the inheritance of the Fool to eat and drink and be merry in the Day that alone is possessed of him without thought of the requiring Night: there is also bidden us that we take no thought for any Morrow. So it is desirable for the follower of Poverty to house under his small roof of the Present, for ever falling to decay and for ever rebuilded, and to burden himself with no care of the Future. The

darkness of the Morrow is as the darkness of Death; let him then front it with a merry face if it lies in his Nature. And let him beware. For while the Stomach go empty, the Soul may be full fed, may sit at ease in the house of the Sun, be drunk with Laughter, and suffer Pride like a Surfeit. And while he is least embarrassed with worldly goods, and so most secure of his holy Mistress, his hand may fall on so light a thing as the bridle of an horse, and straightway lose hers."

From notes in the margin it may be gathered that Mr. Sampson had been galloping the mare in the paddock and had fallen off at the gate. Follows this queer outburst:—

"O Strength and Beauty of the Flesh, which ere we may properly appraise, we stand to lose utterly: in which we go clad for a little, and as soon as we set any Value on that fine Cleading, we behold it wither. Consider, O Beauty, to what an Almshouse ye shall presently come, where ye shall wear a Clod, go shod with Ashes, and learn long upon the tongue the taste of Earth. Consider, O Strength, that in a little while the Spider shall weave a Web across you, and you shall not be able to break it, that the Leaf shall fall on your lips, and there shall be no Breath to heave it away. So consider, O Beauty and Strength, and tread this Path of Poverty with a still heart. Never lift your eyes from that Way. For to the Inn of Denial even Beauty must come, and Strength lie down by that Road's side."

There are a great many notes here in the margin, hurried and smeared with ink. "*Mem*. Must not inadvertently betray to Malachi that I took of the best Flour to try and Powder me with, and made a great Mess of it." "*Query*. Why is she called Periwinkle, and why are the Human Bones of such perishable Stuff?" Then very large and plain: "Curse all the Stuarts." Just here, too, the philosophy book forsakes its high calling and abruptly becomes a mere journal, a fireside gossip.

"Have been in great Distress and unease about Tony. As his strength returns, he insists on going about the Forest in what he calls a Disguise—namely, with his Coat off, his Hair loose, a Bandage over one eye, and a Slouch in his Deportment. This he does greatly Relish, but it affords much concern to me and to Malachi, and we are in Misery till he choose to return. For however he may Smut himself at the Bake-oven, there is that in him which no living Soul, even if blind by Dispensation, could Stomach in a Charcoal-Burner. This morning he so Departed, as Malachi duly informed me, having found a shilling loose in the lining of his Waistcoat, and being determined, as he said, to do a little honest Trading, and show us how this establishment might be started upon a foundation of pure Profit. He did not appear with full daylight. I broke my fast alone, and was hard put to it to obtain of Malachi the commonest Service. It was not till near noon that we saw Tony running across

the paddock. We ran to meet him, and I can answer for it that my heart was knocking against my Teeth in the expectation of more Soldiers. He, however, with his Shirt curiously bulged, and all over Feathers, said no more than, 'Quick, they're scratching me Cruel,' and delivered into our hands two immature speckled Fowl. 'They are to be the making of us,' said he, when we had him safely clapped within doors. And when we inquired of him further—'Eggs, of course,' he said; 'only you must not eat them All, Mick, or there will be none for the Future. I bought them of a Tinker,' he said, 'who had doubtless Stole them: and they kept getting away from me on the road. But we'll have a Poultry yard by the Summer,' he said. I fell to thinking what might hap by the Summer, as I often do at his Speeches. Meanwhile the birds were fighting under the Table, and Malachi watching them. 'Asking your pardon, sir,' says he, 'but you'll get no eggs nor yet poultry yards from them, they're both Cockerels.' We had them for dinner, though they were most singular Small when Plucked, and not worth a Shilling. But, as Tony says, If a man never risk his luck, how shall he better it?"

Here also comes the cry on the page: "God help us, but who would take me for the peaceful poor Soul I was a month ago?"

Mr. Sampson was indeed learning much and rapidly.

In the giving of love there is an education, in the return of it a further one. If, in his sad inexperience, Mr. Sampson had given rashly, he seemed to have given not unworthily. His new friend did not fail him. Brave and gay he must needs have been; Mr. Sampson found him clean in a soiled age, gentle in a brutal one; and he had with him that last appeal, of a bright thing shadowed. At this time Mr. Sampson took his own sentiments very seriously. He looked on young Mr. Oakshott as David might first have raised eyes to his young prince, who was so lovely and so pleasant. Pleasant they found Mr. Oakshott in all his ways. And he cannot be denied a sort of loveliness.

It was, perhaps, only the common quality he shared with everything quick and young and kind, but in some degree that gave him an uncommon grace. When he lay in Mr. Sampson's bed he had shown none of it; now it informed him. He was eager, as if he feared that some cup might pass from him before he had well tasted of it. The heels of his soul were always winged, whatever might be the case with its shoulders. Mr. Sampson had caged a shining bird; perhaps, for the glitter of those Hermes feathers, might take it for an angel.

It is singular to think how little these two knew of each other. "Friendship and all Love," wrote Mr. Sampson, on one of those days when the philosophy book was keeping to the slippery heights with a palpable effort and falling therefrom frequently,

"do build a World for themselves and inhabit there, asking nothing of what went before the Bubble of their own blowing, and as little as Possible of what will come after. But even a Bubble needs Nourishment if it is not to Dissolve into its Parent Air, and it is by the Mercy of Heaven that the fine weather holds so late, for the Faggots are near done. Tony seems to do well on that narrow Fare I should Dread to set before him, did he not meet it with so fine a Grace and so excellent an Appetite. He knows I would give him Better, but I have no Means; neither hath he. What then? We are blessed alike in the giving and the taking. When it is safe, he will write to his Friends, and obtain of them Resources for his Journey to France, which I fear will not ensue without Difficulty. Meanwhile he is well advised to lie Quiet, the Military being still about Betsworth, and word out of a dangerous Fugitive with a Letter from the P. . . and a Plague on him. Whether Tony has such a Letter, I do not seek to know. He has suffered some Hurt in these Matters, as I think, some Injury of Soul too deep to be handled by any; and if I do but turn in speech like a Weathercock to the stormy quarter, he becomes Bleak and ill at ease and leaves me. If I could wish this otherwise, I call myself friendship's Glutton. For I hold in my hands his Honour and his Life, and I am not myself wholly Open with him. It is but a foul little blind Shame like a Maggot that I hide, yet I cannot Purge it away, even on my knees. And in despite of all, Time goes with as sweet a Content as he were shod with Silver and had sworn away his Reaping hook. Only I could wish I were better supplied with clean Hose, Tony having worn the Heels out of the pair I lent him, and Malachi being but slow at the knitting."

These were bubble-days, all-complete, all-containing, frail as breath, full of that strange and eager peace which would hold commerce neither with yesterday nor to-morrow. The philosophy book is full of little incident and reflection like the bosom of a small stream. But such streams may flood very suddenly if their source is in the hills. And on an evening Mr. Sampson sat himself down and inscribed one staring entry on a blank page. "O miserable Wretch," he wrote with a shaking hand, "well for you, and born of God's utmost Compassion, that this be but the Reproach of Words writ upon Paper, and not of the Blood of Abel crying from the Ground." The material connection of ideas is not difficult. In some passion that did away with humour, Mr. Sampson had immortalised his mood with red ink.

Nor, in the light of later happenings, can he be absolved of a certain enjoyment.

He had an honest hunger to hear of that bright World of which he was as ignorant as any monk, and Mr. Oakshott was pleasantly eager to satisfy him on this point; gave him indeed full measure, pressed down and running over. Mr. Sampson, who believed, for instance, that no women were wicked unless men had first broken

their hearts for them, heard some strange stories. He would sit on the edge of the cucumber frame of mild mornings, staring at his guest like a hooked fish; while that young gentleman, very keen at so grave a business, and with his talking eyes that helped him like a Frenchman's gestures, would show the proper carriage of a handkerchief, the correct deportment in a card-room, or the latest mode of drinking tea with a lady. Mr. Sampson said that the life of fashion was the life of chains, and sighed. Mr. Oakshott agreed, but held that such chains were like butter on a cat's paw, and kept one too busy for discontent. Mr. Sampson preferred freedom in life and death. Mr. Oakshott, catching at the last thought, said that a man's behaviour at a wedding was not near so important as his behaviour in a quarrel, and that you were never so civil to a fellow as when you hoped to kill him. Mr. Sampson, in the interests of philosophy, would like to know how it was done.

"What, killing a man?"

"No. Any butcher may show you so much with a cleaver. But that sharp steel of the soul which in an instant may sever the artery of friendship, stop the pulse of trust, turn men into murderers." Philosophy, as usual, lent some warmth to her disciple. "I am a man of peace, and I confess I cannot understand your points of honour. Could my friend hurt me on any point of honour—as you have related to me—with a witless word, sufficient to warrant me driving the point of a sword into his lungs the next morning? Folly, sir. I would put my sword under my arm and wish him good-bye until he was of a better mind." Mr. Sampson picked up a clod of earth and threw it at a blackbird, and his warmth with it. "But that," he finished, with his rare smile, "is the counsel of one who is a man of peace in all things, and who would have a better use for his sword."

Tony, who had been listening very kindly, tilting himself to and fro on his heels and toes, looked down at his host and dusted some straw from his cuff. His voice took on a sudden drawl: "I do not suppose you'd put your sword to that use——"

Mr. Sampson looked up sharply.

"—if you had one."

Mr. Sampson lifted up his voice like a trumpet.

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

Mr. Oakshott fetched his gaze from the roof of the barn. "You'd be more like," he explained sweetly, "to use it for a pea-stick."

Mr. Sampson choked. But the storm might have passed if Tony had not pulled out his handkerchief and, still with that cool stare of his, used it.

Something rolled and broke like thunder in Michael Sampson's brain. He heard himself saying: "I'll soon show you, sir, if I have one or not." . . Then, with no

apparent interval, found himself mounting the stairs in a fury, and wondering all the way up where the devil his sword was, where he'd seen it last. Had it been in Malachi's hand, and connected disgracefully with a rusty side of bacon? He used some words not found in any philosophy book, and flung into the sealed room, the sacred room, his dead cousin's. There was a sword there. He snatched it from the table. Perhaps it would serve, if it were not rusted home. He was still struggling hotly with the sheath as he strode up to the cucumber frame.

Tony had a harness buckle in hand, which he was busy polishing with the handkerchief. He looked up with a grin. "That's how it's done, Michael."

Mr. Sampson stopped. Shame drenched him with the cool sting of a wave. He came to himself—saw himself a murderer, no less. The sword he flung sheathed into a patch of groundsel, and himself out of the gate and into the woods, for all Tony's calling. He stayed there all day with his new knowledge of himself, returning only at night; and then, in Malachi's words, walked off his legs. He said nothing, nor did Tony, respecting a shame he did not understand.

But that same night Malachi heard noises in the little attic where the roof was broken and he kept his jams and conserves of sloe and blackberry for coolness. He went up and surprised his master, very pale and wild, with a bright sword in his hand, making passes at the shelf where the little pots were.

One pot was broken on the floor, and the blade stained a deadly crimson of the veins of currants. Malachi disarmed Mr. Sampson without a word, and led him to his blankets in the loft, afterwards scraping up the spilt jam with a spoon. Mr. Sampson ate it later, and was reminded in no other way of his momentary madness. Some days after Tony offered him fencing lessons; they were refused at first with horror, but in time became an established fact; and the hollows of the old house rang to the stamp and clash of that mimic war. This would be about November. The frosts set in then, silvered the glades, made Michael Sampson shiver in the loft and the mare Periwinkle dance in the stable. The paddock was not enough for her these stinging days. They decided, against all risks, to gallop her in the forest. The hurt hoof was sound again, but there remained the bitter question of new shoes, which she sorely needed. Mr. Oakshott found another shilling, and set about the finding of a smith.

Chap. VII
Noel Bunce and the Bogles

There can be no doubt that Noel Bunce was under the influence of liquor, if not drunk. In token of it, he had spent the best part of the evening disputing with the landlord on the subject of his own Christian name—a sure indication of the rise of his inner or spirituous temperature. Noel, as usual, upheld that he was named from Holy Writ, after one of the Prophets, indeed, and thought it very suitable; in that everyone knew him for the best weatherman in those parts. The landlord replied that all knew it for a bit of French fancifulness unbecoming to the station of the late Mistress Bunce—that there was no Holy Writ about it, and brought a Bible to prove it. Noel, who could only read o's, put his finger immediately after Hosea, and said: "Ho." The landlord said that was Joel, and Noel answered that it was all the same. The landlord said he'd had more than was good for him, and locked up the bar. Noel found himself outside the garden, with his feet upon a frosty white road that wriggled like a worm.

He stood awhile, regarding the blank front of the inn. "I'm numbered with the prophets," he explained loudly, and waited for some notice to be taken either by heaven or earth, but nothing ensued. There was the wink of a candle, a shutter clanged to, and a keen wind whimpered along the thatch. "A prophet," he shouted, and a sleepy hostler came from somewhere among the hay and threw a wet clout at his head. It clung there, flapped him as with chill and monstrous wings, and he wrestled with it tremendously, as Jacob with the angel. He had it down at last, and thoughtfully hung it on a thorn bush to dry. Then he addressed himself to the writhing road.

It was but a step from the inn to the smithy.

That is, it was but a step in the straight, only the road coiled so, and he had to follow it. It reminded him of nothing on earth but a herbalist's window and a thing in a bottle. It took him out of his way at first. But there was a sobering nip in the air. In a few minutes the road laid itself out reasonably, and his thoughts passed by a natural transition from the prophets to the landlord's profits, and lingered there placidly enough.

He was doing well on the level, and had the sense to quicken to a run on the slope. The slope led down to a hollow, where was a little old bridge over a spring.

The marshy ground and the bridge were in a velvet-black shadow of undergrowth; the road ran down to it in bright moonlight, was lost in the darkness a little space, emerged in moonlight again, and led clear to the smithy, a black cavern and a patch of new whitewash upon the soft surface of the night. The smith, trotting heavily, looked ahead with longing. The former heat had died out of him, and he wished for nothing but his bed—desired it with a desperate desire. That house front beyond the dark bridge shone for him as the frontage of a city beyond death for another sort of pilgrim. He dipped boldly into the shadow, his face to the bright vision; his feet rang hollow on the old oak planks. Immediately the vision went out. Something soft and horsey had been thrown over his head.

Deprived of sight, having no instinct of balance, plunged into a horror of darkness, the smith fell immediately. He was in a great fright, and unspeakable confusion of mind. The suddenness of the attack, coming upon the top of so much other emotion, shook him to his foundations; but he fought like a hero as he lay. He aimed large circular kicks at the unseen substance of his foes, and several went home, but with no permanent effect. In his profound and fevered darkness, Noel Bunce envisaged an endless succession of such adversaries, drawn of the night and the fears of it. His heart failed him; his body, vexed by violent exertion after so many pints, rebelled vastly. A few lively moments, and he lay gasping, from head to foot a beaten man.

The darkness roared in his ears—cataracts and whirlpools of it. He heard a voice say: "What shall we do with the poor devil now?" Another voice answered—unearthly words in a strange tongue, mixed with hollow groans. It was but Mr. Sampson soothing his bruises with a Latin quotation, but Bunce took it for a spell. Heaven knows why he should have done so. He began to repeat as much as he could remember of the Lord's Prayer, and someone laughed. He thought it was a mocking laugh, and shuddered.

Hands caught him by the arms. He was lifted to his feet and hurried pitilessly on a journey. His legs moved as in a dream, he clung alike to his captors and to his prayer. They went on endlessly. His shoes had been taken off when he kicked, and he felt under his feet the thrill of wet grass give place to bare earth, a rustle of dead leaves and the ridges of tree roots. He was in the forest; they led him in deeper and deeper, turning and doubling, through mile after mile of sighing trees. His heart failed him again. By the time his legs were ready to do so for very despair, they swung him through a bramble hedge, set him upon a rutty road, led him across it, and thrust him under a roof. He felt the change in the air, a sharp edge caught him upon the shin; he sniffed, and knew he was in a smithy. A door swung to behind him with a shrill

complaint of rust. Another moment and the covering was whisked from his head; he stared about him, staggering.

He saw nothing at first but a reddened darkness, split with roving lights; then these steadied to the cracks of a door, a lanthorn set upon the ground, the glow of a dull fire and the reflections of it on the peak of an anvil and in the soft eyes of a horse. A piebald mare was tied behind the forge. In the shadows other shadows moved. Bunce saw them as trees walking. The whole place dawned on him hugely, hollowed out of the recent night, instinct with the strangeness of dreams. The terror of dreams loosened his sinews, ran like oil into his bones; he fell on his knees, praying aloud, and could get no further than: "Deliver us from evil."

A tremendous voice, booming under the roof, bade him shoe the mare and be quick about it. One of those inhuman shadows moved forward silently and laid hold of his huge bellows; tools were thrust into his hand. His fingers rounded upon the haft of a hammer—seemed at home there and familiar. His body steadied as he set fearfully to work without a word, but his mind heaved like water in a shaken bucket and his eyes were dim. He wondered if he were on the earth or beneath it in some black ante-chamber of the unknown. He wondered where his home might be, and if he would ever see his wife again, and if she'd fat the old goose for Christmas.

Of very habit he did his work well and quickly, finding some comfort in the mare, who was genuine enough—a pretty, sound thing, for all her ugly white patches. He leaned his head against her soft flank and she turned and lipped his hair. He felt a rush of maudlin pity for her in her desperate company, called her "Good lass," and hiccuped, and could have wept as he handled her. The feeling was good for him—took his mind off his own mortal peril and left it more free for his work. When at last it was done, and he straightened and looked up trembling, he had the knowledge somewhere among his muddled wits that he'd never done a neater job.

The great voice asked him if it were finished.

Bunce said: "Yes, my lord."

He was told to sit down on a box that was there. He obeyed, with a ghostly sense that he had done the same thing many a time before. A sack, by the feel of it, was slipped over his head. He shook, and laid hold of the sides of the box. A voice spoke softly at his ear, and he started as if he had been struck.

"Have you any mortal sin upon your soul?"

"N-n-n-no, your lordship, no, your worship, I'll swear it, I'll confess everything ——"

"Heaven help you, I don't want your confession." The voice squeaked strangely. "I but spoke for your own good. For you'll need the help of every holy power you

can call upon if you come out from the sack before morning."

Noel Bunce thinks that here he must have been taken with a kind of sitting swound. For when he came to himself the place was empty; he was all alone, even the poor unlucky mare being gone.

If his fear had been great when in company, it was greater now. He would have given anything to look from under the sack, and dared not for his life. He might only grope abroad cautiously with his hands.

The box upon which he sat presented a hollow front to the calves of his legs; he bent forward and explored timidly within. He felt that he urgently desired something that should be in the box, but could not remember what it was. The very feeling was an uncanny evidence. He shuddered, but groped on. His fingers passed over rusty nails, bits of scrap-iron, broken rubbish of all sorts—closed at last on the neck of a small earthen flask or pipkin. He drew it forth, bewildered, breathing heavily; The sense of familiarity pursued him again like a spectre, but with it, one of triumph; he introduced the neck of the pipkin under the sack, and thought that he'd got the better of them this time.

But he hadn't. When, pipkin-valiant, he began groping abroad with his feet also, they met nothing. Immediately his fears returned to him like a flock of rooks to a tree. He became suddenly certain that he sat upon the brink of a great pit or well in the earth, down which his recent visitants had already vanished. If he moved, he would doubtless follow them quick into that pit. Doubtless also they desired it, but he would get the better of them. No temptation of man or bogle would prevail upon him to move.

He curled his feet under him, gripped the sides of the box, and sat still in a sweat of terror beyond hope or reason.

The pipkin cordial hummed in his ears, his head seemed to grow large and little by fits. Sometimes the thick, soft darkness rustled, was full of a stealthy whisper and hurry; he heard, groaned, and all sound ceased. Once it was cut through by a wild cry, as cloth might be by a knife; he thought it came from the deeps of his visionary pit, and sickened, owls being clean out of his mind. Once he caught himself back with a dreadful start on the very brink of sleep. He wondered, with intense and unaccustomed wistfulness, if his wife, across the intervening leagues of forest, were thinking of him, and troubled that he hadn't come home. Home? He didn't even know where it was, or if he should ever see it again. Would his Mary wrap her head in a shawl and go and seek him along the ditches? She'd done it before. But his Mary was sound asleep this time—never woke till dawn, and then went but leisurely about the place, looking for her Noel.

After all, he must have slept as he sat clenched to his box, for he never heard her till she hauled the sack off his head, crying shrilly: "God help us, what's come to the man that he's set here like a hen with his head in a bag?" He turned such a face upon her then that she would have started back, only he clutched her as if he had been drowning.

"Take me under the arm," he raved at her hoarsely, "I'm too stiff to move my own self. Take me under the arm, and raise me gentle to my feet, and we'll run into the woods, and maybe win home at last. Oh, Mary, Mary, maybe we'll win home at last and be none the worse of it all."

"Why, you doddering fool," said his Mary, an octave higher, "where do you reckon to be now?"

He stared at her, as she said, like a calf in a bush; she went to the door, set it open with an angry heave of the shoulder. Light poured in like a flood, and, if it had been indeed a flood, could not have made Noel Bunce gasp more. He was sitting on his own box, in his own smithy, and down the road in the new sunshine a man in a green cap was repainting the sign-board of the inn.

He said faintly: "Witchcraft."

"See ye here, my man." Mary set herself firmly in front of him. "Don't give me such words. I went to bed, being spent of a day's washing. But I heard the gentry come." (Noel shuddered.) "I heard them go to the inn for ye, and bring ye back, and fine work they had of it. Ye was drunk then"—she picked up a shilling from the anvil —"or ye wouldn't have let them off with a shilling for night work. I heard them go, and I knew, when ye did not come, that ye'd be here drinking, and here ye've been the night through."

"I've not." Bunce was staring at himself strangely in a bit of bright tin against the wall.

"Here ye've been, drinking like an owl. Ye're drunk now."

"Woman, I'm not drunk, but blasted by bogles." He turned his face to her and she screamed. One side of his stubbly head—the side he had leaned against the mare—was white as by the untimely stroke of age.

Mary Bunce said no more, but cried a good deal, and put him to bed. That evening it was all over the village that Noel had been pixy-led in the woods and half his hair turned white, and the smithy was besieged. The story spread, lasted as long as the white on the smith's hair, which was until next time he cut it, and on the way reached to the ears of some gentlemen who did not happen to believe in bogles.

Chap. VIII
Mr. Sampson Continues His Education

Mr. Sampson huddled his back deeper into the ivy and tried to imagine that dry fern made a warm sheathing to the legs. In spite of the cold he wore his coat unbuttoned, being in fear of straining the seams. For he wore beneath it a knitted garment resembling a waistcoat, manufactured secretly from the savings of the stockings by Malachi as a Yule gift; but presented before time owing to the sharp weather. The front of it was rimed with his breath, for indeed he had been standing there a long time. The glade stretched lonely in front of him, lost either end in the glimmer of starshine on frost. The ground was ringing hard under snow as light as a scattering of flowers, newly fallen from quick clouds, and ready to be gone in an hour's sun. Meanwhile it gave to the forest its momentary hushed magic; washed clear all space between earth and her large fellow-stars; and stung Mr. Sampson's feet through his worn shoes into a burning prophecy of chilblains.

"This glade," said Mr. Sampson, reading, as it were, from the unwritten portions of the philosophy book, and careless of any physical discouragement, "is to the wise the type and epitome of our life. He may see its beginning, but not its source; its direction, but not its end. But not by darkness, Malachi, is that end hidden from our eyes. Look well, and you shall see that we are baffled, not by shadows, but by the reflection of far lights."

A hand, holding at length a grandmotherly grey shawl, appeared from the other side of the tree trunk. "Meanwhile you'd be best to put this on, Master Michael, or you'll take a chill to your stomach again with so much loitering."

Mr. Sampson wrapped the shawl about his neck. "You are ever mindful to save me discomfort, Malachi," he said gently.

Malachi grunted. "I'm mindful of saving myself the trouble of putting hot bricks to you, sir. And that your mother was but delicate."

"The very soil we stand on," continued Mr. Sampson after a silence, "is kin to the heart of man. For he is formed of it, bred on it, nourished by it——"

"And very ill if it happens to be a sour clay," put in Malachi.

"—and to it he returns. These hands"—Mr. Sampson held out his own, very red in wrist mufflers—"are but a superior sort of earth, and I do but hold them in fief a little time, as a husbandman his tillage. It is so of all my substance; of that transitory

shadow which, gathered about my mystic core as the ash about the ember, veils, preserves, and presently enchains me. Is the shape of my immortal essence decided by the clay mould into which it is poured? Or does this outward earth show darkly as in a glass the grace of the informing spirit? When the poor vessel is broken, when the pitcher goes no more to the fountain of days, yet shall I take my share still in the unending business of the world. That which was the visible I a child may pluck for a posy-wreath, a lover for his mistress, or—or——"

"A cow eat in the pasture," suggested Malachi. "Move your feet about, sir, and you'll not get so set like."

Mr. Sampson obeyed, and made a great scuffling in the thick dead leaves. "I may," he enlarged pleasantly, "be now stirring up the dust of some past philosopher or disturbing the transmuted ichor that once fed the heart of a poet."

Malachi knew nothing about that—thought it more like to be toadstools, but was sure that Master Oakshott had been gone a long time with Periwinkle.

"He'll be back soon," said Mr. Sampson, staring somewhat wistfully down the glade. "He was to lend me his boots, Malachi, and we were to ride her turn and turn about, you know."

"Then you'd best keep clear of spurs. You ride with your toes turned out like the wings of a roasting fowl. . . But maybe Master Tony's forgot all about it."

Mr. Sampson pulled out a huge tarnished watch and held it close to his nose. "We have been here a scant ten minutes beyond the hour. He said he would not be more, and he knows the ways well. He will be back, as I expect, instantly."

Malachi shifted on the other side of the tree. "You trust a deal to his word, Master Michael."

Michael Sampson waited, with a faint smile on his fine lips.

"You've no more than his word. . . for anything. I'd have you remember that. And these are no times for a poor man to be putting his neck in a noose for one he's known but two months or less. . . What is he doing here? Why isn't he with—the others? . . . Why isn't he honestly in prison or honestly over the water with——"

"Hush, I command you," said Mr. Sampson.

"Well——"

"Be silent, Malachi," said Mr. Sampson violently. "I will not hear a word about him. I loathe the mention of him. He is obnoxious to me, that prince. Men would have naught to say to any of them without the grace of their pestilent misfortunes. A reedy weathercock. Before God," cried Mr. Sampson lawlessly, "I'd have rode alone to London last year sooner than turn back, and shook my single sword in George's teeth."

"There was another thought like that, it seems," grunted Malachi; and continued, answering grudgingly to his master's eye in the darkness: "'Tis only talk—talk of one young gentleman that wouldn't turn back—swore he'd ride to London whatever the others did, and kept his word, Master Michael, with his life in his hand. Not that he shook his sword in anybody's teeth when he got there, sir." A slow grin overspread the old man's face. "'Tis but a tale come down from London town, but 'tis of a piece with—other tales. And he went very agreeable to the play and walked in the park under the Whigs' noses until someone recognised him and he had to ride for it again with scarce a penny in his pocket. Nor do I mention names, sir. It being certain," finished Malachi with a quick return to sourness, "that there's nought so misleading as names, and Anthony Oakshott, Esquire, of no place in particular, might equally be Lord Jeremy Diddler of the same, and you none the wiser."

"Malachi."

"Sir?"

"I have heard, Malachi, that there's a notice up at Betsworth, offering ten golden pounds for—for some information that you could very well supply. Three turns to the left and four to the right, Malachi, from where we stand, would bring you out on the highroad; from there your way would be as straight as Judas's, who also found faith somewhat difficult."

"You've never spoke to me so before, sir," said the old man unsteadily.

"It is a pity I have not," said Mr. Sampson, "if my indulgence has taught you to let your tongue run so on any friend or guest of mine." They were still standing in a fiery silence when a dull and steady throbbing grew in the forest as if somewhere a great heart had begun to beat. Michael Sampson's answered it like a girl's. It grew loud. A flying shadow showed in the shadows, swept down the glimmering glade as light as a cloud, but with a sound that woke the spirit like the drums of an army in that frosty stillness. Mr. Oakshott rode Periwinkle up to them at a loose canter, leapt from the saddle almost before she slowed, and thrust the reins into Michael Sampson's hand, crying: "Up with you, Michael, up with you. 'Tis riding in heaven to-night."

Mr. Sampson sat down in a fluster and began pulling off his shoes. He could see his friend's eyes, shining like the frosty, pale stars; the gay set of his lips, the rime on his hair. The air all in a minute ran tingling against the body, the soul danced to it. The night laughed, the winter earth was not old nor silent, only hoarding her youth. Of such was Tony's quality. He refused to let Mr. Sampson wait for the boots. . . . "She's gentle as a kitten to-night; you're better without the spurs." Mr. Sampson found himself in the saddle, his tingling toes in the stirrups, very mindful to grip with

his knees, keep his elbows down and his back straight. Periwinkle was a little restive under him, but kind towards a friend. He addressed her with caution to the starry path, and down it she bore him, as smoothly indeed as if it had been a road of dreams.

He was no horseman—never would be. But the mare's swallow-smooth flight made him forget that, and everything but the night and his own cheated youth. The air had enough frost in it to be visible like a veil of silver; he seemed to be cleaving some fairy stuff that soaked him to the bones with delight like pain, cold like a caress. He was not on or of the earth for all the hoofs ringing on hard ground. The trees poured past him cloudily. In the higher branches the stars floated, and they alone seemed to move. Only they were awake to swim after him like white fish in the immense pools of the sky where the trees slept like fine weeds, and the birds slept in the trees, and the winds with the birds. He wished for nothing else for ever but that he might ride and ride, with the air in his face and the swing of the mare beneath him, to the dawn of some immortal star more beautiful than these.

Feed your scholar with any rain of emotion, like a currant bush in March, and you get a fine crop of scholarly flower. Mr. Sampson was meditating the first lines of an admirable *chante d'avril* in the French mode—was indeed roaring them softly as he bumped in the saddle—when a sense of distance roused him, and a strangeness in that forest world through which Periwinkle carried him so lightly and so sure. He sighed, blew on the fingers of his free hand, and bore on the reins with the other. But he was scarcely surprised when she took no sort of notice. It was all of a piece with the night and his emotions that she also should feel some enchantment and follow it. He spoke to her, but her ears remained forward. He resigned himself, not unwillingly; the more so that the bit had slipped and he was afraid to meddle with it. He wondered if presently the night would open, show him a rose hedge flowering out of time, and old towers grey with a hundred years of waiting. He thrilled when the mare stopped at tall gates seen dimly under holm oaks.

The gates of an enchanted castle? No, of his uncle's house of Shortsands, some three miles out of Betsworth. He had never in his life ridden through them.

A pale gleam of light from the hidden windows of the lodge showed him one of the heraldic griffins erect upon the gate-post. Mr. Sampson thought that it looked down at him with a sneer. He forgot the *chante d'avril*. Music died out of him.

"The gates of heaven," said Mr. Sampson presently to Periwinkle, "are made of pearl, and the redeemed go through them. In the considerating justice of God, it is possible that the poor have the right of that way before all others, as a sign or recompense of the many gates that have been shut to them on earth; that even the

cohorts of the archangels make room for the sons of Poverty. There are no back doors to heaven. Come, we will look, if we may not enter in. There should be a path here, but the trees have grown. Steady."

She carried him gently along the circuit of the wall. No need for the last word. But perhaps he had addressed it to himself. There was a movement in his heart, a faint stirring of long-buried things.

He knew the trees which hung over that wall. Sometimes as a child he had seen fruit fallen from them here and there on the orchard side; he had never touched it. He knew the shape of the statues which dreamed for ever under those trees, a grey shaft or a twisted shadow in the night, the human likeness gone out of them with the going out of day. He knew only their backs. He had never seen their faces. He knew that door in the wall; it was locked, as it had always been to him.

"When the everlasting doors lifted up their heads," said Mr. Sampson, "it was to admit the Lord strong and mighty, going up with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. But they shook and were abased when a very poor man rode into Jerusalem, and the pattering hoofs of a little ass's colt were heard along the streets of the Celestial City. We have passed the house. This should be the wall of the rose garden."

Periwinkle's soft ears twitched. Her rider stopped under the hazels, looking upward. At the angle of the wall there was a figure of Pan, his head just showing over it. Long ago a small Michael Sampson with a home-made bow and arrows, had shot the rotted head of the god full of shafts, and a gardener had beaten him for it roughly. Malachi had laid in wait for the gardener and thrown a bucket of water over him. Mr. Sampson remembered it all; a long, long, time ago.

Did Time also travel fast for the wooden gods of the garden? Looking up, the head of Pan seemed to be whitened, as if with old age. Mr. Sampson dismounted carefully and tied Periwinkle to a branch. Then, with a kick and a scuffle, he had his elbows on the top of the wall and reached across it to touch Pan's coronal. He expected something harsh or chill to the touch; it was soft and warm and came away in his hand; a bit of worn white ribbon, which someone had tied about the temples, still scarred with arrow wounds in the crumbling wood. He dropped back into the path, holding it.

After a moment, with half a smile, he set his lips to it. It was faintly scented with violets. Thoughts, buried as deep in his soul as the kings of Egypt under their pyramids, began to rise and shake free of their cerements. So directly does the despised nose teach the mind, that in a moment the mere ash of tender recollection took shape again, and verity, and nearness. It was like a resurrection. Periwinkle heard his voice, and turned to it, thinking it a stranger's; she knew nothing of

philosophy.

"The son of Poverty may take no alms of the mercy of chance," expounded Mr. Sampson to the quiet, frosty night, "if any riches are scattered on that road of his, he may not pause to pick them up. The tags and leavings, the orts of the wealthy, are not for him." Here he raised the ribbon again curiously to his face. "Even that which he hath may be taken from him"—here he folded the ribbon small and held it between his hands as if he were praying over it—"let him then be content, for in possessing nothing is his only security"—here he put the ribbon in the pocket of his grey woollen waistcoat—"and in the absence of all desire his only assurance."

The world might have been the richer for further extracts from the philosophy book *in posse*, if a keeper had not come creeping round the wall from the lodge and fairly walked into the philosopher as he meditated in darkness. He trod, in fact, on the incipient chilblains. In the heat and anguish of the moment Mr. Sampson smote out like anything but a philosopher, flung himself anyhow into the saddle, and rode for it. The man picked himself up from the prickles and followed with a charge of buckshot, which went wide, but startled the mare into a frenzy. For ten minutes Mr. Sampson's neck was not worth a three-penny piece. They hunted him off his kinsman's land, and only in the deep forest did the shouts of the keeper and his mates die away, and Periwinkle grow quiet, and the stillness fold him once more like cool water on a hurt. It took him an hour or more to find the others, very cold and anxious under the hedge. He brought away with him the ribbon in his pocket, and the knowledge that Mistress Diantha Holles, his cousin, was home again after finishing her polite education with her paternal grandmother in London.

But he kept these things to himself.

Chap. IX
And Receives an Invitation

Diantha rode down the drive of Shortsands without looking behind her. There was a window on either side of the door, visible right down to the gates; she knew that from one of these windows her father was peeping doubtfully after her retreating figure, and Aunt Marian from the other. She only rode the faster and the straighter for the knowledge. She had fought her battle and said her say, and was not of the kind that lingers either over victory or defeat.

"You are so young, my love," Aunt Marian had said, "that it will have to be a very small affair. And select."

"All the more reason that my cousin should come to it."

"He will not come."

"At the least, he shall be asked."

"There is no need for such a display of loyalty; young Mr. Sampson has ever been treated——"

"Shamefully, aunt," cried the girl, and the ring in her voice brought her father away from his books long enough to ask what was troubling his pet.

She told him, all on fire. He looked at her sadly with his kind, tired eyes, and wondered if a sweeter face had ever been in those old rooms, or a truer heart beat there, or one upon which the world was likely to be more hard. He hoped the child would marry young, a good man. . . As for Michael. . . "He would always have a welcome here, for his poor mother's sake, and, as I do believe, for his own. But there's pride, Dian, pride."

"I am ashamed of such pride."

He answered at that a thought dryly: "Not our pride, my child, but his. And as it is all he has, we may not greatly interfere with it."

She was silent, whispering only: "Poor Michael."

"Poor Michael, indeed," he went on. "You do not know—you were such a child then—that three years ago, hearing a word of how things were going with him, I offered him an allowance, Dian. I told him there could be nothing shameful in my sister's son taking it of me. But he thanked me very courteously, and said that there would be cause for shame if John Sampson's son took it. . . I cannot pretend to be sorry, child. I am glad to know that Anne's son is a gentleman, even if he is a starving

one."

"Are things so bad with him?"

"He cannot have much—no more than the few pounds his—his paternal grandfather left him."

She was silent again, looking over the park. Then said: "But I may invite him, sir?"

"Is it kind, child? Remember, he will scarcely be able to—to make a fitting appearance. Poor Michael."

And then she astonished him with a laugh where he had looked for pity and even tears. "No wonder he will not come here, father. Yes, I think it will be kind to ask him. I will do so myself, and I will make him forget for a little while that he is—Poor Michael." The door shut on her so quickly that he could not be sure if he had called after her aloud or only in his heart: "Dian, Dian, be kind, and do not make him forget too well."

So she rode on her errand, and his eyes followed her to the gates, and his heart a great deal farther. He recognized her power over him with a half-rueful smile, and wondered where her charm would lie for others. For she was not beautiful. Many girls had sweet faces, and perhaps also that great clearness of substance and expression which showed every change of thought as a flower shows sun and shadow. He thought it must be the touch of steel in her frailty, the courage that burned like an altar fire in her heart, which so drew other hearts to her.

Meanwhile that heart was full of her cousin—set him to a kind beat—"Poor Michael." The hoofs beat too on the road—"Poor Michael." It was a quick tune, and old Nicholas, the groom, who, against the proper habit of grooms, had grown as fat as a butler, had a hot time of it behind his young lady.

She drew rein only with the house in view. She had not seen it for two years, and in its momentary unfamiliarity she saw for the first time its sadness. The day was a sad one, grey and misty after a wet night. The trees hung heavily, the twigs had no spring in them, the sap was a long way underground. And the house itself, so old, so lonely, looked in that light no more than a heap of wreckage holding the form of a home, presently to fall away and decay, and be beaten on by rains. She shivered as she saw with new eyes the sagging doors, the blinded windows, the sodden moss on walls and roofs; and Nicholas hoarsely advised an immediate return for fear of chills and the tic. For a little her courage failed her, she was afraid to intrude into that desolation. Nicholas spoke again and coughed heartrendingly. She told him imperiously to be still, and leaned forward, listening. For suddenly in the rotting buildings someone had begun to whistle like a blackbird.

The air was one she had heard in town, and her memory gave it words:

"When along the road of day
Evening comes with stars and wings,
Bids her children put away
Spades and sceptres, clowns and kings,
We remember once again,
Love, how lonely Love hath lain,
Love hath lain."

Her horse moved. She hushed it impatiently. The ringing April whistle went on:

"Though the blind day build us in
With her sorrows and her spears,
Break for us the bread of sin,
Lift to us the cup of tears,
Yet our prison-house shall be
But the door to let Love free,
Let Love free."

The old buildings caught the last notes as if they had been birds under the rafters; in her fancy echoed the words too: "Let Love free, let Love free." She told Nicholas to stay where he was, rode forward, and looked over the gate of the yard.

Her cousin was standing, apparently lost in thought, before a pail of groundsel. He had heard nothing. She pulled off her glove, rolled it into a ball, and threw it at him with an aim as true as a boy's. It hit him in the face, and from there fell down and lay at his feet. After one great start, he stood staring at it as if it had been a fallen star. She laughed at last, and he looked up, with a leap of the heart visible in his face, to see his wild March violet grown into a May rose.

"Cousin Michael, will you come and help me down?"

He was through the gate and at her side in an instant; he said not a word as he lifted her down. Nor did she. Both their hearts were full, though of very different things. She looked at him, and saw that he was leaner and shabbier than ever, but carried himself in a new way; and realized that her pity was the last thing on earth that she must show.

"May I sit down in the courtyard, cousin?"

Still silent, he led her to an old bench against the wall and bowed her into a seat with a grace worthy of the town she had lately left. Her eyes widened with frank surprise to find him so deft; he noticed her look and grew as pale as a ghost, having

just remembered something.

"Will you not speak to me, Michael? Say 'Welcome home, Diantha'?"

"Welcome home, Diantha." His heart was in the words, but he could not avoid one uneasy glance over his shoulder. She misread it. When he turned her face was near his own and her hand a moment on his as she said earnestly:

"I am very glad to see you, dear Michael. Are you glad to see me?"

"Can you not see that I am glad?" Yes, she could see it, a little too plainly, and drew back. He went on in a hurry: "But you are so—wonderful, Diantha, so changed."

"I am grown up, Michael, but not changed. I am still the little Dian that a big boy used to find birds' eggs for, and rare flowers, and used to pass them over the wall of the kitchen garden——"

"When no one was looking," put in Mr. Sampson grimly.

She ignored the hurtful point. "And I used to pass you cakes, and comfits done up in cabbage leaves——"

"Yes. For I was always hungry." She felt the hurt again, and let her glance wander round the yard and the buildings. "You will find no change here," he went on quietly, "except that we are all—two years older. Presently I will call Malachi; he will wish to pay his respects. . . We did not even know that you were home again."

She faced him at that. "It is your own fault if you did not. . . Michael, I am very angry with you. Why have you never been to see my father while I was away?"

He answered her with a look and a smile; it was her clear eyes that fell.

"You do him an injustice," she said in a low voice, as if she were answering an accusation. "You are not—kind to us. He would——"

He interrupted her quickly. "I am very grateful to him, Diantha. He has always been—a friend. And he allows you to be still at times a friend, which is—more. I cannot bear any heavier burthens of gratitude than this. . . Will you come and look at the violets? You always loved them. There are sure to be some in bloom."

She let it go, being always strong enough to wait. But as he stooped over the violet bed—memorable spot—she saw a white thread or so at his temples, where they had no business to be for many a long year.

"Cousin Michael."

"Yes?"

"I am come with an invitation, from my father and myself. Will you honour us with your presence, sir, for the evening, two weeks from Wednesday? I—I hope you will come."

"Diantha, I——"

But she stopped him like a queen. "You know my errand and my hope, Michael. Now give me the violets." And he gave them with a bow that made her wonder where in the world he had learned to do it properly. She must have shown her surprise again, for from being uncommonly pale, Mr. Sampson became a vivid red, and remained so. To cover her mistake, she sought about for some subject for easy chatter, and soon found one to her liking, though not to Mr. Sampson's.

"It is so heavenly quiet here, Michael, after the town. . . But even here you have dangers and perils. 'Tis all over the village that one of Prince Charles' men is down here in hiding—bears with him, they say, a letter. Do you know anything of it?"

Mr. Sampson, a poor liar, was understood to say that he knew nothing.

"'Tis said that sooner than turn back he rode to London alone. I wish I had met him there."

"What would you have done, Diantha?"

"Helped such a one with all I had."

"Are you for the Prince, cousin?"

"Why, no, Michael. We are a Whig house, you know, and I have been taught to believe that he would make a bad king for England. I am not so ignorant, perhaps, as you think me, and that I do believe of myself. But for those who believe in him, who suffer for him, more readily than the disciples for Christ"—her eyes glowed, she was suddenly beautiful as a flame is—"for these my heart is not great enough to hold or yet to show all I feel. Lost causes make such noble things, cousin. And with this lost cause I think something noble dies out of England, even if it is only danger and sacrifice."

He was ready enough to kindle with her, had heaven only known what words upon his lips, when she whipped him back to earth with a change as sudden as a kitten's: "And I'd give my new French shoes to know where he's hid hereabouts."

Here was the child again, looking at him keenly with her head on one side. He looked back at her helplessly; even his face was not a good liar. "They say," she began slowly, then stopped with a quick exclamation. They were walking past the stables, empty so many years, and Periwinkle chose that time to put her head over the half-door.

Such innumerable shades of surprise and conjecture passed over Diantha's face that Mr. Sampson was moved to say at once: "I found it."

"*Found* it, Michael?"

"Yes," replied Michael, with unnecessary firmness; "or, to speak more truly, Malachi did."

"Where?. . . Oh, you beauty."

"In the forest—some few weeks ago."

"Then—do you not see, cousin, do you not see? It is likely to be that poor young gentleman's—his horse, that he was forced to abandon. . . What a story."

The excitement died out of her face as suddenly as it had come there. Mr. Sampson said he thought it very likely indeed that it was the poor young gentleman's horse, but Diantha did not look at him. She was fondling Periwinkle as she said: "It is a very dangerous thing for you to keep her here, Michael."

Mr. Sampson thought the danger small. "And at the worst one may always change her into a piebald with a little whitening."

The considering look in the girl's clear eyes deepened, for she had heard more tales than one. Mr. Sampson's astonishment that she asked no more questions was lost in his relief. He drew an easier breath, and had leisure to look at her firm slight hand on Periwinkle's silken neck. She sighed at last, and turned, and fixed him with her innocent, bright gaze.

"I must go, Michael, having done my errand. . . and shown you, as I hope, that the old Diantha is not lost in the new. But before I go, I wish you would whistle for me again."

"Whistle?"

"Yes. As I heard you when I rode up. It was vastly pretty, like a silver flute. I never heard such whistling. And I wonder where you learned, for I remember years ago you could never make a sound—not even to call my dog for me. And that air is one I am fond of, so whistle it again, Michael, before I go."

Mr. Sampson stood dumb and destroyed.

"Go on, Michael," said my lady kindly.

He screwed up his lips obediently and blew. There came forth a loud, desolate sound, like a gust in a keyhole, and he looked at her in anguish.

"You cannot do it because I am looking at you." Diantha spoke breathlessly, and her eyes danced, but for once Michael had no eyes for them. "If you look at one who tries to whistle, it puts him in a fluster, cousin, and the sound will not come. Hide your face in your hat, cousin, and whistle for me—just once, it was so pretty—as I heard you before."

Beyond anything save obedience, Mr. Sampson hid his face in his hat, but his lips remained dry and silent. He had a thought of attributing the whistle to Malachi, but rejected it as unreasonable. Should he say they kept a tame mavis, or a starling that knew the London songs? No, for Diantha would instantly demand a sight of the gifted bird. He felt himself slipping past thought, and fell to counting the holes in the lining of his hat; his temper rose against Fate's petty injustice and the craft of

circumstance which had devised such a pass for him wherein neither manhood nor philosophy were of service without the ability to whistle a tune. He was on the point of breaking out hotly from behind his hat with a denial of any whistle whatsoever or the possibility of it, when it rang again in his ears. He dropped his hat with a groan.

Anthony Oakshott came round the corner of the coach-house whistling. He had taken with a singular kindness to all the small works and drudgeries of the stables and garden—seemed to find a pleasure in using his hands to any little honest ends; and he came in Mr. Sampson's other shirt, breeches, and a sacking apron, and bore upon his shoulder a truss of straw. He was half hidden by the straw, and hope was born in Mr. Sampson that perhaps his wit might help him. Indeed the whistle only checked one instant as he saw Diantha. Then it went fluting on like a bird's in spring, and he was for passing the lady with a pull at his forelock. But she was at the door of the coach-house barring the way.

Mr. Sampson felt his eyes grow dim as he looked at her. Her clear face seemed to have light in it, and a tremor went through her which made him think of a flame. Mr. Oakshott, meeting that gaze of hers, set down his straw and waited. There was a moment's stillness, in which they heard the rustle of the faint air in the yellow truss and the far cooing of pigeons in the old dove-house across the yard. What seed was sown in that stillness, who shall say? When she leaned forward and spoke, it was very low.

"You may trust me, sir."

"Yes, madam." He also, for some reason, spoke very low. "Yes, madam, I see that I may."

She went on in her earnestness: "I am Michael's cousin, Diantha Holles. We are not of—of your side, sir. But with all my heart I do assure you that your secret, which I have thoughtlessly surprised, is as safe with me as if we were."

He said: "Madam, I already had that assurance."

The glitter of tears sprang into her eyes. "I ask no questions, sir. It is better that I know nothing more. . . But if there is any help that I may give you—or Cousin Michael—I do earnestly beg that you will ask it of me."

Said Mr. Oakshott, lower still: "You give so much, madam, when you give your pity."

"My pity? Ah——"

A hero-making passion was in the girl, and a passion of sympathy that made her splendid, young as she was. She corrected herself proudly—"My reverence, sir"—leaned forward again swiftly, caught his hand, and before he could move, had set her innocent lips to it.

There was something in the childish act that made Mr. Sampson feel like an intruder, a spy on holy things. He wished to look away, but could not. He saw her face lifted; saw Anthony swing away from her with no other courtesy than a muttered word that was like a word of pain. His eyes were held by his friend's face as he went past; it had such a hurt in it, and was stained from throat to hair with a dark flush like a flush of shame.

Chap. X
And Something Not Intended For Him

"Happy is the Chase," wrote Mr. Sampson austerely, "for those who do hunt our holy Poverty with as much earnestness as the World uses on the scent of that red Fox, Riches, or the poor Leveret, Love, or Power the tyned Stag-Royal. For Poverty is light of her Foot as Love, and as soon as we lay hold on her we are in danger to lose her through Pride. For she is very Delicate, this Mistress, and will not house with any Pride, either of the World or the Flesh, or even Pride in her own Self. Nor is she wholly at her Ease with Love, but prefers the silver Sister, Quietness. Of Love likewise there be many Productions, though but one Sort; as from an innocent single Herb the wise Chymist may Distill you anything—Balsam, Electuary, Cordial, or the most Biting Cataplasm. And Poverty's follower will do well to Chuse such Ware of that Herb o' Grace as will help him and not hinder on the Road. Even the Cordials he is better without, let alone the Purges. Let him go Content with a little Pomander Box full of some sweet Savoury Memory, or a Lotion that shall help tired Eyes to see again, even so far as Heaven.

"It would be very Well also if he that is dedicate to Poverty should never know Youth, but should be born into the world Old. It is said that in a crowd of Children at Play one may pick the several parts each shall follow in his Life—may say, Here is the Man of Law, here the Priest, there the Soldier leads already his forlorn Hope with a Whistle of Willow-wood; and there also are those who carry, as it were, Wings sheathed under their little Jackets; soon to be Spread. And it would seem very Well if, even as a Child, the Son of Poverty might wear the grey and still Mien of Years, might walk among his fellows withdrawn, without fellowship, an Age in Little, speaking not even to his Comrades of the Wings. For They are as if One filled a glass Vessel with unsullied Water, and bore it back, and cast it into the Fountain from which it ran, not more pure; but the Son of Poverty should know nothing of beginnings; the end should comfort him; and in his heart there should never be any Houseroom for the thoughts of Youth.

"Yet, O Pitiful, how to know the seasons and the times of his Denial? They are commonly battering at him, these Thoughts. Riots of rainbow Things peep in at his Soul's Windows, rustle in the eaves of it, nest in the thatch like Sparrows—a multitude of little breathing bodies, and of nights he knows them there. Others there

are that keep a watch on him with great mild eyes, scuttle round his corners in a Wind, nibble the Moonwort at his sill, and stand ready for ever to bolt into his Soul like a Coney into a Burrow, and there bide. He can shut up against these winged, and furry-footed Things, these Gypsy Troops, and think it no more than Justice, even if they do cry in the Cold. But suppose there should plead at his Door some holy fruitful Thought, riding on Humility, led by Patience, soon to be delivered to his Salvation; shall he tell her to go to the Ox and the Ass, since there is no room for her in his Inn?

"The Doors of Youth swing on an easy hinge, his Windows have no Shutters to keep out birds; his bedfellows go in and out, and the sharers of his Cup. What is that Cup, O Son of Poverty, that thou art mindful of it? Take on thy tongue the Crust of the Loaf, be content with a little Bread. The Wine is his. As for thee, thou shalt partake in one Kind only of Life's present Sacrament. Take, eat, fill thy mouth with Dust.

"Yet once more says a winged Thought, chattering like a Swallow, Why is Youth despised of Wisdom, as if the Old alone might enter into any excellent Heritage? God is named Eternal, and of Everlasting; the words taste to us of Age, the bitter salt of Time. But He has no Time. He is Alpha and Omega, the immortal Beginning no less than the divine End. Bud and Fruit are equal in His sight. He is the home and the homecoming, and He sees the dawn of dawn and calls it very good. Youth only comes with Scales, weighing justly this with that; the Sea on the breast of a swimmer in the sun against riches, the heave of a strong Horse under the thighs against Honours, the sound of soft Breath in the Night-time against the Kingdoms of the Earth. But have no part in him, Follower of Poverty; stuff thine Ears, look aside. Rose-white he is, and very Quick; he will throw Flower-meal in thine Eyes, make thee lose Sight of Her that thou pursuest. And to no Profit, for he will not stay with thee. He is never to be tamed, though he eat perforce out of the same Platter. He will go to Another, and thy House of Days shall be left to thee desolate. Therefore chuse Poverty, for in Life she will be true of Heart to thee; and in the Grave whose Arms shouldst thou lie in at ease but hers?"

Mr. Sampson read over what he had lately written and was minded to tear it up, feeling himself a false prophet and a cheated philosopher; inasmuch as he had started out to bless Poverty and remained to curse her. He called to Malachi for another rushlight. Malachi reminded him that he had already used three; the follower of Poverty looked but sourly at his servant—said he'd be thanked to do what he was bid for once in a way without so many words.

"I think you be getting a flux from drinking of watered ale, you be that fretty. I'll

make a posset for ye to-night and bring it to the loft. It'll be no care. I had a peck o' bran of Sweetly to make a mash for the mare, and it'll be as easy to do for two of ye as for one."

Mr. Sampson lost his irritation in anxiety. "What did you tell Sweetly you wanted the bran for?"

"Maybe I told 'm you was breeding conies for their fur," said Malachi briskly, going out and shutting the door. Mr. Sampson pinched his dip and returned to his book, having a wish to do some justice to Poverty, his mistress, without further delay. For delays are dangerous.

"O happy Pursuit," he wrote with a heavier face than fitted his philosophy, "O happy Pursuit, of so companionable a Lady. And blessed Disciple, who alone is Safe in the world, who is fenced about with Wants and Lacks like a Sheep secure in Fold. . ." Here, chancing to look up at the uncurtained window while sucking the feather of his quill for a flavour of inspiration, he had a vivid sense that someone had been looking in at him.

Such impressions are common enough to those who sit alone of nights in silent houses; but the impression of any flitting face seen horridly through green bottle glass like the face of a drowned corpse through water could never be common. Mr. Sampson, besides, had plenty of causes for real anxiety. He carefully sanded what he had written, wiped his pen, laid off his shoes, took a poker, and went out into the night.

It was a grey night. The wind that swept the old house was heavy and wet enough, one would have thought, to be visible like a surf. The forest was roaring like a sea for miles. Behind the low clouds was the glimmer of a moon, and such a company of shadows streamed through the garden as the scud streamed by above that it looked like the bed of a river. It was a haunted night. Mr. Sampson, as he shut the door stealthily, felt that by the simple act he was far removed from his fellows, marooned on some grey and reeling star. He tightened his grip on the poker and started out by the rhubarb bed, where a few great leaves still heaved dryly in the gale.

There was nothing there, nothing by the wall, nothing in the rotting arbour but a drove of dead leaves that rushed out past his feet as he entered and startled him absurdly. Nothing about the stables or the dim growth of wilding currant and barren raspberries. He thought the ghostly face must have been an owl's, and was glad he had said nothing of his alarms. He had lately been taken with so many alarms that Anthony, wearied of being continually and quite uselessly hidden in the corn bin or the bedtester, rebelled, and laughed his host to silence. But Mr. Sampson was never

wholly at his ease, and at most times was ready to see a soldier's coat in every red leaf, and a file of grenadiers among the artichokes. This time he went all around the house, and found nothing.

There remained only the little enclosure where Malachi grew his pot herbs between four low walls of mouldering brick. He opened the creaking door. The draught took the skirts of his coat and blew them over his head. And at the same moment someone snatched him round the waist, and yelled—or seemed to yell—"I have un."

The poker was jerked from his hand, but he stuck out his foot by instinct. His assailant tripped and fell, but hung on with fingers like a crab's claws. Mr. Sampson, of course, fell with him. And they both rolled into a lavender bush, fighting like wild beasts.

Since his childhood Michael Sampson had never felt a hand in anger, any more than he had ever known lips in love; here he was in a death grip. A hard chest heaved against his own, hard shoulders met his blind blows, and to the grasp of those arms someone of twice his strength might have yielded. He felt his wind go, knew his ribs might go in another minute. Just then one of the arms loosened, and he had half a breath from it; but it was to dash upward, tear coat and shirt, and catch at his throat. The breath helped him less than rage—rage not so much at the danger as the indignity, for the hand was hot and foul; and he doubted if Malachi could mend his garments after such rough handling. . . He also, in a very passion of fury, felt for a throat, found one by some miracle, dug in his thumbs, and held on. If one had greater strength, the other had read anatomy. There was agony in that hold if he could keep to it. He kept to it, panting in the dark like a dog; but the struggles and blows of his enemy ceased very suddenly. A light flashed in Mr. Sampson's eyes, a voice cried shrilly: "That ain't the one. . ." Something ran squeaking in the darkness, and the man with whom he was fighting lay still as if he were dead, with his head in the lavender bush.

Mr. Sampson knelt slowly upright on his foe's stomach and exclaimed in a trembling voice: "God have mercy, have I killed him?"

There was no answer. He got to his feet with a difficulty he did not expect. He could see nothing, not even the details of that dark lump at his feet. At all costs he must have a light, and see the face of the man he had killed. He set out to fetch one.

He had never known it such a long way to the house, nor the path so rough. And half-way there—it was by the rhubarb, to be precise—he began to wonder why he must fetch a dip when he carried one with him; he could feel the familiar warmth of tallow dripping on his hand. He opened the door with the other hand at last, for fear

of what Malachi would say if he greased the latch; and the tallow seemed to be everywhere.

What seemed a blaze of light met him, and Anthony's voice, crying out. The cry steadied him with a sort of shock and astonishment; he looked down at himself, and saw that he was dripping with blood; it ran from his shoulder and arm, dripped to his hand, and from there to Malachi's scoured boards. Mr. Sampson saw this with a sinking of the heart and tried to express regret to Malachi, who had appeared with great suddenness at his side, but could not manage it. He only said foolishly: "I've killed a man and left him in the lavender bush."

"My God, Michael," cried Anthony, who had appeared on the other side, "are ye sure he's not killed you?"

Mr. Sampson was not sure. He was busy wondering about a good many things. He could not remember lying down, for instance, yet there was the ceiling over him; nor taking off his shirt, yet there it was on the floor. Nor had he noticed Malachi leave the room, yet there was Malachi reporting to Anthony that he'd hunted all over the yerb garden a good twenty minutes and never quick nor dead could he find; which made him wonder very much how a dead man could run away. He wondered to find Anthony bending over him so anxiously; he felt his hands, very light and gentle; sometimes they tickled and sometimes they hurt most confoundedly. He heard him say it was only a cut, but long enough for a tailor, and he'd lost pints, but it would keep down the fever. He heard Malachi say, in a shaking, unknown voice: "He's took what was for you."

"Yes. But not by any purpose of mine, man, God knows."

"Like enough. But if harm had come to him along of you, by God, sir, I'd have led you to Betsworth on the end of a rope and gave you up myself."

"There would have been no need," said Mr. Oakshott very haughtily.

Thereafter Michael fell to thinking of the philosophy book, and that the arms of holy Poverty were warm and strong out of reason.

But they were Anthony's arms, who was half leading, half carrying him up the stairs.

"Lord," said Mr. Sampson indignantly, "but I can walk, I thank ye."

Anthony seemed at that to hold him a bit tighter. Michael, who had opened his eyes to protest, shut them again.

"Ye're light enough," said Mr. Oakshott gruffly.

Mr. Sampson looked up from the pillow. "Are you sure he was gone?"

"Certain sure. Out of the bush and over the wall like a cricket. There's no blood on your hands but your own, Mick."

"A pity," murmured the philosopher, upon the brink of sleep, "a great pity. . . There'd have been one less to trouble you."

Perhaps it was in sleep that he felt the ghost of a caress on his forehead, saw his friend's face again with that hurt and shame in it which he could not quite interpret. Sleep plays odd tricks of hiding and revealing. . . But it was a happy sleep. For if pleasant are the wounds of a friend, wounds taken for a friend may also have a sweetness of their own.

His convalescence may be said to have begun the day after that sleep, when he woke untroubled, and with very little recollection of what had happened to him. They might guess again as to that enemy; he could not help them; he had not seen the man's face, nor so much as distinguished the blow of the knife. Malachi did most of the guessing, for Mr. Oakshott was in one of his silent fits, though constantly about Michael. Michael was well looked after—lacked nothing, as his friend remarked, but polite society.

Perhaps this was why he presently wanted to know if Michael were going to accept that invitation lately given him.

Mr. Sampson, sitting wrapped in his friend's cloak for lack of a gown, and looking somewhat fragile, simply stared and said in his simplicity: "Bless the man, and how can I, with naught to go in?"

"Would you wish to go?" Tony had a queer look in his eyes.

Mr. Sampson looked at him and answered sincerely: "I'd give my soul."

Tony began to laugh, not very merrily. "You might take me with you, you know, as your guest. For our appearance—we might borrow something."

"Borrow?"

"Ay. If you do not mind the risk."

"Risk?" Mr. Sampson was reduced to vain repetitions.

"That you'll get shot by some fool with no sense of humour. But 'tis a small one, and I observe you take such handsomely. The real risk lies in a bad fit. Though we'd pick our man."

"Are ye quite mad?"

Tony, all youth surely dancing in his light wild eyes, said: "Very like. But oh, Michael, let us be mad together."

And Mr. Sampson, who had never done a mad thing in his life, felt reason and commonsense scuttle out of him like rats of a foundering ship. He said: "Well?" and was lost.

Mr. Oakshott, still laughing, unfolded his plan. It was so very mad that it seemed to have a bedlam sort of logic in it. Or perhaps Mr. Sampson was lightheaded from

his hurt.

Chap. XI
Mr. Sampson is Fitted With a Coat

Flittermice, hedgehogs, owls and footpads—Mr. Sampson had hitherto only realised the night as a certain interruption of the philosophic day, given over to this sort of creature and notoriously noxious to mankind. There was a poison abroad at night, working in moon rays and dew, dealing of rheums and frenzies, and wise people shut their windows on it. But lately his enterprises had been carried on of necessity under cover of the dark, and he began to see night for what it was—day's medicine, love's cloak, the harbour of romance. Night winds were homely to him now, and the magic moon but a taper to light Adventure's lanthorn. It was a new world he had discovered, a virgin hemisphere of time. But even Columbus, if he had lived long in America, might have grown tired of it. And Mr. Sampson, as he sat invisible in the lower branches of a holm oak, under solemn oath not to come down under any circumstances, yielded to a brief longing for the sweet reasonableness, the common righteousness, of noon. Their present quest was not a reasonable one. It was, as Mr. Sampson feared, equally far from righteousness. But this follower of Poverty was fallen very low; and his greatest fear was that it should prove unsuccessful.

The day was Tuesday, the time seven of a clear evening. On the morrow Diantha would hold her little fête at Shortsands. But in a famous or infamous house lying some miles down the road beyond Betsworth there was also an assembly to be held by a very great lady. Thither would be going all the country bucks. But what did Mr. Oakshott care for the country bucks, their coming or their going? Less than nothing. His concern was with the London road, which crossed the Betsworth road about half-way between that village and Shortsands. You have them in order so, like beads on a very winding string—Mr. Sampson's house, deep in the woods, the turning to Shortsands, the London Road, Betsworth, and then the mansion. Down the London road, to that mansion, perhaps some real bucks would be posting by chaise. If they came, they would come for that occasion with full portmantles and a diversity of raiment like Solomon's in his glory. Mr. Oakshott hoped they would.

He was waiting in the ditch to borrow some of it.

He had not stirred from the ditch for the last hour except to crawl back and ask Michael if he were cold. Michael was not too far gone in loyalty to feel, at the very

bottom of his heart, that this was a little inconsistent. He was not cold. He wore the knitted waistcoat, the grey shawl, and had in his pocket the half of a hot brick in an old stocking leg. Perhaps these homely precautions helped him to wonder, as time went on, what he was doing in that galley, or, more properly, in the boughs of that holm oak.

The son of Poverty was no longer free. He was bound to the opinions of another, the deeds of another, was racked with fears and hopes not his own. As he walked on his lonely way, youth's chariot wheels had gone over him, as he sometimes imagined, with a definite crunch. Sometimes he used that simile. Sometimes he considered his own soul as a pool, troubled suddenly by an angel, who had stirred up much sediment and whole schools of the rainbow trout of dreams and memories. One such, persistent as a perch after a worm, hung himself, as it were, continually upon Mr. Sampson's hook.

He remembered himself as a child sitting in a dark room of heavy-smelling air. He was sure of that child because, looking down at the shadow that was himself, he saw that its small legs were clad in grey yarn and snuff-coloured homespun; and these had been his wear ever since. If he put down his hands now they would meet and shrink from the same ugly rough touch as they had some quarter-century before. His man's spirit seemed to cling to that child with a pity not all his own. Perhaps it was his mother's. She was in the shadow-room with him—the shadow-mother with the shadow-child.

There was a shadow-gentleman, too, talking with her.

Fine gentlemen still came to see her in those days; they came generally in bitterness or grief. One, but he was very young, had wept. And that had enraged the watching child more than reproach or indignation. He must defend her from those tears, even if they were a fool's. He fell upon the young gentleman with his fists, and was beaten for it after by his father; but very lightly.

The gentleman of this memory was not so young. He was indignant, and very fine. The child crept from the window to feel his coat and finger his sword. He moved the little fingers gently, with an ungentle laugh. "That's not for you, Anne Holles' son," he said. He took up a stick that was in a corner and closed the small hand on that; Mr. Sampson remembered no more, for his father came into the dream, and found him standing erect as a little soldier, with a yard-measure held at the present.

That time it was his mother who had wept. He thought his father comforted her, but was not sure. He was not sure of anything his father had ever said or done; he only saw, as in a glass darkly, his beautiful lion-like face, his thick bright hair, the eyes

that shut for ever before they ceased to be a lover's. Yet it was possible for his son to live to be ashamed of him.

Other memories he had, the vague suns and moons of childhood; stars above a forest of chimney-cowls, and the voice of his shadow-mother, telling him how those stars looked like silver roses in the high branches of the trees at home; girls who sold posies and lavender, and other things along with them; an old lame man, who kept linnets in little wicker cages, and lived in his palsy surrounded, as it were jealously, with the constant flutter of vain wings; boys at play in narrow places, leaping over posts, dabbling in mud puddles. He leaped and dabbled along with them until the voice of his mother called him away. That voice spoke to him, though he was so little, of the high duty of giving the heart worthily, of holding love and friendship no less than a religion. Mr. Sampson could hear it now, and could have wept to listen. He looked at the half-seen shape of his first friend in the ditch, where he crouched, a shadow among shadows, and thought that other gentle shadow would be satisfied.

Cramp in the legs interrupted Mr. Sampson's dreams, and the voice of his friend, asking solicitously if he were cold.

Mr. Sampson denied any sensation of cold through his chattering teeth, and asked who it was that had passed along the road a short time before.

Mr. Oakshott said a farmer. "I was all but stopping him, he rode such a good nag; but I saw him clear against the sky, and he was a sucking Falstaff—we'd have gone abroad with tucks in our coats and running strings in our small-clothes."

Mr. Sampson was rendered a little uneasy by the use of the possessive pronoun. With a late twinge of reason, he said, "Tony, are you bent on this?"

Mr. Oakshott looked up through the dark glistering leaves. Lacking silk, he had masked himself in charcoal, and appeared like a promising young chimney-sweep. Michael Sampson recalled a certain remark about the goal of chimney-sweeps and golden lads; this one showed no sign of returning sanity. He answered curtly: "Yes."

"In the name of sense, I wonder why."

"I wish to pay back something, Michael."

Michael was silent a moment, and in the silence, nothing stirring but the leaves, they heard the faint noise of rolling wheels. Tony skipped back to his ditch; Michael tried to get a view of the road, but could not; he had to trust to his ears, and they were humming like tops.

Once heard, the noise came quickly nearer—a light carriage at a good pace. It changed to the grind of wheels and the plunge of a startled horse. A sharp voice shattered the evening's calm: "Stand away there, fellow. What d'ye want?"

"A word with you, sir."

"A word? Take notice, Antoine, that's what they all say. A word? I'll give ye a dozen. Leave go that horse and take yourself to hell, or——"

"Après vous. Take notice, sir, yourself, that I have you covered. And if the person on the back seat moves, I shall——"

"Tais-toi, Antoine. What, you villain?"

"—take measures, sir, to ensure his quietness."

Mr. Sampson's heart gave a bound like a buoy in a tideway; he felt a ring tighten round his neck like a noose. He had not believed that it would be necessary to make any show of force. . . "'Are you bent on this, Tony?'" Tony seemed bent on it to the risk of their necks.

Tony's voice went on: "I do assure you, sir, that you have no cause for uneasiness."

"Ye're very kind."

"This is a joke, sir."

"Take notice, Antoine—no, none of 'em has ever said it was a joke. My thanks, sir. I'd scarce have recognized it for such without your information."

"Sir, I believe you." Mr. Oakshott spoke with an increasing sweetness. "You are right. You are probably little in the habit of recognising 'em. But to set you fully at rest—this joke is not concerned with your life, your honour, or your valuables. It is concerned only with a trifling loan."

"That's what they all say, Antoine. Well, sir?"

"The loan of your portmantle for a matter of two days, excluding all papers, coin, or articles of jewellery."

A silence. Then: "Yet you are armed, sir, with pistols?"

"Merely to ensure your attention, sir." Mr. Oakshott was very courteous.

When he in the chaise spoke again, it was in a different voice, and almost musingly: "Take notice, Antoine, observe. This is something original. I'd give much to see under that ingenuous soot. . . What's toward? I suppose ye will not tell?"

"Sir, I am not the only one concerned, or you should be treated with the confidence you deserve."

"Take notice, Antoine, a lady in the case. Sure to be a lady in every case, especially a bad one. . . Ye're not Shrewsbury, are ye?"

"I've not the honour."

"Nor Des Landes?"

"I've not the dishonour."

"Ye've a long tongue. May I ask why ye picked on me to share your, ah, joke?"

"Sir," replied Mr. Oakshott, "I saw, as you stood up in your chaise to observe

the road, that we were much of a figure."

Another silence. "Sir," said he in the chaise at last, "being on t'other side of forty, I must take that as a compliment."

Mr. Sampson, struggling among leaves, had a notion that they were bowing to each other.

"It's a very good figure," said Mr. Oakshott modestly.

"Naturally, sir, I am inclined to agree with you. . . And you design to dress it in my clothes?"

"For one occasion only. You will find them here, unhurt, on Thursday morning, I give you my honour."

"How do I know ye've any to give?"

"They say, sir, that there is honour even among thieves. And that I have no design to be."

"Take notice, Antoine, that our gentlemanly tobyman has a neat turn of speech. 'Tis uncommon. . . And I suppose you have guessed, sir, that it may be devilish inconvenient for me to have my clothes borrowed? I see you have a dislike for the stronger word."

"I should suggest, sir, that the quicker the wrench is over the less you will feel it."

He in the chaise took the hint. "Antoine, unstrap the valise."

The man obeyed, and swung it down into the road. Mr. Oakshott remarked that the French made very good servants under a wise master. "And that I take you to be, since you bow so well to necessity."

"Let me tell you, to nothing else, young sir. And I'd have seen you hung, as you'll doubtless live to be, before you'd have had so much as a handkerchief off me, only that I was fool enough to ride with my pistols unloaded."

Mr. Oakshott considered it a grave error.

"As I've found it." Rage seemed to be rising in him against all affectation of calm. "And if I ever have the luck to meet you again, by God, I'll know you——"

"It is not likely," replied Mr. Oakshott with an air of virtue that would have exasperated an archbishop, "that you'll ever meet me in the company ye're bound for."

And that seemed to touch the man in the chaise like a thistle on a sore place; he would have leaped out, but was held back by his frightened servant.

"Drive on," said Mr. Oakshott.

Michael heard again the grinding of wheels, mixed with a grateful farewell from the borrower and the oaths of the lender. All died out, mingling to one mutter of curses, wheels and the hoofs of a cantering horse on the Betsworth road.

Mr. Oakshott gathered up the portmantle and skipped into the woods like a rabbit, being anxious to get well away before moonrise.

In the length and width of the world of night the moon must have shown her blank, silvered countenance to strange things. But probably to nothing more strange than was going on in a lonely glade of that forest—a forlorn place, edged with a constant sigh of firs and inhabited of hares. These, safe under furze, were now watching with started eyes the antics of two young gentlemen in the midst of a patch of desolate moonshine, where they also showed like the stuff of moonshine. One was posturing gravely, a man all in a dream, in a coat of citron velvet worked in silver, beneath which were displayed an inch or so of the tails of a long knitted garment of grey worsted. The other, with a face as dirty as a sweep's, on his knees in the rime beside an open portmantle, was swearing bitterly because among all its rainbow spoils he could not find a pair of pearl-coloured stockings.

Chap. XII
And Appears in Society

Mr. Sampson had kept his own room while his shoulder healed; but when he was recovered of the worst of it, he insisted on returning to the loft. He had a liking for his blankets in the hay. The dried, rustling clover-heads and weedy stems of melilot gave him summer dreams; and the steady stars, unshaken by any passing winds, looked down kindly through the holes in the roof on a fellow-philosopher. The owls counted him one of themselves, dealt him balls of mouse-skin in the small hours, and stared at him nightly with their solemn eyes. And through the rotten flooring came the kind breath and savour of Periwinkle in the clean stall below. Here he betook himself at bedtime, with a hot drink for company if Malachi were in a good mood; here he fled by day, when the yoke of Poverty, his mistress, seemed too uneasy to be borne, and Malachi was counting out the dried beans for the morrow's pottage; here he and Tony talked for hours as young men will, Mr. Sampson humble in the business of learning, and teaching more than he knew. And here he came to dress himself, with Malachi's help, one evening of a Wednesday.

The loft looked ready for a witch dance, with a ring of little rushlights stuck in pots and bottles, and the lanthorn overhead, a steady moon among draughty stars. A cracked mirror was against the wall, and in front of this Mr. Sampson stood and slowly turned himself about.

Our man of reflection had here a pleasant one to look at; a fair gentleman, middling young, of a slim and scholarly figure, very well dressed in a coat of lavender cloth, lavender silk breeches, and pale canary stockings that went with the work on his waistcoat. The things were Mr. Oakshott's choice, and had pleased him, though he said it was a footman's choice in hose. They also pleased the philosophic mind, in spite of a secret longing for the citron velvet, which Mr. Oakshott had banned as gaudy. "Yet I think," said Mr. Sampson, "that they hang a little loose on me."

Malachi took a brass pin out of his mouth, inserted it somewhere in the small of his master's back, and said there, he was tight enough now, and if it was a full dinner, he'd be best to save his buttons. "As for the shoulders, you be wan and peaked yet, and they sit no looser than on any gentleman after an illness."

The disciple of Poverty put his hands in the pockets and said something pettishly about a sloven of a tailor. Having forgotten that neither pockets nor tailor were his

own. Malachi's old eyes twinkled.

"They be all alike, the needlemen. . . Many's the fine gentleman I've helped to dress. . . Many's the prank I've helped 'em in. . . Sit you down, Master Michael. . . Sit you down, lad, and I'll do your hair for 'ee."

Still a man in a dream, Michael sat himself down in front of the cracked glass, and Malachi threw a cloth over his shoulders. A whiteness grew on his head.

"There's little left of the white flour, Malachi."

"Enough for this, sir."

"I—I took a little the other day," said Mr. Sampson guiltily, "but it would not stick."

"I know ye did. Ye come down with a face like a miller's. Sit still, and I'll do my best for ye. Ye'll look a gentleman, but maybe a bit old in the fashion. . . Miss Anne'd like the look of ye now, sir."

"It has been my comfort, Malachi, that she has not seen the look of me since I was a child."

"Ay. . . I mind my first look of ye. I'd gone up to town with the old master when Miss Anne was ill. He had you sent into the room to him, but it was long before he'd look at you. Miss Anne, he had her down by easy stages in the great carriage, in her black gown. . . But I brought you down with the trunks. Ay. When she died, the house came to you. They couldn't alter that. And your father, he was a lone man; you'd no kin in town. So I told old master I'd see to you. 'Twasn't fit Miss Anne's son should come to the gutter. There, Master Michael. You do look wholesome, though not bewtyful like your father. I be glad for that."

"Was he so, Malachi?"

"The most bewtyful face I ever see on a man," said Malachi, as if speaking of a platter on a shelf. "Stoop down while I set the ribbon. There. I be very old, but I've helped to dress a gentleman again for to take his pleasure."

Mr. Sampson's eyes prickled.

"And—stoop ye down, my lad—when you and Mr. Anthony take your wine with the others, don't ye water it. Don't ye water it. And don't ye sit dumb as a louse when the gentlemen tell their stories. You let yourself go in your speech as a gentleman should. I could tell you some fine fashionable swearing," said the old man wistfully, laying his wrinkled hand a moment on his master's arm and smoothing the sleeve, "but it'd be thirty years old or so, thirty years old."

Mr. Sampson laid his hand on Malachi's, over the soft stuff of the coat they had both forgotten was a stolen one. In all the years of his service it was the only caress he had ever given or taken. And when Mr. Oakshott came trailing up the ladder like

a great bat in his dark cloak, he seemed ashamed of it.

Michael had expected a reckless mood of his friend, gaiety and a gorgeousness that would have strained the resources of the portmantle to the utmost. He saw him in an almost plain suit of slate-grey satin, brightened only by the red heels to his shoes and a single red ribbon. His dark face had no colour. He was grave. He spoke, gently and with simplicity, praising Michael's appearance and the touch of powder. Michael felt that though they had lived intimate amidst a sea of danger as two souls on a desert island, yet he had no knowledge of this man whom he loved, whose shoulder brushed his knee as they went down the ladder.

As they had only one horse, and as it would have been undignified on this occasion for one to have ridden her by turns while the other panted behind like a coach-dog, they were obliged to walk to Shortsands, carrying the lanthorn—which they would leave in the hedge—and choosing the driest paths known to Mr. Sampson. It was the one drop of bitter that night in Malachi's cup, that they should have walked away.

He stood and saw them go. And Mr. Sampson, looking back at the turn of the path, saw the old barn leaking rushlight through a score of cracks, and the old man standing darkling in the door. Then these also were gone, and he was foot-free in the adventurous half of time.

The night was mild, not windy, yet full of a hundred little rustling airs. Each tree seemed to have its own small breeze hid in it like a dryad. The smaller stars were lost in haze, through which the larger ones showed irised like moons. Mr. Sampson walked silently ahead, carrying the lanthorn, and Mr. Oakshott followed, in the clothes which he had stolen on the highway, as solemn as if he had been going to a church service. Mr. Sampson looked back at him once. He was cloaked to the chin and his eyes were on the stars.

That thought, sentinel of dust and ashes in the soul, which stands always ready to stretch out a gaunt hand and touch us, touched Mr. Sampson with a vision of the onrush of Time, the implacable machine, the relentless river. Many gods have been sacrificed to, but not Time; the universe is his sacrifice, and from it he chooses his own offerings—a rose, a world, or the life of a sparrow or a man. His friend was there behind him. He could hear him, see him, feel him. They were close as two straws in a current; at any hour they might feel the pull of the eddy that should separate them and at the last cast them on different shores. It is a thought not to be borne in silence, and he spoke.

"Anthony."

Mr. Oakshott came back from that far country that is always ready to take in

youth, and answered; "Michael."

"What do you think of?"

"I was busy wondering, I think, how long this will last."

"What?"

"This." Anthony swung forward a step and slipped his arm through Michael's.

Said Mr. Sampson after a moment, making an assertion; "But you must have scores of friends."

"Not many. None like you. Do you think your sort grows under every thorn bush?—that a man finds a dozen in his life to do for him what you have done for me?"

"I should have thought so," said Mr. Sampson plainly, "for it's little enough. But friends ye must have had, now?"

"They're estranged."

"I see. Politics. . . But, Tony, for your own sake, ye must approach them. The journey to France——"

Mr. Oakshott spoke hurriedly: "Michael——"

"Yes, lad?"

"This must end soon. I know it. Such things always do, good things, beautiful things. Let it go to its own end, Michael, unless you tire of it. Let it end of itself. I swear it shall not endanger you any more than it has done already. And it will not be long till it's over, you know."

Said the philosopher, clapping down the lanthorn in a great heat among the hazel roots: "Am I the one that's likely to end it, when I put my neck in a noose, sitting on the cover of the violet bed, three minutes after I'd first set eyes on you?"

"No. . . And God forgive me for letting you go on with it." He repeated softly: "But it will not be for long."

"What d'ye mean?" snapped the philosopher irritably.

"Hush."

They stood still. Mr. Sampson, bidden by a gesture to listen, listened intently. Every bush rustled fitfully in a wind. But there was a rustling behind them that came between the pauses of the wind when even the few dead oak leaves on the upper twigs were still. He said under his breath: "Hares?"

"No. . . Someone who follows me. Every time, almost, that I go out I go in company. I am followed."

Said Mr. Sampson through his teeth: "By whom?"

"I don't know. 'Tis not worth noticing. The ten pounds has done it, Michael—a high price for me. Let us hope whoever it is will profit by it when it's won, and begin

life honestly on the price of my——"

A sudden wordless sound from Mr. Sampson stopped him. They took up the lanthorn and went on once more silently. Once Michael cried out as if he had been hurt: "Is there anyone living who'd sell so much for ten pounds?"

"For tenpence, my friend," said young Mr. Oakshott gently.

The great gates at Shortsands stood open, but Michael knew a shorter way to the house—up a bank of dead fern, a foot on the leaning branch of an ancient yew, and over the wall. He took that way, with a pause and a glance, offerings to memory, the goddess and guardian of that place. For it was here that a girl-child used to wait for him as he crept down the wall with his clumsy pockets full of moss, eggs, newts, young frogs, chaffinches, mushrooms, willow-flutes—anything that might claim her eager interest and her pretty thanks. It was here under the shadow of the yew that she taught him how to make conserves of rose and violet with two bricks, a pinch of sugar, and the petals of the crushed flowers. The bricks were there now. He set his foot on one of them as he cleared the wall, and the wind whispered in half-living violet leaves.

The park was a breathing-place of shadows and seemed to flow past them with the stillness of water. Everything slept.

The lighted windows in the house struck across that stillness with the effect of a sound, and the opening door crashed like a drum.

Stillness entered into them. If this had been a joke, it was one no longer. Each one, in his own way, approached a holy place.

Mr. Sampson announced himself easily. He had expected trembling knees and an unruly tongue. He heard himself instead speaking leisurely to a staring servant and was as leisurely in being helped out of the cloak that was not his. Even the murmur of voices in the withdrawing-room did not shake him. He felt very quiet, quiet as a dream.

That door was opened. They were announced: "Mr. Michael Sampson and Mr. Anthony of London." For another moment the quiet held. Then it broke, and the spell that had held them.

Aunt Marian dropped a pack of cards.

Mr. Holles dropped his snuff-box.

Diantha, a slip of spring in green and white, went pale as the tucker of her gown, but did not tremble. Michael faced her with a steady warning, but her eyes went past his. She saw no one but Mr. Anthony of London. He entered with his head high; and here was a crown for it. Stepping into the room, he stepped into a kingdom. She waited for him, and he went to her. Why not? thought Mr. Sampson; to whom else

should he go? Their gaze met for a moment in silence, and Mr. Sampson fancied there went past him the rustle of wet wind in a truss of straw, the cooing of pigeons in the old dove-house. . . But this time it was Mr. Oakshott who kissed her hand. His lips were as pale as her little cold fingers, and his knee all but brushed the carpet as he bent.

Then she trembled a little.

Chap. XIII
Mr. Oakshott Makes a Request

"Whether all my summer goes
With the rose,
If it fade or if there lingers
One pure petal like a tear,
One last sweet of all the year
In my fingers,—

Whether all my beauties be
Like a tree
Quick in bloom and quickly over,
Or if one green bough shall bring
Shade of eve and scent of spring
To a lover,—

Whether all my heart grow still,
As it will,
Roofed with dust, and yet remember
All the dreaming noons it knew,
Song and silence, star and dew,
Flame and ember,—"

The fresh voice of a girl, daughter of a guest there, singing of love, sorrow, memory. And Mr. Anthony of London, face to face with that other girl, who as yet knew none of these things.

They were in a recess at one end of the room, in view, yet apart; a tall yellow jar was on the floor, with sprays of moonwort in it; there was a window behind them, and moonlight showed like dust in the candlelight on the curtains and the sill.

"Why did you come?"

Diantha was pale, and her eyes were troubled. He answered her in the language of his time: "To see again, madam, what I had seen once," but he was as serious as she. And so utterly was the child-woman forgetful of herself and thinking of his danger that she never blushed to be reminded of that first meeting.

She said rather piteously: "I think you must be mad. I think my cousin must be mad, too, to allow you to come. You are in very grave danger, sir. You must know it. I cannot dream why you should risk so much to come here this evening."

"Madam, if things had been happier with me, it would have been the greatest of that happiness to dare to hope that I might some day teach you why."

Her lips trembled. "The fine gentlemen in town talk like that, sir, but I am a country girl at heart, and it hurts me. It hurts me that you should think this is the time for compliments, when you are in danger for being—what you are, and Michael for being your friend."

His face went white, and his voice roughened. He swore suddenly: "But, by God, I'm in earnest."

"Yes, sir?" Her clear eyes were fixed on his face. Her voice was a mere breath, wondering. He looked away from her; his hand was on the curtain and a thread of moonlight lay across it like a scar; he looked at that.

"If it had not been too late for me to think of happiness, I might have found its height in that task, even if I had failed. As it is——"

"Yes, sir?"

"—as it is, will you not believe that I came in all honesty to see you again, as a man riding along a road by which he may—by which he will never return—might look into a garden and see a rose growing, and ride back, and look at it again? That is all. He can look at it, you know, without hope. It will grow and blossom, but not for him. Yet it may be his in memory."

They were both breathlessly silent, poor things. Sang the girl at the other end of the room:

"Rose-white, rose-white is she,
But on her breast
One rose laid silently
Reddens the rest.

Rose-white, rose-white she stands,
Perfect, apart,
Yet in her tender hands
Reddens my heart,—"

He said helplessly, under his breath: "My white rose!" She listened with her hands clasped, like a child learning a new lesson.

She said: "Life—I don't know much of it—it seems a very sad thing. But if I

were a man, riding along that road of yours, a road of such sadness, such glory, I do not think I should have a long memory for flowers."

"For one flower." He was speaking very rapidly and eagerly. "And that road, it takes a man so far, so far from the rose he's looked at. Diantha—Diantha—give me one thing for my memory. Give me the assurance——"

"Yes, sir?"

"—of remembrance."

"Blanche-Rose, Blanche-Rose, come near
Not in day's light,
But in some lost and dear
Dream of the night.

Blanche-Rose, Blanche-Rose, the dark
Folds us so deep,
And Sorrow like the lark
Sings in her sleep.

Blanche-Rose, Blanche-Rose, lean down,
Lower thy head.
Song has her courts: we crown
Silence instead.

Sweet was our sun, we say;
Sweeter it seems
You that are Love's by day
Love me by dreams."

"Is that so much to ask—remembrance?"

"I shall never forget you, I think."

"God bless you. And you believe me?"

"I should always believe you."

"After to-night, I may never see you again."

"No."

"I shall go on. Because I must. But my heart's where the rose is—safe there. Will you keep it safe?"

"What shall I say? What am I to say? I do not know, I do not understand—"

"But I understand. I have no time—no time to teach you. It's of your sweet

kindness you've listened to me so long. And you will not forget?"

"I have told you—never."

"And you will take—what I leave with you?"

She was still, scarcely breathing. Her answer, when it came, was almost inaudible: "Give it to me."

He said again: "God bless you." His look set him on his knees at her feet, his face in her hands, her breath on his hair. But he had not moved. She bent her head, held out her hands in a little unconscious gesture of acceptance, and left him without another word.

Of all in the room, Mr. Sampson was the only one who saw and read that gesture; in that acceptance, the child died. He watched her as she moved slowly away. Her head was still drooped, as if it had been too heavily crowned. He scarcely heard his uncle's voice for a minute, or what he was saying. Mr. Sampson managed the rocks and the roughness of Poverty's road well enough, but these soft places threatened to engulf him. He came back to himself with an effort.

"This is very pleasant to me, Michael." Mr. Holles spoke with a warmth that perhaps covered an uneasy conscience. "I hope there will be many more of such evenings for us. Having once come over your wall of pride, step across it more often. Each step will be easier than the last, my dear lad."

Mr. Sampson thought the wall was down, levelled by kindness.

"A man is judged by his friends. I like your taste in them." Mr. Holles looked at Mr. Anthony of London, who was looking at Diantha. "Is he a young man of property?" continued Diantha's father, with a smile in his eyes.

Michael said he thought so, but there had been some disagreement with his friends.

"I see. Plenty such in these times, nephew. Let us be glad we're quiet people, and can keep out of it all." To himself he was saying: "I wonder what Anne would say if she saw Michael with that patient face. Poor lad. Am I much to blame? I must make it up to him. . . I suppose that young spark yonder lent him the clothes. Where in the name of all astonishment did he pick up with the like of that?"

He asked the last aloud in another form.

Mr. Sampson was taken with a cough. The picking up had been so very literal. But he was saved from answering by a reverend gentleman in a wig like a powder-puff who came up and claimed his attention. Mr. Sampson had used a tag or two of Latin in his talk that evening, and had used it with discriminating taste. His reverence thought he might help him with half a line of Horace that had slipped his memory; he had been leading up to it, in fact, in talk with a lady, and at the crucial instant it had

escaped him. "Confounded disconcerting," said the clergyman, wiping his face, which was round and dimpled.

"Amor," began Mr. Sampson obligingly, but was interrupted. Aunt Marian had insisted that the homely company should taste her currant wine, and, with some laughter and joking among old friends, a servant was carrying about a tray of little glasses. Mr. Sampson took one. Across the room, Aunt Marian raised her glass to him, with more than a smile shaking the corners of her mouth; she had disliked him as a child, had never wished to see him, but something in the man's face had won her. He bowed to her. His reverend friend said, "Yes?" with a sort of amiable impatience.

"Amor," he began again, and once more stopped. Anthony had taken one of the little glasses across the room and was offering it to Diantha.

Some accident, which most likely lay in Mr. Sampson's eyes, drew the light of the room to that little glass of common sweets and juices. It glowed. The candlelight danced in it like a fire. It was a burning wine, full of flame and sun and the drained red of roses, that Anthony carried in that cup. The bushes in the kitchen garden could never have grown such a vintage, and who should have trodden it out? White feet, thought Mr. Sampson in his dream, coming from a sea shower and heralded with doves' feathers. He could feel wings that brushed his soul as they passed, and thought a light rested on two faces there. It is the pure in heart shall see the god. But the light changed. Diantha held out her hand. Whatever was in that cup, she took it of him.

"Go on," said the friendly clergyman. "'Amor,' you know," and he jerked him gently by the sleeve.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Sampson, "but I can't get beyond it."

Chap. XIV
And Mr. Sampson a Confession

How did the evening go? Mr. Sampson never knew. A sort of mist was on his soul and his sight, through which he saw only a few things clearly; those two young faces, for instance, the dearest to him in the world, that little wineglass shining suddenly like a Grail. He thought, if this were society, it was a kind and gentle place. He did not know how well he carried himself in his stolen silks, for he had forgotten that he wore them, or that they were stolen; or with what a quiet wit he talked. Mr. Holles could not be kind enough, and the others took their cue from the host. If there were a few surprised whispers, Mr. Sampson did not hear them, and the surprise was a compliment. Poverty, who had fed him husks so long that he might well have turned swine, should have been proud of her disciple. All thought him a very pleasant fellow, and that he had come in still prettier company.

The others were at cards, and he was looking at a book of engravings when he heard a whisper that shook him out of his dream.

"Oh, Michael, why did you let him come?"

"My dear," he answered stealthily, "how could I prevent him? He'd set his heart on it." She was silent, and he went on; "And I do not think, on my soul, that the danger's so great here as it is at home."

"Don't talk so loud, Michael. Danger? I think you can't know how great it is." Mr. Sampson thought ruefully that he had cause to know it very well. "At any moment a word, a question, even a silence, may make someone curious. And there are so many tales about. Take him away. Make some excuse and go. He is your guest; he will leave with you. But take him away if—if you have any pity."

Her voice rent him; he began to hate what they had done and their name for it. Truth goes best in thick garments, and the word joke or jest, defined in some dictionaries as an illusion, is one of the stoutest shifts that Truth can find to hide in; but Mr. Sampson began to doubt if this particular shift were thick enough for the facts behind it. He stared at his book, at a regiment of little Cupids that marched across the page towards towered Troy, bent on stealing away the arms of Paris; he tried to look as if Diantha had been talking to him about them. He stole a look at Mr. Oakshott, who was solemnly dealing cards to the powder-puff clergyman. Take him away! Yes, but it was more easily said than done. Then Mr. Holles came up and

would talk with him again. He was not set free till the company rose from their cards and the gentlemen dispersed to smoke awhile. He went to look for Anthony then, and found Anthony looking for him. Whatever may have been in Mr. Oakshott's soul, the first words on his lips were: "Mick, how much money have you?"

Mr. Sampson felt in his stolen pockets and pulled out three-halfpence, which he showed secretly in the shadow of a curtain.

Mr. Oakshott showed a sixpence.

"That's all we have between us, then. I was a florin in debt to his reverence a half-hour back, and I thought you'd see my hair go grey, and me without powder. But the luck turned. I had my own back and this added to it."

"Then you've a half-crown."

"No," explained Mr. Oakshott serenely, "I hadn't the florin."

He pocketed the sixpence with a satisfied face, leaving Mr. Sampson unaccountably confused. But soon he had other causes of confusion.

Mr. Holles came up from behind them before they could say anything more, and drew them down the hall to the room he called his library, where there were some books and a great many tobacco pipes; the others followed slowly from the drawing-room. Mr. Holles opened the library door.

A pleasant blue haze of smoke met them, and the vision of a sunburned gentleman in an ill-fitting coat and a towering rage, who, with a churchwarden in his mouth and the fragments of several others on the floor, was standing on tiptoe and trying to get a view of his own back in the glass door of a bookcase. Said Mr. Holles: "Oliver."

The sunburned gentleman turned with a growl. There was a rigid silence.

Mr. Holles said again: "Oliver."

A chair went over. A high voice cried: "Devil take me, there are my clothes!"

"You're mad, man. Ye see the garments in every bush and on every back. Let me present——"

The sunburned gentleman stalked out of the smoke and shook his fist in Mr. Oakshott's face. He said: "I thank ye, brother-in-law, but there's no need for introductions. I told ye I'd know ye, ye young dog, and, by God, sir, so I do. Ye may soot your face, sir, but not your eyes. I'll trouble ye for my suit o' clothes, sir, and ye may even go home in your shirt if it's your own, and if it's not, without it."

"Oliver, Oliver," said Mr. Holles, "ye're mistook. Surely, now, ye're mistook."

"Mistook, am I?" The sunburned gentleman seized Mr. Oakshott by the shoulders and twirled him furiously round and round, he suffering it with an expressionless face. "Don't I know my own tailor's work, and dear at that? Don't I

know my own coat? Don't I know my own waistcoat? Don't I know my own breeches, though I've only had 'em on once, and then I thought them or me would split?" He shook the present incumbent backwards and forwards. "Won't I know my own shirt when I see it, and maybe whatever else he's got on? It's to be hoped, sir, I won't know 'em all, or you'll leave this room pretty bare, sir. And who's the other scoundrel?"

"My nephew, Oliver, my nephew."

"The more shame to you to have a nevvy and not keep him in better company." He dropped his hold of Mr. Oakshott and fell back, glaring. Mr. Holles turned, clapped to the door in the fascinated faces of his friends in the hall, and locked it.

Michael could not have spoken one word. Mr. Oakshott had not; as soon as he was released he settled the lace at his wrists thoughtfully. He said: "As I told ye before, ye've no sense of humour."

Mr. Oliver West made strangling noises; they heard the explosion of a button.

"And you don't keep to your word, sir. You lent us these clothes till to-morrow morning."

"At the point of a pistol, sir."

"It wasn't loaded," said Mr. Oakshott soothingly. But Mr. West was not soothed.

"We were under great necessity, sir," said Mr. Oakshott, with a slight bow to Mr. Holles. "And I intend to keep to my side of the bargain. The garments shall be returned to you unhurt within a few hours. Till then, I shall continue, with or without your present goodwill, to wear them."

"Then, sir," said Mr. West, bowing tremendously, "I shall be reduced to the unpleasant necessity of spoiling my own slate-coloured satin and afterwards, sir, of stripping your corpse."

He bowed again. Mr. Oakshott bowed. Mr. Holles sat down heavily in a chair.

There was another door to the room which opened on the yew hedge and the shrubbery. Mr. West held it and waited for Anthony to go through, bowing savagely meanwhile. He went, only pausing to say rapidly to Michael: "I'm sorrier than I can say about this. Better tell your uncle everything if he requires it. I owe you both that." Then he was gone, and the door shut with a crash.

Mr. Holles said sternly: "Michael, you had indeed better tell me everything."

Michael drew a miserable breath. "The clothes——"

"Damn the clothes. I've been hearing nothing else for two hours. I know all about that. He missed his turning, ye see, and went on to Betsworth. What I want to know is why you and your promising friend should be moved to go robbing

travellers of their wardrobes on the king's highway?"

"We wished to come here this evening, uncle. Anthony'd set his heart on it."

"Oh, he had, had he?"

"And you know—you know how little I have."

"I should. It's been a weight on my heart some years."

"He's no better off. We—we thought of it as a joke—to borrow the things——"

"He did, you mean. . . Michael, who is he?"

Michael did not answer.

"My dear lad, if you've never seen fit to trust me before, I think you must now."

Michael looked up quickly. "It's not that, sir. It's——"

"Well?"

"—a matter of life and death, and that life twenty times dearer to me than my own."

Said Mr. Holles under his breath: "Michael, is it possible, that he is——"

"Yes?"

"—that gentleman of the Prince's that we've heard of everywhere like a village ghost—the man that played that trick on Weatherly?"

Michael nodded.

"Oh, dear, dear." Mr. Holles got up and moved restlessly up and down the room. "How did you come to concern yourself in this?"

"He was thrown from his horse, over my wall and into the violet bed. The soldiers from Betsworth were just behind him. I shut the cover of the bed down on him, and—and they didn't find him. He was stunned awhile, and worn out."

"I should think so!"

"We nursed him, Malachi and I, till he recovered. He has been there since, sharing what I have. He dare not leave."

"And you know no more of him than this?"

"It's enough for me. Never man had a better friend."

His uncle was silent, and looked long at him. He might have looked longer, so touched and astonished he was, only they heard from the garden the distant quarrelling of steel. Mr. Holles jumped up and ran to the door.

"What is it?"

"They've begun already. Curse the door, it's jammed."

All Michael's successive emotions were crystallised to one aching point. "Would Mr. West fight him?"

"Lord, yes. Anywhere, anyhow. He's as hot—as hot as ginger. But we must stop this. Come, nephew."

They wrenched the door open and ran down the steps into the black-dark shrubbery full of sighing laurels, between which moonlight lay spilled like snow. At the end farthest from the house was a broad space of shivering whiteness, and here Anthony and Oliver West were fighting. They saw them at the end of a long black tunnel of yew and ivy, small, silvered, unreal figures. They heard the frosty meeting of the steel and saw the spitting sparks. They ran on. The laurels whispered all about. No other sound but that and the swords.

Anthony was playing a quick point and a steady wrist. Mr. West was slashing away like a trooper at a fair, beating down the better sword by mere weight. Or so it seemed. As they ran up, Anthony sprang back with a black patch spreading on his sleeve. He wrung out the dripping linen and tucked it up in silence; little black threads ran down his knuckles and over the hilt he held.

In a great passion Mr. Holles sprang at his brother-in-law and wrenched his weapon out of his hand. He cried: "Oliver, Oliver, would you murder the lad because he played a trick on you?"

Said Mr. West with curious mildness: "If I'd been bent on that, William, I'd have had seconds and everything in order. I didn't mean to hurt him."

"Didn't mean to hurt him?"

"No, I'll swear I didn't. I meant to give him a bit of a lesson, but he was too good for me. He dropped his guard."

Michael was begging Anthony to let him see the gash, to bind it up, to put his sword down and come away. . . Anthony shook him off, taking no notice. He looked haggard and roughly dishevelled, as if some wild wind had blown on him, though the night was still. He said: "Are you ready, sir?"

"Why, no," returned Mr. West doubtfully, "I a'nt ready. I didn't mean it to go quite so far as this. Ye're hurt, sir. Ye're spotting all my breeches. Better have that looked to. It was your own fault, though. Another inch higher, and——Better have it looked to."

"It will do very well. I am waiting for you."

"And you can wait, sir. You've taken my temper out of me, dropping your guard. I'd never have got home on you like that till the cows did. It was suicide. Ye turned me cold."

Anthony stamped his foot; he seemed mad for a minute. "I won't wait. You must fight me. Come, Mr. West, or shall I make you?"

Michael caught him back, and Mr. Holles said sternly:

"Be silent, sir. And you, Oliver, come with me, I must speak with you."

Mr. West followed him to the other side of the yew hedge, trailing his blade

behind him like a tail. He said stormily: "Yes, but why did he drop his guard? I tell you it made me sick."

Anthony turned his haggard, eager face to Michael. "Have you your sword?" His voice was muffled; he had a bit of the torn linen in his teeth; he would not let Michael touch it.

"Yes."

"If he goes on with it you'd better second me."

Michael looked at him. There seemed a hollow where his heart had been, as if that indispensable organ had suddenly fallen to dust. All the mean tragedy, the daily humiliation of his life rose up in his teeth; no philosophy could sweeten them then.

He said: "There is a very formal etiquette about these affairs, is there not?"

"Sometimes; but——"

Michael held up his hand. "And you'd be very careful whom you asked to second you—that he should be your equal, your friend—a gentleman? Yes? Then better not ask me, Tony."

Anthony's amazed, wild face still waited. The soul of Mr. Sampson's life was drawn out of him.

"My father was a linendraper in a small way of trade, over against Cheapside."

"O Brotherhood," one reads in the philosophy book for about this time, "and Love which sticketh Closer; which being Humbled, is not Confounded; Alarmed, is not Shaken; Doubted, is not Reproved. Which endures in Greater Tenderness than a Woman; Vicegerent of Immortality, without Passion being Perfect, without Fear being Content. This shall make Earth rich to me and Heaven Homely; for how shall I fear to look on God, having seen some Reflex of Him in the eyes of a Friend?. . ."

There, it is enough. Let the philosophy book speak for them and be silent. Mr. Holles, returning with his brother-in-law, saw no more than two young men, who had caused him a deal of trouble in the last hour, standing very close together, busied over Mr. Oakshott's arm. He began to speak, but Oliver West forestalled him by striding forward with his hand out.

"Will you shake it, young sir?" he asked in a subdued voice.

Mr. Oakshott shook it.

Mr. West said fervently that he was honoured—honoured that his hand had been shaken and his clothes worn. "You see, William has been telling me a few things. Damme, sir, I'm in sympathy with your side till they're in power, and then I'm against them, naturally. And, besides, I know Weatherly, and the father of him. I'll—I'll send to town for another portmantle of clothes to lend ye if ye could see your way to giving me that story at first-hand, now?"

In a low voice Mr. Oakshott excused himself. He looked shaken. He thought, if they would permit him, he would go home. They thought it was his arm that hurt him, and he let them think so; Mr. West's remorse was as violent as his rage had been. Mr. Holles desired some further speech with his nephew; Mr. West would give himself the extreme pleasure of seeing Mr.—Mr. Oakshott to his own door. He insisted on it. Michael saw them go off together arm-in-arm, Mr. West carrying the lanthorn. He himself went back to the house with his uncle, and talked an hour or more. When he left, it was with a very full heart, and the promise to send back the portmantle in the morning when Malachi had taken the spots out of the grey satin.

Chap. XV

"Whosoever Liveth Knoweth the Cry of This Voice"

"She went into the shop to buy calicoes, and he served her. A month later she ran away and was married to him, and he served her ever after until he died. He was her soul, and she had given everything in exchange for it. She found it too hard to go on living in the body only."

It was morning; they had taken off their fine clothes and bound up Anthony's arm, but they had not slept. Mr. Sampson was telling his mother's story. There was no more of it than this.

"There are women, I suppose, who would have gone on living even for the sake of a poor little half-and-half sprat like me. But she was not one of them. To her, the lover was everything, maybe because she had paid such a price for him."

"And he?"

"I know nothing. I remember no more than the look of his face in sunlight. Perhaps, for that only, he was worth the price. I don't think she would have seen the tape round his neck or the counter-stoop growing in his shoulders—not then, at least. When Apollo sat down with Admetus's maids, d'ye think they looked first at the crook? Come," said Mr. Sampson, "and I'll show you my inheritance."

He led the way through the hollow rooms where the boards sagged under their feet. "Look. It was stripped bare, years ago, of everything that was not mine in strictest legality. My grandfather hated the linendraper's son so that he could not bear I should keep so much as a chair, or a spoon with the Holles crest. Well, can you wonder?. . . And Malachi and I have stripped it year by year since, to the bone. It's a skeleton—empty cupboards, naked walls, the rag and rot of time, fit for a life like mine to house in. And—look. Here's the only thing that's filled."

He flung open the door of a tall press. A heavy smell came out from piles of yellowed linen that clung fungus-like to the shelves.

"Yes, this is mine—more than I can use in a life-time, and I'm ashamed to sell it. See here—fine coverlets, with the arms of the damp on them indelibly, and moulded sheets where the mice sleep, and towels damasced in roses and stinking of rot. The wreckage of the little shop by Cheapside; all they could leave their son. A sad foundation to build a life on."

The breath of decay was all about them, and with the whole strength of his arm Anthony flung back the stiff shutter. Webs, dry-rot, and ivy leaves fell in a shower.

"It shouldn't be," he said, with a passion that startled Mr. Sampson out of his memories. "Sad? Is there anything happier than to be offered love and to buy it at any price? The sadness is when it's offered and ye've no coin left to pay for it. . . They were happy, Michael, never doubt it. And there's the sun."

The sun, late in clearing that dark rampart of trees, now hurled a ray of light at the front of the old house. It came straight as a spear, struck, and was shattered into a hundred arrows which stormed and danced against the mouldering brick. It was like an attack. It seemed to bring wind with it, though the air was still; and sound, though the earth was silent—the blowing of a great horn, or the cry of a golden voice going over the world.

Chap. XVI
To Holy Poverty

The philosophy book had a hard time of it after that. It was coddled, confided in, scorned, neglected, and abused, and holy Poverty along with it. It is full of wild paragraphs that have no beginning and no end. There are pages over which Poverty presides like a schoolmistress, and others whose deity is certainly a winged one. There are all sorts of scribblings and interjections: bits of tragic verse which might be worth preserving if they were ever finished, all about stars, roses, swords, and generally ending with the Worm in capitals. There are sheets torn out recklessly, and there are gaps and omissions everywhere. Two whole pages are devoted to a pair of shoes to be half-soled, their size, shape, original cost, present condition, and all that the philosophic mind may learn from the perishableness of foot-leather—"that which of all Stuff is most a Barrier between Man and his Mother Earth, builded of the innocent Integument of Beasts, on which he stands as a false Foundation, which each Step he treads on the Road wears palpable Away, until he takes the last Stride naked-foot, but too Late to learn of that Contact.". . . But one paragraph is judged enough for the fact that the gypsies hung about the place, that Malachi found their in-toed footprints at morning by the stable, and that they feared they were bent on stealing Periwinkle, "for which," says the philosophy book curtly, "we have no redress in Law, being Out of it." There is a rough drawing here in the margin of a sword, with numerous blots and shapes impaled upon it. Did Mr. Sampson see himself defending the stable against the tribes of Little Egypt, and spitting them one by one on his old rapier? If so, the cold soon froze him out of his fancies and the philosophy book almost into silence. The winter turned very sharp. Malachi, who looked very old, spent most of his time gathering sticks. Their food, divided by three, was just enough to keep life in their bodies but not warmth. In one room of the old house, where the chimney was not too much choked by fallen mortar and daws' nests to draw well, they nursed a fire, guarded it, barricaded it, stuffed the doors. Short and steel-grey were the days, bitter and long the nights. On her disciple Poverty laid a heavy hand, and Mr. Oakshott, somewhat pinched himself, took to long silences and longer looks at him. Up at Shortsands Diantha drooped a little and showed shadows under her eyes. And Mr. Holles wrote and earnestly repeated to Michael a certain offer which he had made before.

The loft was no colder than the house, and Michael still slept there, or went there to sleep. Often he lay awake until the dawn picked out all the cracks in a cold twilight. When he slept, he had vivid dreams; of Diantha, questioning him with her eyes; of Anthony, for ever moving away into some shadow and looking back in good-bye. As half-starvation drew his life more and more from his body to his brain, these increased in intensity. So that he scarcely knew, one night when he crept softly down the ladder at some faint noise, the jingle of bit or buckle, in Periwinkle's stall, if he were awake or asleep. And what he saw there, against the pale square of the open door, was so like his dreams that he doubted still. Anthony, cloaked and booted, was leading out the mare; she was saddled, and had her hoofs wrapped in cloths; and as he led her, the pale oval of his face looked backwards in good-bye.

Mr. Sampson tripped at the last step of the ladder; the other stopped in the doorway, motionless as stone; the look of his face was not visible, only its blank, pale lines. Periwinkle bent and lipped pettishly at her muffled hoofs.

"You're never going to give her a run at this time of night?"

There was no answer. Mr. Sampson felt suddenly very cold.

"Tony, ye're not——"

Anthony turned away from him without a word, laid his bent arm against the door-post, and hid his face there like a beaten man.

Without a word, Mr. Sampson took the reins out of his other hand; it fell heavily, as it had when Mr. Sampson first raised it from among the violet leaves. He remembered that, and much more, in an instant of time, as they say a man does when he's dying. He shut the door, put Periwinkle in her stall again, and led his friend up the ladder. He went quite passive: all the life seemed to have gone out of him. Up in the loft, he stood silent, and with his face still hidden, now in his hands. Mr. Sampson said: "Tony?"

After a long time came an answer: "Well?"

"Were you going away?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I can't endure that you should suffer anything for me. I'm not blind. Every day ——So I was going. I thought I'd get off without you hearing."

"Had you anywhere to go?"

Some sort of an assent, which yet made Mr. Sampson's mouth go dry. He slipped a hand from the shoulder where it had been resting to the waist, and hauled out one of the pistols. He said sharply: "Where's the other?"

"I thought you'd better keep that. I only needed the one."

Mr. Sampson never knew how long he stood, cold as the thing in his hand, with a question on his lips he dared not ask. There are no words to fit the feelings that tore at him; silence only is for such moments; or tears. When he said, "Stay here with me, and wait for the morning," the commonplace speech seemed like a straw stuck up in the path of an avalanche. Mr. Oakshott huddled himself into the hay and seemed to sleep there, within the walls of the impenetrable reserve that lay in him.

But later Mr. Sampson roused at a cry, and struck a light quickly. This time the walls were down. Anthony, his eyes blind with sleep, called and clung to him like a child, crying that he'd be shot or hung or hunted like a cur—"Only not prison, Michael, don't let them take me and put me in prison." He was almost raving, and Michael, gentle as a woman, and shaken to the soul with some reflection of a horror he had never known, held him, comforted him, had him at last quiet again in the hay; and sat and watched him the night through with Heaven knows what unphilosophic thoughts hammering at his heartstrings. It was perhaps characteristic of this queer pair that nothing was said by day of the events of the night. Periwinkle was back in her stall, no doubt wondering what had taken her out of it. Mr. Oakshott was very attentive in a boyish sort of way to Mr. Sampson, and even offered to read the *Utopia* to him of evenings. Mr. Sampson was as tender of Mr. Oakshott as one man could be of another. But a different letter was sent to Mr. Holles in answer to his offer than had been first thought of. And a reply came the following day by the hand of old Nicholas, a reply which Mr. Sampson was bidden to burn after it was read.

Mr. Holles said he was glad that at last he'd come to his senses, especially as this mad matter of foolishly sheltering a certain young gentleman of whom he seemed to know very little—"and for which all we who know cannot but Honour you"—had involved not himself only but the family. It was impossible, with suspicion well aroused, that the aforesaid young gentleman should remain where he was after the weather once broke and the roads were open; it was even inadvisable that Michael himself should do so. Nor must they, with all this to-do still fresh in folks' minds, make for the seaports direct. It would be better to go inland to a secure place of concealment which he thought was already assured, wait there till the search died out, and then take ship for France. It would do Michael no harm to see a little of the world, and all matters for such a journey, even if it should be extended over two or three years, would be forthcoming; only he should insist, as the head of the family, that once over the water, Michael should for a time at least separate from his friend, and appear only in safe society, to which he would be given introductions. At the first mild weather Diantha was going to her grandmother at Coombe, and her Uncle Oliver—"whom ye both know"—would escort her there; they were to be trusted,

and would make all arrangements as quickly as possible. In due time Michael should hear everything from his "loving Uncle and friend, W. L. Holles."

If it was not the letter of a skilled plotter, neither was Michael one. He read it gratefully, yet with an incurable heartache. This matter of helping his friend was taken out of his hands. It was his all, and even this Poverty demanded of her follower; here was an event when all the love in the world was of no use without worldly possessions. He made a little pile of fir cones and dead leaves on the empty hearth, and laid the letter on them. As he watched the superscription curl up the chimney in a fringe of sparks, he thought he might have shorn his hair and laid it on that little pyre, sung a threnody, woven garlands for the sacrifice and the fiery altar of Poverty, his goddess; so much had it meant to him.

With the future daily and hourly in his mind, he began to look at the old house as a man, soon to die, might look at the body that had imprisoned him so long. He had suffered in it; but even freedom scarcely seemed worth such a plunge as waited him over the threshold. Those bricks and timbers had been a sort of secondary body to which he had been little less bound than to the one of clay he carried. He actually remembered no dawn that had not broken reluctantly through the great web of trees, no sunset that had not reddened his tottering chimneys, no night that had not wrapped him and his deep in shadow, like a nurse who folds up a sick child's toy, doubtful if it will ever be wanted again. He had never, since his childhood, travelled farther than his own feet would carry him and back again. To him all roads led into the same strange land. He went about the rooms, staring curiously, as if he had never seen them before; he troubled Malachi with aimless intrusions into sheds and sculleries and cupboards. He looked long out of his windows, noticing how much this tree had grown since last it was leafless, how many more tiles had blown from the coach-house, how the old plan of the garden showed out in the flowerless beds and lost paths like the plan of a ruined city of summer. Ever since he could remember an old statue had lain overthrown in a vast tangle of ivy and nettles behind the arbour; the city's deity. Now, when every day went as if ticked off on a devouring clock, Mr. Sampson unearthed the god and spent a week in fixing him again to the broken pedestal. He was a decrepit deity, smothered in moss and quivering with rot. But Mr. Sampson has resurrected Hermes, called of the Ways, though but a wooden copy. And perhaps it was he, lord of all masterless men, who set the celandine so soon in flower, blurred the hard outline of the branches, sent the wood-pigeons to the pools, and woke an April sweetness in the February sun. The forest ways dried early, and men began to travel on them again. Buds thickened on the lichened roses and French pears, a new-born wonder to Mr. Sampson, because he might never see

them any more. They were transfigured with the halo of farewell.

As the sap rose, so the forest became rich as the bloom on ripe grass, though not a leaf showed. The twigs were tender with coming summer. It was wonderfully alive. Mr. Sampson thought that as soon as they turned their backs on the old house the forest would come flooding in on their footprints, would wash it away on some quiet tide and make it as if it had never been. He felt half afraid of leaving Malachi alone in it.

For Malachi was to stay. The due time came, and their directions with it, which Mr. Sampson imparted to Anthony in the arbour; the blinded god of travellers faced them, smiling stockily under the Jew's-ear that gleamed all over him as if he were splashed with blood. They were to follow such and such a road, avoiding inns and other travellers as much as they reasonably could; here they were to turn; here keep on straight; and there, a little beyond Coombe, where Diantha was, they would be met by a trustworthy man and shown their hiding-place. They could reach it in two days on good horses, and once there, it was surely the last place in which they would be looked for.

Malachi took his orders in silence and seemed content with them, which added a little to his master's heartache. So was Tony quiet in those weeks; his wings seemed to have been clipped by the sense of indebtedness. The biting time was over, and the winter, which should have been one of discontent, yet was not. Mr. Sampson felt the glass of Time in his hand: running, running. Never had he been so true of heart to his chosen Poverty than when, on a day of warm and blinding rain, he rode out of the gate with his friend at his bridle-hand, a good horse from Shortsands under him, a gentleman's clothes on his back and the world before him; and turned to take a last look at his crumbling home.

Already he was too late. The trees had taken it, hidden blank window, falling wall, and sagging roof, and the old man standing in the gate. They were gone. Only above the dim blue hollow of rain, where he knew the house lay, the white pigeon circled twice, and then followed his wild mate to the forest where the changing year had called her.

Chap. XVII
The Road

There's a road in England, one of many in the south, that has borne a gentle current of life for centuries; like a river, it is fed by smaller tributaries that are as old as itself. Its beginning is beautiful in June with fern and rose-campion, beautiful in May with garlic stars and bluebells. If it is so these days, it was more so then, when Michael and Anthony travelled by it, for then the wild growth was rich and the rare flowers not yet gone. And beautiful they found it, though they saw no more under the silver folds of rain than the glittering celandine, that drank with drooped petals the sweet and neutral air. Here, though he had never been that way, Michael was in his kingdom, the kingdom of the poor, which shall not be taken away from them. He showed the buds in the banks, waiting by companies for the trumpets of the sun, as if he owned them; the first nest in a bare bush, designed for the shelter of leaves not yet there, as if God had prepared the house for the bird to live in; the coming catkins, the track of a polecat, a water-rat swimming a pool. And Tony listened like a man learning a new language, the harder for its simplicity. Their spirits rose with every mile they covered. Their first dinner, of bread and meat and a little wine, eaten in a hazel copse well off the road, was a feast; after it, Mr. Sampson sang a song to some mistress that was not Poverty, and Mr. Oakshott, setting up the empty wine-flask a great way off, sent the glass into a rain of green slivers at the third stone. They lingered in that copse some time, for there were molehills on the edge of it and Anthony expressed a wish to see a mole. Michael tried to dig one out for him with the end of his sheathed sword, and failed. They never saw the wood again. When they left the moles came back and took up their undisputed sovereignty, perhaps to this day.

Dangers and fears had hounded them to that road; once on it, the dark pack bayed at their heels unheard. There were other voices in full cry. Horsehoofs went to a tune even in the puddled ruts; there was music in the woods for a fine ear. Two days of freedom they had between prison and prison; like the rain on the bridle-hand, Time dripped away, but left his sweetness.

They went round by fields and cartways to avoid the few straggling villages, and once Michael's horse was nearly bogged in soft ploughland. They met very few on the road that day. Once it was a boy in a drenched smock who was singing to

himself in the rain like a throstle, and Anthony gave him two-pence for it. Then it was an old man coughing by the roadside, and Michael would enlighten him on the infallible virtues of coltsfoot. Both the boy and the ancient took up their singing and coughing and went their ways; the twopence went in rabbit snares, and of the philosopher's recipe the old man had not understood one word. But the travellers did not know, and would not have cared if they had. They found food for talk and laughter in everything, in wind and rain, in the stuff of earth and cloud, in Periwinkle's literally biting scorn for the other horse, and in the wet sparrows dipping and ducking under the ivy sprays.

They were almost riding for their lives, but they found time for a leisurely argument as to how many meals a day they could get out of the provision they carried. Michael thought two if they were large ones; Anthony held out for three and a nightcap, which was plainly impossible. They quarrelled about it very enjoyably all the afternoon, riding, always riding along the wet empty road that came to meet them out of the rain and was silently folded into the mists behind them. They might have been alone in the world. When they stopped to rest the horses they heard nothing but the rain soaking into the earth and the timid cheep of the birds. They could not see much beyond the road. Only the subtly differing scents of the drenched air told Mr. Sampson that he was in a strange country.

Grey evening found them not very sure where they were, and turned them into shadows, ghost-riders adrift in the mist.

The rain ceased. Infinite silences possessed the world. Far in front of them a cow lowed and they passed an old rick or two. An overgrown lane opened like a tunnel. They rode up it softly, looking for some barn or stable where they might have lodging without a landlord. Soon they saw one, a black old tarred place, with a shed beside it. Anthony swung out of the saddle with a jingle that sounded loud, and looked in at the door. A minute after he stepped back and went to Michael, who said: "Will it do?"

Anthony said: "I think so. It's dry and unused, but there's someone there. Come and see."

They went together and looked in.

All was dark in the old barn but for the dim grey of the twilight at the door, blurred with their shadows. In the midst of it a girl sat with her shoulder turned to them, nursing a child. The attitude was unmistakable—the downward look, the tender curve of the neck, the pearly glimmer of the breast. Her hair, of a shining colour too pale for gold, drooped over her. She was wrapped in a footman's coat of faded crimson plush, and as she sat she crooned a wordless lullaby as old as time.

When she turned, though not with fright, they saw she was young, not older than Diantha, and that her arms were quite empty.

Anthony stooped his head and went in under the low lintel, that led downward as if into a tomb. She was not afraid. She looked up, smiled faintly, huddled the livery coat about her, and said: "Don't wake her, sir."

"We'll not disturb you," said Anthony after a silence; "we'll be gone presently."

She shook her head. "No need. I am going. I have been here all day. I sleep all day and walk all night, for then I have the baby for company. She's not there when it's light. She has only been here a few minutes now."

Anthony was on one knee, the better to hear. Her voice was faint, sweet, but all on one note like a broken reed. He said gently: "Have you food in that bag you carry, or will you have some of ours? Michael, bring some bread and wine."

She looked from one to the other, smiling again, even with a shadow of coquetry. "'Tis kind of you, for I'm tired. There's bread, but it's stale. The bag? Oh no, no, no bread there. That's for other things." She turned to Anthony with a little lady-like movement. "Will you hold the baby, sir, while I show you what's in the bag?"

Without a word Mr. Oakshott held out his hands and she laid the imaginary child in them. Michael had never loved his friend so much as then. He brought the bread and wine, and held them for her, but she was busy with the bag, pulling out handfuls of feathers and straws and dried plants, which she set in little bunches on the clay floor. "These straws are promises, sir, they break so easy. And the white feathers are hopes; they blow away unless you set a stone on them—so. These flowers, I forget what they are or where I picked them, but here's one for you." She leaned forward and stuck a little spray in Anthony's coat. "You bring someone to my mind, sir, if I may be so bold, in the straight look of you. Someone far above me in station. I had advantages, and the gentry were always kind to me, but I knew my place. I think I gave him flowers, but only in the way of duty. Now I'll take the child again, sir, and thank you; you've a light hand with children."

She bent once more over the child that was not there, hushing it. She seemed to forget that she had said she was going, and that two strangers watched her. When she ate of the bread beside her, and began her lullaby once more, they left her. They spent that night in the shed with the horses, but before they slept Anthony went and looked in at her again. He reported that she was fast asleep, one arm curved about her ghost-child. Mr. Sampson wondered what she was doing in that pass.

"Taking her wages, I suppose, poor fool, like the rest of us."

"Wages? With that face?"

"Michael, Michael, d'ye think the world you're riding to is to be told by the face of it?" said Anthony sadly, and drew his cloak over him, and was almost at once asleep. Michael was wakeful. His first taste of the world had racked his heart. He went and peeped at his friend once, after his silly custom. Mr. Oakshott lay on his back, his face as peaceful as a child's; the dry sprig that the girl had stuck in his coat was there still. It was a sprig of yew. Mr. Sampson pulled it out and threw it away.

She was astir before them. Her voice, faintly sweet, woke them, singing a rough song. In the grey dawn she stumbled out of the stable, and stood staring dully about her. The child had gone with the first light, and with it had gone the grace, the youth, the mildness that had so hurt their hearts. They could not believe that she was the same. They offered her more bread and meat and she took it, giggling coarsely, and yet lingered. Michael added a shilling or two. Her fluttering eyes were on Anthony. He felt in his pockets; they were all but empty; he would not, for some wild reason of his own, carry any of Mr. Holles' good money in them. He had nothing but the two links of tarnished silver chain which Michael had found there that first night. He gave her that.

She muttered and went slowly. They did not wait to watch her. The horses were seen to hastily, and they rode away without breaking their fast. When the chilly sun rose on a clear heaven and a misty earth, they stopped and ate in another wood, and the brightening air lifted their hearts.

They never saw the girl again, any more than they ever saw the same hazel wood or the moles. She wandered on, poor thing, and came at last to Betsworth, and turned to the inn there to buy ale. A weary-looking soldier, whose commander seemed to have forgotten him, as he was just telling the drawer, was yawning in the bar. She stared at his red coat, and he bantered her roughly, but without meaning any harm. She pulled out the silver chain, hoping to pay for her beer with that, for she'd lost the shillings. The man asked her who she'd stole it from.

"I had it of a fine young gentleman. He gave it to me." She giggled vaguely, and the greyed silver glinted in the sun. "His eyes was near as bright as that," she said.

"Was they, now?" said the soldier, suddenly keen. He paid in a princely fashion for more drink for her; not without pity, but business is business. A small, hairy, earth-coloured countryman with a chin-tuft sidled up to them, listening, as the third mug of ale was put down and paid for and the girl began to talk wanderingly.

Chap. XVIII
The Open Sky

The mill was nothing but a darkness under the dawn, and a great voice in the mist. The mist followed them all the way, though the sky was clear as glass; they seemed to look upward into the lower foundation stone of heaven, and through it to the rest, all colours fused into the colourless glow. But the ground was muffled in mist, and the bushes, and the tree trunks. Mist hung about the mill in great bands and wreaths; a stuff that seemed to be spun by the roaring strength within. One would have taken the mill for the core and origin of it all. The water in the sluice was only a darkness under it.

The child herself, when they first saw her, seemed to be bodied in mist.

The beam that she walked on spanned the mill-race, narrow here. At first they could not see it. She seemed to be floating towards them, a baby thing in a coarse white shift. Her head leaned to her shoulder, and her hand was on her cheek. She was asleep.

Her small bare feet clung stumblingly to the green beam. The mist clung to her curls and drenched them flat. The mist above her was still; beneath her it quivered.

Anthony said, "You'll kill her if you cry out," and was off his horse and gone while he said it. Michael saw him in a moment out on the beam, moving silently to meet the child; yet even so only half saw him, so thick was the fog, and so helplessly were his eyes held by the quiver in it under the beam.

They met, the man and the child, but he did not catch her up. With an outward swing that stopped Michael's heart he passed her and turned; as she walked sleeping along the beam he followed, a hand on either side so that she could not fall. There were only a few yards to go, but it seemed long to Michael before those small bare feet, with Anthony's riding-boots so close behind them, were stumbling through wet grasses.

Here she curled down, tucked her shift under her chin, hugged some imaginary doll or kitten to her heart with the very gesture of the girl in the barn, and lay quite quiet. Mr. Sampson's lips shook as he tried to speak, but Anthony forestalled him, whispering quickly: "It's not good if you wake 'em in a fright. Here's a woman coming."

The woman had come out of the millhouse. She seemed to advance with no

visible motion, like a cloud, and came as fast as one—a huge woman with iron-grey hair and a face and frame of great rounded bones; a face that seemed shaped for wholesome colour, but was now chalk-white and running as with water. She swept up to the two young men as if she were borne along on a mighty wind. She struggled to speak so long that the pause hurt. But when she did, her voice was deep and steady. She said: "I saw it all, from the window."

They were silent. She turned to Anthony, and shot both hands straight over her head. She towered over him. Her voice dropped deeper and lower: "'The Lord be thy keeper: the Lord be thy shade upon thy right hand. So that the sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.'"

She held them with her strange black eyes, full of a wild, melancholy fire; with such eyes John the Baptist might have looked on Israel. She said again, each word tolling like a bell: "He shall preserve thy soul, from this time forth and even for evermore." The walls of the millrace caught the last deep word and added it to the thunder of water under the mist. Then she stooped to the child, seemed to gather and envelop it soundlessly as a lamb is hidden by a cloud.

They would have left her so. But she stopped them, saying: "Wait. There is more laid on me." The little girl was asleep in her great arms. She stood looking from the tiny, hushed face to Mr. Oakshott's, softened and hushed too. She said: "I had a son and he died. He was the child of my youth. She is the child of my old age."

He said; "I'm sorry you had the pain of seeing what you could not help. She is none the worse of it."

The huge woman smiled slowly and answered; "I helped. I prayed."

"Prayed?"

Again she smiled. "Yes. Could I have done better to give you help?" She looked down at the child safe in her hold and again they were silent. "It was Mr. Wesley taught me to pray, not so long ago, in Devon. It's a wonderful good thing to learn. But for you"—she laid her hand suddenly and heavily over Anthony's heart—"but for you, don't you trouble. That's what is laid on me—you are not to trouble. Things have done hard with you in the world, but after this Love'll be your keeper. The thread's in a snarl, but Love'll straighten it. Sin, suffering, sorrow"—she looked into his eyes closely—"sin, suffering, sorrow, Love will lift them. You've been far out of the way. But by some gate or other, Love'll have you home." She drew her hand away slowly and went on in the same voice: "You're riding, and weary. Will you have ale of me, or milk?"

They asked for milk if she could spare it, and she brought them some in a brown jug. While they drank, her eyes rested on Anthony with an extraordinary tenderness. When they had finished and would go, she blessed him again—"though there's little need when Love's your keeper, even for evermore.". . . With the great word on her lips they left her, standing in the mist and the roar huge and unshaken, the child laid like a bird on her arm. The road ran upwards into a low hill, and sank again; she was gone from their sight six paces from the crest. They rode on in silence, hushed, but not sad. Her strange voice seemed to come after them, and sang curiously in one heart: "You've been far out of the way. But by some gate or other, Love'll have you home."

Peace seemed to be in the words. Peace she had wished them. That wild, restless heart began to taste of it.

The road ran uphill all the way now, and the good horses went slower; the mist did not alter, nor the sense of light behind it, and of clearness also. An air came to them now and then that Mr. Sampson had never felt before, the air of free space; it came sliding through the fog, soft itself, yet ripping like a blade through the sweet, rich smells of the valley earth, the wet fields waking, and the mealy catkins ready to break on the alders. It was the air of heaven and the hills.

At noon, still blind with fog, they passed Coombe, and the house where Diantha was; they could see no more of it than a cloud of trees and a faint smoke ascending into the sun. They rode by quickly, and turned off from the main road a mile or so beyond. All features had gone from the world as far as they could see it; nothing but mist, and the sense of emptiness and space enough to make Mr. Sampson dizzy, bred as he was to the close shouldering-in of endless trees. They came at last to a sign-post too worn for reading; here they waited, eating the last of their provisions and drinking to the journey's end in the last of the wine. The fog beading and dripping from the sign-post to the stones below was the only sound they had for company.

At last, well on in the afternoon, an old man came to them, slow as Time in a shepherd's smock, to which clung tufts of wool. His beard was the yellow-white of raw wool. He spoke to them in a broad dialect they could scarcely understand, but his meaning was plain. They mounted and followed him into the mist.

Soon, looking down, they saw no road; only unbroken turf on which the horses went as softly as on velvet. They made no more noise than a company of shadows, and such a stillness was all about them that they could hear the blood in the ears like little drums rolling. Once a rabbit went past them in long leaps. Once a great heavy bird rose flapping almost under the horses, and their guide said it was a bustard.

Otherwise he did not speak. He was silent, of a silent country. Often he stooped and felt the turf with his hands; they could not see what track he was following. They were perfectly lost. But he was not; he felt his way to a clump of furze, felt under it, and pulled out a well-worn crook, which he used to help his steps. They were ascending always by great, slow curves as if they were climbing clouds.

Anthony spoke once or twice. But Michael said snappishly that he felt as if he were dead and following Charon turned shepherd over the desolate fields. For an hour or more they went silently, cut off by this shining mist from all their past; even the horses drooped.

And then, before they might draw two breaths, they had ridden above the mist, and saw before them their new world.

The earth, the sky—this was their world revealed. Michael saw it so for the first time. They looked over endless low hills of turf; or, rather, a great plain that heaved and sank and fell like a sea suddenly stilled, with the sea's tireless beauty of rising and dying curves, and more than the sea's peace. The sun was low. From the lower flanks of the hills the mist streamed like a golden smoke. Between the cloud-soft slopes of two of the larger hills or waves a small wood lay, long and narrow, like a river turned to trees. They saw no water anywhere, nothing to break the pure, bare beauty of the soil. There was not the cry of a bird, not the rustle of a leaf, to break the stillness. Only a sound that was like the very voice of Silence, if Silence should suddenly sing—the note of a keen, sweet wind that never entirely died away, blowing through the miles and miles of turf.

Most ancient music of the earth, and nothing more—surely here for a little while was peace, and safety, and room for all the thoughts of the heart? The shepherd guide pointed to the little wood. They began to descend to it.

At the outskirts something pierced them like pain or joy. They looked back.

A flight of small clouds hovered over the hill like a spiral of white birds. To it the year's first skylark trembled upwards as if in this time, the last for that day, he must touch heaven. He sang of it as he climbed: "Oh, happy, happy, happy. Oh, happy home, oh, happy, happy, home."

Folded in the little wood, they saw their home before them.

Chap. XIX
The Hut in the Wood

Once more they moved among trees, but with difficulty. They led the horses. The wood was one of oak and hornbeam, thorn and holly, all indescribably old, tangled and stunted. The oaks were furred with warm green moss to their very twigs, they felt alive when the hand was laid on them. The thorns were so silvered with lichen that they looked as though their bloom should be of frost, not flowers. The hollies were black and low to the ground, and the whole wood was bound together in a net of the bare brown stems and suckers of clematis and honeysuckle. It was a strange little ancient place, an enchanted forest in miniature. But Chance or the axe of a forgotten shipwright had driven straight paths through it from side to side, and it hummed continually with the air of the downs. Their winds rushed through it day and night. Space glinted always just outside the trees; they lay in the hold of the hills like moss in a curved hand, never to be let go.

In the midst of this lost wood there was a clear space among the oaks. Seeds of furze had blown in here from the open and taken root; an eye of water lay in their midst, round and rippled continually. Behind the ring of furze and the spring was a thatched hut, with a shed beside it. Darkly buried it was in holly and thorn, but the air that danced all about it was the air of the hills. Here the shepherd led them. They looked in.

A strange little place; two beds like ship's bunks against the wall, roughly and newly built of timber; a floor, high and dry, of beaten flint and chalk; an open hearth, two stools, an old table; baskets, a stone jar, a ham hung up; two smocks and two grey homespun cloaks hanging behind the door; a medley of things in a corner, including a new spade: the light shone on the bright edge of the iron as they entered. This is what they saw.

The shepherd pointed to the clothes behind the door and told them in his broad speech to put them on as soon as might be. No one ever came there but himself and his boy, but the smocks would serve to deceive any chance-come eye at a distance. He led the horses to the shed. They were alone in the hut, and were well content with it; it was homelier than the rotting house they had left; sweet, still; furnished with peace.

Mr. Oakshott followed the shepherd to see to the horses.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Sampson began to move about restlessly in the narrow place. They were safe, they were sound, friends had taken thought for them, everything promised well, including the ham. But the philosopher felt most desolate and lost. It came upon him suddenly that he wanted something and did not know what it was. He was desperately saddle-galled, but this was not the cause of his unease. He felt in his pockets and pulled out a pipe; it was not that. And a paper of nails, with which he had prepared himself for any emergency while travelling; now he threw them into the corner, and they tinkled against the spade. He explored his saddle-bags, but could find nothing but a clean silk handkerchief, which he found over and over again; he poked it back impatiently. Then the fact and the truth dawned on him with the shock of a clap of thunder. He'd left the philosophy book at home.

The consolation he blindly longed for, the consolation of a well-charged pen, white paper, and a fine flow of language, was denied him; he wondered gloomily if he would be reduced to writing on the walls, like a prisoner in a dungeon. Something white there was in the corner, but not paper. It was a small white rose from the new hothouse at Coombe, stuck inconsequently into the neck of a bottle.

It seemed to fill the hut; he stood gazing at it, and was still gazing when Anthony came back. It cost him a wrench of the heart to say simply: "This must be for you."

Anthony gazed at it too: he looked quiet and uncommonly tired. "Why for me?"

"Because of the colour," said Mr. Sampson shortly.

"Then she has been here herself?"

Michael nodded.

"And thought of our comfort." They both looked gravely at the ham, the baskets, the stone jar, seeing these unpoetic things transfigured. These they shared; but the rose—the white rose was another matter, and again Michael felt that wrench as Anthony took it up. But the forced bud had been picked too soon, and fell to pieces in his hand. With a faint smile, he held out half the petals to Michael.

What was his thought? Greatly flustered, Michael, took them and stuffed them into his pocket with the pipe. What Anthony did with his he did not know then. A little while and they were eating rye bread and cold ham without any sentiment at all, for man, when healthy and young, cannot live on such exalted food alone. They looked at the smocks and decided to put them on in the morning. The horses were safely hurdled into the shed. The sound of the wind in the wood was as soft as sleep. When the first of the spring moons sank over the little lost wood they were asleep in the heart of it, and the wind sang all night about the hut and the hollies.

Chap. XX
How They Were Weary, But Not Tired

To wake, young in the young morning, in surroundings not yet explored, not yet stamped with the image of memory, the superscription of regret—that's to remember a little of Eden. So Mr. Sampson awoke, and lay in his hard bed, wondering why his eyes should look with so much pleasure on the world. Even the absence of the philosophy book did not weigh on him very heavily. He was heaped from head to foot as he lay with sunlight like a king's covering. Light and air flooded the hut from the open door. The ham swung in the draught, the angles of the new spade in the corner glittered like stars. The new-born morning, Aurora's hour, he knew was a weak thing that grew and died in the fastnesses of the forest, struggling in vain to send its freshness on the sad old house. There was no weakness here. The hollies rattled in the gusts of the dawn. A sweetness, of violet leaves if not of violets, hung in the air. Mr. Sampson sat up in his bed; the world went very well for him.

"O miracle," said the philosopher, addressing himself in the absence of his book, "O sign and marvel a million times repeated, O wonder running like a wave before the feet of the sun as he strides his course: O mystery, tomb of sleep, to which each moment a thousand Lazaruses descend, and from which a thousand others are called and hear and come forth"—Mr. Sampson got out of bed and stood upon the floor, finding it very cold—"O door of silence, half-way house of peace, hospital of the poor"—he pulled on his stockings—"O charitable hostel, never too full for one more guest, how seldom is the going out from thee blessed as the coming in."

And then he thought of yesterday, already as far off from him as last year, and of a voice that had told one of them that all his goings out and his comings in should be safe for ever. It was already like the voice of a dream. He looked about for his friend.

He did not see him till he looked from the door. Then he saw, as it were, the spirit of the wind and the sun, the haunter of the wood made visible—Anthony, coming up from the pool and shaking his wet hair. Fresh as the morning he looked, quick as the air; when he stooped to the grass, he dripped and shone like pale brown satin against the dark furze bushes. Mr. Sampson shuddered. Cold water in quantity at that hour and season was to him a barbarism, learned, he supposed, in the course of a reckless and hardy life. He watched with interest, and wondered if he

had the means at hand to concoct an infallible cure of Malachi's for the wasting cough and the shivering fever.

Anthony still lingered, looking over the little wood to the hills. He moved slowly, picking things up from the ground, a dead leaf, a stone, an empty snail-shell, a rook's feather, which he as slowly let fall again. He had the look a man might have who, imprisoned so long he scarcely knew what earth and heaven were like, was in an hour returned to them. To such a man, the commonest sticks and straws would be the symbols of something forgotten, to be relearned. And as Michael looked, Anthony stretched out his arms to the dawn with a movement as suddenly wild, as passionate, as when a bird struggles with clipped wings to fly. What loss, what hope, did that wild heart see in the level gold light? It beat on him, lit him with a cool, bright fire, changed him for a moment into an immortal likeness of longing. So the first man might have stood and tried by seeking to find out his God. He was in a glory from head to foot; and he stood in it as stiffly as if he were nailed on a cross.

"O youth"—the philosophy book, if it had been present, would have been the richer for some such apostrophe—"on which the world looks with envy, with crying out and catching of garments; rather should we use pity, and that tenderness that is awarded by righteous men to the blind and the infirm. For the eyes of youth are blinded with light, his feet trip over his own wing feathers: poor heavenly vans, soon mired. Is that youth going by thee? Take him, give him a patch to his eye and a little cur to lead him by, set him by the wayside and bid him take alms of the old. They are in better case than he. Their eyes are customed to darkness, and their shuffling feet are in no danger on the road.". . . Mr. Sampson sighed, turned sharply away from the door, and began to get the breakfast. He had it ready by the time Anthony came in laughing in the smock, which was so small for him they had to devise a fastening in the back with twine.

Even on this first day all sense of the passage of time began to fade for them. They were cut off from all the daily round of common events by which, more than by any change in the calendar, time is measured to us. A new order of events marshalled their days and nights; events that were born of air and cloud, light and shade, the infinite rest of space. The horses grazed in one of the grassy paths driven through the wood; they themselves lay out on the clear hillside for hours, content to see the slow march and dispersal of vapour, the sun and the shadow following over the pure bare lines of earth; content to look and learn the immemorial face of the turf, the perfection of the little plants that made it and their difference—Michael counted a dozen in the curve of his hand; content to hear no sound nearer to humanity than the voices of the sheep their friendly guide led to pasture on the far side of the hill, a low,

sad bleating that came blent and blowing over the crest, like the sound of surf on a very distant shore. Dreams went over that turf as many as the sheep. A very pleasant one fell to Mr. Sampson's share as the noon waned—that he was in heaven, showing the philosophy book to Horace. He came out of it reluctantly with the beat of rain in his face.

He sat up and pulled his grey country cloak round him. Anthony lay still without moving in the sudden shower, and the rain glistened and ran on his clear dark face; he had been very busy gathering tiny striped snail-shells as small as pearls from the turf and stringing them on a piece of grass, and he lay now with these in his hand. But he was not asleep, for when Michael moved and shook himself he said quickly: "Don't go."

"But it's raining."

"There's no hurt in this rain. Feel how sweet it is. . . I always liked the rain when I was a child—on the roof, on the windows, in the fields. I used to run away from my tutor whenever it rained and hide in the park."

His voice failed drowsily; he had never before said so much as this about his life. Michael was silent.

"I had my tutor and the servant, you see. No one else. The servants were really mine, the house, the horses. But my guardian used them as his own. How I hated him. . . He brought his friends to the house continually. They drank all night. I used to be sent for after supper, and my man would dress me in a little court suit and open the door for me—on the room of roaring, drunken squires, the table of wine, the candles, the dice—all mine. When he took me away an hour later I was often drunk too. . . Once I fell under the table asleep, and when I woke I saw under the cloth the feet of men, shifting and moving; the room was quite still except for the sound of swords. It was my guardian and another man who fought. . . I saw nothing but their feet. In a minute one pair of feet seemed to trip and stumble against the table; there was a cry, and then a great heavy weight crashed into the trailing cloth and rolled about in it, and then was still. A face came out of the folds close to mine; it was my guardian's, and he was dead. I remember screaming and screaming, and they took me away. After that I was sent to school. At sixteen I fought my first duel, about a drab in dimity. And then—such a hot hurry of life, Mick. If I didn't go into it as deep as some, it was because I never really liked it. I used to dream of woods and fields. One morning I woke, and remembered the rain on the haystacks and the horses' heads over the gate, and I longed to go home, and redeem the old place, somehow, from its sordid memories. But it was not mine then; it was too late; it was sold. . . I went to look at it. . . Then I went away. . . And came to you. And now here. . . This

is a place to grow clean in. The water, the rain, the air, they wash you and make you clean. I should like to stay here and be clean."

The half-unconscious voice failed. Mr. Sampson was silent still, and a little abashed, an eaves-dropper. He knew that this was Love speaking.

It was Love speaking still—Anthony's voice, yet not his—when he went on unexpectedly: "'Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.'. . . Who said that?"

"It's from the Gospels."

"Is it so? I never read them. I knew a man who did, and he said they were devilish fine. I'll read 'em some day, here, if there's no Hebrew in 'em. I suppose—some people read them every day?"

"Yes. My mother did. You shall read her copy if you like. I have it in my saddle-bag. It's the whole Bible, but there's no Hebrew in it."

"Thank you, Mick." Anthony rolled over and lay with his cheek to the turf, but he did not open his eyes, and Mr. Sampson, torn between laughter and a sort of grief, was glad of it. He said again: "This is a place to make you clean. There's nothing here but earth and sky, and yet I've felt, last night and this morning, as if all my life had been just a leading up to this. Now—when I've lost everything—now, when I'm a broken man, a man without hope—now, this tangle of a life seems to be coming to a head, seems to be waiting for something that'll give it a reason. . . Like a lot of paths you showed me once in the forest, all leading to one point, and there was nothing there; you told me a house had been there once. . . All my paths seem leading to one point, but my house is yet to build, and I've nothing left to build it with."

His voice fell again, as if towards sleep. He spoke no more till the sun lowered, and the shadow of the hill lay over them, and they went down to the little wood beneath one star. Here they were busy for a time, attending to the horses and getting their own evening meal. After it, Michael missed Anthony and went through the trees in the clear coolness, looking for him. The day's end was one of peace, no less than the day's beginning had been; it was touched with sadness, just because it was an end of something that had been beautiful.

There was a clear slope of grass some distance in the wood where the trees thinned out, to thicken again beyond it into a low impenetrable thicket of thorn and rose and blackberry. Rabbits had taken it for their own, the whole slope was riddled with burrows and heaped with mounds like elfin graves. Here in the twilight by one of these mounds Anthony knelt and dug a little hole, and buried in it a shower of rose petals which he shook from his hand, watched by a fringe of startled rabbits by the

thicket; he pounded them down with a flint as though he feared a resurrection. And he stayed so long on his knees after he'd done it that Michael had time to turn and go back quietly to the hut.

Michael lost his wish that evening for the philosophy book; the thought of those withering leaves crushed and beaten into the earth of the rabbit-field made him unaccountably bitter towards holy Poverty.

Chap. XXI
Frightened, But Not Disturbed

Spring came in very early; warmth, like a gentle breath, seemed to rise from the chalk-hills. They had not been a week in their hut before they found primroses on the far edge of the rabbit-field, dog-violets in all the grassy paths, brittle, close-packed bluebell buds, and all that little inch-high world of leaves that seems immortal, so lightly is it touched by winter, so imperceptibly does it vanish and return. Gorse of the open began to burn at the end of every path; each evening, hares played silently as ghosts among the sunset-reddened stems. The little wood spoke to itself of time to come, of speedwell and strawberry, young birds, young shoots, and the noiseless surf of the may. Only the winds, always blowing through it, made no change. Even among the trees, their song was of the open, of the turf, the mild grass growing over seas and forests and empires and the hearts of men.

Anthony was never tired of hearing the wind. He said it sounded differently on each height and level of the turf. He would tell Michael to come and listen—how here it was like a breath, there like passing wings, and on the summit like the echo of a hunt, the infinite far-off belling of hounds. He did not care for the wood; he liked to sprawl in some dimple of the chalk, with a sandwich of bread and cheese and the sun and the wind going over him, reading, slowly and laboriously, in Mr. Sampson's small-print Bible. He was somewhere in Deuteronomy, hindered by the Ammonites and the Zamzummins. But besides these, he had many affairs on his hands—digging a channel for the overflow of the spring, trying to catch and tame a rabbit, and carving a tobacco jar for Mr. Sampson out of a knotty piece of wood. His days seemed as full as a boy's, and of the same happy trivialities. Love had opened for him again the doors of innocence; he entered into that world and possessed it for the second time—an experience of the soul that comes to very few; not to Mr. Sampson, for all his gentle philosophies, though he shared in it enough to know, as in a glass darkly, what was happening with his friend.

Of this, loving himself, he had in some way no doubt at all. Anthony had seen Diantha—twice, was it, or three times? And now he saw the very spring coming with her face, and because of her was regenerate with the world. Michael knew, and did not know how he knew. He felt with some sixth sense the presence of the divine thing, more divine in kind perhaps than even his own wistful worshipping affection of

years; greater in its capacity for wrong and for glory; glory there is—a prism on tears—when two hearts would build an immortal house on the sliding sands of time. This bow of promise was perpetually arched over the little wood in these days, and seemed as visible as the rainbows which sprang out after a shower almost at their feet on the turf, and which they saw drawn away from them up the hill and over the top on the skirts of the cloud. "Growing weather," the old shepherd called it, when he brought them new bread and barley cakes and ewes'-milk cheeses. But you may see grass and grain growing; the growth of heart and soul is hidden till the flowering-time.

The old shepherd had generous instructions; he kept them well supplied. Michael had never known such plentiful fare. His ribs filled out, he burst a seam in his old waistcoat, which he insisted on wearing as much as he could; his cheeks had a colour, the dancing turf put a spring into his walk. He did not love the open as much as Anthony did; forest-bred, he still clung to his trees. He liked to climb and sit in one of the higher crotches of the little twisted oaks, watching all he could see of the world with a philosophic eye, and singing to himself at times—a mellow roaring that filled all that part of the wood in the pauses of the wind. There was, it must be confessed, something of the hen in his attitude towards Anthony; and from his seat in the branches he had a view of that young gentleman and most of his occupations—very busy and muddy by the spring; or lying for an hour under the furze with an arrangement of strings which he swore was a snare, and which any rabbit could see a yard off; or whistling and whittling at the tobacco jar with a very blunt knife. The channel by the spring was never puddled, the rabbit was never caught, the jar was never finished; grass and briers hid the spade-marks in a season, the strings rotted away into the mysterious limbo of little things, the jar, with its rough-cut vine leaves, had only blanks for grapes. But how real and living they seem compared to the purposeful monuments that time spares longer.

They explored their little wood, following its windings as if it had been a stream; its source was against a blank chalk face where another spring welled and ran as clear as air into an ancient stone trough, hewn from one mighty block. They could not guess who had set it there, or in what forgotten times. But Mr. Sampson said it was Roman work, and spent one sunny afternoon cutting an inscription into the chalk above it. Golden flowers of lichen small as dust followed his knife, and any wandering shepherd might have read there years afterwards; "I am forgotten of man, but the bees and wood-pigeons remember me. Wherefore pass by, O traveller, if thou wilt, sparing no offerings. For these have given me of their first-fruits, a grain of honey-meal and one grey feather." But they liked no part of the wood better than

that they called their own, where the hut was, and the furze, and the eye of water always rippled.

They felt so safe. Danger seemed a tale that they had heard told, long ago. Nothing followed them but the shadows of clouds, nothing threatened them but the rains, nothing haunted them but the mists. These last came slowly down the wood on the clearest nights, shut it away in the whiteness of wool, as if to hide from the eyes of those who sheltered there the mysterious still business of the hills. Day, after these nights, came like a pearl from the sea. Rest and security became a habit; behind the peace there seemed to be a purpose, an intention of the earth and the air. They waited; in that place they could not doubt that purpose and intention were good.

Only once the old fear woke and touched them like the memory of sorrow in the night. It was in the night, and they were in the hut with the door shut. Michael was smoking and meditating, Anthony was carving at the tobacco jar, and grunting at the toughness of the wood. The season of strange long twilights was beginning, and the window was a little square of green glimmer like the glimmer of water, with one star drowned in it. Against this dim light a shadow passed, and a hand was laid on the door.

They sat without moving, the past rising against them. The hand groped over the door, feeling stealthily for the latch. In that silence they could hear the rasp of rough flesh on the wood. Anthony leaned forward and blew out the light.

It could not be the shepherd; he had been with them that morning and brought them a pasty, and some cider. They listened in breathless darkness. Mr. Sampson started and almost cried out when someone passed him and touched him, for he had heard no sound. It was Anthony who went to the door; he had in his hand a thing like a long thread of light—bare steel. In the dusk it appeared to threaten alike the unseen hand that gripped it and the unseen breast it waited for. Mr. Sampson saw it, and it only, drawn back and quivering, the height of a man's heart from the ground; he was very cold and his mouth was dry.

The door opened—for all he knew, of itself. The naked steel flashed, shook and dropped. There was a hoarse exclamation; he could not have told it for Anthony's voice. And there came into the hut Malachi, with a bundle on his back.

Mr. Sampson heard a shocking sound. Anthony was panting as if he had been running a race, gasping like an overdriven beast against the wall where he leaned; little eddies of light sprang from the shuddering sword he held. Rage possessed him at the sound; he roared, and seized Malachi by the shoulders, shaking him like a rat. "What the devil do you mean by it?" He must have shouted something like this, but there was no answer, and the old shoulders he held seemed to collapse and crumble

under his fingers. He thrust his too faithful servant into a chair. Anthony shook himself and struck a light. Mr. Sampson would not look at him, though, he kept his eyes on Malachi.

Malachi, sitting hunched under the bundle, glared up at his master with indomitable scorn. His lips moved, but he made no sound. They gave him a little wine, and his voice came back to him. "So ye thought I'd bide safe to home?" he said, with an evil leer.

"Of course I did."

"The more fool ye," said Malachi, an appearance of content softening his face in the candlelight. But his voice did not soften. He looked; round the hut, sniffing. "A nice mess ye've got into without me."

"What do you mean?" A certain guilt and anxiety mixed with the anger in Mr. Sampson's tones.

Malachi sneered, groaned, took another sip, and went on: "What's yon?"

"A cheese."

"What for have ye set it on the pasty?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, Lord." Malachi coughed and groaned horribly. "What's that in your hat, now?"

"Herbs. . . Have some more wine?"

"No, I thank you, sir. I knows when I be welcome to a thing and when I be not. . . And books on the bed. And a Jacob's ladder in your new hosen."

Said Anthony out of the dusk: "How did you get here?"

"On my feet, sir, but for a ride or two in a waggon."

"What did you tell people on the road?"

"That I was going to Bristol to help mind a nevvy that was a natural," answered Malachi, glancing at his master with peculiar bitterness.

Mr. Sampson looked back at him helplessly. He said: "What have you done with the house?" as if perhaps the old man had brought that with him too, in his bundle.

"Locked it up—here be the key—and Henry Hobb inside of it."

"Henry Hobb inside of it?"

"Ay. Come roving round, he did, the day after you was gone, and me tidying up a bit ere I set off after ye. There was a low vagabone with him that he left at the gate. . . 'Where be Master Sampson?' says he. 'I've a word for 'm.' 'Where would he be,' I says, 'but setting in his easy-chair in his room, as a gentleman should, a-toasting of his toes at the fire and a-drinking of his sherry wine?' 'You tell him I've a word for 'm,' he says again, 'that maybe he'll be glad to hear and maybe he won't.'

‘And I’ve a word for you,’ says I, ‘that maybe you’ll be glad to hear and maybe you won’t, and that’s get out afore I kicks you out.’ Give me one look, he did, and past me into the kitchens, which was all in a litter, and he spun about with his news in his face, just a-going to yell it to t’other at the gate. I’d a pail of muck handy. I ups with it and into his face and downs him with the bucket. Then I rolled him up in the old bed curtains, sir, that was perishing full of moth, and stuck him in the lower part of the scullery press with a pot lid in his stomach. . . ‘Bide you there for the rattens,’ I says, and I goes and tells his friend at the gate that Henry had gone on, and would join him at the fifth turn to the left, fourth to the right and on a bit; and if he missed ‘m, to come here again come morning. Then I packs and goes. But Henry, he had his head out of the curtains and was a-howling. He’ll be heard and let out through the windy. . . And here I be. Here I be.”

The old voice quavered. Not looking at his master, he groped in his bundle. “I thought you’d be missing this, Master Michael, so I brought it along.” It was the philosophy book. As their hands touched over it, Malachi cried out in a voice that pierced them: “Eh, my lads, my lads, and how could you think to leave me?” But he was grim and gruff again a moment after; and when he fell asleep, as he did very suddenly with his head on the table, even his snores were grim.

They made him a shakedown with straw and the cloaks, and laid him on it. He was dreadfully travel-worn. How such an old man had made the journey on foot, how he lived on the road, by what instinct he had followed them to their hiding, they could not guess. They feared an illness for him. But there is with some old men a stage at which nothing very much hinders or helps their journey down the hill, and the next morning Malachi was much as usual, and ordered all things in the hut with an iron rule. He was very much in the way. But his old bent figure pottering in and out, or waiting for them at the door, had a homelike look. In a day or two it seemed as natural to have him there as the furze bushes and the spring. Nothing could for very long trouble their strange serenity. And Mr. Sampson was the richer for the key of his house and the philosophy book.

He was richer, too, for a memory. It came upon him sometimes in darkness or silence like the toothache—the memory of that dragging breath, the glint of the shaken sword, when Anthony stood hidden in the shadow. He thought of it as little as possible, but it stands recorded here and there in the philosophy book like a black blotch. And the sweet days sped; there were white violets on the broken chalk faces, and cowslip buds on the downs. April showed in the little wood like a dawn; swallows dipped and circled for hours over the spring. England seemed on tiptoe, waiting for her flowering-time like a girl for a kiss.

Chap. XXII
Straitened, But Not Constrained

"Here," said Malachi, on the third day of his sojourning, "here be the money that your uncle gave me to live on these two months while you was first away. And then, he said, he'd see to what was best for me."

Malachi laid the good crown pieces on the table in front of his master with a pitying air. "And I'd be glad, sir, if you could find it convenient to move all this mess of paper awhile, me having been waiting this hour past to mix a pudden on the table."

Mr. Sampson meekly gathered up the money and the philosophy book, and took himself to a seat among deep oak leaves, a dry, dead covering through which the earth was sending a breath of hyacinths. A low branch made a rest for his elbow; he absently laid the coins along it in a row, hung his inkpot from a twig by a loop of string, and resumed the pleasant practice of his meditation.

"It may be Doubted," continued the philosophy book, "whether there is any soul among the Righteous, either in this World or the Other, who truly possesses the Wisdom of Poverty. Rather are they poor who know not What it is, as the Ox and the Ass know not the value of Fodder or the Providence of Stabling; who dwell in this most habitable World like Diogenes in his Tub, save that they never come out from their cooper's heritage even to seek for Honesty by candlelight. Such Cloddishness belongs not in the spiritual Sphere, even among the Lost. That Son of the Morning, so far fallen, might reasonably be considered Poor, since there is no Water to Wash out Remembrance in any part of the Hereafter we have of the Hebrews; but even he is not wholly so, for his Beauty is still Lamented in Heaven."

Mr. Sampson looked at these words in some doubt, not being able to discern very clearly where they led; he caught the eye of a curious thrush, and it seemed to him that the bird watched him with scorn. But all thrushes are scornful and contemptuous. He went on.

"The Soul, that High Priest of all the wandering Tribes of the flesh, may see the Fire and Cloud above the Camp, but the blind Children of Promise will go following after strange gods to the end. Even the Sons of Poverty, that Tribe apart, will worship a Calf now and then or be greedy of fatted Quail. And though their Divinity hide her face from them, yet have they looked on the fair work of their Hands, and

been for once filled with Meat."

Mr. Sampson frowned. Was this the praise of Poverty. He continued, with an absent eye upon his uncle's moneys twinkling among the mosses.

"In this Life the faithful, the follower of Poverty, is at one with those who, in the language of the Unlettered, are in the Chase or Pursuit of a Wild Goose. If he abstain, either of Choice or Necessity, from the holding of worldly Goods, straightway another sort of Lucre is poured upon him from an inexhaustible Treasury. Consider, if this first of all Speedwells under my hand should likewise be the Last, how Dear it would be Held; if these Buds once bloomed and Fallen should never be followed by those germs of Corms, little brown sheathed Prophets that promise yet another Spring beyond Winter and are fulfilled more nearly than Oracles, how this present Season should become a Temple heavy with the Prayers of the Just. The Last Spring! Is there a lover in the Earth who would not desire to Die with it, a Mourner who would not shrink from it, an Ancient who would not strain to wet his dry Mouth once more with the Milk of Youth? Wine and Milk hast thou in thy Seasons, O World, without Money and without Price. Thanks be to God that He does not for our Sins strip thee of them and leave thee a bare Beggar-Star, taking Alms at the Doorways of Orion and the sweet Houses of the Pleiades.

"What are the Seasons of the Stars, shall any of the Wise point them out? Is Jupiter so full of little Waters that run by Cresses and Forget-me-not, are there Cuckoo flowers on Venus, is Mars so early red with Campion and young Oakenshaws? Or is this one-time lost World among the many of the Universe alone blessed with April as it is alone cursed with Winter? Without Winter there is no Spring, nor any Resurrection that is not Purchased out of Death."

Mr. Sampson's inkpot, twirling perilously at the end of its string, sent a large blot here upon the page. He paused to mop it up, to read over again that paragraph wherein he had likened his lady Poverty to a wild goose, and to wonder what sort of a pudding Malachi was making. Having paused once, he paused longer, and drew a picture of the supercilious thrush struggling with a worm; at least the worm is unmistakable, if one has to take the thrush a little for granted. There are pale brown blots or blisters on the yellowed paper that look like tear-marks, but are the marks of the rain that drove him back to the hut. He shut the book on the drops, the blot, the likeness of the thrush and the worm, one speedwell flower, and his philosophic chatterings of Poverty and Spring. He found them unsatisfying.

That day the weather changed, and grew wild and chilly. It was curious how the temper of those April refugees changed with it. Great towers of vapour came reeling up out of the south-east and spilled their rains over the hills in sheet after sheet of

driven and blinding silver. After the rains came the wind. Not the wind of sheltered or broken places, but the vast pressure and advance of great walls and tides of air, like a flood poured out of space. It went to the philosopher's head like wine, and he roamed the wet wood-edges wrapped in his homespun cloak, singing songs of war and watching the march of the brief bright storms over the down, like the movement of an army with banners. Twice or thrice Malachi came out and drove him back into the hut to change his stockings; but the supply ran out long before Mr. Sampson's rapture did. Malachi was left alone with his worrying and growling. Mr. Oakshott had been out on the hills all day, heaven knew where; and he could hear his master trampling and roaring like a bull in the underbrush. Old age huddled over a handful of fire, longing grimly for home; and youth was out in the wet and the wind on the hilltops. Mr. Sampson, looking up from the shelter of his tight-reefed little wood, saw his friend now and then, a small solitary shape on the outer sky-lines, hidden in fuming cloud or revealed again in the beautiful wild lights.

Mr. Sampson's enthusiasm moderated at last, was lost and merged in a longing for his supper. He went to the hut, but the other had not come in; Malachi knew nothing of him, had not seen him for hours. And as it drew towards dusk Mr. Sampson became uneasy, and wished that Anthony had not gone alone.

"Alone?" Malachi broke in with his rare crackling laugh. "Alone? Them at his age isn't commonly alone, master; they most often has God or the devil for company." He went on, almost gently: "And he's hard drove between 'em, poor lad."

"What do you mean, you fool?" said Mr. Sampson pettishly.

Malachi turned and stared at him all over from head to foot.

"What have you been a-doing of to-day, afore you was walking in the wood, sir, if I may be so bold?"

"Writing in my book."

"The devil burn it black!" screamed Malachi suddenly.

"Malachi, I insist——"

Malachi coughed, groaned, and begged pardon. "But do you suppose," he went on, "that everyone's veins runs ink-and-water like yourn, 'stead o' red blood?"

"I don't know what you mean," returned the bewildered philosopher.

Malachi stared at him again, turned away with a hunch of the shoulder and another groan, and muttered: "It's the book-learning on an empty stomach has done it."

"Malachi——"

"Hush!"

They heard at the same moment the light, quick stride they knew so well; but Anthony did not enter the hut, he stopped at the shed where the horses were; a few minutes after they heard him again, speaking low and sharply to Periwinkle; and they heard the dancing drum of impatient hoofs on wet ground.

With an amazed face, Mr. Sampson got up and went to the door; but Malachi was there before him: "Go back, master," he said quietly. "Let him be."

"What's this, Malachi?" Mr. Sampson's voice was dangerous, but the old man did not move.

He only said obstinately: "Go you back and let him be. Let him alone."

Michael's anger fell as quickly as it had risen; he turned away. He felt again, as he had felt so often lately, that he stood on the brink of a world of things that he had learned only as a child learns. The child asks, What are life and love and death? He has to live and love and die before he knows. He heard his own heart beating thickly, and the sound outside of a half-wild creature let loose in the wild night.

The sound swept down one of the crossing paths and was gone in the wind. "He'll break his neck," said Michael under his breath.

"Likely. We can't help or hinder."

"Where's he going?"

After a silence, Malachi said: "How should I know? Maybe——"

"Well?"

"Maybe to Coombe."

Mr. Sampson sat down and drew his book towards him. He sat very still in the candlelight, shading his face with his hand. He did not turn a page in an hour. The wind cried so around the hut and the hollies that he could not read.

Here and there, among the old people and the lonelier villages of the downs, you may still meet with a vague legend, a myth of a horseman riding in storms as soundlessly as a cloud, driven for ever by some forgotten passion or despair.

The myth was born on that night.

Clouds were streaming over the sky. Shadows streamed over the earth until it seemed also as insubstantial a stuff as the air. The shepherd folded with his sheep looked up from his sleep and saw the tall horse pass with these driven and drifting shades—saw not with the eyes of the flesh but of the spirit, how something went by him in the dark, bright, swift, fierce, held by the night like a sword in its sheath. When he told his story in the morning, he told of flames, of a sound like wings beating, of a dreadful rush of speed. Who can say he lied? Though he had seen no more than the dark flutter of a cloak and heard no more than hoofs in the wind?

Horse and rider were one, and for the time ruthless, swift as fire.

By one of the old green cross-tracks of the downs a carter sat dozing against his broken waggon wheel, a blunderbuss across his knees, while his horses grazed peacefully on the short turf, the sweetest in the world. The tall mare was upon them like a shadow, and gone before the carter was awake enough to do more than yell and let off his weapon. It knocked him flat, and as he staggered up, it was to see his own dull beasts rearing, screaming, breaking their hobbles and thundering after her as bits of straw and rubbish are drawn on the heels of a storm. Later he found one blown among the furze and the other dead at the bottom of a chalk face. His tale was also of savagery and fire.

A ragged lad asleep in a hollow, having wandered from God knows where, woke almost under the flying hoofs; the wild mare snorted and snapped at him in passing, but her rider never turned his head. The tramp-boy was left with an inextinguishable memory of the beautiful, vicious horse-face near his own, of the flashing face of her rider that seemed to shear the darkness like an edge of steel. He shuddered in his ditch till morning, and only with the light found courage to brush off the dried bridle-foam that clung to his rags.

On the very top of the hill was a rotting gibbet, where for years had swung the tarred, feather-light body of a man. Even this inhuman thing, this unrecognisable waste and wreckage of life, seemed to be aware of the rider beneath, so wildly it strained and slanted after him on the wind. And he who had never noticed the living in his path found time to stop and look at the dead, and wonder what sort of heart had once burned in those rain-hollowed ribs, before he sent the mare breakneck down the long, smooth, dusky slopes to Coombe.

She was mad now with the speed and the night. He could scarcely hold her in. He swung her down a rough bank into the one street of the village, and she went through it like a blast.

The innocent, sleeping cottages seemed hostile, blank faces that refused him what he sought. He hated them, could have wrecked them as he passed. The flying thunder of hoofs flung back at him from the glimmering walls as if he were being kept off with an invisible fusillade of stones that battered, not his storming flesh, but his soul. Trees and narrow gardens went by with a dark rush. Ahead, black on the soft night, were the trees that folded the great house where Diantha was.

It was very dark here; the shadow of the hills lay on the place. The air was damp, and heavy with budding lilac. The great winds of the open roared far overhead. He went on like a fire. The wet sweetness of the lilac was a fire to him, the air choked him, his own speed consumed him. Ahead, ahead this fortress of gentle trees, sighing softly in an eddy of the wind-storm above, fronted him as

unbreakable as granite and iron. He rode at the gate so close that it seemed he must have wrecked himself and the mare against it, swung her about, wincing, and sent her up a track to the east that wound uphill. He came out on a height of clear grass from whence he could see the house. Struck motionless at last, he sat in the saddle and gazed, the heaving horse under his knees, the April wind in his hair.

Cooled and rested, the mare fidgeted; he sat her motionless.

Rain drove down the slope; he cared for it as little as the man on the gibbet. Periwinkle sighed and moved; he stilled her with a heavier hand than she had ever known. The winds died, the clouds thinned, stars showed but palely. He knew nothing of it, saw nothing but a shadowy roof among the budding of beech and ash, the pallid gleam of a line of windows, and, later, the faint and growing rose colour of old brick. Who can tell what else he saw, what barrier, what denial, or how out of his motionless body his soul fled and beat itself against the tile and brick as at a gate of heaven?

Morning approached, so pale, so pearl-like, it was more a slow recessional of the dark than a dawn of day. The slopes of all the hills were clean-washed and still. In the valley a foot or two of mist hung and turned the low places into pits and abysses, from whose deeps trees and tall roofs shot towering and floated like clouds. Everything was changed, new, a morning so pure and original that it could never have come to the world before in just that way. The weathercock on the great house sprang suddenly into a golden existence, cocks crowed in the village, the eastern sky flooded with colour. He sat his horse high and dark against it, waiting, while his soul beat and called at all its walls.

He was heard. Just as the sun rose, a tiny far-off figure came out on a little balcony from an opened window, and stood, motionless as he, golden from head to foot, lifting up her hands and eyes to the hills.

Then, slowly on the spent horse, he rode away.

Chap. XXIII
The Man in the Furze

He rode at a walking pace. Even so the slow, soft curves of that country had in a half-hour taken him again to themselves. Coombe was a dark cloud of trees under the rising bright clouds of day, vanishing; his passion seemed to have fallen away and sunken with it. He felt infinitely stilled, infinitely tired. Even that star of remembrance that he had with him gave him no more now than an evening light, of unspoken farewell, of unnamed renouncement. Round him was dewy morning, the downs showing a face familiar as the sky, yet new as the day, the larks going up, high and higher, the whispering of the wind that was never quite still. Dawn had surprised him like an enemy in ambush, he had forgotten time and the sun in his course—the sun who now seemed to clear the hills so suddenly that the long hushed shadows stretched from the little bushes of thorn and furze grew short with a leap. He took his direction from it, intending to ride round and enter the little wood from a new side. In all the world of grass and air, nothing seemed to move that morning but himself, and the climbing birds, those visible praises of the earth.

The track that curved by the gates of the house at Coombe ran upwards here a mile or so and died out in the turf like the wake of a ship at sea. A man had turned up this road the night before, mistaking it for the way to the village; finding himself lost, he had put a good face on it and spent the night under a gorse thicket. He was there still as Anthony passed, an empty bottle showing why he slept so late in the sun. He and his reason were a blot on the new-washed world. The man on the horse looked down at him gravely for no other reason than that, for no reason at all the tired mare stopped. The shadows of horse and rider, long still, lay over the man under the gorse. Suddenly Anthony knew what lay there, what, if he looked, he should see.

He silently urged the mare nearer, leaned from the saddle, and looked.

He had had no doubt at all, but the reality was a stunning flash, a blinding explosion that flooded every vein with another sort of fire. His life lay there, and in the warming silence and the music of the wind he sat and looked down at it—at that which fettered him more than chains of iron, walled him in more closely than stone, sickened him more than visible and dreadful death. He saw all this in the round person of a red-faced little man with rustic straw-coloured hair and an innocent

whitish stubble on his chin who lay asleep in badly fitting, rumpled clothes—cast-off gentlemen's clothes five years old in the fashion. And if that little man got up and saw him and named him, it would be as if his own life rose from its grave and destroyed him, as if he were claimed by his own ghost, damned by his own judgment. He sat the mare stone-still except for his quick breathing; his eyes were hard as stones; his heart was like a stone; his hands on the thin leather were heavy and cold as stones. He seemed to have a cold stone in his right hand, and glanced down at it, wondering how he could have picked it up; it was the pistol he had with him. He had not drawn it; rather, it had drawn him.

He slid it forwards. A lark went up from among the furze. There was no other sound in heaven or earth. The man slept on—his life slept.

There was a ticking like the ticking away of time. It was the beating of his own heart; the wind sighed in the furze. The shadow of the stems moved by hairbreadths up the legs of the little rumpled man who was Danger: who was Loss and Remorse and Despair with a stomachful of gin. The mare drooped wearily in the sun. Anthony's hard, light eyes never lifted. Only his hand with the pistol crawled higher. The lark sank, and its song was yearning upwards as it came down: "Sweet, sweet, sweet." Life was sweet, pure love was sweet, too sweet ever to be quite hopeless; the sun was sweet, the eyes of women and the talk of men: freedom was sweet. . . He raised the heavy barrel. The lark gave one piercing note from the thicket. The man snored gently.

The barrel sank. The man still slept. While he slept he was safe.

With a shaking, hasty hand, Anthony thrust the pistol away. His eyes were still on the sleeper; they were raging now; he was biting his lips till the blood reddened them with helpless rage. He longed for the little man to wake, to cry out, to run at him, to run away from him—anything to send a bullet excusably through that yellow, dirty thatch, that steadily heaving chest. He saw him as that part of himself which he had most grown to loathe. He longed for him to wake, and dared not wake him, and dared not shoot him while he slept. The man snored again, fully and peaceably. Inch by inch Anthony turned the mare and edged away. He sat in the saddle more bent than Malachi, and rode away from that place like an old man.

When he had gone, his Despair sat up under the furze and wiped his face and said: "Whew!" He peeped cautiously after Anthony through the stems of the furze; he said: "Philander"—the full name of Anthony's Despair was Philander Coggs —"Philander, you are a man of genius, and that snore was a masterpiece." Anthony was in full view a mile or more, riding wearily over the turf; Mr. Coggs watched him all the way, with varying expressions on his red face, some of which approached

admiration and pity. He was quite a decent little citizen, considering; and kind. But business is business. Before he went down the track to Coombe he cut a mark in the turf under the furze bush, a mark like a dagger or arrow with the point set accurately in the direction that Anthony had ridden. If Mr. Sampson had been there and the heart of this affair had been opened to him he might have fancied that the blade of this little green weapon reached out and touched their little wood, miles away.

It was Mr. Sampson who, after those racking hours, first saw the tired horse and tired rider dragging homeward slowly over the morning hills. He went to meet them, took Periwinkle by the bridle and laid his hand on her rider's knee a moment. He had at times the genius of silence, and he was stricken silent by his friend's face. Anthony looked down at him, too weary almost for speech.

He said: "I've seen her——"

Mr. Sampson bent his head.

"—far off—for a moment—like a star——"

"Yes, I know, I know." Who should know if he did not?

"—for the last time."

Good Michael looked up, and began to speak, hurriedly and shyly. . . "Why the last time? If you go now, please God you will come again. If you've lost everything, there's time enough for you to win everything back. Oh, Tony, there's no heart so true as my little cousin's if—if you've won that. And if you've won that indeed, what have you lost? What is hope for, but for such as you? What's denial for, and loyalty, and suffering, but to lay at feet like hers, and make even her the richer for them? D'ye think you or she can be poor, with all that?. . . While she is still in the world she's yours, isn't she, to worship and serve? And to hope for, even if she is—far off—like a star. And if you lose her——"

"Go on, Michael."

The philosopher was silent for a minute. When he went on his voice was shaken; ". . . if you lose her as well as all the rest, why—you'll be hard put to it to carry such losses humbly even before God, so high they are when measured with other folk's gains."

Anthony slid from the saddle and held by it, swaying; it came to Michael with an extraordinary shock that he was laughing. He said: "Wait a bit, and I'll show you how I'm going to serve and worship." He spoke thickly, like a man asleep, and lunged out his sword, holding the hilt in front of Michael's eyes. "Listen. I will swear true service, and you shall be witness. If I go again to look at her—if I speak to her any more than I must—if I seek her out—what am I saying, Mick?—oh yes—if any more I trouble the peace of her body or soul"—his voice went to a whisper—"may I

know neither rest nor freedom for ever and ever, and may the God that she and you have half-learned me to believe in forsake me in life and deny me in death."

His hard laughter had gone; he stared at Michael as if the voice he had heard speaking was not his own, and set his lips to the hilt. He dropped it immediately, muttering that it was very cold, and he was very tired. Michael got him to the hut, and he flung himself down and slept. He lay for hours, so lax, so motionless, Michael thought he looked like something washed ashore and left there by the ebb of a deep sea.

Chap. XXIV
Diantha

Diantha stood on the hillside above the house at Coombe, looking at hoofprints stamped deep into the turf. The morning was still young. The wind sang about her with a feathery rustle like the wings of birds. The dogs from Coombe were with her; the tall hound stood with his head under her hand; the spaniel, as if he followed with his own amber eyes the look of hers, sniffed at the hoofprints gently.

She thought her heart was laid as open as the hillside and stamped as clearly with a sign.

Of that vision she had seen at dawn nothing was left but this.

She wondered, for not even to herself could she name what she had seen. She had dreamed, wakened, and found her dream again far off in the sunrise; she had lifted her arms and her heart to her dream. But some of it was real. She stooped and laid her hand on the marks. They were dark and wet. Milkworts, blue and white as blue sea and white foam, curled over and feathered the edges. Suddenly, with her hand in the fine grass, she blushed. Memory burned her. The thought of that hero of hers was a fire in her heart.

She hid her face, and the dogs looked at her with their wondering, soft eyes. A plover wheeled towards her, the air drumming in his wings. He flashed away. The world changed for her for ever before the bird turned for another rush. The sun, the air, the earth, everything was changed, touched with a glory, charged with a burden: and she with it. She knew the inexplicable thing.

She lowered her hands. Her eyes were misted. Her clear face was less clear, holding a reserve, a beauty, a secret. No longer expressing her own soul only, it reflected the soul and the face of another; and every reflection is in some sense a shadow.

At first the fact was enough for her. Anthony had ridden here to look at the house where she was. She went no farther. There was no living thing to see her but the dogs and the plover. With that veiled look on her face, she began to gather the tiny milkworts and fill the hoofprints with them.

The sharp-cut edges shadowed the flowers; they looked like flowers in a grave. The thought came, and fear followed it, and doubt. It was her strength and weakness that she could not endure doubt. Truth she must give and take, or go for ever unfed.

That dread and panic of the movement of time that once touched Michael touched her. She also felt blindingly that this man, her man out of the world of men, was in the grip of some current that at any hour might sweep him out of her reach. The necessity of truth was on her, a necessity as great to some souls as the need of bread to the body. He had asked only for memory. She had more to give than that, and before there came their parting-time, he must know that she had more. She was too ignorant to fear truth, too innocent to be ashamed of it, too brave to refuse it. She had no doubt of him at all; her nature had answered to his, a kindred thing. Here she struck truth at its very root. She made a sort of garland of herself and crowned him with it; and truth was justified of her children.

Her dread sent her down the hill to the house and straight to Oliver West. Standing before him with her hands clasped in an old childish attitude, she asked him to take her to the hut in the wood, that she might speak to Michael and his friend before they went.

"Then you know they're going?" Mr. West spoke sharply. He was sorry for it himself. He had vastly enjoyed this matter of young Oakshott and the mythical letter, and liked to fancy himself a living danger to the Hanoverians. And now only that morning had come a letter from Mr. Holles, folded small in a packet of snuff, telling him that all things were ready; his eyes and nose were still red from the reading of it.

But Diantha had not known. Her face was such a question that he began to speak and tell her all the plans: and then stopped himself and told her to go away, that it was no schoolgirl's business.

She said: "You can tell them all that, if I am not wise enough to be concerned in it. Only take me with you and let me speak to him." She did not say to whom. Her hands were clasped unconsciously on her heart.

His irritation died out as he met her eyes. He loved her very tenderly. He answered: "Little Di, to whom do you want to speak, and why must you go?"

She did not say, nor did she move her eyes from his. He saw the red run over her face and die out, leaving her very white. She looked wonderfully young and defenceless and proud. He felt suddenly helpless.

She went on at last: "You know that father has not made me to be quite like other girls. He thinks that good women should be brave and honourable like good men, and so he has tried to teach me. I am in debt. It is not my fault. I have been given more than I can repay, sir. Except—except by a little of the truth. Let me clear myself."

"It's the completest folly—madness, my girl. You are not likely ever to see him again. Lord love you, the first time we lose our hearts we all think it's for ever. You'll

have forgot him this time next year. The whole thing is impossible. Think of it. Think of what he is, how he's placed, what you are, and your father's hopes for you. Be a good girl, and—and—and don't think of it."

"I know it is impossible—as you mean it. But it is not impossible that we should love each other."

"Lord help us, what will your father say? He has only himself to thank for bringing you up with these outlandish notions. A woman should be modest and drooping. Drooping, my dear. And you—you're as straight body and soul as a boy, and I love ye for it. . . And ye're content with things as they are?"

"Since I must be—yes."

"A brave answer. But I'll swear he's not, poor lad."

She said with her quaint air of sobriety and experience: "He will be content. He expected far less, sir."

Mr. West was breathless and wordless, but his whole person expressed still a powerful negative. She suddenly knelt beside him and laid her head on his knee.

"Uncle."

"Well?"

"That which you have spoken of—the first time we love——"

"Well?"

"Have you ever forgotten it?"

After a long silence he said softly: "No."

And again, more softly still: "Never."

She went on: "Then do what I ask of you," and beat him. His hand was on her brown head.

He answered: "I will. You shall have your memories, you pure little heart, as I have mine. . . But, for mercy's sake, don't ye tell your father."

She smiled as she rose, but her eyes met his fully no more. There was some country within her boundaries where he might not encroach. She said: "We will take them a fresh pasty, and some eggs, and a little jar of clover honey, because Michael is so fond of it. If you will order the horses, uncle, I will pack my little basket."

He found himself doing her will, as so many did—almost out of pity. They rode within the hour. Anthony woke from that stunned sleep of his with the news that they were approaching the little wood.

Chap. XXV
The Vivid Flame

Anthony went to meet them.

He was still deadly tired. And he had failed; he had not gone to her, but she was coming to him. The world was as weary and unreal to him as it is to a man after long illness or grief—a thin bright painted veil of the appearances of things, so fragile that the sweep of a hand might brush it away. His senses were numbed and lessened. He scarcely knew that Malachi arranged his hair and his coat; the ancient, many-wintered face was a ghostly thing. Michael was a shadow that moved and talked to him and brought him food. He could not eat. He heard himself thanking them as from a distance. He thought they drew together and watched him gravely, but he was not troubled by it. They were strange, impersonal, infinitely removed. It was as if only two living souls were left in a world of shades, of the half-alive or half-dead—Diantha and himself. He went to meet her.

The world was a flood of cool silver light that dazzled him. Not a leaf moved in the little close wood. The pool lay white among the furze, reflecting a bright white noon. It was full day, and yet the time seemed to have withdrawn again to dawn. Everything was so still, so immaterial, so curiously changed. He watched, seeing how thin threads like the weaving of spiders trailed here and there. The end of all the paths closed in a colour of pearl. It was the mist. It had come over the hills like a wave, soundless; it hung poised over their wood, not fallen yet, but ready to fall. The light and the air were strained through it, softened. It pleased him, because it seemed fitting. But he did not know why. He went to meet the riders and led them out of the mist into the wood, which as yet was clear except for those drifting threads down the pathways and in the hollow by the rippled pool.

Diantha was wearing a country cloak and carried a basket in front of her; her eyes were downcast, her face very still. Mr. West looked grave. He took Anthony's hand and asked after his wound. His wound? He had forgotten it; he said it did very well. He went to help Diantha down, but at the last moment gave place to Michael, contenting himself with the basket, which he held till she took it from him. She gave the eggs and the pasty to Malachi, and the pot of honey to Michael, who clasped the sticky little jar to his bosom speechlessly, generous enough even then to hope that Tony was not jealous. Mr. West, moving stiffly in his tall boots, said that he too had

brought them something—"Your marching orders, young sirs." His honest blue eyes were troubled. He slipped his hand in Michael's arm and drew him to the hut. He had money for him, directions, a route map drawn on tissue paper with all the names left out and the points of the compass changed—the happy and useful device of that arch-plotter, Mr. Holles. Anthony watched them as they went in at the door. Something in the air seemed to deaden all sound; they seemed to fade noiselessly into uncertainty. The horses grazed on the sunny side of the hollies; the sound of their teeth tearing the grass came small to the ear like the sound of a boring beetle in the night. It was not so much the muffling of the fog as that all the audibility of life withdrew itself. The hut was only a few yards away, but in the milky light that rested on it, it looked ready to dissolve. The hush and unreality that rested on the hills and the wood were here too. They were quite alone, with the white water, the dark furze, and the impalpable barriers of the drifting and deepening fog. That, too, was as it should be.

He did not look at her, but at her silvery reflection in the pool. They did not speak. That, too, was as it should be. The silence and the mist seemed to be one thing, one substance. For once the little wood was windless. One could not have been sure whether it was the mist or the silence that dimmed the trees, blotted the distances, drowned the hills. They were alone. They were together. For a long time they did not speak or move. They stood like two children on either side of a gate. He saw those iron bars, but they were invisible to her.

He said at last: "Why did you come?"

"I saw you on the hill this morning."

She answered with a childish directness. They were both throughout their time together as simple as children, or as men and women in the face of a thing much greater than themselves, who are the heirs of heaven, and earth.

"You should not have come."

"Why?"

"It was cruel. I said farewell to you then, and God be with you. I had nothing more to say, that I dared say, then or now. I can only say that over again."

"Say it."

"Farewell."

"No, no. The other."

"God be with you, as my heart is. You will remember that gift you took?"

She said, with a wistfulness he did not understand: "I will never forget. Your gift is—very safe."

"God bless you again. Keep it so."

"Always, Anthony."

She had never called him that before. He caught his breath hard, and stared into the pool of water that looked like a well of bottomless pearly light at his feet. He wondered who would have the right to call her by those names his heart was using to her then—"My dear, my queen, my little rose." He thought of his oath, of his service, of the cold metal that seemed to have struck from his lips to his heart when he kissed the hilt. And of much more, much more. He was fighting for her, against herself and him. Her honesty and innocence were the strongest things she could use against him.

She said again: "Anthony."

"Yes?"

She did not go on for a moment. Then she said, under her breath: "How thick and shining the mist is. It is—it is as if God were making here a little new world for us to hide in, away from war and parting and all trouble. I cannot even see Michael at the door."

"Your world would be too near heaven ever to be mine. . . Look how clear the water is, and almost still."

So they lingered, unwilling to change what they had.

"Why did you ride to Coombe last night?"

"Have you any need to ask me?"

"No. . . No. But I do ask. . . To give me courage."

"To look for the last time at the place that knew you, the walls that held you. It is cruel of you to ask if you knew."

"I am not cruel. It is men who are cruel to women. It is you who are cruel to me."

"I cruel?"

"Hush. Yes. Listen. You want all the glory of giving yourself. You do not wish me to share it. You are ungenerous."

"Diantha——"

"In exchange for that strange, great, sudden thing you gave me, you asked nothing of me but remembrance. A stone for bread. I could give you that. And you would go away, leaving me so, for fear you leave too much. I am braver than that. I can give you remembrance, honour, but they're stones, after all. I can give you——"

"Oh, my God. . . What, Diantha?"

That beautiful flame-like look was hers again, as he had seen her first, though she was weeping. She cried almost fiercely: "Bread for bread, my hero." Her voice rang, but it sank in a moment to a whisper: "Love for love."

Tears blinded her, and she trembled. She hid her face in her hands to shut out his

face, his arms. But he did not take her in them. He stumbled to her, fell on his knees, caught her dress and hid his face there. Her courage had been amazing; but her tears had conquered him. She shook so that she could scarcely stand. She touched his hair, clumsily, timidly. She whispered: "I will always remember you and be true to you, Anthony. I will wait for you. When you are safe in France I shall hear of you sometimes. But if I did not, it would make no difference. Some day you will come back to me. If I grow old and die it will make no difference. I will still wait and you will come to me." She took no account of time and change; she still thought more of love than of her lover.

He was quite still and silent; she might have thought he was crying, only she had never seen a man cry. She touched his hair again and thought, half-frightened, how fine and dark it was. She would ask him for a piece of it—cut it off for herself, perhaps, with her embroidery scissors. Tears choked her. Parting suddenly stood up like a rock, an unrealisable pain. She said again: "Anthony."

"Yes, my white rose?"

"I want to look at you."

With a trembling hand on either side of his head she raised his face. Then she shrank and cried out: "Oh, my dear, what have I done?"

"Did you think it would be easy to win and lose you in a day?"

"How can you lose me when I'm yours?"

He was silent. She whispered: "Have I been cruel after all?"

"Yes."

"But you forgive me?"

"Yes."

"Because you love me?"

"Yes."

"Then there's nothing to grieve over. Happiness and peace must be waiting for us somewhere, though we don't see them. But the things which are not seen are eternal."

So she comforted him; she might have been far older than he when she stooped in answer to his eyes and shyly kissed the fine young haggard face between her hands. The mist drew closer about the pool. Their world was as narrow as this, and as wide as eternity. They spoke and were silent.

Once he cried out: "I shall never forgive myself."

"It was my fault, my fault. Do you despise me for being so bold? No, no, I see you do not. Do not look at me like that, you break my heart. Think how I should have been left, without the right to show my heart even to myself. It would have been

too hard."

"Yes. Too hard."

"And you will go to war again perhaps, and suffer, and perhaps——But you will come back again."

He did not answer. She clung to him suddenly, sobbing: "Oh, what have I done? I could have let you go before. Now I cannot bear it. Tell me what I have done." And he comforted her.

The spoken words, the avowal, the kiss, had been like the miracle that gives substance to a shadow, a body to a dream. She had changed her dream for the reality. He did not tell her so.

Again she said: "Yes, you must go. I must be like those brave women sending their heroes to war." She broke a twig from a flowering thorn and set it gravely in his coat. "The may is very sweet, and that's my hero's colour. I wish it were a rose, but the roses are not out. Will you keep the white-thorn?"

"Yes, for ever."

"I will try to be brave as you are, and hope. Can you believe that a little while ago we did not know each other at all, or think of each other? I cannot."

"No. But all my life seems to have led to you; as if all the roads in the land led to one garden, one rose."

"I shall always think of you."

"I could almost pray that you'll forget."

"How could I? You'll never forget me?"

"No, no."

"Hush! My uncle will come for me in a minute. We have so little time."

"So little time."

"But all life to remember and hope."

"Yes, my rose, all life to remember."

"I can hear my uncle now. He has been telling Michael all about the horses and the inns and the ship. Yes, yes, it is all arranged; you are to go. You will be safe, so I shall be happy. Say good-bye to me now, Anthony, not before the others."

"I cannot. He's not coming."

"Yes, he is."

"It was one of the horses moving. We have a few minutes more, surely, out of all our lives."

"Not many, not many. Oh, say good-bye to me."

He caught her to him roughly. "I will never say good-bye." He held her so a moment, set her down, and turned to meet Mr. West, who at that instant came up to

them. Diantha turned to him a face that was extraordinarily content.

Chap. XXVI
That Mounteth Ever Upward

When, much later, Anthony returned to the hut, he found Mr. Sampson soothing himself with the philosophy book, as others might have tried to do by quarrelling, or by gambling, or by violent exercise. His quill screeched as he drove it across the paper.

"Jealousy," he inscribed among a multitude of splashes, "is one of those hindrances with which the follower of Poverty has little to do. How may he know Jealousy, when he sees all men his Betters? Or Spleen, when he seeks nothing and so is not Rejected? Or Envy, when he has no Possessions which he may belittle by comparing with greater? Only the Son of Poverty may in fact rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that are grieved. He is without Ambitions to prevent him in the former, and without Enjoyments to disturb him from the latter.

"Rejoice then, O Disciple, if there be any Excuse for it. And weep for all that are in the World, outside thy only Brotherhood, troubled with Hope, hurt with Desire, Sheep of rich Pasture for ever straying into Thorns. Thou art not free with these to abide or stray. Thou art a bought Beast tied to an empty Bin.

"And be content, Son of Denial, with the mouldy Feed and the grudged Stabling. If any fill that Bin for thee, they will not seek to fatten thee with Peace. Nay, they will pour in such a Granary of Wars, Changes, Partings, Disturbances, Affections, Pains, Troubles, Alarums, Watchings, Wakings, Starvations, Surfeits, Upheavals, and all Afflictions of Soul and Perils of Body that Poverty shall be no more Visible to thee than a Gnat in a Sandstorm, and thou shalt be crushed by the Multitude of Experience."

Mr. Sampson looked with dislike and distrust on a piece of paper bearing the name of a mariner and the name of a ship. Mr. Sampson was to commit those titles to memory and then burn the paper; he had them already graven on the substance of his brain. He looked furtively at his friend who was leaning in the doorway, blocking up most of the light, filled his pen, and went on.

"The Apostle Paul was right when he said that he died daily. So do many, of quieter Mind and more earthly Parts than he. Each new Experience is in some sort a Death, an immense Addition or an incommensurable Loss. The wonders of the Lord may be in the Deep. But Malachi knows of no Remedy against the Sea-Sickness

except the childish one of carrying a Potatoe in the Pocket, which I do think him to have confused or filched from the Rheumatism. The Counsel of Poverty is plain: go a-shipboard fasting, then thou wilt have naught to lose in this Extremity either; yet am I likely to lack the Fortitude to carry it out. Malachi is not vexed at so soon trusting his Fortunes to the Waves, but then he had, as he tells me, an Uncle a Ship-Chandler; and besides is so busied with the thoughts of wet Sheets at the French Inns that he has time for no other Cares. Nor is the Holy Apostle alone in his Struggle with Beasts. Every Foreign City will be in some sort an Ephesus, it being well known that all such are so filled with Cutpurses, Rogues, Robbers, Highwaymen, Thieves, Cheats, Brigands, Horse-lifters, and hardy Incontinents of every Variety that he who adventures among them carries his Comfort as lightly as a farthing Dip in the Dark.

"And Hope," continued the philosopher, "is yet another Hindrance, vain and unreasonable, which the son of Poverty is wise to let alone. His path leads him to thin-air'd Peaks. Let him never strain his sight for a golden Peep at the Gardens of the Plain and the walled Cities with their pleasant Towers. Nor yet—O discompanionable Way—must he look too long at the Stars lest he trip, nor listen to the rare Birds, lest he be delayed. Let him journey with a level Eye, looking not up or down, but Ahead. The sooner shall he see the lights of that Refuge where all the Homeless harbour them, and the Desolate are sustained, and the Hopeless are filled."

Hope. Mr. Sampson looked at the word thoughtfully, and wrote no more. He glanced once or twice at his friend, and began to speak, but did not go on. It was after long hesitation that he said at last: "I'm going to ask ye an unpardonable question."

"What is it?"

"What brought her here just now?"

Anthony did not answer.

Mr. Sampson looked closely for some minutes at the feather of his quill, and fitted it very carefully into a crack in the table. "You are perfectly in your right to refuse me an answer," he went on, "but I'm asking again, in the hope that—that ye've enough regard for me to tell me. What brought her here so quick this morning? It was not altogether to say good-bye."

Anthony answered, without looking round: "She wished to give me a certain truth, and having done so, she was satisfied."

"She forgot," said Mr. Sampson after a pause, "to say good-bye to me."

He fitted his pen into another crack. "I have sometimes feared," he went on in

the same thoughtful voice, "that she would one day wreck herself on the truth. And that truth you have between you—is it your love for her or—hers for you?"

"Why do you dare to ask me that?"

"Ask yourself why."

There was a long silence.

"Tony?"

"Both, I think," said Anthony at last, very quietly.

"Yet you," said Mr. Sampson immediately, shooting out the quill pen like a threat, "yet you speak like a man without hope!"

"I take it," he continued presently, with more reserve, "that in this matter you are obliged to regard love on its higher and more spiritual side that makes it immortal, that you care much less for the lower quality that all flesh shares with all flesh. Parting and grief are such spiritual agents, they may well take the dross out of any metal. She is worth the pure gold. I know her better than you. Since she was a child I have loved her, quite without hope. She is little more now, or she was, before you came. I've had your friendship these months past, and have been—happy in it. But you have never trusted me, you have never been willingly open with me in any matter. I do not blame you, I have never quarrelled with it, if it has hurt me. It may be no more than a wise habit of caution in you, it may be a natural dumbness you cannot altogether break. You have given me so much in all other ways that I cannot quite understand why I should myself notice this reserve in you, or consider it, or be ever so little abashed by it; unless for the reason that it always seems a silence outside you, forced upon you, not belonging to your nature as I have seen it. With you, now, I'm being very open, against my own pride. And I tell you—do not let her feel that darkness in you. You may give me what you choose and as much or as little as you choose. In everything that concerns her, you have not the same power of choice. She will expect from you the last jot and tittle of honesty, just as she will give it you, unasked. Such claim as I am making on you, I'm making only in her name, as if I were her brother. She's very young. I know her heart. This has come on her with a suddenness fitted to these troubled times, but to nothing else. If she has given you anything, it's her whole heart and soul. Give her yours. If she has given you anything—you see I trust you, I'm asking nothing of you now—I doubt if any man of us can guess how much she has given or with what courage. And I find you in this darkness again, downcast, hopeless. I do not understand you. I think I have never understood you."

Anthony came very slowly and stood on the other side of the table. His face was hidden in the shadow of the low roof. Mr. Sampson did not look at him.

"You are very patient with me. You have always been patient, and often merry, and the kindest fellow—— There is no man in the world whom I would rather see with her. I think of you both so highly that I'd sooner see her alone for the rest of her days with her memory of you, than what the world calls matched well and happily. She would be happier in that sorrow than in any other pleasure, or I don't know her. She would be happier and better. And so would you. That's the darkest side of it. In these times, who is sure of anything, of trouble any more than of peace? If you have lost, you may win. Nothing in life, nor, as I am glad to think, in death, will cause you to lose her. I saw her face when I lifted her to her horse. . . an hour or so past. You were the hero of that brave heart from the first. Oh, I know! You are more than that now. And yet you trust God and her so little that you're sad. Why? Anthony—on my soul—I have thought you very nearly worthy of her. And now again you make me confused, baffled, bewildered. Why are you like this? I have never felt that darkness in you so much before as now, when—for you—everything should be light to the end."

"Then you do not blame me?"

"Blame you? No. Why should I blame? You have kept your word. You did not go to her. Whatever you have of her, I could believe that you have taken unwillingly."

"God knows I have."

"You speak like a man whose fight is lost, not won."

"My fight is lost."

Mr. Sampson opened the philosophy book and violently shut it again. He said curtly: "Then you are not the man I took you for."

"No."

As if he were very tired, Anthony sat down at the other side of the table. His face came into the level of light.

Something like a whip-stroke sent Michael to his feet. The silence was a dark wave, poised, ready to fall.

"No. I am not the man."

Among the eddies and currents, all the backwash of that fall and crash and smother as of many waters, Michael heard a voice speaking—his own.

"Will you go on?. . . Explain?"

"I will try. . . in a very few words. I am not that gentleman of the Prince's that you took me for. I was never within a mile of Weatherly. I was never on the march. . . I never rode to London. I rode from London. Running away, but not from the soldiers. From the bailiffs. From my debts. From the Fleet——"

"But——"

"Let me finish. The soldiers were hunting me when I fell over your wall, in mistake for the other. He was in that neighbourhood. He was, I think, Curtis Everard, or one of the Fords. I hope he is well away, at least. My memory of that time is confused, so forgive me if I cannot tell you much. I do not know much myself. But there was one morning, as it seems, a very long time ago, when I woke in my house in London and knew I was ruined. I sent my man for my pistols—yes, these. I said I had a duel to fight, and wished to see they were in order. He did not believe me. He was very stupid. He went on his knees, and behaved like a woman. At last I made out something—that he had some sort of desperate plan he thought better than mine. There was the mare in the stable, there were five guineas he had saved, and there was the open country. Well, I rode for it.

"The thought of the prison followed me like a shadow, over the hills, over the roads. I do not know how long I lived on those five guineas. I was starving at last, and very weak. I could hardly hold in the saddle. I was bitter that the mare could eat grass and go fed. For days, for weeks, I had thought I was watched and followed; I rode down a lane and came plump on a corporal and a couple of men. They had one look at me, cried out, and gave chase. I do remember no more till I woke under your roof with my tale all ready for me. I should have spoken. I did not. I was afraid."

"Of what?"

"The prison. I had seen—I had seen there a man I once knew."

"Why do you tell me this now?"

Anthony shook his head slowly. "I do not know. Do you think I have not wanted to tell you before?"

Michael was silent, groping among those tides of darkness shot with an aching light. Out of his memory silence sprang up to confront him, and speech; the picture of a man who led out of a stable door a mare with her hoofs muffled, and looked backwards in farewell; the picture again of a duel in a shrubbery of sighing laurels, and Oliver West's puzzled face. These things were such hurts to him that he shrank from them. But there was a worse pain waiting him, somewhere—there—here. Diantha. The pain left him numbed. Words came against his will; "And she has just left you."

"Yes," said Anthony wearily.

Michael bent his head. He, as well as the other, felt a great fatigue, a sense of the futility of all effort, the hopelessness of all struggle. Their words came heavily: dead sounds.

"And so she does not know the truth after all."

"No, she never will. I can never tell her."

They waited—so still and silent on either side of the table that they might have been listening and intent on their own lives dripping away, second by second, beat by beat. Imperceptibly the mist was invading the hut, bringing with it the thick sweetness of the may. It set uncertainty between them. They saw each other from a distance, dimly, farther and farther away, across an unbridgable gulf no wider than the table. That was the last pain of all. After it, Michael's lips just shaped the word "Forgiveness."

"For me? Are you thinking of me? I shall never ask it. She would give it and break her heart. No, for the little time that's left, I must still go dressed, as it were, in the other man's clothes. I began with a lie for my own sake. I must go on with it for hers. And that brings me so low, not even her love can set me on my feet again."

He was speaking carefully, with some difficulty, as he used to read to Mr. Sampson from the *Utopia* and the Bible, halted at the long words. "Look ye here. I have never asked anything of her but remembrance. She's so young, in a little while she'll go back to that, and give me that only, and then she will be comforted." He broke off, and hid his face in his hands. The silence seemed like a barricade that Michael had not the strength to break. He could not look far enough into the future to shape an answer. What answer could he make? His life was a machine suddenly reversed, running into the past.

He said after a time: "The name you gave me——"

"Is my own."

"I am glad of that." He could not think of anything more to say. His house had gone down in sliding sands; he was grateful for that one bit saved from the ruin. That man across the table, who was not himself, not anything that they had thought him, was still Anthony. He was glad of that.

He had suffered an indignity of the soul. The risk, the danger, the crown of a desperate cause, the laurel of a forlorn hope, the glory that always seems ready to lighten an irretrievable disaster, all these ended in a matter of tipstaves and a debtors' prison. And if in his relation he felt that shame, what in hers would Diantha feel? She would be broken by it. He said again heavily: "You are right. You know her better, after all, than I do. You've tied yourself. You can never shift your burden to her. You can never tell her."

"No. I can never tell her."

That confession would have been the last shame, the final cowardice.

Michael looked about the hut, where they had known such freedom and curious

happiness. That they should be there was a dishonesty. The bread they had eaten was ashes in the mouth. Their flight to France was a cheat. Yet they must go on with it—he could have laughed—for fear one girl should know! He was bound to a lie for the rest of his life. And the other? Let their paths separate as quickly as might be. Let him go down into any limbo he chose, so that he might be forgotten. It would be better for him, many times better for her. For her sake the sordid play must be played out; they could do that together still. Still they had that one ground of comradeship.

Later, pity woke in him, not yet for the individual, but for all life and loveliness and youth broken against the brutish circumstance of time. He began to think of the flesh, and the way we are led blind by it; he began to see among many souls one that had struggled to escape from a thing intolerable, by any road. Until Diantha, by her truth, had shut all roads against him. There was no redemption. He began to see the tragedy of that soul, of a nature intended for all bright, fine things, condemned to go for ever a companion to its own single dishonesty, and to be judged by it. He wondered if God did indeed care for all His wastage of creation, if there were any soul He would pity more.

The stillness and silence he had lived in passed. He said hoarsely: "Tony."

The word broke the other, as you might see a man physically broken and shattered by a bullet. A moment after Michael was saying over him, in the old voice: "Don't ye, don't ye, now. But oh, Anthony, why not have told me all this before it was too late?"

Why not? How could they tell? Now, at least, there was little left untold. Bit by broken bit, Michael saw the picture of that soul he had imagined; hating what it had done, bound by it. So hindered by one silence that it seemed there was only one road whereby honour might escape from dishonour. Hindered even in the choice or accident of that, caught back and delayed by all the clutching hands of life and love. He had complained that he saw and knew too little. Now he saw too much. He covered the eyes of his soul; covered them from the past and the future; what future for the broken debtor to whom Diantha had given her heart?

There remained the present, all that he had left. Now, at last, he thought, he knew Poverty; he had seen his goddess unveiled; she was like death.

The light grew more and more confused, coming from no centre, but resting and enlarged with the air. It was a light that seemed to herald something, setting back the clock. The birds were quiet, the winds had left the little wood. Sound had no

business in the place.

"I am not the man."

Michael heard nothing but that. When there came out of the fog the sound of two horses galloping, he had to teach himself afresh what the sound signified. Even so, it brought no fear to him.

They waited quietly.

Oliver West came running to them out of the mist.

Chap. XXVII
Over the Wall

He said: "You must ride for it, Mr. Oakshott, and at once. They've got wind of ye somehow. They're after ye. They're all about the wood."

Still they waited.

"D'ye hear me? There's not a second to lose. We saw them coming down the hill under the fog, and turned at once, I and the girl, to warn ye. They're just behind. Never mind for us or for your friend here. We're known. We'll get out of it somehow. But your risk's too great, and ours, if you are found with us. Ride for it down the wood, and put a few miles behind you before you stop. We'll find you in a day or so, never fear."

Anthony said: "Who are all about?"

"Who? What d'ye mean? Soldiers, of course. Where's your mare? Where's your saddle? Where's your arms?"

A flush, a look of life, came into Anthony's face. He said: "Where is she?"

"Down by the hollies there. Thank God for this fog; it gives us a chance. Haste, for your life."

They led out the mare. She came eager, ready for her master's pleasure, her light hoofs dancing for the open turf. They had her bitted, saddled and girthed in a moment. Their hands flew. Malachi brought arms, holsters, such food as he could get together. Michael ran for the riding-cloak, and fancied, as he held it, that it still bore the ghost of a violet scent. He gave it to Anthony, and their hands touched.

Anthony, high and straight in the saddle, looked down at Michael with a faint smile. The beaten look was gone. He was once more on the very tip-toe of adventure. If he were playing a part, at least he played it very gallantly. Michael stood away from the mare.

The hut stood, screened by its holly and furze, beside one of the paths that cut the wood from side to side. Farther on, at a place just visible in the mist, this path turned into and crossed the broader one that ran the length of the wood. Malachi ran here and waited, peering all four ways. Presently he beckoned with his arm.

Anthony touched the mare. She went forward obediently, almost soundlessly. There were no goodbyes said between her rider and those two who stayed by the hut, watching and listening. Strange, dim, impossibly tall in the mist, they saw him go.

He said nothing to the girl waiting so stilly under the hollies. He could not see her face clearly nor take any message from her eyes. Only, he saw that she was there. She, that as he went by he raised his hand and just touched the whitethorn in his coat. He had no right to the little sweet spray which seemed to shine even in the fog, it was so white.

He drew rein at the corner and waited awhile beside Malachi. They saw the old man reach up and catch his hand. They seemed to speak to each other, but there came no sound of their voices.

Silence, sweetness, mist, and these shadows in it.

Suddenly Anthony swung Periwinkle round the turn into the main path with a leap and was gone; and simultaneously with his going the silence split apart. It was like an instantaneous opening and shutting of the fog, too rapid for the senses to secure; the fog itself swallowed all the echoes. Michael said stupidly: "What was that?"

"A shot."

Malachi stood still at the corner. The noise of the mare's flying hoofs went past him down the long path. They heard it for a moment, beating, lessening, dying away. Said Oliver West under his breath: "He's off. Good luck to him."

The silence closed on the heels of that sound, but only for a moment. It was shattered by shouts, bewildered calls, the crash of bushes, a new thundering of hoofs. Three redcoats, heavily mounted, blundered all together down the long path. Two others wheeled into it from the far side. They were visible only for so long as they crossed the end of the path by which the hut was. They showed like shadows streaming on glass. They flashed away in a momentary storm of sound and speed. The last one halted and shouted something at Malachi.

They saw the old man lift his arm and point the way Periwinkle had taken. The last man plunged after the others. The sound of the pursuit fled away, faded and died out with the sound of the quarry. The silence came back to its own, and the milky still light, and the air's sweetness. A few minutes, and it was hard to believe that they had ever been disturbed.

Michael breathed something, and ran to Malachi. The old man's gesture, his pointing arm, was like a flame in front of his eyes. It was incredible, but he had seen it. He was so angry he could scarcely speak. He faced his servant, white and stammering. The weight and lassitude of the spirit were burned away from him, as rags fall away in fire. He found words at last, fierce and dreadful words. He stoned Malachi with them. He could have lifted his hands and killed the old traitor. Mr. West laid hold of him and drew him away; he shook him off. He felt, in the midst of that

rage with his servant, a more bitter rage with himself. That was Anthony he had let go, riding for his life, without a word. What did anything else matter?

The sense of futility, of abiding incompletion, struck him silent again. Suddenly he was dumb. A little lifting of the mist showed him Malachi's face. He knew, with a twinge of blind fear, that the old man had not heard him. What did it mean, that indifference, those grotesque grey wrinkles, that twisted trembling mouth?

Malachi was weeping. He put out his hand and touched his master's. He moved, and they followed him.

Just at the crossing of the paths, out of view of the hut, was a great tangle of thorn and rose and blackberry. Under the boughs, which grew very low, the earth was hollowed away from the old green roots, as if a ditch had been there. Malachi parted the branches. They looked under them.

Anthony lay in the hollow, just as he had rolled from the saddle at the turn of the path. Life seemed to surround him, the petals of the shaken thorns whitened him all over. But he had already on his lips the faint, wise smile that is not of life as we know it.

His hands were flung among violet buds again, but these were dog-violets, they had no scent. His face was flushed still with the rush, the ride, the adventure, that part he had played to the very end. But here all the stillness of the lost wood had suddenly found its centre.

After, as it appeared, a very long time, Oliver West moved forward softly, and stooped over him. Michael heard their whispers, his and Malachi's. "Instantly. Through the heart as he turned the corner. . . A chance shot. That white flower in the coat must have given them an aim. . ." Michael wondered why they should speak of the flower as white. "What's to do now?. . . Nay, don't speak to him yet awhile. Don't tell him. No help for it. . . Before dark. . . It's no use."

Michael could have told them that. What was the use of their lifting and gazing and searching? His only thought of his friend was that here he had gone again, as he had come, over the wall.

Chap. XXVIII
The Desire of Such

They got up at last and came to Michael.

He wondered why Anthony did not come too, instead of lying there with his face half hidden, and the thin motionless grass against his cheek, over his mouth. He said again and again to himself: "Shot through the heart; shot through the heart as he turned the corner." The words were sounds that meant nothing.

He looked curiously at Oliver West's shaken face. He said to Michael: "The soldiers may be back at any time, though they'll have hard work to find the wood again till the fog lifts if they have gone far after the mare. With luck, they may follow some miles before they see the—the empty saddle. But then again she may turn and lead them back."

But she never did. She never came back. Whether she left her bones at the bottom of some old chalk pit, whether the men caught her at last, whatever fate she found they never learned of it. The mist took her. She never came out of it any more.

"We must get away as quick as we can, after doing the only thing—— What we can, what we must. It's a dreadful business. I'm sorry for you. I little thought I'd feel it so. There was something about him—— It's as if the world had grown older since that shot was fired. It's for the safety of us all to go as soon as we can, and to leave no trace. They'll think the hut is a shepherd's if we hide the books and things. My poor fellow, do you understand? Now—now I must go to Diantha."

Michael listened impatiently. He did not understand. He understood nothing but that he must be alone to speak to Anthony.

Anthony, and yet not Anthony. He had never been so contented and so satisfied. Well, all tangles were smoothed out here, all deceits abolished, all roads ended in this house of peace. He began to speak, rapidly and earnestly;

"It's safe now. You know I'll never tell her. She'll never know. Maybe it's the best thing after all. I've not had much time for thinking, but I don't see any way out of it. You could never have shaken quite free, dear lad. And ye're not made to carry such a grimy weight as that lie through the world. Well, 'tis lifted now to strong enough shoulders. Ye're quit of it. The light she saw you in from the first she will see you in for ever, till it changes to a clearer one. I don't mind now. That's what I had to tell ye. I can't explain, but somehow ye're back where ye were. That's it. Back

where ye were. It's as if I'd never seen you fallen from that place. That's the best of it. And if you know anything, you must know how much easier it will be for her this way. And so you'll be satisfied.

"D'ye hear me, Tony? There's nothing to trouble you now. You've done all you had left yourself to do, and played your part to the end. And the end has cleansed the rest of it. D'ye understand me? It's all right about Diantha now. If you were not worth her love then, you are worth her grief now. So it is very well. That's what I mean. You are back where ye were. Tony——"

Mr. Sampson went on his knees. How tall and straight his friend was, measured so against the stems of the old thorns. He had never known how tall. That was West's cloak over him. Why? Why a cloak at all with the air so warm, and his own was gone on the saddle? He was pale enough now, anyhow. Pale as——

Mr. Sampson knelt on, turned into stone. His brain wouldn't supply any meaning for the word in his mouth. Yet he knew all the time. So that was it.

He saw that someone was beside him—Malachi. The old man bent and arranged the cloak as he used to tuck in the bedclothes when their nameless guest lay in Mr. Sampson's bed after his toss over the wall—not this new unscaleable wall, the garden one. He was grumbling to himself as he used to grumble when they left some of Saturday's porridge: "Wasted, wasted, wasted."

So that was it.

He stayed until Diantha came. He heard her say: "It is not much farther than France after all." He left her then with her hero. There was no injury now in such a thought.

The hut, when he entered it, was just the same as it had been an hour ago. He sat down at the table, just as he had been sitting, looking carefully at everything. The little jar of honey was on the table at his elbow, the carved tobacco jar lay in a corner among a multitude of chips. The philosophy book was there as he had last shut it. Mr. Sampson was conscious of a curious quietness of spirit, a comfort, almost a relief. Anthony was back where he had been.

The wrong and the folly and the weakness were all wiped out. The past could trip him up no more. All that was sordid, all that was common, all that was unclean had passed away. Dignity had come back. The little vulgar story was lifted again to the high level of tragedy. The secret was safe. He was safe. So those who loved him could be content too.

But what a strange emptiness, what a destitution of the heart. Here was Poverty, close at the side, held fast by the hand; he could not let her go if he had tried. The bread had been taken from his mouth, he was beggared again. Far away, he fancied

the old house sharing in his desolation as it had reflected all his fortunes; haunted by a quick foot, a passing face, a whistle shrill as a blackbird's. He thought of Anthony as suddenly gone back there with Periwinkle; busy in the stable; or weeding the carrot bed; or waiting in the loft to give his host a fencing lesson, smiling as Michael fell dubiously on guard; a figure bright and keen as the steel in his hand, never to be blotted out by darkness. Was it possible that the old house was empty too, that it held nothing but its gaunt rooms and echoing halls and all the rotting stuff of its decrepitude? No, for Poverty at least lived there now, a shivering, grey figure, always being fed, always taking, always asking: never satisfied; she and her scrimpings and screwings of the soul, her warpings of the spirit, her meannesses of the flesh, had she reached out and claimed Anthony at last? No, he had nothing to do with her. He was free.

It was hard, after all they had done together, that Tony should have to do this alone. Something lay in the last word, a pressure, a foreboding, just as the weight of the coming flood is felt before the first wave. Michael braced himself for the attack of something that as yet he could not see.

"It's for the safety of us all to go as soon as we can, and to leave no trace. My poor fellow, do you understand?" No, not that, surely. Surely they were not going to leave the lad alone so soon?

Malachi came into the hut. He was whimpering and growling to himself as very old dogs do. He went to the corner where the spade was. He took it up, and the light glinted on the edge. There was some earth dried on the back; still with his whimpering noise, he pulled out a stick and began to clean it; the dry clay fell as softly as rain on the earth floor.

Then for the first time grief came and looked Michael in the eyes.

Chap. XXIX

Leave-taking

In front of them, as they rode—how slowly—up the hills, the evening was clear. But behind them fog still covered the wood and all it held. The twisted tops of the oaks showed now and then above it, golden in the receding light; the leafage, divorced in illusion from its stems, rested there like a crown. Everything else was hidden. They could not believe that it would ever know any change of time or of condition. Their grief, unrealized as it was, had already removed the scene of it into an eternity.

Oliver West rode close to Diantha; a still woman who was strange to him. Michael rode a little apart, leaving room for that fourth horseman always at his bridle rein; every few paces he turned to look for him, and each time the unrelenting emptiness of the air hurt him afresh, more than anything present or visible could have done. Even so, he could not believe it.

The chalk-hills looked down at him. Their mystery was gone, and their appeal. Great clean slopes of unremembering earth, man had nothing to do with them or their serenity. They were friends grown into strangers. So they too had power to hurt him in their way. His friend was not of them, not among them.

Where was he, so suddenly enlarged, the immortal so instantly put on? Not there, in the hollow of the chalk where he sat and read the Bible. Not there, where he lay with the rain beating on his face. Not there, where the hares ran under the furze, and the plover rose wailing, and all the chain of blind life went on to a blind end. Not there. Not here.

They lingered for Malachi, who came up with them and mounted silently behind his master. His hands came round Michael's waist; he shivered when he saw that they were earthy still. He said: "Is all done?"

"Ay. They'll find no trace. All done and put away."

Put away, put away. How the hoofs took up the measure, and beat it out on the turf like a drum far off.

Two men, going directly to the little wood, approached them noiselessly over the turf. Michael watched them indifferently. The first was a short red little man, with yellow hair and a dirty whitish stubble on his chin. The other was lean, drab, a seedy

tradesman by the look of him, except for a singularly white, fierce face. Michael's eyes lingered on this man with a faint instinct of familiarity, though he could not remember to have seen him before.

They made as if they would have spoken to Oliver West: he intercepted them. The little man looked at him, curiously, wisely, not unkindly. He said, after a long, silent stare: "Well, young master, have ye finished with it?"

"I do not understand you." But yes, he had finished with it.

"Ho, yes, ye does. Have ye given up running away from the most righteous law of England and the will of his most Gracious Majesty the King, as expressed and exemplified—I'm a man of eddication—in the person of Philander Coggs, which is me? I've got your friend this time, I have, so I can afford to be pleasant. Should ha' nabbed him long ago, but my idees was all messed up by they fool sojers. Philander Coggs likes to do his work quiet. But he does it well. Is he ready to go along o' me peaceable? He's had a plenty rope."

"You will not find him."

"Lord," said Mr. Coggs almost jocularly, "as if I didn't know all about you and 'im and the little 'ut, and all so pretty and plain. Not but what it was a good notion, and might ha' put me off, but I'd information from a girl at Betsworth and a woman at a mill. Do ye mind, now? Save me from my friends, I say. I'm slow. But death'll let go sooner than Philander Coggs when it's a case of debt."

He swelled his little stature pompously. The lean man broke in, in a hoarse, shrill voice: "My debt."

"You be quiet. You've no recognised standing."

"Quiet? No standing?" the seedy man screamed suddenly. "When he's ruined me? When he's turned me into the streets? When he's here, my gentleman with his coats and his steinkirks and his canes and his bills? He'll not laugh at my bill much longer. It's a true one. I'll live to see him in prison yet. I'll live to see him broke as he's broke me. No standing? I thought I'd left my mark on him once——"

"Yes. With a knife. You ain't perfessional. You're wicious. You're only here for identification purposes." He turned again, quick and suspicious, to Michael. "And don't ye try a cut back, master, to warn him. I'll show my authority——"

"I don't require to see it. I'm not hindering ye in anything ye feel called upon to do. But your time's wasted."

"I know my road," he said, with a grin.

Michael looked at him gravely. "Ye'll not find what you seek at the end of it."

The warmth died out of Mr. Coggs' face. He appeared puzzled and grim. He would have spoken again. The quietness of Michael's face, his whole air of security,

held him silent. And while he stood, silent and staring, Michael saluted him and rode on. He made one movement as if to follow. The tradesman whom Anthony had ruined caught him eagerly by the sleeve and drew him on towards the wood. Once or twice, as Michael rode slowly away from them, he looked behind, and saw that they had stopped and were watching him. Then they went on and were lost in the edges of the mist. Michael smiled. Foul, mean weapons that they were, their charges were drawn: they were like fire that could not burn, water that could not drown. All that dirty business was over. His friend was free of it, clean of it.

The long slopes that led down to Coombe, the great house in its dark trees, quiet, stillness, peace everywhere. Diantha bent forward in the saddle and drew her hood over her face.

All the way they had not spoken. When they drew rein at the gate, they lingered there, as if the act of entering it would put the last stone in the barrier that separated their morning from their evening. They were motionless till Diantha said faintly: "Michael."

He was beside her in a moment and took her down. She stood before him, her hands gripping his shoulders, her eyes strained on his face. She began to speak, with a rising wildness terrible to hear after her restraint.

"Is it true?"

"I don't know, I can't think. I suppose it must be."

Oliver West interposed: "My poor child, let me take you in. Come with me."

"No. Leave me alone. I must speak to Michael. I want Michael. Michael, you have lost him too."

"Yes, my dear."

"But you had him longer than I. I had but just found him. And now he's lost again."

No, not lost as he might have been. Found, reinstated. But he could not tell her so.

"It seemed at first that he was still near. There, in the little wood. But as we left it, we left him. He went. Oh, so far. Much farther than France. He will never write to me. I have never seen his writing. I think his spelling would be very bad. I shall never hear of him, winning fresh glory, new honour, remembering me, perhaps after all coming back to me, my hero. I learnt to love him so quickly. Will it take me long to learn that I shall never see him again?"

"Hush, Dian. I—can't bear it."

In a moment she was trying to comfort him. "Dear cousin, perhaps it will not be

so bad if we bear it together. We will learn to think of it as something bright, something fine, which we had for a little while, and lost—for a little while. I'll not say 'My hero,' I'll say 'Ours,' and we will be brave, as he was, and so proud of him."

She smiled at him. Only by her weight in his arms did he realize that she had lost consciousness with that smile on her lips. He was aware of a cry and a great hurry, and of wide-eyed women that took her from him. In the dark days, of which that was the first, he found a comfort almost fierce in the memory that she had turned to him, that she had wanted him, that to him she had shown her last courage and her last weakness.

Chap. XXX
Mr. Sampson Goes on With His Education

Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo. This was written of a nation; used again, by a later seer, of one young girl he loved. For in any accumulation of human loss, in wars or plagues or any destruction, nothing emerges which is greater or more overwhelming than the "sudden and mysterious disappearance" of one life. This mystery is the mightiest force in the education of the race. Mr. Sampson found himself, poor philosopher, moved down to the foot of the class under that schoolmaster. He had to begin afresh at the alphabet.

He remained some time at Coombe. At first they asked him to stay for the girl's sake; afterwards for his own. They were very good to him. The greathearted lady of the house grew fond of him and called him kinsman. Mr. Holles joined them there. They were left in peace and security, no one came to trouble or disturb them. Danger seemed to have passed away with the mist from the little wood.

Mr. Sampson took their kindness gratefully. There was no room now for pride in his house of days. Besides, Diantha needed him.

From the first, by a sort of unspoken agreement, they refused to do honour to the lost by silence. They talked of Anthony continually, and found a curious cheerfulness sometimes in doing so. He was always there, the third in their company, and Mr. Sampson stood in guardianship of him. The truth, as Michael had first imagined it and as he had learned it at the last, was so involved for him that he grew less and less able to separate the shadow of his belief from the substance of his knowledge. He spoke of Anthony as simply as Diantha did, held him as high. He seemed to forget that he had ever seen his friend fallen; or perhaps he went back to the truth underlying all appearances, and found the soul greater than its doings. To many it would have been an intolerable burden; Mr. Sampson, faced with a life-long deception, found comfort that he was still able to do something for Tony.

But he was lost and pitiably puzzled. There was change and mystery in everything. He was like a man let loose in a strange country where no one understood him when he asked for bread. The most common words and acts were things to bewilder him; nothing was what he had expected it to be. When he had looked forward to the accidents and separations of life, picturing his narrow world as it would be when his friend had left it, he had pictured himself as the same. Now

he found the greatest change and reversal in himself. It was he, not Anthony, who altered; he who went on, and Anthony who was left behind.

Youth and love had taught Mr. Sampson much; but now their learning seemed likely to be blotted out by this last teacher. The slate had been swept clean, as if by the single sweep of a great hand, and words in a new language had been written on it. He tried to make out their meaning. How did he succeed? Only one page of the philosophy book was written in that stately room looking over the downs which was his at Coombe.

"I am like the Spouse of the Song, who made haste to open her Door, but found that her only Friend was Fled. For I felt the Hand of Poverty at last on my Soul's Latch. I sought her to keep hold on her all my Life. Now, I said, it is Well, she comes to seek me. She will house with me at last, and there will be no Room for any other. My different Company hath left me, but she is Faithful; I will grudge her Nothing. In my Hunger she will be fed, in my Loss she will be nourished, in my Incompletion she will be Fulfilled. But when I opened to her, she was gone, when I made ready to meet her, she was away. I inquired for her, but None had seen her. Even as those who follow Joy, so I grasped a Shadow and enriched my Hand with Air. I cried to her, Is there nothing Faithful in the World? But there came in at my Door for answer only the breath of the Morning. And consider, Son of Poverty, how Poor thou art, if even she will have none of thee. I have been True to her, but she Denies me. Many Gifts have I brought to her in my Time; the Smoke of Sacrifice has gone up to her, rich with such Seasoning as few Gods have smelt. Yet for a short Forgetfulness, for a little Falling Away, she removes from me. When it would seem that most is Required of her, there she is not. I have nothing left; why should she refuse me? There is now no Light to Dazzle me; why should she deny me her Face?

"Is she like Innocency, which, once lost, can never be found? Are her hollow Gates like those of Eden, never to be re-entered? Is the mere Dust of the Feet of Love enough to dismay her? Be still, Son of Poverty; she also is a Mystery. Thou canst not answer for her; thou canst not answer even for thyself. There is a dead Wreath on thy head, thy mouth has tasted Wine, thine eyes have seen Salvation. They will see little for a While in this Darkness; they will be too Tired to make out her Footprints or Whither she is fled. She will return upon thee as one that travelleth. Let her alone."

The philosopher was like a man who takes an old garment from the peg where it has hung for years, and tries to put it on, and finds himself grown out of it. He could not resume his spiritual coverings of six months past; they were too tight; they threatened to give way utterly upon pressure. Diantha, with all her generosity of soul,

could not help him; nor his uncle, too late in the rescue; nor Malachi, grieving and ageing like a neglected dog with no one to tease him. He had to weave his own ghostly cleading, and did not know how to set about it. Meanwhile, the universe wore to him the face of an insistent question—seemed to hold itself in suspense, stars, rivers, winds, as if waiting an answer from his one little stumbling, purblind spirit. He did not know that answer, nor what was expected of him. He went bare under the eyes of all life, driven by loss and confusion unspeakable.

Driven so, he went back to the little wood.

He went, because his soul had to go, with a dreadful bodily shrinking. Yet when he reached the place there was nothing dreadful in the quiet trees, the trembling pool, the deserted hut now strangely shrunken into leaves and briers; nor in that grass which had already lost all token that it had ever been disturbed. The marks of the spade were all lost in kind leaves. Life had flooded over all that had been. The traces of death were washed out. There was no sign left of haste, of fear, of the last desertion. Sunlight hallowed the spot, but lent it no special grace above the rest of the wood. Michael wondered how this could be, when to one woman and one man it was consecrated of grief above all the rest of the world.

He pushed in stealthily under the thorns as he used to tiptoe to look at Anthony asleep on the only mattress at home. No disturbing him now. Mr. Sampson had a white rose in his hand, a wild rose that he wanted to stick in the earth there; thinking that if he ever came to tell Diantha of this visit, he could tell her of that too, and she might find some comfort in it. But he hesitated at last. The growth was so thick, young leaves were a veil to his eyes, little webs made him blind, the twisted stems and branches were all alike. . . He hesitated. It came on him like a blow. He was not quite sure. . .

He crashed out of the thicket, pursued by a vivid fear of himself. He was afraid of his own nature, stung by the frailty, the forgetfulness. His hold on his friend had seemed firm as a handclasp; now that hand was sliding from his own; he could not keep to it. What was the reason for this enforced disloyalty, this inexorable thrusting-on? The trees, the sky, the familiar hills were all far withdrawn from him; they all faced him with that still waiting look, as if they asked a great question which he could not hear. No help in them. It was for them to ask, for him to reply. He left the wood as if he had been hunted out of it, and came back to Coombe at dusk.

Diantha was always out of doors in the evening; she was in the kitchen garden now, gathering peas. He saw the glimmer of the big white linen apron she wore, and went, and stood before her like one coming for judgment. He said: "What must I do?"

She shook her head slowly, her clear eyes on his; she did not pretend to misunderstand him.

"What must I do to be healed?" His voice rolled deep as a bell between the homely rows of peas, where on the tip of the sticks white blossom clung like a flight of moths.

"You are a man."

"Not as you, who can turn loss into a friend, sorrow into a lover? I begin to believe you are right." He had been speaking passionately. He changed suddenly and said: "What have you done all day?"

"I? Oh, I learned how to make a pickle of green English cucumbers with wine vinegar and dill and fennel and cloves of garlic. If you like, I will make you some. And I found a passage in my lord of Manchester's works for Uncle Oliver; and I copied out a scientific treatise for my father, all about the Lightning, and how it is caused by the exhalations of the oils of plants. And I read a little, and walked a little, and sewed a little, and unpicked as much as I stitched. And now I am gathering peas, for Mansell has cut her finger."

He said under his breath after a silence: "Yet you have that face to show."

She flushed, faintly, exquisitely. He turned away and walked to the end of the path. He stood so a moment with his back to her. The scent of dewy box became part of memory.

He went back to her. "Diantha."

"Yes, Michael?"

The docile, childish way of answer, the clear upward look!

"Good-bye, my dear."

"Good-bye?"

"Yes. Not now, not at once, but very soon. And I shall say it to you now. . . I must go home."

"Oh, Michael. Why?"

"I do not know. I only know that I must. Here, I am lost. Perhaps, in my own familiar ruin of a house, I may find myself again, learn my lesson, be shown what I have to do. I am grown so desperate, it is worth a trial at least."

"My father——"

He met her eyes gravely, and shook his head. "No. No, I go as I came. As poor ——I took his help—with unspeakable gratitude, dear—for Tony. He does not need it now. Nor do I. I can take my pride again, like a poke on my back, and go. I shall go as soon as may be."

"We shall be very, very sorry."

He could not help it. He lost hold on himself one moment and said swiftly: “And you?”

Her eyes were watching the shadowy hill, fringed with early stars. They turned to him slowly, and they were wet.

“I shall be——”

“Yes?”

“—very lonely.”

Chap. XXXI
Lover and Servant

There are many loose pages at the end of the philosophy book, torn out, closely written in the form of a letter that seems never to have been sent, though there is no doubt for whom it was inscribed with such a generosity of ink. There is doubt, though, if it were intended for her eyes.

"As I write, my only Dear, close against the Pane for the last of the Light, there is on my Page a continuous small falling and etching of Dust shaken down by the mere motion of a Goosefeather, which I must be as continuous in Removing. This is no less than the visible decay of my Habitation, but I am not discountenanced. Why should I be so, when this more intimate House, my Body, was also from my Birth on the Road to Corruption? These Mansions are of use to me. But of that large tho' Inferior one of Stone and Wood, the Uses are all but Accomplished. It is no more a Home to me. And when a man's House ceases to be that for which it was raised out of gross Materials and Mire, he is better quit of it.

"The poor old House. It has served me well enough, till now that I am grown too rich for it. The last service was the greatest. For it has afforded me, not the old Peace that I craved, but a Sword.

"We came back to it, Malachi and I, of a clear grey Noon. Nothing was changed in this short While but a few more Tiles fallen, the Thatch caved in on the old Stye, and Martins builded in the Barn. There, behind those rotting Walls, was my old Self waiting for me. There were my old Habits and Endurances ready for me like Hounds, my cheese-paring Retainers, Economy, Fortitude, Indifference, Submission. Dry bones, dry lips. I am returned from a Pilgrimage I went on with Youth and Love and Death and Danger, and had no Taste for their Welcome. I've had my fill of Wine, and can't stomach sour small Ale again in a hurry. I'm come back, like an Adventurer, too Great for my old Ways. I was a Stranger in my own Courtyard. I made to walk in at my own Door, with Malachi behind me carrying my Portmantle. The Dark and the Emptiness and the silent Reproach of the rooms came to meet me; they barred my way. I fell back—that which I Am from that which I Was. Malachi thought me too deeply moved; he went in first, and lighted a small Fire in the Library, and set my damp Sheets a-steaming in front of it.

"So was I moved, but not as he considered. I had become suited, as it were, to

my fine new Company; and I found my former Fellowship risen against me to cast me out. I had looked to find at last her that I ever followed, with Pain, with Humility, even with Joy. Now at length, I said, I am secure of Poverty my Mistress. But my falling House gave her no room; Love, Grief, Memory I found here, and she is never with them. I shall never come up with her, for I must company with these for ever.

"Is this my Learning? Hath Death leave to visit us that we may learn the sacredness of Life? Holy to me is that last memory, which even we two do scarce touch on together, which leaves you in my Debt, my Dear, as please God you will never dream yourself to be; but holy too are a hundred laughing Recollections that go in and out of my Roof as the Martins do, and in as great Happiness. A hundred times a Day I ask myself, Is it well for the lad? And I answer, with a Surety I thank God you will never share, It is very Well.

"What I dream, I know not. What I must do, I know. I must face the World and go out into it, now, while my Strength is in me, now, while yet the Windows are not darkened. I cannot go back, I must go on. I must join that remorseless and splendid Progressional which was set a-going when Adam's clay was breathed upon, and behold, he was a living Soul. I must go to seek my Fortune, or I am unworthy of one; a poor Prince, under diverse Hindrances, robbed of my only share of youth's inheritance and all the fruits of my Soil. No, not all. I may yet suffer, I may yet serve. And since I may serve and suffer, I may hope.

"Is this my Salvation? While I was yet a-seeking it I went through the empty rooms above—my Mother's, that one where we laid Anthony, my Cousin's. Here in the last there was something that shone in the Dust and the Dusk, a little dim blue Star, a Spark of Hope. I took it up. It was a Sword that I remembered, that had belonged to my Kinsman whom I had never seen. I had it in my Hand once before, only to cast it away. Here it was restored, so dull with rust and Mould that it was hard to think it Steel. Only at the Point for a finger's width the noble Metal broke clear of its Defilement, and took the Light and proclaimed itself. It shall go with me, be my Staff or my Weapon as Occasion calls. I took it Without and rubbed the Cobs off it with Leaves; the Rust remains until I be some way free of my own long Tarnishment.

"So I go. Asking nothing of you, for fear I ask too much. Forget me; you cannot rob me while I remember. Deny me; you cannot cast me down while I am faithful. I see you with the Pea-shucks in your Pinafore more beautiful than the heavenly Roses of the Saint of Hungarie; I look into your Eyes; I kiss your Hands; I shall come again. What I dream, I dream. But if I come again after fifty years, it will still be as your Lover and Servant."

One sees him as he leaves his book and lays down his well-inked quill; the fine smile on his lips, the stoop in his shoulders, the silver touch of time come too early at his temples, where she had seen and grieved for it. He went and found his man busy cleaning out the ashes, long cold, in the old bake-oven, and said: "Malachi, I am going away."

Malachi said "Ay" thoughtfully.

"I shall take the money we saved against sickness. I have a more pressing need of it."

"Ay."

"Can ye not say anything but 'Ay,' like a frog?"

Malachi looked round. Soft white feathers of ash floated about him, he was grey all over, a shadow-coloured old man. He answered: "It's what I've been a-hoping you'd do, sir, any time these five years."

Mr. Sampson was silent. Malachi went on:

"When do you go, if I may make so bold?"

"Soon, I think. Why should I delay?"

"Ay, why? The years won't wait for 'e. What'll ye do wi' yourself?"

The smile brightened in Mr. Sampson's eyes. It came to the old man that after all his master was only young.

"I don't know. Measure myself against the world, I suppose, as others have before me, and let the best win. There must be life enough in the world for me to make a life of."

"Ay. What'll you do with me?"

"You will wait for me at my uncle's house, at Shortsands. I can ask so much of him, when he stands ready to do so much more."

Malachi stooped, lifted his shovel of ashes, and cast them back into the oven once more.

"Why do you do that?"

"Ashes to ashes, the good Book says. There'll be no more fire here. I'll bake no more loaves for 'e in this oven, with all the flues stopped and you that fretty if the kissing-crust was charred."

"I shall come back——"

"Ay? Maybe. But there's no life here." He picked up the shovel and sent the edge of it, with a sudden blow, deep into the lintel of the door. "See, master. There's no life. 'Tis all death, decay, dry-rot. 'Tis all done wi' the old house, and 'tis the same wi' men as wi' housen. I've had my day. I'll wait for 'e. It's what I've done these many years, ever since I turned my back on my world along of a little spindly

boy that was my young lady's son." He sent the shovel again into the wood, and there was a reddish sparkle in his old eyes. "Look, 'tis the best I could do. And all these long years I've waited for Miss Anne's child to stand up like a man, and tell me, for a man, and a gentleman, 'twas not enough."

"Malachi——"

"Don't you dare for to tell me you be sorry, master, when I've waited so long. I wish I could go forth with 'e, a young man, as I rode with young men, years ago. I wish I might serve you that way. But I cannot. I gave the last years o' my strength to your childhood. So I'll wait for 'e. But come back to me, lad, for I be very old, now with the mare gone, and all."

The ashes floated, fell, settled in a shower. In silence Mr. Sampson went to the clouded window and looked out of it.

Day was dying from the forest, the trees were dark. But the light that they had lost made yellow runnels of the paths, wet from an afternoon shower, picked out the ruts with gold, brimmed the footprints with fire, ran like a flame to the open road half lost in light. That road was linked with the Betsworth Road, and that with the highway to London. Mr. Sampson saw them all, a golden intermingling of ways, the very veins and arteries of the world of men, with all the hopes and visions of men at the ends of them. His eyes were blinded with that light when he turned back into the room.

"I will go soon, old friend, soon, with my staff and my scrip and three gold guineas, taking little care of what I shall eat or what I shall put on. For time passes and it's late already. But first——"

The vivid light revealed him, the whitened seams of his old coat, the patch at the knee of his breeches, the worn place in his shoe. It showed, as if for the last time, the rot about him, the ruin, the poverty beyond any subterfuge. It displayed unrelentingly his whole inheritance of memory and decay.

His smile was higher and brighter than ever as he finished.

"—but first will I sell all else I have and give to the Poor, and follow. . . follow."

. .

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Little Hearts* by Marjorie L. C. Pickthall]