COLIN

E. F. BENSON

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By E. F. BENSON

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COLIN

BY
E. F. BENSON

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COLIN. II

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COLIN

Colin comprises the first part only of this romance; it will be completed in a second volume which will tell of the final fading of the Legend with which the story opens.

E. F. B.

C O L I N

Book One

CHAPTER I

Neither superstition nor spiritual aspiration signified anything particular to the Staniers, and for many generations now they had been accustomed to regard their rather sinister family legend with cynical complacency. Age had stolen the strength from it, as from some long-cellared wine, and in the Victorian era they would, to take their collective voice, have denied that, either drunk or sober, they believed it. But it was vaguely pleasant to have so antique a guarantee that they would be so sumptuously looked after in this world, while as for the next....

The legend dated from the time of Elizabeth, and was closely connected with the rise of the family into the pre-eminent splendour which it had enjoyed ever since. The Queen, in one of her regal journeys through her realm (during which she slept in so incredible a number of beds), visited the affiliated Cinque Port of Rye, and, after taking dinner with the mayor, was riding down one of the steep, cobbled ways when her horse stumbled and came down on its knees.

She would certainly have had a cruel fall if a young man had not sprung forward from the crowd and caught her before her Grace's head was dashed against the stones. He set her on her feet, swiftly releasing the virgin's bosom from his rough embrace, and, kneeling, kissed the hem of her skirt.

The Queen bade him rise, and, as she looked at him, made some Elizabethan ejaculation of appreciative amazement—a "zounds," or a "gadzooks," or something.

There stood Colin Stanier in the full blossom of his twenty summers, ruddy as David and blue-eyed as the sea. His cap had fallen off, and he must needs toss back his head to free his face from the tumble of his yellow hair. His athletic effort to save her Grace had given him a moment's quickened breath, and his parted lips showed the double circle of his white teeth.

But, most of all, did his eyes capture the fancy of his Sovereign; they looked at her, so she thought, with the due appreciation of her majesty, but in their humility there was mingled something both gay and bold, and she loved that any man, young or old, high or humble, should look at her thus.

She spoke a word of thanks, and bade him wait on her next day at the Manor of Brede, where she was to lie that night. Then, motioning her courtiers aside with a testy gesture, she asked him a question or two while a fresh horse was being caparisoned and brought for her, and allowed none other but Colin to help her to mount....

It was thought to be significant that at supper that night the virgin sighed, and made her famous remark to my Lord of Essex that she wished sometimes that she was a milk-maid.

Colin Stanier's father was a man of some small substance, owning a little juicy land that was fine grazing for cattle, and the boy worked on the farm. He had some strange, magical power over the beasts; a savage dog would slaver and fawn on him, a vicious horse sheathed its violence at his touch, and, in especial at this season of lambing-time, he wrought wonders of midwifery on the ewes and of nursing on the

lambs. This authoritative deftness sprang from no kindly love of animals; cleverness and contempt, with a dash of pity, was all he worked with, and this evening, after the Queen had passed on, it was reluctantly enough that he went down to the low-lying fields where his father's sheep were in pregnancy. The old man himself, as Colin ascertained, had taken the excuse of her Grace's visit to get more than usually intoxicated, and the boy guessed that he himself would be alone half the night with his lantern and his ministries among the ewes.

So, indeed, it proved, and the moon had sunk an hour after midnight, when he entered the shed in the lambing-field to take his bite of supper and get a few hours' sleep. He crunched his crusty bread and bacon in his strong teeth, he had a draught of beer, and, wrapping himself in his cloak, lay down. He believed (on the evidence of his memoirs) that he then went to sleep.

Up to this point the story is likely enough; a pedant might unsniffingly accept it. But then there occurred (or is said to have occurred) the event which forms the basis of the Stanier legend, and it will certainly be rejected, in spite of a certain scrap of parchment still extant and of the three centuries of sequel, by all sensible and twentieth-century minds.

For, according to the legend, Colin woke and found himself no longer alone in the shed; there was standing by him a finely-dressed fellow who smiled on him. It was still as dark as the pit outside—no faintest ray of approaching dawn yet streaked the eastern sky, yet for all that Colin could see his inexplicable visitor quite plainly.

The stranger briefly introduced himself as his Satanic majesty, and, according to his usual pleasant custom, offered

the boy all that he could wish for in life—health and beauty (and, indeed, these were his already) and wealth, honour, and affluence, which at present were sadly lacking—on the sole condition that at his death his soul was to belong to his benefactor. The bargain—this was the unusual feature in the Stanier legend—was to hold good for all his direct descendants who, unless they definitely renounced the contract on their own behalf, would be partakers in these benefits and debtors in the other small matter.

For his part, Colin had no sort of hesitation in accepting so tempting an offer, and Satan thereupon produced for his perusal (he was able to read) a slip of parchment on which the conditions were firmly and plainly stated. A scratch with his knife on the forearm supplied the ink for the signature, and Satan provided him with a pen. He was bidden to keep the document as a guarantee of the good faith of his bargainer; the red cloak flashed for a moment in front of his eyes, dazzling him, and he staggered and fell back on the heap of straw from which he had just risen.

The darkness was thick and impenetrable round him, but at the moment a distant flash of lightning blinked in through the open door, showing him that the shed was empty again. Outside, save for the drowsy answer of the thunder, all was quiet, but in his hand certainly was a slip of parchment.

The same, so runs the legend, is reproduced in the magnificent Holbein of the young man which hangs now above the mantelpiece in the hall of Stanier. Colin Stanier, first Earl of Yardley, looking hardly older than he did on this momentous night, stands there in Garter robes with this little document in his hand. The original parchment, so the loquacious housekeeper points out to the visitors who to-day

go over the house on the afternoons when it is open to the public, is let into the frame of the same portrait.

Certainly there is such a piece of parchment there, just below the title of the picture, but the ink has so faded that it is impossible to decipher more than a word or two of it. The word “diabolus” must be more conjectured than seen, and the ingenious profess to decipher the words “quodcunque divitiarum, pulchritud” ... so that it would seem that Colin the shepherd-boy, if he signed it, must have perused and understood Latin.

This in itself is so excessively improbable that the whole business may be discredited from first to last. But there is no doubt whatever that Colin Stanier did some time sign a Latin document (for his name in ink, now brown, is perfectly legible) which has perished in the corroding years, whether he understood it or not, and there seems no doubt about the date in the bottom left-hand corner....

The constructive reader will by this time have got ready his interpretation about the whole cock-and-bull story, and a very sensible one it is. The legend is surely what mythologists call ætiological. There was—he can see it—an old strip of parchment signed by Colin Stanier, and this, in view of the incredible prosperity of the family, coupled with the almost incredible history of their dark deeds, would be quite sufficient to give rise to the legend. In mediæval times, apparently, such Satanic bargains were, if not common, at any rate not unknown, and the legend was, no doubt, invented in order to account for these phenomena, instead of being responsible for them.

Of legendary significance, too, must be the story of Philip Stanier, third Earl, who is said to have renounced his part in

the bargain, and thereupon fell from one misfortune into another, was branded with an incurable and disfiguring disease, and met his death on the dagger of an injured woman. Ronald Stanier, a nephew of the above, was another such recusant; he married a shrew, lost a fortune in the South Sea bubble, and had a singularly inglorious career.

But such instances as these (in all the long history there are no more of them, until credence in the legend faded altogether), even if we could rely on their authenticity, would only seem to prove that those who renounced the devil and all his works necessarily met with misfortune in this life, which is happily not the case, and thus they tend to disprove rather than confirm the whole affair.

Finally, when we come to more modern times, and examine the records of the Stanier family from, let us say, the advent of the Hanoverian dynasty, though their splendour and distinction is ever a crescent, not a waning moon, there can be no reason to assign a diabolical origin to such prosperity. There were black sheep among them, of course, but when will you not find, in records so public as theirs, dark shadows thrown by the searchlight of history? Bargains with the powers of hell, in any case, belong to the romantic dusk of the Middle Ages, and cannot find any serious place in modern chronicles.

But to quit these quagmires of superstition for the warranted and scarcely less fascinating solidity of fact, Colin Stanier next day obediently craved audience with the Queen at the Manor of Brede. By a stroke of intuition which does much to account for his prosperous fortune, he did not make himself *endimanché*, but, with his shepherd's crook in his

hand and a new-born lamb in his bosom, he presented himself at the house where the Queen lodged. He would have been contemptuously turned back with buffets by the halberdiers and yeomen who guarded the entrance, but the mention of his name sufficed to admit him with a reluctant alacrity.

He wore but the breeches and jerkin in which he pursued his work among the beasts, his shapely legs were bare from knee to ankle, and as he entered the porch, he kicked off the shoes in which he had walked from Rye. His crook he insisted on retaining, and the lamb which, obedient to the spell that he exercised over young living things, lay quiet in his arms.

Some fussy Controller of the Queen's household would have ejected him and chanced the consequences, but, said Colin very quietly, "It is by her Majesty's orders that I present myself, and whether you buffet me or not, prithee tell the Queen's Grace that I am here."

There was something surprising in the dignity of the boy; and in the sweet-toned, clear-cut speech, so unlike the utterance of the mumbling rustic, and the Controller, bidding him wait where he was, shuffled upstairs, and came back with extraordinary expedition.

"The Queen's Grace awaits you, Mr. ——"

"Stanier," said Colin.

"Mr. Stanier. But your crook, your lamb——"

"Let us do her Majesty's bidding," said Colin.

He was ushered into the long hall of Brede Manor, and the Controller, having thrown the door open, slipped away with an alertness that suggested that his presence was desirable

there no more, and left the boy, barefooted, clasping his lamb, with a rush-strewn floor to traverse. There was a table down the centre of it, littered with papers, and hemmed in with chairs that suggested that their occupants had hurriedly vacated them. At the end was seated a small, bent figure, conspicuous for her ruff and her red hair, and her rope of pearls, and her eyes bright and sharp as a bird's.

Colin, sadly pricked on the soles of his feet by the rushes, advanced across that immeasurable distance, looking downwards on his lamb. When he had traversed the half of it, he raised his eyes for a moment, and saw that the Queen, still quite motionless, was steadily regarding him. Again he bent his eyes on his lamb, and when he had come close to that formidable figure, he fell on his knees.

"A lamb, madam," he said, "which is the first-fruits of the spring. My crook, which I lay at your Grace's feet, and myself, who am not worthy to lie there."

Again Colin raised his eyes, and the wretch put into them all the gaiety and boldness which he gave to the wenches on the farm. Then he dropped them again, and with his whole stake on the table, waited, gambler as he was, for the arbitrament.

"Look at me, Colin Stanier," said the Queen.

Colin looked. There was the tiny wrinkled face, the high eyebrows, the thin-lipped mouth disclosing the discoloured teeth.

"Madam!" he said.

"Well, what next?" said Elizabeth impatiently.

"My body and soul, madam," said Colin, and once more he put into his eyes and his eager mouth that semblance of

desire which had made Mistress Moffat, the wife of the mayor, box his ears with a blow that was more of a caress.

The Queen felt precisely the same as Mistress Moffat, and drew her hand down over his smooth chin. “And it is your wish to be my shepherd-boy, Colin?” she asked. “You desire to be my page?”

“I am sick with desire,” said Colin.

“I appoint you,” she said. “I greet and salute you, Colin Stanier.”

She bent towards him, and neither saint nor devil could have inspired Colin better at that moment. He kissed her (after all, he had been offered the greeting) fairly and squarely on her withered cheek, and then, without pause, kissed the hem of her embroidered gown. He had done right, just absolutely right.

“You bold dog!” said the Queen. “Stand up.”

Colin stood up, with his arms close by his side, as if at attention in all his shapeliness and beauty, and the Queen clapped her hands.

The side door opened disclosing halberdiers, and through the door by which Colin had entered came the Controller.

“Colin Stanier is my page,” she said, “and of my household. Summon my lords again; we have not finished with our Spanish business. The lamb—I will eat that lamb, and none other, at the feast of Easter.”

Within the week Colin was established in attendance on the Queen, and the daring felicity which had marked his first dealings with her never failed nor faltered. His radiant youth, the gaiety of his boyish spirits, the unfailing tact of his flattery, his roguish innocence, the fine innate breeding of the

yeoman-stock, which is the best blood in England, wove a spell that seemed to defy the usual fickleness of her favouritism. Certainly he had wisdom as far beyond his years as it was beyond his upbringing, and wisdom coming like pure water from the curves of that beautiful young mouth, made him frankly irresistible to the fiery and shrewd old woman.

From being her page he was speedily advanced to the post of confidential secretary, and queer it was to see the boy seated by her side at some state council while she rated and stormed at her lords for giving her some diplomatic advice which her flame-like spirit deemed spiritless. Then, in mid-tirade, she would stop, tweak her secretary by his rosy ear, and say, “Eh, Colin, am I not in the right of it?”

Very often she was not, and then Colin would so deftly insinuate further considerations, prefacing them by, “As your Grace and Majesty so wisely has told us” (when her Grace and Majesty had told them precisely the opposite) that Elizabeth would begin to imagine that she had thought of these prudent things herself.

The Court in general followed the example of their royal mistress, and had not Colin’s nature, below its gaiety and laughter, been made of some very stern stuff, he must surely have degenerated into a spoilt, vain child, before ever he came to his full manhood. Men and women alike were victims of that sunny charm; to be with him made the heart sing, and none could grudge that a boy on whom God had showered every grace of mind and body, should find the mere tawdry decorations of riches and honour his natural heritage.

Then, too, there was this to consider: the Queen’s fickle and violent temper might topple down one whom she had

visited but yesterday with her highest favours, and none but Colin could induce her to restore the light she had withdrawn. If you wanted a boon granted, or even a vengeance taken, there was no such sure road to its accomplishment as to secure Colin's advocacy, no path that led so straight to failure as to set the boy against you. For such services it was but reasonable that some token of gratitude should be conferred on him by the suppliant, some graceful acknowledgment which, in our harsh modern way, we should now term "commission," and Colin's commissions, thus honestly earned, soon amounted to a very pretty figure. Whether he augmented them or not by less laudable methods, by threats or what we call by that ugly word "blackmail," is a different matter, and need not be gone into.

Yet, surrounded as he was by all that might have been expected to turn a boy's head, Colin remained singularly well-balanced, and whatever tales might be told about his virtue, the most censorious could find no fault with his prudence. The Queen created him at the age of twenty-five Knight of the Garter and Earl of Yardley, a title which his descendants hold to this day, and presented him with the Manor of Yardley in Buckinghamshire, and the monastic lands of Tillingham on the hills above the Romney Marsh. He incorporated the fine dwelling-house of the evicted abbot into the great and glorious mansion of Stanier, the monks' quarters he demolished altogether, and the abbey church became the parish church of Tillingham for worship, and the chapel and burying-place of the Staniers for pride.

But, though the Queen told him once and again that it was time her Colin took a wife, he protested that while her light was shed on him not Venus herself could kindle desire in his

heart. This was the only instance in which he disobeyed Gloriana's wishes, but Gloriana willingly pardoned his obduracy, and rewarded it with substantial benefits.

On her death, which occurred when he was thirty, he made a very suitable match with the heiress of Sir John Reeves, who brought him, in addition to a magnificent dowry, the considerable acreage which to-day is part of the London estate of the Staniers. He retired from court-life, and divided the year between Stanier and London, busy with the embellishment of his houses, into which he poured those treasures of art which now glorify them.

He was, too, as the glades and terraces of Stanier testify, a gardener on a notable scale, and his passion in this direction led him to evict his father from the farm where Colin's own boyhood was passed, which lay on the level land below the hill, in order to make there the long, ornamental water which is one of the most agreeable features of the place.

His father by this time was an old man of uncouth and intemperate habits, and it could not perhaps be expected that the young earl should cherish his declining years with any very personal tenderness. But he established him in a decent dwelling, gave him an adequate maintenance with a permission to draw on the brewery for unlimited beer, and made only the one stipulation that his father should never attempt to gain access to him. The old man put so liberal an interpretation on his beer-rights, that he did not enjoy them very long.

This taint of hardness in Colin's character was no new feature. He had left the home of his boyhood without regret or any subsequent affection of remembrance: he had made his pleasurable life at Court a profitable affair, whereas others

had spent their salaries and fortunes in maintaining their suitable magnificence, and, like the great Marlborough a few generations later, he had allowed infatuated women to pay pretty handsomely for the privilege of adoring him, and the inhumanities, such as his eviction of his father, with which his married life was garlanded, was no more than the reasonable development of earlier tendencies. Always a great stickler for the majesty of the law, he caused certain sheep-stealers on the edge of his property to be hanged for their misdeeds, and why should not the lord of Tillingham have bought their little properties from their widows at a more than reasonable price?

Though his own infidelities were notorious, the settlements of his marriage were secure enough, and when he had already begotten two sons of the hapless daughter of Sir John Reeves, he invoked the aid of the law to enable him to put her away and renew his vow of love and honour to the heiress of my Lord Middlesex. She proved to be a barren crone, and perhaps had no opportunity of proving her fruitfulness, but she was so infatuated with him that by the settlements she gave him unconditionally the Broughton property which so conveniently adjoined his own.

To go back again for a moment to that obscure matter of the Stanier legend, it appears that on the day on which each of his sons came of age, their father made them acquainted with the agreement he had made on behalf of himself and the heirs of his body, and shewed them the signed parchment. They had, so he pointed out to them, the free choice of dissociating themselves from that bargain, and of taking the chance of material prosperity here and of salvation hereafter;

he enjoined on them also the duty of transmitting the legend to their children in the manner and at the time that it had been made known to themselves.

Neither Ronald, the elder, nor his brother Philip felt the least qualm about the future, but they both had a very considerable appreciation of the present, and on each occasion the parchment was restored to its strong box with no loss of validity as regards the next generation. Ronald soon afterwards made one of those prudent marriages for which for generations the Staniers have been famous; Philip, on the other hand, who presently made for himself at the Court a position hardly less brilliant than his father's had been, found celibacy, with its accompanying consolations, good enough for him.

This is too polite an age to speak of his infamies and his amazing debauches, but his father was never tired of hearing about them, and used to hang on the boy's tales when he got leave of absence from the Court to spend a week at home. Ronald was but a prude in comparison with the other two, protesting at Philip's more atrocious experiences. His notion, so he drunkenly tried to explain himself (for his grandfather's pleasures made strong appeal to him) was that there were things that no gentleman would do, whatever backing he had, and with a curious superstitious timidity he similarly refused to play dice on the Communion table in the old monastic chapel....

For full forty years after the death of the Queen, Colin, Knight of the Garter and first Earl of Yardley, revelled at the banquet of life. All that material prosperity could offer was his; his princely purchases, his extravagances, his sumptuous hospitalities were powerless to check the ever-swelling roll of

his revenues; he enjoyed a perfect bodily health, and up to the day of his death his force was unabated, his eye undimmed, and the gold in his hair untouched by a single thread of silver.

As the years went on, his attachment to this stately house of Stanier grew to a passion, and however little credence we may give to the legend, it is certain that his descendants inherit from Colin Stanier that devotion to the place where they were born. No Stanier, so it is said, is ever completely happy away from the great house that crowns the hill above the Romney Marsh; it is to them a shrine, a Mecca, a golden Jerusalem, the home of their hearts, and all the fairest of foreign lands, the most sunny seas, the most sumptuous palaces are but wildernesses or hovels in comparison with their home. To such an extent was this true of Colin, first Earl, that for the last ten years of his life he scarcely left the place for a night.

But though his bodily health remained ever serene and youthful, and youth's excesses, continued into old age, left him unwrinkled of skin and vigorous in desire, there grew on him during the last year of his life a malady neither of body nor of mind, but of the very spirit and essence of his being. The compact that he believed himself to have made had been fully and honestly observed by the other high contracting party, and as the time drew near that his own share in the bargain must be exacted from him, his spirit, we must suppose, conscious that the imprint of the divine was so shortly to be surcharged with the stamp and superscription of hell, was filled with some remorseful terror, that in itself was a foretaste of damnation.

He ate, he drank, he slept, he rioted, he brought to Stanier yet more treasures of exquisite art—Italian pictures, bronzes

of Greek workmanship, Spanish lace, torn, perhaps, from the edges of altar-cloths, intaglios, Persian Pottery, and Ming porcelain from China. His passion for beauty, which had all his life been a torch to him, did not fail him, nor yet the wit and rapier-play of tongue, nor yet the scandalous chronicles of Philip. But in the midst of beauty or debauchery, there would come to his mind with such withering of the spirit as befel Belshazzar when the writing was traced on the wall, the knowledge of his approaching doom.

As if to attempt to turn it aside or soften the inexorable fate, he gave himself to deeds of belated pity and charitableness. He endowed an almshouse in Rye; he erected a fine tomb over his father's grave; he attended daily service in the church which he had desecrated with his dice-throwings. And all the time his spirit told him that it was too late, he had made his bed and must lie on it: for he turned to the God whom he had renounced neither in love nor in sincerity, nor in fear of Him, but in terror of his true master.

But when he tried to pray his mind could invoke no holy images, but was decked with pageants of debauchery, and if he formed his lips to pious words there dropped from them a stream of obscenities and blasphemy. At any moment the terror would lay its hand on his spirit, affecting neither body nor mind, but addressing itself solely to the immortal and deathless part of him. It was in vain that he attempted to assure himself, too, that in the ordering of the world neither God nor devil has a share, for even the atheism in which he had lived deserted him as the hour of his death drew near.

The day of his seventieth birthday arrived: the house was full of guests, and in honour of the occasion there was a feast for the tenants of the estate in the great hall, while his own

friends, making a company of some fifty, sat at the high table on the dais. All day distant thunder had muttered obscurely among the hills, and by the time that the lights were lit in the hall, and the drinking deep, a heavy pall had overspread the sky.

Lord Yardley was in fine spirits that night. For years he had had a presentiment that he would do no more than reach the exact span appointed for the life of men, and would die on his seventieth birthday, and here was the day as good as over, and if that presentiment proved to be unfulfilled he felt that he would face with a stouter scepticism the other terror. He had just risen from his place to reply to the toast of the evening, and stood, tall and comely, the figure of a man still in the prime of life, facing his friends and dependents. Then, even while he opened his lips to speak, the smile was struck from his face, and instead of speech there issued from his mouth one wild cry of terror.

“No, no!” he screamed, and with his arm pushed out in front of him as if to defend himself against some invisible presence, he fell forward across the table.

At that moment the hall leaped into blinding light, and an appalling riot of thunder answered. Some said that he had been struck and, indeed, on his forehead there was a small black mark as of burning, but those nearest felt no shock, and were confident that the stroke which had fallen on him preceded the flash and the thunder: he had crashed forward after that cry and that gesture of terror, before even the lightning descended.... And Ronald reigned in his stead.

By the patent of nobility granted to Colin Stanier by Elizabeth, the estates and title descended not through heirs

male only, but through the female line. If an Earl of Yardley died leaving only female issue, the girl became Countess of Yardley in her own right, to the exclusion of sons begotten by her father's or grandfather's younger brother. It was perhaps characteristic of the Queen to frame the charter thus—she had done so of her own invention and devising—for thus she gratified her own sense of the capability of her sex, and also felt some phantom of posthumous delight in securing, as far as she could, that the honours that she had showered on her favourite should descend in direct line. But for many generations her foresight and precaution seemed needless, since each holder of the title bore sons only, and the line was straight as a larch, from father to son. By some strange arbitrament of fate it so happened that younger sons (following the unchaste example of Philip) died in legal celibacy, or, if they married, were childless, or became so in that generation or the next. Thus the family is unique in having to this day no collateral branches, and in this the fancifully disposed may be prone to see a certain diabolical observance of the original bond. No dowries for daughters had to be provided, and such portions as were made for younger sons soon rolled back again into the sea of family affluence.

The purchase of land formed the main outlet for the flood of ever-increasing revenue, and as surely as Lord Yardley entered upon his new acreages, mineral wealth would be discovered on the freshly-acquired property (as was the case in the Cornish farms, where the Stanier lode of tin was found), or if when, at a later date, as in a mere freak, he purchased barren fields fit only for grazing, by the sea, it was not long before the Prince Regent found that the Sussex coast enjoyed a bracing and salubrious air, and lo! all the grazing-

lands of Lord Stanier became building sites. Whatever they touched turned to gold, and that to no anæmic hands incapable of enjoying the lusts and splendours of life. Honours fell on them thick as autumn leaves: each holder of the title in turn has won the Garter, and never has the Garter been bestowed on them without solid merit to carry it. Three have been Prime Ministers, further three ambassadors to foreign countries on difficult and delicate businesses; in the Napoleonic wars there was a great general.... But all these records are public property.

Less known, perhaps, is the fact that no Lord Yardley has ever yet died in his bed or received the religious consolation that would fit him to go forth undismayed on his last dark, solitary journey, and though each in turn (with the sad exception of Philip, third Earl, and his nephew, the recusant Ronald) has lived to the comfortable age of seventy, swift death, sometimes with violence, has been the manner of his exit. Colin, fourth Earl, committed suicide under circumstances which made it creditable that he should do so; otherwise strange seizures, accompanied, it would appear, by some inexplicable terror, has been the manner of the demise.

And what, in this brief history of their annals, can be said of the legend, except that from being a terrible truth to Colin, first Earl, it has faded even as has faded the ink which records that mythical bargaining? It is more than a hundred years ago now that the Lord Yardley of the day caused the parchment to be inserted in the frame of his infamous ancestor, where it can be seen now every Thursday afternoon from three to five, when Stanier is open, without fee, to decently-clad visitors, and the very fact that Lord Yardley (*temp.* George III.) should have displayed it as a curiosity, is

the measure of the incredulity with which those most closely concerned regarded it. A man would not put up for all the world to see the warrant that he should burn eternally in the fires of hell if he viewed it with the slightest tremor of misgiving. It was blasphemous even to suppose that worldly prosperity (as said the excellent parson at Stanier who always dined at the house on Sunday evening and slept it off on Monday morning) was anything other than the mark of divine favour, and many texts from the Psalmist could be produced in support of his view. Thus fortified by port and professional advice, Lord Yardley decreed the insertion of the document into the frame that held the picture of that ancestor of his whose signature it bore, and gave a remarkably generous subscription to the organ-fund. Faded as was the writing then, it has faded into greater indecipherability since, and with it any remnant of faith in its validity.

Yet hardly less curious to the psychologist is the strange nature of these Staniers. Decked as they are with the embellishment of distinction, of breeding, and beauty, they have always seemed to their contemporaries to be lacking in some quality, hard to define but easy to appreciate or, in their case, to miss. A tale of trouble will very likely win from them some solid alleviation, but their generosity, you would find, gave always the impression of being made not out of love or out of sympathy, but out of contempt.

Their charm—and God knows how many have fallen victims to it—has been and is that of some cold brilliance, that attracts even as the beam of a lighthouse attracts the migrating birds who dash themselves to pieces against the glass that shields it; it can scarcely be said to be the fault of the light that the silly feathered things broke themselves

against its transparent, impenetrable armour. It hardly invited: it only shone on business which did not concern the birds, so there was no definite design of attraction or cruelty in its beams, only of brilliance and indifference. That is the habit of light; such, too, are the habits of birds; the light even might be supposed by sentimentalists faintly to regret the shattered wing and the brightness of the drowned plumage.

But, so it is popularly supposed, it is quite easy, though not very prudent, to arouse unfavourable emotion in a Stanier; you have but to vex him or run counter to his wish, and you will very soon find yourself on the target of a remorseless and vindictive hate. No ray of pity, so it is said, softens the hardness of that frosty intensity; no contrition, when once it has been aroused, will thaw it. Forgiveness is a word quite foreign to their vocabulary, and its nearest equivalent is a contemptuous indifference. Gratitude, in the same way, figures as an obsolete term in the language of their emotions. They neither feel it nor expect it: it has no currency. Whatever you may be privileged to do for a Stanier, he takes as a mite in the endowment which the world has always, since the days of our Elizabethan Colin, poured into their treasuries, while if he has done you a good turn, he has done so as he would chuck a picked bone to a hungry dog: the proper course for the dog is to snatch it up and retire into its corner to mumble it.

It would be strange, then, if, being without ruth or love, a Stanier could bestow or aspire to friendship with man or woman, and, indeed, such an anomaly has never occurred. But, then, it must be remembered that Staniers, as far as we can find out from old letters and diaries and mere historical documents, never wanted friendship nor, indeed,

comprehended it. Their beauty and their charm made easy for them the creation of such relationships as they desired, the assuaging of such thirst as was theirs, after which the sucked rind could be thrown away; and though through all their generations they have practised those superb hospitalities which find so apt a setting at Stanier, it is rather as gods snuffing up the incense of their worshippers than as entertaining their friends that they fill the great house with all who are noblest by birth or distinction.

George IV., for instance, when Prince Regent, stayed there, it may be remembered, for nearly a fortnight, having been asked for three days, during which time the entire House of Lords with their wives spent in noble sections two nights at Stanier, as well as many much younger and sprightlier little personages just as famous in the proper quarter. The entire opera from Drury Lane diverted their evening one night, baccarat (or its equivalent) beguiled another, on yet another the Prince could not be found....

Not so fortunate, perhaps, save in being the mistresses of all this splendour, and invariably the mothers of handsome sons, have been the successive wives in this illustrious line. For with whatever natural gaiety, with whatever high and independent spirit these ladies married the sons of the house, they seemed always to have undergone some gloomy and mysterious transformation. It was as if they were ground in a mill, and ground exceeding small, and as if the resulting powder of grain was mixed and kneaded and baked into the Stanier loaf.

Especially was this the case with her who married the young Lord Stanier of the day; long before she succeeded to

her full honours she had been crushed into the iron mould designed for the Countesses of Yardley. In public, dignity and stateliness and fine manner would distinguish her, but below these desirable insignia of her station, her character and individuality seemed to have been reduced to pulp, to have been frozen to death, to have been pounded and brayed in some soul-shattering mortar. Perhaps when first as a bride she entered through the glass doors which were only opened when the eldest son brought home his wife, or when there was welcomed at Stanier some reigning monarch, her heart would be all afire with love and virgin longing for him with whom she passed through those fatal portals, but before the honeymoon was over this process that tamed and stifled and paralysed would have begun its deadly work.

For the eldest son and his wife there was reserved a floor in one of the wings of the house; they had no other establishment in the country, and here, when not in London, the family dwelt in patriarchal fashion. When no guests were present, the heir-apparent and his wife breakfasted and lunched in the privacy of their wing, if so they chose; they had their own horses, their own household of servants, but every evening, when the warning bell for dinner sounded, the major-domo came to the door of their apartments and preceded them down to the great gallery where, with any other sons and daughters-in-law, they awaited the entrance of Lord Yardley and his wife. Then came the stately and almost speechless dinner, served on gold plate, and after that a rubber of whist, decorous and damning, until Lady Yardley retired on the stroke of ten, and the sons joined their father in the billiard-room.

Such evenings were rare (for usually throughout the shooting season there were guests in the house), but from them we can conjecture some sketch of the paralysing process: this was the conduct of a family evening in the mere superficial adventure of dining and passing a sociable evening, and from it we can estimate something of the effect of parallel processes applied to the thoughts and the mind and the aspirations and the desires of a young wife. No Stanier wanted love or gave it; what he wanted when he took his mate was that in obedience and subjection she should give him (as she always did) a legitimate and healthy heir. She was not a Stanier, and though she wore the family pearls like a halter, she was only there on sufferance and of necessity, and though her blood would beat with the true ichor in the arteries of the next generation, she was in herself no more than the sucked orange-rind.

The Staniers were too proud to reckon an alliance with any family on the face of the earth as anything but an honour for the family concerned; even when, as happened at the close of the eighteenth century, a princess of the Hohenzollern line was married to the heir, she was ground in the mill like any other. In her case she shared to the full in the brutal arrogance of her own family, and had imagined that it was she who, by this alliance, had conferred, not accepted, an honour. She had supposed that her husband and his relations would give her the deference due to royalty, and it took her some little time to learn her lesson, which she appears to have mastered.

A hundred years later the Emperor William II. of Germany had a reminder of it which caused him considerable surprise. On one of his visits to England he deigned to pass a week-end at Stanier, and though received as a reigning monarch

with opening of the glass doors, he found that his condescension in remembering that he was connected with the family was not received with the rapture of humility which he had expected. He had asked to be treated by the members of the family as Cousin Willie, and they did so with a nonchalance that was truly amazing.

Such, in brief, was the rise of the Staniers, and such the outline of their splendour.

CHAPTER II

By the middle of the nineteenth century the fading of the actual deed signed by Colin Stanier had scarcely kept pace with the fading of the faith in it: this had become the mildest of effete superstitions. About that epoch, also, the continuity of Stanier tradition was broken, for there was born in the direct line not only two sons but a daughter, Hester, who, a couple of centuries ago, would probably have been regarded as a changeling, and met an early fate as such. She was as lovely as the dawn, and had to the full, with every feminine grace added, a double portion of the Stanier charm, but in her disposition no faintest trace of traditional inheritance could be found; instead of their inhuman arrogance, their icy self-sufficiency, she was endowed with a gaiety and a rollicking gutter-snipe enjoyment of existence, which laughed to scorn the dignity of birth.

Being of the inferior sex, her father decreed that she should be brought up in the image of the tradition which ground so small the women who had married into the family; she must become, like her own mother, aloof and calm and infinitely conscious of her position. But neither precept nor example had the smallest effect on her: for dignity, she had

boisterousness; for calm, buoyant, irrepressible spirits; and for self-control, a marked tendency to allure and kindle the susceptibilities of the other sex, were he peer or ploughboy.

Alone, too, of her race, she had no spark of that passionate affection for her home that was one of the most salient characteristics of the others.

She gave an instance of this defect when, at the age of fifteen, she ran away from Stanier half-way through August, while the family were in residence after the season in London, being unable to stand the thought of that deadly and awful stateliness which would last without break till January, when the assembling of the Houses of Parliament would take them all back to the metropolis which she loved with extraordinary fervour. Part of the way she went in a train, part of the way she rode, and eventually arrived back at the huge house in St. James's Square, now empty and sheeted, and persuaded the caretaker, who had been her nurse and adored her with unique devotion, to take her in and send no news to Stanier of her arrival.

"Darling Cooper," she said, with her arms round the old woman's neck and her delicious face bestowing kisses on her, "unless you promise to say nothing about my coming here, I shall leave the house and get really lost. They say a healthy girl can always get a living."

"Eh, my dear," said Cooper, much shocked, "what are you saying?"

Hester's look of seraphic ignorance that she had said anything unusual reassured Cooper.

"What am I saying?" asked Hester. "I'm just saying what I shall do. I shall buy a monkey and a barrel-organ and dress

like a gipsy and tell fortunes. But I won't go back to that awful Stanier."

"But it's your papa's house," said Cooper. "Young ladies have to live with their families till they are married."

"This one won't," said Hester. "And I believe it's true, Cooper, that we own it through the power of the devil. It's a dreadful place: there's a blight on it. Grandmamma was turned to stone there, and mamma has been turned to stone, and they're trying to turn me to stone."

Poor Cooper was in a fair quandary; she knew that Hester was perfectly capable of rushing out of the house unless she gave her the desired promise, and then with what face would she encounter Lord Yardley, how stammer forth the miserable confession that Hester had been here? Not less impossible to contemplate was the housing of this entrancing imp, and keeping to herself the secret of Hester's whereabouts. Even more impossible was the third count of giving Hester the promise, and then breaking it by sending a clandestine communication to her mother, for that would imply the loss of Hester's trust in her, and she could not face the idea of those eyes turned reproachfully on her as on some treacherous foe.

She hesitated, and the artful Hester noted her advantage.

"Darling Cooper, you wouldn't like me to be turned to stone," she said. "I know I should make a lovely statue, but it's better to be alive."

"Eh, my dear, be a good girl and go back to Stanier," pleaded Cooper. "Think of your mamma and the anxiety she's in about you."

Hester made "a face." "It's silly to say that," she said. "Mamma anxious, indeed! Mamma couldn't be anxious:

she's dead inside."

Cooper felt she could not argue the point with any conviction, for she was entirely of Hester's opinion.

"And I've had no tea, Cooper," said the girl, "and I am so hungry."

"Bless the child, but I'll get you your tea," said Cooper. "And then you'll be a good girl and let me send off a telegram...."

What Hester's future plans really were she had not yet determined to herself; she was still acting under the original impulse which had made her run away. Come what might, she had found the idea of Stanier utterly impossible that morning; the only thing that mattered was to get away.

But as Cooper bustled about with the preparations of the tea, she began to consider what she really expected. She was quite undismayed at what she had done, and was on that score willing to confront any stone faces that might be-Gorgon her, but her imagination could not picture what she was going to do. Would she live here *perdue* for the next six months till the family of stone brought their Pharaoh-presence into London again? She could not imagine that. Was it to come, then, to the threatened barrel-organ and the monkey and the telling of fortunes? Glib and ready as had been her speech on that subject, it lacked reality when seriously contemplated in the mirror of the future.

But if she was not proposing to live here with Cooper, or to run away definitely—a prospect for which, at the age of fifteen, she felt herself, now that it grimly stared her in the face, wholly unripe—there was nothing to be done, but to-day or to-morrow, or on one of the conceivable to-morrows,

to go back again. And yet her whole nature revolted against that.

She was sitting in the window-seat of the big hall as this dismal debate went on in her head, but all the parties to that conference were agreed on one thing—namely, that Cooper should not telegraph to her mother, and that, come what might, Cooper should not be imagined to be an accomplice. Just then she heard a step on the threshold outside, and simultaneously the welcome jingle of a tea-tray from the opposite direction. Hester tiptoed towards the latter of these sounds, and found Cooper laden with good things on a tray advancing up the corridor.

"Go back to your room, Cooper," she whispered; "there is some one at the door. I will see who it is."

"Eh, now, let me open the door," said Cooper, visibly apprehensive.

"No! Go away!" whispered Hester, and remained there during imperative peals of the bell till Cooper had vanished.

She tried, by peeping sideways out of the hall window, to arrive at the identity of this impatient visitor, but could see nothing of him. Then, with cold courage, she went to the front-door and opened it. She expected something bad—her mother, perhaps, or her brothers' tutor, or the groom of the chambers—but she had conjectured nothing so bad as this, for on the doorstep stood her father.

That formidable figure was not often encountered by her. In London she practically never saw him at all; in the country she saw him but once a day, when, with the rest of the family, she waited in the drawing-room before dinner for his entrance with her mother. Then they all stood up, and paired off to go in to dinner. In some remote manner Hester felt that

she had no existence for him, but that he, at close quarters, had a terrible existence for her. Generally, he took no notice whatever of her, but to-day she realised that she existed for him in so lively a manner that he had come up from Stanier to get into touch with her. Such courage as she had completely oozed out of her: she had become just a stone out of the family quarry.

"So you're here," he said, shutting the door behind him.

"Yes," said Hester.

"And do you realise what you've done?" he asked.

"I've run away," said she.

"I don't mean that," said he; "that's soon remedied. But you've made me spend half the day travelling in order to find you. Now you're going to suffer for it. Stand up here in front of me."

As he spoke he drew off his fine white gloves and put the big sapphire ring that he wore into his pocket. At that Hester guessed his purpose.

"I shan't," she said.

He gave her so ill-omened and ugly a glance that her heart quailed. "You will do as I tell you," he said.

Hester felt her pulses beating small and quick. Fear perhaps accounted for that, but more dominant than fear in her mind was the sense of her hatred of her father. He was like a devil, one of those contorted waterspouts on the church at home. She found herself obeying him.

"Now I am going to punish you," he said, "for being such a nuisance to me. By ill-luck you are my daughter, and as you don't know how a daughter of mine ought to behave, I am going to show you what happens when she behaves as you

have done. Your mother has often told me that you are a wilful and vulgar child, disobedient to your governesses, and, in a word, common. But now you have forced your commonness upon my notice, and I'm going to make you sorry for having done so. Hold your head up."

He drew back his arm, and with his open hand smacked her across her cheek; with his left hand he planted a similar and stinging blow. Four times those white thin fingers of his blazoned themselves on her face, and then he paused.

"Well, why don't you cry?" he said.

"Because I don't choose to," said Hester.

"Put your head up again," said he.

She stood there firm as a rock for half a dozen more of those bitter blows, and then into his black heart there came a conviction, bitterer than any punishment he had inflicted on her, that he was beaten. In sheer rage at this he took her by her shoulders and shook her violently. And then came the end, for she simply collapsed on the floor, still untamed. Her bodily force might fail, but she flew no flag of surrender.

She came to herself again with the sense of Cooper near her. She turned weary eyes this way and that, but saw nothing of her father.

"Oh, Cooper, has that devil gone?" she asked.

"Eh, my lady," said Cooper, "who are you talking of? There's no one here but his lordship."

Hester raised herself on her elbow and saw that awful figure standing by the great chimneypiece. The first thought that came into her mind was for Cooper.

"I wish to tell you that ever since I entered the house Cooper has been saying that she must telegraph to you that I

was here," she said.

He nodded. "That's all right then, Cooper," he said.

Hester watched her father take the sapphire ring from his waistcoat pocket. He put this on, and then his gloves.

"Her ladyship will stay here to-night, Cooper," he said. "And you will take her to the station to-morrow morning and bring her down to Stanier."

He did not so much as glance at Hester, and next moment the front door had closed behind him.

Hester arrived back at Stanier next day after this abortive expedition, and it was clear at once that orders had been issued that no word was to be said to her on the subject of what she had done. She had mid-day dinner with her governess, rode afterwards with her brothers, and as usual stood up when her father entered the drawing-room in the evening. The awful life had closed like a trap upon her again, rather more tightly than before, for she was subject to a closer supervision.

But though the apparent victory was with her father, she knew (and was somehow aware that he knew it, too) that her spirit had not yielded one inch to him, and that he, for all his grim autocracy, was conscious, as regards her, of imperfect mastery. If he had broken her will, so she acutely argued, she would not now have been watched; her doings would not, as they certainly were, have been reported to him by the governess. That was meat and drink to her. But from being a mere grim presence in the background he had leaped into reality, and with the whole force of her nature, she hated him.

The substance of the Stanier legend, faint though the faith in it had become, was, of course, well known to her, and every morning, looking like some young sexless angel newly come to earth, she added to her very tepid prayers the fervent and heartfelt petition that the devil would not long delay in exacting his part of the bargain.

Two years passed, and Hester became aware that there were schemes on foot for marrying her off with the utmost possible speed. The idea of marriage in the abstract was wholly to her mind, since then she would be quit of the terrible life at Stanier, but in the concrete she was not so content with her selected deliverer. This was the mild and highborn Marquis of Blakeney, a man precisely twice her age, of plain, serious mind and irreproachable morals. He adored her in a rapt and tongue-tied manner, and no doubt Hester had encouraged him with those little smiles and glances which she found it impossible not to bestow on any male denizen of this earth, without any distinct ulterior views. But when it became evident, by his own express declaration made with the permission of her father, that he entertained such views, Hester wondered whether it would be really possible to kiss that seal-like whiskered face with any semblance of wifely enthusiasm.

Had there been any indication that her pious petition with regard to the speedy ratification of the Stanier legend as regards her father would be granted, she would probably have recommended the mild Marquis to take his vows to other shrines, but her father seemed to be suffering no inconvenience from her prayers, and she accepted the rapt and tongue-tied devotion. Instantly all the bonds of discipline

and suppression were relaxed; even in her father's eyes her engagement made her something of a personage, and Hester hated him more than ever.

And then the vengeance of winged, vindictive love, more imperious than her father, overtook and punished her, breaking her spirit, which he had never done. At a dance given at Blakeney Castle to celebrate the engagement, she saw young Ralph Brayton, penniless and debonair, with no seal-face and no marquisate, and the glance of each pierced through the heart of the other. He was the son of the family solicitor of Lord Blakeney, and even while his father was drawing out the schedule of munificent settlements for the bride-to-be, the bride gave him something more munificent yet, and settled it, her heart, upon him for all perpetuity.

She did her best to disown, if not to stifle, what had come upon her, and had her marriage but been fixed for a month earlier than the day appointed, she would probably have married her affianced bridegroom, and let love hang itself in its own silken noose and chance its being quite strangled. As it was, even while her room at Stanier was silky and shimmering with the appurtenances of a bride, she slipped out one night as the moon set, and joined her lover at the park gates. By dawn they had come to London, and before evening she was safe in the holding of her husband's arms.

On the news reaching Lord Yardley he had a stroke from which he did not recover for many years, though he soon regained sufficient power of babbling speech to make it abundantly clear that he would never see Hester again. As she was equally determined never to see him, their wills were in complete harmony. That brutal punishment she had received from those thin white hands two years before,

followed by the bondage of her life at home, had rendered her perfectly callous as regards him. Had he been sorry for it, she might have shrugged her pretty shoulders and forgotten it; for that cold pale slab of womanhood, her mother, she felt nothing whatever.

This outrageous marriage of Hester's, followed by her father's stroke, were contrary to all tradition as regards the legend, for these calamities, indeed, looked as if one of the high contracting parties was not fulfilling his share of the bargain, and the behaviour of Philip, Lord Stanier, the stricken man's eldest son, added weight to the presumption that the luck of the Staniers (to put it at that) was on the wane —fading, fading like the ink of the original bond. Instead of marrying at the age of twenty or twenty-one, as his father and forefathers had done, he remained obstinately celibate and ludicrously decorous. In appearance he was dark, heavy of feature, jowled even in his youth by a fleshiness of neck, and built on massive lines in place of the slenderness of his race, though somehow, in spite of these aberrations from the type, he yet presented an example, or, rather, a parody, of the type. But when you came to mind, and that which lies behind body and mind alike, that impenetrable essence of individuality, then the professors in heredity would indeed have held up bewildered hands of surrender. He was studious and hesitating, his mental processes went with a tread as deliberate as his foot, and in place of that swift eagerness of the Stanier mind, which, so to speak, threw a lasso over the mental quarry with one swing of a lithe arm, and entangled it, poor Philip crept on hands and knees towards it and advanced ever so imperceptibly nearer. In the matter of mode of life the difference between him and the type was most marked of all. Hitherto the eldest son had married early and wisely for the

sole object of the perpetuation of the breed, and having arrived at that, pursued the ways of youth in copious indiscretions which his wife, already tamed and paralysed, had no will to resent. Philip, on the other hand, living in the gloom of the house beneath the stroke and the shadow that had fallen on his father, seemed to have missed his youth altogether. Life held for him no bubbling draught that frothed on his lips and was forgotten; he abstained from all the fruits of vigour and exuberance. One family characteristic alone was his—the passionate love of his home, so that he preferred even in these conditions to live here than find freedom elsewhere. There he dreamed and studied, and neither love nor passion nor intrigue came near him. He cared little for his mother; his father he hated and feared. And yet some germ of romance, perhaps, lay dormant but potential in his soul, for more and more he read of Italy, and of the swift flowering of love in the South....

It seemed as if the hellish bargain made three hundred years ago had indeed become obsolete, for the weeks and months added themselves together into a swiftly mounting total of years, while a nightmare of eclipsed existence brooded over the great house at Stanier. Since the stroke that had fallen on him after Hester's runaway match, Lord Yardley would have no guests in the house, and with the constancy of the original Colin, would never leave the place himself. Grinning and snarling in his bath-chair, he would be drawn up and down its long galleries by the hour together, with his battered and petrified spouse walking by his side, at first unable to speak with any coherence, but as the years

went on attaining to a grim ejaculatory utterance that left no doubt as to his meaning.

Sometimes it was his whim to enter the library, and if Philip was there he would give vent to dreadful and stuttering observations as he clenched and unclenched the nerveless hands that seemed starving to throttle his son's throat. Then, tired with this outpouring of emotion, he would doze in his chair, and wake from his doze into a paroxysm of tremulous speechlessness. At dinner-time he would have the riband of the Garter pinned across his knitted coat and be wheeled, with his wife walking whitely by his side, into the gallery, where the unmarried Philip, and his newly-married brother and his wife, stood up at his entrance, and without recognition he would pass, jibbering, at the head of that small and dismal procession, into the dining-room.

He grew ever thinner and more wasted in body, but such was some consuming fire within him that he needed the sustenance of some growing and gigantic youth. He was unable to feed himself, and his attendant standing by him put into that open chasm of a mouth, still lined with milk-white teeth, his monstrous portions. A couple of bites was sufficient to prepare for the gulp, and again his mouth was ready to receive.

Then, when the solid entertainment was over, and the women gone, there remained the business of wine, and, sound trencherman though he was, his capacity over this was even more remarkable. He took his port by the tumblerful, the first of which he would drink like one thirsty for water, and this in some awful manner momentarily restored his powers of speech. Like the first drops before a storm, single words began dripping from his lips, as this restoration of

speech took place, his eye, brightening with malevolence, fixed itself on Philip, and night after night he would gather force for the same lunatic tirade.

"You sitting there," he would say, "you, Philip, you aren't a Stanier! Why don't you get a bitch to your kennel, and rear a mongrel or two? You heavy-faced lout, you can't breed, you can't drink, you can do nought but grow blear-eyed over a pack of printed rubbish. There was Hester: she married some sort of sweeper, and barren she is at that. I take blame to myself there: if only I had smacked her face a dozen times instead of once, I'd have tamed her: she would have come to heel. And the third of you, Ronald there, with your soapy-faced slut of a wife, you'd be more in your place behind a draper's counter than here at Stanier. And they tell me that there's no news yet that you're going to give an heir to the place. Heir, good God...."

Ronald had less patience than his brother. He would have drunk pretty stiffly by now, and he would bang the table and make the glasses jingle.

"Now you keep a civil tongue in your head, father," he said, "and I'll do the same for you. A pretty figure you cut with your Garter and your costermonger talk. It's your own nest you're fouling, and you've fouled it well. There was never yet a Stanier till you who took to a bath-chair and a bib and a man to feed him when he couldn't find the way to his own mouth."

"Here, steady, Ronald!" Philip would say.

"I'm steadier than that palsy-stricken jelly there," said Ronald. "If he leaves me alone I leave him alone: it isn't I who begin. But if you or he think I'm going to sit here and listen to his gutter-talk, you're in error."

He left his seat with a final reversal of the decanter and banged out of the room.

Then, as likely as not, the old man would begin to whimper. Though, apparently, he did all he could to make residence at Stanier impossible for his sons, he seemed above all to fear that he would succeed in doing so.

“Your brother gets so easily angered with me,” he would say. “I’m sure I said nothing to him that a loving father shouldn’t. Go after him, Phil, and ask him to come back and drink a friendly glass with his poor father.”

“I think you had better let him be, sir,” said Philip. “He didn’t relish what you said of his wife and his childlessness.”

“Well, I meant nothing, I meant nothing. Mayn’t a father have a bit of chaff over his wine with his sons? As for his wife, I’m sure she’s a very decent woman, and if it was that which offended him, there’s that diamond collar my lady wears. Bid her take it off and give it to Janet as a present from me. Then we shall be all comfortable again.”

“I should leave it alone for to-night,” said Philip. “You can give it her to-morrow. Won’t you come and have your rubber of whist?”

His eye would brighten again at that, for in his day he had been a great player, and if he went to the cards straight from his wine, which for a little made order in the muddle and confusion of his brain, he would play a hand or two with the skill that had been an instinct with him. His tortoise-shell kitten must first be brought him, for that was his mascotte, which reposed on his lap, and for the kitten there was a saucerful of chopped fish to keep it quiet. It used to drag fragments from the dish on to the riband of the Garter, and eat from there.

He could not hold the cards himself, and they were arranged in a stand in front of him, and his attendant pulled out the one to which he pointed a quivering finger. If the cards were not in his favour he would chuck the kitten off his knee. “Drown it; the devil’s in it,” he would mumble. Then, before long, the gleam of lucidity rent in his clouds by the wine would close up again, and he would play with lamentable lunatic cunning, revoking and winking at his valet, and laughing with pleasure as the tricks were gathered. At the end he would calculate his winnings and insist on their being paid. They were returned to the loser when his valet had abstracted them from his pocket....

Any attempt to move him from Stanier had to be abandoned, for it brought on such violent agitation that his life was endangered if it were persisted in, and even if it had been possible to certify him as insane, neither Philip nor his brother nor his wife would have consented to his removal to a private asylum, for some impregnable barrier of family pride stood in the way. Nor, perhaps, would it have been easy to obtain the necessary certificate. He had shown no sign of homicidal or suicidal mania, and it would have been hard to have found any definite delusion from which he suffered. He was just a very terrible old man, partly paralytic, who got drunk and lucid together of an evening. He certainly hated Philip, but Philip’s habits and Philip’s celibacy were the causes of that; he cheated at cards, but the sane have been known to do likewise.

Indeed, it seemed as if after their long and glorious noon in which, as by some Joshua-stroke, the sun had stayed his course in the zenith, that the fortunes of the Staniers were dipping swiftly into the cold of an eternal night. In mockery

of that decline their wealth, mounting to more prodigious heights, resembled some Pharaoh's pyramid into which so soon a handful of dust would be laid. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the long leases of the acres which a hundred years ago had been let for building land at Brighton were tumbling in, and in place of ground-rents the houses came into their possession, while, with true Stanier luck, this coincided with a revival of Brighton as a watering-place. Fresh lodes were discovered in their Cornish properties, and the wave of gold rose ever higher, bearing on it those who seemed likely to be the last of the name. Philip, now a little over forty years old, was still unmarried; Ronald, ten years his junior, was childless; and Lady Hester Brayton, now a widow, had neither son nor daughter to carry on the family.

Already it looked as if the vultures were coming closer across the golden sands of the desert on which these survivors were barrenly gathered, for an acute and far-seeing solicitor had unearthed a family of labourers living in a cottage in the marsh between Broomhill and Appledore, who undoubtedly bore the name of Stanier, and he had secured from the father, who could just write his name, a duly-attested document to the effect that if Jacob Spurway succeeded in establishing him in the family possessions and honours, he would pay him the sum of a hundred thousand pounds in ten annual instalments. That being made secure, it was worth while secretly to hunt through old wills and leases, and he had certainly discovered that Colin Stanier (*æt.* Elizabeth) had a younger brother, Ronald, who inhabited a farm not far from Appledore and had issue. That issue could, for the most part, be traced, or, at any rate, firmly inferred right down to the present. Then came a most gratifying search through the chronicles and pedigrees of the line now

in possession, and, explore as he might, John Spurway could find no collateral line still in existence. Straight down, from father to son, as we have seen, ran the generations; till the day of Lady Hester Brayton, no daughter had been born to an Earl of Yardley, and the line of such other sons as the lords of Stanier begot had utterly died out. The chance of establishing this illiterate boor seemed to Mr. Jacob Spurway a very promising one, and he not only devoted to it his time and his undoubted abilities, but even made a few clandestine and judicious purchases. There arrived, for instance, one night at the Stanier cottage a wholly genuine Elizabethan chair in extremely bad condition, which was modestly placed in the kitchen behind the door; a tiger-ware jug found its way to the high chimneypiece and got speedily covered with dust, and a much-tarnished Elizabethan sealtop spoon made a curious addition to the Britannia metal equipage for the drinking of tea.

But if this drab and barren decay of the direct line of Colin Stanier roused the interest of Mr. Spurway, it appeared in the year 1892 to interest others not less ingenious, and (to adopt the obsolete terms of the legend) it really looked as if Satan remembered the bond to which he was party, and bestirred himself to make amends for his forgetfulness. And first—with a pang of self-reproach—he turned his attention to this poor bath-chaired paralytic, now so rapidly approaching his seventieth year. Then there was Philip to consider, and Ronald.... Lady Hester he felt less self-reproachful about, for, unhampered by children, and consoled for the loss of her husband by the very charming attentions of others, she was in London queen of the smart Bohemia, which was the only court at all to her mind, and was far more amusing than the

garden parties at Buckingham Palace to which, so pleasant was Bohemia, she was no longer invited.

So then, just about the time that Mr. Spurway was sending Elizabethan relics to the cottage in the Romney Marsh, there came over Lord Yardley a strange and rather embarrassing amelioration of his stricken state. From a medical point of view he became inexplicably better, though from another point of view it could be as confidently stated that he became irretrievably worse. His clouded faculties were pierced by the sun of lucidity again, the jerks and quivers of his limbs and his speech gave way to a more orderly rhythm, and his doctor congratulated himself on the eventual success of a treatment that for twenty years had produced no effect whatever. Strictly speaking, that treatment could be more accurately described as the absence of treatment: Sir Thomas Logan had said all along that the utmost that doctors could do was to assist Nature in effecting a cure: a bath-chair and the indulgence of anything the patient felt inclined to do was the sum of the curative process. Now at last it bore (professionally speaking) the most gratifying fruit. Coherence visited his speech, irrespective of the tumblers of port (indeed, these tumblers of port produced a normal incoherence), his powerless hands began to grasp the cards again, and before long he was able to perambulate the galleries through which his bath-chair had so long wheeled him, on his own feet with the aid of a couple of sticks. Every week that passed saw some new feat of convalescence and the strangeness of the physical and mental recovery touched the fringes of the miraculous.

But while Sir Thomas Logan, in his constant visits to Stanier during this amazing recovery, never failed to find

some fresh and surprising testimonial to his skill, he had to put away from himself with something of an effort certain qualms that insisted on presenting themselves to him. It seemed even while his patient's physical and mental faculties improved in a steady and ascending ratio of progress, that some spiritual deterioration balanced, or more than balanced, this recovery. Hard and cruel Lord Yardley had been before the stroke had fallen on him—without compassion, without human affection—now, in the renewal of his vital forces, these qualities blazed into a conflagration, and it was against Philip, above all others, that their heat and fury were directed.

While his father was helpless Philip had staunchly remained with him, sharing with his mother and with Ronald and his wife the daily burden of companionship. But now there was something intolerable in his father's lucid and concentrated hatred of him. Daily now Lord Yardley would come into the library where Philip was at his books, in order to glut his passion with proximity. He would take a chair near Philip's, and, under pretence of reading, would look at him in silence with lips that trembled and twitching fingers. Once or twice, goaded by Philip's steady ignoring of his presence, he broke out into speeches of hideous abuse, the more terrible because it was no longer the drunken raving of a paralytic, but the considered utterance of a clear and hellish brain.

Acting on the great doctor's advice, Philip, without saying a word to his father, made arrangements for leaving Stanier. He talked the matter over with that marble mother of his, and they settled that he would be wise to leave England for the time being. If his father, as might so easily happen, got news of him in London or in some place easily accessible, the awful law of attraction which his hatred made between them

might lead to new developments: the more prudent thing was that he should efface himself altogether.

Italy, to one of Philip's temperament, appeared an obvious asylum, but beyond that his whereabouts was to be left vague, so that his mother, without fear of detection in falsehood, could say that she did not know where he was. She would write him news of Stanier to some forwarding agency in Rome, with which he would be in communication, and he would transmit news of himself through the same channel.

One morning before the house was astir, Philip came down into the great hall. Terrible as these last years had been, rising to this climax which had driven him out, it was with a bleeding of the heart that he left the home that was knitted into his very being, and beat in his arteries. He would not allow himself to wonder how long it might be before his return: it did not seem possible that in his father's lifetime he should tread these floors again, and in the astounding rejuvenation that there had come over Lord Yardley, who could say how long this miracle of restored vitality might work its wonders?

As he moved towards the door a ray of early sunlight struck sideways on to the portrait of Colin Stanier, waking it to another day of its imperishable youth. It illumined, too, the legendary parchment let into the frame; by some curious effect of light the writing seemed to Philip for one startled moment to be legible and distinct....

CHAPTER III

One morning, within a month of his departure from Stanier, Philip was coming slowly up from his bathing and basking on the beach, pleasantly fatigued, agreeably hungry,

and stupefied with content. He had swum and floated in the warm crystal of the sea, diving from deep-water rocks into the liquid caves, where the sunlight made a shifting net of luminous scribbles over the jewelled pebbles; he had lain with half-shut eyes watching the quivering of the hot air over the white bank of shingle, with the sun warm on his drying shoulders and penetrating, it seemed, into the marrow of his bones and illuminating the very hearth and shrine of his spirit.

The hours had passed but too quickly, and now he was making his leisurely way through vineyards and olive-farms back to the road where a little jingling equipage would be waiting to take him up to his villa on the hill above the town of Capri. On one side of the path was a sun-flecked wall, where, in the pools of brightness, lizards lay as immobile as the stones themselves; the edges of these pools of light bordered by continents of bluish shadow wavered with the slight stirring of the olive trees above them. Through the interlacement of these boughs he caught glimpses of the unstained sky and the cliffs that rose to the island heights. On the other side the olive groves declined towards the edge of the cliff, and through their branches the sea, doubly tinged with the sky's blueness, was not less tranquil than the ether.

Presently, still climbing upwards, he emerged from the olive groves, while the vineyards in plots and terraces followed the outline of the hill. Mingled with them were orchards of lemon trees bearing the globes of the young green fruit together with flower; and leaf and flower and fruit alike reeked of an inimitable fragrance. There were pomegranates bearing crimson flowers thick and waxlike against the wall of an ingle house that bordered the narrow path; a riot of

morning-glory was new there every day with fresh unfoldings of blown blue trumpets. Out of the open door came an inspiriting smell of frying, and on the edge of the weather-stained balcony were rusty petroleum tins in which carnations bloomed. A space of level plateau, with grass already bleached yellow by this spell of hot weather, crowned the hill, and again he descended between lizard-tenanted walls through vineyards and lemon groves.

His rickety little carriage was waiting, the horse with a smart pheasant's feather erect on its head, the driver with a carnation stuck behind his ear; the harness, for the sake of security, was supplemented with string. The whip cracked, the horse tossed its pheasant's feather and jingled its bells, and, followed by a cloud of dust, Philip creaked away up the angled road, musing and utterly content.

He could scarcely believe, as the little equipage ambled up the hill, that the individual known by his name, and wearing his clothes, who had lived darkly like a weevil in that joylessness of stately gloom, was the same as this sun-steeped sprawler in the creaking carriage. He had come out of a nightmare of tunnel into the wholesome and blessed day, and was steeped in the colour of the sun. It was but a few weeks ago that, without anticipation of anything but relief from an intolerable situation, he had stolen out of Stanier, but swift æons of evolution had passed over him since then. There was not more difference between the darkness of those English winter days that had brooded in the halls and galleries of Stanier and this caressing sun that pervaded sea and sky, than there was between his acceptance of life then and his embrace of life now. Now it was enough to be alive: the very conditions of existence spelled content, and at the

close of every day he would have welcomed a backward shift of the hours so that he might have that identical day again, instead of welcoming the close of each day in the assurance of that identical day not coming again. There would be others, but from the total sum one unit had been subtracted. It had perished: it had dropped into the well of years.

Philip had no need to ask himself what constituted the horror of those closed years, for it was part of his consciousness, which called for no catechism, that it was his father's existence; just the fact of him distilled the poison, thick as dew on a summer night, which made them thus. He had to the full the Stanier passion for the home itself, but as long as his father lived, the horror of the man so pervaded the place, so overrode all other sentiments with regard to it, that he could not think of the one apart from the other, for hatred, acid and corrosive, grew like some deadly mildew on the great galleries and the high halls.

It was no mere passive thing, an absence of love or affection, but a positive and prosperous growth: a henbane or a deadly nightshade sprouted and flowered and flourished there. Dwelling on it even for the toss of his horse's head, as they clattered off the dusty road on to the paved way outside the town, Philip felt his hands grow damp.

He had come straight through to Rome and plunged himself, as in a cooling bath, in the beauty and magnificence of the antique city. He had wandered through galleries, had sat in the incense-fragrant dusk of churches, had spent long hours treading the vestiges of the past, content for the time to feel the spell of healing which the mere severing himself from Stanier had set at work. But soon through that spell there sounded a subtler incantation, coming not from the

haunts of men nor the achievements of the past, but from the lovely heart of the lovely land itself which had called forth these manifestations.

He had drifted down to Naples, and across the bay to the enchanted island hanging like a cloud on the horizon where the sea and sky melted into each other. As yet he wanted neither man nor woman, the exquisite physical conditions of the southern summer were in themselves the restoration he needed, with a truce from all human entanglements. Potent, indeed, was their efficacy; they ran through his heart like wine, rejuvenating and narcotic together, and to-day he could scarcely credit that a fortnight of eventless existence had flowed over him in one timeless moment of magic, of animal, unreflecting happiness.

Curious good fortune in elementary material ways had attended him. On the very day of his arrival, as he strolled out from his hotel in the dusk up the moon-struck hill above the town, he had paused beneath the white garden wall of a villa abutting on the path, and even as in imagination he pictured the serenity and aloofness of it, his eye caught a placard, easily legible in the moonlight, that it was to let, and with that came the certainty that he was to be the lessee.

Next morning he made inquiry and inspection of its cool whitewashed rooms, tiled, floored and vaulted. Below it lay its terraced garden, smothered with neglected rose-trees and from the house, along a short paved walk, there ran a vine-wreathed pergola, and a great stone pine stood sentinel. A capable *contadina* with her daughter were easily found who would look after him, and within twenty-four hours he had transferred himself from the German-infested hotel. Soon, in answer to further inquiries, he learned that at the end of his

tenure a purchase might be effected, and the negotiations had begun.

To-day for the first time he found English news awaiting him, and the perusal of it was like the sudden and vivid recollection of a nightmare. Lord Yardley, so his mother wrote, was getting more capable every day; he had even gone out riding. He had asked no questions as to where Philip had gone, or when he would return, but he had given orders that his name should not be mentioned, and once when she had inadvertently done so, there had been a great explosion of anger. Otherwise life went on as usual: Sir Thomas had paid a visit yesterday, and was very much gratified by his examination of his patient, and said he need not come again, unless any unfavourable change occurred, for another month. His father sat long after dinner, and the games of whist were often prolonged till midnight....

Philip skimmed through the frozen sheets ... his mother was glad he was well, and that sea-bathing suited him.... It was very hot, was it not?—but he always liked the heat.... The hay had been got in, which was lucky, because the barometer had gone down.... He crumpled them up with a little shudder as at a sudden draught of chilled air....

There was another from his sister Hester.

“So you’ve run away, like me, so the iceberg tells me,” she wrote. “I only wonder that you didn’t do it long ago. This is just to congratulate you. She says, too, that father is ever so much better, which I think is a pity. Why should he be allowed to get better? Mother says it is like a miracle, and if it is, I’m sure I know who worked it.

“Really, Phil, I am delighted that you have awoke to the fact that there is a world outside Stanier—good Lord, if

Stanier was all the world, what a hell it would be! You used never to be happy away from the place, I remember, but I gather from what mother says that it became absolutely impossible for you to stop there.

"There's a blight on it, Phil: sometimes I almost feel that I believe in the legend, for though it's twenty years since I made my skip, if ever I have a nightmare, it is that I dream that I am back there, and that my father is pursuing me over those slippery floors in the dusk. But I shall come back there, if you'll allow me, when he's dead: it's he who makes the horror...."

Once again Philip felt a shiver of goose-flesh, and sending his sister's letter to join the other in the empty grate, strolled out into the hot stillness of the summer afternoon, and he hailed the sun like one awakening from such a nightmare as Hester had spoken of. All his life he had been sluggish in the emotions, looking at life in the mirror of other men's minds, getting book knowledge of it only in a cloistered airlessness, not experiencing it for himself—a reader of travels and not a voyager. But now with his escape from Stanier had come a quickening of his pulses, and that awakening which had brought home to him the horror of his father had brought to him also a passionate sense of the loveliness of the world.

Regret for the wasted years of drowsy torpor was there, also; here was he already on the meridian of life, with so small a store of remembered raptures laid up as in a granary for his old age, when his arm would be too feeble to ply the sickle in the ripe cornfields. A man, when he could no longer reap, must live on what he had gathered: without that he would face hungry and empty years. When the fire within began to burn low, and he could no longer replenish it, it was

ill for him if the house of his heart could not warm itself with the glow that experience had already given him. He must gather the grapes of life, and tread them in his winepress, squeezing out the uttermost drop, so that the ferment and sunshine of his vintage would be safe in cellar for the comforting of the days when in his vineyard the leaves were rotting under wintry skies. Too many days had passed for him unharvested.

That evening, after his dinner, he strolled down in the warm dusk to the piazza. The day had been a *festa* in honour of some local saint, and there was a show of fireworks on the hill above the town, and in consequence the piazza and the terrace by the funicular railway, which commanded a good view of the display, was crowded with the young folk of the island. Rockets aspired, and bursting in bouquets of feathered fiery spray, dimmed the stars and illumined the upturned faces of handsome boys and swift-ripening girlhood. Eager and smiling mouths started out of the darkness as the rockets broke into flower, eager and young and ready for love and laughter, fading again and vanishing as the illumination expired.

It was this garden of young faces that occupied Philip more than the fireworks, these shifting groups that formed and reformed, smiling and talking to each other in the intervals of darkness. The bubbling ferment of intimate companionship frothed round him, and suddenly he seemed to himself to be incapsulated, an insoluble fragment floating or sinking in this heady liquor of life. There came upon him sharp and unexpected as a blow dealt from behind, a sense of complete loneliness.

Every one else had his companion: here was a group of chattering boys, there of laughing girls, here the sexes were mingled. Elder men and women had a quieter comradeship: they had passed through the fermenting stage, it might be, but the wine of companionship with who knew what memories were in solution there, was theirs still. All these rapturous days he had been alone, and had not noticed it; now his solitariness crystallised into loneliness.

With a final sheaf of rockets the display came to an end, and the crowd began to disperse homewards. The withdrawal took the acuteness from Philip's ache, for he had no longer in front of his eyes the example of what he missed, his hunger was not whetted by the spectacle of food.

The steps of the last loiterers died away, and soon he was left alone looking out over the vine-clad slope of the steep hill down to the Marina. Warm buffets of air wandered up from the land that had lain all day in its bath of sunlight, rippling round him like the edge of some spent wave; but already the dew, moistening the drought of day, was instilling into the air some nameless fragrance of damp earth and herbs refreshed. Beyond lay the bay, conjectured rather than seen, and, twenty miles away, a thin necklet of light showed where Naples lay stretched and smouldering along the margin of the sea. If a wish could have transported Philip there, he would have left the empty terrace to see with what errands and adventures the city teemed, even as the brain teems with thoughts and imaginings.

Into the impersonal seduction of the summer night some human element of longing had entered, born of the upturned faces of boys and girls watching the rockets, and sinking back, bright-eyed and eager, into the cover of darkness, even

as the sword slips into its sheath again. Youth, in the matter of years, was already past for him, but in his heart until now youth had not yet been born. No individual face among them all had flown a signal for him, but collectively they beckoned; it was among such that he would find the lights of his heart's harbour shining across the barren water, and kindling desire in his eyes.

It was not intellectual companionship that he sought nor the unity and absorption of love, for Philip was true Stanier and had no use for love; but he craved for youth, for beauty, for the Southern gaiety and friendliness, for the upleap and the assuagement of individual desire. Till middle-age he had lived without the instincts of youth; his tree was barren of the golden fruits of youth's delight. Now, sudden as his change of life, his belated springtime flooded him.

It was in Naples that he found her, in the studio of an acquaintance he had made when he was there first, and before midsummer Rosina Viagi was established in the villa. She was half English by birth, and in her gold hair, heavy as the metal and her blue eyes, she shewed her mother's origin. But her temperament was of the South—fierce and merry, easily moved to laughter, and as easily to squalls of anger that passed as swiftly as an April shower, and melted into sunlight again. She so enthralled his senses that he scarcely noticed, for those first months, the garish commonness of her mind: it scarcely mattered; he scarcely heeded what she said so long as it was those full lips which formed the silly syllables. She was greedy, and he knew it, in the matter of money, but his generosity quite contented her, and he had got just what he had desired, one who entirely satisfied his passion and left his mind altogether unseduced.

Then with the fulfillment of desire came the leanness that follows, a swift inevitable Nemesis on the heels of the accomplishment of an unworthy purpose. He had dreamed of the gleam of romance in those readings of his at Stanier, and awoke to find but a smouldering wick. And before the summer was dead, he knew he was to become a father.

In the autumn the island emptied of its visitors, and Rosina could no longer spend her evenings at the café or on the piazza, with her countrywomen casting envious glances at her toilettes, and the men boldly staring at her beauty. She was genuinely fond of Philip, but her native gaiety demanded the distraction of crowds, and she yawned in the long evenings when the squalls battered at the shutters and the panes streamed with the fretful rain.

"But are we going to stop here all the winter?" she asked one evening as she gathered up the piquet cards. "It gets very melancholy. You go for your great walks, but I hate walking; you sit there over your book, but I hate reading."

Philip laughed. "Am I to clap my hands at the rain," he said, "and say, 'Stop at once! Rosina wearies for the sun'?"

She perched herself on the arm of his chair, a favourite attitude for her supplications. "No, my dear," she said, "all your money will not do that. Besides, even if the rain obeyed you and the sun shone, there would still be nobody to look at me. But you can do something."

"And what's that?"

"Just a little apartment in Naples," she said. "It is so gay in Naples even if the sirocco blows or if the tramontana bellows. There are the theatres; there are crowds; there is movement. I cannot be active, but there I can see others being active. There are fresh faces in the street, there is gaiety."

“Oh, I hate towns!” said Philip.

She got up and began to speak more rapidly. “You think only of yourself,” she said. “I mope here; I am miserable. I feel like one of the snails on the wall, crawling, crawling, and going into a dusty crevice. That is not my nature. I hate snails, except when they are cooked, and then I gobble them up, and wipe my mouth and think no more of them. You can read your book in a town just as well as here, and you can take a walk in a town. Ah, do, Philip!”

Suddenly and unexpectedly Philip found himself picturing his days here alone, without Rosina. He did not consciously evoke the image; it presented itself to him from outside himself. The island had certainly cast its spell over him: just to be here, to awake to the sense of its lotus-land tranquillity, and to go to sleep knowing that a fresh eventless day would welcome him, made him content. He could imagine himself now alone in this plain vaulted room, with the storm swirling through the stone-pine outside, and the smell of burning wood on the hearth without desiring Rosina’s presence.

“Well, it might be done,” he said. “We could have a little nook in Naples, if you liked. I don’t say that I should always be there.”

Rosina’s eyes sparkled. “No, no, that would be selfish of me,” she said. “You would come over here for a week when you wished, as you are so fond of your melancholy island....” She stopped, and her Italian suspiciousness came to the surface. “You are not thinking of leaving me?” she asked.

“Of course I am not,” he said impatiently. “You imagine absurdities.”

“I have heard of such absurdities. Are you sure?”

“Yes, you silly baby,” said he.

She recovered her smiles. “I trust you,” she said. “Yes, where were we? You will come over here when you want your island, and you will be there when you want me. Oh, Philip, do you promise me?”

Her delicious gaiety invaded her again, and she sat herself on the floor between his knees.

“Oh, you are kind to me!” she said. “I hope your father will live for ever, and then you will never leave me. There is no one so kind as you. We will have a flat, will we not? I know just such an one, that looks on to the Castello d’Ovo, and all day the carriages go by, and we will go by, too, and look up at our home, and wonder who are the happy folk who live there, and every one who sees me will envy me for having a man who loves me. And we will go to the restaurants where there are lights and glitter, and the band plays, and I will be happier than the day is long. Let us go over to-morrow. I will tell Maria to pack....”

It was just this impetuous prattling childishness which had enthralled him at first, and even while he told himself now how charming it was, he knew that he found it a weariness and an unreality. The same Rosina ten minutes before would be in a gale of temper, then, some ten minutes after, under a cloud of suspicious surmise. His own acceptance of her proposal that they would be together at times, at times separate, was, in reality, a vast relief to him, yet chequering that relief was that curious male jealousy that the woman whom he had chosen to share his nights and days should contemplate his absences with his own equanimity. While he reserved to himself the right of not being utterly devoted to her, he claimed her devotion to him.

It had come to that. It was not that his heart beat to another tune, his eyes did not look elsewhere; simply the swiftly-consumed flame of passion was now consciously dying down, and while he took no responsibility for his own cooling, he resented her share in it. He treated her, in fact, as Staniers had for many generations treated their wives, but she had an independence which none of those unfortunate females had enjoyed. He had already made a handsome provision for her; and he was quite prepared to take a full financial responsibility for his fatherhood. Yet, while he recognised how little she was to him, he resented the clear fact of how little he was to her.

He got up. “You shall have it all your own way, darling,” he said. “We’ll go across to Naples to-morrow; we’ll find a flat—the one you know of—and you shall see the crowds and the lights again....”

“Ah, you are adorable,” said she. “I love you too much, Philip.”

He established her to her heart’s content, and through the winter divided the weeks between Naples and the island. She had no hold on his heart, and on his mind none; but, at any rate, he desired no one else but her, and as the months went by there grew in him a tenderness which had not formed part of the original bond. Often her vanity, her childish love of ostentation, a certain querulousness also which had lately exhibited itself, made him long for the quiet solitude across the bay. Sometimes she would be loth to let him go, sometimes in answer to her petition he would put off his departure, and then before the evening was over she would have magnified some infinitesimal point of dispute into a serious disagreement, have watered it with her tears, sobbed

out that he was cruel to her, that she wished he had gone instead of remaining to make himself a tyrant. He shared her sentiments on that topic, and would catch the early boat next morning.

And yet, even as with a sigh of relief he settled himself into his chair that night by the open fireplace, and congratulated himself on this recapture of tranquillity, he would miss something.... She was not there to interrupt him, to scold him, to rage at him, but she had other moods as well, when she beguiled and enchanted him. That was no deep-seated spell, nor had it ever been. Its ingredients were but her physical grace, and the charm of her spontaneous gaiety.

Perhaps next morning he would get a long scrawled letter from her, saying that he had been a brute to leave her, that she had not been out all day, but had sat and cried, and at that he would count himself lucky in his solitude. And even while he felt as dry as sand towards her, there would come seething up through its aridity this moist hidden spring of tenderness.

He had made just such an escape from her whims and wilfulness one day towards the end of February, but before the evening was half over he had tired of this solitude that he had sought. His book did not interest him, and he felt too restless to go to bed. Restlessness, at any rate, might be walked off, and he set out to tramp and tranquillise himself.

The moon was near to its full, the night warm and windless, and the air alert with the coming of the spring. Over the garden beds hung the veiled fragrance of wallflowers and freezias, and their scent in some subtle way suggested her presence. Had she been there she would, in the mood in which he had left her, have jangled and irritated him,

but if a wish would have brought her he would have wished it.

He let himself out of the garden gate, and mounted the steep path away from the town, thinking by brisk movement to dull and fatigue himself and to get rid of the thought of her. But like a wraith, noiseless and invisible, she glided along by him, and he could not shake her off. She did not scold him or nag at him: she was gay and seductive, with the lure of the springtime tingling about her, and beckoning him. Soon he found himself actively engaged in some sort of symbolic struggle to elude her, and taking a rough and steeper path, thought that he would outpace her.

Here the way lay over an uncultivated upland, and as he pounded along he drank in the intoxicating ferment of the vernal night. The earth was dew-drenched, and the scent of the aromatic plants of the hillside served but as a whet to his restless thoughts, and still, hurry as he might, he could not escape from her and from a certain decision that she seemed to be forcing on him. Finally, regardless of the dew, and exhausted with the climb, he sat down and began to think it out.

They had been together now for eight months, and though she often wearied and annoyed him, he could not imagine going back to the solitary life which, when first he came to Capri, had been so full of enchantment. They had rubbed and jarred against each other, but never had either of them, loose though the tie had been, considered leaving each other. They had been absolutely faithful, and were, indeed, married in all but the testimony of a written contract.

It had been understood from the first that, on his father's death, Philip would take up the reins of his government at

home, leaving her in all material matters independent and well off, and in all probability her dowry, cancelling her history, would enable her to make a favourable marriage. But though that had been settled between them, Philip found now, as he sat with her wraith still silent, still invisible, but insistently present, that not till this moment had he substantially pictured himself without her, or seen himself looking out for another woman to be mother of his children. He could see himself going on quarrelling with Rosina and wanting her again, but the realisation of his wanting any one else was beyond him.

On the other hand, his father, in this miraculous recovery of his powers, might live for years, and who knew whether, long before his death, both he and Rosina might not welcome it as a deliverance from each other?

But not less impossible also than the picturing of himself without Rosina, was the imagining of her installed as mistress at Stanier. Try as he might, he could not make visible to himself so unrealisable a contingency. Rosina at Stanier ... Rosina.... Yet, so soon, she would be the mother of his child.

The moon had sunk, and he must grope his way down the hillside which he had mounted so nimbly in the hope of escape from the presence that hovered by him. All night it was with him, waiting patiently but inexorably for the answer he was bound to give. He could not drive it away, he could not elude it.

There arrived for him next morning an iced budget from his mother. All went on as usual with that refrigerator. There had been a gale, and four elm trees had been blown down.... Easter was early this year; she hoped for the sake of the holiday-makers that the weather would be fine.... It was odd

to hear of the warm suns and the sitting out in the evening.... Was he not tired of his solitary life?...

Philip skimmed his way rapidly through these frigidities, and then suddenly found himself attending.

“I have kept my great news to the end,” his mother wrote, “and it makes us all, your father especially, very happy. We hope before March is over that Ronald will have an heir. Janet is keeping very well, and your father positively dotes on her now. The effect on him is most marked. He certainly feels more kindly to you now that this has come, for the other day he mentioned your name and wondered where you were. It was not having a grandchild that was responsible for a great deal of his bitterness towards you, for you are the eldest....”

Philip swept the letter off the table and sat with chin supported in the palms of his hands, staring out of the open window, through which came the subtle scent of the wallflower. As a traveller traces his journey, so, spreading the situation out like a map before him, he saw how his road ran direct and uncurving. Last night, for all his groping and searching, he could find no such road marked; there was but a track, and it was interrupted by precipitous unnegotiable places, by marshes and quagmires through which no wayfarer could find a path. But with the illumination of this letter it was as if an army of road-makers had been busy on it. Over the quagmire there was a buttressed causeway, through the precipitous cliffs a cutting had been blasted. There was yet time; he would marry Rosina out of hand, and his offspring, not his brother’s, should be heir of Stanier.

The marriage making their union valid and legitimatising the child that should soon be born, took place on the first of

March at the English Consulate, and a week later came the news that a daughter had been born to his sister-in-law. On the tenth of the same month Rosina gave birth to twins, both boys. There was no need for any riband to distinguish them, for never had two more dissimilar pilgrims come forth for their unconjecturable journey. The elder was dark like Philip, and unlike the most of his father's family; the other blue-eyed, like his mother, had a head thick-dowered with bright pale gold. Never since the days of Colin Stanier, founder of the race and bargainer in the legend, had gold and blue been seen together in a Stanier, and "Colin," said Philip to himself, "he shall be."

During that month the shuttle of fate flew swiftly backwards and forwards in the loom of the future. Thirty-six years had passed since Ronald, the latest born of his race, had come into life, ten years more had passed over Philip's head before, within a week of his brother and within a fortnight of his marriage, he saw the perpetuation of his blood. And the shuttle, so long motionless for the Staniers, did not pause there in its swift and sudden weavings.

At Stanier that evening Ronald and his father sat long over their wine. The disappointment at Ronald's first child being a girl was utterly eclipsed in Lord Yardley's mind by the arrival of an heir at all, and he had eaten heavily in boisterous spirits, and drunk as in the days when wine by the tumblerful was needed to rouse him into coherent speech. But now no attendant was needed to hold his glass to his lips: he was as free of movement as a normal man.

"We'll have another bottle yet, Ronnie," he said. "There'll be no whist to-night, for your mother will have gone upstairs to see after Janet. Ring the bell, will you?"

The fresh bottle was brought, and he poured himself out a glassful and passed it to his son.

“By God, I haven’t been so happy for years as I’ve been this last week,” he said. “You’ve made a beginning now, my boy; you’ll have a son next. And to think of Philip, mouldering away all this time. He’s forty-six now; he’ll not get in your way. A useless fellow, Philip; sitting like a crow all day in the library, like some old barren bird. I should like to have seen his face when he got the news. But I’ll write him to-morrow myself, and say that if he cares to come home I’ll treat him civilly.”

“Poor old Phil!” said Ronald. “Do write to him, father. I daresay he would like to come back. He has been gone a year, come May.”

Lord Yardley helped himself again. His hand was quite steady, but his face was violently flushed. Every night now, since the birth of Ronald’s baby, he had drunk deeply, and but for this heightened colour, more vivid to-night than usual, the wine seemed scarcely to produce any effect on him. All day now for a week he had lived in this jovial and excited mood, talking of little else than the event which had so enraptured him.

“And Janet’s but thirty yet,” he went on, forgetting again about Philip, “and she comes of a fruitful stock: the Armitages aren’t like us; they run to quantity. Not that I find fault with the quality. But a boy, Ronald.”

A servant had come in with a telegram, which he presented to Lord Yardley, who threw it over to Ronald.

“Just open it for me,” he said. “See if it requires any answer.”

Ronald drew a candle nearer him; he was conscious of having drunk a good deal, and the light seemed dim and veiled. He fumbled over the envelope, and drawing out the sheet, unfolded it. He stared at it with mouth fallen open.

"It's a joke," he said in a loud, unsteady voice. "It's some silly joke."

"Let's have it, then," said his father. "Who's the joker?"

"It's from Philip," said he. "He says that he's married, and that his wife has had twins to-day—boys."

Lord Yardley rose to his feet, the flush on his face turning to purple. Then, without a word, he fell forward across the table, crashing down among the glasses and decanters.

A fortnight after the birth of the twins, Rosina, who till then had been doing well, developed disquieting symptoms with high temperature. Her illness declared itself as scarlet fever, and on the 6th of April she died.

Surely in those spring weeks there had been busy superintendence over the fortunes of the Staniers. Philip, till lately outcast from his home and vagrant bachelor, had succeeded to the great property and the honours and titles of his house. Two lusty sons were his, and there was no Rosina to vex him with her petulance and common ways. All tenderness that he had had for her was diverted into the persons of his sons, and in particular of Colin. In England, in this month of April, the beloved home awaited the coming of its master with welcome and rejoicing.

Book Two

CHAPTER I

Colin Stanier had gone straight from the tennis-court to the bathing-place in the lake below the terraced garden. His cousin Violet, only daughter of his uncle Ronald, had said that she would equip herself and follow him, and the boy had swum and dived and dived and swum waiting for her, until the dressing-bell booming from the turret had made him reluctantly quit the water. He was just half dry and not at all dressed when she came.

"Wretched luck!" she said. "Oh, Colin, do put something on!"

"In time," said Colin; "you needn't look!"

"I'm not looking. But it was wretched luck. Mother...."

Colin wrapped a long bath-towel round himself, foraged for cigarettes and matches in his coat pocket, and sat down by her.

"Mother?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Mother was querulous, and so she wanted some one to be querulous to."

"Couldn't she be querulous to herself?" asked Colin.

"No, of course not. You must have a partner or a dummy if you're being querulous. I wasn't more than a dummy, and so when she had finished the rest of it she was querulous about that. She said I was unsympathetic."

"Dummies usually are," said Colin. "Cigarette?"

"No, thanks. This one was, because she wanted to come and bathe. Did you dive off the top step?"

“Of course not. No audience,” said Colin. “What’s the use of doing anything terrifying unless you impress somebody? I would have if you had come down.”

“I should have been thrilled. Oh, by the way, Raymond has just telephoned from town to say that he’ll be here by dinner-time. He’s motoring down.”

Colin considered this. “Raymond’s the only person older than myself whom I envy,” he said. “He’s half an hour older than me. Oh, I think I envy Aunt Hester, but then I adore Aunt Hester. I only hate Raymond.”

“Just because he’s half an hour older than you?” asked the girl.

“Isn’t that enough? He gets everything just because of that unlucky half-hour. He’ll get you, too, if you’re not careful.”

Colin got up and gathered his clothes together.

“He’ll have Stanier,” he observed. “Isn’t that enough to make me detest him? Besides, he’s a boor. Happily, father detests him, too; I think father must have been like Raymond at his age. That’s the only comfort. Father will do the best he can for me. And then there’s Aunt Hester’s money. But what I want is Stanier. Come on.”

“Aren’t you going to dress?” asked Violet.

“Certainly not. As soon as I get to the house I shall have to undress and dress again.”

“Not shoes?” asked she.

“Not when the dew is falling. Oh, wet grass is lovely to the feet. We’ll skirt the terrace and go round by the lawn.”

“And why is it that you envy Aunt Hester?” asked the girl.

“Can’t help it. She’s so old and wicked and young.”

Violet laughed. “That’s a very odd reason for envying anybody,” she said. “What’s there to envy?”

“Why, the fact that she’s done it all,” said Colin frowning. “She has done all she pleased all her life, and she’s just as young as ever. If I wasn’t her nephew, she would put me under her arm, just as she did her husband a thousand years ago, and marry me to-morrow. And then you would marry Raymond, and—and there we would all be. We would play whist together. My dear, those ghastly days before we were born! Grandfather with his Garter over his worsted jacket and a kitten on his knee, and grandmamma and Aunt Janet and your father and mine! They lived here for years like that. How wonderful and awful!”

“They’re just as wonderful now,” said Violet. “And....”

“Not quite so awful; grandfather isn’t here now, and he must have been the ghastliest. Besides, there’s Aunt Hester here to tone them up, and you and I, if it comes to that. Not to mention Raymond. I love seeing my father try to behave nicely to Raymond. Dead failure.”

Colin tucked his towel round him; it kept slipping first from one shoulder, then the other.

“I believe Raymond is falling in love with you,” he said. “He’ll propose to you before long. Your mother will back him up, so will Uncle Ronald. They would love to see you mistress here. And you’d like it yourself.”

“Oh—like it?” said she. She paused a moment. “Colin, you know what I feel about Stanier,” she said. “I don’t think anybody knows as well as you. You’ve got the passion for it. Wouldn’t you give anything for it to be yours? Look at it! There’s nothing like it in the world!”

They had come up the smooth-shaven grass slope from the lake, and stood at the entrance through the long yew-hedge that bordered the line of terraces. There were no ghastly monstrosities in its clipped bastion; no semblance of peacocks and spread tails to crown it: it flowed downwards, a steep, uniform embattlement of stiff green, towards the lake, enclosing the straight terraces and the deep borders of flower-beds. The topmost of these terraces was paved, and straight from it rose the long two-storied façade of mellow brick balustraded with the motto, "Nisi Dominus ædificavit," in tall letters of lead, and from floor to roof it was the building of that Colin Stanier whose very image and incarnation stood and looked at it now.

So honest and secure had been the workmanship that in the three centuries which had elapsed since first it nobly rose to crown the hill above Rye scarcely a stone of its facings had been repaired, or a mouldering brick withdrawn. It possessed, even in the material of its fashioning, some inexplicable immortality, even as did the fortunes of its owners. Its mellowing had but marked their enrichment and stability; their stability rivalled that of the steadfast house. The sun, in these long days of June, had not yet quite set, and the red level rays made the bricks to glow, and gave a semblance as of internal fire to the attested guarantee of the motto. Whoever had builded, he had builded well, and the labour of the bricklayers was not lost.

A couple of years ago Colin, still at Eton, had concocted a mad freak with Violet. There had been a fancy-dress ball in the house, at which he had been got up to represent his ancestral namesake, as shewn in the famous Holbein. There the first Colin appeared as a young man of twenty-five, but

the painter had given him the smooth beauty of boyhood, and his descendant, in those rich embroidered clothes, might have passed for the very original and model for the portrait.

This, then, had been their mad freak: Violet, appearing originally in the costume of old Colin's bride, had slipped away to her room, when the ball was at its height, and changed clothes with her cousin. She had tucked up her hair under his broad-brimmed jewelled hat, he had bewigged himself and easily laced his slimness into her stiff brocaded gown, and so indistinguishable were they that the boys, Colin's friends and contemporaries, had been almost embarrassingly admiring of him, while her friends had found her not less forward. A slip by Colin in the matter of hoarse laughter at an encircling arm and an attempt at a kiss had betrayed him into forgetting his brilliant falsetto and giving the whole thing away.

Not less like to each other now than then, they stood at the entrance of the terraces. He had gained, perhaps, a couple of inches on her in height, but the piled gold of her hair, and his bare feet equalised that. No growth of manhood sheathed the smoothness of his cheeks; they looked like replicas of one type, still almost sexless in the glow of mere youth. Theirs was the full dower of their race, health and prosperity, glee and beauty, and the entire absence of any moral standard.

Faun and nymph, they stood there together, she in the thin blouse and white skirt of her tennis-clothes, he in the mere towel of his bathing. He had but thrown it on anyhow, without thought except to cover himself, and yet the folds of it fell from his low square shoulders with a plastic perfection. A hand buried in it held it round his waist, tightly outlining the springing of his thighs from his body. With her, too, even

the full tennis-skirt, broad at the hem for purposes of activity, could not conceal the exquisite grace of her figure; above, the blouse revealed the modelling of her arms and the scarcely perceptible swell of her breasts. High-bred and delicate were they in the inimitable grace of their youth; what need had such physical perfection for any dower of the spirit?

She filled her eyes with the glow of the sunlit front, and then turned to him. “Colin, it’s a crime,” she said, “that you aren’t in Raymond’s place. I don’t like Raymond, and yet, if you’re right and he means to propose to me, I don’t feel sure that I shall refuse him. It won’t be him I refuse, if I do, it will be Stanier.”

“Lord, I know that!” said Colin. “If I was the elder, you’d marry me to-morrow.”

“Of course I should, and cut out Aunt Hester. And the funny thing, darling, is that we’re neither of us in love with the other. We like each other enormously, but we don’t dote. If you married Aunt Hester I shouldn’t break my heart, nor would you if I married Raymond.”

“Not a bit. But I should think him a devilish lucky fellow!”

She laughed. “So should I,” she said. “In fact, I think him devilish lucky already. Colin, if I do refuse him, it will be because of you.”

“Oh, chuck it, Violet!” said he.

She nodded towards the great stately house. “It’s a big chuck,” she said.

From the far side of the house there came the sound of motor-wheels on the gravel, and after a moment or two the garden door at the centre of the terrace opened, and Raymond came out. He was not more than an inch or so shorter than his

brother, but his broad, heavy, short-legged build made him appear short and squat. His eyebrows were thick and black, and already a strong growth of hair fringed his upper lip. While Colin might have passed for a boy of eighteen still, the other would have been taken for a young man of not less than twenty-five. He stood there for a minute, looking straight out over the terrace, and the marsh below. Then, turning his eyes, he saw the others in the dusky entrance through the yew-hedge, and his face lit up. He came towards them.

"I've only just come," he said. "Had a puncture. How are you, Violet?"

"All right. But how late you are! We're all late, in fact. We must go and dress."

Raymond looked up and down Colin's bath-towel, and his face darkened again. But he made a call on his cordiality.

"Hullo, Colin," he said. "Been bathing? Jolly in the water, I should think."

"Very jolly," said Colin. "How long are you down for?"

He had not meant any particular provocation in the question, though he was perfectly careless as to whether Raymond found it there or not. He did, and his face flushed.

"Well, to be quite candid," he said, "I'm down here for as long as I please. With your permission, of course."

"How jolly!" said Colin in a perfectly smooth voice, which he knew exasperated his brother. "Come on, Vi, it's time to dress."

"Oh, there's twenty minutes yet," said Raymond. "Come for a few minutes' stroll, Vi."

Colin paused for her answer, slightly smiling, and looking just above Raymond's head. The two always quarrelled

whenever they met, though perhaps “quarrel” is both too strong and too superficial a word to connote the smouldering enmity which existed between them, and which the presence of the other was sufficient to wreathe with little flapping flames. Envy, as black as hell and as deep as the sea, existed between them, and there was no breath too light to blow it into incandescence. Raymond envied Colin for absolutely all that Colin was, for his skin and his slimness, his eyes and his hair, and to a degree unutterably greater, for the winning smile, the light, ingratiating manner that he himself so miserably lacked, even for a certain brusque heedlessness on Colin’s part which was interpreted, in his case, into the mere unselfconsciousness of youth. In the desire to please others, Raymond held himself to be at least the equal of his brother, yet, where his efforts earned for him but a tepid respect, Colin would weave an enchantment. If Raymond made some humorous contribution to the conversation, glazed eyes and perfunctory comment would be all his wages, whereas if Colin, eager and careless, had made precisely the same offering, he would have been awarded attention and laughter.

Colin, on the other hand, envied his brother not for anything he was, but for everything he had. Theirs was no superficial antagonism; the graces of address and person are no subjects for light envy, nor yet the sceptred fist of regal possessions. That fist was Raymond’s; all would be his; even Violet, perhaps, Stanier certainly, would be.

At this moment the antagonism flowered over Violet’s reply. Would she go for a stroll with Raymond or wouldn’t she? Colin cared not a blade of grass which she actually did; it was her choice that would feed his hatred of his brother or make him chuckle over his discomfiture. For an infinitesimal

moment he diverted his gaze from just over Raymond's head to where, a tiny angle away, her eyes were level with his. He shook his head ever so slightly; some drop of water perhaps had lodged itself from his diving in his ear.

"Oh, we shall all be late," said she, "and Uncle Philip hates our being late. Only twenty minutes, did you say? I must rush. Hair, you know."

She scudded off along the paved terrace without one glance behind her.

"Want a stroll, Raymond?" said Colin. "I haven't got to undress, only to dress. I needn't go for five minutes yet."

Raymond had seen the headshake and Colin's subsequent application of the palm of a hand to his ear was a transparent device. Colin, he made sure, meant him to see that just as certainly as he meant Violet to do so. The success of it enraged him, and not less the knowledge that it was meant to enrage him. Colin's hand so skilfully, so carelessly, laid these traps which silkenly gripped him. He could only snarl when he was caught, and even to snarl was to give himself away.

"Oh, thanks very much," he said, determined not to snarl, "but, after all, Vi's right. Father hates us being late. How is he? I haven't seen him yet."

"Ever so cheerful," said Colin. "Does he know you are coming, by the way?"

"Not unless Vi has told him. I telephoned to her."

"Pleasant surprise," said Colin. "Well, if you don't want to stroll, I think I'll go in. Vi's delighted that you've come."

Once again Raymond's eye lit up. "Is she?" he asked.

"Didn't you think so?" said Colin, standing first on one foot and then on the other, as he slipped on his tennis shoes to

walk across the paving of the terrace.

There had been no break since the days of Colin's grandfather in the solemnity of the ceremonial that preceded dinner. Now, as then, the guests, if there were any, or, if not, the rest of the family, were still magnificently warned of the approach of the great hour, and, assembling in the long gallery which adjoined the dining-room, waited for the advent of Lord Yardley.

That piece of ritual was like the Canon of the Mass, invariable and significant. It crystallised the centuries of the past into the present; dinner was the function of the day, dull it might be, but central and canonical, and the centre of it all was the entrance of the head of the family. He would not appear till all were ready; his presence made completion, and the Staniers moved forward by order. So when the major-domo had respectfully enfolded the flock in the long gallery, he took his stand by the door into the dining-room. That was the signal to Lord Yardley's valet who waited by the door at the other end of the gallery which led into his master's rooms. He threw that open, and from it, punctual as the cuckoo in the clock, out came Lord Yardley, and every one stood up.

But in the present reign there had been a slight alteration in the minor ritual of the assembling, for Colin was almost invariably late, and the edict had gone forth, while he was but yet fifteen, and newly promoted to a seat at dinner, that Master Colin was not to be waited for: the major-domo must regard his jewelled flock as complete without him. He, with a "Sorry, father," took his vacant place when he was ready, and his father's grim face would soften into a smile. Raymond's

unpunctuality was a different matter, and he had amended this weakness.

To-night there were no guests, and when the major-domo took his stand at the dining-room door to fling it open on the remote entry of Lord Yardley from the far end of the gallery, all the family but Colin were assembled. Lord Yardley's mother, now over eighty, white and watchful and bloodless, had been as usual the first to arrive, and, leaning on her stick, had gone to her chair by the fireplace, in which, upright and silent, she waited during these canonical moments. She always came to dinner, though not appearing at other meals, for she breakfasted and lunched in her own rooms, where all day, except for a drive in the morning, she remained invisible. Now she held up her white hand to shield her face from the fire, for whatever the heat of the evening, there was a smouldering log there for incense.

Ronald Stanier sat opposite her, heavy and baggy-eyed, breathing sherry into the evening paper. His wife, the querulous Janet, was giving half an ear to Raymond's account of his puncture, and inwardly marvelling at Lady Hester's toilet. Undeterred by the weight of her sixty years, she had an early-Victorian frock of pink satin, high in the waist and of ample skirt. On her undulated wig of pale golden hair, the colour and lustre of which had not suffered any change of dimness since the day when she ran away with her handsome young husband, she wore a wreath of artificial flowers; a collar of pearls encircled her throat which was still smooth and soft. The dark eyebrows, highly arched, gave her an expression of whimsical amusement, and bore out the twinkle in her blue eyes and the little upward curve at the corner of her mouth. She was quite conscious of her sister-in-law's

censorious gaze; poor Janet had always looked like a moulting hen....

By her stood Violet, who had but this moment hurried in, and whose entrance was the signal for Lord Yardley's valet to open the door. She had heard Colin splashing in his bath as she came along the passage, though he had just bathed.

Then, with a simultaneous uprising, everybody stood, old Lady Yardley leaned on her stick, Ronald put down the evening paper, and Raymond broke off the interesting history of his punctured wheel.

Philip Yardley went straight to his mother's chair, and gave her his arm. In the dusk, Raymond standing between him and the window was but a silhouette against the luminous sky. His father did not yet know that he had arrived, and mistook him for his brother.

"Colin, what do you mean by being in time for dinner?" he said. "Most irregular."

"It's I, father," said Raymond.

"Oh, Raymond, is it?" said Lord Yardley. "I didn't know you were here. Glad to see you."

The words were sufficiently cordial, but the tone was very unlike that in which he had supposed himself to be addressing Colin. That was not lost on Raymond; for envy, the most elementary of all human passions, is also highly sensitive.

"You came from Cambridge?" asked his father, when they had sat down, in the same tone of studious politeness. "The term's over, I suppose."

"Yes, a week ago," said Raymond. As he spoke he made some awkward movement in the unfolding of his napkin, and

upset a glass which crashed on to the floor. Lord Yardley found himself thinking, “Clumsy brute!”

“Of course; Colin’s been here a week now,” he said, and Raymond did not miss that. Then Philip Yardley, considering that he had given his son an adequate welcome, said no more.

These family dinners were not, especially in Colin’s absence and in Raymond’s presence, very talkative affairs. Old Lady Yardley seldom spoke at all, but sat watching first one face and then another, as if with secret conjectures. Ronald Stanier paid little attention to anything except to his plate and his glass, and it was usually left to Violet and Lady Hester to carry on such conversation as there was. But even they required the stimulus of Colin, and to-night the subdued blink of spoons on silver-gilt soup-plates reigned uninterrupted. These had just ceased when Colin appeared, like a lamp brought into a dusky room.

“Sorry, father,” he said. “I’m late, you know. Where’s my place? Oh, between Aunt Hester and Violet. Ripping.”

“Urgent private affairs, Colin?” asked his father.

“Yes, terribly urgent. And private. Bath.”

The whole table revived a little, as when the gardener waters a drooping bed of flowers.

“But you had only just bathed,” said Violet.

“That’s just why I wanted a bath. Nothing makes you so messy and sticky as a bathe. And there were bits of grass between my toes, and a small fragment of worm.”

“And how did they get there, dear?” asked Aunt Hester, violently interested.

“Because I walked up in bare feet over the grass, Aunt Hester,” said Colin. “It’s good for the nerves. Come and do it

after dinner.”

Lord Yardley supposed that Colin had not previously seen his brother, and that seeing him now did not care to notice his presence. So, with the same chill desire to be fair in all ways to Raymond, he said:

“Raymond has come, Colin.”

“Yes, father, we’ve already embraced,” said he. “Golly, I don’t call that soup. It’s muck. Hullo, granny dear, I haven’t seen you all day. Good morning.”

Lady Yardley’s face relaxed; there came on her lips some wraith of a smile. Colin’s grace and charm of trivial prattle was the only ray that had power at all to thaw the ancient frost that had so long congealed her. Ever since her husband’s death, twenty years ago, she had lived some half of the year here, and now she seldom stirred from Stanier, waiting for the end. Her life had really ceased within a few years of her marriage; she had become then the dignified lay-figure, emotionless and impersonal, typical of the wives of Staniers, and that was all that her children knew of her. For them the frost had never thawed, nor had she, even for a moment, lost its cold composure, even when on the night that the news of Raymond’s and Colin’s birth had come to Stanier, there came with it the summons that caused her husband to crash among the glasses on the table. Nothing and nobody except Colin had ever given brightness to her orbit, where, like some dead moon, she revolved in the cold inter-stellar space.

But at the boy’s salutation across the table, she smiled. “My dear, what an odd time to say good morning,” she said. “Have you had a nice day, Colin?”

“Oh, ripping, grandmamma!” said he. “Enjoyed every minute of it.”

“That’s good. It’s a great waste of time not to enjoy....” Her glance shifted from him to Lady Hester. “Hester, dear, what a strange gown,” she said.

“It’s Aunt Hester’s go-away gown after her marriage,” began Colin. “She....”

“Colin,” said his father sharply, “you’re letting your tongue run away with you.”

Very unusually, Lady Yardley turned to Philip. “You mustn’t speak to Colin like that, dear Philip,” she said. “He doesn’t know about those things. And I like to hear Colin talk.”

“Very well, mother,” said Philip.

“Colin didn’t have a mother to teach him what to say, and what not to say,” continued Lady Yardley; “you must not be harsh to Colin.”

The stimulus was exhausted and she froze into herself again.

Colin had been perfectly well aware during this, that Raymond was present, and that nothing of it was lost on him. It would be too much to say that he had performed what he and Violet called “the grandmamma trick” solely to rouse Raymond’s jealousy, but to know that Raymond glowered and envied was like a round of applause to him. It was from no sympathy or liking for his grandmother that he thawed her thus and brought her back from her remoteness; he did it for the gratification of his own power in which Raymond, above all, was deficient.... Like some antique bird she had perched for a moment on Colin’s finger; now she had gone back into her cage again.

Colin chose that night to take on an air of offended dignity at his father's rebuke, and subsided into silence. He knew that every one would feel his withdrawal, and now even Uncle Ronald who, with hardly less aloofness than his mother, for he was buried in his glass and platter, and was remote from everything except his vivid concern with food and drink, tried to entice the boy out of his shell. Colin was pleased at this: it was all salutary for Raymond.

"So you've been bathing, Colin," he said.

"Yes, Uncle Ronald," said he.

"Pleasant in the water?" asked Uncle Ronald.

"Quite," said Colin.

Aunt Hester made the next attempt. They were all trying to please and mollify him. "About that walking in the grass in bare feet," she said. "I should catch cold at my age. And what would my maid think?"

"I don't know at all, Aunt Hester," said Colin very sweetly.

Raymond cleared his throat. Colin was being sulky and unpleasant, and he, the eldest, would make things agreeable again. No wonder Colin subsided after that very ill-chosen remark about Aunt Hester.

"There's a wonderful stride been made in this wireless telegraphy, father," he said. "There were messages transmitted to Newfoundland yesterday, so I saw in the paper. A good joke about it in *Punch*. A fellow said, 'They'll be inventing noiseless thunder next.' "

There was a dead silence, and then Colin laughed loudly.

"Awfully good, Raymond," he said. "Very funny. Strawberries, Aunt Hester?"

That had hit the mark. Leaning forward to pull the dish towards him, he saw the flush on Raymond's face.

"Really? As far as Newfoundland?" said Lord Yardley.

By now the major-domo was standing by the dining-room door again, and Philip rose. His mother got up and stood, immobile and expressionless, till the other women had passed out in front of her. Then, as she went out, she said exactly what she had said for the last sixty years.

"You will like a game of whist, then, soon?"

Generally when the women had gone, the others moved up towards the host. To-night Philip took up his glass and placed himself next Colin. The decanters were brought round and placed opposite him, and he pushed them towards Raymond.

"Help yourself, Raymond," he said.

Then he turned round in his armchair to the other boy.

"Still vexed with me, Colin?" he said quietly.

"Of course not, father," he said. "Sorry I sulked. But you did shut me up with such a bang."

"Well, open yourself at the same place," said Philip.

"Rather. Aunt Hester's dress, wasn't it? Isn't she too divine? If she ever dies, which God forbid, you ought to have her stuffed and dressed just like that, and put in a glass case in the hall to shew how young it is possible to be when you're old. But, seriously, do get a portrait done of her to hang here. There's nothing of her in the gallery."

"Any other orders?" asked Philip.

"I don't think so at present. Oh, by the way, are you going to Italy this year?"

“Yes, I think I shall go out there before long for a few weeks as usual. Why?”

“I thought that perhaps you would take me. I’ve got four months’ vacation, you see, now that I’m at Cambridge, and I’ve never been to Italy yet.”

Philip paused; he was always alone in Italy. That was part of the spell. “You’d get dreadfully bored, Colin,” he said. “I shall be at the villa in Capri: there’s nothing to do except swim.”

Colin divined in his father’s mind some reluctance other than that which he expressed. He dropped his eyes for a moment, then raised them again to his father’s face, merry and untroubled.

“You don’t want me to come with you, father,” he said. “Quite all right, but why not have told me so?”

Philip looked at the boy with that expression in his face that no one else ever saw there; the tenderness for another, the heart’s need of another, which had shot into fitful flame twenty years ago, had never quite been extinguished; it had always smouldered there for Colin.

“I’ll think it over,” he said, and turned round in his chair.

“You were telling me something about wireless, Raymond,” he said. “As far as Newfoundland! That is very wonderful. A few years ago scientists would have laughed at such an idea as at a fairy-tale or a superstition. But the superstitions of one generation become the science of the next.”

Raymond by this time was in a state of thorough ill-temper. He had witnessed all the evening Colin’s easy triumphs; he had seen how Colin, when annoyed, as he had

been at his father's rebuke, went into his shell, and instantly every one tried to tempt him out again. Just now in that low-voiced conversation between his brother and his father, he had heard his father say, "Still vexed with me?" in a sort of suppliance.... He determined to try a manœuvre that answered so well.

"I should have said just the opposite," he remarked, re-filling his glass. "I should have thought that the science and beliefs of one generation became the superstitions of the next. Our legend, for instance; that was soberly believed once."

Philip Yardley did not respond quite satisfactorily. "Ah!" he said, getting up. "Well, shall we be going?"

Raymond had just poured himself out a glass of port, and, very unfortunately, he remembered a precisely similar occasion on which his father, just when Colin had done the same, proposed an adjournment. He repeated the exact words Colin had used then.

"Oh, you might wait till I've finished my port," he said.

That did not produce the right effect. On the previous occasion his father had said, "Sorry, old boy," and had sat down again.

"You'd better follow us, then," said Philip. "But don't drink any more, Raymond. You've had as much as is good for you."

Raymond's face blazed. To be spoken to like that, especially in front of his uncle and brother, was intolerable. He got up and pushed his replenished glass away, spilling half of it. Instantly Colin saw his opportunity, and knowing fairly well what would happen, he put his hand within Raymond's arm in brotherly remonstrance.

“Oh, I say, Raymond!” he said.

Raymond shook him off. “Leave me alone, can’t you?” he said angrily.

Then he turned to his father. “I didn’t mean to spill the wine, father,” he said. “It was an accident.”

“Accidents are liable to happen, when one loses one’s temper,” said Philip. “Ring the bell, please.”

There were two tables for cards laid out in the drawing-room, and Raymond, coming in only a few seconds after the others, found that, without waiting for him, the bridge-table had already been made up with Lady Hester, Violet, his father, and Colin. They had not given him a chance to play there, and now for the next hour he was condemned to play whist with his grandmother and his uncle and aunt, a dreary pastime.

At ten old Lady Yardley went dumbly to bed, and there was the choice between sitting here until the bridge was over, or of following Uncle Ronald into the smoking-room. But that he found he could not do; his jealousy of Colin, both as regards his father and as regards Violet, constrained him as with cords to stop and watch them, and contrast their merriment with his own ensconced and sombre broodings.

And then there was Violet herself. Colin’s conjecture had been perfectly right, for in the fashion of Staniers, he must be considered as in the process of falling in love with her. The desire for possession, rather than devotion, was the main ingredient in the bubbling vat, and that was very sensibly present. She made a ferment in his blood, and though he would not have sacrificed anything which he really valued, such as his prospective lordship of Stanier, for her sake, he could not suffer the idea that she should not be his. He knew,

too, how potent in her was the Stanier passion for the home, and that he counted as his chief asset, for he had no illusion that Violet was in love with him. Nor was she, so he thought, in love with Colin; the two were much more like a couple of chums than lovers.

So he sat and watched them round the edge of the newspaper which had beguiled Uncle Ronald's impatience for dinner. The corner where he sat was screened from the players by a large vase of flowers on the table near them, and Raymond felt that he enjoyed, though without original intention, the skulking pleasures of the eavesdropper.

Colin, as usual, was to the fore. Just now he was dummy to his partner, Aunt Hester, who, having added a pair of tortoiseshell spectacles to complete her early-Victorian costume, was feeling a shade uneasy. She had just done what she most emphatically ought not to have done, and was afraid that both her adversaries had perceived it. Colin had perceived it, too; otherwise the suit of clubs was deficient. Violet had already alluded to this.

"Oh, Aunt Hester!" cried Colin. "What's the use of pretending you've not revoked? Don't cling on to that last club; play it, and have done with it. If you don't, you'll revoke again."

Aunt Hester still felt cunning; she thought she might be able to bundle it up in the last trick. "But I ain't got a club, Colin," she said, reverting to mid-Victorian speech.

"Darling Aunt Hester, you mean 'haven't,' " said Colin. " 'Ain't' means 'aren't,' and it isn't grammar even then, though you are my aunt. 'Ain't....' "

Lord Yardley, leaning forward, pulled Colin's hair. It looked so golden and attractive, it reminded him.... "Colin,

are you dummy, or ain't you?" he asked.

"Certainly, father. Can't you see Aunt Hester's playing the hand? I shouldn't call it playing, myself. I should call it playing at playing. Club, please, Aunt Hester."

"Well, if you're dummy, hold your tongue," said Lord Yardley. "Dummy isn't allowed to speak, and...."

"Oh, those are the old rules," said Colin. "The new rules make it incumbent on dummy to talk all the time. Hurrah, there's Aunt Hester's club, aren't it? One revoke, and a penalty of three tricks...."

"Doubled," said his father.

"Brute," said Colin, "and no honours at all! Oh yes, fourteen to us above. Well played, Aunt Hester! Wasn't it a pity? Your deal, Vi."

Colin, having cut the cards, happened to look up at the big vase of flowers which stood close to the table. As he did so, there was a trivial glimmer, as of some paper just stirred, behind it. He had vaguely thought that Uncle Ronald and Raymond had both gone to the smoking-room, but there was certainly some one there, and which of the two it was he had really no idea. Every one else, adversaries and partner, was behaving as if there was no one else in the room, so why not he?

"Raymond's got the hump this evening," he said cheerfully. "He won at whist—Lord, what a game!—because I saw Aunt Janet pay him half-a-crown with an extraordinarily acid expression, and ask for change. So as he's won at cards, he will be blighted in love. I expect he's had a knock from the young thing at the tobacconist's in King's Parade. I think she likes me best, father. But it'll be

the same daughter-in-law. She breathes through her nose, and is marvellously genteel. Otherwise she's just like Violet."

"Pass," said Violet.

"Hurrah! I knew it would make you pessimistic to be called like a tobacconist's...."

Philip Yardley laid down his cards and actually laughed. "Colin, you low, vulgar brute," he said, "don't talk so much!"

Colin imitated Raymond's voice and manner to perfection. "I should have said just the opposite," he remarked. "I should have thought you wanted me to talk more, and make trumps."

Violet caught on. "Oh, you got him exactly, Colin," she said. "What did he say that about?"

"Go on, Colin," said his father. "We shall never finish."

Colin examined his hand. "Three no-trumps," he said. "Not one, nor two, but three. Glorious trinity!"

There was no counter-challenge, and as Lord Yardley considered his lead, Colin looked up through the vase of flowers once more. There was some one there still, and he got up to fetch a match from a side-table. That gave him a clearer view of what lay beyond.

"Hullo, Raymond?" he said. "Thought you'd gone to the smoking-room."

"No; just looking at the paper," said Raymond. "I'm going now."

"Oh, but we'll have another rubber," said Colin. "Cut in?"

"No, thanks," said Raymond.

Colin waited till the door had closed behind him. "Lor!" he said.

"Just shut that door, Colin," said Lord Yardley.

Lady Hester was thrilled about the tobacconist's young thing; it really would be rather a good joke if one of the boys, following his father's example, married a "baggage" of that sort, and she determined to pursue the subject with Colin on some future occasion. She loved such loose natural talk as he treated her to; he told her all his escapades. He was just such a scamp as Colin the first must have been, and with just such gifts and utter absence of moral sense was he endowed.

Indeed, the old legend, so it seemed to her, lived again in Colin, though couched in more modern terms. It was the mediæval style to say that for the price of the soul, Satan was willing to dower his beneficiary with all material bounty and graces; more modernly, you said that this boy was an incorrigible young Adonis, who feared neither God nor devil. True, the lordship of Stanier was not yet Colin's, but something might happen to that grim, graceless Raymond.

How the two hated each other, and how different were the exhibitions of their antagonism! Raymond hated with a glowering, bilious secrecy, that watched and brooded; Colin with a gay contempt, a geniality almost. But if the shrewd old Lady Hester had been asked to wager which of the two was the most dangerous to the other, she would without hesitation have put her money on Colin.

The second rubber was short, but as hilarious as the first, and on its conclusion Lady Hester hurried to bed, saying that she would be "a fright" in the morning if she lost any more sleep. Violet followed her, Philip withdrew to his own room, and Colin sauntered along to the smoking-room in quest of whisky. His Uncle Ronald was still there, rapidly approaching the comatose mood of midnight, which it would

have been inequitable to call intoxication and silly to call sobriety. Raymond sprawled in a chair by the window.

“Hullo, Uncle Ronald, still up?” said Colin. “You’ll get scolded.”

Uncle Ronald lifted a sluggish eyelid. “Hey?” he said. “Oh, Colin, is it? What’s the time, my boy?”

“Half-past twelve,” said Colin, adding on another half-hour. He wanted to get rid of his uncle and see how he stood with his brother. No doubt they would have a row.

“Gobbless me,” said Ronald. “I shall turn in. Just a spot more whisky. Good night, boys.”

As soon as he had gone Raymond got out of his chair and placed himself where he could get his heels on the edge of the low fender-kerb. He hated talking “up” to Colin, and this gave him a couple of inches.

“I want to ask you something,” he said.

“Ask away,” said Colin.

“Did you know I was in the room when you imitated me just now?”

“Hadn’t given a thought to it,” said Colin.

“It’s equally offensive whether you mimic me before my face or behind my back,” said Raymond. “It was damned rude.”

“Shall I come to you for lessons in manners?” asked Colin. “What do you charge?”

Colin spoke with all the lightness of good-humoured banter, well aware that if Raymond replied at all, he would make some sledge-hammer rejoinder. He would swing a cudgel against the rapier that pricked him, yet never land a blow except on the air, or, maybe, his own foot.

“It’s beastly insolence on your part,” said Raymond.

“And that’s very polite,” said Colin. “You may mimic me how and where and when you choose. If it’s like, I shall laugh. If it isn’t, well, I shall still laugh.”

“I haven’t got your sense of humour,” said Raymond.

“Clearly, nor Violet’s. She thought I had got you to a ‘t.’ You probably heard what she said from your sequestered corner behind your newspaper.”

Raymond advanced a step. “Look here, Colin, do you mean to imply that I was listening?”

Colin laughed. “And I want to ask you a question,” he said. “Didn’t you know that we all thought you had gone away?”

Raymond disregarded this. “Then there’s another thing. What do you mean by telling father about the girl at the tobacconist’s? You know it was nothing at all.”

“Rather,” said Colin. “I said so. You seem to forget that I told him that I was the favourite. That’s the part you didn’t like.”

Raymond flushed. “It’s all very well for you to say that,” he said. “But you know perfectly well that my father doesn’t treat us alike. Things which are quite harmless in his eyes when you do them appear very different to him when I’m the culprit. I had had a knock from a tobacconist’s girl, had I? You’re a cad to have told him that quite apart from its being a lie.”

Colin laughed with irritating naturalness. “Is this the first lesson in manners?” he said. “I’m beginning to see the hang of it. You call the other fellow a cad and a liar. About my father’s not treating us alike, that’s his affair. But I should never dream of calling you a liar for saying that. We’re not

alike: why should he treat us alike? You've got a foul temper, you see; that doesn't add to your popularity with anybody."

He spoke in the same voice in which he might have told Raymond that he had a speck of dust on the coat, and yawned rather elaborately.

"Take care you don't rouse it," said Raymond.

"Why not? It rather amuses me to see you in a rage."

"Oh, it does, does it?" said Raymond with his voice quivering.

"I assure you of it. I'm having a most amusing evening, thanks to you. And this chat has been the pleasantest part of it. Pity that it's so late."

Raymond, as usual, had throughout, the worst of these exchanges and was quite aware of it. He had been ill-bred and abusive through his loss of temper while Colin, insolent though his speech and his manner had been, had kept within the bounds of civil retort in his sneers and contempt. In all probability he would give an account of it all to Violet to-morrow, and there was no need for him to embroider; a strictly correct version of what had passed was quite disagreeable enough.

This Raymond wanted to avoid in view of his desire that Violet should look on him as favourably as possible. Whether he meant to propose to her during his visit here, he hardly knew himself, but certainly he wanted to be in her good books. This, and this alone, prompted him now; he hated Colin, all the more because he had been absolutely unable to ruffle him or pierce the fine armour of his composure, but as regards Violet, and perhaps his father, he feared him.

“I’m afraid I’ve lost my temper, Colin,” he said. “And I owe you an apology for all I’ve said. You had annoyed me by mimicking me and by telling father about that girl at Cambridge.”

Colin felt that he had pulled the wings off a fly that had annoyed him by its buzzing; the legs might as well follow....

“Certainly you owe me an apology,” he said. “But, considering everything, I don’t quite know whether you are proposing to pay it.”

Raymond turned on him fiercely. “Ah, that’s you all over!” he said.

“Oh, we’re being quite natural,” said Colin. “So much better.”

He paused a moment.

“Now I don’t want to be offensive just now,” he said, “so let’s sit down and try to tolerate each other for a minute. There.”

Raymond longed to be at his throat, to feel his short, strong fingers throttling the life out of that smooth white neck. But some careless superior vitality in Colin made him sit down.

“Let’s face it, Raymond,” he said. “We loathe each other like poison, and it is nonsense to pretend we don’t. Unfortunately, you are the eldest, so in the end you will score, however much I annoy you. But put yourself in my place; imagine yourself the younger with your foul temper. You would probably try to kill me. Of course, by accident. But I’m not intending to kill you. I am very reasonable; you must be reasonable, too. But just put yourself in my place.”

Raymond shifted in the chair in which Colin, with a mere gesture of a finger, had made him sit. “Can’t we possibly get

on better together, Colin?" he said. "After all, as you say, I come into everything on my father's death. I have Stanier, I have the millions where you have the thousands. I can be very useful to you. You adore the place, and I can let you come here as often and as long as you like, and I can also prevent your setting foot in it. If you'll try to be decent to me, I promise you that you shan't regret it."

Colin put his head on one side and looked at his brother with an air of pondering wonder. "Oh, that cock won't fight," he said. "You know as well as I do that when you are master here, I would sooner go to hell than come here, and you would sooner go to hell than let me come. Perhaps I've got a dull imagination, but it's no use my trying to imagine that. Do be sensible. If you could do anything to injure me at this moment when you are proposing a truce, you know that you would do it. But you can't. You can't hurt me in any way whatever. But what you do know is that I can hurt you in all sorts of ways. I can poison my father's mind about you—it's pretty sick already. I can poison Violet's mind, and that's none too healthy. You see, they both like me most tremendously, and they don't very much like you. It's just the same at Cambridge. I've got fifty friends: you haven't got one. I dare say it's not your fault: anyhow, we'll call it your misfortune. But you want me to do something for you in return for nothing you can do for me, or, perhaps, nothing that you will do for me."

Raymond frowned; when he was thinking he usually frowned. When Colin was thinking he usually smiled.

"If in the future there is anything I can do for you, Colin," he said, "I will do it. I want to be friends with you. Good Lord, isn't that reasonable? We're brothers."

Colin leaned forward in his chair. He was aware of the prodigious nature of what he was meaning to say. “Give me Stanier, Raymond,” he said. “With what father is leaving me, and with what Aunt Hester is leaving me, I can easily afford to keep it up. I don’t ask you for any money. I just want Stanier. Of course, it needn’t actually be mine. But I want to live here, while you live somewhere else. There’s the Derbyshire house, for instance. I’ve got Stanier in my blood. If, on father’s death, you’ll do that, there’s nothing I won’t do for you.”

He paused.

“I can do a good deal, you know,” he said. “And I can refrain from doing a good deal.”

The proposal was so preposterous that Raymond fairly laughed. Instantly Colin got up.

“That sounds pleasant,” he said. “Good night, Raymond. I wouldn’t have any more whisky, if I were you. Father seemed to think you’d had enough drink before the end of dinner.”

CHAPTER II

Breakfast at Stanier was a shade less stately than dinner. The table was invariably laid for the complete tale of its possible consumers, and a vicarious urn bubbled at the end of the board with an empty teapot in front of it, in case of old Lady Yardley coming down to breakfast and dispensing tea. She had not come down for over twenty years, but the urn still awaited her ministrations.

On the arrival of tidings that she was having breakfast in her room, the urn was taken away, and if news filtered through the butler to the footman that some one else was breakfasting upstairs, a place at the table was removed. Hot

dishes above spirit-lamps stood in a row on the sideboard, and there remained till somebody had come down or till, from the removal of knives and forks, it was clear that nobody was coming.

But when Lady Hester was in the house, these dishes were always sure of a partaker, for, after her cold bath, she breakfasted downstairs, as she considered her bedroom a place to sleep and dress in, not to eat in. The urn would have been removed by this time, for Lady Yardley's maid would have taken her tray upstairs, and for Lady Hester and for any one else who appeared there was brought in a separate equipage of tea or coffee, hot and fresh, and deposited in front of the occupied chair.

This morning she was the first to arrive, dressed in a white coat and blouse and a jaunty little straw hat turned up at the back and decorated with pheasants' feathers. Provision of fish and bacon was brought her, and an ironed copy of a daily paper. There were still four places left at the table unremoved, and she promised herself a chatty breakfast.

Raymond was the next comer, but he did not much conduce to chattiness. He looked heavy-eyed and sulky, only grunted in response to her salutation, and immured himself behind the *Daily Mail*. Lady Hester made one further attempt at sociability, and asked him if he had slept well, but as he had nothing to add to his "No, not very," she considered herself free from any further obligation.

Then there came a very welcome addition to his grievous company, for Colin entered through the door that opened on to the terrace. Flannel trousers, coat and shirt open at the neck was all his costume, and there was a bathing towel over his shoulder.

“Morning, Aunt Hester,” he said. “Morning, Raymond.”

He paused in order to make quite sure that Raymond made no response, and sat down next his aunt.

“Been bathing,” he said. “Hottest morning that ever was. Why didn’t you come, too, Aunt Hester? You’d look like a water-nymph. I say, what a nice hat! Whom are you going to reduce to despair? Hullo, three letters!”

“How many of them are love-letters?” asked Aunt Hester archly.

“All, of course,” said Colin. “There’s one from Cambridge.”

“That’ll be the young woman in the tobacconist’s shop whom you told us about,” began Aunt Hester.

“Sh!” said Colin, nodding towards Raymond. “Sore subject.”

Raymond, pushing back his chair, could not control himself from casting one furious glance at Colin, and went out.

“Well, that’s one bad-tempered young man gone,” said Lady Hester severely. She could understand people being thieves and liars, but to fail in pleasantness and geniality was frankly unintelligible to her.

“Why does he behave like that, my dear?” she continued. “He hadn’t a word to chuck at me like a bone to a dog, when I wished him good morning. What makes him like that? He ain’t got a belly-ache, has he?”

Colin, as he swam in the sunshine this morning, had devoted some amount of smiling reflection as to his policy with regard to Raymond. Raymond had rejected his amazing proposal with a derisive laugh; he did not think that an

alliance with his brother was worth that price, and he must take the consequences of his refusal.

Violet entered at this moment; that was convenient, for she, too, could hear about the quarrel last night at one telling.

“Oh, we had a row last night,” he said. “It was pitched a little higher than usual, and I suppose Raymond’s suffering from after-effects. He was perfectly furious with me for having mimicked him, and wasn’t the least soothed by my saying he might mimic me as often as he pleased. Then I was told I was a cad and a liar for that nonsense I talked about the tobacconist’s. After I had stood as much as I could manage, I left him to his whisky, and I don’t imagine there’ll be much left of it. Oh, I say, Violet, did you shut the door when you came in? I believe it’s open; I’ll do it.”

Colin got up, went to the door which was indeed ajar, and looked out into the long gallery. Raymond, it so happened, was sitting in the nearest window-seat lighting his pipe.

Colin nodded to him. “Just shutting the door,” he said, and drew back into the dining-room, rattling and pushing the door to make sure that the latch had gone home. He felt sure that what he had just said to Raymond (that very innocent piece of information!) would go home, too.

“He was just outside,” said Colin softly, returning to the breakfast-table. “Wasn’t it lucky I thought of shutting the door?”

“Go on; what else?” asked Violet.

“Nothing more. Of course, it was very awkward his having overheard what we all said at our bridge. That had riled him. It was best to be sure that there wouldn’t be a repetition of it this morning. But if people will sit behind a newspaper and a vase of flowers, it’s difficult to be aware of their presence.

People ought to betray their presence in the usual manner by coughing or sneezing. I shall have a thorough search of the room first before I say anything about anybody. If I want to say you are an old darling, Aunt Hester, I shall look behind the coal-scuttle first."

Colin, whatever his private sentiments were, had an infinite lightness of touch in the expression of them. He had declared, not to Violet alone, but to Raymond himself, that he frankly detested him, and yet there was a grace about the manner of the presentment that rendered his hatred, if not laudable, at any rate, venial. And his account of the quarrel last night was touched with the same graceful brush. Without overstepping the confines of truth, he left the impression that he had been reasonable and gentle, Raymond headstrong and abusive.

This, too, was part of his policy; when others were present, he would make himself winningly agreeable to Raymond, and shew a control and an indulgence highly creditable in view of his brother's brusque ways, and take no provocation at his hands. That would accentuate the partisanship of the others, which already was his, and would deprive Raymond of any lingering grain of sympathy. When he and Raymond were alone, he would exercise none of this self-restraint; he would goad and sting him with a thousand biting darts.

The three strolled out presently into the gallery; Lady Hester and Violet passed Raymond without speech, but Colin sauntered up to him.

"Coming out to play tennis presently?" he asked.

Colin's careful closing of the dining-room door had not been lost on his brother. Raymond had interpreted it just as Colin wished him to, and he was boiling with rage.

“No, I’m not,” said he.

Colin turned to where Violet was standing, just shrugged his shoulders with a lift of the eyebrows, and went on towards her without spoken comment.

“Tennis soon, Vi?” he asked. “We’ll have to play a single.”

“Right. That will be jolly,” said Violet. “In half an hour?”

Colin nodded, and passed on to Lady Hester. “Come out, Aunt Hester, and let’s sit in the shade somewhere till Vi’s ready. It’s lovely outside.”

“I must have me sunshade,” said she, “or I shall spoil me complexion.”

“That’ll never do,” said Colin. “None of your young men will fall in love with you, if you do that. I’ll get it for you. Which will you have, the blue one with pink ribands, or the pink one with blue ribands?”

“Neither, you wretch,” said Aunt Hester. “The yaller one.”

They found an encampment of basket-chairs under the elms beyond the terrace, and Colin went straight to the business on which he wanted certain information. This, too, was an outcome of his meditations in the swimming-pool.

“I asked father to take me out to Italy this summer,” he said, “and it was quite clear that he had some objection to it. Have you any idea what it was?”

“My dear, it’s no use asking me,” said Aunt Hester. “Your father’s never spoken to me about anything of the sort, and he ain’t the sort of man to ask questions of. But for all these years he has gone off alone for a month every summer. Perhaps he only just wants to get rid of us all for a while.”

Colin extended himself on the grass, shading his eyes against the glare with his hand. His ultimate goal was still too

far off to be distinguished even in general outline, far less in any detailed aspect. He was but exploring, not knowing what he should find, not really knowing what he looked for.

"Perhaps that's it," he said. "In any case, it doesn't matter much. But I did wonder why father seemed not to welcome the idea of my going with him. He usually likes to have me with him. He's devoted to Italy, isn't he, and yet he never talks about it."

Colin spoke with lazy indifference, knowing very well that the surest way of getting information was to avoid any appearance of anxiety to obtain it, and, above all, not to press for it. Suggestions had to be made subconsciously to the subject.

"Never a word," said Lady Hester, "and never has to my knowledge, since he brought you and Raymond back twenty years ago."

"Were you here then?" asked Colin.

"Yes, and that was the first time I saw Stanier since I was seventeen. Your grandfather never spoke to me after my marriage, and for that matter, I wouldn't have spoken to him. He was an old brute, my dear, was your grandfather, and Raymond'll be as like him as two peas."

"Not as two peas, darling," said Colin, "as one pea to another pea."

"Oh, bother your grammar," said Lady Hester. "Speech is given us to show what we mean. You know what I mean well enough. But as soon as your grandfather died, Philip made me welcome here, and has made me welcome ever since. Yes, my dear, the first I saw of you, you were laughing, and you ain't stopped since."

“Did you know my mother?” asked Colin quietly.

He was getting on to his subject again, though Lady Hester was not aware of it.

“No. Never set eyes on her. Nobody of the family knew she existed until you were born, and less than a month after that she was dead. Your father had left home, one May or June it must have been, for he couldn’t stand your grandfather any more than I could, and not a word did any one but your grandmother hear of him, and that only to say it was a fine day, and he was well, till there came that telegram to say that he was married and had a pair of twins. Your grandfather was at dinner, sitting over his wine with your Uncle Ronald—he used to drink enough to make two men tipsy every night of his life—and up he got when your uncle read the telegram to him, and crash he went among the decanters, and that was the end of him. Then your mother died, and back came your father with you and Raymond, within a twelvemonth of the time he’d gone away. And not a word about that twelvemonth ever passes his lips.”

Colin let a suitable pause speak for the mildness of his interest in all this. “He must have been married, then, very soon after he went to Italy,” he said.

“Must have, my dear,” said Lady Hester.

It was exactly then that Colin began to see a faint outline, shrouded though it was by the mists of twenty years, that might prove to be the object of his exploration. Very likely it was only a mirage, some atmospheric phantom, but he intended to keep his eye on it, and, if possible, get nearer to it. A certain *nuance* of haste and promptitude with which Lady Hester had agreed to his comment perhaps brought it in sight.

He sat up, clasping his knees with his hands, and appeared to slide off into generalities. “How exceedingly little we all know of each other,” he said. “What do I know of my father, for instance? Hardly anything. And I know even less of my mother. Just her name, Rosina Viagi, and I shouldn’t know that if it wasn’t for the picture of her in the gallery. Who are the Viagis, Aunt Hester? Anybody?”

“Don’t know at all, my dear,” said she. “I know as little about them as you. Quite respectable folk, I daresay, though what does it matter if they weren’t?”

“Not an atom. Queen Elizabeth wished she was a milk-maid, didn’t she?”

“Lord, she’d have upset the milk-pails and stampeded the cows!” observed Lady Hester. “Better for her to be a queen. Why, here’s your father.”

This was rather an unusual appearance, for Lord Yardley did not generally shew himself till lunch-time. Colin instantly jumped up.

“Hurrah, father!” he said. “Come and talk. Cigarette? Chair?”

Lord Yardley shook his head. “No, dear boy,” he said. “I sent for you and heard you were out, so I came to look for you. Have five minutes’ stroll with me.”

Colin took his father’s arm. “Rather,” he said. “Tell Vi that I’ll be back in a few minutes if she comes out, will you, Aunt Hester?”

Philip stopped. “Another time will do, Colin,” he said, “if you’ve made any arrangement with Violet.”

“Only vague tennis.”

They walked off up the shady alley of grass to where, at the end, an opening cut in the trees gave a wide view over the plain. The ground in front fell sharply away in slopes of steep turf, dotted with hawthorns a little past the fulness of their flowering. A couple of miles away the red roofs of Rye smouldered in the blaze of the day, outlined against the tidal water of the joined rivers, that went seawards in expanse of dyke-contained estuary. On each side of it stretched the green levels of the marsh, with Winchelsea floating there a greener island on the green of that grassy ocean, and along its margin to the south the sea like a silver wire was extended between sky and land. To the right for foreground lay the yew-encompassed terraces, built and planted by Colin the first, the lowest of which fringed the broad water of the lake, and along them burned the glory of the June flower-beds. Behind, framed in the trees between which they had passed, the south-east front of the house rose red and yellow between the lines of green.

The two stood silent awhile.

"Ah, Colin," said his father, "we're at one about Stanier. It beats in your blood as it does in mine. I wish to God that when I was dead...."

He broke off.

"I want to talk to you about two things," he said. "Raymond's one of them, but we'll take the other first. About Italy. I'll take you with me if you want to come. I was reluctant, but I am reluctant no longer. Apart from my inclination which, as I tell you, is for it now not against it, you've got a certain right to come. You and I will live in the villa where I lived with your mother. I've left it you, by the way. My romance, my marriage with her, and our life

together, was so short and was so utterly cut off from everybody else that, as you know, I've always kept it like that, severed from all of you. But you're her son, my dear, and in some ways you are so like her that it's only right you should share my memories and my ghosts. They're twenty-one years old now, and they've faded, but they are there. There's only one thing I want of you; that is, not to ask me any questions about her. Certain things I'll tell you, but anything I don't tell you...."

He broke off for a moment.

"Anything I don't tell you is my private affair," he said.

"I understand, father," said Colin.

"You'll probably see your Uncle Salvatore," continued Philip. "So be prepared for a shock. He usually comes over when he hears I am at the villa ... but never mind that. He takes himself off when he's got his tip. So that's settled. If you get bored you can go away."

"That is good of you, father," said the boy.

"Now about the second point," said Philip; "and that's Raymond. He's a sulky, dark fellow, that brother of yours, Colin."

Colin laughed. "Oh, put all the responsibility on me," he said.

"Well, what's to be done with him? He was in the long gallery just now as I came out, and I spoke to him and was civil. But there he lounged, didn't even take his feet off the window-seat, and wouldn't give me more than a grunted 'yes' or 'no.' So I told him what I thought of his manners."

"Oh, did you? How good for him."

“Well, I didn’t see why he should sulk at me,” said Philip. “After all, it’s my house for the present, and if he is to quarter himself there, without either invitation or warning, the least he can do is to treat me like his host. I try to treat him like a guest, and like a son, for that matter. Don’t I?”

“Yes, dear father,” said Colin. “You always try.”

“What do you mean, you impertinent boy?”

Colin laughed again. “Well, you don’t always succeed, you know. You cover up your dislike of him....”

“Dislike?”

“Rather. You hate him, you know.”

Philip pondered over this. “God forgive me, I believe I do,” he said. “But, anyhow, I try not to, and that’s the most I can do. And I will be treated civilly in my own house. How long is he going to stop, do you know?”

“I asked him that yesterday,” said Colin. “He said that, with my permission—sarcastic, you know—he was going to stop as long as he pleased.”

Philip frowned. “Oh, did he?” he said. “Perhaps my permission will have something to do with it.”

“Oh, do tell him to pack off!” said Colin. “It was so ripping here before he came. I had a row with him last night, by the way.”

“What about?”

“Oh, he chose to swear at me for mimicking him. That is how it began. But Raymond will quarrel over anything. He’s not particular about the pretext. Then there was what I said about the tobacconist’s wench.”

They had passed through the box-hedge on to the terrace just below the windows of the long gallery. Colin raised his

eyes for one half-second as they came opposite the window-seat which Raymond had been occupying, and saw the top of his black head just above the sill. He raised his voice a little.

"Poor old Raymond," he said. "We've got to make the best of him, father. I suppose he can't help being so beastly disagreeable."

"He seems to think he's got a monopoly of it," said Philip. "But I'll show him I can be disagreeable, too. And if he can't mend his ways, I'll just send him packing."

"Oh, it would be ripping without him," said Colin. "He might come back after you and I have gone to Italy."

In pursuance of his general policy, Colin made the most persevering attempts at lunch to render himself agreeable to his brother, for the impression he wished to give was that he was all amiability and thereby throw into blackest shadow against his own sunlight, Raymond's churlishness. A single glance at that glowering face was sufficient to convince Colin that he had amply overheard the words which had passed between his father and himself below the open window of the gallery, and that he writhed under these courtesies which were so clearly of the routine of "making the best of him." All the rest of them would see how manfully Colin persevered, and this geniality was a goad to Raymond's fury; he simply could not bring himself to answer with any appearance of good-fellowship.

"What have you been at all morning, Raymond?" Colin asked him as he entered. "I looked for you everywhere."

"Been indoors," said Raymond.

Colin just shook his head and gave a little sigh of despair, then began again, determined not to be beaten. He saw his father watching and listening, and Raymond knew that Lord Yardley was applauding Colin's resolve to "make the best of him."

"You ought to have come down to the tennis-court and taken on Vi and me together," he said. "We shouldn't have had a chance against you, but we'd have done our best. Father, you must come and look at Raymond the next time he plays; he's become a tremendous crack."

Raymond knew perfectly well that either Colin or Violet could beat him single-handed. Yet how answer this treacherous graciousness?

"Oh, don't talk such rot, Colin!" he said.

He looked up angrily just in time to see Colin and his father exchange a glance.

"Well, what shall we do this afternoon?" said Colin, doggedly pleasant. "Shall we go and play golf? It would be awfully nice of you if you'd drive me down in your car."

"You know perfectly well that I loathe golf," said Raymond.

"Sorry," said Colin.

Colin laughed, and without the smallest touch of ill-humour, gave it up and turned to Violet.

"We'll have our game in that case, shall we, Vi?" he asked. "Father, may we have a car to take us down?"

"By all means," said Philip. "Hester and I will come down with you, go for a drive, and pick you up again. You'd like that, Hester?"

"Oh, but that will leave Raymond alone...." began Colin.

Raymond broke in: “That’s just what I want you to do with me,” he snapped.

Colin got up. “I’ll just go and see granny for a minute,” he said. “I told her I would look in on her after lunch....”

Philip had listened to Colin’s advances and Raymond’s rebuffs with a growing resentment at his elder son’s behaviour, and as the others went out he beckoned him to stop behind.

“Look here, Raymond,” he said when the door had closed. “I had to speak to you after breakfast for your rudeness to me, and all lunch-time you’ve been as disagreeable as you knew how to be to your brother. And if you think I’m going to stand these sulks and ill-temper, you’ll very speedily find yourself mistaken. Colin did all that a good-natured boy could to give you a chance of making yourself decently agreeable, and every time he tried you snapped and growled at him.”

“Do you wish me to answer you or not, sir?” asked Raymond.

“Certainly. I have every desire to be scrupulously fair to you,” said Philip. “I will hear anything you wish to say.”

“Then, father, I wish to say that you’re not fair to me. If I’m late for dinner, do you chaff me in the way you do Colin? Last night you asked him with a chuckle, ‘Urgent private affairs?’ That was all the rebuke he got. If he says he hasn’t finished his wine, you sit down again, and say ‘Sorry.’ If I haven’t, you tell me I’ve had enough already. Colin’s your favourite, and you show it every minute of the day. You dislike me, you know.”

There was quite enough truth in this to make the hearing of it disagreeable to his father. “I didn’t ask you to discuss my

conduct, but to consider your own," he said. "But you shall have it your own way. My conduct to you is the result of yours to me, and yours to everybody else. Look at yourself and Colin dispassionately, and tell me whether I could be as fond of you as of him. I acknowledge I'm not. Are you fond of me, if it comes to that? But I'm polite to you, until you annoy me beyond endurance, as you are continually doing. If Colin had behaved at lunch as you've behaved, I should have thought he was ill."

"And I'm only sulky," said Raymond.

"You're proving it every moment," said his father. "That's quite a good instance."

Raymond paused, biting his lip. "You judge Colin's behaviour to me, father," he said, "by what you see of it. You think he's like that to me when we're alone. He's not: he's fiendish to me. Don't you understand that when you're there, or anybody else is there, he acts a part, to make you think that he's ever so amiable?"

"And how do you behave to him when you're alone together?" asked Philip. "If I take your word about Colin, I must take Colin's about you."

"You've done that already, I expect," said Raymond.

His father got up. "I see I haven't made myself clear," he said. "Try to grasp that that's the sort of remark I don't intend to stand from you for a moment. If I have any further complaint to make of you, you leave the house. You've got to be civil and decently behaved. Otherwise you go. I do not choose to have my general enjoyment of life, or Colin's, or your uncle's, or your aunt's, spoiled by your impertinences and snarlings. You'll have to go away; you can go to St. James's Square if you like, but I won't have you here unless

you make a definite effort to be a pleasanter companion. As I told Colin this morning, you seem to think that being disagreeable is a monopoly of your own, but you'll find that I can be disagreeable, too, and far more effectively than lies in your power."

Philip was quite aware that he was speaking with extreme harshness, with greater harshness, in fact, than he really intended. But the sight of that heavy brooding face, the knowledge that this was his elder son, who would reign at Stanier when he was dead to the exclusion of Colin, made his tongue bitter beyond control.

"Well, that's all I've got to say to you," he said. "I won't have you insolent and uncivil to me or any one in this house. I'm master here for the present, and, rightly or wrongly, I shall do as I choose. And I won't have you quarrelling with Colin. You tell me that when I'm not here and when you're alone with him, he's fiendish to you; that was the word you used. Now don't repeat that, because I don't believe it. You're jealous of Colin, that's why you say things like that; you want to injure him in my eyes. But you only injure yourself."

At that moment there came into Philip's mind some memory, now more than twenty years old, of himself in Raymond's position, stung by the lash of his father's vituperations, reduced to the dumb impotence of hatred. Though he felt quite justified in all he had said to the boy, he knew that his dislike of him had plumed and barbed his arrows, and he experienced some sort of reluctant sympathy with him.

"I've spoken strongly," he said, "because I felt strongly, but I've done. If you've got anything more to say to me, say

it.”

“No,” said Raymond.

“Very good. I shan’t refer to it all again, and it’s up to you to do better in the future. Put a check on yourself. Believe me, that if you do you will have a better time with me and every one else.... Think it over, Raymond; be a sensible fellow.”

The departure of the others gave Raymond abundance of leisure for solitary reflection, and his father’s remarks plenty of material for the same. Stinging as those hot-minted sentences had been, he felt no resentment towards the orator; from his own point of view—a perfectly reasonable one—his father was justified in what he said. What he did not know, and what he refused to know, was the truth about Colin, who neglected no opportunity which quickness of speech and an unrivalled instinct gave him as to what rankled and festered, of planting his darts when they were alone together. Raymond accepted Colin’s hatred of him, just as he accepted his own of Colin, as part of the established order of things, but what made him rage was this new policy of his brother’s to win sympathy for himself and odium for him, by public politeness and affectionate consideration. No one observing that, as his father had done, could doubt who was the aggressor in their quarrels—the genial, sweet-tempered boy, or he, the morose and surly. And yet, far more often than not, it was Colin who intentionally and carefully exasperated him. It amused Colin, as he had said, to see his brother in a rage, and he was ingenious at providing himself with causes of entertainment.

And what, above all, prompted his father’s slating of him just now? Again it was Colin; it was his championship of his

favourite which had given the sting to his tongue. Here, too, Raymond acquitted his father of any motive beyond the inevitable one. Nobody could possibly help liking Colin better than himself, and it was the recognition of that which made his mind brush aside all thought of his father, and attach itself with claws and teeth to the root of all this trouble. He was slow in his mental processes whereas Colin was quick, and Colin could land a hundred stinging darts, could wave a hundred maddening flags at him, before he himself got in a charge that went home. That image of the arena entirely filled his thought. Colin, the light, applauded matador, himself the savage, dangerous animal.

But one day—and Raymond clenched his hands till the nails bit the skin, as he pictured it—that light, lissome figure, with its smiling face and its graceful air, would side-step and wheel a moment too late, and it would lie stretched on the sand, while he gored and kneaded it into a hash of carrion. “Ah!” he said to himself, “that’ll be good; that’ll be good.”

The intensity and vividness of the image surprised him; he came to himself, sitting on the terrace, with the hum of bees drowsy in the flower-beds, as if from some doze and dream. He had not arrived at it from any consecutive interpretation of his hate for Colin; it had not been evolved out of his mind, but had been flashed on to it as by some vision outside his own control. But there it was, and now his business lay in realising it.

He saw at once that he must be in no hurry. Whether that goring and kneading of Colin was to be some act of physical violence or the denouement of a plot which should lead to some disgraceful exposure, Raymond knew he must plan

nothing rashly, must test the strength of every bolt and rivet in his construction. Above all, he must appear, and continue to appear, to have taken his father's strictures to heart, and for the sake, to put it at its lowest, of being allowed to stay on at Stanier, to observe the general amenities of sociability, and in particular to force himself into cordial responses to Colin's public attentions.

Temporarily, that would look bitterly like a victory for Colin; with his father to back him, it would seem as if Colin had reduced his brother to decent behaviour. But that could not be helped; he must for many weeks yet cultivate an assiduous civility and appear to have seen the error of his sulky ways in order to lull suspicion fast asleep. At present Colin was always watchful for hostile manœuvres; it would be a work of time and patience before he would credit that Raymond had plucked his hostility from him.

Then there was Violet. Not only had his intemperate churlishness damaged him with his father, but not less with her. That had to be repaired, for though to know that Stanier was to her, even as to Colin, an enchantment, an obsession, she might find that the involved condition of marrying him in order to become its mistress was one that she could not face. She did not love him, she did not even like him, but he divined that her obsession about Stanier, coupled with the aloofness and independence that characterised her, might make her accept a companionship that was not positively distasteful to her.

It was not the Stanier habit to love; love did not form part of the beauty with which nature had dowered them. The men of the family sought a healthy mate; for the women of the family, so few had there ever been, no rule could be deduced.

But Violet, so far as he could tell, followed the men in this, and for witness to her inability to love, in the sense of poets and romanticists, was her attitude to Colin.

Had he been the younger, Raymond would have laughed at himself for entertaining any notion of successful rivalry. Colin, with the lordship of Stanier, would have been no more vulnerable than was the moon to a yokel with a pocket-pistol. But he felt very sure that love, as a relentless and compelling factor in this matter, had no part in her strong liking for Colin. Neither her feeling for him nor his for her was ever so slightly dipped in any infinite quality; it was ponderable, and he himself had in his pocket for weight in the other scale, her passion for Stanier.

Colin strolled gracefully into the smoking-room that evening when the whist and bridge were over, marvelling at the changed Raymond who had been so courteous at dinner and so obligingly ready to play whist at poor granny's table. He himself had kept up that policy of solicitous attention to his brother, which had made Raymond grind his teeth at lunch that day, but the effect this evening was precisely the opposite. Raymond had replied with, it must be supposed, the utmost cordiality of which he was capable. It was a grim, heavy demeanour at the best, but such as it was....

No doubt, however, Raymond was saving up for such time as they should be alone, the full power of his antagonism, and Colin, pausing outside the smoking-room, considered whether he should not go to bed at once and deprive his brother of the relief of unloading himself. But the desire to bait him was too strong, and he turned the door-handle and entered.

“So you got a wigging after lunch to-day,” he remarked. “It seems to have brought you to heel a bit. But you can let go now, Raymond. You haven’t amused me all evening with your tantrums.”

Raymond looked up from his illustrated paper. He knew as precisely what “seeing red” meant as did the bull in the arena. He had to wait a moment till that cleared.

“Hullo, Colin,” he said. “Have you come for a drink?”

“Incidentally. My real object was to see you and to have one of our jolly chats. Did father pitch it in pretty hot? I stuck up for you this morning when we talked you over.”

Raymond was off his guard, forgetting that certain knowledge he possessed was derived from overhearing. “Yes, you said you must make the best of me...” he began.

Colin was on to that like a flash. “Now, how on earth could you have known that?” he asked. “Father didn’t tell you.... I know! I said that just as I was passing under the window in the gallery where you were sitting after breakfast. My word, Raymond, you’ve a perfect genius for eavesdropping. It was only last night that you hid behind the flower-vase and heard me mimic you, and if I hadn’t shut the door of the dining-room this morning, you’d have listened to what Aunt Hester and Violet and I were saying, and then you overhear my conversation with father. You’re a perfect wonder.”

Raymond got up, his eyes blazing. “Take care, Colin,” he said. “Don’t go too far.”

Colin laughed. “Ah, that’s better,” he said. “Now you’re more yourself. I thought I should get at you soon.”

Raymond felt his mouth go dry, but below the violence of his anger there was something that made itself heard. “You’ll

spoil your chance if you break out," it said. "Keep steady...." He drained his glass and turned to his brother.

"Sorry, Colin," he said, "but I'm not going to amuse you to-night."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Colin. "I've hardly begun yet. Your manner at dinner, now, and your amiability. It was not really a success. No naturalness about it. It sat on you worse than your sulkiest moods. You reminded me of some cad in dress-clothes trying to catch the note of the ordinary well-bred man. Better be natural. I'll go on sticking up for you; I'll persuade father not to pack you off. I've a good deal of influence with him. I shall say you're injuring yourself by not behaving like a sulky boor. Besides, you can't do it; if your geniality at dinner was an attempt to mimic me, I must tell you that nobody could guess who it was meant for. Vi was very funny about it."

"Really? What did she say?" asked Raymond.

"Oh, naturally I can't give her away," said Colin. "But perhaps you'll hear her say it again if you're conveniently placed."

"You know quite well Vi didn't say anything about it," said Raymond at a venture.

"Naturally, you know best. And, talking of Vi, are you going to propose to her? I wouldn't if I were you; take my hint and save yourself being laughed at."

"Most friendly of you," said Raymond. "But there are some things that are my business."

"And not an affectionate brother's?" asked Colin. "You don't know how I feel for you. It makes me wince when I see you blundering and making the most terrible *gaffes*. It's odd

that I should have had a brother like you, and that you should be a Stanier at all."

Colin threw a leg over the arm of his chair. It was most astonishing that not only in public but now, when there was no reason that Raymond should keep up a semblance of control, that he should be so impervious to the shafts that in ordinary stung him so intolerably.

"You're so awkward, Raymond," he said. "However much you try, you can't charm anybody or make any one like you. You've neither manners, nor looks, nor breeding. You've got the curse of the legend without its benefits. You're a coward, too; you'd like nothing better than to slit my throat, and yet you're so afraid of me that you daren't even throw that glass of whisky and soda in my face."

For a moment it looked as if Raymond was about to do precisely that; the suggestion was almost irresistible. But he loosed his hand on it again.

"That would only give you the opportunity to go to my father and tell him," he said. "You would say I had lost my temper with you. I don't intend to give you any such opportunity."

Even as he spoke he marvelled at his own self-control. But the plain fact was that the temptation to lose it had no force with him to-night. For the sake of his ultimate revenge, whatever that might be, that goring and kneading of Colin, it was no less than necessary that he should seem to have put away from him all his hostility. Colin and the rest of them—Violet above all—must grow to be convinced in the change that had come over him.

He rose. "Better give it up, Colin," he said. "You're not going to rile me. You've had a good try at it, for I never knew

you so studiedly insolent. But it's no use. Good night."

During the fortnight which intervened before the departure of Lord Yardley and Colin to Italy, Raymond never once faltered in the task he had set himself. There was no act of patience too costly for the due attainment of it, no steadfastness of self-control in the face of Colin's gibes that was not worth the reward which it would ultimately bring. He avoided as far as possible being alone with his brother, but that, in the mere trivial round of the day, happened often enough to give Colin the opportunity of planting a dart or two. But now they seemed to have lost all penetrative force; so far from goading him into some ill-aimed response, they were but drops of showers on something waterproof.

Colin was disposed at first to attribute this incredible meekness to the effect of his father's strictures. Raymond had been given to understand without any possible mistake, that, unless he mended his ways, he would have to leave Stanier, and that, no doubt, accounted for his assumption of public amiability. But his imperviousness in private to any provocation was puzzling. He neither answered Colin's challenges nor conducted any offensive of his own. At the most a gleam or a flush told that some jibe had gone home, but no angry blundering reply would give opportunity for another. For some reason Raymond banked up his smouldering fires, not letting them blaze.

His impotence to make his brother wince and rage profoundly irritated Colin. He had scarcely known before how deep-rooted was his pleasure in so doing; how integral a part of his consciousness was his hatred of him, which now seemed to have been deprived of its daily bread.

Not less irritating was the effect that Raymond's changed behaviour produced on his father and on Violet. His father's civilities to him began to lose the edge of their chilliness; a certain cordiality warmed them. If the boy was really taking himself in hand, Lord Yardley must, in common duty and justice, encourage and welcome his efforts, and the day before the departure for Italy, he made an opportunity for acknowledging this. Once more after lunch, he nodded to Raymond to stay behind the others.

"I want to tell you, Raymond," he said, "that I'm very much pleased with you. You've been making a strong effort with yourself, and you're winning all down the line. And how goes it with you and Colin in private?"

Raymond took rapid counsel with himself. "Very well indeed, sir," he said. "We've had no rows at all."

"That's good. Now what are your plans while Colin and I are away? Your Uncle Ronald and Violet are going to stop on here. I think your aunt's going up to London. You can establish yourself at St. James's Square, if you like, or remain here."

"I'll stop here if I may," said Raymond. "I don't care about London."

Philip smiled. "Very good," he said. "You'll have to take care of Violet and keep her amused."

Raymond answered with a smile. "I'll do my best, father," he said.

"Well, all good wishes," said his father. "Let me know how all goes."

Colin had seen throughout this fortnight Raymond's improvement of his position with regard to Lord Yardley, and he had felt himself jealously powerless to stop it. Once he had tried, with some sunnily-told tale of Raymond's ill-temper, to put the brake on it, but his father had stopped him before he was half through with it. "Raymond's doing very well," he said. "I don't want to hear anything against him." A further light was shed for Colin that evening.

He and Violet, when the rubber of whist was over and Lady Yardley had gone upstairs, strolled out into the hot dusk of the terrace with linked arms, but with no more stir of emotion in their hearts than two schoolboy friends, whose intimacy was to be severed by a month of holiday, would have experienced. The shadow cast by the long yew hedge from the moon near to its setting had enveloped them in its clear darkness, the starlight glimmered on the lake below, and in the elms beyond the nightingales chanted.

"Listen at them, look at it all," said Colin impatiently. "Starlight and shadow and nightingales and you and me as cool as cucumbers. You look frightfully attractive, too, to-night, Vi: why on earth don't I fall madly in love with you?"

"Oh, my dear, don't!" said Violet. "You might make me fall in love with you. But I suppose I needn't be afraid. You can't fall in love with anybody, Colin, and I daresay I can't either. But I shall try."

"And what do you mean by that?" asked Colin.

"It's pretty obvious," she said.

"Raymond, do you mean?" asked Colin.

"Of course. What's come over him? There's something attractive about him, after all; he's got charm. Who would have thought it?"

Though Colin had just now truthfully declared that he was in no way in love with his cousin, he felt a pang of jealousy just as authentic as that which the notion of Raymond's possession of Stanier caused in him.

"But you can't, Violet!" he said. "That boor...."

"I'm not so sure that he is a boor. He's keeping the boor in a box, anyhow, and has turned the key on him. He's quite changed. You can't deny it."

Colin slipped his arm out of Violet's. "Raymond's cleverer than I thought," he said. "All this fortnight it has puzzled me to know what he's been at, but now I see. He's been improving his position with father and with you."

"He has certainly done that," said Violet.

"So, if he asks you, you intend to marry him?" asked Colin.

"I think so."

"I shall hate you if you do," said he.

"Why? How can it matter to you? If you were in love with me it would be different, or if I were in love with you. Oh, we've talked it all over before; there's nothing new."

They had passed through the cut entrance in the yew hedge into the moonlight, and Violet, turning, looked at her companion. Colin's face was brilliantly illuminated. By some optical illusion that came and went in a flash, he looked at that moment as if his face was lit from within, so strangely it shone against the dark serge of the hedge for background. There was an unearthly beauty about it that somehow appalled her. He seemed like some incarnation, ageless and youthful, of the fortunes of the house. But the impression was infinitesimal in duration, and she laughed.

“Colin, you looked so wonderful just now,” she said. “You looked like all the Staniers rolled into one.”

Somehow this annoyed him. “Raymond included, I suppose?” he asked. “But you’re wrong; there is something new. Hitherto you’ve only considered Raymond as a necessary adjunct to being mistress here; now you’re considering him as a man you can imagine loving. Hasn’t he got enough already? Good God, how I hate him!”

He had hardly spoken when there emerged from the entrance in the hedge through which they had just passed, Raymond himself. Colin, white with fury, turned on him.

“Hullo, at it again?” he said. “You’ve overheard something nice this time!”

Raymond’s mouth twitched, but he gave no other sign. “Father has just sent me out to tell you that he wants to speak to you before you go to bed,” he said, and, turning, went straight back to the house.

Violet waited till the sound of his step had vanished. “Colin, you’re a brute,” she said. “You’re fiendish!”

“I know that,” said Colin. “Who ever supposed I was an angel?”

“And it’s acting like a fool to treat Raymond like that,” she went on. “Can you afford to make him hate you?”

He laughed. “I’ve afforded it as long as I can remember,” he said. “It amuses me.”

“Well, it doesn’t amuse me to see you behave like a fiend,” said Violet. “And do you know that you lost your temper? I’ve never seen you do that yet.”

Colin licked his lips; his mouth felt dry. “That was an odd thing,” he observed. “Now I know what I make Raymond

feel like when we chat together. But it's amazing that Raymond should have done the same to me. I must go in to father."

They moved back into the shadow of the hedge and Colin stopped.

"I say, Vi, give me a kiss," he said.

She drew back a moment, wondering why she did so. "But, my dear, why?" she asked.

"We're cousins," he said. "Why shouldn't you? I should awfully like to kiss you."

She had got over her momentary surprise, which was, no doubt, what made her hesitate. There was no conceivable reason, though they did not kiss each other, why they should not.

"And if I won't?" she said.

"I shall think it unkind of you."

She came close to him. "Oh, Colin, I'm not unkind," she said, and kissed him.

He stood with his hands on her shoulders, not letting her go, though making no attempt to kiss her again. "That was delicious of you," he said.

Suddenly and quite unexpectedly to herself, Violet found her heart beating soft and fast, and she was glad of the darkness, for she knew that a heightened colour had sprung to her face. Was Colin, too, she wondered, affected in any such way?

His light laugh, the release of her shoulders from his cool hands, answered her.

"Good Lord! To think that perhaps Raymond will be kissing you next," he said. "How maddening!"

CHAPTER III

From the first some call of his Italian blood had made itself audible to Colin; even as their train emerged out of the drip and roaring darkness of the Mont Cenis tunnel, there had been a whisper in his ears that this was the land of his birth to which he had come, and that whisper had grown into full-voiced welcome when, at the hot close of day, he and his father had strolled out after dinner along the sea-front of Naples. Though he had never been here yet, sight, scent, and sound alike told him that he was not so much experiencing what was new as recognising what, though dormant, had always been part of him, bred into the very fibre and instinct of him. It was not that he hailed or loved this lure of the South; it would be more apt to say that he nodded to it, as to an old acquaintance—taken for granted rather than embraced.

This claiming and appropriation by Colin of his native place unfroze in his father the reticence that he had always observed with regard to that year he had spent in Italy into which had entered birth and death, and all that his life held of romance. That, till now, had been incapsulated within him, or at the most, like the ichor in some ductless gland, was performing some mysterious function in his psychology. Now this claim of Colin's on the South, his easy stepping into possession by right of his parentage, unsealed in Philip the silence he had so long preserved.

Colin, as he regarded his surroundings with friendly and familiar eyes, was visibly part of his old romance; the boy's mother lived again in that sunny hair, those eyes, and the clear olive skin, just as surely as did old Colin of the Holbein portrait. But now Stanier was far away, and the spell of the South as potent as when Philip, flying from the glooms and

jibes of that awful old man, his father, first came under its enchantment. And Colin, of all that dead time, alone was a vital and living part of its manifestation. Through the medium of memory he stirred his father's blood; Philip felt romance bubble in him again as he walked along the familiar ways with the flower that had blossomed from it. He felt, too, that Colin silently (for he asked no question) seemed to claim the right to certain knowledge; he seemed to present himself, to be ready, and, indeed, it would be singular if, having brought him here, his father did not speak of that which, every year, had taken him on his solitary pilgrimage to the South.

They were to spend the greater part of the next day in Naples, leaving by the afternoon boat for Capri, and as they finished their breakfast on a shady veranda, Philip spoke:

"Well, we've got all the morning," he said, "to trundle about in. The museum is very fine; would you like to see it?"

"No, I should hate it," said Colin.

"But it's a marvellous collection," said Philip.

"I daresay; but to see a museum would make me feel like a tourist. At present I don't, and it's lovely."

He looked at his father as he spoke, and once again, this time compellingly, Philip saw confident expectancy in his eyes. Colin was certainly waiting for something.

"Then will you come with me on a sentimental journey?" he asked.

"Ah, father, won't I just!" he said. "After all, you and I are on a sentimental journey."

There seemed to Philip in his devotion to Colin, something exquisitely delicate about this. He had wanted but,

instinctively had not asked, waiting for his rights to be offered him.

"Come, then," he said. "I'll show you where we lived, your mother and I. I'll show you our old haunts, such as survive. You belong to that life, Colin."

Colin paused a moment, sitting quite still, for a span of clear, concentrated thought. He desired to say precisely the right thing, the thing that his father would most value. It was not in the smallest degree affection for his father which prompted that; it was the wish that the door should be thrown open as wide as possible—that all the keys should be put into his hand.

"I know I do," he said. "I've known that for years, but I had to wait for you to want me to share it. It had to be you who took me into it."

He saw approval gleam in his father's eyes. This was clearly the right tack.

"And you must remember I know nothing whatever about your life with my mother," he said. "You've got to begin at the beginning. And ... and make it long, father."

It was not surprising that Colin's presence gave to this sentimental journey a glow which it had lacked during all those years when Philip made his annual solitary visit here. Already the mere flight of years, and the fact that he had never married again, had tinged that long-past time with something of the opalescence which sunlit mist confers on objects which in themselves hardly rise above the level of the mean and the prosaic; and what now survived for him in memory was Rosina's gaiety, her beauty, her girlish charm, with forgetfulness for her vapid vanity, her commonness, and the speed with which his senses even had been sated with her.

But it was an unsubstantial memory of blurred and far-off days, girt with regrets and the emptiness of desires dead and unrecoverable.

Now Colin's presence gave solidity to it all; it was as if the sunlit mist had been withdrawn from the dim slopes which it covered, and lo! the reality was not mean or prosaic, but had absorbed the very tints and opalescences which had cloaked it. There was Colin, eager and sympathetic, yet checking any question of his own, and but thirsty for what his father might give him, and in the person of the boy who was the only creature in the world whom Philip loved, and in whom Rosina lived, that tawdry romance of his was glorified. To tell Colin about his mother here, in the places where they had lived together, was to make a shrine of them.

The flat which he and Rosina had occupied in Naples, when the autumnal departure of visitors from Capri rendered the island so desolating to her urban nature, happened to be untenanted, and a couple of lire secured their admittance. It still held pieces of furniture which had been there twenty years ago, and Colin, moving quietly to and fro, his eyes alight with interest in little random memories which his father recalled, was like a ray of sunlight shining into a place that had long slept in dust and shadows. Mother and son reacted on each other in Philip's mind; a new tenderness blossomed for Rosina out of his love for Colin, and he wondered at himself for not having brought them together like this before.

Here were the chairs which they used to pull out on to the veranda when the winter sun was warm; here was the Venetian looking-glass which Rosina could never pass without a glance at her image, and now, as Colin turned

towards it, there were Rosina's eyes and golden hair that flashed back at Philip out of the past and made a bridge to the present.

And there, above all, was the bedroom, with the glitter of sun on the ceiling cast there from the reflecting sea, where, at the close of a warm, windy day of March, the first cry of a new-born baby was heard. And by that same bedside, at the dawn of an April morning, Philip had seen the flame of Rosina's life flicker and waver and expire. He regretted her more to-day than at the hour when she had left him. Some unconscious magic vested in Colin cast that spell.

For all these recollections Colin had the same eager, listening face and the grave smile. Never even in his baiting of Raymond had he shewn a subtler ingenuity in adapting his means to his end. He used his father's affection for him to prize open the locks of a hundred caskets, and enable him to see what was therein. He wanted to know all that his father would tell him about that year which preceded his birth, and not asking questions was the surest way of hearing what he wanted.

Already he had found that his Aunt Hester knew very little about that year, or, if she knew, she had not chosen to tell him certain things. His curiosity, when he had talked to her under the elms, had been but vague and exploratory, but, it will be remembered, it had become slightly more definite when, in answer to his comment that his father and mother must have been married very soon after his arrival in Italy, Aunt Hester had given a very dry assent.

Now his curiosity was sharply aroused about that point, for with all his father's communicativeness this morning, he had as yet said no word whatever that bore on the date of their

marriage. Colin felt by an instinct which defied reason, that there was something to be known here; the marriage, the scene, the date of it, must have passed through his father's mind, and yet he did not choose, in all this sudden breakdown of long reticence, to allude to it. That was undeniably so; a question, therefore, would certainly be useless, for believing as he did, that his father had something to conceal, he would not arrive at it in that way.

They were standing now in the window looking over the bay, and Philip pointed to the heat-veiled outline of Capri, floating, lyre-shaped, on the fusing-line of sea and sky.

"We were there all the summer," he said, "in the villa you will see this evening. Then your mother found it melancholy in the autumn and we came here—I used to go backwards and forwards, for I couldn't quite tear myself away from the island altogether."

That struck Colin as bearing on his point; it was odd, wasn't it, that a newly-married couple should do that? You would have expected them to live here or there, but together.... Then, afraid that his father would think he was pondering on that, he changed the topic altogether.

"I have loved hearing about it all," he said. "But somehow—don't be shocked, father—I can't feel that Raymond comes into it one atom. We've been realising you and my mother and the squalling thing that I was. But I can't feel Raymond with us then any more than he's with us now. Let's keep Italy to ourselves, father. Poor old Raymond!"

That shifting of the topic was skilfully designed and subtly executed. Colin confessed to alienation from Raymond and yet with a touch of affectionate regret. His father was less guarded.

“Raymond’s got nothing to do with Italy,” he said. “There’s not a single touch of your mother in him. We’ve got this to ourselves, Colin. Raymond will have Stanier.”

“Lucky dog!” said Colin.

There was one item connected with the marriage that he might safely ask, and as they went downstairs he put it to his father, watching him very narrowly.

“I feel I know all about my mother now,” he said, “except just one thing.”

Lord Yardley turned quickly to him. “I’ve told you all I can tell you,” he said sharply.

That was precisely what Colin had been waiting for. There was something more, then. But the question which he was ready with was harmless enough.

“I only wanted to know where you were married,” he said. “That’s the one thing you haven’t told me.”

There was no doubt that this was a relief to his father; he had clearly expected something else, not the “where” of the boy’s question, but the “when,” which by now had definitely crystallised in Colin’s mind.

“Oh, that!” he said. “Stupid of me not to have told you. We were married at the British Consulate.”

They passed out into the noonday.

“Mind you remember that, Colin,” said his father. “On my death the marriage will have to be proved; it will save a search. Your birth was registered there, too. And Raymond’s.”

Such was the sum of information that Colin took on board with him that afternoon when they embarked on the steamer for Capri, and though in one sense it took him back a step, in

another it confirmed the idea that had grown up in his mind. He felt certain (here was the confirmation) that if he had asked his father when the marriage took place, he would have been told a date which he would not have believed. Lord Yardley would have said that they had been married very soon after his arrival twenty-one years ago. He had waited with obvious anxiety for Colin's one question, and he had hailed that question with relief, for he had no objection to the boy's knowing where the contract was made.

And the retrograde step was this: that whereas he had been ready to think that his father's marriage was an event subsequent to his own birth and Raymond's, he was now forced to conclude (owing to the fact that his father told and impressed on him to remember, that it had been performed at the British Consulate) that he and Raymond were legitimately born in wedlock. That seemed for the present to be a *cul-de-sac* in his researches.

The warm, soft air streamed by, and the wind made by the movement of the boat enticed Colin out from under the awning into the breeze-tempered blaze of the sun. He went forward and found in the bows a place where he could be alone and study, like a map, whatever could be charted of his discoveries.

That willingness of his father to tell him where the marriage had taken place was somehow disconcerting; it implied that the ceremony made valid whatever had preceded it. He had himself been born in mid-March, and he did not attempt to believe that his father had been married in the previous June, the month when he had first come to Italy. But he could not help believing that his father had married before his own birth.

Colin was one of those rather rare people who can sit down and think. Everybody can sit down and let his mind pleasantly wander over a hundred topics, but comparatively few can tether it, so to speak, so that it grazes on a small circle only. This accomplishment Colin signally possessed, and though now there could be no practical issue to his meditations, he set himself to carve out in clear, cutting strokes what he would have done in case he had discovered that he and Raymond alike were born out of wedlock. He imagined that situation to himself; he cropped at it, he grazed on it....

The disclosure, clearly, if the fact had been there, would not have come out till his father's death, and he could see himself looking on the face of the dead without the slightest feeling of reproach. He knew that his father was leaving him all that could be left away from Raymond; he was heir also to Aunt Hester's money.

But in that case Stanier, and all that went with the title, would not be Raymond's at all; Raymond would be nameless and penniless. And Colin's beautiful mouth twitched and smiled. "That would have been great fun," he said to himself. "Raymond would have been nobody and have had nothing. Ha! Raymond would not have had Stanier, and I should have ceased to hate him. I should have made him some small allowance."

Yes, Stanier would have passed from Raymond, and it and all that it meant would have gone to Violet ... and at that the whole picture started into life and colour. If only now, at this moment, he was possessed of the knowledge that he and Raymond alike were illegitimate, with what ardour, with what endless subtlety, would he have impelled Violet to

marry him! How would he have called upon the legendary benefactor who for so long had prospered and befriended the Staniers, to lend him all the arts and attractions of the lover! With such wiles to aid him, he would somehow have forced Violet to give up the idea of marrying Raymond in order to get Stanier, and instead, renouncing Stanier, take him, and by her renunciation for love's sake, find in the end that she had gained (bread upon the waters) all that she had imagined was lost.

And he, Colin, in that case, would be her husband, master of Stanier to all intents and purposes. Willingly would he have accepted, eagerly would he have welcomed that. He wanted what he would never get unless Raymond died, except at some such price as that. But it was no use thinking about it; his father's insistence on the place where he and Rosina were married made it certain that no such fortunate catastrophe could be revealed at his death.

Presently Lord Yardley joined him as they passed along the headland on which Sorrento stands, and there were stories of the visit that he and Rosina made here during the summer. Colin listened to these with suppressed irritation; what did he care whether they had spent a week at Sorrento or not? Of all that his father had to tell him, he had mastered everything that mattered, and he began to find in these recollections a rather ridiculous sentimentality. He knew, of course, that he himself was responsible for this; it was he, Rosina's son, and his father's love for him, that conjured up these tendernesses. He was responsible, too, in that all the morning he had listened with so apt a sympathy to similar reminiscences. But then he hoped that he was about to learn something really worth knowing, whereas now he was convinced that there

was nothing of that sort to know. Fond as his father had always been of him, he easily detected something new in his voice, his gestures, the soft eagerness of his eyes; it was as if in him his father was falling in love with Rosina.

Sunset burned behind Capri as their steamer drew near to it, and the eastern side lay in clear shadow though the sea flared with the reflected fires of the sky, and that, too, seemed to produce more memories.

"You are so like her, Colin," said his father, laying his arm round the boy's neck, "and I can imagine that twenty-one years have rolled back, and that I am bringing her across to Capri for the first time. It was just such an evening as this, sunset and a crescent moon. I had already bought the villa; we were going back to it together."

"Straight from the Consulate?" asked Colin quietly.

"What?" asked Philip.

"From the Consulate, father," he repeated.

"Yes, yes, of course," said Philip quickly, and his voice seemed to ring utterly untrue. "Straight from the Consulate. Ha! there's Giacomo, my boatman. He sees us."

"Does he remember my mother?" asked Colin.

"Surely. But don't ask him about her. These fellows chatter on for ever, and it's half lies."

Colin laughed. "As I shouldn't understand one word of it," he said, "it would make little difference whether it was all lies."

Once again, and more markedly than ever, as they drove up the angled dusty road set in stone walls and bordered by the sea of vineyards, the sense of homecoming seized Colin. It was not that his father was by him or that he was going to his

father's house; the spell worked through the other side of his parentage, and he felt himself strangely more akin to the boys who, trudging homewards, shouted a salutation to their driver, to the girls who clustered on the doorsteps busy with their needle, than to the grave man who sat beside him and watched with something of a lover's tenderness his smiles and glances and gestures. Philip read Rosina into them all, and she who had so soon sated him till he wearied of her, woke in him, through Colin, a love that had never before been given her.

"I cannot imagine why I never thought of bringing you out to Italy before," said Philip, "or why, when you asked me to take you, I hesitated."

Colin tucked his arm into his father's. He was wonderfully skilful in displaying such little signs of affection, which cost him nothing and meant nothing, but were so well worth while.

"Do I seem to fit into it all, father?" he said. "I am so glad if I do."

"You more than fit into it, my dear," said Philip. "You're part of it. Why on earth did I never see that?"

"Part of it, am I? That's exactly what I've been feeling all day. I'm at home here. Not but what I'm very much at home at Stanier."

Lord Yardley clicked his tongue against his teeth. "I wish to God you were my eldest son," he said. "I would give anything if that were possible. I would close my eyes ever so contentedly when my time comes if I knew that you were going to take my place."

"Poor old Raymond!" said Colin softly. "He's doing his best, father."

“I suppose he is. But you’re a generous fellow to say that; I shan’t forget it. Here we are; bundle out.”

Their carriage had stopped in the piazza, and Colin getting out, felt his lips curl into a smile of peculiar satisfaction. That his father should believe him to be a generous fellow was pleasant in itself, and the entire falsity of his belief added spice to the morsel. He seemed to like it better just because it was untrue.

Colin stepped into the drifting summer existence of visitors to the island with the same aptness as that which had graced his entry to his mother’s native land. He went down to the bathing-beach after breakfast with a book and a packet of cigarettes, and spent a basking amphibious morning. Sometimes his father accompanied him, and after a constitutional swim, sat in the shade while Colin played the fish in the sea or the salamander on the beach. On other mornings Lord Yardley remained up at the villa, which suited Colin quite well, for this uninterrupted companionship of his father was very tedious. But he always managed to leave the impression that he wanted Lord Yardley to come with him.

And so much this morning did Colin want to be alone that, had Philip said that he was coming with him, he would probably have pleaded a laziness or indisposition, for he had that morning received a letter from Violet which called for solitary and uninterrupted reflection. To-day, however, Philip’s brother-in-law, Salvatore Viagi, had announced his advent, “to pay his fraternal respects and give his heart’s welcome,” so ran his florid phrase—and Philip remained at the villa to receive these tributes.

“It’s a nuisance,” he said, “for I should have liked a dip. But I should have to hurry back to get here before him.”

Colin laughed. “You speak as if he might steal the silver,” he said.

“Perfectly capable of it,” said his father. “No, I shouldn’t have said that. But he’s perfectly capable of asking for it.”

Colin perceived that there was no danger of his father’s coming down to bathe with him. “Surely he can wait till we get back,” he said. “Come down and bathe, father!”

Philip shook his head. “No, I can’t,” he said. “Salvatore would think it very odd and rude if I were not here. He wouldn’t understand: he would think I was intentionally unceremonious.”

“He sounds rather a bounder,” observed Colin.

“He does,” said Philip drily.

Colin took Violet’s letter down to the beach with him, and after a short dip of refreshment from his dusty walk, came out cool and shining from the sea to dispose himself on the beach that quivered in the hot sun, and ponder over it. He read it again twice through, stirring it into his brains and his emotions, till it seemed to form part of him....

So Raymond had proposed to her, and, having asked for a week’s delay in her answer, she, while the matter was still private, had to tell Colin that, as far as she knew her own intentions, she was meaning to accept him. And yet this letter in which she said that she was going to marry his brother, seemed hardly less than a love-letter to himself.

She appeared to remember that last evening at Stanier when, under the moon-cast shadow of the yews, she had

given him the kiss he asked for, just as vividly as did Colin. It was vivid to him because he had asked for that with a definite calculated end in view, and with the same end in view he had exclaimed how maddening it was to think that Raymond would kiss her next. No doubt Raymond had done so, and Violet, though she said she meant to marry him, had, perhaps, begun to know something more of her own heart. That was why the evening was vivid to her, exactly as he had intended it should be. She had learned that there was a difference between him and Raymond, which being mistress at Stanier might counterbalance, but did not cancel.

The wetness had dried from Colin's sun-tanned shoulders, and, lying down at length on the beach, he drew from his pocket Violet's letter in order to study one passage again which had puzzled him. Here it was:

> "You were perfectly brutal to Raymond that evening," she wrote, "and he was admirable in his answer to your rudeness. If we are to remain friends you must not behave to him like that. You don't like each other, but he, at any rate now, has control over himself, and you must copy his example."
>
> ("Lord! me copying Raymond's example," thought Colin to himself, in an ecstatic parenthesis.)
>
> "I shall always do my best to make peace between you, for I am very fond of you, but Raymond's side will in the future be mine. You were

> nice to me afterwards, but, dear Colin, you mustn't ask me to kiss you again. Raymond wouldn't like it....”

With this perusal all that was puzzling vanished. “That's not genuine; none of that's genuine,” thought Colin. “She says what she's trying to feel, what she thinks she ought to feel, and doesn't feel.” He turned the page.

> “I hope my news won't hurt you,” she went on. “After all, we've settled often enough that we weren't in love with each other, and so when that night you said it was maddening to think of Raymond kissing me next, it couldn't make any difference to you as you aren't in love with me....”

No, the news did not hurt Colin, so he told himself, in the way that Violet meant, and she was quite right about the reason of that: he was not in love with her. But it struck him that the news must undeniably hurt Violet herself; she was trying to wriggle away from it, while at the same time she tried to justify herself and that unfortunate (or should he call it fortunate?) kiss she had given him.

He glanced hastily over the rest; there were more allusions to that last evening, more scolding and exhortations about his conduct to Raymond, and, as a postscript, the request that he should send her just one line, to say he wasn't hurt. This letter of hers was absolutely private, but she had to tell him what was about to happen. In a week's time both she and

Raymond would write to his father, who, so Raymond thought, was not unprepared.

Colin tore off the final half-sheet of Violet's letter, and with his stylograph scribbled his answer on it. He had long ago made up his mind what he should say:

> "VIOLET, MY DEAR" (he wrote),
>
> "It was delightful of you to tell me, and I send you a million congratulations. I am so pleased, for now you will be mistress of Stanier, and you seem quite to have fallen in love with Raymond. I must be very nice to him, or he'll never let me come to Stanier in days to come, and you will take his side, as you say. But how could I be hurt at your news? It is simply charming.
>
> "Father and I are having a splendid time out here. I shall try to persuade him to stop on after this month. Of course we shall come back before your marriage. When is it to be, do you think?
>
> "Best love from
> "COLIN."

The ink in this hot sun dried almost as quickly as he wrote, and he had scarcely signed his own name when it wore the appearance not of a tentative sketch but of a finished communication ready for the post, and, reading it over, he

found that this was so: he could not better it. So slipping it back into his pocket, he went across the beach again for a longer swim, smiling to himself at the ease with which he had divined Violet's real mind, and at the fitness of his reply. As he swam he analysed his own purpose in writing exactly like that.

He had expressed himself with all the cordial geniality of which he was capable: he had welcomed Violet's choice. He had endorsed, as regards his own part of the situation, her proposition that he ought not to be hurt, since they were not in love with each other, and the eagerness of his endorsement (that swift enthusiastic scrawl) would quite certainly pique her. He had adopted her attitude, and knew that she would wish he had another; the same, in fact, which he had expressed when he had said that it was maddening to think that she would be kissing Raymond next. Colin knew well how fond she was of him, and his letter would be like this plunge into the clear crystal of the sea which, while it cooled you, was glowingly invigorating.

He was quite prepared to find that in a week's time she and Raymond would write to his father saying that they were engaged, but not for a moment did he believe that they would ever be married. He had but to keep up his cordial indifference till Violet found it intolerable. To have remonstrated with her, to have allowed that her news hurt him, was to give Violet just what she wanted. A loveless marriage faced her, while all the time she was not heart-whole, and however much she wanted Stanier, she would be daily more conscious that the conditions on which she got it were a diet of starvation.

“She *is* rather in love with me,” thought Colin, “and very likely my letter will drive her into accepting him. But if only I can keep cool and pleasant, she’ll never marry him. Devilish ingenious! And then there’s Raymond!”

Colin laughed aloud as he thought of Raymond, who really lay at the bottom of all these plans. Even if it had been possible now, before Violet accepted him, to intervene in some way and cause her to refuse instead of to take him, he would not have stirred a finger, for thus he would baulk himself of the completeness of Raymond’s discomfiture, since Raymond would feel the breaking off of his engagement more bitterly than an original refusal. Let Violet accept him first and then throw him over. That would be a real counter-irritant to the sting of Raymond’s primogeniture, an appreciable counter-weight to his future possession of Stanier.

It had been a check in that fraternal feud that Raymond’s birth and his own were certainly legitimate, and that nothing now could stand in the way of his brother’s succession, but if the check in that direction had not occurred, there would never have been any chance of Violet’s marrying him, and Raymond would have been spared the wounding humiliation which instinctively, Colin felt sure, was to be dealt him. Raymond was genuinely desirous of her; he would feel her loss very shrewdly. If only, by some diabolical good fortune, Raymond could lose them both! Colin saw himself, Violet by his side, smilingly observing Raymond’s final departure from Stanier, and hoping that he would have a pleasant journey.

Alas! it was time to swim shorewards again, for the morning boat from Naples which was carrying Salvatore

Viagi had already gone by on its tourist route to the Blue Grotto, and Salvatore would have disembarked at the Marina. He felt curious to see Uncle Salvatore, and was determined to make himself uncommonly pleasant, for there might be things which Salvatore knew which his father had not told him. The date of the marriage, for instance; though he despaired of any practical use arising from that, Colin would like to know when it took place.

He dressed and strolled up through the vineyards through which, twenty-one years ago, his father had gone, tasting for the first time the liberty and gaiety of the South, and found his little jingling conveyance awaiting him. His quiet concentrated hate of Raymond sat smiling beside him up the dusty road, and he rejoiced in its companionship.

Colin found that Salvatore had arrived, and his father was waiting lunch for him, and so without decoration of himself in the way of brushings or putting on tie or socks, he went straight to the salon. There was sitting there a very gorgeously-dressed gentleman, and his heart fell as he saw him, for it would be difficult to cultivate cordial relationships with so exquisite a bounder, whatever information might be the reward of his efforts.

Salvatore was clad in ill-fitting broadcloth, florid with braid; he wore patent leather shoes, a tie of pink billows in which nestled a preposterous emerald, cuffs and collar clearly detachable, and a gold watch-chain from which a large, cheap locket depended. Luxuriant hair, suspiciously golden and carefully curled, crowned his face; fierce moustaches, brushed and waxed, were trained away to show a mouth full of dazzling teeth, and his features were just those of a wax

bust, representing the acme of masculine beauty, that may be seen in the window of a hairdresser.

With this troubadour was sitting his father, stiff and starched and iced. Colin guessed that this period of waiting had been embarrassing, for both seemed highly relieved at his entry, and the troubadour bounded to his feet with a tenor cry of welcome.

"*Collino mio!*" he exclaimed, kissing him, to Colin's great surprise, on both cheeks. "Ah, the joy of the day when I behold my own nephew! And you are so like her, so like her. Look on the image of her which I ever carry about with me! I do not forget her, no, no!"

He opened the locket, and showed Colin a photograph faded into illegibility.

"Her eyes, her nose, her mouth," he said. "I see again the features of my adored Rosina!"

This was so much worse than could possibly have been expected, that the only thing to be done was to treat it all as some game, some monstrous charade. This was the stock of which he had come; his mother was sister to this marvellous mountebank. At that moment Colin hated his father; how could he have joined himself to any of such a family? It was clearer than ever that, whatever the history of that year preceding his birth had been, it had not begun with marriage. His father had been prey to a pretty face.

Then he set himself to play the game.

"Dear Uncle Salvatore!" he said. "I can't tell you how I've been looking forward to seeing you. I hurried in, as you see, when I heard you were here, without dressing or tidying myself. I could not wait. And you think I am like my mother?"

“But you are a true Viagi! You are the very image of her. And if I place myself beside you, my noble brother-in-law will not, I think, fail to mark a certain family resemblance.”

He put his hand on Colin’s shoulder as if for a Bank Holiday photograph, and rose on his toes to make himself the taller.

At that his noble brother-in-law, catching Colin’s merry glance, which shouted to him, “Play up, father, play up!” seemed to determine to make the best of it, too.

“Amazing resemblance,” he said, rising. “Two brothers. Shall we go in to lunch? Please go on, Salvatore.”

“With the escort of my brother Colin,” said Salvatore, in tremendous good spirits. He had clearly, so he thought, found a friendly heart in Colin, who would no doubt in time warm the heart of his brother-in-law, which at present seemed inclined to be chilly. It was desirable that a more generous warmth should be diffused there, before they came to speak of financial matters.

Philip’s efforts in answer to Colin’s unspoken bidding, to see the humorous side of their visitor, were put to a sad strain before that portentous meal was over. Salvatore was bent on making a fine and dashing impression, and adopted for that end a manner compounded of brag and rich adulation.

“Your cousins, Collino, my own beloved children!” he exclaimed. “Never will Vittoria and Cecilia forgive me, if I do not on my return prove to have got your promise to pay them a visit before you quit Italy. We must persuade your father to spare you for a day; you must dine and sleep, and, ho, ho! who knows but that when our ladies have gone to bed, you and I will not play the bachelor in our gay Naples? It would, I am afraid, be useless to urge you, my dear Philip,

to be of the party, but ah! the happiness, ah! the honour that there would be in the Palazzo Viagi, if Lord Yardley would make himself of the family! But I know, I know: you come here to enjoy your quiet and blessed memories."

"Very good of you, Salvatore," said Philip. "But, as you say, I come here for quiet. I am afraid I shall hardly be able to get across to Naples."

"Ah! *Il eremito*, as we say! The hermit, is it not?"

"You speak excellent English, Uncle Salvatore," said Colin.

"And should I not? Was not English the language of my adored mother? It is Vittoria's dream to go to England. Some day, perhaps, I will take Vittoria to see the home of her English ancestors, of her grandmother and of yours, my Colin. But the expense! *Dio!* the expense of travel. Once it was not so with the Viagi; they did not need to count their soldi, and now there are no soldi to count! They were rich once; their wealth was colossal, and had it not been for nefarious enemies, slanderers, and swindlers, they would be rich still, and a line of princes. As it is, they have nothing left them but their pride, and from that, whatever their poverty, they will never part. I, the head of the family, proclaim that to the world."

"Very proper," said Philip.

Salvatore had hit himself quite a severe blow on the chest as he proclaimed his pride, which had set him coughing. This was curable by a considerable draught of hock, which started him again on the adulatory tack.

"A nectar! Nectar of the gods," he exclaimed. "There is no such wine to be obtained in my beggarly country. But you

must be a millionaire to drink it. I would die happy drowned in wine like that.”

“You must take a bottle or two away with you,” said Philip, rising. “If you will excuse me for ten minutes, there are a couple of letters I want to finish for this afternoon’s post. And then, perhaps, you will spare me a quarter of an hour, Salvatore, for a talk. There will be plenty of time before your boat goes.”

“Dear friend, my time is yours,” said Salvatore, “and the boat may go to Naples without me if we have not finished. I brought a small toilet bag in case I stopped the night. I can no doubt find a room at some modest hotel.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” said Philip, leaving him and Colin together.

Salvatore poured himself out some more of the nectar when the door had closed (he was making sure of taking a bottle at least with him), and pointed dramatically to his heart.

“My noble and venerated brother-in-law has never rallied from the shock of your mother’s death,” he said. “His heart broke. He lives only for the day when he will rejoin her. Till then it is a solace to him to minister to those who were nearest and dearest to Rosina. So generous a heart! Do you think I made a good impression on him to-day?”

“Admirable! Excellent!” said Colin. “Now talk to me about the old days, Uncle Salvatore. A glass of brandy? Did you see my father that year he spent in Italy, when he married my mother, and when I was born?”

Salvatore paused in the sipping of his brandy and made a splendid scowl with gesture of fist and rolling eyes. Quick as a lizard, Colin saw that he must appear to know facts which

hitherto were only conjecture to him, if he was to learn the cause of these grimaces.

“I know all, of course, Uncle Salvatore,” he said. “You can speak to me quite freely.”

“And yet you ask if I was there!” said Salvatore. “Should I have permitted it? I was but a boy of eighteen, and in a bank at Rome, but, had I known, boy as I was, I should have gone to your father and have said, ‘Marry my sister out of hand or face the vengeance of Salvatore Viagi.’ ”

Colin held out his hand. “You would have done well, Uncle Salvatore,” he said. “I thank you for my mother’s sake.”

This was so deeply affecting to Salvatore that he had to take a little more brandy. This made him take a kindlier view of his noble brother-in-law.

“Yet I wrong him,” he said. “There was no need for Salvatore Viagi to intervene for his sister’s honour. She died Countess of Yardley, an alliance honourable to both of our families.”

“Indeed, yes,” said Colin. “I am proud of my Viagi blood. The marriage was at the British Consulate, of course. What day of the month was it, do you remember?”

Salvatore made a negative gesture. “The exact date escapes me,” he said. “But it was spring: March, it would have been March, I think. Two letters I got from my beloved Rosina at that time; in one she told of the marriage, in the next of the birth of her sons. I have those letters still. Treasured possessions, for the next news of my Rosina was that her sweet soul had departed! My God, what lamentations were mine! What floods of never-ceasing tears!”

Colin thought rapidly and intently as he replenished his uncle's glass with brandy. No definite scheme formed itself in his mind, but, whatever possibilities future reflection might reveal to him, it would clearly be a good thing to get hold of those letters. He might conceivably want to destroy them.

He leaned forward towards Salvatore. "Dear Uncle Salvatore," he said, "I am going to ask a tremendous favour of you. I have nothing of my mother's, and I never saw her, as you know. But I am learning to love her, and those letters would be so treasured by me. You have the memory of her, all those delightful days you must have spent together. Will you give me those letters? I hope before long to come across to Naples and see you and my cousins, and it would good of you if you would give me them. Then I shall have something of hers."

A sob sounded in Salvatore's voice. "You shall have them, my Colin," he said, "and in turn perhaps you can do something for me. Intercede, I pray you, with your father. He is a generous, a noble soul, but he does not know my needs, and I am too proud to speak of them. Tell him, then, that you wrung out of me that I am in abject poverty. Vittoria is growing up, and dowerless maidens are not sought after."

"Of course I will do all I can," said Colin warmly. "I will talk to my father as soon as you have gone. And I may say that he listens to me."

"I will send off the letters to you to-night," he said. "And what joy will there be in Casa Viagi, when my girls know that their cousin Colin is to visit us! When will that happy day be?"

"Ah, I must write to you about that," said Colin, noticing that the Palazzo had become a Casa. "Leave me your card.

And now it is time for you to talk to my father; I will see if he is ready. But not a word of all we have been saying, to him."

"Trust me, my nephew," said Salvatore gaily.

CHAPTER IV

Colin used his good offices with his father to such effect that he succeeded in procuring for Salvatore a further substantial cheque, in addition to that which he had carried off with the two bottles of wine that afternoon. His uncle apparently thought better of his reckless generosity in sending the letters of which Colin was desirous quite unconditionally, but the receipt of the second cheque was sufficient, and the morning's post two days later brought them.

They were written in ill-spelled English, and contained precisely what his uncle had told him. The first, dated March 1, gave the information that she had been married that morning to Philip Lord Stanier; the second, dated March 17, stated that a week ago she had given birth to twins. They were quite brief, conveyed no other news, and had evidently been preserved with care, for the purple ink in which they were written was quite unfaded. But apart from the fact now definitely known to Colin that his father had legalised his life with Rosina but ten days before he himself and Raymond were born, they did not help in any way towards the attainment of the double object which now was putting out firm, fibrous roots in his mind as the ideal project, namely to prove by some means yet utterly unconjecturable the illegitimacy of Raymond and himself, and, by marrying Violet, who in that case would succeed to the title and the estates, to become master of Stanier. Indeed these letters were

but a proof the more of what was no doubt sufficiently attested in the register of the British Consulate, namely, that the marriage had taken place previously to his own birth.

It seemed a hopeless business. Even if, by some rare and lucky mischance, there was any irregularity in the record at the Consulate, these letters, so long as they were in existence, constituted, if not a proof, at any rate a strong presumption in favour of the marriage having taken place on the first of the month, and it might be better to destroy them out of hand so that such testimony as they afforded could not by any possibility be produced. And yet he hesitated; somehow, in his subconscious mind, perhaps, there was a stir and a ferment which bubbled with a suggestion that had not yet reached his consciousness. Might not something conceivably be done with them?... It was maddening that just ten days out of all those uneventful hundreds of days which had elapsed since, should suffice to wreck any project that he might make.

And then a bubble of that ferment broke into his conscious mind. There was the letter, announcing the marriage which had taken place that day dated March 1. There was the letter dated March 17 announcing the birth of himself and Raymond a week previously. What if by the insertion of a single numeral in front of the “1” of the first date, he converted it into March 31st? As far as these two letters went, they would in that case show precisely what he desired.

Psychologically, too, there would be a reasonable interpretation. In his father, it would be argued, there had sprung up after the birth of his sons, a tenderness and an affection for the mother of them, and he had married her so that she, in the future, might bear him legitimate offspring.

Already she had borne two lusty and healthy sons; the union was vigorous and fruitful.

Colin got up from the long chair in his bedroom where he had taken these letters, and began softly pacing up and down the floor, lithe and alert, and smiling. His father was coming down with him to bathe that morning, but there was a quarter of an hour yet before he need join him downstairs, and a great deal of thinking might be put into a quarter of an hour if you could only concentrate.

He knew he was very far yet from the attainment of his ambition, for that register at the Consulate, which somehow he must manage to see, might contain insuperable obstacles to success. There might, for instance, be other entries between March 1 of that year and March 31, so that even if he could contrive to alter the first date into the second it would throw those other entries, if such existed, out of their chronological order; the marriage contracted on March 31 would precede those that lay in between the two dates. In that case he might have to tear out the page in which this entry occurred, and that might be quite impossible of accomplishment.

It would not be wise, at any rate, to tamper with the date on this first letter of his mother's, till he knew how the ground lay at the Consulate. But given that it proved possible to make some alteration in the register or tear out a page, how conclusively would his case be established, if, in support of that, there were produced those letters of his mother?

Salvatore the troubadour.... Colin frowned and bit his lip at the thought of Salvatore, who would be ready to swear that, when he parted with those letters to Colin, the one that conveyed the news of his sister's marriage was dated March

1, not March 31. There were experts on such subjects, too; prying, meticulous men who made a profession of detecting little things like altered dates, and produced evidence about a difference of hand or a difference in the analysis of two inks.

Yet if the register at the Consulate was found to endorse the evidence of the letters? The same detective-minded folk would examine the record at the Consulate, and might arrive at the damnable conclusion that it, too, had been tampered with. And if the letters which bore signs of being tampered with were in Colin's possession, and he was known to have visited the register at the Consulate, there would be an unwelcome conclusion as to who had committed a forgery. Penal servitude was not an agreeable substitute for Stanier.

Colin focused his clear brain, as if it had been a lens, on Salvatore. He had been very decorative and melodramatic on the subject of his sister's honour, but there had been much of cheap strutting, of tinsel, of footlights about that. And Salvatore, so Colin reasoned with a melting and a smoothing out of his frown, was not all strutting and swagger. There was a very real side to that impecunious uncle with his undowered Vittoria. His concern for his sister's honour was not surely so dominant in him as his desire for coin. A suitable cheque would no doubt induce him to recollect that the first of Rosina's letters announced the births of the twins, the second, that of March 31, her marriage.

Salvatore, for love of Vittoria (to put it at that), would probably see the sense of allowing his memory of the dates at the head of this letter to be faulty. He would not be obliged to perjure himself in any way; all he had got to do (given that a page had been torn out of the register at the Consulate, or that the date of the marriage as recorded there was March 31) was

to swear that his sister's letters had always been in his possession until he had given them to his attractive nephew.... Yes, Salvatore would surely not prove an insuperable obstacle; he would rate the living, himself and Vittoria, higher than the dead.

For one moment, brief as that in which, according to the legend, the ancestral Colin had considered whether he should close with that strange offer made him in the sheep-fold, his descendant, his living incarnation, hesitated when he thought of his father. His father had always been devoted to him, and such affection as Colin was capable of was his. But, after all, Philip would necessarily be dead when (and if) the discovery was made that Rosina's letter to her brother gave the date of the marriage as March 31, and when, on search being made in the register of the British Consulate, it was discovered that, owing to a page being missing, there was no record of the marriage at all, or that the date given there corresponded with that of Rosina's letter.

Colin had no intention of producing this evidence in his father's lifetime; there might be counter-proofs which his father could produce. If he could only make some dealing with the register and with the date on the letter, he would let the whole matter sleep till his father was dead. Then nothing could hurt him; you cannot hurt the dead. Even if—Colin gave little thought to this—the spirit of the dead survived in consciousness of the living, would not his father's spirit gladly make this posthumous sacrifice of his earthly honour and rejoice to see Colin, his beloved, master of Stanier? So his hesitation was fleeting as breath on a frosty morning, it appeared but mistily, and dispersed.

His father, out in the garden, was calling him, and with a cheerful response he picked up his towels and went downstairs. For the present there was but one necessary step to be taken; he had to get a day in Naples before he left, and pay a visit to the British Consulate. It was no use making any further plans beyond that, in his ignorance of what he should find there. A visit to his uncle, and a night spent there, might possibly serve as an excuse.

Philip had also heard from his brother-in-law this morning: the communication was not so satisfactory to him, as Colin's post had been.

"I've heard from Salvatore," he said. "He's a nauseating fellow, Colin."

"Oh, no; only a comic, father," said Colin gaily. "You take him too heavily."

"Read that," said Philip.

The letter was certainly characteristic, and as Colin read his smile broadened into a laugh. The writer spoke of the deep humiliation it was for a Viagi to take gifts from any; it had not been so with them once, for the family had been the dispensers of a royal bounty. Indeed, two considerations only made it possible for him to do so, the first his paternal devotion to his two sweet maids, Vittoria and Cecilia, the second his fraternal devotion to his noble and generous relative. That sentiment did honour to them both, and with happy tears of gratitude he acknowledged the safe receipt of the cheque. He wrote with some distraction, for his sweet maids kept interrupting him to know if he had sent their most respectful love to their uncle, and had reminded their dearest Colin that they looked for his advent with prodigious excitement and pleasure. They demanded to know when that

hour would dawn for them. One bottle of the nectar of France would be preserved for that day to drink the health of his friend, his relative, his noblest of benefactors. He signed himself "Viagi," as if the princely honours had been restored.

"Oh, but priceless," said Colin. "Haven't you got a sense of humour, father?"

"Not where Salvatore is concerned. As for your going over to dine and sleep, I shan't let you. Do you know we've only got a fortnight more here, Colin?"

"I know; isn't it awful?" said Colin with a sigh. "But about my going over for a night. I wonder if I hadn't better do that. It would be kind, you know. He would like it."

Philip passed his hand over the boy's shoulders.

"Colin, are you growing wings?" he said.

"Yes, and they don't go well with my cloven hoofs. In other words, I should loathe spending the night there, and yet Uncle Salvatore would like it. Then I don't want to leave you."

"Don't then. Salvatore, thanks to you, has got double his usual allowance. You've done enough for him."

"Yes, but that didn't cost me anything," said Colin. "It only cost you. I've still my debt to pay for the wonderful entertainment he gave me here. Besides he is actually my uncle: I'm a Viagi. Princely line, father!"

"Don't marry one of the young princesses," said his father.

Colin had one moment's acute thought before he answered. It struck him that his father could hardly have said that if in his very self he had loved his mother. But what he had said just came from his very self.... He laughed.

“I’ll promise not to, however entrancing Vittoria is,” he said. “Ah, how divine the sea looks this morning. I long to be in it.”

A sudden idea occurred to him.

“Do let us stop on another fortnight, father,” he said. “Can’t we?”

“I can’t,” said he. “I must get back by the end of the month. But—” he paused a moment and Colin knew that he had caught his own idea, which his suggestion was designed to prompt. “There’s no reason why you shouldn’t have another fortnight here if you want,” he said.

Colin had fallen behind his father on the narrow path to the bathing-place, and gave a huge grin of satisfaction at his own subtlety.

“Oh, I should love that!” he said, “though it won’t be half as much fun as if you would stop too. And then I can go over to Naples with you when you start homewards, and make my wings sprout by staying with Uncle Salvatore.”

Nothing could have fallen out more conveniently, and Colin, as for the next two hours he floated in the warm sea and basked on the hot pebbles, had a very busy mind in his lazy, drifting body. His father’s absence would certainly make his investigations easier. He could, for instance, present Lord Yardley’s card at the Consulate with his own, and get leave to inspect the register with a view to making a copy of it, in accordance with his father’s wishes. Better yet, he could spend a few days in Naples, make the acquaintance of the Consul in some casual manner, and produce his request on the heels of an agreeable impression. He would not, in any case, be limited to a single visit, or tied by the necessity of acting at once. He would not have to fire his bribe, with

regard to the letters like a pistol in Salvatore's face, he would be careful and deliberate, not risking a false step owing to the need of taking an immediate one. And all the time the suggestion of stopping on here alone had not come from himself at all. His father had made it.

On the way up to the villa again after the morning's bathe, they often called at the post-office in the piazza for letters that had arrived by the midday post. To-day these were handed under the grille to Colin, and, sorting them out between his father and himself, he observed that there were two for Lord Yardley in the handwritings of Raymond and Violet. Possibly these were only the dutiful and trivial communications of those at home, but possibly Violet's week of postponement had been shortened.

"Two from Stanier for you, father," he said. "Violet and Raymond. The rest for me."

His father looked at the envelopes.

"Yes, Raymond's spider scrawl is evident enough," he said. "I never saw such a handwriting except yours; his and yours I can never tell apart. One wants leisure to decipher you and Raymond."

Colin simmered with impatience to see his father put both of these letters into his pocket, and simmered even more ebulliently when, having put them on the table at lunch, his father appeared to forget completely about them, and left them there when lunch was over. But Colin could remind him of that, and presently the one from Violet lay open.

His father gave an exclamation of surprise, and then was absorbed in it. It appeared to be short, for presently he had finished, and, still without a word to Colin, opened the letter from Raymond. Here exclamations of impatience at the ugly,

illegible handwriting took the place of surprise, and it was ten minutes more before he spoke to Colin. He, meantime, had settled with himself, in case these letters contained what he guessed for certain that they must contain, that since Violet's previous warning to him was private, he would let the news that his father would presently tell him be a big emotional surprise to him. This would entail dissimulation, but that was no difficulty. Colin knew himself to be most convincing when his brain, not his sincerity, dictated his behaviour.

"Have Violet and Raymond written to you to-day?" asked his father.

Colin yawned. He generally took a siesta after the long morning in the sea and sun, and it was already past his usual hour. There was a pleasant fiction that he retired to write letters.

"No," he said, getting up. "Well, I'm off, father. Lots of letters...."

"Wait a moment. Violet and Raymond send me news which pleases me very much. They're engaged to be married."

Colin stared, then laughed.

"I'd forgotten it was the first of April," he said. "I thought we were in June."

"We are," said his father. "But it's no joke, Colin. I'm quite serious."

Colin looked fixedly at his father for a moment.

"Ah!" he said, and getting up walked to the window. He stood there with his back to the room twirling the blind-string, and seeming to assimilate the news. Then, as if

making a strong effort with himself, he turned himself again, all sunshine.

"By Jove, Raymond will be happy!" he said. "How—how perfectly splendid! He's head over ears in love with her, has been for the last six months. Lucky dog! He's got everything now!"

He could play on his father like some skilled musician, making the chord he wanted to sound with never a mistake. Those words "he's got everything now," conveyed exactly the impression he intended, namely, that Violet was, to him, an important part in Raymond's possessions. That was the right chord.

It sounded.

"But it was a great surprise to you, Colin," he said.

"Yes, father," said Colin.

"The surprise, then, was that Violet has accepted him," said Lord Yardley gently. He felt himself to be probing Colin's mind ever so tenderly, while Colin looked at him wide-eyed like a child who trusts his surgeon.

"Yes, father," he said again. "It surprised me very much."

This was magnificent; he knew just what was passing in his father's mind; unstinted admiration of himself for having so warm-heartedly welcomed the news of Raymond's good fortune, and unstinted sympathy because his father had guessed a reason why Violet's engagement was a shock to him. This was immensely to the good, for when, as he felt no doubt would happen, Violet threw over Raymond for himself, Lord Yardley would certainly remember with what magnanimous generosity he had congratulated Raymond on his success. Whether anything came of his project about the

register or not, he was determined to marry Violet, for so the thirst of his hatred of his brother would be assuaged. But how long and how sweet would the drink be, if in the cup was mingled the other also.

His father came across the room to where he still stood by the window, and laid loving hands on his shoulders.

“Colin, old boy,” he said. “Are you fond of Violet—like that?”

Colin nodded without speech.

“I had no idea of it,” said Lord Yardley. “I often watched you and her together, and I thought you were only as brother and sister. Upon my word, Raymond seems to have got everything.”

Colin’s smile was inimitable. It seemed to fight its way to his beautiful mouth.

“I’ve got you, father,” he said, out of sheer exuberance of wickedness.

The subject was renewed that night when they sat under the vine-wreathed pergola where they had dined. The sun, bowling down the steep cliff away westward, had just plunged into the sea, and darkness came swiftly over the sky, without that long-drawn period of fading English twilight in which day is slowly transformed into night. Here night leaped from its lair in the East and with a gulp absorbed the flames of sunset and swiftly the stars sprang from the hiding-places where all day they had lain concealed, and burning large and low made a diffused and penetrating greyness of illumination that dripped like glowing rain from the whole heavens.

Dim and veiled though that luminance was, compared to the faintest of the lights of day, it gave a curious macabre

distinctness to everything, and Colin's face, in a pool of starshine that filtered between the trailing garlands of the vines, wore to his father some strange, wraith-like aspect. So often had he sat here in such light as this with Rosina opposite him, and all that he loved in Rosina seemed now to have been reincarnated, spectre-like, in the boy he cared more for than he cared for all the rest of the world. All that he had missed in the woman who had satisfied and so soon sated his physical senses, flowered in Colin with his quick intelligence, his sunny affection.... And his father, for all his longing, could do nothing to help him in this darkness which had overshadowed the dawn of love for him.

Instead of Colin, Raymond had got all, that son of his whom he had never liked even, and had always, in some naturally-unnatural manner, been jealous of, in that he would inherit all that his own fingers would one day relax their hold on. Had it been Colin who would grasp the sceptre of the Staniers, Philip would, as he had said, close his eyes for his last sleep in unenvious content. And now Raymond had got the desire of his heart as well, which, too, was the desire of Colin's heart.

All day, since the arrival of those letters, Colin had been very quiet, yet without any bitterness; grave and sweet, but only a shadow, a ghost of himself for gaiety. Now his face, pale in the starlight, was ghostlike also, and his father divined in it an uncomplaining suffering, infinitely pathetic.

"Colin, I wish I could do anything for you," he said, with unusual emotion. "You are such a dear fellow, and you bear it all with such wonderful patience. Wouldn't it do you good now to curse Raymond a little?"

Colin felt that he must not overdo the angelic rôle.

“Oh, I’ve been doing so,” he said, “but I think I shall stop. It’s no use. It wouldn’t hurt Raymond, even if he knew about it, and it doesn’t help me. And it’s certainly time I stopped sulking. Have I been very sulky all evening, father? Apologies.”

“You’ve been a brick. But about stopping out here alone. Are you sure you won’t mope and be miserable? Perhaps I might manage to stay out with you an extra week.”

That would not do at all. Colin hastened to put that out of the question.

“Oh, but you must do nothing of the kind,” he said quickly. “I know you’ve got to get back. I shan’t mope at all. And I think one gets used to things quicker alone. There’s only just one thing I wonder about. Have we both been quite blind about Violet? Has she been in love with Raymond without our knowing it? I, at any rate, had no idea of it. She’s in love with him now, I suppose. Did her letter give you that impression?”

Philip hesitated. Violet’s letter, short and unemotional, had not given him any such impression. But so triumphantly successful had been Colin’s assumption of the unembittered, though disappointed, lover, that he paused, positively afraid that Colin would regret that Violet’s heart was not so blissfully engaged as his brother’s. Before he answered Colin spoke again:

“Ah, I see,” he said. “She’s in love with him, and you are afraid it will hurt me to know it. Ripping of you.... After all, she’s lucky, too, isn’t she? She’s got the fellow she loves, and she’ll be mistress of Stanier. I think she adores Stanier almost as much as you and I, father.”

Colin felt he could not better this as a conclusion. He rose and stretched himself.

"There!" he said. "That expresses what I feel in my mind. It has been cramped all day, and now I've stretched it, and am not going to have cramp any more. What shall we do? Stroll down to the piazza, or sit here and play piquet? I vote for the piazza. Diversion, you know."

Colin pleaded sleepiness on their return from the piazza as an excuse for early retirement, but the sleepiness was not of the sort that led to sleep, and he lay long awake, blissfully content and wondering at himself with an intense and conscious interest. Never before had it so forcibly struck him that deception was a thing that was dear to him through some inherent attraction of its own, irrespective of what material advantages it might bring him; it was lovely in itself, irrespective of the fruit it bore. Never yet, too, had it struck him at all that he disliked love, and this was a discovery worth thinking over.

Often, especially during these last weeks, he had known that his father's love for him bored him, as considered as an abstract quality, though he welcomed it as a means to an end. That end invariably had been not only the material advantages it brought him, but the gratification of his own hatred of Raymond. For, so he unerringly observed, his own endearing of himself to his father served to displace Raymond more and more, and to-day's manœuvres were a brilliant counter-attack to the improved position Raymond had made for himself in those last weeks at Stanier. But, apart from these ends, he had no use for any love that was given him, nor any desire to give in return. To hate and to get, he

found, when he looked into himself, was the mainspring which moved thought, word, and action.

Outside, the evening breeze had quite died down, but the silent tranquillity of the summer night was broken by the sound of a footfall on the garden terrace below the window, which he knew must be that of his father strolling up and down there. For a moment that rather vexed him; it seemed to disturb his own isolation, for he wanted to be entirely encompassed in himself. It was inconsiderate of his father to go quarter-decking out there, intruding into his own consciousness; besides, Colin had told him that he was sleepy, and he should have kept quiet.

But then the explanation of his ramble up and down occurred to Colin. There could be no doubt that his father was troubled for him, and was made restless by thinking of him and his disappointment. That made Colin smile, not for pleasure in his father's love, but for pleasure in his trouble. He was worrying himself over Colin's aching heart, and the boy had a smile for that pleasing thought; it had an incense for him.

He began to wonder, idly at first, but with growing concentration, whether he hated his father. He did not wish him ill, but ... but supposing this business of the register was satisfactorily accomplished, and supposing he succeeded, as he felt no doubt he would, in causing Violet to throw over Raymond and marry himself, he did not see that there would be much gained by his father's continued existence. He would be in the way then, he would stand between him and his mastership, through Violet, of Stanier. That, both from his passion for the place, and from the joyous triumph of ejecting

Raymond, was the true object of his life: possession and hatred, to get and to hate. His father, when these preliminary feats had been carried through, would be an obstacle to his getting, and he supposed that he would hate him then.

Lying cool and naked under his sheet, Colin suddenly felt himself flush with the exuberance of desire and vitality. Hate seemed as infinite as love; you could not plumb the depths of the former any more than you could scale the heights of the other, while acquisition, the clutching and the holding, stretched as far as renunciation; he who lived for himself would not be satisfied until he had grasped all, any more than he who lived for others would not be satisfied until he had given all, retaining nothing out of self-love.

With Violet as his wife, legal owner of Stanier, and Raymond outcast and disinherited, it seemed to Colin that he would have all he wanted, and yet in this flush of desire that combed through him now, as the tide combs through the weeds of the sea, he realised that desire was infinite and could never be satisfied when once it had become the master passion. No one who is not content will ever be content, and none so burned with unsatisfied longing as he. If he could not love he could hate, and if he could not give he could get.

The steps on the terrace below had long ceased, though, absorbed in this fever of himself, he had not noticed their cessation. His activity of thought communicated itself to his body, and it was impossible in this galvanic restlessness to lie quiet in bed. Movement was necessary, and, wrapping his sheet round him, he went to his open window and leaned out.

The night was starlit and utterly tranquil; no whisper of movement sounded from the stone-pine that stood in the garden and challenged by its stirring the most imperceptible

of breezes. Yet to his sense the quiet tingled with some internal and tremendous vibration; a force was abroad which held it gripped and charged to the uttermost, and it was this force, whatever it was, that thrilled and possessed him. The warm, tingling current of it bathed and intoxicated him; it raced through his veins, bracing his muscles and tightening up the nerves and vigour of him, and, stretching out his arms, he let the sheet drop from him so as to drink it in through every thirsting pore of his body. Like the foaming water in a loch, it rose and rose in him, until the limit of his capacity was reached, and his level was that of the river that poured it into him. And at that, so it seemed, when now he had opened himself out to the utmost to receive it, the pressure which had made him restless was relieved, and, unutterably tired and content, he went back to bed, and instantly sank into the profound gulfs of healthy and dreamless slumber.

His father had usually finished breakfast when Colin appeared, but next morning it was the boy who was in advance.

“Hurrah, I’ve beaten you for once, father,” he said when Lord Yardley appeared. “The tea’s half cold; shall I get you some more?”

“No, this will do. Slept well, Colin?”

“Like a top, like a pig, like a hog, like a dog.”

“Good.”

Lord Yardley busied himself with breakfast for a while.

“Curious things dreams are,” he said. “I dreamed about things I hadn’t thought of for years. You were so vividly mixed up in them, too, that I nearly came into your room to see if you were all right.”

“I was,” said Colin. “I was wonderfully all right. What was the dream?”

“Oh, one of those preposterous hashes. I began dreaming about Queen Elizabeth and old Colin. She was paying him a visit at Stanier and asked to see the parchment on which he signed the bond of the legend. He shewed it her, but the blood in which he had signed his own name was so faded that she told him he must sign it again if he wanted it to be valid. I was present and saw it all, but I had the feeling that I was invisible. Then came the nightmare part. He pricked his arm to get the ink, and dipped a pen in it. And then, looking closely at him, I saw that it wasn’t old Colin at all, but you, and that it wasn’t Queen Elizabeth but Violet. I told you not to sign, and you didn’t seem conscious of me, and then I shouted at you, in some nightmare of fear, and awoke, hearing some strangled scream of my own, I suppose.”

Colin had been regarding his father as he spoke with wide, eager eyes. But at the conclusion he laughed and lit a cigarette.

“Well, if you had come in, you certainly wouldn’t have found me signing anything,” he said. “But I cut myself shaving this morning. I call that a prophetic dream. And I must write to Vi and Raymond this morning, so that will be the signing.”

CHAPTER V

Lord Yardley’s residence at his villa at Capri had, as usual, leaked into the diplomatic consciousness, and the English Ambassador at Rome, an old acquaintance of his, had, as usual, reminded him of a friendly presence in Rome, which would be delighted to welcome him if the welcome afforded

any convenience. To leave by the very early boat from Capri, and thus catch the Paris express that evening was a fatiguing performance, would he not, therefore, when the regretted day for his departure came, take the more reasonable midday boat, dine and spend the night at the Embassy, and be sent off from there next day in comfort, for the morning express from Rome entailed only one night in the train instead of two? The British Consul at Naples would see to his seclusion in the transit from Naples to Rome, where he would be met and wafted to the Embassy. Otherwise an early start from Capri, and a hurried train connection in Rome, would deprive His Excellency of the great pleasure of a renewal of cordiality.

His Excellency, it may be remarked, liked an invitation to Stanier, and there was method in his thoughtfulness. This proposal arrived a week before Lord Yardley's departure; a heat wave had drowned the country, and already he looked with prospective horror on the notion of two nights in the train.... It entailed a night in Paris, and, if he was to arrive in England for a debate in the House, a departure from Capri by the midday boat on Tuesday, instead of the early boat on Wednesday. It entailed, in fact, a few hours less of Colin.

Colin saw the shining of his star. Never had anything, for his purpose, been so excellently opportune. The British Consul would be at the station to see his father off, and so, beyond doubt, would he himself, on a visit to Uncle Salvatore. An acquaintanceship would be made under the most auspicious and authentic circumstances.

"It all fits in divinely, father," he said. "I shall come across with you, see you off from Naples, and then do my duty at Uncle Salvatore's. Probably, if there was nothing to take me to Naples, I should never have gone, but now I shall have to

go. Do let me kill two birds with one stone. I shall see the last of you—one bird—without having to get up at five in the morning, and I shall have made my visit to Uncle Salvatore inevitable—two birds. Say ‘yes’ and I’ll write to him at once.”

It was in the belief that this arrangement had been made, that Lord Yardley left Naples a week afterwards. Mr. Cecil, the British Consul, had come to the station to secure for him the reserved compartment to Rome, and, that being done, had lingered on the platform till the train started. At the last moment, as he and Colin stood together there, and while the train was already in motion, Colin sprang on to the footboard for a final good-bye, and with a kiss leaped off again. There came a sharp curve and the swaying carriages behind hid the platform from his father.

Colin turned to Mr. Cecil. Salvatore was in the background for the present.

“It was delightful of you to come to see my father off,” he said. “He appreciated it immensely.”

Colin paused a moment, just the pause that a bather takes before he gets up speed for a running header into the sea.

“He left me a small matter to talk to you about,” he said. “I wonder if I might refer to it now.”

Mr. Cecil gave a plump, polite little bow.

“Pray do, Mr. Stanier,” he said.

“My father wants a copy of the register of his marriage,” he said, “and he asked me to copy it out for him. The marriage was performed at the British Consulate, and if you would be so good as to let me copy it and witness it for me, I should be so grateful. May I call on you in the morning about

it? It will save trouble, he thinks, on his death, if among his papers there is an attested copy."

"A pleasure," said Mr. Cecil.

"You are too kind. And you will do me one further kindness? I am going back to Capri to-morrow for another fortnight, and it would be so good of you if you would tell me of a decent hotel where I can pass the night. I shall not be able, I am afraid, to catch the early boat, with this business of the copying to do, for it leaves, does it not, at nine, and the Consulate will not be open by then."

Colin was at full speed now; his running feet had indeed left the ground, and he was in the air. But he was already stiffened and taut, so to speak, for the plunge; he had made all preparation, and fully anticipated a successful dividing of the waters. For he had already made himself quite charming to Mr. Cecil, and attributed his lingering on the platform as much to the pleasure of a sociable ten minutes with him as to the honour done to his father.

"But I will not hear of you staying at a hotel," said Mr. Cecil, "if I can persuade you to pass the night at my flat. It adjoins the Consulate offices, and is close to where the Capri boat lies. Indeed, if you wish to catch the early boat, we can no doubt manage that little business of yours to-night. It will take only a few minutes."

Colin suffered himself to be persuaded, and they drove back to the Consulate. Office hours were already over, and presently Mr. Cecil led the way into the archive-room, where, no doubt, Colin's search would be rewarded. But there had come in for him a couple of telegrams delivered after the clerks had gone, and he went to his desk in the adjoining room to answer these, leaving the boy with the volume

containing the year of his father's marriage. The month, so said Colin, was not known to him. His father had told him, but he had forgotten—a few minutes' search, however, would doubtless remedy that.

So Mr. Cecil, leaving an official form with him on which to copy the entry, fussed away into the next room, and Colin instantly opened the volume. The year was 1893, and the month, as he very well knew, was March.... There it was on March the first, and he ran his eye down to the next entry. Marriages at the Naples Consulate apparently were not frequent, and the next was dated April the fourth.

Colin had already his pen in hand to make the copy, and it remained poised there a moment. There was nothing more necessary than to insert one figure before the single numeral, and the thing would be done. It remained after that only to insert a similar "three" in the letter which his mother had written to Salvatore announcing her marriage. On this hot evening the ink would dry as soon as it touched the page. And yet he paused, his brain beginning to bubble with some notion better yet, more inspired, more magically apt....

Colin gave a little sigh and the smile dawned on his face. He wrote in a "three," making the date of March 1 into March 31, and then once again he paused, watching with eager eyes for the ink to dry on the page. Then, taking up a penknife which lay on the table beside him, he erased, but not quite erased, the "three" he had just written there. He left unerased, as if a hurried hand had been employed on the erasure, the cusp of the figure, and a minute segment of a curve both above and below it.

Looking at the entry as he looked at it now, when his work was done, with but casual carefulness, any inspector of it

would say that it recorded the marriage of Philip Lord Stanier to Rosina Viagi on the first of March. But had the inspector's attention been brought to bear more minutely on it, he must, if directed to hold the page sideways to the light, have agreed that there had been some erasure made in front of the figure denoting the day of the month; for there was visible the scratching of a penknife or some similar instrument. Then, examining it more closely, he would certainly see the cusp of a "three," the segment of the upper curve, and a dot of ink in the place where the lower segment would have been.

These remnants would scarcely have struck his eye at all, had not he noticed that there were the signs of an erasure there. With them, it was impossible for the veriest tyro in conjecture not to guess what the erasure had been.

The whole thing took but a half-minute, and at the expiration of that, Colin was employed on the transcription of the record of the marriage. He knew that he had to curb a certain trembling of his hand, to reduce to a more regular and slower movement the taking of his breath, which came in pants, as if he had been running.

Half a minute ago, no notion of what he had already accomplished had entered his head; his imagination had not travelled further than the possibility of changing the date which he knew he should find here into one thirty days later. Out of the void, out of the abyss, this refinement in forgery had come to him, and he already recognised without detailed examination how much more astute, how infinitely more cunning, was this emended tampering. Just now he could spare but a side glance at that, for he must copy this entry (unaware that pen and pen-knife had been busy there) and take it to plump Mr. Cecil for his signature, but the sharp,

crisp tap of conviction in his mind told him that he had done more magnificently well than his conscious brain had ever suggested to him.

No longer time than was reasonable for this act of copying alone had elapsed before Colin laid down his pen and went into the next room.

“Well, Mr. Stanier, have you done your copying?” asked Cecil.

“Yes. Shall I bring it here for your signature?” said Colin.

Mr. Cecil climbed down from the high stool where he was perched like some fat, cheerful little bird.

“No, no,” he said. “We must be more business-like than that. I must compare your copy with the original entry before I give you my signature.”

Colin knew that the skill with which he had effected the alteration which yet left the entry unaltered, would now be put to the test, but he felt no qualm whatever as to detection. The idea had been inspired, and he had no doubt that the execution of it was on the same level of felicitous audacity. They passed back into the archive-room together, and the Consul sat himself before the volume and the copy.

“Yes, March the first, March the first,” he said, comparing the two, “Philip Lord Stanier, Philip Lord Stanier, quite correct. Ha! you have left out a full stop after his name, Mr. Stanier. Yes, Rosina Viagi, of 93 Via Emmanuele....”

He wrote underneath his certificate that this was a true and faithful copy of the entry in the Consular archives, signed his name, stamped it with the official seal and date, and handed it to Colin.

“That will serve your father’s purpose,” he said, and replacing the volume on its shelf, locked the wire door of its bookcase.

“If you will be so good as to wait five minutes,” he said, “I will just finish answering a telegram that demands my attention, and then I shall be at your service for the evening.”

He gave a discreet little chuckle.

“We will dine *en garçon*,” he said, “at a restaurant which I find more than tolerable, and shall no doubt contrive some pleasant way of passing the evening. Naples keeps late hours, Mr. Stanier, and I should not be surprised if you found the first boat to Capri inconveniently early. We shall see.”

Mr. Cecil appeared to put off the cares and dignity of officialdom with singular completeness when the day’s work was over, and Colin found he had an agreeably juvenile companion, ready to throw himself with zest into the diversions, whatever they might be, of the evening. He ate with the appetite of a lion-cub, consumed a very special wine in magnificent quantities, and had a perfect battery of smiles and winks for the Neapolitans who frequented the restaurant.

“*Dulce est desipere in loco*,” he remarked gaily, “and that’s about the sum of the Latin that remains to me, and, after all, it can be expressed equally well in English by saying ‘All work, no play, makes Jack a dull boy.’ And when we have finished our wine, all the amusements of this amusing city are at your disposal. There is an admirable cinematograph just across the road, there is a music-hall a few doors away, but if you choose that, you must not hold me responsible for what you hear there. Or if you think it too hot a night for indoor entertainment, there is the Galleria Umberto, which is cool and airy, but again, if you choose that, you must not hold

me responsible for what you see there. Children of nature: that is what we Neapolitans are. We, did I say? Well, I feel myself one of them, when the Consulate is shut, not when I am on duty, mark that, Mr. Stanier. But my private life is my own, and then I shed my English skin."

In spite of the diversions of the city, Colin was brisk enough in the morning to catch the early boat, and once more, as he had done a month ago on his initial visit to the island, he sequestered himself from the crowd under the awning, and sought solitude in the dipping bows of the little steamer. To-day, however, there was no chance of his meditations being interrupted by his father with tedious talk of days spent at Sorrento; no irksome demonstrations of love were there to be responded to, but he could without hindrance explore not only his future path, but, no less, estimate the significance of what he had done already.

Once more, then, the register of his father's marriage was secure in the keeping of the Consulate, Mr. Cecil had looked at it, compared Colin's copy, which now lay safe in the breast-pocket of his coat, with the original, and had certified it to be correct. Colin had run no risk by inserting and then erasing a figure which might prove on scrutiny to be a subsequent addition; Mr. Cecil himself had been unaware that any change had been wrought on the page. But when the register on Lord Yardley's death should be produced in accordance with the plan that was already ripening and maturing in Colin's mind, a close scrutiny would reveal that it had been tampered with. Some hand unknown had clearly erased a figure there, altering the date from March 31 to March 1. The object of that would be clear enough, for it legalised the birth of the twins Rosina had borne. It was in

the interest of any of four people to commit that forgery—of his father, of his mother, of Raymond, and of himself. Rosina was dead now these many years; his father, when the register was next produced, would be dead also, and from dead lips could come neither denial nor defence. Raymond might be left out of the question altogether, for never yet had he visited his mother's native city, and of those alive when the register was produced, suspicion could only possibly attach to himself. It would have been in his interest to make that alteration, which should establish his legitimacy as well as that of his brother.

Colin, as he sat alone in the bows, fairly burst out laughing, before he proceeded to consider the wonderful sequel. He would be suspected, would he?... Then how would it come about that it was he, who in the nobility of stainless honour would produce his own mother's letter, given him by his uncle, in which she announced to her brother that she was married at the British Consulate on the 31st of March? Had he been responsible for that erasure in the Consulate register, to legitimatise his own birth, how, conceivably, could he not only not conceal, but bring forward the very evidence that proved his illegitimacy? Had he tampered with the Consular book, he must have destroyed the letter which invalidated his forgery. But, instead of destroying it, he would produce it.

There was work ahead of him here and intrigue in which Salvatore must play a part. The work, of course, was in itself nothing; the insertion at the top of one of the two letters he owned of just that one figure which he had inserted and erased again in the register was all the manual and material business; a bottle of purple ink and five minutes' practice would do that. But the intrigue was more difficult. Salvatore

must be induced to acquiesce in the fact that the date of the letter announcing Rosina's marriage was subsequent to that announcing the birth of the twins. That would require thought and circumspection; there must be no false step there.

And all this was but a preliminary manœuvring for the great action whereby, though at the cost of his own legitimacy, he should topple Raymond down from his place, and send him away outcast and penniless, and himself, with Violet for wife, now legal owner of all the wealth and honours of the family, become master of Stanier. She might for the love of him, which he believed was budding in her heart, throw Raymond over and marry him without cognisance of what he had done for her. But he knew, from knowledge of himself, how overmastering the passion for Stanier could be, and it might happen that she would choose Raymond with all that marriage to him meant, and stifle the cry of her love.

In that case (perhaps, indeed, in any case), Colin might find it better to make known to her the whole, namely that on his father's death she would find herself in a position to contest the succession and claim everything for her own. Which of them, Raymond or himself, would she choose to have for husband in these changed circumstances? She disliked and proposed to tolerate the one for the sake of the great prize of possession; she was devoted to the other, who, so she would learn, had become possessed of the fact on which her ownership was established.

Or should he tell her all? Reveal his part in it? On this point he allowed his decision to remain in abeyance; what he should do, whether he should tell Violet nothing, or part, or all, must depend on circumstances, and for the present he

would waste no more time over that. For the present, too, he would keep the signed and certified copy of his father's marriage.

The point which demanded immediate consideration was that concerning Salvatore. Colin puzzled this out, sometimes baffled and frowning, sometimes with a clear course lying serene in front of his smiling eyes, as the steamer, leaving the promontory of the mainland behind, approached the island. He must see Salvatore, whom he had quite omitted to see in Naples, as soon as possible, and it would be much better to see him here, in the privacy of the villa, than seek him, thought Colin, in the publicity of the Palazzo Viagi, surrounded by those siren dames, Vittoria and Cecilia.

He would write at once, a pensive and yet hopeful little epistle to Uncle Salvatore wondering if he would come across to Capri yet once again, not for the mere inside of a day only, but for a more hospitable period. His father had left for England, Colin was alone, and there were matters to be talked over that weighed on his conscience.... That was a good phrase; Uncle Salvatore would remember what Colin had already done in the matter of the reduplicated cheque, and it would seem that the generous fellow had a debt of conscience yet unliquidated; this conveyed precisely the right impression.

In a postscript he would hint at the French nectar which, still dozing in the cellar.... He hesitated a moment, and then decided not to mention the subject of his mother's letters, for it was better that since they were the sole concern of his visit, Uncle Salvatore should have the matter sprung upon him.... A bottle of purple ink ... no, that would not be necessary yet, for

the later that you definitely committed yourself to a course of action the better.

Colin's letter produced just the effect that he had calculated on; Salvatore read into the conscience-clause a generous impulse and congratulated himself on the departure of that grim, dry brother-in-law to whom (for he had tried that before) tears and frayed cuffs made no appeal. He had accordingly given that up, and for his last visit here made himself nobly resplendent. But to Colin, in the guilelessness of his blue-eyed boyhood, a tale of pinching and penury might be a suitable revelation, and it was a proud but shabby figure which presented itself at the villa a few evenings later, without more luggage than could be conveniently conveyed in a paper parcel. Colin, who had been observing the approach from the balcony of his bedroom, ran down, choking with laughter that must be choked, to let his uncle in.

"Ah, this is nice," he said. "You have no idea how welcome you are. It was good of you to take pity on my loneliness. What a jolly evening we shall have. And Vittoria and Cecilia? How are they?"

A gleam brightened Uncle Salvatore's gloom, and he fervently pressed Colin's hand.

"They are well, thank God," he said. "And while that is so, what matters anything?"

He appeared with a gesture of his hand to pluck some intruding creature from the region of his heart, and throw it into the garden-beds. Then he gave a little skip in the air.

"Collino *mio*!" he said. "You charm away my sad thoughts. Whatever happens to-morrow, I will be gay to-night. I will not drag your brightness down into my gloom and darknesses. Away with them, then!"

Colin fathomed the mountebank mind with an undeviating plummet. The depth (or shallowness) of it answered his fairest expectations. He found nothing inconsistent in this aspect of Salvatore with that which he had last presented here; the two, in fact, tallied with the utmost exactitude as the expression of one mind. They both chimed true to the inspiring personality. He waited, completely confident, for the advent of the opportunity.

That came towards the end of dinner: without even having been hilarious, Salvatore had at least been cheerful, and now, as suddenly as if a tap had been turned off, the flow of his enjoyment ceased. He sighed, he cleared his throat, he supported his head on his hands, and stared at the tablecloth. To Colin these signals were unmistakable.

"You're in trouble, Uncle Salvatore," he said softly, "and now for the first time I am glad that my father has gone back to England. If he were here, I should not be able to say what I mean to say, for, after all, he is my father, and he has always been most generous to me. But he is not equally generous to others who have claims on him. I have tried to make him see that, and, as you and I know, I have succeeded to some small extent. But the extent to which I have succeeded does not satisfy me. Considering all that I know, I am determined to do better for you than I have been able to make him do. If I am his son, I am equally my mother's son. And you are her brother."

Colin paused a moment, and, sudden as a highland spate, inspiration flooded his mind. He had not thought out with any precision what he meant to say, for that must depend on Salvatore, who might, equally well, have adopted the attitude of a proud and flashy independence. But he had declared for

frayed cuffs and a fit of gloom, and Colin shaped his course accordingly.

"And I can't forget," he said, "that it was you who put me in possession of certain facts when you sent me those two letters of my mother. I learned from them what I had never dreamed of before. I never in the wildest nightmare thought that my father had not married your sister till after my birth. I should have had to know that sometime: on my father's death it must have come out. And you have shown a wonderful delicacy in breaking the fact to me like that. I thank you for that, Uncle Salvatore; I owe you a deep debt of gratitude which I hope to repay!"

Colin listened to his own voice, which seemed to make itself articulate without any directing will of his own. The summer night was charged with the force of obedience to which his tongue moved against his teeth, and his lips formed letters, and his throat gave the gutturals. Literally, he did not know what he was going to say till he heard himself saying it. The breeze whispered in the stone-pine, and he spoke....

The breeze was still now and the stone-pine was silent. But he had said enough to make it necessary that Salvatore should reply. Presently a bat would flit through the arches of the pergola where they dined, or the wind would stir in the pine, and then he would speak again. There was just that same stir abroad on the night when he had listened from his bedroom to his father's footfalls on the terrace.

"What do you mean, Collino?" said his uncle excitedly. "I cannot understand what you say. My sainted Rosina married your father on the first of March, for I glanced at the letters again before I sent them to you. Your birth...."

Colin interrupted.

“Ah, a bat,” he said. “I love bats. If you hold a handkerchief up does not a bat come to it? Let us interrupt our conversation for a moment.”

He spread his handkerchief over his head, and next moment Salvatore leaped to his feet, for there, beady-eyed and diabolical, with hooked wings as of parchment, spread out on either side of its furry body, one of the great southern bats alighted, making a cap for Colin’s golden head. Only for a moment it stopped there, and then flitted off into the dusk again.

“Soft, furry thing,” said Colin. “But you hate them, do you, Uncle Salvatore? It was stupid of me. Let us talk again!”

He hitched his chair a little closer to the table, and looked Salvatore straight in the eyes.

“But you have forgotten the dates on those letters you gave me,” he said. “My mother was married to my father not on the first of March, but on the thirty-first. The second letter recording Raymond’s birth and mine was written on the seventeenth.”

Again he paused.

“Raymond and I were born,” he said slowly and distinctly, “before my father’s marriage. The letters which you gave me prove it. If further proof was wanted, you would find it at the Consulate where the marriage took place. Some one has tampered with the register, and the date has been made to look as if it recorded the first of March. But it does not: it records the thirty-first of March, and the ‘three’ has been erased. But it is still visible. I saw it myself, for I went across to Naples to see my father off, and subsequently at the Consulate made a copy of the entry. I should have proposed myself to stay with you that night, Uncle Salvatore, but I had

no spirit left in me to see anybody. When you sent me those two letters of my mother, I hoped against hope perhaps, that there was some ghastly mistake. I nearly destroyed them, indeed, in order that from them, at any rate, there should be no conceivable evidence. But when I saw the entry in the book at the Consulate, with the mark of the erasure visible to any careful scrutiny, I knew that it was no use to fight against facts. On my father's death, the evidence of the date of his marriage must be produced, and it will be clear what happened. My mother bore him two boys—I was one. Subsequently he married her, hoping, I have no doubt, to beget from her an heir to the name and the property."

The wind sighed heavily in the pine, and little stirs of it rustled the vine-leaves.

"Is it at no cost to me," said Colin, "that I keep my mother's letter which proves Raymond and me to be bastards? Oh, it is an ugly word, and if you were me, you would know that it is an ugly thing. Without my mother's letter which you sent me, it would be hard indeed to prove, indeed, any one might copy out the entry at the Consulate and fail to see the erasure altogether. Raymond, at my father's death would succeed, and I, his twin, beloved of him, would take an honourable place in the eyes of the world, for it is not nothing to be born a Stanier."

Colin's voice was soft and steadfast.

"But my mother's letter to you makes it impossible for me to have honour in the eyes of the world, and to preserve my own," he said. "Ah, why did you send me those two letters, Uncle Salvatore? It was in all innocence and kindness that you sent them, and you need not remind me that I asked for them. Having seen them, what could any one with a shred of

honour do but to admit the truth of the whole ghastly business? The only wish that I have is that my father shall not know that I know. All I want is that he, when the hour of his death comes, should hope that the terrible fraud which has been practised, will never be detected. But for that letter of my mother's, that would undoubtedly have happened. The register at the Consulate would have been copied at his death by some clerk, and the Consul would have certificated its accuracy. Look at me, then, now, and look at yourself in the same light, you of unblemished descent, and me and Raymond!"

Salvatore had certainly woke out of his dejection.

"But it's impossible," he cried, beating the table. "I sent you two letters; the first, dated March the first, announced my sainted Rosina's marriage to your father. Where is it? Produce it!"

Colin was quite prepared for that. He put his sun-browned fingers into his breast-pocket, and drew out a paper.

"I can't show you the original letters," he said, "because it was clearly my duty to put them into inviolable custody as soon as possible. I sent them, in fact, as soon as I had seen the register at the Consulate, to my bank, with orders that they were to be kept there until I gave further instructions, or until the news of my death reached them. In that case, Uncle Salvatore, I gave instructions that they were to be sent to my father. But before I despatched them to the bank, I made a copy of them, and here that copy is."

He passed over to his uncle the copy he had made of the letter that afternoon, before (instead of sending it to the bank) he locked the original safely away upstairs. It was an accurate

copy, except that it was dated March 31. Salvatore took it and read it; it tallied, but for the date, with his recollection of it.

“But it is impossible!” he said. “For years I have known that letter. When I gave it you it was dated March the first.”

“Do you imply that I altered it?” asked Colin. “Not a living eye has seen that letter but mine. Give me any reason for altering it. Why should I make myself nameless and illegitimate?”

Salvatore looked that in the face. The validity of it stared at him unflinchingly.

“But I can’t believe it; there is some huge mistake,” said Salvatore. “Often have I read that letter of Rosina’s. March the first was the date of her marriage. I will swear to that; nothing shall shake my belief in that.”

Colin shook his head in answer.

“What good will that do?” he said. “You gave the letter to me, and no hand but mine has ever touched it. The letter must be produced some day, not for many years, I hope and trust, but on my father’s death it must come to light. How will your recollections stand in the face of that evidence which all can see?”

Salvatore glanced round. They were alone with the fitful wind in the pine.

“Destroy the letter, Collino,” he said. “Save your mother’s honour and your own.”

Colin gave him one glance, soft and pitiful.

“Ah, you must not suggest that to me,” he said. “You must not add force to the temptation I can only just resist. But where would my honour be if I did that? What shred of it would be left me? How could I live a lie like that?”

Colin leaned forward and put his hand on Salvatore's arm.

"I have got to accept my illegitimacy," he said. "And if you are sorry for me, as I think you are, you can shew it best by accepting it too. It would be infinitely painful to me when this revelation is made, as it will have to be made on my father's death, to have you attempting to save my mother's honour and my own, as you put it just now, by insisting that this letter bore another date. I should never have a moment's peace if I thought a scene like that was ahead of me. In fact, I want to be assured against that, and the only way I can think of to make that safe is that when you get back to Naples tomorrow you should write me a couple of lines, saying how you feel for me in this discovery that is new to me. And then I want you to name the discovery, which is the date of my mother's marriage. I want you to accept that date, and give me proof that you accept it."

Colin made a gesture with his hand, as if cutting off that topic, and instantly spoke again.

"With my cousin Vittoria growing up," he said, "you must be put to expenses which it is impossible for you to meet out of the pittance my father gives you. He wronged you and your family most terribly, and I must repair that wrong. When I get that letter of yours, Uncle Salvatore, I will send you a cheque for £500."

Colin gave a glance at his uncle, to make sure that there was no faintest sign of dissent. There was none, and he went on:

"I see you understand me," he said, "so let us go a step further. If my brother Raymond dies before my father, I will make that five hundred pounds an annuity to you, and I will destroy both the letter I ask you to write now, and the letter of

my mother's about which we have been talking. You will never be asked to say anything about either of them. If on the other hand my father dies first, and if I make the marriage which I expect to make, I shall have to use your letter and that letter of my mother's. You may be asked to swear to the genuineness of the letter which I hope you will write me to-morrow, and to the recollection of my mother's letter which will tally with it. Have another glass of this delicious French wine."

He had no need to think what he was saying, or frame a specious case. He spoke quite simply and directly as if by some inspiration, as if he was an Æolian harp hung in the wind which whispered through the stone-pine.

"I don't think there is need for any discussion," he said, "though, of course, if you like to ask me any question, I will consider whether I shall answer it. But I don't think there is need for any question, is there? You might tell me, I fancy, straight off, whether you accept or reject my proposal. If you reject it, perhaps I had better tell you that it is exceedingly unlikely that my father will give you any further assistance financially, for, as you know, I have a good deal of influence with him.

"It would not pay you to refuse, would it? And as to threatening me with making this conversation of ours public, with a view to getting money out of me, I know your gentlemanly feelings would revolt against such an idea. Besides it would be singularly unremunerative, for no one would possibly believe you. Our conversation and my proposal would strike anybody as incredible. And you are not perjuring yourself in any way; you did send me a letter of my mother's, and you will, I hope, write me another letter to-

morrow, saying that the story of my mother's marriage is very shocking, which is indeed true. So shall it be 'yes' or 'no,' Uncle Salvatore?"

Salvatore, superstitious, like most Southern Italians, to the core, found himself making the sign of the cross below the table. Apart from the obvious material advantage of accepting Colin's offer, he felt that some fierce compelling agency was backing Colin up. That dreadful little incident of the bat had already upset him, and now in Colin's blue gay glance so earnestly fixed on him, he divined some manifestation of the evil eye, which assuredly it were not wise to provoke into action. And as if, in turn, Colin divined his thought, he spoke again:

"Better say 'yes,' Uncle Salvatore," he said. "My friends lead more enjoyable lives than my enemies. But whatever you answer, I want your answer now."

Perhaps through some strange trick of light played by the guttering candles, it suddenly seemed to Salvatore that Colin's eyes undeviatingly fixed on his face, seemed in themselves luminous, as if a smouldering light actually burned behind them.

"I accept," he said quickly, "for Vittoria's sake."

Colin took up his glass.

"I thought I should move your paternal heart, dear Uncle Salvatore," he said. "I drink to our pleasant bargain."

CHAPTER VI

Though Colin had taken the news of his brother's engagement with so touching and unselfish a gentleness, his father, in spite of the joy of seeing the boy again, looked

forward to his arrival at Stanier with considerable uneasiness. The trouble and the trial for him would be when he saw Raymond and Violet together, though, to be sure, Violet did not seem to him to embody any ideal of maidenly rapture with her affianced. She seemed indeed to tolerate, rather than adore her lover, to permit rather than to provoke, and to answer with an effort the innumerable little signals of devotion which Raymond displayed for her. About the quality of his devotion there could be no question. It was clear that in his own fashion, and with all his heaviness and awkwardness in expression, he was utterly in love with her. He had no eyes for any one but her, but for her his eyes were dog-like in fidelity; when she was absent his senses dozed.

They were, just for the present, this party of three. Lady Hester had gone back to town after the departure of Colin and his father to the South, and Ronald and his wife had betaken themselves for the month of July to Marienbad, in order to enable him to continue eating too much for the next eleven months without ill effects. Every evening old Lady Yardley appeared for dinner and made the fourth, but she was not so much a presence as a shadow. In Colin's absence, she hardly ever spoke, though each night she monotonously asked when he was expected back. Then, after the rubber of whist, mutely conducted, she retired again, and remained invisible till the approach of the next dinner-hour. So long had she been whitely impassive that Philip scarcely noticed the mist that was thickening about her mind.

Raymond, then, was comprehensible enough, he was head over ears in love with Violet, and nothing and nobody but her had any significance for him. But dog-like though his devotion was, it struck his father that there was, in the

absence of Violet's response, something rather animal about it. Had she met with more than mere toleration his glances, his little secret caresses, his thirst for contact even of finger-tips or a leaning shoulder, there would have been the spark, the leap of fire which gives warmth and life to such things. But without it there was a certain impalpable grossness: Raymond did not seem to care that his touch should be responded to, it contented him to touch.

But though he, to his father's mind, was comprehensible enough, Violet puzzled him, for she seemed even before her marriage to have adopted the traditional impassivity of Stanier brides; she had professed, in the one interview she had had with him, a quiet acceptance of her position, and a devotion to Raymond of which the expression seemed to be a mute passivity. Towards the question of the date of her marriage she had no contribution to give. Lord Yardley and Raymond must have the settling of that, and with the same passivity she accepted a date in the first week of October. Then the great glass doors would be opened, and the bridegroom's wing, long shuttered, for Philip's bride had never come here, would see the light again. She asked no question whatever about Colin's return; his name never presented itself on her lips unless mere conventional usage caused it to be spoken. It was as if the boy with whom she had been so intimately a friend, had ceased to exist for her. But when Philip once consciously noted that omission, he began to wonder if Violet was not comprehensible after all.... These days, in any case, after Philip's return, while Colin still lingered in Italy, were worthy of the stateliest and deadliest Stanier traditions.

Colin had been expected all one long July afternoon. His announcement of his arrival had been ambiguous, for he might catch the early train from Paris, and thus the earlier boat, but the connection was uncertain, and if he missed it he would not get to Dover till six in the evening. In that case he would sleep in London, and come down to Stanier next day.

Philip had read this out at breakfast that morning, and for once Violet shewed some interest in Colin.

"Why not send a motor to Dover, Uncle Philip?" she said. "It can get there in time for the first boat, and if he is not on it, it can wait for the second. He will arrive here then by dinner time."

Raymond looked up from his paper at the sound of her voice.

"Vi, darling, what an absurd plan," he said. "There are a hundred chances to one on Colin's not finding the motor. He'll get straight into the train from the boat."

Violet instantly retreated into that strange shell of hers again.

"Ah, yes," she said.

Philip's curiosity put forth a horn at this. There was some new element here, for Raymond seemed to resent the idea of special arrangements being made for Colin.

"That's not a bad idea of yours, Violet," he said. "It will save Colin going up to London."

As he spoke he kept a sideways eye on Raymond.

"But, father, think of the crush getting off the boat," he said. "The chances are that Colin won't see your chauffeur."

He spoke with an impatient anger which he could not cloak, and which rang out unmistakably in his voice.

“We’ll take the off chance then,” said his father.

Raymond got up. “Just as you like,” he said.

Philip paused a moment. The relations between himself and Raymond had been excellent up till to-day. Raymond without charm (which was not his fault), had been pleasant and agreeable, but now this matter of meeting Colin had produced a spirit of jealous temper.

“Naturally I shall do just as I like,” he observed. “Ring the bell, please, Raymond. The motor will have to start at once.”

Though none of the three communicated the news of Colin’s arrival to old Lady Yardley, it somehow got round to her, *via* perhaps, some servant’s gossip about a motor going to Dover, and most unusually she came downstairs at tea-time with inquiries whether Colin had arrived. It was soon clear that he could not have caught the early boat, or he would have been here by now, and thus three hours at least must elapse before his arrival could be looked for, but in spite of this, old Lady Yardley did not go back to her room again, but remained upright and vigilant in her chair on the terrace, where they had had tea, looking out over the plain where, across the gardens and lake, appeared glimpses of the road along which the motor must come.

Philip had intended to go for a ride, but he, too, when his servant told him that his horse was round, lingered on and shewed no sign of moving. Neither he nor his mother gave any reason for their remaining so unusually here, but somehow the cause of it was common property. Colin was coming. Raymond, similarly, had announced his intention of going to bathe, but had not gone; instead he fidgeted in his chair, smoked, took up and dropped the evening paper, and

made aimless little excursions up and down the terrace. His restlessness got on his father's nerves.

"Well, go and bathe, if you mean to, Raymond," he said, "or if you like take my horse and go for a ride. But, for goodness' sake, don't keep jumping about like that."

"Thanks, I think I won't ride, father," he said. "I shall be having a bathe presently. Or would you feel inclined for a game of tennis, Vi?"

"I think it's rather too hot," said she.

He sat down on the arm of her chair, but she gave no welcome to him, nor appeared in any way conscious of his proximity. In that rather gross fashion of his, he gently stroked a tendril of loose hair just behind her ear. For a moment she suffered that without moving. Then she put up her hand with a jerky, uncontrolled movement, and brushed his away.

"Oh, please, Raymond," she said in a low voice.

He had a sullen look for that, and, shrugging his shoulders, got up and went into the house. His father gave a sigh of relief, the reason for which needed no comment.

"Colin will be here for dinner, won't he?" asked old Lady Yardley.

"Yes, mother," said Philip. "But won't you go and rest before that?"

"I think I will sit here," said she, "and wait for Colin."

Presently Raymond was back again, with a copy of some illustrated paper. Violet and Philip alike felt the interruption of his presence. They were both thinking of Colin, and Raymond, even if he sat quiet, was a disturbance, a distraction.... Soon he was by Violet's side again, shewing her

some picture which he appeared to think might interest her, and Philip, watching the girl, felt by some sympathetic vibration how great an effort it was for her to maintain that passivity which, all those days, had so encompassed her. The imminence of Colin's arrival, he could not but conjecture, was what troubled her tranquillity, and below it there was some stir, some subaqueous tumult not yet risen to the surface, and only faintly declaring itself in these rising bubbles....

Raymond had placed the paper on her knee, and, turning the page, let his hand rest on her arm, bare to the elbow. Instantly she let it slip to her side, and, raising her eyes at the moment, caught Philip's gaze. The recognition of something never mentioned between them took place, and she turned to Raymond's paper again.

"Quite excellent," she said. "Such a good snapshot of Aunt Hester. Show it to Uncle Philip."

Raymond could not refuse to do that, and the moment he had stepped over to Philip's side, she got up.

That passivity was quite out of her reach just now in this tension of waiting. Soon Colin would be here, and she would have to face and accept the situation, but the waiting for it.... If only even something could happen to Colin which would prevent his arrival. Why had she suggested that sending of the motor to Dover? Had she not done that, he could not have got here till to-morrow morning, and she would have had time to harden, to crystallise herself, to render herself impervious to any touch from outside.

She was soon to be a Stanier bride, and there in the tall chair with the ivory cane was the pattern and example for her. It was on old Lady Yardley that she must frame herself,

quenching any fire of her own, and content to smoulder her life away as mistress of the family home which she so adored, and of all the countless decorations and riches of her position. Never had the wonder and glory of the place seemed to her so compelling as when now, driven from the terrace by Raymond's importunity, she walked along its southern front and through the archway in the yew-hedge where she and Colin had stood on his last night here. It dozed in the tranquillity of the July evening, yellow and magnificent, the empress of human habitations. Round it for pillow were spread its woodlands, on its breast for jewel lay the necklace of deep flower-beds; tranquil and stable through its three centuries, it seemed the very symbol and incarnation of the pride of its owners; to be its mistress and the mother of its lords yet unborn was a fate for which she would not have exchanged a queen's diadem.

Whatever conditions might be attached to it, she would accept them—as indeed she had already pledged herself to do—with the alacrity with which its founder had, in the legend, signed his soul away in that bargain which had so faithfully been kept by the contracting parties.... And it was not as if she disliked Raymond; she was merely utterly indifferent to him, and longing for the time when, in the natural course of things, he would surely grow indifferent to her. How wise and indulgent to his male frailties would she then show herself; how studiously and how prudently blind, with the blindness of those who refuse to see, to any infidelities.

Had there not been in the world a twin-brother of his, or, even if that must be, if she had not stood with him under this serge-arch of yews beneath the midsummer moon and given him that cousinly kiss, she would not now be feeling that his

return, or, at any rate, the waiting for it, caused a tension that could scarcely be borne. She had made her choice and had no notion—so her conscious mind told her—of going back on it; it was just this experience of seeing Colin again for the first time after her choice had been made that set her nerves twanging at Raymond's touch. Could she, by a wish or the wave of a wand, put off Colin's advent until she had actually become Raymond's wife, how passionately would she have wished, how eagerly have waved. Or if by some magic, black or white, she could have put Colin out of her life, so that never would she set eyes on him again or hear his voice, his banishment from her would at that moment have been accomplished. She would not admit that she loved him; she doggedly told herself that she did not, and her will was undeviatingly set on the marriage which would give her Stanier.

Surely she did not love Colin; they had passed all their lives in the tranquillity of intimate friendship, unruffled by the faintest breath of desire. And then, in spite of her dogged assertion, she found that she asked herself, incredulously enough, whether on that last evening of Colin's the seed of fire had not sprouted in her? She disowned the notion, but still it had reached her consciousness, and then fiercely she reversed and denied it, for she abhorred the possibility. It would be better that she should hate Colin than love him.

The evening was stiflingly hot, and in the park, where her straying feet had led her, there was no breath of wind stirring to disperse the heaviness. The air seemed thick with fecundity and decay; there was the smell of rotting wood, of crumbling fungi overripe that mingled with the sharp scent of

the bracken and the faint aroma of the oaks, and buzzing swarms of flies gave token of their carrion banquets. The open ground to the north of the house was no better; to her sense of overwrought expectancy, it seemed as if some siege and beleaguerment held her. She wanted to escape, but an impalpable host beset her, not of these buzzing flies only and of the impenetrable oppression of the sultry air, through which she could make no *sortie*, but, internally and spiritually, of encompassing foes and hostile lines through which her spirit had no power to break.

There on the terrace, from which, as from under some fire she could not face, she had lately escaped, there would be the physical refreshment of the current of sea-wind moving up, as was its wont towards sunset, across the levels of the marsh; but there, to this same overwrought consciousness, would be Raymond, assiduous and loverlike, with odious little touches of his affectionate fingers. But, so she told herself, it was enforced on her to get used to them; he had a right to them, and it was Colin, after all, who was responsible for her shrinking from them, even as she shrank from the evil buzzings of the flies. If only she had not kissed Colin, or if, having done that, he had felt a tithe of what it had come to signify to her.

But no hint of heart-ache, no wish that fate had decreed otherwise, had troubled him. He had asked for a cousinly kiss, and in that light geniality of his he had said, out of mere politeness, and out of hatred for Raymond (no less light and genial) that it was “maddening” to think that his brother would be the next visitor there.

She had waited for his reply to her letter announcing that Raymond had proposed to her and that she was meaning to

accept him, with a quivering anxiety which gave way when she received his answer to a sense of revolt which attempted to call itself relief. He seemed, so far from finding the news "maddening," to welcome and rejoice in it. He congratulated her on achieving her ambition of being mistress of Stanier, and on having fallen in love with Raymond. He could not be "hurt"—as she had feared—at her news; it was altogether charming.

She had expressed the charitable hope that he would not be hurt, and with claws and teeth her charity had come home to roost. It had dreadful habits in its siesta; it roosted with fixed talons and sleepless lids; it cried to the horses of the night to go slowly, and delay the dawn, for so it would prolong the pleasures of its refreshment. And each day it rose with her, strengthened and more vigorous. Had Colin only rebelled at her choice, that would have comforted her; she would have gathered will-power from his very opposition. But with his acquiescing and welcoming, she had to bear the burden of her choice alone. If he had only cared he would have stormed at her, and like the Elizabethan flirt, she would have answered his upbraidings with a smile. As it was, the smile was his, not hers. Almost, to win his upbraidings, she would have sacrificed the goodly heritage—all the honour and the secular glory of it.

Perhaps by now, for she had wandered far, the rest of them might have dispersed, her grandmother to the seclusion of her own rooms, Uncle Philip to the library, and Raymond to the lake, and she let herself into the house by the front door and passed into the hall. The great Holbein above the chimney piece smiled at her with Colin's indifferent lips; the faded parchment was but a blur in the dark frame, and she went

through into the long gallery which faced the garden front. All seemed still outside, and after waiting a moment in the entrance, she stepped on to the terrace, and there they were still; her grandmother alert and vigilant, Philip beside her, and Raymond dozing in his chair, with his illustrated paper fallen from his knee. What ailed them all that they waited like this; above all, what ailed her, that she cared whether they waited or not?

Soundless though she hoped her first footfalls on the terrace had been, they were sufficient to rouse Raymond. He sat up, his sleepiness all dispersed.

"Hullo, Vi!" he said. "Where have you been?"

"Just for a stroll," said she.

"Why didn't you tell me? I would have come with you."

Suddenly old Lady Yardley rose, and pointed down on to the road across the marsh.

"Colin is coming," she said. "There's his motor."

Certainly a mile away there was, to Violet's young eyes, an infinitesimal speck on the white riband, but to the dimness of the old, that must surely have been invisible. Lord Yardley, following the direction of her hand, could see nothing.

"No, mother, there's nothing to be seen yet," he said, proving that he, too, was absorbed in this unaccountable business of waiting for Colin.

"But I am right," she said. "You will see that I am right. I must go to the front door to welcome him."

She let the stick, without which she never moved, slide from her hand, and with firm step and upright carriage, walked superbly down the terrace to the door of the gallery.

“He is coming home,” she cried. “He is coming for his bride, and there will be another marriage at Stanier. Let the great glass doors be opened; they have not been opened for the family since I came here sixty years ago. They were never opened for my poor son Philip. I will open them, if no one else will. I am strong to-night.”

Philip moved to her side.

“No; it’s Raymond you are thinking of, mother,” he said. “They will be opened in October. You shall see them opened then.”

She paused, some shade of doubt and anxiety dimming this sudden brightness, and laid her hand on her son’s shoulder.

“Raymond?” she said. “Yes, of course, I was thinking of Raymond. Raymond and Violet. But to please me, my dear, will you not open them now for Colin? Colin has been so long away, it is as if a bridegroom came when Colin comes. We are only ourselves here; the Staniers may do what they like in their own house, may they not? I should love to have the glass doors open for Colin’s return.”

The speck she had seen or divined on the road had come very swiftly nearer, and now it could be seen that some white waving came from it.

“I believe it is Colin, after all,” said Raymond. “How could she have seen?”

Old Lady Yardley turned a grave glance of displeasure on him.

“Do not interrupt me when I am talking to your father,” she said. “The glass doors, Philip.”

Raymond with a smile, half-indulgent of senile whims, half-protesting, turned to the girl.

“Glass doors, indeed,” he said. “The next glass doors are for us, eh, Violet?”

Surely some spell had seized them all. Violet found herself waiting as tensely as her grandmother for Philip’s reply. She was hardly conscious of Raymond’s hand stealing into hers; all hung on her uncle’s answer. And he, as if he, too, were under the spell, turned furiously on Raymond.

“The glass doors are opened when I please,” he said. “Your turn will come to give orders here, Raymond, but while I am at Stanier I am master. Once for all understand that.”

He turned to his mother again.

“Yes, dear mother,” he said, “you and I will go and open them.”

Inside the house no less than among the watchers on the terrace the intelligence that Colin was at hand had curiously spread. Footmen were in the hall already, and the major-domo was standing at the entrance door, which he had thrown open, and through which poured a tide of hot air from the baking gravel of the courtyard. Exactly opposite were the double glass doors, Venetian in workmanship, and heavily decorated with wreaths and garlands of coloured glass. The bolts and handles and hinges were of silver, and old Lady Yardley, crippled and limping no longer, moved quickly across to them, and unloosing them, threw them open. Inside was the staircase of cedar wood, carved by Gibbons, which led up to the main corridor, opposite the door that gave entrance to the suite of rooms occupied by the eldest son and his wife.

What strange fancy possessed her brain none knew, and why Philip allowed and even helped her in the accomplishment of her desire was as obscure to him as to the

others, but with her he pushed the doors back and the sweet odour of the cedar wood, confined there for the last sixty years, flowed out like the scent of some ancient vintage. Then, even as the crunching of the motor on the gravel outside was heard, stopping abruptly as the car drew up at the door, she swept across to the entrance.

Already Colin stood in the doorway. For coolness he had travelled bareheaded and the gold of his hair, tossed this way and that, made a shining aureole round his head. His face, tanned by the southern suns, was dark as bronze below it, and from that ruddy-brown his eyes, turquoise blue, gleamed like stars. He was more like some lordly incarnation of life and sunlight and spring-splendour than a handsome boy, complete and individual; a presence of wonder and enchantment stood there.... Then, swift as a sword-stroke, the spell which had held them all was broken; it was but Colin, dusty and hot from his journey, and jubilant with his return.

"Granny darling!" he said, kissing her. "How lovely of you to come and meet me like this. Father! Ever so many thanks for sending the motor for me. Ah, and there are Violet and Raymond. Raymond, be nice to me; let me kiss you, for, though we're grown up, we're brothers. And Violet; I want a kiss from Violet, too. She mustn't grudge me that.... What! The glass doors open. Ah! of course, in honour of the betrothal. Raymond, you lucky fellow, how I hate you. But I thought that was only done when the bridegroom brought his bride home."

"A whim of your grandmother's," said Philip hastily, disowning apparently his share in it.

Instantly Colin was by the old lady's side again.

“Granny, how nice of you!” he said. “But you’ve got to find me a bride first before I go up those stairs. And even then, it’s only the eldest son who may, isn’t it? But it was nice of you to open the doors because I was coming home.”

He had kissed Raymond lightly on the cheek, and Violet no less lightly, and both in their separate and sundered fashions were burning at it, Raymond in some smouldering fury at what he knew was Colin’s falseness, Violet with the hot searing iron of his utter indifference; and then light as foam and iridescent as a sunlit bubble of the same, he was back with his father again, leaving them as in some hot desert place. And dinner must now be put off, growled Raymond to himself, because Colin wanted to have a bathe first and wash off the dust and dryness of his journey, and his father would stroll down after him and bring his towel, so that he might run down at once without going upstairs.

Colin had come home, it appeared, with the tactics that were to compass his strategy rehearsed and ready. Never had his charm been of so sunny and magical a quality, and, by contrast, never had Raymond appeared more uncouth and bucolic. But Raymond now, so ran his father’s unspoken comment on the situation, had an ugly weapon in his hand, under the blows of which Colin winced and started, for more than ever he was prodigal of those little touches and caresses which he showered on Violet. Philip could not blame him for it; it was no more than natural that a young man, engaged and enamoured, should use the light license of a lover; indeed, it would have been unnatural if he had not done so.

Often and often, ten times in the evening, Philip would see Colin take himself in hand and steadfastly avert his eyes from

the corner where Raymond and Violet sat. But ever and again that curious habit of self-torture in lovers whom fate has not favoured would assert itself, and his eyes would creep back to them, and seeing Raymond in some loverlike posture, recall themselves. And as often the sweetness of his temper, and his natural gaiety, would reassert its ray, and the usual light nonsense, the frequent laugh, flowed from him. Exquisite, too, was his tact with Violet; he recognised, it was clear, that their old boy-and-girl intimacy must, in these changed conditions, be banished. He could no longer go away with her alone to spend the morning between tennis-court and bathing pool, or with his arm round her neck, stroll off with a joint book to read reclined in the shade. Not only would that put Raymond into a false position (he, the enamoured, the betrothed) but, so argued the most pitiless logic of which his father was capable, that resumption of physical intimacy, as between boy and boy, would be a tearing of Colin's very heart-strings not only for himself but for her also. In such sort of intimacy Colin, with his brisk blood and ardent lust of living, could scarcely help betraying himself, and surely then, Violet, little though she might care for Raymond, would see her pool of tranquil acceptance shattered by this plunge of a stone into the centre of it. Her liking for Colin was deep, and she would not fail to see that for her he had even profounder depths. A light would shine in those drowned caves, and Colin, as wise as he was tender, seemed to shew his wisdom by keeping on the surface with Violet, and only shining on her tranquillity, never breaking it.

Sometimes—so thought his father—he shewed her a face which, in virtue of their past intimacy, was almost too gaily indifferent; she would attempt some perfectly trivial exhibition of their old relations, perch herself on the arm of

his chair, and with the contrast of his bronzed face and golden hair, tell him that he must gild his face like the grooms in "Macbeth" or dye his hair. But on the instant he would be alert and spring up, leaving her there, for the need of a cigarette or a match. He allowed her not the most outside chance of resuming ordinary cousinly relations with him. His motive was sound enough; loving her he mistrusted himself. She was sealed to be his brother's wife, and he must not trust himself within sight of the notice to trespassers. It was better to make himself a stranger to her than to run the risk of betraying himself. So, at least, it struck an outsider to Colin's consciousness.

He avoided, then, all privacy with Violet, and no less carefully he avoided privacy with Raymond. If the three men were together and his father left them, Colin would be sure to follow him, and if they all three sat up together in the smoking-room, Colin would anticipate the signal of a silence or of his father's yawning or observation of the clock, to go to bed himself. Here, again, he almost overdid the part, for as the first week after his return went by, Philip, firmly determined to be just to Raymond, thought he saw in him some kind of brotherly affection for Colin, which the latter either missed or intentionally failed to respond to. There could be no harm in a seasonable word, and when, one morning Raymond, after half a dozen chill responses from his brother, had left him and Colin together, Philip thought that the seasonable word was no less than Raymond's due. But the seasonable word had to be preceded by sympathy.

He sat down in the window seat by Colin.

"Well?" he said.

Those blue eyes, gay but veiled by suffering, answered him.

“It’s damned hard on you, Colin,” he said. “Are you getting used to it, old boy?”

Colin, with one of those inimitable instinctive movements, laid his hand on his father’s shoulder.

“No, not a bit,” he said. “But I’ve got to. I can’t go on like this. I must feel friendly to Raymond and Violet. I must manage to rejoice in their happiness. Got any prescription for me, father? I’ll take it, whatever it is. Lord! How happy I used to be.”

All that Philip had missed in Rosina was here now; the tender, subtle mind, which should have been the complement of her beauty. His sympathy was up in arms for this beloved child of hers, and his sense of fairness elsewhere.

“Raymond’s doing his best, Colin,” he said. “I wonder....” and he paused.

“You can say nothing that will hurt me, father,” said Colin. “Go on.”

“Well, I wonder if you’re responding to that. To put it frankly, whenever he makes any approach to you, you snub him.”

Colin lifted his head.

“Snub him?” he said. “How on earth can I snub Raymond? He’s got everything. I might as well snub God.”

This was a new aspect.

“I can’t do otherwise, father,” said the boy. “I can only just behave decently to Raymond in public and avoid him in private. Don’t bother about Raymond. Raymond hates me, and if I gave him any opportunity, he would merely gloat

over me. I can't behave differently to him; I'm doing the best I can. If you aren't satisfied with me, I'll go away again till it's all over and irrevocable. Perhaps you would allow me to go back to Capri."

Philip's heart yearned to him. "I wish I could help you," he said.

"You do help me. But let's leave Raymond out of the question. There's a matter that bothers me much more, and that's Violet. If I let myself go at all, I don't know where I should be. What am I to do about her? Am I right, do you think, in the way I'm behaving? We were chums—then she became to me, as I told you, so much more than a chum. I can't get back on to the old footing with her; it would hurt too much. And she's hurt that I don't. I can see that. I think I was wrong to come back here at all, and yet how lovely it was! You all seemed pleased to see me—all but Raymond—and I didn't guess the bitterness of it."

It was inevitable that Philip should recall his surprise at Violet's passivity. Colin, whose heart he knew, had been, in all outward appearance, just as passive, and he could not help wondering whether that passivity of Violet's cloaked a tumult as profound as Colin's. The suspicion had blinked at him before, like some flash of distant lightning; now it was a little more vivid. If that were true, if from that quarter a storm were coming up, better a thousand times that it should come now than later. Tragic, indeed, would it be if, after she had married Raymond, it burst upon them all.... But he had nothing approaching evidence on the subject; it might well be that his wish that Violet could have loved Colin set his imagination to work on what had really no existence outside his own brain.

“I hate seeing you suffer, Colin,” he said, “and if you want to go back to Capri, of course you may. But you’ve got to get used to it some time, unless you mean to banish yourself from Stanier altogether. Don’t do that.”

Colin pressed his father’s arm.

“I’ll do better, father,” he said. “I’ll begin at once. Where’s Violet?”

It was in pursuance of this resolve, it must be supposed, that when Lady Yardley’s rubber of whist was over that night, Colin moved across to the open door on to the terrace where Violet was standing. In some spasm of impatience at Raymond’s touch she had just got up from the sofa where he had planted himself close to her, leaving him with an expression, half offended, half merely hungry....

“Five minutes stroll outside, Vi?” he asked.

“It’s rather late,” she said.

“Right,” said Colin cheerfully, and went forth alone, whistling into the darkness.

The moment he had gone Violet regretted not having gone too. Since Colin’s return she had not had a half-hour all told alone with him, and the tension of his entire indifference to her was becoming intolerable. She had not dreamed that he would cut himself off from her with this hideous completeness, nor yet how much she longed for the renewal of the old intimacy. Bitterest of all was the fact that she meant nothing to him, for he had never been more light-heartedly gay. Where Philip, knowing what he did, saw strained and heroic effort, she saw only the contemptuous ignoring of herself and Raymond.... And now, with that same craving for self-torture that is an obsession to the luckless in love, when Colin made his first advance to her again, she

must needs reject it. There was Raymond watching her, and revolt against that hungry look of his decided her. She stepped out on to the terrace.

Colin had come to the far end of it; his whistling directed her; and now in the strong starlight, she could see the glimmer of his shirt-front. She felt her knees trembling and hid the reason out of sight as she strolled, as unconcernedly as she could, towards him. Soon he perceived her and his whistling stopped.

“Hullo, Vi,” he said, “so you’ve come out after all. That’s ripping.”

They were close to each other now, and bright was the stream of starlight on him.

“Managed to tear yourself away from Raymond for five minutes?” he asked. “I was beginning to think I should never have a word with you again.”

“That’s your fault,” said she. “You have been a brute all this last week.”

“I? A brute?” said Colin. “What do you mean? I thought I had been conducting myself superbly....”

He looked up quickly at the oblong of light that flowed from the open door into the gallery, and saw that it framed a shadow.

“Hullo, there’s Raymond,” he said, “looking after us. Here we are, Raymond. Come and join us.”

He heard Violet’s clicked tongue of impatience.

“I had to say that,” he whispered. “He won’t come.”

Colin’s psychology was correct enough; Raymond had not meant to be seen, he only meant to see. Besides he had a

grievance against Violet for her impatience just now; he was annoyed with her.

"No, thanks," he said, "I'm going to the smoking-room."

"That's to punish you, Vi," said Colin with a tremble of laughter in his voice. "But perhaps we had better go in. You mustn't vex him."

Nothing could have been better calculated.

"Is one of the conditions of my engagement that I mustn't speak to you?" she asked. "Certainly it seems like it."

Colin tucked his arm into Violet's.

"Well, we'll break it for once," he said. "Now you're vexed with me. That's very unreasonable of you. You made your choice with your eyes open. You've chosen Raymond and Stanier. It stands to reason we can't always be together. You can't have Raymond and Stanier and me. It was your own doing. And I thought everything was going so well. Whenever I look up I see you and him holding hands, or else he's kissing the back of your neck."

"Ah!" said Violet with a little shiver.

"You've got to get used to it, Vi," said he. "You've got to pay for having Stanier. Isn't it worth it?"

He heard her take a quick breath; her control was swaying like a curtain in the wind.

"Oh, don't be such a brute to me, Colin," she said. "I hadn't realised that—that you would desert me like this."

Colin just passed his tongue over his lips.

"Oh, that doesn't mean anything to you," he said.

"But it does, it does," said she.

They were back now in the shadow of the yew-hedge, where one night she had kissed him. As he thought of that he knew that she was thinking of it too.

“Give Raymond up,” he said. “Let him and Stanier go. It will be the wisest thing you can do.”

He paused a moment, and all the witchery of the night came to the reinforcement of his charm.

“I want you, Vi,” he said. “Promise me. Give me a kiss and seal it.”

For one second she wavered, and then drew back from him.

“No, I can’t do that,” she said. “I’ll give you a kiss, but it seals no promise.”

“Kiss me then,” said he, now confident.

There was no mistaking the way in which she surrendered to him. She stood enfolded by him, lambent and burning. She knew herself to be bitterly unwise, but for the moment the sweetness was worth all the waters of Marah that should inundate her.

“Ah, you darling, never mind your promise,” said he. “I shall have that later. Just now it’s enough that you should hate Raymond and love me.”

She buried her face on his shoulder.

“Colin, Colin, what am I to do?” she whispered.

He could see well that, though her heart was his, the idea of giving up Stanier still strove with her. To-night she might consent to marry him; to-morrow that passion for possession might lay hands on her again. She was bruised but not broken, and instantly he made up his mind to tell her the secret of his mother’s letter and of the entry at the Consulate.

That would clinch it for ever. When she knew that by giving up Raymond and Stanier together, she retained just all she wanted out of her contract and gained her heart's desire as well——

"What are you to do?" he said. "You are to do exactly what you are doing. You're to cling to me, and trust me. Ah, you're entrancing! But I've got something to tell you, Vi, something stupendous. We must go in; I can't tell you here, for not even the trees nor the terrace must know, though it concerns them."

"But, Colin, about Raymond. I can't be sure...."

He pressed her to him, thrilled all through at this ebb and flow of her emotional struggle.

"You've finished with Raymond, I tell you," he said. "You've given him up and you've given up Stanier, haven't you; you've given up everything?"

Some diabolical love of cruelty for its own sake; of torturing her by prolonging the decision which pulled at her this way and that, possessed him.

"It's a proud hour for me, Vi," he said. "I love Stanier as madly as you do, and you've given it up for me. I adore you for doing that; you'll never repent it. I just hug these moments, though there must come an end to them. Let us go in, or Raymond will be looking for us again. Go straight to your room. I shall come there in five minutes, for there's something I must tell you to-night. I must just have one look at Raymond first. That's for my own satisfaction."

Colin could not forego that look at Raymond. He knew how he should find him, prospering with a glass of whisky, disposed, as his father had said, to be brotherly, having all the winning cards in his hand. Stanier would be his, and, before

that, Violet would be his, and Colin might be allowed, if he were very amiable, to spend a week here occasionally when Raymond came to his throne, just as now he had been allowed a starlit stroll with Violet. These were indulgences that would not be noticed by his plenitude, morsels let fall from the abundant feast. The life only of one man, already old, lay between him and the full consummation; already his foot was on the steps where the throne was set. Just one glance then at victorious Raymond....

Raymond fulfilled the highest expectations. Whisky had made him magnanimous; he was pleased to have granted Colin that little starlit stroll with Violet, it was a crumb from the master's table. His heavy face wore a look of great complacency as his brother entered.

"Hullo, Colin," he said. "Finished making love to Violet?"

Colin grinned. "You old brute!" he said. "Not content with having everything yourself, you must mock me for my beggary. You lucky fellow."

He poured himself out a drink and sat down.

"Raymond, I had no idea how devoted Violet was to you till to-night," he said. "I think she's afraid to let herself go, to shew it too much."

The grossness of Raymond, his animal proprietorship, was never more apparent. It was enough for him to desire her.

"Oh, Vi's all right," he said.

Colin felt his ribs a-quiver with the spasm of his suppressed laughter. He distrusted his power of control if he subjected himself to further temptation.

"I'm off to bed," he said. "I just looked in to envy you."

"Where's Vi?" asked Raymond.

Colin bethought himself that he did not want Raymond knocking at Violet's door for a good-night kiss.

"Oh, she went upstairs half an hour ago," he said. "She told me she was awfully sleepy. In fact, she soon got tired of me."

He drank in a final impression of Raymond's satisfied face and went upstairs, going first to his room, where from his locked despatch-case he took the two letters which Salvatore had given him, and which now bore the dates of March 17 and March 31. Then, passing down the long corridor, he came to her room; the door was ajar, and he rapped softly and then entered.

Violet, in anticipation of his coming, had sent her maid away, and was brushing her hair, golden as Colin's own, before her glass. Often and often in the days of their intimacy had he come in for a talk during this ritual; on dry, frosty nights Violet would put out her light, and pale flashes of electricity and cracklings and sparks would follow the progress of her brush. Her hair would float up from her head and cling to Colin's fingers as sea-weed that had lain unexpanded on the shore spreads out, floating and undulating, in the return of the tide. To-night it lay thick and unstirred, rippling for a moment under her brush, and then subsiding again into a tranquil sheet of gold.

She saw him enter in the field of her mirror and heard the click of the key as he turned it.

"Just in case Raymond takes it into his head to say good-night to you," he said.

She had risen from her chair and stood opposite to him.

"What have you got to tell me, Colin?" she said.

He looked at her a moment with parted lips and sparkling eyes. Each seemed the perfect complement of the other; together they formed one peerless embodiment of the glory of mankind. Through them both there passed some quiver of irresistible attraction, and, as two globules of quick-silver roll into one, so that each is merged and coalesced in the other, so with arms interlaced and faces joined, they stood there, two no longer. Even Colin's hatred for Raymond flickered for that moment and was nearly extinguished since for Violet he existed no more. Then the evil flame burned up again, and he loosed Violet's arms from round his neck.

"Now you're to sit and listen to me," he said. "What I have got to tell you will take no time at all."

He opened the envelope which he had brought with him, and drew out the two letters. He had decided not to tell Violet any more than what, when his father was dead, all the world would know.

"Salvatore Viagi gave me these," he said. "He is my mother's brother, you know, and I saw him at Capri. They were written by my mother to him, and announce the birth of Raymond and me and her marriage to my father. Take them, Vi, look at the dates and read them in order."

She gave him one quick glance, took them from him, read them through and gave them back to him. Then in dead silence she got up and stood close to him.

"I see," she said. "On Uncle Philip's death, Stanier, everything will be mine. According to those letters, that is."

He nodded. "Yes, on the one condition, of course, that you and I are wife and husband."

She looked at him again with a smile breaking through her gravity.

“I promised that before I knew,” she said. “And now that I know that Stanier will be mine, instead of believing that my choice forfeited it, it isn’t very likely that I shall change my mind.”

“There’s something else, you know, too,” he said. “You’re marrying....”

She interrupted. “I’m marrying Colin,” she said. “But as regard you. Is it horrible for you? Ah.... I’ve been thinking of myself only. Stanier and myself.”

She moved away from him and walked to the end of the room, where, pushing the blind aside, she looked out on to the terrace where they had stood this evening. As clearly as if she spoke her thoughts aloud, Colin knew what was the debate within her. It lasted but a moment.

“Colin, if—if you hate it,” she said, “tear that letter up. I’ve got you, and I would sooner lose Stanier than let you be hurt. Tear it up! Let Raymond have Stanier so long as I don’t go with it.... Oh, my dear, is it the same me, who so few weeks ago chose Raymond, and who so few hours ago wondered if I could give up Stanier, even though to get it implied marrying him? And now, nothing whatever matters but you.”

Instantly Colin felt within himself that irritation which love invariably produced in him. Just so had his father’s affection, except in so far as it was fruitful of material benefits, fatigued and annoyed him, and this proposal of Violet’s, under the same monstrous impulsion, promised, in so far from being fruitful, to prove itself some scorching or freezing wind which would wither and blast all that he most desired. But, bridling his irritation, he laughed.

“That wouldn’t suit me at all,” he said, “and besides, Vi, how about honour? Stanier will be legally and rightfully yours. How on earth could I consent to the suppression of this? But lest you should think me too much of an angel—father asked me one day how my wings were getting on—I tell you quite frankly that it will be sweet as honey to send Raymond packing. My adoring you doesn’t prevent my hating him. And as for what is called irregularity in birth, who on earth cares? I don’t. I’m a Stanier all right. Look at half the dukes in England, where do they spring from? Actresses, flower-girls, the light loves of disreputable kings. Who cares? And, besides, my case is different: my father married my mother.”

Up and down his face her eyes travelled, seeing if she could detect anywhere a trace of reluctance, and searched in vain.

“Are you quite sure, Colin?” she asked.

“Absolutely. There’s no question about it.”

Once more she held him close to her.

“Oh, it’s too much,” she whispered. “You and Stanier both mine. My heart won’t hold it all.”

“Hearts are wonderfully elastic,” said he. “One’s heart holds everything it desires, if only it can get it. Now there’s a little more to tell you.”

“Yes? Come and sit here. Tell me.”

She drew him down on to the sofa beside her.

“Well, my uncle sent me these letters,” said he, “but, naturally, they won’t be enough by themselves. It was necessary to find out what was the entry in the register of their marriage. My father had told me where it took place, at

the British Consulate in Naples, and I got the Consul to let me see the register. I told him I wanted to make a copy of it. I saw it. The marriage apparently took place not on the 31st of March, but on the 1st. But then I looked more closely, and saw that there had been an erasure. In front of the '1' there had been another figure. But whoever had made that erasure had not done it quite carefully enough. It was possible to see that a '3' had been scratched out. The date as originally written was '31' not '1.' That tallies with the date on my mother's letter."

Colin's voice took on an expression of tenderness, incredibly sweet.

"Vi, darling," he said, "you must try to forgive my father, if it was he who made or caused to be made that erasure which might so easily have passed unnoticed, as indeed it did, for when the Consul prepared my copy with the original he saw nothing of it; word by word he went over the two together. You must forgive him, though it was a wicked and a terrible fraud that my father—I suppose—practised, for unless he had other children, he was robbing you of all that was rightfully yours.

"I think the reconstruction of it is easy enough. My mother died, and he was determined that his son, one of them, should succeed. I imagine he made, or procured the making, of that erasure after my mother's death. He had meant to marry her, indeed he did marry her, and I think he must have desired to repair the wrong, the bitter wrong, he did her in the person of her children. I've got something to forgive him, too, and willingly I do that. We must both forgive him, Vi. I the bastard, and you the heiress of Stanier."

Violet would have forgiven Satan himself for all the evil wrought on the face of the earth from the day when first he set foot in Paradise.

"Oh, Colin, yes," she said. "Freely, freely!"

"That's sweet of you. That is a great weight off my mind. And you'll make your forgiveness effective, Vi?"

She did not grasp this.

"In what way?" she asked.

"I mean that you won't want to make an exposure of this now," said he. "I should like my father never to know that I have found out what he did. I should like him to die thinking that Raymond will succeed him, and that his fraud is undiscovered. Of course, you would be within your rights if you insisted on being established as the heiress to Stanier now. There are certain revenues, certain properties always made over to the heir on coming of age, and Raymond and I come of age in a few months. Can you let Raymond enjoy them for my father's sake? He has always been amazingly good to me."

"Oh, Colin, what a question!" she said. "What do you take me for? Would that be forgiveness?"

"That's settled then; bless you for that. The only objection is that Raymond scores for the present, but that can't be helped. And there's just one thing more. About—about what has happened between us. Shall I tell my father to-morrow? Then we can settle how Raymond is to be told."

"Oh, Colin, to-morrow?" said she. "So soon?"

He laughed. "To-night if you like," he said, "though it's rather late. Of course, if you want to put it off, and have Raymond nosing about you still like a ferret...."

“Don’t!”

“He shan’t then. Now I must go. One kiss, Vi.”

She clung to him. “I’m frightened of Raymond,” she said. “What will he do?”

“Howl like a wounded bear, I suppose. Hullo!”

There was the sound of knocking at the door, and Raymond’s voice:

“Violet,” he said. “May I come in; just to say good-night?”

Colin frowned. “Been listening, probably,” he whispered, “and heard voices.”

Without pause he went to the door, and turned the key and handle together.

“Come in, Raymond,” he said as he opened it. “Violet’s been talking of nothing but you. So here we all are, bride and bridegroom and best man. Let’s have one cigarette before we all go to bed.”

Raymond wore his most savage look. “I thought you had gone to bed,” he said, “and I thought you said Violet had gone to bed half an hour before that?”

“Oh, Raymond, don’t be vexed,” said Colin. “Haven’t you got everything?”

In just such a voice, dexterously convincing, had he pleaded with Violet that she should forgive his father....

CHAPTER VII

Philip was waiting in his library for Raymond’s entry, wanting to feel sorry for him, but as often as he could darken his mind behind that cloud, the edges of it grew dazzlingly bright with the thought of Colin, and the sun re-emerging warmed and delighted him....

Yet he was sorry for Raymond, and presently he would express his sympathy, coldly and correctly, he was afraid, with regret and truism and paternal platitudes; but duty would dictate his sentiments. At the most he could not hope for more than to give the boy the impression he was sorry, and conceal from him his immensurable pleasure in the news Colin had made known to him. All these weeks, ever since, on that morning in Capri, he had learned of Raymond's engagement and Colin's desire, he had never been free from heartache, and his favourite's manliness, his refusal to be embittered, his efforts with himself, gaily heroic, had but rendered those pangs the more poignant. And in the hour of his joy Colin had shewn just the same marvellous quickness of sympathy for Raymond's sorrow, as, when Philip had first told him of the engagement, he had shewn for Raymond's happiness.

"I would have given anything to spare Raymond this, father," he had said. "As you know, I kept all I felt to myself. I didn't let Violet see how miserable I was, and how I wanted her. And then last night—it was like some earthquake within. Everything toppled and fell; Vi and I were left clinging to each other."

After Colin, Philip had seen Violet, and she, too, had spoken to him with a simplicity and candour.... She had already begun to love Colin, she thought, before she accepted Raymond, but how she loved Stanier. She had been worldly, ambitious, stifling the first faint calls of her heart, thinking, as many a girl thought, whose nature is not yet wholly awake, that Raymond would "do," as regards herself, and "do" magnificently as regards her longing for all that being mistress of Stanier meant to her. Then came Colin's return

from Italy, and the whisper of her heart grew louder. She could not help contrasting her lover with her friend, and in that new light Raymond's attentions to her, his caresses, his air—she must confess—of proprietorship grew odious and insufferable. And then, just as Colin had said, came the earthquake. In that disruption, all that from the worldly point of view seemed so precious, turned to dross.

At that point she hesitated a moment, and Philip had found himself recording how like she was to Colin. With just that triumphant glow of happiness with which he had said: "Raymond has got Stanier, father, Violet and I have got each other," so Violet now, after her momentary hesitation, spoke to him.

"Stanier, for which I longed, Uncle Philip, doesn't exist for me any more. How could I weigh it against Colin?"

Colin's happiness ... nothing could dim that sunshine for his father, and the sunshine was not only of to-day, it was the sunshine that had shone on him and Rosina more than twenty years ago. His heart melted with the love that through Colin reacted on her. Surely she must rejoice at the boy's happiness to-day! Raymond, to be sure, was the fruit of her body also, but it was through Colin that she lived, he was the memory and the gracious image of her beauty.

Raymond entered, snapping the golden thread.

"You wanted to see me, father," he said.

Philip had been attempting to drill himself into a sympathetic bearing towards his son, but Raymond's actual presence here in succession to Colin and Violet, brought sheer helplessness. For the brightness and beam of the others there was this solid self-sufficiency. It seemed as if a crime had been averted in the transference of the girl to another

bridegroom. What unnatural union would have been made by this mating of her! His heart sang; it were vain to try to throttle it into silence.

"Yes, Raymond; sit down," said he, indicating a place on the sofa where he sat.

"Oh, thanks, it doesn't matter. I'll stand," said Raymond.

"I've got bad news for you," said Philip. "You must brace yourself to it."

"Let's have it," said Raymond.

Philip felt his sympathy slipping from him. He wanted chiefly to get it over; there was no use in attempting to lead up to it.

"It concerns you and Violet," he said.

A savage look as of a hungry dog from whom his dinner is being snatched, came across Raymond's face.

"Well?" he said.

"She wished me to tell you that she can't marry you," said his father. "She asks you to set her free from her engagement."

The savagery of that sullen face grew blacker. "I don't accept that from you," he said. "If it's true, Violet will have to tell me herself."

Philip made a great effort with himself. "It is true," he said, "and I want at once to tell you that I'm very sorry for you. But it would have been very painful for her to tell you, and it was I who suggested that I should break her decision to you. I hope you won't insist on having it from her."

"She has got to tell me," said Raymond. "And is that all, father? If so, I'll go to her at once."

"No, there's more," said he.

Raymond's face went suddenly white; his mouth twitched, he presented a mask of hatred.

"And so it's Colin who has got to tell me the rest," he said. "Is that it?"

"She is going to marry Colin."

For a moment Raymond stood perfectly still; just his hands were moving; knitted together they made the action of squeezing something. Once it seemed that he tried to speak, but no word came; only the teeth shewed in his mouth.

"Colin has got to tell me then," he said. "I will see Colin first."

Philip got up and laid a hand of authority on Raymond's shoulder. The boy, for all his quietness, seemed beside himself with some pent-up fury all the more dangerous for its suppression.

"You must not see either of them in the state you are in now," he said.

"That's my affair," said Raymond.

"It's mine, too. You're my son and so is Colin. You must wait till you've got more used to what has happened. And you must remember this, that a few weeks ago Colin was in the same case as you are now. He loved Violet, and it was I then, out in Capri, who told him that Violet was going to marry you. And he took it like a man, like the generous fellow he is. His first words were: 'By Jove, Raymond will be happy!' I shall never forget that, and you mustn't either, Raymond."

Raymond gave a dry snap of a laugh.

"I won't," he said. "That's just what Colin would say. Perfect character, isn't he? Only last night I found him

talking to Violet in her bedroom. I wasn't pleased, and he begged me not to be vexed, as I had got everything. He had taken Violet from me when he said that, or if not, he came back when Violet was in bed, and got engaged to her then. Engaged!"

"Now stop that, Raymond," said his father.

"Very good. He was already engaged to her when he told me I had got everything. You don't understand Colin. He hates more than he loves. He has hated me all my life. 'By Jove, Raymond will be happy!' I'll be even with Colin some day. Now I'm going to see him. Or shall I say: 'By Jove, Colin will be happy?' Then you'll consider me a generous fellow."

Once again Philip tried to put himself in Raymond's place, and made allowance for his bitter blackness. His hand went on to the boy's shoulder again, with less of authority and more of attempted affection.

"Raymond, you must do better than this," he said. "You would be very unwise to see Colin and Violet just now, but if you insist on doing so, you shall see them in my presence. I can't trust you, in the mood you're in, not to be violent, not to say or do something which you would bitterly repent, and which they would find it hard to forgive. And if, which I deny, Colin has always hated you, what about yourself?"

Both of them now were on bed-rock. By implication, by admission, by denial even, they had got down to the hatred that, like a vein of murderous gold, ran through the very foundation of the brothers' existence. Who knew what struggle might have taken place, what prenatal wrestling in the very womb of life, of which the present antagonism was but a sequel, logical and inevitable!

Even as Philip spoke, he half-realised the futility of bringing argument to bear on Raymond's nature, for this hatred sprang from some ineradicable instinct, an iron law on which intelligence and reason could but perch like a settling fly. He could deny that Colin hated his brother, he could urge Raymond to show himself as generous as he believed Colin to have been, but nothing that he could say, no persuasion, no authority could mitigate this fraternal hostility. And even while he denied Colin's animosity, with the evidence he had already brought forward to back it, he found himself wondering if at heart Colin could feel the generosity he had expressed, or whether it was not a mere superficial good-nature, mingled with contempt perhaps, that had given voice to it.

Raymond had ceased from the clutching and squeezing of his hands.

"You don't know what Colin is," he said, "and I know it is no use trying to convince you. I shan't try. You judge by what you see of him and me, and you put me down for a black-hearted, sullen fellow, and he's your heart's darling."

"You've got no right to say that," said Philip.

"But can I help knowing it, father?" asked he.

Philip felt that his very will-power was in abeyance; he could not even want to readjust the places which his two sons held in his heart, or, rather, to find place in his heart for the son who had never been installed there yet. And there would be no use in "wanting," even if he could accomplish that. Colin held every door of his heart, and with a grudging sense of justice towards Raymond, he was aware that Colin would grant no admittance to his brother. Or was that conviction only the echo of his own instinct that he wanted no one but

Colin there? He had no love to spare for Raymond. Such spring of it as bubbled in him must fall into Colin's cup, the cup that never could be filled.

How could he but contrast the two? Here was Raymond, sullen in his defeat, attempting (and with unwelcome success) to put his father in the wrong, jealous of the joy that had come to Colin, insisting, Shylock-like, on such revenge as was in his power, the pound of flesh which would be his, in making a scene with the girl who had chosen as her heart bade her, and the boy who was her choice. On the other side was Colin, who, when faced with an identical situation, had accepted his ill-luck with a wave of welcome for the more fortunate. And Raymond would have it that that splendid banner was but a false flag, under cover of whose whiteness a treacherous attack might be made.

"I don't know that we need pursue that," said Philip. "Your feelings are outside my control, but what is in my control is to be just to you in spite of them. I have tried to tell you with all possible sympathy of——"

"Of Violet's jilting me," interrupted Raymond. "And you have clearly shewn me, father, your sympathy with Colin's happiness."

Philip felt every nerve jarring. "I am not responsible for your interpretations of myself," he said, "nor do I accept them. If your design is to be intolerably offensive to me, you must work out your design somewhere else. I am not going to have you stop here in order to amuse yourself with being rude to me, and spoiling the happiness of others——"

"Ah! Just so!" said Raymond. "Colin."

Philip was exasperated beyond endurance.

“Quite right,” he said. “I am not going to have you spoiling Colin’s happiness. And Violet’s. I should have suggested you leaving Stanier for the present for your own sake, if you had allowed me to show sympathy for you. As you do not, I suggest that you should do so for Colin’s sake. You may go to St. James’s Square if you like, and if you can manage to behave decently, you may stop on there when we come up next week. But that depends on yourself. Now if you want to see Violet and your brother you may, but you will see them here in my presence. I will send for them now, if that is your wish. When you have seen them you shall go. Well?”

Suddenly the idea of leaving Colin and Violet here became insupportable to Raymond. He *had* to see them as lovers, and hate them for it: his hate must be fed with the sight of them.

“Must I go, father?” he said.

“Yes; you have forced me to be harsh with you. It was not my intention. Now do you want to see them?”

Raymond hesitated: if Colin could be cunning, he could be cunning too. “I should like to see them both,” he said.

Philip rang the bell, and in the pause before they came, Raymond went across to the window-seat, and sat there with face averted, making no sign, and in the silence Philip reviewed what he had done. He had no wish, as he had said, to be harsh to Raymond, but what possible gain to any one was his remaining here? He would be a misery to himself, and no entertainment to others; and yet the boy wanted to stop, thinking perhaps that thus he would be sooner able to accept the position. It was impossible to grudge him any feasible alleviation of the blow that, so far from stunning him, had awakened all that was worst in him. Much must depend on his behaviour now to Colin and Violet.

They entered together. Colin looked first at his father; then, without pause, seeing the huddled figure in the window-seat, went straight to Raymond. All else, Violet even, was forgotten.

He laid his hand on Raymond's shoulder. "Oh, Raymond," he said, "we're brutes. I know that."

Philip thought he had never seen anything so exquisite as that instinct of Colin's to go straight to his brother. Could Raymond recognise the beauty of that?... And was it indeed Raymond who now drew Colin on to the window-seat beside him?

"That's all right, Colin," he said. "You couldn't help it. No one can help it when it comes. I couldn't."

He stood up. "Father's told me about it all," he said, "and I just wanted to see you and Violet for a moment in order to realise it. I've got it now. Good-bye, Colin; good-bye, Violet."

He went across to his father with hand outstretched. "Thanks ever so much for letting me go to St. James's Square," he said. "And I'm sorry, father, for behaving as I did. I know it's no use just saying that; I've got to prove it. But that's all I can do for the present."

He went straight out of the room without once looking back.

"Is Raymond going away?" asked Colin.

"Yes. It's better so."

Colin heard this with a chill of disappointment, for among his pleasurable anticipations had been that of seeing Raymond wince and writhe at the recasting of their parts. Raymond would have hourly before his eyes his own rôle

played by another, and with what infinitely greater grace. The part of heroine would be filled by its "creator," but, in this remodelled piece, what sparkle and life she would put into her scenes. Where she had been wooden and impassive, she would be eager and responsive, that icy toleration would melt into a bubbling liquor of joy. Then there would be the part now to be filled by Raymond; would he fill that with Colin's tact and sweetness? Of minor characters there would be his father and grandmother, and with what convincing sincerity now would they fill their places.... But Raymond's absence would take all the sting and fire out of the play.

"Oh, father, does he feel like that?" asked Colin. "Did he feel he couldn't bear to stop? I'm sorry."

"No, it was I who told him to go," said Philip. "He behaved outrageously just now with me."

"But he's sorry," said Colin. "He wants to do better. Mayn't he stop? He'll be wretched all alone up in London."

A sudden thought struck him, a touch of genius. "But it concerns Vi most," he said. "What do you vote, darling?"

"By all means let him stop," said she. Nothing but Colin's wish, here clearly indicated, could have any weight with her.

"Then may he, father?" he asked. "That is good of you. Come and tell him, Vi."

Raymond was in the hall. He had just ordered his car, and was now about to telephone to the housekeeper in town to say he was coming, when Colin and Violet came out of the library. Philip followed them to complete the welcome, and saw Colin go up to his brother.

"Raymond, don't go," he said. "We all want you to stop. Vi does, father does, I do."

Raymond saw his father in the doorway. “May I stop, then, father?” he said.

“By all means. We all wish it,” said he.

Raymond looked back again at his brother. Colin was standing just below the portrait of his ancestor, the very image and incarnation of him.

“I’ve got you to thank, I expect, Colin,” he said.

Their eyes met; Colin’s glittered like a sword unsheathed in the sunlight of his hatred and triumph; Raymond’s smouldered in the blackness of his hatred and defeat.

“I wish there was anything I could do for you, Ray,” said Colin gently.

The entertainment which Colin had anticipated from these alterations in the cast of this domestic drama did not fall short of his expectations. He held Raymond in the hollow of his hand, for Raymond’s devotion to Violet, gross and animal though it had been, gave Colin a thousand opportunities of making him writhe with the shrewd stings of jealousy, and with gay deliberation he planted those darts. The *coup de grâce* for Raymond would not come yet, his father’s death would give the signal for that; but at present there was some very pretty baiting to be done. Not one of those darts, so becomingly beribboned, failed to hit its mark: a whispered word to Violet which made the colour spring bright and eager to her face, a saunter with her along the terrace in the evening, and, even more than these, Colin’s semblance of sparing Raymond’s feelings, his suggestion that he should join them in any trivial pursuit—all these were missiles that maddingly pierced and stung.

No less adequately did Philip and old Lady Yardley fill their minor parts; he, with the sun of Colin's content warming him, was genial and thoughtful towards Raymond in a way that betrayed without possibility of mistake the sentiment from which it sprang; while Lady Yardley, braced and invigorated by the same emotion, was strangely rejuvenated, and her eyes, dim with age, seemed to pierce the mists of the encompassing years and grew bright with Colin's youth.

As regards his own relations with Violet, Colin found he could, for the present anyhow, manage very well; the old habits of familiarity and intimacy appeared to supply response sufficient; for she, shuddering now, as at some nightmare, at her abandoned engagement to Raymond and blinded with the splendour of the dawn of her love, saw him as a god just alighted on the gilded and rosy hills.... Colin shrugged his shoulders at her illusion; she presented to him no such phantasmal apparition, but he could give her liking and friendship, just what she had always had from him. Soon, so he hoped, this vision of himself would fade from her eyes, for even as he had found his father's paternal devotion to him in Capri a fatiguing and boring business, so he foresaw a much acuter *gêne* that would spring from a persistence of Violet's love. No doubt, however, she would presently become more reasonable.

What above all fed Colin's soul was to stroll into the smoking-room when Violet had gone upstairs, and his father had retired to his library, and to make Raymond drink a cup more highly spiced with gall than that which had refreshed him in public. Raymond had usually got there first, while Colin lingered a moment longer with Violet, and had beside

him a liberally mixed drink, and this would serve for Colin's text:

"Hullo, Raymond! Drowning dull care?" he asked. "That's right. I can't bear seeing you so down. By Jove, didn't Violet look lovely to-night with her hair brought low over her forehead?"

"Did she?" said Raymond. He tried to entrench himself in self-control; he tried to force himself to get up and go, but hatred of Colin easily stormed those defences. "Stop and listen," said that compelling voice. "Glut yourself with it: Love is not for you; hate is as splendid and as absorbing...."

"Did she?" echoed Colin. "As if you hadn't been devouring her all the evening! But we all have our turn, don't we? Every dog has its day. Last week I used to see you and Violet; now you see Violet and me. Tell me, Raymond, does Violet look happy? We can talk so confidentially, can't we, as we have both been in the same position? What a ticklish thing it is to be a girl's lover. How it ages one! I feel sixty. But does she seem happy? She used to wear a sort of haunted look last week. I suppose that was her wonder and her misgiving at a man's brutal adoration. It frightened her. As if we weren't frightened too! Did the idea of marriage terrify you as it terrifies me? A girl's adoration is just as brutal."

Colin moved about the room as he spoke, dropping the sentences out like measured doses from some phial of a potent drug. After each he paused, waiting for a reply, and drinking glee from the silence. In that same silence Raymond was stoking his fires which were already blazing.

"Yes, every dog has its day," he said, replenishing his glass.

“And every dog has his drink,” said Colin. “Lord, how you’ll get your revenge when your day comes! What sweetness in your cup that Vi and I will never be allowed to come to Stanier again. You’ll like that, Raymond. You’ll have married by that time. I wonder if it will be the tobacconist’s girl who’ll have hooked you. You’ll be happier with her than Vi, you know, and I shouldn’t wonder if Vi will be happier with me than with you....”

Still there was silence on Raymond’s part.

“You must be more cheerful, Raymond,” said Colin. “Whatever you may do to me hereafter, you had better remember that I’m top-dog just now. I shall have to ask father to send you away after all, if you don’t make yourself more agreeable. It was I who made him allow you to stop here, and I will certainly have you sent away if you’re not kinder to me. You must be genial and jolly, though it’s a violence to your nature. You must buck up and be pleasant. So easy, and so profitable. Nothing to say?”

There was a step outside, and their father entered. He carried an opened letter in his hand.

“I’ve just had a note from the governor of the asylum at Repstow,” he said. “One of their patients has escaped, a homicidal lunatic.”

“Gosh, I’ll lock my door,” said Colin. “No use for him. What else, father?”

“It’s no joke, Colin. The keeper at the Repstow Lodge was out attending to the pheasants’ coops this afternoon, and while he was gone a man vaulted over the fence, frightened his wife into hysterics, and decamped with his gun and a bag of cartridges. Then he bolted into the woods. It’s almost certain that he is the escaped lunatic.”

Raymond, who had been listening intently, yawned.

“But they’re out after him, I suppose,” he said. “They’ll be sure to catch him.”

Colin wondered what that yawn meant.... To any boy of twenty—to himself anyhow—there was a spice of excitement about the news. It was impossible not to be interested. But Raymond did not seem to be interested.... Or did he wish it to appear that he was not interested?

Colin, with an eye on Raymond, turned to his father. Two or three more little darts were ready for his brother, at which he would not yawn....

“Oh, father,” said he, “come and sleep in my room and we’ll take watches. What glorious fun. You shall take the watch from midnight till, till half-past eight in the morning, and then you’ll wake me up, and I’ll take the watch till five in the afternoon without a wink of sleep. Then Raymond and Vi can slumber in safety. Now I shall go upstairs and say good-night to Vi——”

“Better not tell her about it to-night,” said Lord Yardley.

“Rather not: we shall have other things to talk about, thanks. But not a minute before half-past eight, father. Good-night; good-night, Raymond. Sleep well.”

Raymond, in spite of these good wishes, passed an almost sleepless night. If he shut his eyes it was to see Colin’s mocking face floating on the darkness of his closed lids, and to have echoing in his ears the mockery of Colin’s jibes. As he passed Violet’s door on his way up to bed he had heard the sound of speech and laughter from within, and his jealousy seemed to arrest his tip-toeing steps, so that what he might overhear should give it the bitter provender it loved. But some new-born fear of Colin made him go on instead of

lingering: Colin seemed prospered in all he did by some hellish protection; a mysterious instinct might warn him that there was a listener, and he would throw open the door and with a laugh call Violet to see who was eavesdropping on the threshold.... Then after they had laughed and pointed at him, Colin would shut the door again, locking it for fear of—of a homicidal maniac—and the talking would go on again till it was quenched in kisses....

He had tossed and turned as on a gridiron, with the thought of Colin and Violet together to feed and to keep the fire alive. He did not believe that Colin loved her; if she had not promised to marry himself, he would not have sought her. It was from hatred of himself that he had given her a glance and a smile and whistled her to him, so that she threw away like a scrap of waste-paper the contract that would have installed her as mistress of the house she adored. Colin had idly beckoned, just to gratify his hate, and she had flamed into love for him.

What subtle arts of contrivance and intrigue were his also! He had wanted to feast that same hatred on the sight of his brother's defeat and discomfiture, and a word from him had been sufficient to make his father revoke his edict and let him remain at Stanier. Thus Colin earned fresh laurels in the eyes of the others for his compassionate forbearance, and by so doing accomplished his own desire of having Raymond there, like a moth on a pin.

As the hours went on strange red fancies crossed his brain. He imagined himself going to his father's room and smothering him, so that next day he would be master of Stanier, and free to turn Colin out. Not another hour should he stay in the place. Out he should go, and Violet with him.

Better still would it be to come behind Colin with a noose in his hand, which he would draw tight round his neck and laugh to see his face go black and his eyes start from his head with the strangling.... That would satisfy him; he could forgive Colin when he lay limp and lifeless at his feet, but till then he would never know a moment's peace or a tranquil hour.

All this week his fever of hatred had been mounting in his blood, to-night the heat of it made to flower in his brain this garden of murderous images. And all the time he was afraid of Colin, afraid of his barbed tongue, his contemptuous hate, above all, of the luck that caused him to prosper and be beloved wherever he went. Just at birth one stroke of ill-luck had befallen him, but that was all....

Earlier in the evening, he remembered, an idea had flitted vaguely through his head, which had suggested to him some lucky accident.... He had purposely yawned when that notion presented itself, so that Colin should not see that he took any interest in what was being talked about.

For the moment he could not recollect what it had been; then he remembered how his father had come into the smoking-room and told them that a homicidal lunatic had got hold of a gun and was at large, probably in the park.... That was it; he had yawned then, for he had pictured to himself Colin strolling through the leafy ways and suddenly finding himself face to face with the man. There would be a report and Colin would lie very still among the bracken till his body was found. Ants and insects would be creeping about him.

That had been the faint outline of the picture; now in the dark it started into colour. What if once again Colin's luck failed him, and in some remote glade he found himself alone

with Raymond? He himself would have a gun with him, and he would fire it point-blank at Colin's face and leave him there. It would be supposed that the escaped mad-man had encountered him....

It was but a wild imagining, born of a sleepless night, but as he thought of it, Raymond's eyelids flickered and closed, and just before dawn he fell asleep. When he was called a few hours later, that was the first image that came into his mind, and by the light of day it wore a soberer, a more solid aspect. What if it was no wild vision of the night, but a thing that might actually happen?

No fresh news when they met at breakfast was to hand about the escaped man; indeed, in answer to an inquiry sent by Lord Yardley to the asylum, there came the reply that, though search-parties were out after him, nothing had as yet been seen of him. Colin was engaged to play a round of golf on the Rye links, and the chance of falling in with him seemed so remote that soon after breakfast he went off on his motor-bicycle, promising, in order to soothe Violet's apprehensions, to travel at the rate of not less than forty miles an hour. That did not please her either; in fact, there was no pleasing her about his expedition, whether he went fast or slow; so he kissed her, and told her to order her mourning. At the last moment, however, at his father's wish, he slipped a revolver into his pocket.

Raymond, as usual, refused to play golf, and preferred a wander in the park with a gun as a defensive measure for himself, and as an offensive measure against the plague of wood-pigeons. They were most numerous in the woods that lay on the steep slope through which the road to Repstow

passed. That had been Colin's road, too, and when Raymond set out a quarter of an hour later, the dust raised by his motor-bicycle still hung in the windless air.

Ten minutes walking brought him to the point where the road which hitherto had lain across the open grass of the park descended into the big belt of wood which stretched as far as the lodge-gates. On each side of it the ground rose sharply, covered on the one side by firs and birches with groundwork of heather, on the other by the oaks of what was known as the Old Park. According to tradition they were of the plantings of Elizabeth's Colin, and for age and grandeur they might well be so, for stately and venerable they rose from the short deer-nibbled turf, well-spaced with full freedom for roots and branch alike. No other trees were on that slope, but these great, leafy sentinels stood each with his ring of shade round him, like well-tried veterans who have earned their leisure and the dignified livery of repose. A low wall of grey stone, some four feet high, mossy and creviced and feathered with small ferns, separated this Old Park from the road.

It was among these great oaks that the pigeons congregated, and Raymond was soon busy with them. This way and that, startled by his firing, they flew, often wary and slipping out of the far side of a tree and interposing its branches between him and them so that he could get no sight of them, but at other times coming out into the open and giving him a fair shot. Before long the whole battalion of them were in commotion, wheeling and flying off and returning again, and in an hour's time he had shot some forty of them, not reckoning half a dozen more, which, winged or otherwise wounded, trailed off on his approach, fluttering on in front of him. Raymond was quite willing to put any such

out of their misery, if they would only stop still and be killed like sensible birds, but on a hot morning it was too much to expect him to go trotting after the silly things, especially when he had killed so many. He took no pleasure in the cruelty of leaving them to die; he was simply indifferent.

He had come almost to the end of his cartridges, and if he was to continue his shooting, he would have to go back to the house for more ammunition or borrow some from the keeper at the Repstow lodge. That was nearer than the house, but before going he sat down in the shade of one of old Colin's oaks to cool down and have a cigarette.

For the last hour he had been completely absorbed in his sport; now with a snap like that of a released spring his mind leaped back to that which had occupied it as he walked here and saw the dust of his brother's motor-bicycle hanging in the air. He had locked up in his mind, when he began his shooting, all connection with that, his hate, the sleepless night with its visions that seemed so wild at the time, but which, on his waking, had taken on so much quieter and more likely an aspect, and now, when he unlocked his mind again, he found that they had grown like fungi in the darkness of a congenial atmosphere. They were solid and mature: where before there had been but a fairy-ring of imagination, where nightly elves had danced, there were now those red, firm-fleshed, poisoned growths, glistening and corrupt.

His subconscious mind poured out its storage: it had been busy while he was shooting, and wonderfully acute. It reminded him now that a quarter of a mile further on, the Old Park came to an end, and one clump of rhododendrons stood behind the wall which ran along the road. Just here the road took a sharp turn to the right: a man walking along it (or, for

that matter, bicycling along it) would only come into sight of any one who might happen to be by that rhododendron bush half-a-dozen yards before he came to it himself, and anything else he might see there (a gun, for instance) would be at point-blank range. Such a gun-barrel would rest conveniently on the top of the wall; any one who happened to be holding the weapon would be concealed between the wall and the bush....

These pictures seemed to be shewn Raymond rather than to be imagined by him; it was as if some external agency held open the book which contained them and turned over the leaves. It might prove to be himself who would presently lie *perdu* there, but he had no sense of any personal volition or share in the matter. His hatred of Colin had somehow taken counsel (even as doctors consult over a bad case) with the necessity that Colin should die, and this was their advice; Raymond was but the patient who in the apathy of sickness was going to do as they told him, not caring much what happened, only conscious that if this advice was successful in all its aspects, he would be restored to complete health.

He hardly knew if he hated Colin any more; all that he was certain of was that there existed—somewhere—this black dynamic enmity. He hardly knew whether it was he who was about to shoot Colin, as presently on his motor-bicycle he would come round that sharp bend by the rhododendron bush. All that he was certain of was that Colin would presently lie dead on the road with his face all shattered by the shot. The homicidal maniac, of course, escaped from the asylum, must have been his murderer.

There was no use for more cartridges than the two which he now slipped into his gun. If the fellow hidden behind the

rhododendron bush could not kill Colin with two shots, he could not kill him with twenty, and Raymond, looking carefully round, began moving quietly down the slope to the corner, keeping in the shadow of the leafage of the splendid trees. His foot was noiseless on the cropped plush of the turf, and he passed quickly over the patches of sun between the shadows of the oaks, pausing every now and then to make sure there was no one passing along the road or the hillside, who was within sight of him. But there was no one to be seen; after the cessation of his shooting, the deer had come back to their favourite grazing-ground, and were now cropping at the short, sweet grass, or lying with twinkling ears alert in the shade. No one was moving up there at the top of the Old Park, where a foot-path made a short cut to the house from the Repstow Lodge, or the deer would not be so tranquil, while his own sharp eye assured him that within the circle of his vision there was none astir.

His remembrance of the rhododendron bush close to the angle in the road, was astonishingly accurate. The top of the grey wall was a most convenient rest for his gun, and a man coming round the corner from the direction of Repstow would suddenly find himself within six yards of the barrels. Probably he would never see them at all; there would be just a flash of flames close to his startled eyes, perhaps even the report of the explosion would never reach him.

That was the only imperfect touch in these schemes which had been thus presented to Raymond; he would like Colin to know, one-half second before he died, whose hand had pulled the trigger and put a muzzle on his mocking mouth and a darkness over his laughing eyes, and he determined that when the beat of Colin's approaching motor-bicycle sounded loud

round the corner he would stand up and show himself. It would be all too late for Colin to swerve or duck then, and he should just see who had the last laugh. Raymond felt that he would laugh as he fired.... Till that moment it was best to conceal himself from the road, and he leaned against the wall, crouching a little, with the muzzle of his gun resting on it.... It was already after one o'clock. Colin would be here any minute now.

A quarter of an hour before, Colin had arrived at the Repstow lodge with a puncture in his hind tyre. Luck was kind to him as usual; the puncture had occurred only a few yards down the road, and he could leave his machine with the lodge-keeper, and send a mechanic from the garage to repair it and bring it back to the house. For himself, he would take the short cut through the top of the Old Park back home; that reduced the distance by at least a half, and on this hot morning the soft-turfed shade would be pleasant.

Then a sudden thought struck him, and he asked whether the escaped madman had been captured; the walk home would be less exciting but perhaps pleasanter if they had caught him. And again it appeared that Colin's affairs were being well looked after; the man had been found on the other side of the park half an hour ago; cleverly taken, so the keeper said. He must have been in the woods all night, and they came upon him as he dozed, seizing the gun he had possessed himself of before he woke and getting a noose round his arms.

So that was all right, and Colin, with a smile for the keeper's wife and a sixpenny piece for the small child who regarded him with wide, wondering eyes, set off for the mile

walk to the house. He took his revolver out of his pocket with the intention of giving it to the keeper, and having it brought up to the house with the bicycle; but then thought better of it, and, emptying the cartridges out, replaced it. It made a rather weighty bulge in his coat, but on general principles it was wise not to leave fire-arms about.

The thought of Raymond at his pigeon-shooting occurred to him as he walked, but no sound of firing came from the direction of the Old Park, which now lay close in front of him, and he supposed that his brother would have gone home by this time. What a sullen, awkward fellow he was; how he winced under Colin's light artillery; how impotently Raymond hated him.... Colin could not imagine hating any one like that and not devising something deadly. But Raymond devised nothing; he just continued hating and doing nothing.

Colin had come to the beginning of the Old Park; the path lying along the top of it wound in and out of the great oaks; below to the right lay the road with the low stone wall running beside it. The road had been out of sight hitherto, forming a wider circuit, but just below him now there was a sharp corner and it came into view.

But what was that bright line of light on the top of the wall just at that point? Something caught the sun, vividly gleaming. For some reason he was imperatively curious to know what gleamed there, just as if it intimately concerned him, and half-closing his eyes to focus it and detach it from that baffling background of dappled light and shadow, he saw. Simultaneously and unbidden the idea of Raymond out shooting pigeons occurred to him. But what was he doing—if it were Raymond—hidden behind that dark-leaved

rhododendron-bush with his gun resting on the wall and pointing at the road? That was a singular way of shooting pigeons, very singular.

Colin's face broke into one great smile, and he slipped behind one of the oaks. Looking out he saw that another tree lower down the slope hid the rhododendron bush from him, and keeping behind the broad trunk he advanced down the hill in its direction. Twice again, in similar cover, he approached, and, peering round the tree, he could now see Raymond close at hand. Raymond's back was towards him; he held his gun, with the end of the barrels resting on the top of the wall, looking at the angle of the road round which, but for that puncture in his bicycle, he himself would already have come.

There was now but one big tree between him and his brother, and on tiptoe, as noiselessly as a hunting tiger, he crept up to it, and, drawing his revolver from his pocket, he came within ten paces of him. Then some faint sound of his advance—a twig, perhaps, snapping beneath his step—or some sense of another's presence reached Raymond, and he turned his head quickly in Colin's direction. He found himself looking straight down the barrel of his revolver.

"Raymond, if you stir except to do precisely what I tell you, I shall shoot," said Colin quietly. "If you take your eyes off me I shall shoot."

Colin's finger was on the trigger, his revolver as steady as if a man of stone held it.

"Open the breech of your gun," he said, "and let the barrels drop.... Now hold it in one hand, with your arm stretched out.... That's right. Good dog!... Now lay the gun down and turn round with your back to me.... Stop like that without

moving.... Remember that I am covering you, and I could hardly miss at this distance."

Colin picked up the gun and took the two cartridges out and put them in his pocket. Not till they clinked against the revolver cartridges that lay there did he remember that all the time his pistol had been unloaded. He stifled a laugh.

"Take off your cartridge-bag, Raymond," he said, "and put it on the ground."

"There are no more in it," said Raymond, speaking for the first time.

"You ill-conditioned swine, do as I tell you," said Colin. "I shan't give you an order twice again.... Well, what you said seems to be true, but that's not the point. The point is that you're to do as I tell you. Now have you got any more cartridges in your pockets?"

"No."

Colin thought he had better make sure of this for himself, and passed his hand over Raymond's coat-pockets.

"Now you stand just where you are," he said, "because we've got to talk. But first I'll put some cartridges in my own revolver. It has been perfectly empty all this time. Isn't that damned funny, Raymond, dear? There were you expecting every moment would be your last, and obeying me like the sweet, obedient boy you are. Laugh, can't you? It's one of the funniest things that ever happened."

Colin lit a cigarette with shouts of laughter.

"Well, to business," he said. "Turn round and let's see your face. Do you know a parlour-trick called thought-reading? I'm going to tell you what you've been thinking about. You expected me to come round that corner on my bike; and from

behind the wall you were going to fire point-blank at me. Not at all a bad idea. There was the homicidal lunatic, you thought, loose in the woods, and my death would have been put down to him.... But you would have been hanged for it all the same, because he was taken nearly an hour ago without firing a shot. So I've saved you from the gallows. Good idea of yours, but it had a flaw in it."

Colin came a step nearer his brother, his eyes dancing.

"Raymond, I can't resist it," he said. "You've got to stand quite still, while I smack your filthy face just once, hard. It'll hurt you, I'm afraid, but you've just got to bear it. If you resist in any way, I shall tell my father exactly what has happened this morning as soon as I get in. I shall tell him at lunch before Violet and the servants. I may settle to tell him in any case; that depends on how our talk goes off. But if you don't stand still like a good boy, I shall certainly tell him. Now! Shut your eyes and see what I'll give you.... There! It quite stung my fingers, so I'm sure it stung your face. Sit down; no, I think you look nicer standing. Let me think a moment."

Colin lit another cigarette, and stared at his brother as he smoked it.

"You've been wise about one thing," he said, "in not attempting to deny the truth of my pretty thought-reading. You're beaten, you see; you daren't deny it. You're a whipped cur, who daren't even growl. Lucky for you that you're such a coward.... Now, I've settled what to do with you. As soon as we get in, you shall write out for me a confession. You shall say that you intended to shoot me, and put down quite shortly and clearly what your plan was. You shall sign, and my father and I will sign it as witnesses. He

shan't read it; I will tell him that it is a private friendly little matter between you and me, and we just want his signature.

"I'm devilish good to you, you know; it's lucky that that affair about my revolver-cartridges amused me; that, and smacking your face. Then I shall send your confession to my bank, to be kept unopened there, except in case of my death, in which case it is to be sent to my father. That'll keep you in order, you see. You won't dare to make any other attempt on my life, because if it were successful, it would be known that you had tried to kill me before, and that would be a suspicious circumstance. How's your face?... Answer, can't you?"

"It's all right," said Raymond.

"Good Lord, I don't want to know about your face. What do you say to my proposal? The alternative is that I tell my father and Violet all about it. I rather fancy—correct me if I am wrong—that he will believe me. Shocking affair, but true. Answer."

"I accept it," said Raymond.

"Of course you do. Now pick up your gun. Did you have good sport with the pigeons? Answer pleasantly."

"I got about forty," said Raymond.

"And you hoped to get one more at that corner, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Damned rude of you to call me a pigeon. I'll pay you out for that."

Philip was out on the terrace when the two boys came in. Colin took Raymond's arm affectionately when he saw him.

“Hullo, father,” he said. “We’ve had such a ripping morning. I won my match, and Raymond downed forty pigeons, and they’ve caught the madman. Oh, my bicycle punctured, by the way, but that was a blessing in disguise, for I had a jolly walk through the Old Park, and found Raymond. We’ve had a nice talk, too, and we want you to witness something for us after lunch.”

“What’s that?” said Philip.

“Oh, just a private little arrangement that only concerns us.... Shan’t we show it father, Ray?”

“Oh, I think not,” said he.

Colin raised his eyebrows as he met his father’s glance. “All right,” he said. “Just as you like.”

CHAPTER VIII

Colin was lying on the beach of the men’s bathing-place at Capri after an hour’s swim. A great wave of heat had swept over Europe, and now, though it was late in October, the conditions of summer still prevailed. It might have been June still, and he here with his father, quietly making the plans that had turned out so well. On this beach it was that he lay, pondering his reply to Violet’s letter which told him she was engaged to Raymond. He had thought out his reply here, that congratulatory reply, saying how delightful her news was, and as for feeling hurt.... That had been a thorn to Violet, which had pricked and stung her, as she had confessed. She had confessed it to him between dusk and dawn on their marriage-night.

He knew all about it; that casual kiss in the dusk of the yew-hedge the night before he and his father left for Italy had begun it; his indifference to her had made her ache, and his

arrival back in England had made the ache intolerable. To be mistress at Stanier had become worthless to her, and to reward her sense of its worthlessness, had come the news that she would not be that only....

Colin stirred his sun-stained body to get a fresh bed of hot sand and pebbles for his back. He had absorbed the heat of those on which he had been lying, but a little kneading movement of his elbow brought him on to another baked patch. That was gloriously hot; it made him pant with pleasure, as he anticipated one more cool rush into the sea. He purred and thought of the lovely days that had passed, of the lovely day that was here, of the lovely days that awaited him. Quite methodically, he began at the beginning.

Violet and he had been married in the first week of October, on the very day indeed that had been arranged for her marriage with Raymond. There was a suave brutality about that; he had made Raymond, under some slight hint of pressure, advocate it. Raymond (under that same hint) had become marvellously agreeable; he had been almost sentimental and had urged Violet to be married on that day. He himself would be best man, if Colin would allow him, instead of being bridegroom. Her happiness, it appeared, was of greater import to him than his own.

Little conversations with Colin in the smoking-room, before Colin went up to say good-night to Violet, were responsible for this Scotch sentimentality. Raymond had been quite like a noble character in a sloshy play. He had understood and entered into the situation; he had given up without bitterness; he had rejoiced at his brother's happiness and had been best man. The happy pair had left that afternoon for Italy.

The attitude which he had forced on Raymond gave Colin the most intense satisfaction. He had been made to appear to be affectionate and loving, high-minded and altruistic, and Colin knew what wormwood that must be to him. It was tiresome enough, as he knew from his experience of the last fortnight, to be supposed to love when you only liked, but how infinitely more galling it must be to be supposed to love when you hated. But he did Raymond justice; a mere hint at publicity for that paper which lay at his bankers together with his mother's letters and that confirmatory line from Uncle Salvatore, produced wonderful results. Raymond could be bridled now with a single silken thread.

Colin's thought turned over that leaf of the past, and pored over the present—this delightful, actual present. There was the sun baking his chest and legs, and the hot sand and pebbles warm to his back, while the cool, clear sea awaited him when the rapture of heat became no longer bearable. Violet had not come down with him to-day. She had taken to the rather more sophisticated bathing establishment at the Marina, where more complete bathing-dresses were worn, and men did not dress and undress in the full eye of day. Colin quite agreed with her that the Marina was more suitable for her; this bay was really the men's bathing-place and though women could come here if they chose, they were rather apt to be embarrassing and embarrassed. She would find the huts at the Marina more satisfactory and still more satisfactory to him was to be rid of her for a few hours.

There was a stern, pitiless insistency about love which bored him. He could not be quite tranquil when, from moment to moment, he had to make some kind of response. A glance or a smile served the purpose, but when Violet was

there he had, unless he betrayed himself, always to be on the look out. This love was a foreign language to him, and he must attend, if he were to reply intelligently. He liked her, liked her quite immensely, but that which was a tireless instinct to her was to him a mental effort. It was no effort, on the other hand, to be with Raymond, for there his instinct of hatred functioned flawlessly and automatically.

Colin turned over that page of the present, and cast his eyes over the future. At the first glance all seemed prosperous there. His father had aged considerably during the last few months, and just before their marriage had had a rather alarming attack of vertigo, when, after a hot game of tennis, he had gone down with Colin to the bathing-pool to swim himself cool. The boy had not been the least frightened; he had brought his father to land without difficulty, and on his own responsibility had telephoned for his father's doctor to come down to Stanier. The report had been quite reassuring, but a man who had left his sixtieth birthday behind him must not over-exert himself at tennis and then bathe. Nature, the wise old nurse, protested.

This suggested eventualities for the future; no doubt his father would now be more prudent and enjoy a long ripe old age. Colin quite acquiesced; his father had been so consistently good to him that he scarcely felt any impatience about that. But what this morning occupied him with regard to the future was the idea, not of his father's death, but of Raymond's. In this uncertain world accidents or illness might carry off even the strongest and sulkiest, and he himself would then be in a very odd position. Supposing (as was natural) his father died first, Raymond (on the strong case that could be built on the evidence of his mother's letter to

Salvatore and the erasure in the Consulate archives), would, no doubt, be incontinently “hoofed out” of his promised land, and Violet be in possession, with him as husband to the owner. But if Raymond died first, Colin by his juggling would merely have robbed himself of the birthright which would be rightfully his. It had been a great stroke to provide at his father’s death for Raymond’s penniless illegitimacy, and, by himself marrying Violet, to submerge his own. Not possibly could he have provided for the eventuality of Raymond’s pre-deceasing his father as well, but now that he had married Violet it was worth while brooding and meditating over the other. Something might conceivably be done, if Raymond died first, though he could not as yet fashion the manner of it.

The morning had sped by all too quickly, and by now the other bathers had gone and the beach was empty, and Colin plunged once more into that beloved sea. The cool, brisk welcome of it encompassed him, its vigour seemed to penetrate his very marrow and brain with its incomparable refreshment, and he began to think of this problem with a magical lucidity....

Colin regretfully left the water and put his clothes into the boat in which he had been rowed round from the Marina, meaning to dress on the way there. Young Antonio, the son of Giacomo, Philip’s old boatman, had brought him round here, and was now asleep in a strip of shadow at the top of the beach, waiting till Colin was ready to return. There he lay, with his shirt open at the neck and a carnation perched behind his ear, lithe and relaxed like some splendid young Faun. The boy’s mouth smiled as he slept.

Was he dreaming, thought Colin, of some amorous adventure proper to his age and beauty? His black hair grew low on his forehead, the black lashes swept his smooth, brown cheek; it seemed a pity to awake him, and for a minute or two Colin studied his face. Violet before now had remarked on his extraordinary resemblance, except in point of colouring, to Colin, and he wondered if, through his noble Viagi blood, they were related. He liked to think he resembled this merry Nino; he would almost have been willing to give him his blueness of eye and golden hair, and take in exchange that glossy black, which caught the tints of the sky among its curls.

Then Nino stirred, stretched a lazy arm and found his hand resting on Colin's shoulder. At that he sprang up.

"Ah, pardon, signor," he said. "I slept. You have not been waiting?"

Colin had picked up Italian with great ease and quickness; it came naturally to his tongue.

"I've been watching you smiling as you slept, Nino," he said. "What have you been dreaming about?"

Nino laughed. "And if I was not dreaming of the signorino himself," he cried.

"What about me?" demanded Colin.

"Oh, just a pack of nonsense," he said. "We were in the boat, and it moved of itself without my rowing, and together we sat in the stern, and I was telling you the stories of the island. You have heard the most of them, I think, by now.... Are you not going to dress?"

"I'll dress in the boat," said Colin. "But there's that story of Tiberio which you wouldn't tell me when the signora was

with us.”

“Indeed a story of Tiberio is not fit for the signora. A fat, bald old man was Tiberio; and as ugly as a German. Seven palaces he had on Capri; there was one here, and so shameful were the things done in it that, so the priests say, the sea rose and swallowed it. But I do not know that the priests are right. They say that, do you think, signor, to frighten us from the wickedness of Tiberio? And one day Tiberio saw—*scusi, signor*....”

How attractive was the pagan gaiety of these young islanders! They believed in sunshine and wine and amusement, and a very good creed it was. They took all things lightly, except the scirocco. Love was a pleasant pastime, an affair of eager eyes and a kiss and a smile at parting, for had he not seen Nino himself in a corner of the piazza yesterday making signals to his girl (or one of them), and then strolling off in the warm dark? They were quite without any moral sense, but it was ludicrous to call that wicked. Pleasure sanctified all they did; they gave it and took it, and slept it off, and sought it again. How different from the bleak and solemn Northerners!

Imagine, mused Colin, as this really unspeakable history of Tiberio gaily unfolded itself, encouraging a gardener’s boy to regale you with bawdy tales. How he would snigger over the indecency, thus making it indecent; how heavy and dreary it would all be! But here was Nino with his dancing eyes and his laughing mouth and his “*scusi*, signor,” and all was well. These fellows had charm and breeding for their birthright, and, somehow, minds which vice did not sully.

The end of the story was rapidly told, with gestures to help out the meanings of recondite words, for they were

approaching the Marina, and Colin's signora was waiting for him there, as Nino had already seen with a backward glance.... An amazing moral was tacked on the conclusion of those dreadful doings of Tiberio, for when Tiberio died, God permitted the devil to torture him from morning to night as the anniversary of that orgy came round.

"But that's not likely, Nino," said Colin, deeply interested. "If Tiberio were so wicked, the devil would not want to torture him. He would be the devil's dear friend."

Nino took both oars in one hand for a second and crossed himself.

"What do you do that for, Nino?" asked Colin.

"It is safer," said Nino. "Who knows where the devil is?"

Colin made an admirably apposite remark: a thing that Neapolitans said, so Mr. Cecil had told him, when they found themselves talking about the devil, and Nino was duly appreciative.

"That is good!" said he. "That muddles him up.... Yes, signor, it is as you say. If Tiberio were very wicked, he and the devil would be very good friends. Do you believe in the devil, signor, in England?"

"We're not quite sure. And in Capri, Nino?"

"Not when the sky is blue, like ... like the signor's eyes," said Nino. "But when there is scirocco, we are not so certain."

The prow of the boat hissed and was quenched against the sandy beach. There, under the awning of the stabilimento, was Violet, rather fussed at the leisurely progress of Colin's boat, for in two minutes more the funicular would start, and if they missed that there was the dusty drive up to the town.

“Quick, darling, quick,” she called out. “We have only a couple of minutes.”

“Oh, don’t fuss,” said he. “Run on, if you want to. Nino and I are talking folk-lore.”

He felt in his pockets and spoke in Italian again.

“Nino, I haven’t got a single penny,” he said, “to pay you for your boat. If you are in the town to-night, come to the villa and I will pay you. If not, to-morrow. I shall want your boat again at ten.”

“*Sicuro!*” said the boy. “*Buon appetit.*”

He stepped into the water and held out his bare arm like a rail for Colin to lean on as he jumped on to the beach.

“Thanks,” he said. “Same to you, Nino. Villa Stanier; you know.”

Violet was waiting at the edge of the beach. The midday steamer had just come in from Naples, and now there was no need to hurry, for the funicular would certainly wait for the passengers who were landing in small boats at the quay.

“Nice bathe, darling?” she said as Colin joined her.

Colin found himself mildly irritated by her always saying “darling.” She could not speak to him without that adjunct, which might surely be taken for granted.

“Yes, darling,” he said. “Lovely bathe, darling. And you, darling?”

There was certainly an obtuseness about Violet which had not been hers in the old days. She seemed to perceive no impression of banter, however good-natured, in this repetition. Instead, that slight flush, which Colin now knew so well, spread over her face.

“Yes, darling, the water was lovely,” she said. “Like warm silk.”

“Ugh!” said Colin. “Fancy swimming about in silk. What horrible ideas you have.”

“Don’t be so literal,” said she. “Just a silky feeling. Look at these boat-loads of people. Aren’t they queer? That little round red one, like a tomato, just getting out.”

Colin followed her glance; there was no doubt whom she meant, for the description was exactly apt. But even as he grinned at the vividness of her vegetable simile, a sense of recognition twanged at his memory. The past, which he had thought over this morning, was sharply recalled, and somehow, somehow, the future entered into it.

“Why, that’s Mr. Cecil,” he said, “the Consul at Naples. You must know him, Vi.”

Mr. Cecil greeted Colin with welcome and deference. Consular business had brought him to Capri; he had no idea that Mr. Stanier was here. Was Lord Yardley here also?

“No, but somebody much more important,” laughed Colin. “My wife—we’re on our honeymoon. Violet, this is Mr. Cecil, who was so kind to me when I was here last. Mr. Cecil’s our Consul at Naples.”

It was natural that Mr. Cecil should have his lunch with them, though he pleaded shortness of time. He was going back by the afternoon boat.

“But you clearly must have lunch somewhere,” said Colin, “and we’ll give you a very bad one probably, but a quick one if you are in a hurry. Ah, that’s delightful of you.”

Colin was hugely cordial, exerting the utmost of his charm. He even curtailed his siesta in order to walk down with his

visitor to the Consular office in the town, and gratefully promised, on behalf of Violet and himself, to spend the night at his house on their way back to England. He wanted that; he had made up his mind to get that invitation, for it formed part of the plan which had come to him in his final swim that morning, before he got into Nino's boat and heard that horrible scandal concerning Tiberio. He wanted Violet to pass the night at the Consulate. There might arise emergencies which would render that convenient.

It was like her to have waited for his return instead of going to her room for the afternoon sleep, and there she was under the pergola where they had lunched at the far end of the garden. She was sitting with her back to the garden-door and did not see him enter, and, quick as a lizard and as silent-footed, Colin tip-toed into the house. If she saw him, she would discuss Mr. Cecil, she would linger in the garden, and, as likely as not, linger in his room, and he wanted his nap. If she chose to sit out under the pergola, it was no business of his; there was no proof after all that she was waiting for his return. Another day he would take a sandwich down to the bathing place, and, like Nino, have his siesta in some strip of shade down there, where no one would disturb him or wait for him or want to talk with him. Violet was a dear; it was hardly possible to have too much of her, but just now and then it was nice to have no one watching you and loving you.

A couple of hours later he strolled, still coatless, into the great cool sitting-room; she was already there, waiting to make tea for him.

"I never heard you come in, darling," she said. "I was waiting for your return in the pergola, and then eventually I

came in and peeped into your room, and there you were fast asleep.”

“Funny I shouldn’t have seen you,” said Colin. “I just went down with Mr. Cecil to the piazza, and was back in less than half-an-hour. I adore Mr. Cecil, he enjoys himself so much, and drinks such a lot of wine. A gay dog!”

“Oh, I thought he was a dreadful little man,” said Violet.

“You’re too refined,” said Colin. “You don’t like little red bounders. By the way, I’ve solemnly promised him that you and I will spend the night at his house in Naples on our way home.”

“Darling, how could you?” asked Violet.

“To please him. He thinks you’re marvellous, by the way. Don’t elope with him, Vi. Besides it’s a good thing to be friends with a Consul. He reserves carriages and oils the wheels of travel.”

“Colin, you’re full of surprises,” said she. “I should have thought Mr. Cecil was the very type of man you would have found intolerable.”

Colin laughed. “You don’t allow for my Viagi blood,” he said. “The bounding Viagi blood. Shouldn’t I love to see you and Uncle Salvatore together! Now what shall we do? Let’s go for an enormous walk till dinner-time.”

She came behind him and stroked the short hair at the back of his neck.

“Darling, would you mind if I didn’t come all the way?” she asked. “I’m rather tired; I had a long swim this morning. I’ll start with you, and make myself comfortable and wait for you to come back.”

“Don’t come at all, Vi, if you’re tired,” he said. “I can’t have you tired. And then if you sit down and wait for me, I shall feel you’re waiting, and hurry in consequence. Besides, I shall have to come back the same way.”

“Then I’ll certainly come with you all the way,” said she. “It’s more laziness with me than tiredness.”

Colin moved his head out of reach of the caressing fingers as if by accident.

“You tickle me,” he said. “And if you’re obstinate, I shan’t go for a walk at all, and I shall get fat like Mr. Cecil. Stop at home and be lazy for once, Vi.”

Colin, as usual, had his own way, and managed in his inimitable manner to convey the impression that he was very unselfish in foregoing her companionship. He established her with a book and a long chair, and, greatly to his own content, went off alone up the steep hillside of Monte Solaro. It was but a parody of a path that lay through the dense bush of aspen and arbutus that clothed the slopes, and he would have had to keep holding the stiff elastic shoots back for Violet to pass, to have tarried and dawdled for her less vigorous ascent, had she come with him. But now, having only his own pace to suit, he soon emerged above this belt of woodland that buzzed with flies in a hot, stagnant air, and came to the open uplands that stretched to the summit.

The September rains and the thick dews of October had refreshed the drought of the summer, and, as if spring were here already, the dried and yellow grasses, tall and seeding, stood grounded in a new velvet of young growth, and tawny autumn lilies reared their powdered stamens laden with pollen. Still upwards he passed, and the air was cooler, and a wind spiced with long travel over the sea, blew lightly but

steadily from the north-west. Presently he had reached the top; all the island lay at his feet, and the peaks of the nearer mainland were below him, too, floating, promontory after promontory, on the molten rim of the sea. Far away to the west, like the shadow of a cloud, he could just descry the coast of Corsica; all the world and the glory of the sea lay at his feet, and how he lusted for it! What worship and fealty was he not ready to give for the possession and enjoyment of it?

There was no crime, thought Colin, that he would not commit if by that the flame of life burned brighter; he would do a child to death or rob a sacristy of its holy vessels, or emulate the deeds of Tiberius to feed that flame ... and he laughed to himself thinking of the amazing history told by Nino with the black eyes and laughing mouth. Surely Tiberius must have made an alliance and a love-match with evil itself, such gusto did he put into his misdeeds. In this connection the thought of the family legend occurred to him. Dead as the story was, belonging to the mists of mediævalism, you could not be a Stanier without some feeling of proprietorship in it.

Naturally, it was up to anybody to make a bargain for his soul with the devil if he believed in the existence of such things as devils or souls, and certainly for generations, when sons of his house came of age, they had either abjured their original benefactor or made alliance with him. Of course, they had really made their choice already, but it was quaint and picturesque to ratify it like that.... But for generations now that pleasant piece of ritual had dropped into misuse: it would be rather jolly, mused Colin, when he came of age next March, to renew it.

The edges of his thoughts lost their sharpness, even as the far-off capes and headlands below melted into the blue field of sea and sky, and as he lay in the little sheltered hollow which he had found at the very summit of the peak, they merged into a blurred panorama of sensation. His life hitherto, with its schemings and acquirings, became of one plane with the future and all that he meant the future to bring him; he saw it as a whole, and found it exquisitely good. Soon now he must return to the love that awaited him in the villa, and before many days now he must go back to England; a night at the Consulate first with Violet, and then just a waiting on events till his father's death or Raymond's.... His eyelids dropped, the wind rustled drowsily in his ears....

Colin sat up with a start; he had not been conscious of having gone to sleep, but now, wide-awake again, it certainly seemed as if his brain recorded other impressions than those of this empty eminence. Had there been some one standing by him, or was it only the black shadow of that solitary pine which his drowsiness had construed into the figure of a man? And had there been talking going on, or was it only the whisper of the wind in the dried grasses which sounded in his ears? In any case, it was time to go, for the sun had declined westwards, and, losing the flames and rays of its heat, was already become but a glowing molten ball close above the sea. How strangely the various states of consciousness melted into each other, though the sense of identity persisted. Whatever happened that remained....

At the corner of the garden, perched on the wall which ran alongside the steep footpath up from the town, was a little paved platform, where they often sat after dinner. There had

been a letter for Colin from his father which had arrived during his walk, and now, holding it close to his eyes to catch the last of the swiftly-fading light, he communicated pieces of its contents to Violet.

“Raymond’s gone back to Cambridge,” he said. “Father seems reconciled to his absence. That’s funny now; there’s my elder brother an undergraduate and me a married man and not of age yet. It was touch and go whether it wasn’t the other way about, Vi.”

“Oh, don’t, Colin!” said she. “I can’t bear to think of it.”

“But you did think of it. Wasn’t that a nice surprise for you when I told you that to marry me didn’t mean giving up Stanier? That made all the difference.”

She came close to him. “Colin, don’t be such a brute,” she said. “There’s just one thing you mustn’t jest about and that’s my love for you. I wish almost I wasn’t going to get Stanier in order to show you. Don’t jest about it.”

“I won’t then. Serious matter! But don’t you jest about getting Stanier. Vi, if you would move your head an inch I should get more light.”

“What else does he say?” she asked.

Colin ran his eyes down the page. “Lots of affection,” he said. “He wants us back. Uncle Ronald’s down at Stanier, and Aunt Hester. Then some more affection. Oh, he has had another little attack of giddiness, nothing to worry about. So we won’t worry. And Aunt Hester’s going off a bit, apparently, getting to repeat herself, father says. And then some more affection.”

Colin lit a match for his cigarette, disclosing a merry face that swam before Violet’s eyes after the darkness had closed

on it again.

“That’s so like old people,” he said. “Aunt Hester wrote to me the other day saying she was quite shocked to see how slowly my father walked. She’s quite fond of him, but somehow it gives old people a little secret satisfaction to look for signs of breaking up in each other.”

“Colin, you’ve got a cruel eye sometimes,” said Violet.

“Not in the least; only a clear one. And then there’s father saying that Aunt Hester is beginning to repeat herself, and in the same dip of the pen he repeats himself for the third time, sending us his love.”

Violet gave a quick little sigh. “At the risk of repeating myself, you really are cruel,” she said. “When you love, you have to say it again and again. You might as well say that if you’re hungry you mustn’t ask for something to eat, because you ate something yesterday.... It’s a permanent need of life. I hope you don’t think I’m breaking up because I have told you more than once that I rather like you.”

“Poor Vi! Sadly changed!” said Colin, teasing her.

“I have changed,” she said, “but not sadly. We’re both changed, you know, Colin. A year ago we no more thought of falling in love with each other than of killing each other. But I don’t call the change sad.”

Colin felt extremely amiable this evening, pleasantly fatigued by his walk, and pleasantly exhilarated by his dinner, but he had to stir up his brains to find a suitable reply. There was the unfair part of it; Violet talked on this topic without effort; indeed, it was an effort for her not to, whereas he had to think....

“But you call it serious,” he said. “I mustn’t laugh about it, and I mustn’t weep. What am I to do?”

“Nothing, darling. I want you just to be.”

He determined not to let his amiability be ruffled.

“I certainly intend to ‘be’ as long as ever I can,” he said. “I love being. It’s wonderfully agreeable to be. And I would much sooner be here than at Cambridge with Raymond.”

“Ah, poor Raymond!” said Violet.

That exasperated Colin; to pity or to like Raymond appeared to him a sin against hate.

“My dear, how can you talk such nonsense?” he said. “That’s pure sentimentality, Vi, born of the dark and the stars. You don’t really pity Raymond any more than I do, and I’m sure I don’t. I hate him; I always have, and I don’t pretend otherwise. Why, just now you were telling me not to mention him, and two minutes afterwards you are saying, ‘Poor Raymond.’ ”

“You were reminding me of what might have happened,” she said. “It was that I could not bear to think of. But I can be sorry for Raymond. After all, he took it very well when Uncle Philip told him what we were going to do. I believe he wanted me to be happy in spite of himself.”

This was too much for Colin; the temptation to stop Violet indulging in any further sympathy with Raymond was irresistible. She should know about Raymond, and hate him as he himself did. He had promised Raymond not to tell his father of a certain morning in the Old Park, but he had never promised not to tell Violet. Why he had not already done so he hardly knew; perhaps he was keeping it for some specially suitable occasion, such as the present moment.

“He wanted you to be happy, did he?” he exclaimed. “Do you really think that? If so, you won’t think it much longer. Now, do you remember the morning when there was an escaped lunatic in the park?”

“Yes,” said she.

“Raymond went out shooting pigeons, and I played golf. My bicycle punctured, and I walked home through the Old Park. There I found Raymond crouching behind the wall meaning to shoot me as I came round that sharp corner of the road. I came close up behind him while he watched for me by the rhododendrons, and, oh Lord! we had a scene! Absolutely scrumptious! There was I covering him with my revolver, which, all the time, hadn’t got a cartridge in it, and I made him confess what he was up to....”

“Stop, Colin; it’s not true!” cried she.

“It is true. He confessed it, and wrote it all down, and father and I witnessed it; and he signed it, and it’s at my bank now. Perhaps he thought you would be happier with him than me, and so from unselfish notions he had better fire a barrel of Number Five full in my face. All for your sake, Violet! My word, what unutterable bunkum!”

His hate had submerged him now; that final bitter ejaculation showed it clearly enough, and it pierced Violet like some metallic stab. He had no vestige of consideration for her, no faintest appreciation of the horror of his stinging narrative, which pealed out with some hellish sort of gaiety. She could not speak; she could only crouch and shudder.

Colin got up, scintillating with satisfaction. “I promised him not to tell father,” he said, “which was an act of great clemency. Perhaps it will be too great some day and I shall. And I didn’t distinctly mean to tell you, but you really forced

me to when your heart began bleeding for that swine, and saying he wanted to make you happy. Come, Vi, buck up! Raymond didn't get me. It was clever of him, by the way, to see his opportunity when the looney was loose. I rather respected that. Let's go indoors and have our piquet."

She got up in silence, just pressed his arm, and went up the gravelled path towards the house. Colin was about to follow when, looking over the garden-wall, he saw Nino's figure coming up the path, and remembered he had told him that, if he were in the town, he might come up to the villa, and receive the liras he was owed for his boat this morning.

Instantly the picture of sitting with Nino out here in the dusk, with a bottle of wine between them, presented itself. Gay and garrulous would Nino be, that bright-eyed, laughing Faun, more Faun-like than ever at night, with Tiberian or more modern tales and wonderful gesticulations. That would be a welcome relaxation after this tragic, irritating talk with Violet; he was much more attuned to Nino's philosophy. Indoors there would be a game of piquet with those foolish pasteboard counterfeits of kings and queens and knaves, and five liras as the result of all that dealing and meditation and exchange of cards. That knave Nino would be far more amusing.... And even piquet was not the worst of the tedium he would find indoors. There was Violet, clearly very much upset by his tale; she would be full of yearnings and squeezings and emotional spasms. To-morrow she would be more herself again, and would bring a lighter touch to life than she would be disposed to give it to-night. He really could not spend the evening with Violet if it could possibly be avoided.

He called in a low voice to Nino:

“Signor!” said Nino, with gay, upturned face.

“Wait ten minutes, Nino,” he whispered. “If I don’t come out again, you must go. I shall want your boat to-morrow morning. But wait ten minutes, and then, perhaps, I shall be able to give you a glass of wine and hear more stories, if you have half an hour to spare.”

“*Si*, signor,” whispered Nino, pleased at this mystification and intrigue.

Colin followed quickly after Violet. She was in the big studio, where a cardtable was laid, walking up and down still horrified and agitated. She placed her hands on Colin’s shoulders and dropped her head there. It required all his self-control not to jerk himself free.

“Oh, Colin!” she said. “The horror of it. How can I ever speak to Raymond again? I wish you hadn’t told me.”

There was blame in this, but he waived his resentment at that for the present.

“I wish I hadn’t indeed, darling,” he said, “if it’s disturbed you so much, and I’m afraid it has. Go to bed now; you look awfully tired; we won’t have our piquet to-night. We shall neither of us attend.”

“It’s all so terrible,” she said. “Supposing your bicycle hadn’t punctured?”

He laughed. “I remember I was annoyed when it happened, but it was a blessing after all,” he said. “The point that concerns us is that it did, and another point is that you’re not to sit up any longer.”

“But you’d like a game,” she said. “What will you do with yourself?”

Colin knew his power very well. He turned, drawing one of her hands that rested on his shoulder round his neck.

“The first thing I shall do with myself is to take you to your room,” he said, “and say good-night to you. The second is to sit up for another half-hour and think about you. The third to look in on tiptoe and see that you’re asleep. The fourth, which I hope won’t happen, is to be very cross with you if you’re not. Now, I’m not going to argue, darling.”

The ten minutes were passing, and without another word he marched her to her room, she leaning on him with that soft, feminine, clinging touch, and closed her Venetian shutters for her, leaving the windows wide.

“Now promise me you’ll go to sleep,” he said. “Put it all out of your mind. Raymond’s at Cambridge. You’ve got not to think about him; I don’t. Good-night, Vi!”

At the door he paused a moment, wondering if she had heard him speak to Nino over the wall. In case she had, it were better to conceal nothing.

“I’m just going downstairs to give Nino what I owe him for his boat this morning,” he said. “I told him to come up for it. I shall just peep in on you, Vi, when I go to bed. If you aren’t asleep, I shall be vexed. Good-night, darling!”

Colin went downstairs again and opened the garden door into the road. There was Nino sitting on the step outside. He beckoned him in and shut the door behind him.

“Come and have a glass of wine, Nino,” he said. “Come quietly, the signora has gone to bed.”

He led the way into the dining-room, and brought out a bottle of wine.

“There, sit down,” he said softly. “Cigarettes? Wine? Now for another of your histories only fit for boys to hear, not women. So Tiberius had supper with a gilded girl to wait on him, and a gilded boy to give him wine. And what then?”

The atrocious tale shocked nobody; this bright-eyed Nino was just a Faun with the candour of the woodland and the southern night for conscience. In face and limb and speech he was human, but not of the humanity which wrestles with evil and distrusts joy. And just as Colin knew himself to be, except in his northern colouring, another Nino in bodily form, so, in a resemblance more remarkable yet, he recognised his spiritual kinship with this incandescent young pagan. Violet, he thought, had once been like that, but this love had come which in some way had altered her, giving her a mysterious fatiguing depth, a dim, tiresome profundity into which she seemed to want to drag him too. All her charm, her beauty, were hers still, but they had got tinged and stained with this tedious gravity. She had lost the adorable soullessness, which knew no instinct beyond its own desire, and on which no frost of chill morality had ever fallen....

Colin had been hospitable towards Nino’s glass; the boy was becoming Faun and Bacchant in one; he ought to have had a wreath of vine-leaves in his hair. It amused Colin to see how gracefully intoxication gained on him; there would be no sort of *vin triste* about Nino, only a livelier gesticulation to help out the difficulties of pronunciation.

“And then the melancholy seized Tiberius,” said Nino with a great hiccup, “for all that he had done, and it must be a foolish fellow, signor, who is melancholy for what he has done. I would be more likely to get the melancholy when I was old for the things I might have done and had not. And the

signor is like me, I think. Ah, thank you, no more wine. I am already half tipsy. But it is very good wine."

"Talk yourself sober, then, Nino," said Colin, filling his glass.

"What, then, shall I tell you? All Capri is in love with the signora and you, some with one and some with the other. It was thought at first that you must be brother and sister, so like you are, and both golden. You were too young, they thought, to be married; it was playtime still with you."

"Are you going to marry, Nino?" asked Colin.

"There is time yet. Presently perhaps. I do not reap in spring."

There spoke the Faun, the woodland, the drinker of sweet beverages, who drank with filled cup till the drink was done, and wiped his mouth and smiled and was off again. By a luxury in contrast, Colin envisaged Violet lying cool and white in the room above, sleeping, perhaps, already in answer to the suggestive influence of his wish, while he below breathed so much more freely in this atmosphere of Fauns, where nothing was wicked and nothing was holy, and love was not an affair of swimming eyes and solemn mouth. Love was a laugh.... Nino, the handsome boy, no longer existed for him in any personal manner. Nino was just part of the environment, a product and piece of the joyous paganism with which the night was thick. The pale-blue flower of the plumbago that clothed the southern wall of the house nodded in the open window-frame; the stir of the wind whispered; the star-light, with a moon lately risen, all strove to be realised, and, Nino seemed some kind of bilingual interpreter of them, no more than that, who, being boy, spoke with human voice, and, being Faun, spoke the language of Nature, cruel and

kindly Nature, who loved joy and was utterly indifferent to sorrow. She went on her course with largesse for lovers and bankruptcy for the bilious and the puritan. She turned her face away from pain, and, with a thumb reversed, condemned it. She had no use for suffering or for the ugly. The bright-eyed and the joyful were her ministers, on whatever errand they came. Thought and tenderness and any aspiration after the spiritual were her foes, for in such ascetic fashion of living there was sorrow, there was fatigue and striving.

Colin was at home here. Like a fish put back into water, after a panting excursion into a rarefied air, his gills expanded again, and drank in the tide.

"And have you chosen your girl yet, Nino?" he asked.

"*Dio!* No. I am but twenty. Presently I will look about and find who is fat and has a good dowry. There is Seraphina Costi; she has an elder brother, but the inheritance will be hers. He passes for the son of Costi, but we all know he is no son of Costi. It was like this, Signor Colin...."

"*Si*, Signor Nino," said Colin.

"*Scusi!* But to me you are Signor Colin. No, with loving thanks, no more wine. My father says it is a waste to drink good wine when one is drunk. My father was boatman to your father before you and I were born. That is strange to think on; how the old oaks flourish and bear leaf still. Two stepmothers already have I had, and there may be a third yet. Have you stepmothers, signor? I would put all old women out of the way, and all old men. The world is for the young. Sometimes I think to myself, would it not be very easy to put my hands round my father's neck, and squeeze and squeeze again, and wait till he was still, and then leave him thus and go to bed. They would find him there in the morning; perhaps

I should be the first to find him, and it would be said that he had died in his chair, all cool and comfortable."

Colin was conscious of some rapturous surprise at himself in his appreciation of the evening as it was, compared with the evening as it might have been. Normally, he would have played a couple of games of piquet with Violet, and thereafter have drowsily rejoined her. There would have been whispers of love and then sleep, all that was already routine to him. Instead, he, through the medium of this wonderful Faun, was finding himself, and that was so much better than finding Violet. Nino, with those swift gesticulations, was shewing him not Nino, but himself. But by now the boy was getting extremely drunk—the vision was clouding over. There was time for just another question or two.

"But aren't you afraid of Satana?" asked Colin, "if you kill your father?"

"Why should I be afraid? Satana is a good friend to me and I to him. Why should we fall out, he and I?"

Those full eyelids drooped, and as, on this morning, the lashes swept the brown cheek.

"Nino, you must go to bed," said Colin.

"*Si*, signor! But I doubt if I could carry myself down to the Marina to-night. I have the legs of the old woman, as I shall know when I come to stand up. May I sleep myself sober in your garden beside the cistern? It is the signor's fault—*scusi*—that I am thus; my fault for taking, but his for giving."

Colin rapidly pondered this.... Should Violet be wakeful and open her Venetian blinds, she would surely see him there. He pointed to the sofa against the wall.

“Lie down there, Nino,” he said, “and I will bring you a rug. You will be more comfortable than on the gravel. You must be off before dawn. Just wait a minute.”

Colin kicked off his shoes, so as not to disturb Violet, ran upstairs and peeped into her room. There was silence and stillness there, and going into his dressing-room next door, he picked up a folded rug off his bed, and went downstairs with it. Nino was bowed over the table, helpless and inert, and Colin choked down a spasm of laughter within him.

“Nino, wake up for one minute,” he said. “Put your arm round my neck and let me lay you down. Oh, do as I tell you, Nino!”

Nino leaned his whole weight on Colin’s encircled neck, and was laid down on the sofa. Colin loosed the smart tie with which he had adorned himself for this visit to the villa, and unbuckled his leather belt, and taking out a ten lira note from his purse, he thrust it into Nino’s breast-pocket.

“I’ve put ten liras in your pocket, Nino; don’t forget.”

“But that is too much, signor,” murmured Nino with a guarding hand on his pocket.

“Not for such an agreeable evening. Good-night; I shall want you and your boat again to-morrow morning.”

“*Sicuro! Felice notte*, signor.”

Colin went up to bed with no desire for sleep, for his blood tingled and bubbled in his veins. He wished now, amusing though it had been, that he had not made Nino tipsy so soon, for he longed to continue holding up the mirror to himself. In that reflecting surface he could see much that he had only suspected in himself, and this Nino unwaveringly confirmed. Never, till Nino had so gaily asserted that he did not fear the

devil, for the devil was his very good friend, had Colin so definitely realised that, whatever the truth about his Elizabethan ancestor might be, he had accepted the legend as his own experience.

Twice before had some inkling of this come into his mind, once when lying here and listening to his father's footfall on the terrace below he had realised that hate was as infinite as love, and once again this afternoon, when betwixt sleeping and waking on the top of Monte Solaro, he had received the impression of taking part in some dream-like colloquy. But on both these occasions he had but dealt in abstractions and imaginings, to-night Nino had shown him himself in the concrete. Ah, how good it was to be so well looked after, to have this superb youthful vitality, this rage for enjoyment; above all, never to be worried and perplexed by any conflict of motives; never to feel the faintest striving towards a catalogue of tedious aspirations. To take and never to give, to warm your hands at the glowing fires of hate and stoke those fires with the dry rubbish called love.... It was worth any price to secure immunity from these aches and pains of consciousness.

Colin announced to Violet his intention of taking his lunch down to the bathing-place next morning, and having his siesta there, and he saw with impatient amusement that she instantly put out of sight the fact that she would spend a solitary day and thought only of him.

"That will be lovely for you," she said. "You'll get a long enough bathe for once, and not have to break it off to get back to lunch."

"And what will you do?" he asked.

“Think of you enjoying yourself,” said she.

Colin marvelled in silence. That was a good instance of the change in Violet; in the old days she would at the most have acquiesced, if argument were useless. Now the only argument that seemed to have any weight with her was his enjoyment. Anyhow they were at one about that.

Colin spent a most satisfactory day. There was Nino waiting for him at the Marina rather heavy-eyed, but looking precisely as a Bacchant should after a characteristic night.

“You were wonderfully drunk last night, Nino,” said Colin, as they pushed off over the waveless bay.

Nino grinned. “*Molto, molto!*” he said cheerfully. “But I slept well, and I shall bathe, and then it will be as if I had drunk no more than a glass of water.”

“And will you confess that to the priest?” asked Colin.

“It may have gone from my mind,” said Nino. “God only remembers everything. And indeed I do not know much about last night, but that I enjoyed myself.”

“That’s all that is worth remembering about anything,” remarked Colin.

A long bathe followed, and a bask on the beach and again a bathe. Then came lunch, lying in a strip of shadow and stories from Nino, and sleep, and it was not till late in the afternoon that Colin found himself reluctantly loitering back to the villa where Violet awaited him. He beguiled himself with wondering what he would do if she were not there; if, as in some fairy-tale, she had disappeared leaving no trace behind. But hardly had he come within sight of the white garden wall when he saw her out on the balcony of his room. She waved at him, as if she had gone there to catch the first

sight of him, and then disappeared. Next moment she was at the garden-gate, walking down to meet him. Was there news, perhaps from England. Raymond? His father?

"What is it?" he asked, as he came within speaking distance. "Nothing wrong?" ("Nothing right?" would have expressed his thought more accurately.)

"Nothing," said she, "I only came to meet you. Nice day?"

"Delicious. Long bathe, good lunch, long sleep. Stories from Nino."

Colin hesitated a moment. He was rather curious to see what Violet would think of last night.

"Nino's an amusing youth," he said. "He came up here as I told you, for the money I owed him, and so I gave him a glass of wine, two in fact. He told me the most horrible tales about Tiberius and others, and then got frightfully drunk. He simply couldn't walk, and slept on the sofa in the dining-room."

"Oh, Colin, how disgusting!" said she. "I hope you've said you don't want his boat any more."

"I've said nothing of the kind. I want it every day."

Violet had nothing to say to this, and Colin felt his irritation at her rising.

"Well, what is it?" he said. "Why shouldn't Nino get drunk?"

"But you shouldn't have let him, Colin," said she. "It's coarse."

"But I come of a low family," said he. "Viagi one side and Stanier on the other. How many generations of Staniers have got drunk most nights of their lives?"

Violet stopped at the gate. "What would you think of me, Colin, if I took that little girl who helps in the kitchen and

made her drunk?" she asked.

"I should think you were a very odd young woman," said Colin. "But I should be all for your doing what you wanted to."

"Whatever it is?"

"Don't you think so? Most people don't want to do anything at all; it's certainly better to do anything than nothing. You may make Maria drunk as often as you please provided you assure me that you really like it."

"I infer that you liked making Nino drunk."

Colin clapped his hands. "Bravo!" he said. "You've guessed right. I wanted to find out when Nino was most himself, tipsy or sober, and now I know that it is sober. I shan't make him drunk again. I longed to see pure Faunishness, but Nino sober is Faunier than Nino drunk."

"Faunishness?" asked she.

"Yes, joyful, immoral, wicked, lovely nature. Without a rag to cover, not its shame, but its glory. Nino is naked sober. He was too heavenly last night, before—er—the coarseness. He thought of killing his father because he keeps giving him stepmothers, and is generally rather in the way. And when I asked him if he weren't afraid of the devil, he said: 'Why should I be? The devil is a very good friend to me.' Wasn't that queer? Just as if he were a Stanier. I felt as if Nino were my brother; though, of course, he could never supplant Raymond in my heart. But then Raymond's my twin: that is why we are so wrapped up in each other."

Violet felt as if some light-winged creature was settling on her now here, now there, and stinging her. Just so did Colin make her wince.

“And as for the wickedness—or coarseness, was it not?—of making any one drunk,” he added, “I don’t agree with you. If people are most really themselves when they are rather tipsy, they should be rather tipsy as often as possible. When is Uncle Ronald at his best? Why when his dear nephew has been sitting by him after dinner, and filling up his glass for him. Let’s have tea.... Oh, dear, I can’t do right. I did wrong to tell you about Raymond yesterday, and I did wrong to tell you about Nino to-day. I shall lead a double life, darling, and tell you nothing.”

Dimly, as he spoke, Violet was aware of some reverberation of dismay that his words and his manner stirred in her. Was Colin really like that? Were those light words just gibes and jokes—not very pleasant ones—or were they authentic glimpses of himself? It seemed that her very faith was at stake; at all costs she must refuse to acknowledge so unthinkable a possibility.... That could not be Colin; he was just teasing her. She must reply with the same outrageousness.

“Darling, lead more than a double life,” she said. “Such lots of people do that. Lead three or four. I’ll do the same. We’ll have as many lives as a cat between us.... Now tell me some of Nino’s stories, or I shall be afraid that they weren’t what mother might call quite nice.”

“I don’t think for a moment she would call them quite nice,” said he.

The month of Indian summer, with warm days and windless nights, passed by in golden procession, but now with the deepening of autumn the *ponente* from the west, veering sometimes to a chillier quarter sucked the basking

out of the bathing, and the evenings grew long with the passage into November. The sunshine lost its force, rain was scribbled across it, the grey sea-clouds expunged it, the wind roared in it. It was like passing out of daylight into some dank and dripping tunnel, where windows are closed and voices silent, and the magic of the day is quenched. More tunnel-like even was a certain darkness that fell between the two yet on their honeymoon, and in that darkness they grew apart like strangers; they were just passengers who chanced to be together in the same compartment.

To Violet that darkness consisted of her own ignorance, or so she felt it, of what Colin really was, and in proportion as she began to guess at him, it grew of more nightmare-like impenetrability. He had his moods of entrancing charm, of eager affection, but now these seemed more like some will-o'-the-wisp dancing above a marsh, than a flame that while it consumed, yet fed her and warmed her. His light was not meant for her, it only happened to fall on her; she was in the circle of its brightness.

She could not avoid pursuing the thought and seeing where it led her. She could see no change in him, she perceived that he had always been like this, and that it was her own light, so to speak, the illumination of her love which had revealed him to her.

She began to question who or what it was that shed that charm and evoked that enchantment, and shuddered at her own conjecture. Hints as to that came from other quarters: there was his complete indifference as to his father's health; true, Lord Yardley had told him not to worry, for there was no cause for that, but how could the son of so devoted a father be so immune to any sort of anxiety? Not less significant was

his attitude towards Raymond, that, namely, of contemptuous hate. He despised Raymond (that was clear) for his failure to kill him, he hated him, not for having made his attempt so much as for being Raymond.

And there was a puzzle for Violet. Raymond, from what Colin had told her, could now never stand in his way; and at Lord Yardley's death he would simply cease to exist as an obstacle to all that Colin desired. But Colin still hated; it was just the fact of Raymond, not the fact of Raymond having planned to kill him. And there, indeed, was a true flame burning. Colin's feeling about Raymond had an authentic heat of its own. Hate, in fact, was real to him in a way that love was not.

There was yet one more puzzle. Colin was determined to spend the night at the house of the British Consul in Naples. Not once or twice only, but constantly, he alluded to this. If he wanted it, Violet knew that he would get it, and for herself it made no great matter. She considered Mr. Cecil a "little red bounder," as Colin had phrased it, and could not understand his insistence on the point. He got impatient now when, he having alluded to their night in Naples, she asked why he wanted it, and his answer, the same as ever, that it would please Mr. Cecil, who was a useful little red bounder, carried no conviction. There was something behind and she could not conceive what it was.

The day of their departure was still uncertain, when a second morning of driving rain caused Colin to come down to breakfast with his mind made up.

"It's quite intolerable," he said. "Capri without the heat and sun is like a pantomime without the fairies. What a

cursed place; it only exists in the summer. Let's go to-day, Vi. We'll catch the midday boat."

"But it goes in two hours," said she.

"The sooner the better."

"But, darling...." she said.

"Oh, Lord, throw your things into your boxes, and sit on them, darling!" said Colin. "If they're spoiled you shall have new ones. But I can't endure this island any more. We ought to have left before the weather broke, instead of stopping on."

"But I really don't think I can be ready," she said. "Besides, you wanted to stay the night with Mr. Cecil. You can't pounce on him."

"As a matter of fact, I've just sent Giuseppe down to the telephone office to say that we shall arrive to-night," said Colin.

Violet felt a justifiable rebellion at this; she choked it down with a not very convincing lightness.

"But, darling, you're being too autocratic," she said. "How would it be if you went and I caught you up to-morrow? Then you could have your adorable Mr. Cecil all to yourself."

Colin turned on her with a blaze of white fury in his eyes. Of that she caught one glimpse, authentic and terrifying. Then, as if by some magical and instantaneous solvent, it melted before he spoke into his most charming mood.

"I know I oughtn't to have telephoned, darling, until I had consulted you," he said. "But it's your fault; you've spoiled me. You've made me think that if I want to do a thing very much, you'll agree to it. I apologise. It was stupid of me. Now if you really don't want to come, just say so, and I'll run

down to the town and reverse my first message if it has gone. It shall be exactly as you like."

Violet had to take one moment to steady herself. That glimpse of Colin, the most complete she had had yet of something that lay below, had gripped her very soul with terror. That stabbed at her and passed, and from whence it had come she knew not, nor whither it had gone. Only Colin remained.

"My dear, of course I'll come," she said.

"Ah, that's delicious of you," said he.

She went upstairs to tell her maid to pack everything at once, as they were off this morning. She found her knees trembling with the effect of that moment of abject terror, but already, in its vanishing, it had taken away with it any impression that could be analysed. Just that stroke, stunning as a blow, and then Colin again.

CHAPTER IX

For many years now with Philip Yardley a widower and his mother old, Stanier had withdrawn itself from the splendour of its traditional hospitalities, but now with the installation of Violet and Colin there, on their return from Italy, it blossomed out again into lavish and magnificent flower. Throughout November a succession of parties assembled there for the pheasant shooting, and in the early frosts of that December the wild fowl, snipe and duck and teal in the marshes, and the unprecedented abundance of woodcock in the park, gave an added lustre to the battues. In the evening, after an hour's concert, or some theatrical entertainment for which the artists had come from London or Paris, the band

reassembled in the long gallery, and dancing kept the windows bright almost till the rising of the late dawn.

There were many foreign royalties in England that year, and none left without a visit to Stanier, accompanied by cousins of the English house. Stanier, in fact, opened its doors, as in the days before the stroke fell on Philip's father, and fairly outshone its own records for magnificence. Colossal in extravagance, there was yet nothing insensate in its splendour; it shone, not for purposes of dazzling, but only as reasserting its inherent and historical gorgeousness.

Violet seemed born to the position which she now occupied. While Colin's father lived, it was his pleasure that she should be hostess here, and she picked up the reins, and drove the great gold coach along, as if she had been born and trained all her life for that superb rôle. She and Colin, at Philip's wish, occupied the wing which was only tenanted by the heir and his wife, and though at his death, so he supposed, they would not step from porch to possession, he loved to give them this vicarious regency.

Out of the silver safe there had come for her the toilet set by Paul Lamerie, boxes and brushes, candle-stick and spirit lamp, and, above all, the great square mirror mounted on a high base. Amarini of chiselled metal supported it on each side; there was no such piece known in museum or royal closet. A double cable-band encircled the base, and the man who was in charge of the plate showed Colin how, by pressing a stud in the cable just above the maker's mark, the side of the base sprang open disclosing a secret drawer. For some reason not even known to himself, Colin had not passed on that curious contrivance to Violet.

Then Philip had brought out for her, as Colin's wife, those incredible jewels, which his mother, tenant for life, had long suffered to repose in their chests, and one night she gleamed with the Stanier pearls, another she smouldered among the burning pools of the rubies, another she flashed with the living fire of those cascades of diamonds, and more than once she wore the sapphire to which so strange a story was attached. Some said that it had once belonged to the regalia, and that Elizabeth had no more right to give it to her favourite who founded the splendour of to-day, than she had to bequeath to him the sceptre of her realm, but though twice an attempt had been made on the part of the Crown to recover it, once at Elizabeth's death, and once with the coming of the German Dynasty, the Crown had not proved successful on either of these inauspicious occasions, and had to content itself with what it had.

This great stone was of 412 carats in weight, soft cornflower blue in colour, and matchless in aqueous purity. How it had got among the Crown jewels none knew, but its possession was even then considered a presage and a fulfilment of prosperity, for, beyond doubt, Elizabeth had worn it on her withered breast every day while her fleet was sailing to encounter the Armada. By tradition the wearer was decked with no other jewels when it blazed forth, and indeed its blue flame would have withered any lesser decoration. It figured in the Holbein portrait of its original possessor in the Stanier line, as a brooch to Colin's doublet, and there once more, impersonating his ancestor, Colin wore it at the fancy dress ball which concluded the last of these December parties. This took place the night before Raymond came back from Cambridge.

Strange undercurrents, swirling and eddying, moved so far below the surface of the splendour that no faintest disturbance reached it. Admirable as was the manner in which Violet filled her part, it was not of her that Philip thought, or at her that he looked, when he waited with her and Colin for the entrance of royal visitors before dinner in the great hall. Day after day the glass doors were opened, but to his way of thinking it was neither for Violet nor for them that they swung wide, but for Colin. His own life he believed to be nearly consumed, but about the ash of it there crept red sparks, and these, too, were Colin's. All his emotions centred there. It was for him and his matchless charm, that these great gatherings were arranged. Philip obliterated himself, and feasted his soul on the sight of Colin as lord of Stanier. While Raymond lived that could never come to pass, but he beguiled himself with the fantasy that when his own eyes grew dim in death, Colin's splendour would light the halls from which he himself had faded. That of all the material magnificence of which he still was master, had power to stimulate him; sceptical of any further future for himself, and incurious as to what that might be, if it existed at all, the only future that he desired was for the son on whom all his love was centred. He knew that he was cheating himself, that this sight of Colin playing host at Stanier was one that, in all human probability, would never after his death be realised, but it was in his power now to give Colin a taste of it, and himself share its sweetness. For this reason he had arranged that these gorgeous weeks of entertainment should take place before Raymond got back from Cambridge, for with Raymond here, Raymond, the heavy and the unbeloved, must necessarily exclude Colin from the place which his father so

rapturously resigned to him. At Christmas there would be just the family party, and he would be very civil to his eldest son.

Such was the course pursued by one of these undercurrents; two others sprang from Violet, one in direct opposition to that of her father-in-law. For she knew that, so far from his death dethroning her and giving the sovereignty to Raymond, it but passed on to her with complete and personal possession. Could his spirit revisit these earthly scenes, it would behold her in ownership on her own account of all the titles and splendours that had been his. Raymond—there alone her knowledge marched with his desire—would be without status here, while for Colin there would be just such position as his marriage with her gave him. She, exalted now by Philip's desire, to play hostess in virtue of her marriage, would be hostess indeed hereafter, and Colin host through his relationship to her.

These weeks had given her a hint, a foretaste, of what would be hers, and once more, as in her maidenhood, she felt that she would have made any marriage in order to robe herself thus. The splendour of what she was lent had set light to her old ambitions again, and this was all to be hers, not lent, but her own. She would enter into the fabled inheritance of the legend, that legend to which, for its very remoteness, she had never given two serious thoughts. But now, though it still wore, like a cloak over its head, its unconvincing mediævalism, the shape of it vaguely outlined and indifferently regarded, had something sinister about it. It did not matter; it was only an ugly shadow in the background, but now she averted her eyes from it, instead of merely not noticing it.

Here, then, was the second undercurrent, which, sluggish and veiled, yet steadily moved within her. For though with the passing of the inheritance to her, it would be she who came within the scope and focus of the legend, which, frankly, when looked in the face, presented that meaningless, age-worn countenance, she felt that she was in the grip of it not directly but, somehow, through Colin. She told herself that by no combination of diabolical circumstance could that be; for, with the knowledge that was hers about the date of Colin's birth and his mother's marriage, it was he, he and Raymond, who had passed out of reach of the parchment with its promises and its penalty. Yet instinct, unconvinced by reason, told her that it was through Colin that she and the children she would bear him, would be swept into the mysterious incredible eddy. Was it the persistent luck that attended him which induced so wildly superstitious a presage? Like some supernaturally protected being, he passed along his way. Raymond's attempt to kill him had, by the merest most fortuitous circumstance of a punctured tyre, led to Raymond's utter helplessness in his hands.... Colin moved on a charmed pilgrimage, idolised and adored by herself, by his father, by all who came in contact with him and, she was beginning to see, he had no spark of love in him that was kindled by these fires. Analyse him and you would find no faintest trace of it. Perhaps, in spite of his twenty-one years now so nearly complete, he had remained a child still in respect of the heart's emotions. Yet who could hate like Colin? Who, so she shuddered to think, could have shewn, though but for a second, so white-hot a mask of fury as he had once turned on herself?

She could not succeed in forgetting that, and all Colin's warmth and eagerness of affection to her ever since, could

not wash that out. All day, perhaps, in the hospitable discharge of their duties, they would scarcely have a word together, but when at length for a few hours of rest the house grew silent, he sought her side, relaxed and sleepy, yet tingling, so she felt, with some quality of vitality that no one else had a spark of. Youth and high spirits, the zest of life and the endless power of enjoyment filled the house, but Colin alone, unwearied and eminent as the sun, lit up all others. It was not the exuberance of his health and energy that was the source of his burning; something inspired them.

The last night had come. To-morrow morning their guests would depart, and during the day Raymond would arrive. That night there had been the fancy dress ball, and she, wearing the crown and necklace and girdle made by Cellini, had impersonated the ill-fated Duchess of Milan for whom they were made, and who, while wearing them, had drunk the poisoned draught which she had herself prepared for her lover. Colin adored that story; the lover, a mere groom of the chambers, he averred, was a sort of old Colin Stanier—all prospered with him, even to the removal of his mistress in this manner, for she was growing old and wearied him with her insatiable desire. Colin himself had appeared as his ancestor wearing the great sapphire.

Violet had undressed and got into bed, while he remained downstairs with two or three men who still lingered. The Cellini jewels lay on her dressing-table, and feeling too sleepy to plait her hair, she had just let it down, and it lay in a spread web of gold over her pillow. Then the door from his dressing-room softly opened, and he looked in.

“Not asleep?” he asked.

“No, but nearly. Oh, Colin, stand under the light a moment. There! The sapphire is alive to-night. It’s like a blue furnace of flame. Now shield it from the light.”

Violet sat up in bed. “But it’s the most extraordinary thing!” she said. “Not a ray from the lamp touches it, yet it’s burning as brightly as ever. Where does the light come from? It comes from below it. I believe it comes from you. I’m frightened of you. Are you a fire?”

It seemed to him no less than her that some conflagration not lit from without burnt in the heart of the stone. Blue rays, generated within, shot from it; it shone with some underlying brilliance, as if, as she had said, it was he who kindled it.

“Watch it, then,” he said, unbuckling his cloak. Even as he detached it from him, the fire in it grew dim; only the reflection from outside fed it. Incredulous at what she thought she saw, willing to attribute it to some queer effect of faceted surfaces, she laughed.

“You’ve killed it,” she said. “I think I shall have to give it you, when it’s mine, so that you may keep it alive.”

“Ah, do,” he said. “When you come into your own—may that day be far distant.”

“Indeed, yes,” she said.

He sat down on the edge of his bed, and began unloosing the jewelled buttons of his doublet.

“I believe my father would almost give it me now,” he said, “though I suppose he has no right to, just as Elizabeth gave it to the other Colin. I simply adore it. I’ve been saying my prayers to it, standing in front of the picture.”

“Is that what has kept you?” she asked.

“No, they didn’t take me long. The Prince kept me; he wanted to hear the whole of the legend. He was frightfully impressed; he said he felt as if the original Colin had been telling it him, and expects nightmare. He also besought me to swear allegiance when I come of age and see what happens. I really think I shall, though, after all, I haven’t got much to complain of in the way of what the world can give.”

“But it will be I, really, to choose whether I do that or not,” said Violet.

“Well, I couldn’t tell him that,” said Colin, “though as a matter of fact, I forgot it. In any case it isn’t I to do that. Raymond’s the apparent heir-apparent, and dear Raymond has shewn his allegiance pretty well already, though one doesn’t quite see why Satan made my bicycle-tyre to puncture. If he had been on Raymond’s side, my face would have been nearly blown to bits. No, Raymond’s not his favourite. Fancy Raymond being anybody’s favourite. Oh, Vi, a thousand pardons; he was yours just for a little.”

Colin was slowly undressing as he gave utterance to these reflections. He had taken off his shirt, and his arms, still brown from the tanning of the sun and sea, were bare to the shoulder.

“You brute, Colin,” she said, “you brown, bare brute.”

“Shall I dress again,” said he, “if a bare arm shocks you?”

“No, I don’t mind that. It’s the brute I object to. By the way, Raymond comes to-morrow—to-day rather. How on earth can I behave to him with decency. Don’t you wish he wasn’t coming?”

Colin picked up a long tress of her hair and wound it round his arm.

“No, I’m looking forward to his coming,” he said, smiling. “I’m going to make Raymond wish that he had never been born. I’m going to be wonderfully agreeable to him, and everything I say shall have a double meaning. Raymond wanted to kill me; well, I shall shew him that there are other ways of scoring off people. My father isn’t very fond of Raymond as it is, but when he sees how pleasant I am to him, and how black and sulky Raymond is to me, he won’t become any fonder of him. I must think it all out.... And then all the time Raymond will be consoling himself with the thought that when father dies his day will come, and he’ll reign in his stead. There’s the cream of it, Vi! He’ll be longing for my father to die, you know, and when he does Raymond will be worse off than ever. And you, you once said,‘Poor Raymond!’ to me. Raymond’s got to pay for that. I won’t have Raymond pitied.”

Never had Colin worn a more radiant face than when, walking in and out of his dressing-room, brown and lithe, as he divested himself of his gorgeous dress and put on his night clothes, his beautiful mouth framed itself to this rhapsody of hatred. There was nothing passionate about it, except its sincerity; he did not rage and foam on the surface of his nature, he but gleamed with the fire that seemed so strangely to have lit up those wonderful rays in the sapphire that he had been wearing. He still held it in his hand when, after having turned out the lights in his dressing-room, he closed the door and sprang to her side.

“I don’t like to leave it alone,” he said. “I must pin it to the pillows. It will watch over us. With you and it by me, I shall lie in enchantment between waking and sleeping, floating on

the golden sea of your hair. Raymond, let's make plans for Raymond...."

She lay in the warm tide of his tingling vitality, and soon fell asleep. But presently she tore herself out of the clutch of some hideous vision, which faded from vagueness into non-existence as she woke and heard his breathing, and felt his cheek resting on her shoulder.

The next night, instead of the long cloth which, evening after evening, had stretched from the window of the great dining-room to the Elizabethan sideboard at the other end, there was spread near the fire, for the night was cold, a small round table that just held the five of them—Philip and his mother, Violet, Raymond, and Colin—and instead of the rows of silver sconces in the dark panels, four red-shaded candlesticks, sufficient for purposes of knife and fork, left the rest of the room in a velvety dimness. Raymond had arrived only just in time to dress for dinner, coming into the gallery but half a minute before his father, while Colin, who all this week had been a model of punctuality, had not appeared yet. Philip gave his arm to his mother, and behind, unlinked, came Violet and Raymond. He had advanced to her with elbow formally crooked, but she, busy with a sleeve-lace that had caught in her bracelet, moved on apart from him. She had shaken hands with him, and given him a cool cordial word, but she felt incapable of more than that.

Philip sat down with a sigh of relief.

"A reasonable evening at last," he said, "though I wouldn't say that if Colin were here. I believe he got fresher and livelier every day. Ah, Raymond, you must know we've had

some parties here. Colin took your place, as you had to be at Cambridge."

Raymond tried to put into his answer the geniality he did not feel.

"I know," he said. "The daily picture papers have been full of Colin. Are you having more people at Christmas, father?"

"No, just ourselves as usual."

Raymond turned to Violet. "You had a fancy-dress ball last night, hadn't you?" he said. "I could have got down yesterday if I had known."

Philip conjectured a reproach in this and resented it. The last few weeks had been planned by him as "Colin's show." If Colin could not step into his shoes when he was dead, he could wear them for a week or two while he lived.

"I thought your term was not over till to-day," he said.

"I could have got leave," replied Raymond. "But I understand, father."

Philip felt rising in him that ceaseless regret that Colin was not his first-born. And that jealousy of Colin, implied in Raymond's "I understand" irritated his father. He wanted Colin to come and relieve the situation, as he always did.

"What exactly do you mean by that?" he asked.

Suddenly old Lady Yardley joined in. "I know what he means, Philip," she said. "He means that he should have been host here, if you were going to depute one of your sons to do the honours for you, and that you preferred that Colin should do them instead. That is what he means."

"There, mother, that's enough," said Philip.

An embarrassed silence ensued, broken by the sound of running steps in the gallery. Just as they arrived at the door,

which one of the footmen opened, there was a loud crash and Colin slid in on his back, and had begun to laugh before he picked himself up.

"Gosh, what a bang!" he said. "I believe somebody greased the boards in the hope that I should be in a hurry and fall down. Sorry, father; sorry, granny; sorry, Violet, for upsetting all your nerves. Why—Raymond!"

Colin laid his hand affectionately on his brother's shoulder.

"I never knew you had come," he said. "How are you, dear Raymond? How's Cambridge? We have missed you in all this hullabaloo. Every one asked after you and wanted to know why you weren't here."

Colin took the vacant place between Violet and his grandmother.

"How far have you all got?" he said. "Oh, very well, I won't have any soup. Now this is jolly! Just ourselves, Granny, and short coats and black ties. Vi, darling, why didn't you come and pull me out of my bath? I was just lying soaking there; I had no idea it was so late."

Colin spared one fleeting glance at his brother, and began to put into words some of the things he had thought about in his bath.

"Raymond, it is time that you came home," he said. "The pigeons are worse than ever in the Old Park, and I'm no earthly use at that snap-shooting between the oaks. Give me a rabbit coming towards me along a road, not too fast, and a rest for my gun, I can hit it in the face as well as anybody. But those pigeons among the oaks beat me."

"Yes, we might have a morning in the Old Park to-morrow," said his father.

Colin looked at Violet as if she had called his attention to something.

“Yes, Vi, what?” he asked.

“Nothing.”

“Oh, I thought you jogged my elbow. To-morrow, father? Oh, what a bore! I promised to play golf. But I shall be back by one if I go on my motor-bicycle. May I join you at that sharp corner in the road; that’s about half-way to the keeper’s lodge, and I could come on with you from there.”

“But that corner is at the far end of the Old Park,” said his father.

“Is it? The one I mean has a big rhododendron bush close to it. You know where I mean, Raymond. Is it at the far end?”

“Yes, that’s the far end,” said Raymond.

“I believe you’re right. Oh, of course you’re right, and I’m idiotic. It’s where I picked you up one day in the autumn when you had been after the pigeons.”

Colin applied himself to his dinner, and caught the others up.

“There’s something in my mind connected with that day,” he said, “and I can’t remember what it is. I had been playing golf, and I punctured, and walked back along the ridge instead of wheeling my bicycle along the road. Something funny: I remember laughing. Vi, darling, can’t you remember? Or didn’t I tell you?”

Violet saw that even in the red glow of the candle-shades Raymond’s face had turned white. There was red light upon it, but not of it.

“You certainly did not tell me,” she said in sheer pity. “I remember the day, too. There was a man who had escaped

from the asylum and stolen a gun from the keeper's...."

"Yes, that's right," said Colin. "I believe that's on the track. A man with a gun."

Philip laughed.

"One of the most amusing things I ever heard, Colin," he said. "I am surprised at Violet's forgetting it. Is that all?"

Colin turned to his grandmother. "Granny, they're all laughing at me because I can't remember. Father's laughing at me, so is Violet. You and Raymond are the only kind ones. Man with a gun, Raymond shooting pigeons. That makes two men with a gun. Then there was me."

"The very best story, Colin. Most humorous," said his father.

Colin sighed. "Sometimes I think of things just as I'm going to sleep," he said. "If I think of it to-night, I shall wake Violet and tell her, and then she'll remember it if I can't. Man with a gun...."

"Oh, Colin, stop it," said Violet.

"Well, let's put it to the vote," said Colin. "Father and Violet want me to stop trying to remember it; little do they know how it would amuse them if I did. Granny and I want me to go on—don't you, dear—it all depends on Raymond. What shall I do, Ray?"

Raymond turned to his father, appearing not to hear Colin's question.

"Did you have good sport last week?" he asked.

"Ah, Raymond votes against us, Granny," said Colin. "He's too polite to tell me directly. We're squashed, Granny; we'll squash them at whist afterwards; you and I shall be partners, and we'll play Raymond and father for their

immortal souls. It will be like the legend, won't it? Violet shall look on and wonder whether her poor husband is going to heaven or hell. I keep my immortal soul in a drawer close to Violet's bedside, Granny. So if we lose, she will have to go up to her bedroom and bring it down. Oh, I say, I'm talking too much. Nobody else can get a word in edgeways."

It was a fact that the other four were silent, but Raymond had the faculty of producing silence in his neighbours. Cigarettes had come now with coffee, and this was the usual signal for old Lady Yardley to rise. To-night, however, she took no notice of the gold-mounted stick which was put into her hand by Philip.

"Never mind them, my dear," she said, "they are amusing themselves. Listen to me, Colin."

There was no other voice in the room but hers, the servants had gone out, and again she spoke. No one moved; no one spoke; but Raymond opposite her leaned forward; Violet leaned left-wise; Philip, with her stick in his hand leaned to the right. She dropped her voice to a whisper, but in the tense stillness a shout would not have been more audible.

"There are strange things in this house, darling," said she to Colin. "I have been here sixty years, and I know better than anybody. Green leaf I have been, and flower and fruit, and now I am withered. Sixty years ago, my dear, I sold my soul to the master of it, and from that moment I have been a ghost, oh, such a happy ghost, looking on at the glory of the house. And then my son Philip married, and he brought you here, and the moment I set eyes on you I loved you, for I knew that you were born of the blood and the bargain...."

Philip drew back his chair and got up.

“There’s your stick, mother,” he said. “We’ll follow you quite soon, or it will be too late for your game of whist.”

She fumbled for the crook of the handle, and rose; her eyes were bright, and as blue as the sapphire Colin had worn last night.

“Yes, but I must talk to Colin again,” she said. “No one understands me except Colin. There used to be other games than whist, Philip, at Stanier. There was dice-throwing, you know, on the altar of God. We are not so wicked now to all appearance. Whist in the gallery; far more seemly.”

Raymond held the door open for her, and she hobbled through, Violet following. As she passed out, Violet looked first at Raymond, and then swiftly away, with a shudder, at Colin.

“Don’t be long, Uncle Philip,” she said in a low voice. “Grandmamma is so queer to-night.”

Colin moved up next his father.

“Give me a glass of port, father,” he said. “Here’s Raymond back, and I’m so glad to see him. Your health, Ray!”

He drank off his glass. “Father, isn’t it lovely to have Raymond back again?” he said. “But—this is an aside—he’s putting on flesh. May your shadow never grow more, Raymond. Tell us all about Cambridge; has it been delightful? I’m sure it has; for otherwise you wouldn’t look so prosperous. Speech! Mustn’t we have a speech from him, father?”

There, on one side of Philip, was Colin, brimming with good humour and welcome, brimming, too, as he had shewn during dinner with the mere nonsense born of happiness. On

the other side was Raymond, serious and unresponsive, without a spark to answer this crackling fire. There he sat, and what sort of host would he have made during these last weeks? He made no attempt to reply to Colin, and but fingered the stem of his glass.

"You might tell us what has been going on, Raymond," said his father.

"Nothing particular. Just the ordinary term. I've been playing for the University at soccer. I shall probably be in the team."

"And you never told us?" said Colin. "Lord! What a swell he is, father! We're not worthy to hear about it; that's what is the matter with us."

Philip turned to Raymond. "That's good," he said. "That's pleasant news. There's Colin here, who won't do anything more violent than golf."

"Oh, father! What about shooting pigeons?" said Colin. "Oh, no, Raymond did that. Bother! There was a man with a gun...."

Philip got up. "Now don't get on to that again," he said. "You've amused us enough for one night...."

"But I may amuse Vi, mayn't I, if I think of the rest of it?" asked Colin.

Philip turned his back on him and took Raymond's arm. He had the sense of behaving with great fairness, but the impartiality demanded effort.

"Ring the bell, Colin, will you?" he said over his shoulder. "I'm delighted to hear about your success in the—the football field, Raymond. Games are taking the place of sport in this

generation. Your Uncle Ronald and I never played games; there was shooting, there was riding....”

“Oh, but there’s lots of sport still,” said Colin. “Big game, father; large animals. Not footballs, things that feel.... And then my bicycle punctured. Oh, you wanted me to ring.”

At this rite of whist for the sake of old Lady Yardley, it was necessary that one of the five should cut out. She herself and Philip took no part in this chance; the rite was that both should play if there was not another table to be formed. Raymond turned the highest card, and with a paper to beguile him, sat just where he had sat when one night the whist-table had broken up, and he heard Colin’s mimicry. As the four others cut for deal, some memory of that must have come into Colin’s mind.

“What an awful night that was, Vi,” he said, “when we were playing bridge with Aunt Hester. She revoked, do you remember, and swore she hadn’t. How we laughed. And then I thought everybody else had gone to bed, and I—good Lord.... Yes!”

“Another of Colin’s amusing stories,” said his father.

“Sh-sh,” said Colin. “Granny, you always turn up the ace for your trump card. Will you give me lessons?”

The rubber was very quickly over, and Raymond took Colin’s place. Colin drew a chair up close to his brother, and instead of reading a paper in the corner, watched his hand and the play of it with breathless attention.

“Raymond; you’re a wizard,” he said at the end of it. “Every plan of yours was right. You finessed and caught the king, you didn’t finesse and caught the queen. Why don’t I have luck like yours? It’s enough to make any fellow jealous; I shan’t look at your hand any more. I shall look at Violet’s.

My poor wife! Raymond's got all the winning cards again. Or, if he hasn't, he'll turn them into winning cards. He'll down you."

"Colin, if you would talk just a little less," said his father, "we should be able to attend a little more."

Raymond, if no one else, fully appreciated the utter absence of reproof in his father's voice. If it had been he who had been talking, there would have been, at the best, a chill politeness there; at the worst, a withering snub. But this was the candour of friend to friend.... About that signed paper now, which Colin had deposited at his bank. He himself had signed some sort of mad confession that he had planned to shoot Colin. His will had bent to Colin's like hot wax to strong fingers, but could he not somehow get possession of it again? While it was in Colin's hands, it was like a toasting-fork in which that devil-twin of his impaled and held him before the fire. All dinner-time Colin had scorched him, and not less burning was this mocking kindliness which made the one appear so warmly genial, the other awkward and ungracious. How long would he be able to stand it? Presently, at the end of the rubber, Colin would join him in the smoking-room and reveal another aspect, no doubt. But he could rob him of that further indulgence, he would go to bed as soon as the rubber was over.

The next hand finished it and Lady Yardley got up. She had won to-night from Colin, and clinked a couple of half-sovereigns in her hand.

"But it will come back to you, darling," she said. "Everything there is will come to you if you are wise and careful. My eyes grow dim as I get older, but there is another sort of sight that gets brighter. Oh, I see very well."

Philip went with her to the door.

“Your eyes are wonderful yet, mother,” he said. “There are years of vision in them yet.”

As if Colin had read Raymond’s thought of going to bed, he turned to Violet.

“I may be a little late to-night, darling,” he said. “Raymond and I are going to have a long talk in the smoking-room.”

“Oh, I think not,” said Raymond. “I’m tired; I shall go to bed.”

Colin whisked round to him. “Not just yet, Ray,” he said. “I haven’t seen you for so long. It would be nice of you to come and have a chat. I know you will. Persuade him to do as I ask, Vi. Who knows what important things I may have to tell about?”

Philip rejoined them. “I shall just come in and have a cigarette with you boys,” he said. “Good-night, Violet.”

“Ah, that’s jolly,” said Colin.

They preceded him to the smoking-room, for he turned into his own room a moment, and as soon as they were there Colin shut the door.

“Father will be with us in a minute,” he said, “and I can only just begin my talk. But if you attempt to go to bed when he does, Raymond, I shall tell him about the morning when you shot pigeons. Oddly enough, I have remembered all about it. And to-morrow I’ll telephone for the envelope I left at my bank. So it’s up to you.”

Colin came a step closer; with such an eagerness must some Borgia Pope have looked on the white skin of the victim he had ordered to be flayed.

“It’s jolly seeing you again, you sulky blackguard,” he said. “Has anybody smacked your face since I did it for you? You’re going to spend the whole of the vacation here, unless I get tired of you and send you away before. Ah, there’s father. Isn’t it jolly, father; Raymond hopes to spend the whole of the vacation here.”

Philip did not seem as enthusiastic as Colin about this, but he was adequately cordial, and, having smoked his cigarette in silence, got up to go.

“Are you coming?” he said to his sons.

Colin nodded to Raymond to answer this.

“We were just going to have a talk first, father,” he said.

“Very good. Don’t sit up too late. Colin hasn’t been to bed till three for the last fortnight.”

Colin waited till the door was shut.

“Now for our talk,” he said. “Isn’t Violet looking divine? Aren’t I a lucky fellow? Even the thought of being mistress of Stanier wasn’t enough to make her tolerate you. We had a lovely honeymoon, Raymond. We often talked of you. Lord! How she loathes you! I should think even you could see that. Now an interesting question. I ask for information. Do you think she knows about that morning we were speaking of at dinner?”

“I have no means of telling,” said Raymond.

“Well, we’ll assume she doesn’t. Now I want you to observe her closely again to-morrow, and see if you think she knows then. I’ve remembered all about it, and, as you heard me say, I was thinking of telling her, just drowsily and quietly to-night. And then to-morrow you’ll guess whether I have

done so or not. Take coffee for breakfast if you think I have, tea, if you think I haven't. What a jolly Christmas game!"

Colin poured himself out a glass of whisky and soda.

"Fancy father saying that I didn't care for sport," he said. "I adore the thought of the sport I'm going to have with you. You used to be rude to me when we were alone, now you have got to be polite. I can always send for that paper which you signed and father witnessed. Now don't be tedious and say that the condition on which you signed was that I would not tell him. What does that matter to me? You wanted to kill me; all that I do now is in self-defence. Otherwise you might plan to kill me again."

He yawned. "I'm rather sleepy to-night, Raymond," he said. "I thought the satisfaction of seeing you again would make me wakeful. I shall go upstairs. Violet will be pleased that I have not sat up late after all. I shall sit on her bed and talk to her. Last night her hair made a golden mat on the pillow. There is a marvellous fragrance in her hair. Do you remember that from the days—not many of them—when you used to kiss her? How she winced! Now it's your turn to wince. We shall talk about you, no doubt. And remember about the tea and the coffee to-morrow."

Day after day Colin amused himself thus; morning after morning Raymond had to guess whether Violet had been told, until one evening, wearying of this particular game, Colin casually mentioned that all his guessings had been superfluous, for Violet had known ever since one day on their honeymoon, when she had provoked him by saying, "Poor Raymond." Even as a cat with a mouse, so Colin played with him, taking no notice of him except in ordinary intercourse, for nearly a whole day, and letting him seem forgotten; then,

with quivering shoulders, he would spring on him again, tap him with sheathed claws and a velvet paw, or with more forcible reminder, nip him with needle-like teeth. It was useless and worse than useless for Violet to plead for him; her advocacy, her appeal to the most elementary feeling of compassion only exasperated Colin.

"Darling, as if my brain wasn't busy enough with Raymond, you must go and add to my work like that!" he said. "I've got to cure you of being sorry for Raymond as well. I thought you were cured when I told you he tried to murder me. Just let your mind dwell on that. He planned to shoot me from behind that wall. I'll take you there to-morrow and show you the place, to make it more vivid to you. One's brother must not make such plans and fail without suffering for it afterwards. Perhaps you would prefer that he had succeeded? Ah! I made you shudder then. You trembled deliciously.... I've got such a delightful Christmas present for him, a little green jade pigeon with ruby eyes. It cost a lot of money. The green—I shall explain to him—is his jealousy of me, for he's devoted to you still, and the red eyes are the colour of my blood, and the whole will remind him of that amusing morning."

The new year came in with three nights of sharp frost, and the ice on the bathing lake grew thick enough to bear. The lake was artificial, lying in a small natural valley through which a stream ran. A dam some twelve feet high had been built across the lower end of it, in which was the sluice gate; thus the stream, confined by the rising ground at the sides, and the dam at the end, had spread itself into a considerable sheet of water, shallow where the stream entered it, but some nine feet deep at the lower end, where was the bathing-place

and the header boards and pavilions for bathers. The dam was planted with rhododendron bushes, whose roots strengthened the barrier, and in summer the great bank of blossom overhung the deep water. A path ran behind them crossing the sluice by a stone bridge with balustrade.

Raymond had gone down there directly after breakfast, and came back with the news that he had walked this way and that across the ice, and that it seemed safe enough. For some reason which Colin failed to fathom, he seemed in very cheerful spirits to-day; it might be that the end of the Christmas vacation was approaching, when he would return to Cambridge; it might be that he, like Colin, himself had seen the rapidity with which old age was gaining on his father. There was humour in that. Raymond looked forward, and little wonder, to his own succession here, not knowing, poor shorn lamb, that he would be worse off than ever when that unpropitious event occurred. As for the remission of subtle torture which his return to Cambridge would give him, there were several days yet, thought Colin; opportunity for much pleasant pigeon-conversation.

So Raymond got his skates, while Colin and Violet, sitting cosy in the long gallery, wondered whether it was worth while going out, and he went down by the long yew hedge to the lake, with brisk foot and brightened eye. After all, other people besides Colin could make plans, and one of his had matured this morning into a luscious ripeness. Sleepless nights had been his, with hands squeezing for Colin's throat and dawn breaking in on the fierce disorder of his thoughts, before he had distilled his brain down to the clear broth. Wild and vagrant fancies got hold of him, goaded as he was to the verge of desperation by this inhuman persecution; red

madnesses had flashed before him, like the cloaks that the matadors wave before the bull, and, whether he charged or not, another ribanded dart pierced him. He had bitten his lip till the blood flowed in order to recall himself to self-control, and to use those hours of the night, when Colin was with Violet, to hew out some defence to the fluttered red and the ribanded dart. There had been his handicap: hate of Colin had made him violent, whereas Colin's hate of him had made Colin calm and self-possessed; he must cease to rage if he hoped to arrive at any plan. So night after night he had curbed himself, making his wits reduce their mad galloping to an orderly pace, and pull steadily in harness.

The grass was encrusted with the jewels of frost; every step crunched a miracle of design into powder, and now for the first time since he had come to Stanier, Raymond fed with the braced joy of a frosty morning on the banquet which the season spread. He was hungry for it, all these days he had been starved and tortured, sick with apprehension, and shuddering at the appearance of Colin with rack and pincers. But now he was hungry again for the good things of life, and the long draught of cold air was one of them, and the treading of the earth with muscles alternately strong and relaxed was another, and the sense of the great woodlands that would in no distant future be his, was a third, for how old, how rapidly ageing, was his father; and the *congé* he would soon give to Colin and Violet was a fourth, sweeter than any. How sour had turned his love of Violet, if indeed there had ever been any sweetness in it. He lusted after her: that he knew, but just because she knew the events of that morning, when all had gone so awry, he thought of her as no more than a desirable mistress. Ha! there was a woodcock. In the frost of the morning it had lain so close that he approached within twenty

yards of it before it got up. He was near enough to see how it pulled itself forward, grasping a blade of grass in its reed-like bill, before it could get those long wings free of the ground where it squatted. With a flip flap, it skidded and swerved through the rhododendron bushes; even if he had had a gun with him he could scarcely have got a shot.

"Flip—flap"; it was just so that he had escaped from Colin's barrels. Those nights of thought, when he had bandaged the eyes of rage, had given him simplicity at last, such simplicity as Colin had so carelessly arrived at when he came through the oaks of the Old Park. He had trusted to the extraordinary similarity of his own handwriting to that of Colin, and had written a letter in Colin's name to Colin's bankers, requesting them to send the letter which he had deposited there last August, with the note on the outside of it about its eventual delivery in case of his death, to his brother, Lord Stanier, whose receipt would be forwarded.... Raymond knew it to be a desperate measure, but, after all, nothing could be more desperate than his position here, bound hand and foot to Colin, as long as that sealed envelope remained at Messrs. Bertram's. The bank might possibly make a further inquiry; telegraph to Colin for confirmation, but even if that happened, Colin was doing his worst already. No such disaster had followed. This morning Raymond had received from the bank a registered letter, containing the unopened envelope, forwarded to him by direction of Hon. Colin Stanier.

So now, as he went briskly towards the frozen lake, the confession which he had signed was safe in the letter-case he carried in the inside pocket of his coat, and for very luxury of living over again a mad moment which now was neutralised,

he drew it out and read it. There it was ... in that crisis of guilt, covered by Colin's pistol, he had consented to any terms. But now, let Colin see what would be his response when next he talked in flashes of that veiled lightning concerning a shooting of pigeons, concerning a morning when there was a lunatic at large....

Indeed Raymond determined that this very day he would fling the challenge himself. Instead of sitting dumb under Colin's blistering jibes, he would defy him; he would insult and provoke him, till he was stung into sending to the bank for the famous confession, vowing an instant disclosure of the whole matter to his father. How Raymond would snap a finger in his face for that threat, and how, when Colin received the answer from the bank that the packet in question had been sent by his own orders to his brother, would he choke with the derisive laughter of hate! Who without solid proof would credit such a tale? Besides (Raymond had it all ready now) no doubt Lord Yardley would remember witnessing with Colin the paper about which he now impotently jabbered. Had not the brothers come in together, ever so pleasantly, on that morning of the pigeon-shooting, and asked for his witnessing signature? That paper (so Raymond now framed it) had set forth how he had determined to make a better job of brotherhood than he had hitherto done, and to realise that Violet and Colin were mated in love. And already the pact had fulfilled itself, for never had the two spent days of such public fraternal amity. "Write to the bank for it in my name," Colin would be supposed to have said, "and tear it up, dear Ray! It'll be fun, too, to see if they can distinguish your handwriting from mine."... That was what Colin would find waiting for him if he sent to the

bank for the document on which this insane accusation was based.

His skates, fitted on to boots, clanked in his hand, his foot trod briskly on the frozen soil that would soon be his own. Those eye-teeth of Colin's were drawn; his father aged rapidly, and, without doubt, before many months, the park-gates would have clapped on to the final exit of Colin and his wife. Perhaps he would let Stanier to some dollar-gorged American; he had no feeling for it himself, and the other two would abhor that. Never yet had Stanier been tenanted by aliens; it was enough to make the dead turn in their graves. What was more important, it would make the living writhe. Perhaps Colin—he would be very rich, alas—would try to take it. The would-be lessees must be closely scrutinised.

So here was the lake with its stiff frozen margin; a stamp on it and a short slide over the black ice produced no cluck of remonstrance. The pavilion of the bathing-place was on the other side, but a felled tree-trunk made a comfortable seat for the exchange of his walking shoes into the boots with skates on them. He had spent a winter month in Switzerland two years before, and hungered for the bite of the blade on the sweet fodder of that black field.... Instantly, as in swimming, the instinct of that balance came back to him, and with long strokes he curved out on to the delightful playground. Outside edge, and a dropped turn, an outside back, and a taking up of the direction with the other foot....

Colin, at this moment, had made up his mind not to skate till after lunch.

"I'm lazy," he said to Violet. "I'm tired of baiting Raymond. He was more cheerful than I like this morning, Vi.

I shall smoke a cigarette and think of something new. Lord! I've got no matches."

There was a paper basket handy, and he drew a crumpled envelope from it, meaning to get a light with it from the log fire. Uncrumpling it he saw it was addressed to Lord Stanier, and idly turning it over, as he made his spill, he saw the seal of his own bank. The envelope was registered.

He tore a narrow strip off the edge of it, and used it for his purpose.

"I should like to sit here talking to you all morning," he said, "but that beastly motor-bicycle of mine has gone wrong again. I think I'll go up to the stables to see about it. Skating this afternoon, isn't it? I hate seeing Raymond skate because he's so good at it. But as I want to skate myself, what's to be done?"

Colin floated off in his crisp, graceful manner, and never was he so alert as when he appeared to be loitering. Why had Raymond received a registered envelope from Bertram's? Bertram's was not Raymond's bank. What had that envelope contained?

He strolled out of the front door; the stables lay to the right, but Raymond, hugely cheerful that morning, had gone to the lake, which was in the opposite direction. So deferring the matter of the bicycle he went down by the yew hedge and along the path on the top of the dam behind the rhododendrons. He could hear the ring of Raymond's skates on the frozen surface. Raymond would have to cease his sport and explain the matter of the envelope.

Hidden by the bushes, he had nearly come to the bridge over the sluice when from close at hand there came a noise of

loud crackings and splintering across the lake and a great splash. For one moment Colin stood quite still, his heart beating high and fast; then, with quickened pace, he walked on to the bridge over the sluice. Some ten yards out was a large hole in the surface with jagged edges; a cap and fragments of broken ice floated on it, and bubbles rose from below.

“He has been carried under the ice,” thought Colin. “How cold it must be! The water is deep there.”

What was to be done? Nothing it seemed. He could run up to the house and get help, a rope, a plank, something to put out across that gaping hole on which the sunlight glittered, but before he could return all hope (all chance rather) of saving Raymond must have passed. Was there no other plan? His mind, usually so ingenious and resourceful, seemed utterly blank, save for an overwhelming curiosity as to whether Raymond would come to the surface again, just once, just for a second.... As he looked, leaning on the balustrade of the bridge, Raymond’s head appeared; his face was white and wide-eyed, the lips of his open mouth blue with the cold. Across those ten yards which separated them their eyes met, Colin’s bright and sparkling with exuberant life, the other’s stricken with the ultimate and desperate terror.

Colin waved his hand.

“So you’ve fallen in,” he said. “I’ll go and see what can be done. If I’m too late, well, good-bye! Rather cold, isn’t it?”

The last words were spoken to emptiness. There was the cap still floating and the stream of bubbles breaking on the surface of the sparkling water.

Colin gave one leap in the air like some young colt whose limbs tingle with the joy of life, and rubbed his hands which were chilled with leaning on the bridge. Of course it was no use going to the house; the shock and cold and the soft, smothering water would have done their work long before he could bring help, and the resources of Stanier, so powerful for the living had no succour or consolation for the dead. Indeed, it would be better not to go to the house at all, for he could not imagine himself, in this ecstatic moment, simulating haste and horror and all that would be appropriate to the occasion. So making a circuit through the woods, he strolled ten minutes later into the stable yard to see about his bicycle. He had a pleasant word for the groom and a joke for the motor-mechanic. Just then his brain could only be occupied with trivial things; a great glittering curtain seemed to be let down across it, behind which were stored treasures and splendours. Presently, when he came to himself, he would inspect these.

He showed himself to Violet and his father, who were in the long gallery, when he got back to the house, said a word about his motor-bicycle, hoped that Raymond was having a good time, and went into the smoking-room. Now was the time to pull up that glittering curtain.

Till then the fact of Raymond's death, just the removal, the extinction of him had hidden all that might lie behind it; now Colin saw with an amazed gasp of interest how all the activity of his brain was needed to cope with the situation. Raymond was finished with, while his father still lived. The remote, the unexpected, the unlooked-for had occurred. Yet not quite unlooked-for ... one morning dreaming on the Capri beach, Colin had taken this possibility into account, had let it

simmer and mature in his brain, and as outcome had made Violet spend a night at the house of the British Consul in Naples. How wise that had proved; he would have been grinding his teeth if he had not done that.

Swiftly he ran over the whole process from the beginning, and though there were problems ahead of him, so far his course had been flawless. First had come the erasure in the Consulate register and the insertion of that single numeral in his mother's letter to Salvatore.... He would have to see dear Uncle Salvatore again.... That had smoothed the way for his marriage with Violet; that had ensured, even if Raymond lived to be a hundred, his own mastership and that of his children after him at Stanier. It was not mastership in name, for he would but be husband to its mistress, but he knew that name alone would be lacking to the completeness of possession. He could not have provided better for the eventuality of his father's death, which, according to all human probability, would occur before Raymond's. But fate, that blind incalculable chance, had decreed otherwise, and Colin gave a frown and a muttered exclamation to the recognition of the fact that had he left the register alone, and torn up, instead of emending his mother's letter, he would now be heir to Stanier as he indeed truly was, in his own right.

It was a pity to have devoted all that ingenuity, to have saddled himself with considerable expense as regards that troublesome Salvatore, when fate all the time was busier and wiser than he.... Yet it had been necessary, and it was no use wasting regret over it.

What stood in his way now was the letter and the register. With regard to the former it was easy to destroy it, and to

indicate to Salvatore that all required of him was to hold his tongue, or, if necessary, to tell a mere simple truth that he had given Colin two letters, one—he seemed to recollect—dated March 1, in which his sister announced her marriage, the other a fortnight later, giving news of the birth of the twins. Uncle Salvatore, with his Viagi pride, so Colin smilingly reflected, would be glad that the stain on the family honour could be expunged; Rosina was married when she brought forth. For him, too, it was pleasant to have the bar sinister lifted from him. It would not, he allowed, have weighed heavily on him; in any case it would have been amply compensated for by the enjoyment of Stanier and the expulsion of Raymond, but now there was no need for that ounce of bitter.... So much, then, for the letters; they could be destroyed. Violet would ask in vain for their production to prove her possession.

"What letters do you mean, darling?" he would answer. Yes, those letters should perish at once.

He turned his thoughts to the register. There at this moment it reposed in that archive-room, bearing the erasure so easily overlooked, so convincing when pointed out. You had but to look carefully, and, so to speak, you could see nothing but the erased numeral: it stared at you. He had, it was true, in his keeping a copy of that entry, certified to be correct by Mr. Cecil, which bore the earlier date, but, now that Violet had been informed of that erasure, she would, when Stanier changed hands, insist on the production of the register, and, knowing where to look and what to see, her lawyer would draw the conclusion, which even in the absence of confirming letters, might easily satisfy a jury. The register had been tampered with, and in whose interests but Colin's?

And by what hand? Without doubt by his father's (not that that would hurt him then) or his own. There was danger, remote perhaps but alive and smouldering, on that page; it must be quenched.

Colin recalled his meditations on the Capri beach which foresaw this contingency with a vividness as clear as was the October air on that morning. All the circumstances of it were equally sharp-edged in his memory, the sense of the hot pebbles of the beach on which he lay, the sea and its crystal embrace awaiting him when he got baked and pining for its coolness, Nino, the joyous pagan boy asleep in the shade, Vesuvius across the bay with the thin streamer of smoke. That was the *milieu* where thought came clean and clear to you, and clear and clean that morning had his thoughts been, providing for this very situation. The pieces of it lay in his brain like the last few fragments of a puzzle; he had no need even to fit them together, for he could see how curve corresponded with curve and angle with angle. All was in order, ready to be joined up, now that Raymond no longer blocked his way, and the key-piece round which the others fitted was undoubtedly that visit of Violet to Mr. Cecil.

Then came quick steps up the passage, and Violet burst in.

"Oh, Colin," she said, "a terrible thing has happened! Uncle Philip and I walked down to the lake. Raymond was not there; his boots were on the bank, there was a hole where the ice had given way at the deep end. Uncle Philip is getting men and ropes...."

CHAPTER X

It was not till well on in the afternoon that the body was recovered. All day the cold had been intense, and the ropes with the tackle for this terrible fishing got stiff and frozen. But at sunset they found it; the stream had carried it along below the ice towards the sluice.

Philip sat up with Colin in the long gallery when Violet and Lady Yardley had gone to bed. He felt no sorrow, for he had not liked Raymond, he had not even loved him with his fatherhood, for all that had been given to Colin.... Often and often he had longed that Colin had been the eldest, now there was none other than Colin; he would have all that his father coveted for him. But though he felt no sorrow, he felt remorse and pity; remorse that he had not liked this dead son of his, pity that he had died young.

"I reproach myself, Colin, most bitterly," he had been saying. "It was hard to be kind to poor Raymond, he kept kindness at arm's length. But I ought to have tried more. I ought to have taken example from you: you never wearied of kindness."

Colin laid his hand on his father's arm. All the evening he had been keeping things together by a tact so supreme that it appeared pure naturalness. He had talked quite freely about Raymond; recalled a hundred little incidents in which Raymond was a mild hero; his shooting, his prospect of playing football for Cambridge.... It was clear, too, that the tragedy had made very little impression on his grandmother, and so he had taken it for granted that they would play their rubber of whist. Why not?

"You mustn't think of it like that, father," he said. "You did what you could. You made it very jolly for him here. He liked coming home; he was going to stop here the whole of the

Christmas vacation, you know. If he had not been enjoying it, he would not have done that.”

Colin revelled in the underlying meaning of his words ... how Raymond had been enjoying it, hadn’t he?

Philip’s servant came into the room; he carried on a tray Raymond’s watch and chain, and a pocket-book.

“They found these on his lordship’s body, my lord,” he said. “I thought it best to bring them you.”

Philip took them, and looked absently at the watch which had stopped at a few minutes to eleven.

“He must have fallen in almost immediately,” he said. “I had better look at what is in his pocket-book. It may contain papers that must be attended to.”

Not until that moment had Colin given another thought to what Raymond had received that morning in the envelope from Bertram’s bank. Now in a flash he conjectured that whatever it was (and he felt no doubt of what it was) it would be found in that pocket-book which his father even then was opening. How lucky it was that he had not told his father about that attempt of Raymond’s! How splendid would appear his own magnanimity, his own unfailing kindness to him! He could emphasise them even more by a reluctance that his father should examine these remains. The water, it is true, might have got in and soaked the paper, if it was there, into illegibility, but the leather of the pocket-book seemed to have resisted well: it might easily prove to contain a legible document.

He got up in an excitement which his father did not understand.

“Are you wise to do that, do you think?” he asked in a quick, anxious voice. “There may be something there which will pain you.”

“All his papers must be gone through,” said his father. “Have you any reason, Colin?”

“I can’t explain,” said Colin.

Papers were coming out of the pocket-book now, in no way perished by the long immersion; they were damp but they held together, and Colin glanced with a lynx’s eye at them as his father unfolded them. There were a couple of bills, he could see, which Philip laid on one side, and then he came to a half-sheet of foolscap.... He read a line or two, looked at the bottom of it and saw his own name....

“What is this?” he said. “It’s signed by Raymond and witnessed by you and me.”

“Don’t look at it, father,” said Colin, knowing that it was inevitable that his father must read anything that was witnessed by himself. “Let me take it and burn it.”

“No, I can’t do that,” said Philip. “What does this mean? What....”

“Ah! don’t read it, don’t read it!” said Colin in a voice of piteous pleading.

“I must.”

“Then listen to me instead. I will tell you.”

Never had his father looked so old and haggard as then. He had seen enough of what was written there to light horror in his eyes and blanch his face to a deadly whiteness.

“Tell me then,” he said.

Colin sat down on the edge of his father’s chair.

“It’s a terrible story,” he said, “and I hoped you should never know it. But it seems inevitable. And remember, father, as I tell you, that Raymond is dead....”

His voice failed for a moment.

“That means forgiveness, doesn’t it?” he said. “Death is forgiveness; you see what I mean. It’s—it’s you who have to teach me that; you will see.”

He collected himself again.

“It was after I came back from Capri in the summer, and after Vi was engaged to me,” he said, “that what is referred to there took place. He—poor Raymond—always hated me. He thought I had your love, which should have been his as well. And then I had Violet’s love, after she had accepted him for her husband. There was a thought in that which made it so bitter that—that it poisoned him. He got poisoned; you must think of it like that. And the thought, Raymond’s poisoned thought, was this: He knew that Violet had the passion for Stanier which you and I have. Yet when she was face to face with the marriage to him, she gave up Stanier. Father dear, it wasn’t my fault that I loved her, you didn’t think it was when I told you out in Capri? And it wasn’t her fault when she fell in love with me.”

“No, Colin,” he said. “Love is like that. Go on, my dear.”

Colin spoke with difficulty now.

“Then came a day,” he said, “when a lunatic escaped from that asylum at Repstow. You had news of it one night, and told Raymond and me. He was a homicidal fellow, and he got hold of one of your keeper’s guns. Next morning Raymond went to shoot pigeons, and I bicycled on my motor to play golf. And then—then, father, we must suppose that the devil himself came to Raymond. It wasn’t Raymond who planned

what Raymond did.... He expected me to come back along the road from the lodge, and he—he hid in the bushes at that sharp corner with his gun resting on the wall, and his plan was to shoot me. It would have been at the distance of a few yards only."

Lord Yardley interrupted; his voice was hoarse and nearly inaudible.

"Wait a minute, Colin," he said. "All this reminds me of something I have heard, and yet only half heard."

Colin nodded. "I know," he said. "I'll tell that presently.... There was poor Raymond waiting for me to come round the corner. There was this madman loose in the park somewhere, and if the—the plan had succeeded, it would have been supposed that it was the madman who had killed me. But an accident happened: my bicycle punctured, and I walked back for the trudge along the ridge of the Old Park."

Colin choked for a moment.

"I caught the glint of sun on a gun-barrel by the wall at that sharp corner," he said, "and I wondered who or what that could be. It could not be the escaped madman, for they had told me at the lodge that he had been caught; and then I remembered that Raymond was out shooting pigeons, and I remembered that Raymond hated me. It occurred to me definitely then, and I felt sick at the thought, that he was waiting for me. And then, father, the mere instinct of self-preservation awoke. If it was Raymond, if I was terribly right, I could not go on like that in constant fear of my life.... I had to make myself safe.

"I stole down, taking cover behind the oaks, till I got close and then I saw it was Raymond. I was white with rage, and I was sick at heart. I had a revolver with me, for you or Vi—

you, I think—had persuaded me to take it out in case I met the wretched madman, and, father, I *had* met a wretched madman. I covered him with it, and then I spoke to him. I told him that if he moved except as I ordered him, I would kill him. He collapsed; every atom of fight was out of him, and he emptied his gun of its cartridges and laid it down. And all the time there wasn't a cartridge at all in my revolver: I had taken them out and forgotten to put them back. It was after he had collapsed that I found that out."

A wan smile, as unlike to Colin's genial heat of mirth as the moonlight is to the noonday sun, shivered and trembled on his mouth and vanished again, leaving it so serious, so tender.

"He confessed," he said. "But I had to make myself safe. I told him he must put that confession into writing and sign it, and you and I would witness it. That was done. I told you—do you remember?—that Raymond and I had a secret pact, and we wanted your witness to his signature. That was it; and it is that you hold in your hand now. I sent it to my bank, Bertram's, again in self-defence, for I knew that he would not dare to make any attempt on me, since, if it were successful, however far from suspicion he seemed to stand, there would come into your hands the confession that he had attempted to kill me. Look at the envelope, father. In case of my death, you will read there, it was to be delivered to you."

Philip did not need to look.

"Go on, Colin," he said. "How did it come into Raymond's possession?"

"I can only conjecture that. But this morning, after poor Ray had gone out to skate, I wanted a light for my cigarette, and I had no matches. I drew out something from the waste-

paper basket. It was an envelope directed to Raymond, and on the back was the seal of the bank. His handwriting, as you know, was exactly like mine, a spider scrawl you used to call it. I think he must have written to the bank in my name, asking that what I had deposited there was to be sent to him. He would never be safe till he had got that. And—and, oh, father, I should never have been safe when he had got it."

There was a long silence; Colin's head was bent on his father's shoulder; he lay there quivering, while in Philip's face the grimness grew. Presently Colin spoke again:

"You said you had heard, or half heard, some of this," he said. "I will remind you. One night at dinner, the night Ray got back from Cambridge, I made the usual nonsensical fool of myself. I seemed to try to recollect something funny that had happened on the morning when Ray went out to shoot pigeons. 'A man with a gun,' I said, and you and Vi voted that I was a bore. But I think Raymond knew why I said it, and went on with it till you were all sick and tired of me. I made a joke of it, you see; I could not talk of it to him. I could not be heavy and say, 'I forgive you; I wipe it out.' That would have been horrible for him. The only plan I could think of was to make a joke of it, hoping he would understand. I think he did; I think he saw what I meant. But yet he wanted to be safe. Oh, Lord, how I understand that! How anxious I was to be safe and not to have to tell you. But I have had to. If you had listened to me, father, you would have burned that paper. Then no one would ever have known." (Of course Colin remembered that Violet knew, but he went on without a pause:)

"I'm all to pieces to-night," he said. "I have horrible fears and all sorts of dreadful things occur to me. That paper is safe

nowhere, father. It wasn't even safe—poor Ray—at my bank. Supposing Vi, by some appalling mischance, got to see it. It would poison Raymond's memory for her. He did love her, I am sure of that, and though she didn't love him, she thinks tenderly and compassionately of him. She is not safe while it exists. Burn it, father. Just look at it once first, if you want to know that I have spoken quiet, sober truth, which I did not want to speak, as you know, and then burn it."

Philip's first instinct was to throw it straight into the smouldering logs. He believed every word Colin had said, but there was justice to be done to one who could not plead for himself. He was bound to see that Raymond had acted the story that Colin had told him. Dry-eyed and grim, he read it from first word to last, and then stood up.

"Here it is," he said. "You have been scrupulously accurate. I should like you to see me burn it."

The paper was damp, and for a little while it steamed above the logs. Then, with a flap, a flame broke from it. A little black ash clung to the embers and grew red, then a faint, grey ash ascended and pirouetted.... Philip's stern eyes melted, and he turned to his only son.

"And now I have got to forget," he said.

That seemed the very word Colin was waiting for.

"That's easy," he said. "It's easy for me, dear father, so it can't be difficult, for I'm an awful brute. We shall have to make a pact, you and I. We must burn what we know out of our hearts, just as you have burned the evidence of it. It doesn't exist any more. It was some wretched dream."

"Oh, Colin!" said his father, and in those words was all the wonder of love which cannot credit the beauty, the splendour, that it contemplates.

Colin saw his father to his room, and then walked back down the great corridor, quenching the lights as he went, for he had told the butler that no one need sit up. He drew back the curtains of the window at the head of the stairs as he passed and looked out on to the clearness of the frosty midnight. Moonlight lay over the whiteness of the gardens and terraces, but the yew hedge, black and unfrosted, seemed like some funeral route to be followed to where the ice gleamed with a strange vividness as if it were the skylight to some illuminated place below. Then, letting the curtain fall again, he went softly past the head of the lit passage where his room and Violet's lay, to put out the light at the far end of this corridor. In the last room to the left he knew Raymond was lying, and he went in.

The last toilet had been finished and the body lay on its bed below a sheet. Candles were burning, as if that which lay there dreaded the darkness, and on the table by the bed was a great bowl of white hothouse flowers. Colin had not seen Raymond since that white face looked at him across the rim of broken ice; there had been disfigurement, he imagined, and, full of curiosity, he turned back the sheet. There were little scars on the nose and ears particularly, but nothing appalling, and he looked long at Raymond's face. The heavy eyelids were closed, the mouth pouted sullenly; death had not changed him at all; he hardly looked asleep, drowsy at the most. Not a ray of pity softened Colin's smiling face of triumph.

For a month after Raymond's death, the four of them, representing three generations of Staniers, remained quietly

there. His name was mentioned less and less among them, for, after Colin's disclosure to his father, Philip avoided all speech about him, and, as far as he could, all thought. Horror came with the thought of him. The most his father could do was to try to forget him. But for an accident in that matter of a punctured tyre, Colin would now be lying where Raymond lay, and all sunshine would have passed from his declining years. He was no more than sixty-six, but he was old; Colin used to wonder at the swift advance of old age, like some evening shadow, which lengthened so rapidly. But beyond the shadow Philip's sky was full of light. His desire had been realised, though by tragic ways, and his death, neither dreaded nor wished-for, would realise it.

There were, however, events in the future which he anticipated with eagerness; the first was Colin's coming of age next March. For generations that festival had been one of high prestige in the family, and in spite of the recency of Raymond's death, he meant to celebrate it with due splendour.

The other was even more intimately longed-for; early in July, Violet would, if all were well, become a mother; and to see Colin's son, to know that the succession would continue, was the dearest hope of his life. And these two expectations brought back some St. Martin's summer of the spirit to him; he began to look forward, as is the way of youth, instead of dwelling in the past. The lengthening shadow stayed, it even retreated.... But Colin had an important piece of business to effect before his father's death, and he was waiting, without impatience but watchfully, for an opportunity to set out on it. As usual, he wanted the suggestion which would give him this opportunity to come, not from himself, but from others;

he would seem then to do what he desired because it was urged on him.

A week of dark, foggy weather towards the end of February favoured his plans. Influenza was about, and he had a touch of it, in no way serious, indeed possibly useful. After a couple of days in his room he reappeared again, but with all the fire gone out of him. He was silent and depressed, and saw that his father's eyes watched him with anxiety.

"Still feeling rather down?" asked Philip one morning, when Colin pushed an untasted plate away from him at breakfast.

Colin made a tragic face at the window. Nothing could be seen outside, the fog was opaque and impenetrable.

"That's not very encouraging, father," he said. "Not convalescing weather."

He appeared to pull himself together. "But there's nothing to worry about," he said. "I should feel depressed in this damp darkness whether I had had the flue or not."

"You want the sun," said Philip.

"Ah, the sun! Is there one? Do show it me."

Philip walked to the window; thin rain was leaking through the fog. It certainly was not inspiriting.

"Well, why not go and see it for yourself?" he said. "There's sun somewhere. Go off to the Riviera for a fortnight with Violet."

"Oh, that would be divine if we only could," said Colin. "But—I daresay it's funny of me—I don't want Vi to go through the sort of journey you have at this time of year. The trains are crammed; a fellow I know had to stand all the way

from Paris to Marseilles. I shouldn't like her to do that. Besides we can't both leave you."

"Go alone then. Violet will understand."

Colin sighed.

"I don't think I feel much like travelling either," he said. "I'll stick it out, father. I can go to bed again. I think that's the most comfortable place. Besides the Riviera is like a monkey-house just now."

"Go to the villa at Capri then."

"Ah, don't talk of it," said Colin, getting up. "Can't I see the stone-pine frying in the sunshine. And the freesias will be out, and the wall-flowers. Nino, your old boatman's son, wrote to me the other day. He said the spring had come, and the vines were budding, and it was already hot! Hot! I could have cried for envy. Don't let's talk of it."

"But I will talk about it," said Philip. "I'm master here yet...."

"Father, I don't like that joke," said Colin.

"Very well. We'll leave it out and be serious. I shall talk to Violet, too."

"No, no, no!" said Colin without conviction. "Hullo, here is Vi. Please don't mention the name of that beloved island again or I shall cry. Morning, Vi. You're enough sunshine for anyone."

Colin strolled out of the room so as to leave the others together, and presently Philip passed through the long gallery, and was certainly engaged in telephoning for a while. It was a trunk-call, apparently, for there was an interval between the ringing up and the subsequent conversation. All that day neither Philip nor Violet made the least allusion to Capri, but

there was certainly something in the air.... The last post that night, arriving while they were at cards, brought a packet for Lord Yardley, which he opened.

"There, that's the way to treat obstinate fellows like you, Colin," he observed, and tossed over to him the book of tickets to Naples and back.

"Father and Violet, you're brutes," he said. "I give up."

Colin was ever so easily persuaded by Mr. Cecil to spend a couple of nights, if not more, in Naples, before he went across to the island, and he had a youthful, pathetic tale to tell. They had had a terrible time in England. No doubt Mr. Cecil had seen the notice of his brother's death—Mr. Cecil could imagine his father's grief, and indeed his own and Violet's. Kind messages, by the way, from them both: they would none of them forgive him, if he came to England this year and did not reserve at least a week for them, either in London or at Stanier.... Then Colin himself had caught influenza, and his father and wife had insisted on his going south for a week or two and letting the sun soak into him. But after that month of secluded mourning at Stanier, it was rather heavenly—Colin looked like a seraph who had strayed into a sad world, as he said this—to pass a couple of days in some sort of city where there were many people, and all gay, some stir of life and distraction from his own sorrowful thoughts.

"One has to buck up again some time," said Colin, "and often I longed to escape from Stanier and just go up to town and dine with some jolly people, and go to a music-hall, and have supper somewhere, and forget it all for a time. Shocking of me, I suppose."

“No, no, I understand. I quite comprehend that, Colin,” said Cecil. “I beg your pardon: I should say Lord Stanier.”

“Oh, don’t,” said Colin. “I hate the title. It was dear Raymond’s. You never saw him, I think?”

Mr. Cecil had begun to feel like a family friend. He felt himself a sort of uncle to this brilliant boy, so shadowed by woe, so eager to escape out of the shadow. It was his mission, clearly, to aid in this cure, physical and mental, of sunlight.

“No, never,” said he, “only you and your wife and your father. A privilege!”

Colin drank the hospitable cocktail that stood at his elbow. His definite plans were yet in the making, but he began to suspect that alcohol in various forms would be connected with them. He had the Stanier head as regards drink; it only seemed to collect and clarify his wits, and he remembered that Mr. Cecil, on that night which he had spent alone here, had quickly passed through joviality and perhaps want of dignity, to bland somnolence.... He got up with an air of briskness and mutual understanding.

“I’m not going to be a wet-blanket, Mr. Cecil,” he said. “I’ve told you enough to make you see that I pine for enjoyment again. That little restaurant where you and I went before—may we dine there again? I want to see other people enjoying themselves, and I want the sun. Those are my medicines; be a kind, good doctor to me.”

Mr. Cecil’s treatment, so he congratulated himself, seemed wonderfully efficacious that evening. Colin cast all sad thoughts behind him, and between one thing and another, and specially between one drink and another, it was after twelve o’clock before they returned from their dinner to Mr. Cecil’s flat again. Even then, a story was but half-told, and Mr. Cecil

drew his keys from his pocket to unlock a very private drawer where there were photographs about which he now felt sure Colin would be sympathetic.

"You'll like them," he giggled, as he produced these prints. "Help yourself, Colin. I see they have put out some whisky for us."

"Oh, Lord, how funny," said Colin looking at what Mr. Cecil shewed him. "But I can't drink unless you do. Say when, Mr. Cecil."

Mr. Cecil was looking at the next photograph, and Colin took advantage of his preoccupation. The big bunch of keys by which this private, this very private, drawer was opened still dangled from the lock.

"And this one," said Mr. Cecil, applying himself to the liberal dose.

"But what a glorious creature," said Colin. "May I help myself?"

Mr. Cecil had a confused idea that Colin had finished his first drink and wanted another. So he finished his own and wanted another.

"Of course, my dear boy," he said. "Just a night-cap, eh? A drop of whisky at bed-time, I've noticed, makes one sleep all the sounder."

Colin was on the apex of watchfulness. Photograph after photograph was handed to him, but long before they came to the end of them the effects of the night-cap were apparent in Mr. Cecil. The keys still hung from the lock, and Colin, as he replaced the last of this unblushing series, got up and stood between this table-drawer and his host.

“And that statuette there?” he said, pointing to the other side of the room. “Surely we’ve seen a photograph of that?”

Mr. Cecil chuckled again; but the chuckle could hardly emerge from his sleep-slack mouth.

“Ah, I’ll tell you about that to-morrow,” he said, looking round at it.

Colin, with one of his caressing, boyish movements, put his hand on Mr. Cecil’s shoulder, and ever so imperceptibly drew him towards the door.

“I feel a different fellow altogether,” he said. “I shall sleep like a top, and I have enjoyed myself. You ought to give up your consular work and start a cure for depressed young men. You’d make a fortune.”

They were out in the passage by this time, and it was clear that the night-cap had banished all thought of his keys from Mr. Cecil’s head. He saw Colin to his room, lingered a moment to see that he had all he wanted, and then went to his own.

“A charming young fellow,” he thought; performed a somnambulistic feat of undressing, and fell into his bed.

Colin heard his door shut, and then in a moment turned off his light, and, stealthily opening his own door, stood in the entry listening for any sound. For a minute or two there were faint, muffled noises from his host’s room, but soon all was still, except for the creaking of his own shirt-front as he breathed. Then, re-entering his room, he stripped and put on his pyjamas and soft felt slippers which would be noiseless on the boards outside. Once more he stood there and waited, and now from inside Mr. Cecil’s room came sounds rhythmical and reassuring. Enough light dribbled in through the uncurtained windows to guide his steps without fear of

collision, and he glided into the room they had just left and felt his way to the table where the keys still dangled. He unloosed them, grasping them in the flap of his jacket, so that they should not jingle as he moved, and went down the passage to the door of the consular offices. The big key for the door was in the lock, and turned noiselessly.

The archive-room lay to the right, and with the door into the house shut behind him, he permitted himself the illumination of a match, and passed through. The shutters were closed, and he lit a candle that stood on the table for official sealing. There, in the wall, was the locked press that he so well remembered, and the trial of half-a-dozen of the keys on the bunch he carried gave him the one he looked for. The date labels were on the back of the volumes, and he drew out that which comprised the year he wanted. Quietly he turned over the leaves and found the page which contained the contract between Rosina Viagi and Philip Lord Stanier. Even in this one-candle-power light the erasure was visible to the eye that looked for it. A paper-knife lay among the tools of writing on the table, and folding the leaf back to its innermost margin he severed it from the book and thrust it inside the cord of his trousers.

Bright-eyed and breathing quickly with excitement and success, he replaced the volume and locked the press. He grasped the keys as before, blew out the candle, quenching the smouldering wick in his fingers, and went back, locking the door of the office behind him, into the room from which he had fetched the keys. He replaced them in the drawer of unblushing photographs and, pausing for a moment at his own door, listened for the noise that had reassured him before. There it was, resonant and rhythmical. He closed his

door, turned up his light, and drew the severed page from his trousers. He had been gone, so his watch told him, not more than five minutes.

"Rosina Viagi to Philip Lord Stanier...." March 1, or March 31, mattered no more. "I have but cancelled a forgery," he thought to himself as he pored over it. It was a pity to be obliged to destroy so ingenious a work, which at one time gave him the mastership of Stanier, but Raymond's death had given it him more completely, and it no longer served his end, but was only a danger. Yet should he destroy it, or....

His mind went back to the night that he and Violet had passed together here. How supreme had been his wisdom over that! For supposing, on his father's death, that Violet threatened to contest his succession on the information he had given her to induce her for certain to marry him, what now would the register show but an excised leaf? In whose interest had it been to remove that, except Violet's, for with its disappearance there vanished, as far as she knew, all record of the marriage. Had she had an opportunity of doing so? Certainly, for had she not spent a night here on the return from their honeymoon? Should she be so unwise as to send her lawyer here to examine the register on the ground that it had been tampered with, she would be faced with a tampering of an unexpected kind. The leaf had gone; but how lucky that before its suspicious disappearance, Colin had copied out the entry of the marriage and had it certified as correct by the Consul himself. He had it safe, with its date, March 1. That would be a surprise to poor Violet when she knew it, and the finger of suspicion, wavering hitherto, would surely point in one very definite direction.... As for the letter from Rosina to Salvatore Viagi, of which she would profess

knowledge on Colin's authority, what did she mean and where was the letter? Uncle Salvatore, whom Colin would see to-morrow, would be found to know nothing about it.

About the destruction of this page.... Colin fingered his own smooth throat as he considered that. Supposing Violet seriously and obstinately threatened to contest the succession? And what if, when the page was found to be missing, it was discovered in some locked and secret receptacle of her own? That would be devilish funny.... Colin hoped, he thought, that it would not come to that. He liked Violet, but she must be good, she must be wise.

The click of an electric switch and the noise of a step outside sent his heart thumping in his throat, and next moment he had thrust the page into his despatch-box and turned the key on it. The step passed his room, and was no longer audible, and with infinite precaution he turned the handle, and holding the door just ajar, he listened. It had not gone the whole length of the passage down to the entry to the consular offices, and even while he stood there he heard the chink of keys. Then the step was audible again, and the chink accompanied it. At that comprehension came to him, confirmed next moment by the repeated click of the electric switch and the soft closing of his host's door.

"My luck holds," thought Colin, and blessed the powers that so wonderfully protected him. In another minute he was in bed, but even as sleep rose softly about him, he woke himself with a laugh.

"That's where I'll put the leaf from the register," he thought. "Priceless! Absolutely priceless!"

It was no news to him when at breakfast next morning Mr. Cecil certified the accuracy of his interpretation of the step.

“Amazingly careless I was last night,” he said. “I went straight to bed after we had looked at those photographs, and fell asleep at once.”

“Night-cap,” said Colin. “I did exactly the same.”

“Well, my night-cap fell off,” said Mr. Cecil. “It fell off with a bang. I hadn’t been to sleep more than a quarter of an hour when I woke with a start.”

“Some noise?” asked Colin carelessly.

“No. I hadn’t heard anything, but my conscience awoke me, and I remembered I had left my keys in the lock of that private drawer of mine. I got out of bed in a fine hurry, for not only was that drawer unlocked—that would never do, eh?—but on the bunch were keys of cupboards and locked cases in the Consulate. But there the keys were just where I had left them. I can’t think how I came to forget them when I went to bed.”

Colin looked up with an irresistible gaiety of eye and mouth:

“I know,” he said. “You were so busy looking after your patient.... And you gave me a lot of medicine, Dr. Cecil, wine, liqueurs, cocktails, whiskies and sodas. I was as sleepy as an owl when I tumbled into bed. How thirsty it makes one in the morning to be sleepy at night.”

Mr. Cecil broke into a chuckle of laughter.

“Precisely my experience,” he said. “Odd. Now can you amuse yourself to-day till I’m free again?”

“Not so much as if you were with me,” said Colin. “But I must pay a duty call on my uncle. I don’t say it will be amusing. Do you know him? Salvatore Viagi.”

Mr. Cecil had not that happiness, and presently Colin went in search of the mansion which Salvatore had once alluded to as the Palazzo Viagi.

Leaving nothing to chance that could be covered by design, he had telegraphed from Rome yesterday to say he would make this visit, and wanted a private interview with Salvatore. The Palazzo Viagi proved to be a rather shabby flat in an inconspicuous street, but Salvatore skipped from his chair with open arms to receive him, and assumed an expression that was suitable to the late family bereavement and his joy at seeing Colin.

"*Collino mio!*" he cried. "What a happy morning is this for your poor uncle, yet, oh, what a terrible blow has fallen on us since last I saw you! Dear friend, dear nephew, my heart bled for you when I saw the news! So young, and with such brilliant prospects. Lamentable indeed. Enough."

He squeezed Colin's hand and turned away for a moment to hide his emotion at the death of one on whom he had never set eyes. He wore an enormous black tie in token of his grief, but was otherwise as troubadourial as ever.

"But we must put away sad thoughts," he continued. "I am all on tenter-hooks to know what brings you to my humble doors. Not further bad news: no, not that? Your beloved father is well, I hope. Your beloved wife also, and your revered grandmother. Yes? Put me out of my suspense."

The health of these was not so much an anxiety at this moment to Salvatore as the desire to know that all was well with the very pleasant financial assistance which Colin provided. It was easy, in fact, to guess the real nature of his suspense, and consequently Colin found a delicate pleasure in prolonging it a little.

“Yes, they’re all well,” he said. “My father bore the blow wonderfully considering how devoted he was to Raymond. Violet, too, and my grandmother. You can make your affectionate heart at ease about them all.”

“Thank God! thank God!” said Salvatore. “I—I got your telegram. I have made arrangements so that our privacy shall be uninterrupted. I have, in fact, sent Vittoria and Cecilia to visit friends at Posilippo. Such reproaches, such entreaties, when they heard their cousin Colin was expected, but I was adamant.”

“And how are Vittoria and Cecilia?” asked Colin. The troubadour was almost dancing with impatience.

“They are well, I am glad to say; they have the constitution of ostriches, or whatever is healthiest in the animal kingdom. But time presses, no doubt, with you, dear fellow; you will be in a hurry; duties and pleasure no doubt claim you.”

“No, no,” said Colin. “I am quite at leisure for the day. I am staying with Mr. Cecil our Consul. He is officially engaged all day, and all the hours are at our disposal.... So at last I see the home of my mother’s family. Was it here she lived, Uncle Salvatore?”

“No, in quite another street. My wretched penury drove me here. Even with your bounty, dear Collino, I can scarcely make the two ends meet.”

Colin looked very grave.

“Indeed, I am very sorry to hear that,” he said.

“Ah! You have come to me with bad news,” exclaimed Salvatore, unable to check himself any more. “Break it to me quickly. Vittoria....”

At last Colin had pity.

“Let’s come to business, Uncle Salvatore,” he said. “There’s no bad news, at least if there is you will be making it for yourself. Now, do you remember two letters of my mother which you once sent me? We had a talk about them, and I want you to give me your account of them. Can you describe them to me?”

Salvatore made a tragic gesture and covered his eyes with his hand. The ludicrous creature made a farce of all he touched.

“They are graven on my heart,” he said. “Deep and bitterly are they graven there. The first that I received, dated on the seventeenth of March, told me of the birth of her twins, one named Raymond and yourself. The second, dated March the thirty-first, announced her marriage which had taken place that day with your father....” and he ground his teeth slightly.

Colin leaned forward to him.

“Uncle Salvatore you are a marvellous actor!” he said. “Why did you never go on the stage? I can tell you why. You have no memory at all.”

Salvatore gave him a hunted kind of look. Was not his very existence (and that of Vittoria and Cecilia) dependent on the accuracy of this recollection?... Was Colin putting him to some sort of test to see if he would stick to his impression of those letters.

“Dear fellow, those letters and those dates are engraved, as I have previously assured you, on my heart. Alas! that it should be so....”

A sudden light dawned on him.

“You have come to tell me that I am wrong,” he said. “Is it indeed true that my memory is at fault?”

“Absolutely with regard to the date of one of those letters,” said Colin. “The date on that which announced my mother’s marriage was surely March the first, Uncle Salvatore. You are right about the date of the other.”

Colin suddenly broke into a shout of laughter. His uncle’s puckered brow and his effort to recollect what he knew and what he had been told were marvellous to behold. Presently he recovered himself.

“Seriously, Uncle Salvatore,” he said. “I want you to see if you cannot recollect that the marriage letter was dated March the first. It is very important that you should do that; it will be disastrous for you if you don’t. I just want you to recollect clearly that I am right about it. The letters will never be produced, for I have destroyed them both.... But surely when you sent me them you thought that it was as I say. Probably you will never be called upon to swear to your belief, but just possibly you may. It would be nice if you could recollect that; it would remove the stain from the honour of your illustrious house, and, also, parenthetically, from my poor shield.”

Colin paused a moment with legs crossed in an attitude of lazy ease; he lay back in his low chair and scratched one ankle with the heel of his shoe.

“Mosquitoes already!” he said, “what troublesome things there are in the world! Mosquitoes you know, Uncle Salvatore, or want of money for instance. If I were a scheming, inventive fellow, I should try to arrange to give a pleasant annuity to mosquitoes on the condition of their not biting me. If one bit me after that, I should withdraw my annuity. What nonsense I am talking! It is getting into the sun and the warmth and your delightful society that makes me foolish and cheerful. Let us get back to what I was saying. I

am sure you thought when you gave me those dear letters that the date of your adored sister's marriage was the first of March. In all seriousness I advise you to remember that it was so. That's all; I believe we understand each other. Vittoria's future, you know, and all the rest of it. And on my father's death, I shall be a very rich man. But memory, what a priceless possession is that! If you only had a good memory, Uncle Salvatore!... Persuade me that you have a good memory. Reinstate, as far as you can, the unblemished honour of the Viagis. Yes, that's all."

Colin got up and examined the odious objects that hung on the walls. There was a picture framed in shells; there was a piece of needlework framed in sea-weed; there was a chromo-lithograph of something sacred. All was shabby and awful. A stench of vegetables and the miscellany called *frutta di mare* stole in through the windows from the barrows outside this splendid Palazzo Viagi.

"But the record at the Consulate," said Salvatore, with Italian cautiousness. "You told me that though the date there appeared to be the same as that which I certainly seem to recollect on the letter...."

Colin snapped himself round from an absent inspection of, no doubt, Vittoria's needlework.

"But what the deuce has that got to do with you, Uncle Salvatore?" he said. "I want your recollection of the dates on the letters which we have been speaking of and of nothing else at all. Do I not see Vittoria's handiwork in this beautiful frame of shells? How lucky she has a set of clever fingers if her father has a bad memory! She will have herself to support and him as well, will she not? And what do you know of any register at the Consulate? The noble Viagis would not mix

themselves up with low folk like poor Mr. Cecil. In fact, he told me that he had not the honour of your acquaintance. Do not give it him. Why should you know Mr. Cecil? About that letter now....”

“It was certainly my impression,” began Salvatore.

Colin interrupted. “I don’t deal with your impressions,” he said. “Was not the letter concerning my mother’s marriage dated the first of March? That’s all; yes or no.”

Salvatore became the complete troubadour again, and his malachite studs made him forget his black tie. Again he skipped from his chair with open arms.

“I swear to it,” he said. “The restoration of my adored idol! It has been a nightmare to me to think.... Ah, it was just that, a bad dream.... Were not those letters imprinted on my heart?”

Colin evaded his embrace; he was like some monstrous goat in broadcloth.

“That’s all settled then,” he said. “You were only teasing me when you pretended not to remember. You will be sure not to forget again, won’t you? Forgetfulness is such a natural failing, but what dreadful consequences may come of it. Let the thought of them be your nightmare in the future, Uncle Salvatore. There’ll be pleasant realities instead if you will only remember, and a pleasant reality is nicer than a bad dream which comes true.... I’ll be going now, I think....”

“I cannot permit it,” exclaimed Salvatore. “Some wine, some biscuits!”

“Neither, thanks,” said Colin. “I had wine last night, though I can’t remember the biscuits. Probably there were

some. Vittoria and Cecilia! What an anxiety removed with regard to their future!”

“And your movements, dear Collino?” exclaimed Salvatore. “You go to Capri?”

Colin thought of the tawdry, bibulous evening that probably awaited him, and his uncle’s question put a new idea into his head. His innate love of wickedness made it desirable to him to hurt those who were fond of him, if their affection could bring him no advantage. Uncle Salvatore, at any rate, could do nothing more for him, and he was not sure that Mr. Cecil could. Mr. Cecil had been a wonderful host last night; he had fulfilled the utmost requirements of his guest in getting sleepy and drunk, and was there any more use for Mr. Cecil? Drink and photographs and leerings at the attractive maidens of Naples was a very stupid sort of indulgence....

“Yes, to-morrow,” he said. “Perhaps even by the afternoon boat to-day.”

“But alone?” said Salvatore. “How gladly would I relieve your solitude. I would bring Vittoria and Cecilia; how charming a family party.”

Colin felt some flamelike quiver of hatred spread through him. His nerves vibrated with it; it reached to his toes and fingertips.

“A delightful suggestion,” he said, “for you and Vittoria and whatever the other one’s name is. But I don’t want any of you, thank you. I haven’t seen either of them, but I guess what they are like from you. You’re like—you’re like a mixture of a troubadour and a mountebank, and the man who cracks the whip at the horses in a circus, Uncle Salvatore. You’re no good to me any more, but I can be awfully bad for you if you lose your memory again. You know exactly what I

want you to remember, and you do remember it. You forgot it because I told you to forget it. Now it has all come back to you, and how nice that is. But if you think I am going to bore myself with you and Vittoria and the other, you make a stupendous error. I'm very kind to you, you know; I'm your benefactor to a considerable extent, so you mustn't think me unkind when I utterly refuse to saddle myself with your company. I butter your bread for you, be content with that. Good-bye. Love to Vittoria!"

So that was done, and he strolled back along the sea-front towards the Consulate. Capri, a little more solid only than a cloud, floated on the horizon, and with that delightful goal so near, it was miserable to picture another tiresome crapulous evening with the little red bounder. Last night, stupid and wearisome though the hours had been, they had yielded him the prize he sought for, whereas to-night there would be no prize of any sort in view. Those interminable drinks, those stupid photographs, why waste time and energy in this second-hand sort of debauchery? He had been prepared, when he started from England, to spend with Mr. Cecil as much time as was necessary in order to achieve what was the main object of his expedition, but that was accomplished now. He would be so much happier at the villa, where he was, after all, expected to-day, than in seeing Mr. Cecil get excited and familiar and photographic and intoxicated.

The whispering stone-pine, the vine-wreathed pergola, the piazza full of dusk and youth, the steps of belated passengers on the pathway outside the garden made sweeter music than the voice of an inebriated Consul with its hints and giggles. Stout, middle-aged people, if there had to be such in the

world, should keep quiet and read their books, and leave the mysteries and joys of youth to the young.... It was there, in that cloud that floated on the horizon, that he had first realised himself and the hand that led him, in the scent-haunted darkness and the whispering of the night wind; that fed his soul with a nourishment that Mr. Cecil's cocktails and photographs were starvingly lacking in. He would feast there to-night.

A promise to spend another night at the Consulate on his return from Capri made good his desertion to-day, for, in point of fact, Mr. Cecil felt considerably off-colour this morning, and rather misdoubted his capacity for carrying off with any semblance of enjoyment a repetition of last night. His reproaches and disappointment were clearly complimentary rather than sincere, and the afternoon boat carried Colin on it. Once he had made that journey with his father, once with Violet, but could a wish have brought either of them to his side he would no more have breathed it than have thrown himself off the boat. He did not want to be jostled and encumbered by love, or hear its gibberish, and with eager eyes, revelling in the sense of being alone with his errand already marvellously accomplished, he watched the mainland recede and the island draw nearer through the fading twilight.

Lights were springing up along the Marina, and presently there was Nino alongside in his boat, ready to ferry him ashore. He, with his joyous paganism, his serene indifference to good or evil, was far closer to what Colin hungered for than either his father or Violet, but closer yet, so Colin realised, was the hatred between himself and his own dead brother....

And then presently there was the garden dusky and fragrant with the odour of wallflowers and freesias, and the whispering of the warm breeze from the sea, and the oblong of light from the open door to welcome him.

On the table just within there lay a telegram for him, and with some vivid presentiment of what it contained, he opened it. His father had died quite suddenly a few hours ago.

The whisper of the pine grew louder, and the breeze suddenly freshening, swept in at the door thick with garden scents, with greeting, with felicitations.

CHAPTER XI

Just a fortnight later Colin was lying in one of the window seats of the long gallery at Stanier reading through some papers which required his signature. They had come by the post which Nino had just given him, for he had brought the boy with him from Capri, with a view to making him his valet. His own, he said, always looked as if he were listening to a reading of the ten commandments, and Colin had no use for such a person. Nino, at any rate, would bring cheerfulness and some touch of southern gaiety with his shaving-water; besides, no servant approached the Italian in dexterity and willingness.

And now that the pause of death was over, adjustments, businesses, the taking up of life again had to begin, and his lawyer was getting things in shape for his supervision. These particular papers were tedious and hard to follow and were expressed in that curious legal shibboleth which makes the unprofessional mind to wander. He tried to attend, but the effort was like clinging to some slippery edge of ice; he could get no firm hold of it, and the deep waters kept closing over

him. There, below the terrace, lay the lake where he had seen one such incident happen.

By that he had become heir to all that this fair, shining spring day shewed him; his father's death put him in possession, and now this morning, wherever he turned his eyes, whether on lake or woodland, or within on picture and carved ceiling, all were his. This stately home, the light and desire of his eye, with all that it meant in wealth and position, had passed again into the hands of Colin Stanier, handed down from generation to generation, ever more prosperous, from his namesake who had built its enduring walls and founded its splendours.

Of his father's death there was but little to tell him, when, coming straight back again from Capri, he had arrived here at the set of a stormy day. Philip had reeled as he crossed the hall one morning, and fallen on the hearthrug in front of the Holbein. For half an hour he had lived, quite unconscious and suffering nothing, then his breathing had ceased. Until the moment of his stroke, that bursting of some large blood-vessel on the brain, he had been quite well and cheerful, rejoicing in the fact that Colin by now had found the sun again, and already longing for his return.

Violet had been Colin's informant, and she told him these things with that air of detachment from him which had characterised her intercourse with him since Raymond had come home for that last Christmas vacation. She had watched then with some secret horror dawning in her eyes, Colin's incessant torture of his brother. That dismay and darkness which had spread its shadow on her in the month of their honeymoon, when first she really began to know Colin, interrupted for a time by their return home and the high

festivals of the autumn, had returned to her then with a fresh infusion of blackness. Never once had she spoken to him about his treatment of Raymond, but he was conscious that she watched and shuddered. It did not seem that her love for him was extinguished; that horror of hers existed side by side with it; she yearned for his love even while she shrank from his pitilessness. She feared him, too, not only for the ruthless iron of him, but for the very charm which had a power over her more potent yet.

Then came the weeks after Raymond's death, and Colin thought he saw in her a waning of her fear of him; that, he reflected, was natural. Some time, so he read her mind, she knew she would be mistress here in her own right; it seemed very reasonable that she should gain confidence.

For the last few days, when the wheels of life were now beginning to turn again, he saw with a comprehending sense of entertainment that there was something in Violet's mind: she was trying to bring herself up to a certain point, and it was not hard to guess what that was. She was silent and preoccupied, and a dozen times a day she seemed on the verge of speaking of that which he knew was the subject of her thought. Till to-day her father and mother and Aunt Hester in becoming mourning had been with them, now they had gone, and Violet's restlessness had become quite ludicrous. She had been in and out of the room half a dozen times; she had sat down to read the paper, and next moment it had dropped from her lap and she was staring at the fire again lost in frowning thought.

Knowing what her communication when it came must be, Colin, from the very nature of the case could not help her out with it, but he wished that she would wrestle with and

vanquish her hesitation. If it had been he who in this present juncture had had to speak to Raymond on this identical subject, how blithely would he have undertaken it. Then, finally, Violet seemed to make up her mind to take the plunge, and sat down on the edge of the seat where he lounged. He extended his arm and put it round her.

"Well, Vi," he said, "are you finding it hard to settle down? I am, too, but we've got to do it. My dear, Aunt Hester's little black bonnet! Did you ever see anything so chic? Roguish; she gets sprightlier every day!"

Violet looked at him gravely.

"There's something we have to talk about, Colin," she said, "and we both know what it is. Will you let me speak for a minute or two without interrupting me?"

He put his finger on the line to which he had come in this tiresome document, which his solicitor assured him required his immediate attention.

"An hour or two, darling; the longer the better," he said. "What is it? Are you sure I know? Something nice I hope. Ah, is it about my birthday perhaps? The last affair that dear father was busy over were plans for my birthday. Of course I have counter-ordered everything and we must keep it next year. Well, what is it? I won't interrupt any more."

Colin leaned back with his hand still under Violet's arm, as if to draw her with him. She bent with him a little way and then disengaged herself.

"I hate what lies before me," she said, "and I ask you to believe that I have struggled with myself. I have tried, Colin, to give the whole thing up, to let it be yours. But I can't. I long to be Lady Yardley in my own right, as you told me I should be on Uncle Philip's death. All that it means! I fancy

you understand that. But I think I might have given that up, if it was only myself of whom I had to think. I don't know; I can't be sure."

She paused, not looking at him. She did not want to know till all was done how he was taking it. Of course he anticipated it: he knew it must be, and here was the plain point of it....

"But I haven't got only myself to think about," she said. "Before many months I shall bear you a child; I shall bear you other children after that, perhaps. I am thinking of them and of you. Since we married I have learned things about you. You are hard in a way that I did not know was possible. You have neither love nor compassion. I must defend my children against you; the only way I can do it is to be supreme myself. I must hold the reins, not you. I will be good to you, and shall never cease loving you, I think, but I can't put myself in your hands, which I should do, if I did not now use the knowledge which you yourself conveyed to me. You did that with your eyes open; you asked for and accepted what your position here will be, and you did it chiefly out of hatred to Raymond. That was your motive, and it tells on my decision. You hate more than you love, and I am frightened for my children.

"It is true that when I accepted Raymond, I did it because I should get Stanier—be mistress here anyhow. But I think—I was wavering—that I should have thrown him over before I married him and have accepted you, though I knew that marriage with you forfeited the other. Then you told me it was otherwise, that in forfeiting Stanier, I found it even more completely."

Colin—he had promised not to interrupt—gave no sign of any sort. His finger still marked the place in this legal document.

"I have sent for my father's solicitor," she said, "and they have told me he is here. But before I see him I wanted to tell you that I shall instruct him to contest your succession. I shall tell him about the register in the Consulate at Naples and about your mother's letters to your uncle. You said you would let me have them on your father's death. Would you mind giving me them now, therefore? He may wish to see them."

Colin moved ever so slightly, and she for the first time looked at him. There he lay, with those wide, child-like eyes, and the mouth that sometimes seemed to her to have kissed her very soul away. He had a smile for her grave glance; just so had he smiled when torturingly he tried to remember exactly what had happened in the Old Park on the day that Raymond shot pigeons. But even while she thought of his relentless, pursuing glee, the charm of him, the sweet supple youth of him, all fire and softness, smote on her heart.

"Won't you go away, till it is all over?" she said. "It will be horrible for you, Colin, and I don't want you to suffer. The letters are all I want of you; I will tell Mr. Markham about the register and he will do whatever is necessary. Go back to your beloved island; you were robbed of your stay there. Wait there until all this business, which will be horrible for you, is done. You can see your dear Mr. Cecil again...." she added, trying to smile back at him.

"Yes, I might do that," said Colin thoughtfully. "In fact, I probably shall. But I must try to take in what you have been saying. I can't understand it: you must explain. You referred,

for instance, to my mother's letters. What letters? I don't know of any letters of my mother as being in existence. Still less have I got any. How could I have? She died when I was but a few weeks old. Do mothers write letters to the babies at their breasts?"

"The two letters to your uncle," said she.

Colin planted a levering elbow by his side, and sat up.

"I suppose it is I who am mad," he said, "because you talk quite quietly and coherently, and yet I don't understand a single word of what you say. Letters from my mother to my uncle? Ah...."

He took her hand again, amending his plan in accordance with his talk with Salvatore.

"You're right," he said. "Uncle Salvatore did once give me two letters from my mother to him. Little faint things. I destroyed them not so long ago: one should never keep letters. But you're right, Vi. Uncle Salvatore did give me a couple of letters once, but when on earth did I mention them to you? What a memory you have got! It's quite true; one announced my mother's marriage, the other spoke of the birth of poor Raymond and me. But what of them? And what—oh, I must be mad—what in heaven's name do you mean, when you talk, if I understand you correctly, about sending somebody out to Naples? The register in the Consulate there? And my succession? Are they connected? Isn't it usual for a son to succeed his father? I'm all at sea—or am I asleep and dreaming? Pinch me, darling. I want to wake up. What register?"

Some nightmare sense of slipping, slipping, slipping took hold of Violet.

“The erasure in the register,” she said. “All that you told me.”

Colin swung his legs off the window-seat and got up. There was an electric bell close at hand and he rang it.

“There’s some plot,” he said, “and I have no idea what it is. I want a witness with regard to anything further that you wish to say to me. What’s his name? Your father’s solicitor, I mean. Oh, yes, Markham. Don’t speak another word to me.”

He turned his back on her and waited till a servant came in.

“Her ladyship wishes to see Mr. Markham,” he said. “Ask Mr. Markham to come here at once.”

“Colin....” she began.

It was just such a face that he turned on her now as he had given to her one evening at Capri.

“Not a word,” he said. “Hold your tongue, Violet. You’ll speak presently.”

Mr. Markham appeared, precise and florid. Colin shook hands with him.

“My wife has a statement to make to you,” he said. “I don’t know what it is: she has not yet made it. But it concerns me and the succession to my father’s title and estates. It had therefore better be made to you in my presence. Please tell Mr. Markham what you were about to tell me, Violet.”

In dead silence, briefly and clearly, Violet repeated what Colin had told her on the night that they were engaged. All the time he looked at her, Mr. Markham would have said, with tenderness and anxiety, and when she had finished he spoke:

“I hope you will go into this matter without any delay, Mr. Markham,” he said. “My wife, as I have already told her, is

perfectly right in saying that my uncle—you will need his address—gave me two letters from my mother to him. She is right also about the subject of those letters. But she is under a complete delusion about the dates of them. I destroyed them not so long ago, I am afraid, so the only person who can possibly settle this is my uncle, to whom I hope you will apply without delay. No doubt he will have some recollection of them; indeed, he cherished them for years, and if the dates were as my wife says that I told her they were, he must have known that my brother and I were illegitimate. So much for the letters."

Colin found Violet's eyes fixed on him; her face, deadly pale, wore the stillness of stone.

"With regard to my wife's allegation about the register," he said. "I deny that I ever told her any such story. I have this to add: when my father and I were in Naples last summer, I made, at his request, a copy of the record of his marriage from the consular register. He thought, I fancy, that in the event of his death, a certified copy of it, here in England, might be convenient for the purpose of proving the marriage. I made that copy myself, and Mr. Cecil, our Consul in Naples, certified it to be correct. I gave it my lawyer a few days ago, when he was down here, and it is, of course, open to your inspection."

Colin paused and let his eyes rest wistfully on Violet.

"My wife, of course, Mr. Markham," he said, "is under a delusion. But she has made the allegation, and in justice to me, I think you will agree that it must be investigated. She supposes—don't you, darling?—that there is an erasure in the register at the Consulate showing that it has been tampered with, and that erasure points to an attempt on some one's

part, presumably my father's or my own, to legitimatise his children. In answer to that I am content for the present to say that when I made the copy I saw no such erasure, nor did Mr. Cecil who certified the correctness of it. Mr. Cecil, to whom I will give you an introduction, no doubt will remember the incident. I am glad I have got that copy, for if the register proves to have been tampered with, it may be valuable. My belief is that no such erasure exists. May I suggest, Mr. Markham, that you or some trustworthy person should start for Naples at once? You will take the affidavits—is it not—of my uncle with regard to the letters, and of Mr. Cecil with regard to the genuineness of the copy of my father's marriage. You will also inspect the register. The matter is of the utmost and immediate importance."

He turned to Violet. "Vi, darling," he said, "let us agree not to speak of this again until Mr. Markham has obtained full information about it all. Now, perhaps, you would like to consult him in private. I will leave you."

Mr. Markham shared Colin's view as to the urgency and importance of setting this matter at rest, and left for Naples that evening with due introductions to Salvatore and the Consul. Colin had a word with him before he left, and with tenderness and infinite delicacy, spoke of Violet's condition. Women had these strange delusions, he believed, at such times, and the best way of settling them was to prove that they had no foundation. Mr. Markham, he was afraid, would find that he had made a fruitless journey, as far as the ostensible reason for it went, but he had seen for himself how strongly the delusion had taken hold on his wife, and in that

regard he hoped for the best results. In any case the thing must be settled....

Never had the sparkle and sunlight of Colin's nature been so gay as during these two days when they waited for the news that Mr. Markham would send from Naples. It had been agreed that the issues of his errand should not be spoken of until they declared themselves, and here, to all appearance, was a young couple, adorably adorned with all the gifts of Nature and inheritance, with the expectation of the splendour of half a century's unclouded days spread in front of them. They had lately passed through the dark valley of intimate bereavement, but swiftly they were emerging into the unshadowed light, where, in a few months now, the glory of motherhood, the pride of fatherhood, awaited them. In two days from now, as both knew, a disclosure would reach them which must be, one way or the other, of tremendous import, but for the present, pending that revelation, presage and conjecture, memory even of that interview with Mr. Markham, which had sent him across the breadth of Europe, were banished; they were as children in the last hour of holidays, as lovers between whom must soon a sword be unsheathed.

They wandered in the woods where in the hot, early spring the daffodils were punctual, and, "coming before the swallow dares," took the winds of March with beauty, and Colin picked her the pale cuckoo-pint which, intoxicated with nonsense, he told her comes before the cuckoo dares.... They spoke of the friendship of their childhood which had so swiftly blossomed into love, and of the blossom of their love that was budding now.

All day the enchantment of their home and their companionship waved its wand over them, and at night, tired with play, they slept the light sleep of lovers. Certainly, for one or other of them, there must soon come a savage awakening, or, more justly, the strangle-hold of nightmare, but there were a few hours yet before the dreams of spring-time and youth were murdered.

The third day after Mr. Markham's departure for Naples was Colin's birthday, when he would come of age, and Violet, waking early that morning, while it was still dark, found herself prey to some crushing load and presage of disaster, most unpropitious, most unbirthday-like. For the last two days, these days of waiting for news, they had made for themselves a little artificial oasis of sunshine and laughter; now some secret instinct told her that she could linger there no more. To-day, she felt sure, would come some decisive disclosure, and she dreaded it with a horror too deep for the plummet of imagination. In that dark hour before dawn, when the vital forces are at their lowest, she lay hopeless and helpless.

Colin had denied all knowledge of what he had himself told her; he had been eager for Mr. Markham to disprove it.... He knew something which she did not. What that could be she could form no idea at all. At the worst, Salvatore would confirm his account of those letters, and no such erasure as Colin had spoken of would be found in the register. Had he, then, invented this merely to ensure her marrying him; and now that Raymond's death had given him mastership at Stanier, was he simply denying what never existed at all? From what she knew of him now, he was capable of having done that in order to make her throw over Raymond, but it

was not that which she dreaded. There was something more; a black curtain seemed to hang before her, and presently some hot blast would blow it high in the air, and she would see what lay behind it.

It was rapidly growing light, and outside the birds were busy with their early chirrupings. By the window which last night Colin had opened, pulling back the curtains, the silver of her Paul Lamerie toilet-set glimmered with the increasing brightness. Colin lay close to her, with face turned towards her, fast asleep. His cheek was on his hand, the other arm, languid and slack, was stretched outside the bedclothes, his mouth was a little parted, and it seemed to be smiling. And then he stirred and, leaning his head a little back, his smile broadened and he laughed in his sleep with open mouth. At that some nameless panic seized her, and, stopping her ears, she buried her face in the clothes. A child might laugh so, but was the merriment of his dream that of a child? Or had some sense that did not sleep reminded him that his twenty-first birthday was now dawning?

She feigned to be asleep when Nino's tap came to the door of his dressing-room, and she heard Colin get up. He spoke to her quietly, but she did not answer or open her eyes. Then his room door opened and closed and she was alone.

Colin was already at breakfast when she came down, and apparently his mood of the last two days had suffered no ungenial change.

"Good morning, darling," he said. "I tried to say that to you before, but you were busy sleeping. What shall I give you? There's some nasty fish and some tepid bacon."

He looked at her with some sort of wistful expectancy, as if wondering if she would remember something, and the

thoughts, the wild imaginings which had made the dawn a plunge into some dark menace, dropped from her mind like drugged creatures.

"Colin dear, your birthday. What can I give you?" she said, kissing him. "It was the first thing I thought of when I woke. We're the same age again. I was a year ahead of you till this morning."

"Delicious of you to remember it, Vi," said he. "Yes, we're forty-two years old between us. A great age! Hullo, Nino."

"*Pella signora*," said Nino, and gave Violet a telegram.

Colin watched her fingers fumbling at the gummed flap of the envelope, as if numb and nerveless. Then with a jerk she tore it across and opened it. Only once before had he seen a living face as white as that, when fingers were slipping from the ice.

"Read it for me," she said at length. "I don't seem to see what it means."

Colin took it; it had been sent from Naples late last night, and came from Mr. Markham. He read:

> "Salvatore Viagi's account of
> letters agrees with your husband's.
> Page containing marriages of year
> and month in question has been cut
> out of register at Consulate."

Colin passed the sheet back to Violet. She did not take it from his hand and he let it drop on to the tablecloth. He leaned a little towards her.

"Vi, you're magnificent," he said. "That was a glorious stroke of yours! That night when you and I stayed at the Consulate. No, darling, don't interrupt, let me speak for two

or three minutes just as you did a few mornings ago. Eat your bacon and listen.... I see now the reason of your pretended reluctance to stay with Mr. Cecil. It put me off the scent completely at the time."

"What scent?" she asked. "What do you mean?"

"I asked you not to interrupt. There we were on our honeymoon and so casually, so unthinkingly, I told Mr. Cecil that we would stay with him on our way home. You objected, but eventually you agreed. Your reluctance to stay with him, as I say, put me quite off the scent. Having done that you yielded. Little did I dream then of your superb project...."

She gazed at him like some bird hypnotised by the snake that coil after coil draws nearer. Colin, too, drew nearer; he pushed his chair sideways and leaned towards her, elbows on the table.

"I remember that night so well," he said. "I was sleeping in the dressing-room next door to you, and the door was wide, for it was hot. I heard you get out of bed. I heard your latch creak. Oh, yes, you called to me first, and I did not answer. I called to you this morning, you remember, and you did not answer. Sometimes one pretends to be asleep. Till this minute I knew nothing for certain more of what you did. Now I know. You were playing for a great stake: I applaud you. You got hold of Mr. Cecil's keys (he is careless about them) and tore that leaf out of the register. You knew that on my father's death his marriage to my mother must be proved before Raymond or I (poor Raymond) could succeed, for, of course, it was common property that he lived with her before they were married. Giuseppe, his boatman, Uncle Salvatore, half-a-dozen people, could have told you that. And then, oh! a crowning piece of genius, you make up a cock-and-bull story

about erasure and letters which force us to have the register examined, and lo! there is no record of the marriage at all. What is the presumption? That Raymond and I were, well, an ugly word. But just there fate was unkind to you through no fault of yours, except that failure is a fault and the most fatal one. You did not know that I had made a copy of the entry and got it signed and certified by our charming Mr. Cecil, before the curious disappearance of that page. And then you made just one terrible mistake. How could you have done it?"

She turned to him a face of marble, faultlessly chiselled, but wholly lifeless.

"What mistake did I make?" she said.

"You kept that leaf," said Colin pityingly. "A record of your triumph, I suppose, like a cotillon-toy, to dream over when you were mistress here."

"Go on," said she.

Colin came closer yet. "Darling, will you be awfully nice to me," he said, "and give me that leaf as a birthday present? It would be a delightful souvenir. You know where it is."

She paused. She remembered the tradition of the icy self-repression of the Lady Yardleys who had preceded her, the frost that fell on them. From personal knowledge there was her grandmother. That Arctic night was darkening on her now, and she shivered.

"I don't know where it is," she said. "Make up another lie."

He rose. "You must learn politeness, Violet," he said. "You must learn many useful things. I am being very kind to you. You don't appreciate that."

Night had not quite fallen yet.

“Just as you were kind to Raymond,” she said.

He smiled at her. “Yes, the same sort of kindness,” he said.

He spoke to her as to a troublesome child with soft persuasion.

“Now you know where it is quite well, but you want to give me the trouble of reminding you. You won’t say you’re sorry, or anything of that sort. Not wise.”

“Spring the trap on me,” she said.

“Very well; you put it in the secret drawer in the stand of your lovely Lamerie looking-glass, the evening we came back from our honeymoon. You had left me talking to father, but as soon as you had gone, I followed you. It was pure chance: I suspected nothing then. But I looked in from my dressing-room and saw you with the secret drawer open, putting something into it. I went downstairs again. But I am bound to say that my curiosity was aroused; perhaps you might have been having a billet-doux from Nino. So I took a suitable opportunity—I think it was when you were at church—and satisfied myself about it.”

Colin reviewed this speech, which seemed to come to him impromptu, except for the one fact that underlay it, which in a few minutes now would be made manifest to Violet.

“So poor Nino was not my rival,” he said. “That was such a relief, Vi darling, for I should have had to send him away. But I never really gave a serious thought to that, for I believed you liked your poor Colin. But what I found did surprise me. I could not believe that any one so clever could have been so stupid as to keep the evidence of her cleverness. When you have been clever, it is wise to destroy the evidence of your cleverness. Shall we come?”

“But my looking-glass? A secret drawer?” said Violet. “There’s no secret drawer that I know of.”

“No, no, of course not,” said Colin. “I shall be obliged to show it you. But wait a minute. I had better have a witness of what I find in the secret drawer of which you are ignorant. My solicitor is here, but with this other disclosure, he might urge me to proceed against you for conspiracy, which I don’t at present intend to do. Your maid, now; no, you would not like her to know such things about you. She might blackmail you. How about Nino? He will do no more than understand that a paper has been found, and that he witnesses to the finding of it. One has to protect oneself. I had to protect myself against Raymond. May I ring for Nino?”

At that the Arctic night fell on Violet, and presently the three of them were in her bedroom. Round the base of the looking-glass ran a repoussé cable band, and Colin was explaining to her how, if she pressed the stud at the corner of it, just where the silversmith’s name—L. A. for Lamerie—was punched in the metal, the side of the base would fly open. And so it was; she pressed it herself while he stood aside, and within was the drawer and the folded paper.

Colin took a swift step and plucked the paper out, holding it at arm’s length.

“There, darling, all your responsibility is over,” he said. “I will keep it for you now. I will just open it and show you what it is, but do not come too close or try to snatch it. There! Names of happy couples one below the other, and in the space next the name the date of their marriage. Half-way down the page you see the names we are looking for, Rosina Viagi and Philip Lord Stanier and the date, March the first, 1893.”

He turned to Nino and spoke in Italian.

"And you, Nino," he said, "you saw me take this paper out of the drawer of the signora's looking-glass. And now you see me—give me a big envelope from the table—you see me put it in this envelope and close it—it is as if I did a conjuring trick—and I sit down and write on the envelope for the signora to read. I say that in your presence and in mine the enclosed was taken from the secret drawer in the looking-glass where it had been placed for safe custody by Violet Stanier, Countess of Yardley, and given into the care of her husband, Colin Stanier, Earl of Yardley. Sign it, Nino, and observe that I sign. I date it also. That's all, Nino; you may go."

Colin laid his hand on Violet's neck.

"It has been trying for you, dear," he said. "Rest a little. But your mind may be at ease now; the anxiety of having that in your possession is removed, and it will be in safe keeping. I will give it at once to my lawyer, with instructions that it is to be delivered to no one except to me in person, and that at my death it is to be destroyed unopened. It entirely depends on yourself as to whether it ever sees the light again.... And then, when you are rested, shall we go for one of our delicious rambles in the park. What's that line of Wordsworth? 'This one day we'll give to idleness.' Thank you, darling, for your lovely birthday present."

Never on Walpurgis Night nor at Black Mass had there ever been so fervent an adorer to his god as Colin, so satanic a rite as that which he had performed on this birthday morning. No need was there for him to make any vow of lip-service, or by any acceptation of the parchment that was set

in the frame of the Holbein, to confirm his allegiance. The spirit was more than the letter, and in no wanton ecstasy of evil could he have made a more sacramental dedication of himself. It was not enough for him to have forged, ever so cunningly, the evidence which, while Raymond lived, proved his illegitimacy, nor, more cunningly yet, to have got rid of that evidence when Raymond's death cleared for him the steps to the throne. He must in the very flower and felicity of wickedness preserve that evidence in order to produce it as the handiwork of his wife. The edifice would have been incomplete otherwise; it would have lacked that soaring spire of infamy. But now all was done, and on his birthday came the consecration of the abominable temple of himself to the spirit he adored.

He came to her room that night and sat as he so often did on the edge of her bed.

"You have been perfect to me to-day, darling," he said. "You have given me the happiest birthday. You have been so quiet and serene and controlled. And have you been happy?"

"Yes, Colin," said she.

He pulled off his tie and flapped her fingers with the end of it.

"I think I shall go south again," he said. "I was defrauded of my stay in Capri owing to my father's death. What about you? Had you not better stay quietly at home? Get your father and mother to come down."

"Just as you please," said she.

"Let us settle it like that, then. And look at me a minute, Violet."

She raised her eyes to his.

"Ah, that's right," he said. "You've had a lesson to-day, darling. It has tired you, and I will leave you to sleep in one moment. We can't have you tired; you must take great care of yourself; eat well, sleep well, be out a great deal. About that lesson. Take it to heart, Vi. Never again try to cross my path: it's much too dangerous. And you've no delusions left about letters and registers, have you? Answer me, dear."

"No," said she.

"That's good. Now I'll leave you."

The March night was warm and moonlit, and Colin stood by the open window letting the breeze stream in against his skin, and looked out over terrace and lake and woodland. All that he had so passionately desired since first he toddled about this stately home of his race was his, and nothing now could upset his rights. And how wonderful the process of arriving at it had been: every step of that way was memorable; fraud, intrigue, trickery, matchless cruelty, had paved the road, and to-day the road was finished.

He put out his light, and curled himself up in bed.... Violet's first-born must surely be a son, who should learn early and well from lips that knew what they were saying the sober truth of that which in the legend wore the habiliment of mediæval superstition. He should learn how poor Uncle Raymond had allowed himself to love—yes, there was a time when he had loved mother, and—was not that tiresome for him—mother happened to prefer father. Well, poor Uncle Raymond had loved, and that, perhaps, was his undoing, for he had fallen into the lake, under the ice, and the icy water

had smothered him, and the fishes had nibbled him.... Colin chuckled to himself at the thought of recounting that.

For a moment, as he looked out on to the night, he had experienced a dulness and dimness of spirit as of a cloud passing over the bright circle of the moon at the thought that he had accomplished all that had so thrillingly occupied him. But at the thought of his fatherhood, the brightness shone forth again. How fascinating it would be to till and to sow in that soft soil, to rear the seedlings that he would water and tend so carefully, to watch them putting forth the buds of poisonous flowers that swelled and prospered till they burst the sheaths of childhood and opened wide-petalled to night and day.

His thoughts, drowsy and content, turned towards Violet. Certainly there had been noticeable in her all day a freezing, a congealment. She was becoming like those impassive portraits of her predecessors, marble women out of whose eyes looked some half-hidden horror....

A flash of lightning, very remote, blinked in through the uncurtained oblong of the window opposite his bed, and a mutter of thunder, as drowsy as himself, answered it. He slid his hand underneath his cheek, and fell asleep.

THE END

[The end of *Colin* by E. F. (Edward Frederic) Benson]