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THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURE OF JANE SMITH

BY

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CHAPTER I

The dining-room of Molloy's flat had not been built to receive twenty-five guests, but the Delegates of twenty-five affiliated Organisations had been crowded into it. The unshaded electric light glared down upon men of many types and nationalities. It did not flatter them.

The air was heavy with the smoke of bad tobacco and the fumes of a very indifferent gas fire. There was a table in the middle of the room, and some dozen of the men were seated at it. The rest stood in groups, or leaned against the walls.

Of the four who formed the Inner Council three were present. Most of the Delegates had expected that the head of The Council, the head of the Federated Organisations, that mysterious Number One whom they all knew by reputation and yet had never seen in the flesh, would be present in person to take the chair. But the Delegates who had entertained this expectation were doomed to disappointment. Once again Number One's authority had been delegated to the other three members of The Council. Of these, Number Three was Molloy, the big, handsome Irishman who rented the flat. He sat facing the door, a fine figure of a man in the late forties. Number Two leaned forward over the fire, warming his hands, his pale, intellectual face expressionless,

his eyes veiled. Belcovitch, who was Number Four, was on his feet speaking. They were large, bony feet, in boots which had most noticeably not been made for him. He spoke fluently, but with a heavy foreign accent.

“Propaganda,” he said, and laughed; really he had a very unpleasant laugh—“propaganda is what you call rot, rubbish, damn nonsense. What else have we been about for years—no, generations—and where are we to-day?”

Number Two drew his chair closer to the fire with an impatient jerk. Number Four’s oratory bored him stiff. The room was cold. This gas fire was like all gas fires. He pulled his fur coat together and spoke sharply:

“Molloy, this room’s most infernally cold, and where in the world does the draught come from?”

“Propaganda is dead,” said Number Four. He looked over his shoulder with dislike at Number Two, and mopped his brow with a dirty handkerchief. Molloy, just opposite him, turned a little and laughed.

“You bring the cold with you, Number Two,” he said. “Here’s Number Four as hot as his own speeches. You’ve got all the fire, and the door’s shut, and a screen in front of it, so what more do you want?”

“Propaganda is dead,” repeated Number Four. He stood with his back to the door. Only the top panel of it showed above the black screen which had been drawn across it. The screen had four leaves. On each leaf a golden stork on one leg

contemplated a golden water-lily. The light shone on the golden birds and the golden flowers.

Number Four thrust his handkerchief back into his pocket, and rapped sharply on the table. It was covered with a red cloth which had seen better days. Number Fourteen had upset the ink only a few moments before, and a greenish-purple patch was still spreading amidst the crimson.

Belcovitch leaned forward, both his hands on the table, his raucous voice brought to a dead level. “Instead of propaganda, what?” he said. “Instead of building here, teaching there, what? That is what I’m here to-night to tell you. To-morrow you all go to your own places, each to his post; but before you go, I am authorised to prepare you for what is to come. It will not be to-day, but it may be to-morrow, or it may not be for many to-morrows yet. One final stage is lacking, but in essentials The Process is complete. Propaganda is dead, because we no longer need propaganda. Comrades”—his voice sank a little—“there are enough of us. Every city in the world has its quota. What The Process will effect”—he paused, looked round, caught Number Two’s slightly sardonic expression, and struck the table with his open hand—“what The Process will effect is this,” he cried—“in one word, Annihilation of the whole human race! Only our organisation will be left.”

“Now what I am instructed to tell you is this,”—he spoke evenly, swiftly, statement following statement—never had the attention of an audience been so fully his; and then suddenly the thread was broken. With a loud grating sound,

Number Fifteen, sitting next to Molloy, pushed his chair back, and sprang to his feet.

“The door!” he shouted. “The door!” Every man in the room looked where Fifteen was looking. Above the water-lilies and the storks, where the top panel of the door had shown, there was a dark, empty space. The door was open.

Number Four whipped out a revolver and dragged the screen away. The door was open, and in the doorway stood a girl in her nightdress. Her hands were stretched out, as if she were feeling her way. Her eyes, of a greenish hazel in colour, were widely opened, and had a dazed expression. Her brown hair hung in two neat plaits. Her feet were bare. Molloy pushed forward quickly.

“Well, there, if that wasn’t the start of our lives,” he said, “and no reason for it when all’s said and done. It’s my daughter, Renata, comrades, and she’s walking in her sleep. Now I’ll just take her back to her room and be with you again.”

“A minute, I think, Molloy,” said Number Two. He got up slowly out of his chair, and came across to where the girl stood motionless, blinking at the light. “I *said* there was a most infernal draught. Will you come in, Miss Molloy?” he added politely, and took the girl by the hand. She yielded to his touch, and came into the room, shivering a little. Some one shut the door. Molloy, shrugging his shoulders, pulled the crimson cloth from the table and wrapped it about his daughter. The ink-soaked patch came upon her bare shoulder,

and she cried out, cast a wild look at the strange and terrifying faces about her, and burst into a flood of tears.

Molloy, standing behind her, looked around as she had looked, and his face darkened. Number Four had his back against the door, and his revolver in his hand. There was only one face in the whole circle that was not stamped with suspicion and fear, and behind the fear and the suspicion there was something icy, something ruthless. Number Two, with a slightly bored expression, was feeling in his waistcoat pocket. He produced a small glass bottle, extracted from it a tiny pellet, and proceeded to dissolve it in the glass of water which had stood neglected at Number Four's right hand.

"Now, Miss Molloy," he said, but Molloy caught him by the wrist.

"What the devil——" he stammered, and Number Two laughed.

"My dear Molloy," he said, "how crude! You might know me better than that."

He held the glass to Renata's lips, and she took it and drank. When she had set down the glass, she felt her way to a chair and leaned back with closed eyes. The room seemed to whirl about her. A confusion of sound was in her ears, loud, angry, with sentences that came and went. "If she heard,"—then another—"How long was she there? Some one must have seen the door open."

“Who did, then?” Then in the harshest voice of all, “I don’t care if she’s Molloy’s daughter fifty times over, if she heard what Four said about The Process, she must go.” Go where?

There was something cold and wet touching her shoulder. The cold seemed to spread all over her. Now her father was speaking. She had never heard his voice quite like that before. And now the man in the fur coat, the one who had given her the glass of water:

“Yes, certainly, elimination if it is necessary. We’re all agreed about that. But let us make sure.” His voice had quite a gentle sound, but Renata’s heart began to beat with great thuds.

“Miss Molloy,”—he was speaking to her now, and she opened her eyes and looked at him. His face was of a clear, even pallor. His eyes, light blue and without noticeable lashes, looked straight into hers. The veil was gone from them. They held a terrifying intelligence.

Renata sat up. The crowd of men had cleared away. She, and her father, and the man in the fur coat were in an angle formed by the table and the black screen, which had been drawn close around them. Her father sat between her and the fire. His head was turned away, and he drummed incessantly on the table with the fingers of his right hand. Beyond the screen Renata could hear movements, and it came to her that the other men were there, waiting. The man in the fur coat spoke to her again. His voice was pleasant and cultivated, his manner reassuring.

“You are better now? Please don’t be frightened. I am a doctor; your father will tell you that. Being wakened suddenly like that gave you a shock, but you are better now.”

“Yes,” said Renata. She wished that her heart would stop beating so hard, and she wished that the man in the fur coat would stop looking at her.

“Now, Miss Renata, I am your doctor, you know, and I want you to answer just a few questions. You have walked in your sleep before?”

“Yes,” said Renata—“oh yes.”

“Often?”

“Yes.”

“What was the first time?”

“I think—I think I was five years old. They found me in the garden.”

Molloy let out a great breath of relief. If she had forgotten, if her account had differed from his—well, well, their luck was in.

There was a whispering from behind the screen. Number Two frowned.

“And the last time?”

“It was at school. I walked into another dormitory and frightened the girls.”

The man in the fur coat nodded. “So your father said.” And for a moment Molloy stared over his shoulder at him. “And to-night? Do you dream on these occasions?”

Renata was reassured. Every moment it was more like an ordinary visit to a doctor. She had been asked all these questions so often. Her voice no longer trembled as she answered. “Yes, I dream. I walk in my sleep because of the dream; now to-night....”

“Yes, to-night?”

“I dreamt I was back at school, and I thought I heard talking in the next dormitory. You know we are not allowed to talk, and I am—I mean I was a prefect. So I got up, and went to see what was the matter, and some one pulled the screen away, and there was such a light, and such a noise.” She put out a shaking hand, and Number Two patted it kindly.

“Very startling for you,” he said. “So you opened the door and came in and heard us all talking. Can you tell me what was being said?” His hand was on Renata’s wrist, and he felt the pulses leap. She spoke a shade too quickly:

“I don’t know.”

“Perhaps I can help you. Your father, you know, travels for a firm of chemists, a firm in which I and my friends are also interested. We were discussing a new aniline dye which, we hope, will capture the markets of the world. Now did you

hear that word—aniline—or anything like it? You see I want to find out just what woke you. What tiresome questions we doctors ask, don't we?"

He smiled, and Renata tried to collect her thoughts. They were in great confusion.

Aniline—annihilate—the two words kept coming and going. If her head had been clearer she would almost certainly have fallen into the trap which had been laid for her. Molloy stopped drumming on the table and clenched his hand. With all his strength he was praying to the saints in whom he no longer believed. Behind the screen twenty-three men waited in a dead silence. Renata was not frightened any more, but she was tired—oh, so dreadfully tired. Annihilate—aniline—the words and their similarity of sound teased her. She turned from them with a little burst of petulance.

"I didn't hear anything like that. Oh, do let me go to bed! I only heard some one call out...."

"Yes?" said Number Two.

"He said, 'The door, the door!' and then there were all those lights."

CHAPTER II

Jane Smith sat on a bench in Kensington Gardens. Her entire worldly fortune lay in her lap. It consisted of two shillings and eleven pence. She had already counted the pennies four times, because there really should have been three shillings. She was now engaged in making a list in parallel columns of (*a*) those persons from whom she might seek financial assistance, and (*b*) the excellent reasons which prevented her from approaching them.

Jane had a passion for making lists. Years and years and years ago Mr. Carruthers had said to her, “My dear, you must learn to be businesslike. I have never been businesslike myself, and it has always been a great trouble to me.” And then and there he and Jane had, in collaboration, embarked upon the First List. It was a thrilling list, a list of toys for Jane’s very first Christmas tree. Since then she had made lists of her books, lists of her clothes, shopping lists, and an annual list of good resolutions.

Jane stopped writing, and began to think about all those other lists. She had always showed them to Mr. Carruthers, and he had always gazed at them with the same vague benignness, and said how businesslike she was getting.

Dear Cousin James—Jane was rich instead of poor when she thought about him. She looked across at the trees in their new mist of green, and then suddenly the thin April sunshine dazzled in her eyes and the green swam into a blur. Cousin James was gone, and Jane was alone in Kensington Gardens with two-and-elevenpence and a list.

She opened and shut her eyes very quickly once or twice, and fixed her attention upon (*a*) and (*b*) in their parallel columns. At the top of the list Jane had written "Cousin Louisa," and the reason against asking Cousin Louisa's assistance was set down as, "Because she was a perfect beast to my darling Jimmy, and a worse beast to me, and anyhow, she wouldn't."

In moments of irreverence the late Mr. Carruthers—*the* Mr. Carruthers, author of five monumental volumes on Ethnographical Differentiation—had been addressed by his young ward and cousin as "darling Jimmy."

Professor Philpot came next. "A darling, but he is sitting somewhere in Central Africa in a cage learning to talk gorilla. I do hope they haven't eaten him, or whatever they do do to people when they catch them."

It will be observed that Miss Smith's association with the world of science had not succeeded in chastening her grammar.

Jane's pencil travelled down the list.

"Mr. Bruce Murray. In Thibet studying Llamas."

“Henry”—Jane shook her head and solemnly put two thick black lines through Henry’s name. One cannot ask for financial assistance from a young man whose hand one has refused in marriage—“even if it was three years ago, and he’s probably been in love with at least fifteen girls since then.”

“Henry’s mamma—well, the only time she ever loved me in her life was when I refused Henry, so I should think she was an Absolute Wash Out—and that’s the lot.”

Jane folded up the list and put it into her handbag. Two silver shillings and eleven copper pennies, and then the workhouse!

It was at this moment that a stout lady with a ginger-coloured pug sat heavily down upon the far end of Jane’s bench. The ginger-coloured pug was on a scarlet leather lead, and after seating herself the stout lady bent forward creaking, and lifted him to a place beside her.

Jane wondered vaguely why a red face and a tightly curled fringe should go with a passion for bugled bonnets and pugs.

“Was ’ums hungry?” said the stout lady.

The pug breathed stertorously, after the manner of pugs, and his mistress at once produced two paper bags from a beaded reticule. From one of them she took a macaroon, and from the other a sponge finger. The pug chose the macaroon.

“Precious,” cooed the stout lady, and all at once Jane felt entirely capable of theft and murder—theft from the stout lady, and murder upon the person of the ginger pug. For at

the sight of food she realised how very, very hungry she was. Bread and margarine for breakfast six hours before, and the April air was keen, and Jane was young.

The pug spat out the last mouthful of macaroon, ignored the sponge finger, and snorted loudly.

“Oh, naughty, naughty,” said the stout lady. She half turned towards Jane.

“You really wouldn’t believe how clever he is,” she observed conversationally; “it’s a cream bun he’s asking for as plain as plain, and yesterday when I bought them for him, he teased and teased until I went back for macaroons; though, of course, a nice plain sponge finger is really better for him than either. I don’t need the vet. to tell me that. Come along, a naughty, tiresome precious then.” She lifted the pug down from the seat, put the paper bags tidily back into her reticule, rose ponderously to her feet, and walked away, trailing the scarlet lead and cooing to the ginger pug.

Jane watched her go.

“Why don’t I laugh?” she said. “Why doesn’t she amuse me? One needn’t lose one’s sense of humour even if one is down and out.”

It was at this unpropitious moment that the tall young man who had sat down unseen upon Jane’s other side, laid his hand upon hers and observed in stirring accents:

“Darling.”

Jane whisked round in an icy temper. Her greenish-hazel eyes looked through the young man in the direction of the north pole. He ought to have stiffened to an icicle then and there, instead of which he murmured, “Darling,” again, and then added—“but what’s the matter?” Jane stopped looking at him or through him. He had simply ceased to exist. She picked up her two shillings and her eleven pence, put them into her purse, and consigned her purse to her handbag. She then closed the handbag with a snap, and rose to her feet.

“Renata!” exclaimed the young man in tones of consternation.

Jane paused and allowed herself to observe him for the first time. She saw a young man with an intellectual forehead and studious brown eyes. He appeared to be hurt and surprised. She decided that this was not a would-be Lothario.

“I think you have made a mistake,” she said, and was about to pass on.

“But, Renata, Renata, darling!” stammered the young man even more desperately. Jane assumed what Cousin Louisa had once described as “that absurdly grand manner.” It was quite kind, but it induced the young man to believe that Jane was conversing with him from about the distance of the planet Saturn.

“I think,” she said, “that you must be taking me for my cousin, Renata Molloy.”

“But I’m engaged to her—no, I mean to you—oh, hang it all, Renata, what’s the sense of a silly joke like this?”

Jane looked at him keenly. “What is my cousin’s middle name?” she inquired.

“Jane. I hate it.”

“Thank you,” said Jane. “My name is Jane Renata Smith, and I am Renata Jane Molloy’s first cousin. Our mothers were twin sisters, and I have always understood that we were very much alike.”

“Alike!” gasped the young man. Words seemed to fail him.

Jane bowed slightly and began to walk away, but, before she had gone a dozen paces, he was beside her again.

“If you’re really Renata’s cousin, I want to talk to you—I must talk to you. Will you let me?”

Jane walked as far as the next seat, and sat down with resignation.

“I don’t even know your name.”

“It’s Todhunter—Arnold Todhunter.” He seemed a trifle breathless. “My sister Daphne was at school with Renata, and she came to stay with us once in the holidays. I said we were engaged, didn’t I? Only, nobody knows it. You won’t tell Mr. Molloy, will you?”

“I’ve never spoken to Mr. Molloy in my life,” said Jane. “There was a most awful row when my aunt married him, and none of us have ever met each other since. My aunt died years and years ago. I think Mr. Molloy is an Anarchist of some sort, isn’t he?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” said Mr. Todhunter, with violence. He banged the back of the iron seat with his hand. Jane reflected that he must be very much in love if he failed to notice how hard it was.

“Yes, yes, he is,” repeated Mr. Todhunter, “and worse; and Renata is in the most dreadful position. I must talk to somebody, or I shall go mad.”

“Well, you can talk to me,” said Jane soothingly. “I have always wanted to meet Renata, and I should love to hear all about her.”

Mr. Todhunter hesitated.

“Miss Smith—you did say Smith, didn’t you?—it’s so difficult to begin. You’ll probably think I’m mad, or trying it on, but it’s like this: I’ve just qualified as an engineer, and I’ve got a job in South America. Naturally I wanted to see Mr. Molloy. Renata wouldn’t let me. She hardly knows her father, and she’s most awfully scared of him. We used to meet in the Park. Then one day she didn’t come. She went on not coming, and I nearly went mad. At last I went to Molloy’s flat and asked to see her. They said she had left town, but it was a lie. Just before the door shut, I heard her voice.” Mr. Todhunter paused. “Look here, you

won't give any of this away, will you? You know, it's awfully confusing for me, your being so like Renata. It makes my head go round."

"Go on," said Jane.

"Well, the bit I don't want you to tell any one is this—I mean to say, it's confidential, absolutely confidential: when I was at the Engineering School, I knew a chap who had got mixed up with Molloy's lot. He didn't get deep in, you'll understand. They scared him, and he backed out. Well, I remembered a yarn he had told me. He was in Molloy's flat one night, and it was raided. And I remembered that he said a lot of them got away down the fire-escape into a yard, and then out through some mews at the back. Well, I went and nosed about until I found that fire-escape, and I got up it, and I found Renata's room and talked to her through the window. It's not so dangerous as it sounds, because they lock her in the flat at night, and go out. And she's in a frightful position—oh, Miss Smith, you simply have no idea of what a frightful position she's in!"

"I might have, if you would tell me what it is," said Jane dryly. She found Mr. Todhunter diffuse.

"Well, she's a prisoner, to start with. They keep her locked in her room."

"Who's they?" interrupted Jane.

Mr. Todhunter rumpled his hair. "She doesn't even know their names," he said distractedly. His voice

dropped to a whisper. “It’s the most appalling criminal organisation, Miss Smith. Molloy’s one of them, but they won’t even let Molloy see her alone now. You see, they think she overheard something. They don’t know whether she did or not. If they were sure that she did, they would kill her.”

“Well, did she?” said Jane.

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Todhunter gloomily. “She cried such a lot, and we were both rather confused, and she’s most awfully frightened, you know.” He glared at Jane as if she had something to do with Renata being frightened. “If I’m to take up this job of mine, I have to sail in three days’ time. I want her to marry me and come too; but she says that, if she runs away, they’ll make sure she heard something, and, if it’s the farthest ends of the earth, they’ll find her and kill her. It seems Molloy told her that. And if she stays here and they bully her again, she doesn’t know what she may give away. It’s a frightful position, isn’t it?”

“Why don’t you go to the police?” said Jane.

“I thought of that, but they’d laugh at me. I haven’t heard anything, and I don’t know anything. Molloy would only say that Renata was under age, and that he had locked her in to prevent her running away with me. Then they’d kill her.”

“I see,” said Jane. Then—“What do you want me to do?” she asked.

All the time that Mr. Todhunter had been glooming and groaning, running his fingers through his hair and

depicting Renata's appalling position, the Great Idea had been slowly forming itself in his mind. Every time that he looked at Jane, her likeness to Renata made him feel quite giddy. The Great Idea intoxicated him. He began to decant it.

"Miss Smith, if you would—you see, if we could only get a clear start—what I mean to say is, South America's a long way off——"

"Quite a distance," Jane agreed.

"And if they thought that you were Renata, they wouldn't look for her—and once we were clear away——"

"My *dear* Mr. Todhunter!" said Jane.

"I could take you up the fire-escape," said Mr. Todhunter, in low, thrilling accents. "It would be quite easy. They would never know that Renata was not there. You do see what I mean, don't you?"

"Oh yes," said Jane in rather an odd voice. "You've made it beautifully clear. Renata is in a position of deadly peril—I think that's what you called it—and the simple way out is for Renata to elope with you to South America, and for me to be in the position of deadly peril instead. It's a beautiful plan."

"Then you'll do it?" exclaimed the oblivious Mr. Todhunter.

Jane looked away. Immediately in front of her was a strip of gravelled path. Beyond that there was green grass, and a bed of pale blue hyacinths, and budding daffodils. Two-and-elevenpence, and then the workhouse—the ascent of a fire-

escape in the April darkness, and at the top of the fire-escape a position of deadly peril.

“Of course,” said Jane, speaking to herself in her own mind. “I might try to be a housemaid, but one has to have a character, and I don’t believe Cousin Louisa would give me one.”

She turned back to the chafing Mr. Todhunter.

“Let’s talk,” she said briefly.

CHAPTER III

Jane took down the telephone directory, opened it, and began to run her finger along the column of “M’s.” As she did so, she wondered why the light in public call offices is so arranged as to strike the top of the occupant’s head, and never by any chance to illumine the directory.

“Marbot”—“Marbottle”—“March, The Rev. Aloysius”—“March, George William Adolphus”—“March, Mrs. de Luttrelle.”

Jane made a mark opposite the number.

When Rosa Mortimer married Henry Luttrell March, she thought, and often said, how much nicer the Luttrell would look if it were written de Luttrelle. If her husband had died six months earlier than he actually did, the name in this improved form would most certainly have been inflicted upon an infant Henry. As it was, the child was baptized and registered as Henry Luttrell, and ten years later took up the struggle over the name where his father had left it. Eventually, a compromise was effected, Mrs. March flaunting her de Luttrelle, and Henry tending to suppress his Luttrell under an initial. His mother never ceased to bemoan his stubbornness.

“Any one would think that Henry was not proud of his family, and he may say what he likes, but there were de Luttrelles for hundreds of years before any one ever heard of a Luttrell. And Luttrell Marches is bound to come to him, or practically bound to, because, whatever Henry may say, I am quite sure that Tony will never turn up again.”

The very sound of the aggrieved voice was in Jane’s ears as she unhung the receiver and gave the number. She supposed that Henry still lived with his mother, and that Mrs. March would still keep an indignant bridge table waiting whilst she discoursed upon Henry—his faults, his foibles, his ailments, and his prospects of inheriting Luttrell Marches.

At that moment Henry, appropriately enough, was gazing at a photograph of Jane. It must not be imagined that this was a habit of his. Three years ago was three years ago, and Jane had receded into the distance with a great many other pleasant things. But to-night he had been looking through some old snapshots, and all of a sudden there was that three-years-old Cornish holiday, and Jane. Henry sat frowning at the photograph.

Jane—why was one fond of Jane? He wondered where she was. It was only last week that some one had mentioned old Carruthers, and had seemed surprised that Henry did not know how long he had been dead.

The telephone bell rang, and Henry jumped up with relief.

“Hullo!” said a voice—and “Hullo!” said Henry.

“Is that Captain March?”

“Speaking,” said Henry.

“It’s Jane Smith,” said the voice, and Henry very nearly dropped the receiver. There was a pause, and then Jane said:

“I want to come and see you on business. Can you spare the time?”

“Er—my mother’s out,” said Henry, and he heard her say, “Thank goodness,” with much sincerity. The next moment she was apologising.

“Oh, I say, Henry, that sounded awfully rude, but I really do want to see you about something very important. No, you can’t come and see me. I’m one of the great unemployed, and I’m not living anywhere at present. No, I won’t meet you at a restaurant either. Just tell me your nearest Tube Station, and I’ll come along. All right then; I won’t be more than ten minutes.”

Henry turned away, feeling a little dazed. Being a methodical young man, he proceeded to put away the photographs with which the table was littered. A little snapshot of Jane he kept to the last, and ended by not putting it away at all. After he had looked at it for some time, he put it on the mantelpiece behind the clock. The hands pointed to nine o’clock precisely. Then he looked at himself in the glass that was over the mantel, and straightened his tie.

Henry’s mother naturally considered him the most beautiful of created beings. Without going quite as far as this, Henry

certainly approved of his own looks. Having approved of himself, he proceeded to move the clock back half an inch, and to alter the position of the twisted candlesticks on either side of it. Then he poked the fire. Then he began to walk up and down the room. And then the bell rang.

Henry went out into the hall and opened the door of the flat, and there on the threshold stood Jane in a shabby blue serge coat and skirt, with an old black felt hat. Not pretty, not smart —just Jane. She walked in and gave him her hand.

“Hullo, Henry!” she said. Then she laughed. “Or, do I call you Captain March?”

“You call me Henry,” said Henry, and he shut the door.

“I expect you’d like to come into the drawing-room”—this came hurriedly after a moment’s pause. He moved across the hall, switched on the light, and stood aside for her to pass. Jane looked in and saw more pink cushions and pink lamp-shades than she would have believed it possible to get into one small room. There were also a great many pink roses, and the air was heavy with scent.

“I’m sure that’s not where you see people on business,” said Jane, and Henry led the way into the dining-room.

“This is my room,” he said, and Jane sat down on a straight, high-backed chair and leaned her elbows on the table.

“Now, Henry,” she said, “I’ve come here to tell you a story, and I want you to sit down and listen to it; and please forget that you are you, and that I am I. Just listen.”

Henry sat down obediently. It was so good to see Jane again that, if she liked to sit there and talk till midnight, he had no objection.

“Now attend,” said Jane, and she began her story.

“Once upon a time there were twin sisters, and they were called Renata and Jane Carruthers. They had a cousin James—you remember him—my darling Jimmy? Jimmy wanted to marry Renata, but she refused him and married John Smith, my father, and when I was five years old she and my father both died, and Jimmy adopted me. Now we come to the other twin. Her name was Jane, and she ran away to America with a sort of anarchist Irishman named Molloy. She died young, and she left one daughter, whom she called Renata Jane. I, by the bye, am Jane Renata. The twin sisters were so much alike that no one ever knew them apart. Jimmy had photographs of them, and even he could never tell me which was my mother and which was my Aunt Jane. Now, Henry, listen to this. My Cousin Renata is in London, and it seems that she and I are just as much alike as our mothers were. In fact, it’s because Renata’s young man took me for Renata this afternoon that I am here, asking your advice, at the present moment.”

Henry smiled a somewhat puzzled smile. “Have you asked my advice?” he said; but Jane did not smile. Instead, she leaned forward a little.

“Are you still at Scotland Yard, Henry?”

He nodded.

“Criminal Investigation Department?”

He nodded again.

“Then listen. Renata is in what her young man calls ‘a position of deadly peril.’ In more ordinary language, she’s in a nasty hole. Do you know anything about Cornelius Molloy? That’s the Anarchist Uncle, Renata’s father, you know.”

“There aren’t any anarchists nowadays,” said Henry meditatively.

“I was brought up on anarchists, and I don’t see that it matters what you call them,” said Jane. “‘A’ for Anarchist, ‘B’ for Bolshevik, and so on. The point is, do you know anything about Molloy?”

“I’ve heard of him,” Henry admitted.

“Nothing good?”

“We don’t hear much that’s good about people—officially, you know.”

“Well, Arnold Todhunter says that Renata is supposed to have overheard something—something that her father’s associates think so important that they’re keeping her under lock and key, and seriously contemplating putting her out of the way altogether.”

“Did she overhear anything?” asked Henry, just as Jane had done.

“No one knows except Renata, and she won’t tell. Molloy goes back to the States to-morrow. They won’t let him take Renata with him, and Arnold Todhunter wants to marry her and carry her off to Bolivia, where he’s got an engineering job.”

“That appears to be a good scheme,” said Henry.

“Yes, but you see they’ll never let her go so long as they are not sure how much she knows. Arnold says she was walking in her sleep, and blundered in on about twenty-five of them, all talking the most deadly secrets. And they don’t know when she woke or what she heard. And”—Jane’s eyes began to dance a little—“Arnold has a perfectly splendid idea. He takes Renata to Bolivia, and I take Renata’s place. Nobody knows she has gone, so nobody looks for her.”

“What nonsense,” said Henry; then—“What’s this Todhunter like?”

“A mug,” said Jane briefly. She paused, and then went on in a different voice:

“Henry, who is at Luttrell Marches now? Did your Cousin Tony ever turn up?”

Henry stared at her.

“Why do you ask that?”

“Because,” said Jane, with perfect simplicity, “Renata is to be sent down to Luttrell Marches to-morrow, and

somebody there—somebody, Henry—will decide whether she is to be eliminated or not.”

Henry sat perfectly silent. He stared at Jane, and she stared at him. It seemed as if the silence in the room were growing heavier and heavier, like water that gathers behind some unseen dam. All of a sudden Henry sprang to his feet.

“Is this a hoax?” he asked, in tones of such anger that Jane hardly recognised them.

Jane got up too. The hand that she rested upon the table was not quite steady.

“Henry, how dare you?” and her voice shook a little too.

Henry swung round.

“No, no—I beg your pardon, Jane, for the Lord’s sake don’t look at me like that. It’s, it’s—well, it’s pretty staggering to have you come here and say....” He paused. “What was it you wanted to know?”

“I asked you who is living at Luttrell Marches.”

Henry was silent. He walked to the end of the room and back. Jane’s eyes followed him. Where had this sudden wave of emotion come from? It seemed to be eddying about them, filling the confined space. Jane made herself look away from Henry, forced herself to notice the room, the furniture, the pictures—anything that was commonplace and ordinary. This was decidedly Henry’s room and not his mother’s, from the worn leather chairs and plain oak table to

the neutral coloured walls with their half-dozen Meissonier engravings. Not a flower, not a trifle of any sort, and one wall all books from ceiling to floor. Exactly opposite to Jane there was a fine print of “The Generals in the Snow.” The lowering, thunderous sky, heavy with snow and black with the omens of Napoleon’s fall, dominated the picture, the room. Jane looked at it, and looked away with a shiver, and as she did so, Henry was speaking:

“Jane, I don’t want to answer that question for a minute or two. I want to think. I want a little time to turn things over in my mind. Look here, come round to the fire and sit down comfortably. Let’s talk about something else for a bit. I want all your news, for one thing. Tell me what you’ve been doing with yourself.”

Jane came slowly to the fireside. After all, it was pleasant just to put everything on one side, and be comfortable. Henry’s chair was very comfortable, and the day seemed to have lasted for weeks, and weeks, and weeks. She put out her hands to the fire, and then, because she noticed that they were still trembling a little, she folded them in her lap. Henry leaned against the mantelpiece and looked down at her.

“Where have you been?” he asked.

“Well, that summer at Upwater—you know we were lodging with the woman who had the post office—Jimmy and I stayed on after all the other visitors were gone. I expect it was rather irregular, but I used to help her. You see her son didn’t get back until eighteen months after the armistice, and she wasn’t really up to the work. In the end, you may say I

ran that post office. I did it very well, too. It was something to do, especially after Jimmy died."

"Yes, I heard. I wondered where you were."

"I stayed on until the son came home, and then I couldn't. He was awful, and she thought him quite perfect, poor old soul. I came to London and got a job in an office, and a month ago I lost it. The firm was cutting down expenses, like everybody else. And then—well, I looked for another job, and couldn't find one, and this morning my landlady locked the door in my face and kept my box. And that, Henry, is why I am thinking seriously of changing places with my Cousin Renata, who, at least, has a roof over her head and enough to eat."

"Jane," said Henry furiously, "you don't mean to say—so that's why you're looking such a white rag!"

Jane was horrified to find that her eyes had filled with tears. She laughed, but the laugh was not a very convincing one.

"I did have a cup of coffee and two penny buns," she began; and then Henry was fetching sandwiches from the sideboard and pressing a cup of hot chocolate into her not unwilling hands.

"They leave this awful stuff over a spirit lamp for my mother, and she always has sandwiches when she comes in. It's better than nothing," he added in tones of wrath.

"It's not awful," protested Jane; but Henry was not mollified.

“I don’t understand,” he said. “Why are you so hard up? Didn’t Mr. Carruthers provide for you?”

Jane’s colour rose.

“He hadn’t much, and what he had was an annuity. You know what Jimmy was, and how he forgot things. I am really quite sure that he had forgotten about its being an annuity, and that he thought that I should be quite comfortable.”

Henry swallowed his opinion of Mr. Carruthers.

“Was he your only relation?”

“Well,” said Jane, who was beginning to feel better, “you can’t really count Cousin Louisa; she was only Jimmy’s half-sister, and that makes her a sort of third half-cousin of my mother’s. Besides, she always simply loathed me.”

“And you’ve no other relations at all?”

“Only the Anarchist Uncle,” said Jane brightly. She gave him her cup and plate. “Your mother has simply lovely sandwiches, Henry. Thank you ever so much for them, but what will she do when she comes home and finds I have eaten them all?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure.” Henry’s tone was very short. “Look here, Jane, you must let—er, er, I mean, won’t you let....” He stuck, and Jane looked at him very kindly.

“Nothing doing, Henry,” she said, “but it’s frightfully nice of you, all the same.”

There was a silence. When Jane thought it had lasted long enough, she said:

“So, you see, it all comes back again to Renata. Have you done your thinking, Henry?”

“Yes,” said Henry. He drew a chair to the table and sat down half turned to the fire—half turned to Jane. Sometimes he looked at her, but oftener his gaze dwelt intently on the rise and fall of the flames.

“What makes you think that your cousin is to be taken to Luttrell Marches? Did these people tell her so?”

“No,” said Jane—“of course not. As far as I can make out from Arnold Todhunter, Renata is locked in her room, but there’s another key and she can get in and out. She can move about inside the flat, but she can’t get out of it. Well, one night she crept out and listened, though you would have thought she had had enough of listening, and she heard them say that, as soon as her father was out of the way, they would send her to Luttrell Marches and let ‘Number One’ decide whether she was to be ‘eliminated.’ Since then she’s been nearly off her head with terror, poor kid. Now, Henry, it’s your turn. What about Luttrell Marches?”

Henry’s face seemed to have grown rigid. “It’s impossible,” he said in a low voice.

The clock above them struck ten, and he waited till the last stroke had died away.

“I don’t know quite what to say to you, but whatever I say is confidential. You’ve heard my mother talk of the Luttrells, and you may or may not know that my uncle died a year ago. You have also probably heard that his son, my Cousin Anthony, disappeared into the blue in 1915.”

“Then Luttrell Marches belongs to you?” For the life of her, Jane could not keep a little consternation out of her voice.

“No. If Tony had been missing for seven years, I could apply for leave to presume his death, but there’s another year to run. My mother—every one—supposes that I am only waiting until the time is up. As a matter of fact—Jane, I’m telling you what I haven’t told my mother—Anthony Luttrell is alive.”

“Where?”

“I can’t tell you. And you must please forget what I have told you—unless——”

“Unless?”

“Unless you have to remember it,” said Henry in an odd voice. “For the rest, Luttrell Marches was let during my uncle’s lifetime to Sir William Carr-Magnus. You know who I mean?”

“*The* Sir William Carr-Magnus?” said Jane, and Henry nodded.

Jane felt absolutely dazed. Sir William Carr-Magnus, the great chemist, great philanthropist, and Government expert!

“He is engaged,” said Henry, “on a series of most important investigations and experiments which he is conducting on behalf of the Government. The extreme seclusion of Luttrell Marches, and the lonely country all round are, of course, exactly what is required under the circumstances.”

Quite suddenly Jane began to laugh.

“It’s all mad,” she said, “but I’ve quite made up my mind. Renata shall elope, and I will go to Luttrell Marches. It will be better than the workhouse anyhow. You know, Henry, seriously, I have a lot of qualifications for being a sleuth. Jimmy taught me simply heaps of languages, I’ve got eyes like gimlets, and I can do lip-reading.”

“What?”

“Yes, I can. Jimmy had a perfectly deaf housekeeper, and it worried him to hear us shouting at each other, so I had her taught, and learned myself for fun.”

Henry crossed to the bookcase and came back with a photograph album in his hand. Taking a loose card from between the pages, he put it down in front of Jane, saying:

“There you may as well make your host’s acquaintance.”

Jane looked long at the face which was sufficiently well known to the public. The massive head, the great brow with

eyes set very deep beneath shaggy tufts of hair, the rather hard mouth—all these were already familiar to her, and yet she looked long. After a few moments' hesitation, Henry put a second photograph upon the top of the first, and this time Jane caught her breath. It was the picture of a woman in evening dress. The neck and shoulders were like those of a statue, beautiful and, as it were, rigid. But it was the beauty of the face that took Jane's breath away—that and a certain look in the eyes. The word hungry came into her mind and stayed there. A woman with proud lips and hungry eyes, and the most beautiful face in the world.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Raymond Carr-Magnus. She is Lady Heritage, and a widow now—Sir William's only child. He gave her a boy's name and a boy's education—brought her up to take his place, and found himself with a lovely woman on his hands. This was done from Amory's portrait of her in 1915—the year of her marriage. She was at one time engaged to my Cousin Anthony. If you do go to Luttrell Marches, you will see her, for she makes her home with Sir William."

Henry's voice was perfectly expressionless. The short sentences followed one another with a little pause after each. Jane looked sideways, and said very quick and low:

"Were you very fond of her, Henry?"

And when she had said it, her heart beat and her hands gripped one another.

Henry took the photograph from her lap.

“I said she was engaged to Tony.”

“Yes, Henry, but were you fond of her?”

“Confound you, Jane. Yes, I was.”

“Well, I don’t wonder.”

Jane rose to her feet.

“I must be going,” she said. “I have an assignation with Arnold Todhunter, who is going to take me up a fire-escape and substitute me for Renata.”

Henry took out a pocket-book.

“Will you give me Molloy’s address, please?” And when she had given it: “You know, my good girl, there’s nothing on earth to prevent my having that flat raided and your cousin’s deposition taken.”

“No, of course not,” said Jane—“only then nobody will go down to Luttrell Marches and find out what’s going on there.”

She looked straight at Henry as she spoke.

“I’m going, whatever you say, and whatever you do, and I only came to you because——”

“Because——”

“Well, it seemed so sort of lonesome going off into situations of deadly peril with no one taking the very slightest interest.”

Jane’s voice shook absurdly on the last word. And in an instant Henry had his arm round her and was saying, “Jane—Jane—you shan’t go, you shan’t.”

Jane stepped back. Her eyes blazed. “And why?” she said.

She tried to say it icily, but she could not steady her voice. Henry’s arm felt solid and comfortable.

“Because I’m damned if I’ll let you,” said Henry very loud, and upon that the door opened and there entered Mrs. de Luttrelle March, larger, pinker, and more horrified than Jane had ever seen her. She, for her part, beheld Henry, his arms about a shabby girl, and her horror reached its climax when she recognised the girl as “that dreadfully designing Jane Smith.”

“Henry,” she gasped—“oh, Henry!”

Jane released herself with a jerk, and Mrs. de Luttrelle March sat down in the nearest chair and burst into a flood of tears. Her purple satin opera cloak fell away, disclosing a peach-coloured garment that clung to her plump contours and seemed calculated rather for purposes of revelation than concealment. Large tears rolled down her powdered cheeks, and she sought in vain for a handkerchief.

“Henry—I didn’t think it of you—at least not here, not under my very roof. And if you were going to break my heart like your father, it would have been kinder to do it ten years ago,

because then I should have known what to expect, and anyhow, I should probably have been dead by now.”

She sniffed and made a desperate gesture.

“Oh, Henry, I can’t find it! Haven’t you got one, or don’t you care whether my heart’s broken? And I haven’t even got a handkerchief to cry with.”

Henry produced a handkerchief and gave it to her without attempting to speak. Years of experience had taught him that to stay his mother’s first flood of words was an impossibility.

Jane felt rather sick. Mrs. March was so very large and pink, and the whole affair so very undignified, that her one overmastering desire was to get away. She heard Henry’s “This is Miss Smith, Mother. She came to see me on business”; and then Mrs. March’s wail, “Your father always called it business too, and I didn’t think—no, I didn’t think you’d bring a girl in here when my back was turned.”

Jane stood up very straight, but Henry had taken her hand again.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, in a very low voice. “She—she had a rotten time when she was young”; then, in a tone that cut through Mrs. March’s sobs as an east wind cuts the rain, he said:

“My dear mother, you are making some extraordinary mistake. The last time that I saw Miss Smith was three years ago. I then asked her to marry me, and she refused. I would go on asking her every day from now to kingdom come if I

thought that it was the slightest good. As it isn't, I am only anxious to be of use to her in any possible way. She came here to-night to ask my advice on an official matter."

Mrs. March fixed her very large blue eyes upon her son. They were swimming with tears, but behind the tears there was something which suddenly went to Jane's heart—something bewildered and hurt, and rather ungrown-up.

"You always were a good boy, Henry," said Mrs. March, and Henry's instant rigid embarrassment had the effect of cheering Jane. She came forward and took the limp white hand that still clutched a borrowed handkerchief.

"I'm sure he'll always be a good son to you, and I wouldn't take him away from you for the world. He's just a very kind friend. Good-night, Mrs. March."

She went out without looking back, but Henry followed her into the hall.

"You're not really going to plunge into this foolish affair?" he said as they stood for a moment by the door. It was Jane who opened it.

"Yes, I am, Henry. You can't stop me, and you know it."

Jane's eyes looked straight into his, and Henry did know.

"Very well, then. Read the agony column in *The Times*. If I want you to have a message, it will be there, signed with the day of the week on which it appears. You understand? If the message is in *The Times* of Wednesday, it will be signed,

‘Wednesday.’ And if there are directions in the message, you will obey them implicitly.”

“How *thrilling*,” said Jane.

“Is it?”

Henry looked very tired.

“I don’t know if I’ve done right, but I can’t tell you any more just now. By the way, Molloy’s flat will be watched, and I shall know whether you go to Luttrell Marches or not. Good-bye, Jane.”

“Good-bye, Henry.”

Henry watched the lift disappear.

CHAPTER IV

“This,” said Arnold Todhunter, “is the fire-escape.” His tone was that of one who says, “This is our Rembrandt.” Proud proprietorship pervaded his entire atmosphere.

“Ssh!” said Jane.

They stood together in a small back-yard. It seemed to be quite full of things like barrows, paving-stones, old tin cans, and broken crockery. Jane had already tripped over a meat tin and collided with two chicken coops and a dog kennel. She reflected that this was just the sort of back-yard Arnold would find.

Everything was very dark. The blackest shadow of all marked the wall that they were to climb. Here and there a lighted window showed, and Jane could see that these windows had rounded parapets jutting out on a level with the sill.

Arnold, meanwhile, was tugging at something which seemed to be a short plank.

“What on earth?” she whispered.

“We shall need it. I’d better go first.”

And forthwith he began to climb, clutching the plank with one hand and the iron ladder with the other.

Jane let him get a good start, and followed.

The ladder was quite easy to climb; it was only when one thought of how immensely far away the skyline had looked, that it seemed as if it would be very uncomfortable to look down instead of up, and to see that horrid little yard equally far below.

Jane did look down once, and everything was black and blurred and shadowy. It was odd to be clinging to the side of a house, with the dark all round one, and the steady roar of the London traffic dulled almost to nothingness.

The night was very still, and a little cold. Somewhere below amongst the tin cans a cat said, “Grrrwoosh,” not loud, but on a softly inquiring note. The inquiry was instantly answered by a long, piercing wail which travelled rapidly over four octaves, and then dwelt with soulful intensity upon an agonising top note.

With a muttered exclamation, Arnold Todhunter dropped his plank. It grazed Jane’s shoulder, and fell among the cats and crockery with a most appalling clatter.

Jane shut her eyes, gripped the ladder desperately, and wondered whether she would fall first and be arrested afterwards, or the other way about. Nothing happened. Apparently the neighbourhood was inured to the bombardment of cats.

After a moment Jane became aware of Arnold's boots in close proximity to her head. A wave of fury swept away her giddiness, and she began to descend with a rapidity which surprised herself.

Once more they stood in the yard.

Once more Arnold groped for his plank.

"I'm going up first," said Jane, in a low tone of rage. "I won't be guillotined on a public fire-escape. Which floor is it?"

"The top," said Arnold sulkily, and without more ado Jane went up the ladder.

It was exactly like a rather horrid dream. The ladder was very cold and very gritty, and you climbed, and climbed, and went on climbing without arriving anywhere.

Pictures of the Eiffel Tower and New York skyscrapers flitted through Jane's mind. She also remembered interesting paragraphs about how many million pennies placed on end would reach to the moon. And at long, long last the escape ended at a window-sill with a parapet-enclosed space beneath it.

Jane sat down on the window-sill and shut her eyes tight. She had a horrid feeling that the building was rocking a little. After a moment Arnold crawled over the edge of the coping, dragging his plank. He was panting.

“This,” he said, with his mouth close to Jane’s ear—“this window only leads to the landing where the lift shaft ends. We’ve got to get across to the next one, which is inside Molloy’s flat. That’s what the plank is for.”

“You’re blowing down my neck,” said Jane.

Arnold Todhunter felt that he had never met a girl whom he disliked so much. Extraordinary that she should look so like Renata and be so different.

He knelt just inside the parapet, and pushed the board slowly out into the dark until it rested on the parapet of the next window.

“Will you go first, or shall I?” he whispered.

“I will.”

Jane felt sure that, if she had to watch Arnold balancing on that plank miles above the ground, she would never be able to cross it herself.

The reflection that it was Renata, and not she, who would have to make the descent fortified her considerably. Even so, she never quite knew how she crossed to the other window. It was an affair of clenched teeth and a mind that shut out resolutely everything except the next groping clutch of the hand—the next carefully taken step.

She sank against the window-sill and heard Arnold follow her. Just at the end he slipped; he seemed to change his feet, and then with a heavy thud pitched down on the top of Jane.

She thought he said “Damn!” and she was quite sure that she said “Idiot!”

There was an awful moment while they listened for the fall of the plank, but it held to the coping by a bare half-inch.

“Thank goodness I’m not Renata!” said Jane, with heartfelt sincerity. And—

“Thank goodness, you’re not!” returned Mr. Todhunter, with equal fervour, and at that moment the window opened.

There was a little sobbing gasp, and a girl was clinging to Arnold Todhunter and whispering:

“Darling—darling, I thought you’d never come.”

Arnold crawled through the open window, and from the pitch-black hall there came the sounds of demonstrative affection.

“Good gracious me, there’s no accounting for tastes!” said Jane, under her breath. And she too climbed down into the darkness.

Arnold appeared to be trying to explain Jane to Renata, whilst Renata alternated between sobs and kisses.

Jane lost her temper, suddenly and completely.

“For goodness’ sake, you two, come where there’s a light, and where we can talk sense. Every minute you waste is just asking for trouble. What’s that room with the light?”

It is difficult to be impressive in a low whisper, but Renata did stop kissing Arnold.

“My bedroom,” she said—“I’m supposed to be locked in.”

Jane groped in the dark and got Renata by the arm.

“Come along in there and talk to me. We’ve got to talk. Arnold can wait outside the window. I don’t want him in the least. You’re going to spend the rest of your life with him in Bolivia, so you needn’t worry. I simply won’t have him whilst we are talking.”

Arnold loathed Jane a little more, but Renata allowed herself to be detached from him with a sob.

Inside the lighted bedroom the two girls looked at one another in an amazed silence.

In height and contour, feature and colouring, the likeness was without a flaw.

Facing them was a small wardrobe of painted wood. A narrow panel of looking-glass formed the door. The two figures were reflected in it, and Jane, tossing her hat on to the bed, studied them there with a long, careful scrutiny.

The same brown hair, growing in the same odd peak upon the forehead, the same arch to the brow, the same greenish-hazel eyes. Renata’s face was tear-stained, her eyelids red and swollen—“but that’s exactly how I look when I cry,” said Jane. She set her hand by Renata’s hand, her foot by Renata’s foot. The same to a shade.

The other girl watched her with bewildered eyes.

“Speak—say something,” said Jane.

“What shall I say?”

“Anything—the multiplication table, the days of the week—I want to hear your voice.”

“Oh, Jane, what an odd girl you are!” said Renata—“and don’t you think Arnold had better come in? It must be awfully cold out there.”

“Presently,” said Jane. “It’s very hard to tell, but I believe that our voices are as much alike as the rest of us.”

She opened her bag, and took out The List and a pencil.

“Now, write something—I don’t care what.”

Renata wrote her own name, and then, after a pause, “It is a fine day.”

“Quite like,” said Jane, “but nearly all girls do write the same hand now. I can manage that. Now, tell me, where were you at school?”

“Miss Bazing’s, Ilfracombe.”

“When did you leave?”

“Two months ago.”

“Have you been in America?”

“Not since I was five.”

“Anywhere else out of England?”

“No.”

“What languages do you know?”

“French—I’m not good at it.”

“Well, that’s that. Now, Arnold tells me you heard them say you were to go to Luttrell Marches?”

Renata looked terrified.

“Yes, yes, I did.”

“You’re not supposed to know? They haven’t told you officially?”

“No—no, they haven’t told me anything.”

“Your father goes away to-morrow. Have they told you that?”

“I can’t remember,” said Renata, bursting into tears. “Oh, Jane, you don’t know what it’s like!—to be locked in here—to have them come and ask questions until I don’t know what I’m saying—and to know, to know all the time that if I make one slip I’m lost.”

“Yes, yes, but it’s going to be all right,” said Jane.

“I can’t sleep,” sobbed Renata, “and I can’t eat.” She held up her wrist and looked at it with interest. “I’ve got ever so much thinner.”

Jane could have slapped her. She reflected with thankfulness that Bolivia was a good long way off.

“Now, look here,” she said, “you talk about ‘they’—who are ‘they’?”

“There’s a man in a fur coat,” faltered Renata—“that is to say, he generally has on a fur coat; he always seems to be cold. He’s the worst; I don’t know his name, but they call him Number Two. He’s English. Then there’s Number Four. He’s a foreigner of some sort, and he’s dreadful—dreadful. I think—I think”—her voice dropped to a whisper—“my father is Number Three.” Then almost inaudibly, “Number One is at Luttrell Marches. It’s Number One who will decide about me—about me. Oh, Jane, I’m so dreadfully frightened!”

Renata’s eyes, wide and terrified, stared past Jane into vacancy.

“You needn’t be in the least frightened; you’re going to Bolivia,” said Jane briskly.

“I must tell some one,” said Renata, still in that whispering voice—still staring. “I didn’t tell them, I wouldn’t tell them, but I must tell some one. Jane, I must tell you what I heard.”

Quick as lightning Jane put her hand over the other girl's mouth.

"Wait!" she said, and in the pause that followed two things stood out in her mind clear and sharp. If Renata told her secret, Jane's danger would be doubled. If Renata did not tell it, the crime these men were planning might ripen undisturbed. Jane had a high courage, but she hesitated.

Her hand dropped slowly to her side. She saw Renata's mouth open protestingly, and there came on her a wild impulse to stave things off, to have time, just a little time before she let that secret in.

"We've got to change clothes," she said. "Quick, give me that skirt and take mine. Yes, put on the coat, and I'll give you my shoes, too. My hat's on the bed; you'd better put it on."

Renata obeyed. A resentful feeling of being hustled, ordered about, treated like a child, was upon her; but Jane moved and spoke so quickly, and seemed so sure of herself, that there seemed no opening for protest. She thought Jane's blue serge shabby and old fashioned—not nearly as nice as her own—and Jane's shoes were terribly worn and needed mending.

"Now, listen," said Jane.

"If Arnold likes to go to my rooms and pay up two weeks' rent, he can get my box and all my other clothes for you. There's not very much, but it'll be better than nothing. I'll write a line for him to take, and put the address on it. And

will you please remember now and from henceforth that you are Jane Renata Smith, and not Renata Jane Molloy?”

Jane was scribbling a couple of lines as she spoke, and as she turned and gave the paper into Renata’s hand, she knew that she must decide now. The moment of grace was up, and whether she bade Renata speak or be silent, there could be no drawing back.

“What were you going to tell me?” she said.

Renata stood silent for a long minute. She was twisting and turning the slip of paper which Jane had given her. She looked down at her twisting fingers; her breath began to come more quickly. Then with great suddenness she pushed the note into her pocket, and caught at Jane with both hands.

“Yes, I must tell you—I must. It will be coming nearer all the time, and I must tell some one, or I shall go mad.”

“Tell me, then,” said Jane. “You were walking in your sleep, and you opened the door and heard—what did you hear?”

Jane’s eyes were bright and steady, her face set. She had taken her decision, and her courage rose to meet an unknown shock.

“I was walking in my sleep,” repeated Renata, in a low, faltering voice, “and I opened the door, and I heard——”

“What did you hear?”

“There was a screen in front of me, and just beyond the screen a man talking. I heard—oh, Jane, I heard every single word he said! I can’t forget one of them—if I could, if I only could!”

“What did you hear?” said Jane firmly.

Renata’s grip became desperate. She leant forward until her lips touched Jane’s ear. In a voice that was only a breath, she gave word for word, sentence by sentence, the speech in which Number Four had proclaimed the death sentence of the civilised world. It was just a bald transcript like the whisper of a phonograph record, as if the words and sentences had been stamped on an inanimate plate by some recording machinery, to be released again with utter regularity and correctness.

Every vestige of colour left Jane’s face as she listened. Only her eyes remained bright and steady. Something seemed to knock at her heart. Renata’s last mechanical repetition died away, and with a sob of relief she flung her arms round Jane.

“Oh, Jane, I do hope they won’t kill you! Oh, I do hope they won’t!”

“So do I,” said Jane.

She detached herself from Renata, and as she did so, both girls heard the same thing—from beyond the two closed doors the groan and grind of the lift machinery in motion.

“They’ve come back,” said Renata, in a whisper of terror.

Jane’s hand was on the electric-light switch before the words had left Renata’s lips.

As darkness sprang upon the room she had the door open. Her grip was on Renata’s wrist, her arm about Renata’s waist, and they were in the hall. It seemed pitch black at first, with a gloom that pressed upon their eyes and confused the sense of direction.

The lift rose with a steady rumble.

Then, as Jane stared before her, the oblong of the window sprang into view. She took a step forward and felt Renata’s head against her shoulder.

“I’m going to faint,” came in a gasp.

“Then you’ll never see Arnold again. Do you want to be caught like this?”

“Jane, I can’t.”

Jane dragged her on.

“Renata, you rabbit!—if they don’t kill you, I will. Faint in Bolivia as much as you like, but I forbid you to do it here.”

“Oh, Jane!”

Jane’s arm felt the weight of a limp, sagging figure, but they had reached the window. From the sill Arnold bent, listening anxiously.

“Quick!” gasped Jane.

And, as his arm relieved the strain, she pinched Renata with all her might. There was a sob—a gasp—Arnold lifted, Jane pushed, and somehow the thing was done. Arnold and Renata were outside, crouched down between the parapet and the window, whilst Jane leaned panting against the jamb.

As the lift stopped with a jerk, her rigid fingers drew the window down and fastened it. Now, horribly loud, the clang of the iron gate. Steps outside—voices—the grate of a key in the lock.

Jane knew now what Renata had felt. Easy, so easy to yield to this paralysis of terror, and to stand rooted there until they came! With all her might she pushed the temptation from her and roused to action.

Thank Heaven, she had had no time to put on Renata’s shoes!

After the first movement strength and swiftness came to her. She was across the hall without a sound. The bedroom door closed upon her. As it did so, the door of the flat swung wide.

CHAPTER V

Jane stood in the dark, her hand upon the door knob. Slowly, very slowly, she released it. As she leaned there, her head almost touching the panelling, she could hear two men talking in the hall beyond. They spoke in English, but only the outer sound of the words came to her.

With an immense effort she straightened herself, and was about to move away when a thought struck her like a knife-blow—the key—the second tell-tale key—if she had forgotten it!

Her hand slid back, touched the cold key, turned and withdrew it, moving with a steady firmness that surprised herself.

Then she made a half-turn and tried to visualise the room as she had seen it in the light.

Immediately opposite, the cupboard with the looking-glass panel. The window in the right-hand wall, and the bed between window and cupboard. At the foot of the bed a chair, and on the same side as the window a chest of drawers with a looking-glass upon it and Renata's plain schoolgirlish brush and comb.

When she had placed everything, Jane began to move forward in the direction of the window. Her left hand touched the rail of the bed-foot, her right, groping, brushed the counterpane and rested on something oddly familiar. Her heart gave a sudden jerk, for this was her own bag, which Renata should have taken. She opened it with quick, trembling fingers, took out her handkerchief, and then stuffed the bag right down inside the bed.

A couple of steps brought her to the window, and she pressed closely to it, listening, and wished she dared to open it. There was no sound from outside. She leaned her forehead against the glass, and wondered how many years had passed since the morning. It seemed impossible for this day to come to an end.

Then quite suddenly a key turned in the lock, and the door opened, not widely, but as one opens the door of a room where some one is asleep. A man's head was silhouetted against the hall light. Part of his shoulder showed in a dark overcoat.

He spoke, and a hint of brogue beneath a good deal of American twang informed Jane that this was her official father.

"Are you awake, Renata?"—and, as he asked the question, a second man came up behind him and stood there listening.

"Yes," said Jane, muffling her voice with her handkerchief.

He hesitated a moment, and then said:

“Well, good-night to you”—and the other man, speaking over his shoulder, said in an easy, cultivated voice without any accent at all:

“Pleasant dreams, Miss Renata.”

Jane’s “Good-night” was just audible and no more, but obviously it satisfied the two men, for the door was shut, the key turned and withdrawn, and presently the hall light went out, and the darkness was absolute and unrelieved, except where the midnight sky showed just less black than the interior of the room.

After what seemed a long, long time, Jane undressed and got to bed. It was strange to grope for and find Renata’s neatly folded nightdress.

Presently she lay down, and presently she slept. Time ceased; the day was over.

She woke suddenly a few hours later. It was still dark. She came broad awake at once, and sat up in bed as if some one had called to her. Her mind was full of one horrifying thought.

The plank—what had Arnold done with the plank?

Impossible that he should have helped Renata down the fire-escape and carried the plank as well, and somehow Jane did not see Arnold troubling to come back for it.

One thing was certain; if Arnold had left the plank in its compromising position, it must be removed before daylight.

Jane got out of bed, shivering. She went to the window, opened it, and leaned out. The yard, mews, wall, and parapet—all were veiled in the same thick dusk. She strained her eyes, but it was impossible to distinguish anything. There was nothing for it but to cross that horrid little hall again, open the window, and make sure.

With the key in her hand, and mingled rage and terror in her heart, she felt her way to the door, opened it noiselessly, and crossed barefoot to the window. The hasp was stiff, it creaked, and the window stuck.

Recklessness took possession of Jane. With a jerk she pushed it up; as it chanced, recklessness made less noise than caution would have done. She leaned right out, and there, sure enough, was the plank.

Even Jane's anger could provide her with nothing more cutting than, "How exactly like Arnold Todhunter."

She stood quite still and considered.

A bold course was the only one. Remembering the plank's previous fall and the perfect calm with which the neighbourhood had received it, she decided to take the same chance again—only, she must be quick and have it all planned in her head: first a shove to the plank, then down with the window and latch it, five steps—no, six—across the hall, and then her own door, and on no account must she forget the key.

She drew a long breath, leaned out, and pushed. The board was heavier than she had supposed—harder to move. She had to pull it in, until the sudden weight and strain told her that it was clear of the coping upon which the farther end had rested. Then she pushed with all her might, and as it fell, her hands were on the window quick and steady. Next moment she was crouching in Renata's bed, the clothes clutched about her, the door key cold in her palm. She pushed it far down beneath the clothes, and sat breathless—listening.

The crash with which the plank had landed seemed to have deafened her, but as the vibrations died away, she heard, sharp and unmistakable, the click of a latch and hurrying footsteps.

The next moment her door was opened and her light switched on. Quick as thought her hand was over her eyes and the sheet up to her chin.

Molloy stood in the doorway, and beyond him the other.

"What's doing? Did you hear it?" he stammered, and then the other man pushed him aside.

"I'd like a look from your window if you'll excuse me, Miss Renata," he said, and crossed the room.

As he leaned out, Jane watched him from beneath her hand, and recalled Renata's words, "He generally wears a fur coat; they call him Number Two." This man wore a fur coat over pale blue silk pyjamas. When he turned, saying, "I can't see a thing," she was ready with her stammered, "What was it?"

“You heard it, then?” said Molloy.

“Such a fearful crash! It—it frightened me most dreadfully,”—and here Jane spoke the literal truth.

“I don’t know.” It was Molloy who answered again, but the other man’s eyes travelled round the room, and a feeling of terror came over Jane.

If she had forgotten anything, if there were one shred of incriminating evidence, those eyes would miss nothing! She felt as if they must pierce the bedclothes and see her bag and the hidden key, but he merely nodded to Molloy, and they left the room, switching out the light and locking the door.

Jane drew a long breath of relief, turned upon her side, and in five minutes was asleep again.

The day came in with a thick mist. Jane opened her eyes upon it sleepily.

She began to think what a strange dream she had had, and then, as sleep ebbed from her, she remembered that it was not a dream at all. She was Renata Molloy under lock and key, and in front of her stretched a day that might be even more crowded with adventure than yesterday.

She jumped out of bed, and as she dressed her eyes brightened and her courage rose. With Renata’s scissors she unpicked the initials which marked her underclothes. This was a game at which one must not make a single slip. Her bag worried her a little, but it was just such a plain leather bag as any one might possess. She ransacked it

carefully, and frowned over an envelope addressed to Miss Jane Smith. What in the world was she to do with it?

There were no matches, so it could not be burned. After some thought she soaked it in water, scratched the name to shreds with a hairpin, and crumpling the wet paper into a ball, tossed it out of the window.

By the time her door was unlocked, she was very hungry. This time, it appeared, she was being summoned to bid the departing Mr. Molloy a fond farewell.

His luggage was already being carried out to the lift, and two or three men were coming and going. The man in the fur coat stood with his back to the window, smoking a cigarette. Obviously Molloy's farewell was not to be said in private.

Jane looked at him with some curiosity—a tall man, strongly built, with a bold air and a florid complexion.

It was he who had opened the door, and he stood still holding the handle and looking, not at Jane, but over her shoulder. For this she felt grateful.

"Well, well then, I'm off," said Molloy. "You'll be a good girl and do as you're bid, and I'll be having you out to keep house for me in less than no time."

From what she had seen of Renata, Jane fancied that a sob would meet the occasion. She therefore sobbed, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"There, there," said Molloy hastily.

He bent and deposited an awkward kiss upon the top of her head. Then he took his hand from the door and was gone.

The lift gate clanged, and Jane realised that the real adventure had begun.

The man by the window threw the end of his cigarette into the fireplace and came towards her.

“Parental devotion is a beautiful thing, isn’t it, Miss Renata? Suppose we have some breakfast.”

A meal, a proper meal, enough to eat! As she passed into the dining-room and beheld a ham, coffee, and boiled eggs, Jane felt as if she could confront any one or anything. Besides, the first trick was hers.

In the full light of day, and under those cold, pale eyes, she had passed as Renata.

She allowed herself to sigh and dab her eyes, and then—oh, how good was the rather stale bread, the London egg, and the indifferent ham.

The man watched her quizzically.

As she finished her second cup of coffee, he remarked that she had a good appetite, and there was something in his tone that cast a chill upon the proceedings.

Jane pushed back her chair.

“I’ve finished,” she said.

“Well, then,” said the man, “I think we must talk. Yes, sit down again, please. I won’t keep you very long.”

Jane did as she was told.

“Well, Molloy’s gone,” he said. “You know what that means? He’s washed his hands of you. Just in case—just in case, you’ve been relying on Molloy, I would like to point out to you that his own position is none too secure. The firm he works for has not been entirely satisfied with him for some time. It is, therefore, quite out of the question that he should influence any decision that may be come to with regard to yourself. His going off like this shows that he realises the position and accepts it. Self-preservation is Molloy’s trump suit, first, last, and all the time. I shouldn’t advise you to count upon trifles like parental devotion, or anything of that sort. In a word—he can’t help you, *but I can*.”

The man leaned forward as he spoke, and a sudden smile changed his features.

“Just be frank,” he went on. “Tell me what you really heard, and I’ll see you through.”

Jane let her eyes meet his. That smile had puzzled her; it was so spontaneous and charming, but it did not reach his eyes.

She looked and found them cold and opaque, and as she looked, she saw the pupils narrow, expand, and then narrow again.

He got up from his chair, walked to the mantelpiece, stopped for a light to his cigarette, and came back again with a thin blue haze of smoke about him.

“Perhaps I haven’t been altogether frank with you,” he said. “That little romance of mine about a firm of chemists who employ your father—you didn’t really believe it? No, I thought not. The fact is, that first night I took you for just a schoolgirl, and one can’t tell schoolgirls everything. But now, now I’m talking to you as a woman. I can’t tell you everything, even so, but I can tell you this. It’s a Government matter, a most important one, and it is vital that I should know just what you overheard.”

Jane looked down.

“I don’t understand,” she said in a low voice. “I was dreaming and I waked up suddenly. There was a screen in front of me, and some one on the other side of the screen called out very loud, ‘The door, the door!’ That’s what I heard.”

She felt the pale eyes upon her face. Then with an abrupt movement the man came over to her.

“Stand up,” he said.

Jane stood up.

“Look at me.”

Jane looked at him.

After what seemed like a very long time, he threw out his hand with an impatient gesture. It struck the table edge with a sharp rap, the spring that held his wrist watch gave, and the watch on its gold curb flew off and fell on the floor behind Jane.

She turned, glad of an excuse to turn, and bent to pick it up. The back of the watch was open; her fingers caught and closed it instantly, but not for nothing had she told Henry that she had gimlet eyes. The back of the watch contained a photograph, and Jane had seen the photograph before. Henry's voice sounded in her ears. "It was done from Amory's portrait of her, in 1915—the year of her marriage."

Number Two, the man in the fur coat, Renata's "worst of them all," had in the back of his watch a photograph of Lady Heritage!

Jane laid the watch on the table without giving it a second glance.

CHAPTER VI

As the watch slid back into its place beneath his shirt cuff, the man spoke with an entire change of manner.

“Well, Miss Renata, that was all very stiff and businesslike. You mustn’t hold it up against me, because I hope we’re going to be friends. Don’t you want to know your plans?”

Jane looked at him with a little frown.

“My plans?”

“What is going to happen to you. Oh, please, don’t look so grave! It’s nothing very dreadful. You have heard of Sir William Carr-Magnus?”

“Yes, of course,” said Jane. She hoped that she looked innocent and surprised.

“Well,” said the man in the fur coat, “I happen to be his secretary, and that reminds me, I don’t believe you know my name. Your father and his friends use a ridiculous nickname which sticks to me like a burr ... but let me introduce myself —Jeffrey Ember, and your friend, if you will have me.”

The charming smile just touched his face, and then he said in a quiet, serious way:

“Sir William’s daughter, Lady Heritage, has commissioned me to find her an amanuensis—companion—no, that’s not quite right either. She doesn’t want a trained stenographer, or a young person with a business training, but she wants a girl in the house—some one who’ll do what she’s told, write notes, arrange the flowers.... I dare say you can guess the sort of thing. She is willing to give you a trial, and your father has agreed. As a matter of fact, I’m taking you down there to-day.”

“Oh!” said Jane, because she seemed expected to say something, and for the life of her she could not think of anything else to say.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to submit to certain restrictions at Luttrell Marches. You see, Sir William is engaged upon some very important experiments for the Government, and all the members of his household have to conform to certain regulations. Their letters must be censored, and they must not leave the grounds, which are, however, extremely delightful and extensive. It isn’t much of a hardship, really.”

“Oh no,” said Jane in her best schoolgirl manner.

And there the interview ended.

They made the journey to Luttrell Marches by car, but, after the manner of Mrs. Gilpin’s post-chaise, it did not pick them up at the door. An ordinary taxi conveyed them to Victoria

Station, and it was in the station yard that they and their luggage were picked up by the Rolls-Royce with the Carr-Magnus crest upon the door.

The mist was thinner, and as they came clear of London, the sun came out. The day warmed into beauty, and the green growth of the countryside seemed to be expanding before their eyes. So many long hedges running into a blur, so many miles of road all slipping past. Jane fell fast asleep, and did not know how long she slept.

It was in the late afternoon that they came into the Marsh country—great flat stretches of it, set with boggy tussocks and intersected by straight lanes of water. Purple-brown and green it stretched for miles. To the right a humped line of upland, but to the left, and as far as the eye could see in front, nothing but marsh. Then the road rose a little; the ground was firmer and carried a black pine or two.

They came to a three-cross way and turned sharply to the right. The ground rose more and more. They climbed a steep hill, zigzagging between banked-up hedges to make the rise, and came out upon a bare upland. Ahead of them one saw a high stone wall pierced by iron gates. The car stopped. Mr. Ember leaned out, and after a pause the gates swung inwards.

For a mile the drive lay through a flat waste of springing bracken, with here and there a group of wind-driven trees, then a second gate through a high fencing topped with wire. An avenue of trees led up to the house, a huge grey pile set against a sky full of little racing clouds.

Jane felt stiff and bewildered with the long drive. She followed Mr. Ember up a flight of granite steps and came into the great hall of Luttrell Marches with its panelled walls and dark old portraits of half-forgotten Luttrells.

Exactly opposite the entrance rose the stairway which was the pride of the house. Its beautiful proportions, the grapes and vine leaves of its famous carvings, were lighted from beneath by the red glow of a huge open fire, and from above by the last word in electric lighting.

Ember walked straight across the hall and up the stair, and Jane followed him.

She thought she knew exactly how a puppy must feel when, blinking from the warmth and straw of his basket, he comes for the first time into the ordered solemnity of his new master's house.

And then she looked up and saw The Portrait.

It hung on the panelling at the top of the stair where the long corridors ran off to right and left, and it took Jane's breath away—the portrait of Lady Heritage.

Amory had painted more than a beautiful woman standing on a marble terrace: he had painted a woman Mercury. The hands held an ivory rod—diamond wings rose from the cloudy hair. Under the bright wings the eyes looked out, looked far—dark, splendid, hungry eyes.

"The earth belongs to her, and she despises it," was Jane's thought.

She stood staring at the portrait. Nineteen-fifteen, Henry had said—the year when other women posed with folded linen hiding their hair and the red cross worn like a blazon. She could think of several famous beauties who had been painted thus. But this woman wore her diamond wings, though, even as she wore them, Fate had done its worst to her, for Anthony Luttrell was a name with other names in a list of missing, and no man knew his grave.

A sharp clang of metal upon metal startled Jane. She looked quickly to her right, and saw that a steel gate completely barred the entrance to the corridor on that side. It had just closed behind a curious white-draped figure.

“Ah, Jeffrey,” said a voice—a deep, rather husky voice—and the figure came forward.

Jane saw that it was a woman wearing a long white linen overall, and a curious linen head-dress, which she was undoing and pushing back as she walked. She pulled it off as she came up to them, saying, “It’s so hot in there I can hardly breathe, but too fascinating to leave. You’re early. Is this Miss Molloy?”

She put out her hand to Jane, and Jane, with her mind full of the portrait, looked open-eyed at its original.

Afterwards she tried to formulate her sensations, but, at the time, she received just that emotional shock which most people experienced when they first met Raymond Heritage.

Beautiful—but there are so many beautiful women. Charming? No, there was rather something that repelled, antagonised. In her presence Jane felt untidy, shabby, gauche.

Lady Heritage unbuttoned her overall and slipped it off. She wore a plain white knitted skirt and jersey. Her fingers were bare even of the wedding ring which Jane looked for and missed. Her black hair was a little ruffled, and above the temples, where Amory had painted diamond wings, there were streaks of grey.

Bewilderment came down on Jane like a thick mist, which clung about her during the brief interchange of sentences which followed, and went with her to her room.

It was a queer room with a rounded wall set with three windows and to right and left irregular of line, with a jutting corner here and a blunted angle there. It faced west, for the sun shone level in her eyes.

Crossing to the window, as most people do when they come into a strange room, she looked out and caught her breath with amazement.

The sea—why, it seemed to lie just beneath the windows!

They had driven up from the landward side, and this was her first hint that the sea was so near.

There was a wide gravel terrace, a stone wall set with formal urns full of blue hyacinths, the sharp fall of the cliff, and then the sea.

The tide was in, the sun low, and a wide golden path seemed to stretch almost from Jane's feet to the far horizon. Overhead the little racing clouds that told of a wind high up were golden too.

The humped ridge of upland, which Jane had seen as they drove, ran out to sea on the right hand. It ended in low, broken cliff, and a line of jagged rocks of which only the points stood clear.

Jane turned from all the beauty outside to the ordered comfort within. Hot water in a brass can that she could see her face in, a towel of such fine linen that it was a joy to touch it, this pretty white-panelled room, the chintzes where bright butterflies hovered over roses and sweet-peas—she stood and looked at it all, and she heard Renata's words, "At Luttrell Marches they will decide whether I am to be eliminated."

This curious dual sense remained with her during the days that followed. Life at Luttrell Marches was simple and regular. She wrote letters, gathered flowers, unpacked the library books, and kept out of Sir William's way.

Sir William, she decided, was exactly like his photograph, only a good deal more so; his eyebrows more tufted, his chin more jutting, and his eyes harder. For a philanthropist he had a singularly bad temper, and for so eminent a scientist a very frivolous taste in literature. One of Jane's duties was to provide him with novels. She ransacked library lists and trembled over the results of her labours.

Sir William did not always join the ladies after dinner, but when he did so he would read a novel at a sitting and ask for more.

Mr. Ember was never absent, and when Lady Heritage talked, it was to him that her words were addressed. Sometimes she would disappear inside the steel gate for hours.

Jane soon learnt that the whole of the north wing was given up to Sir William's experiments. On each floor a steel gate shut it off from the rest of the house. All the windows were barred from top to bottom.

She also discovered that the high paling where the avenue began had, on its inner side, an apron of barbed wire, and it was the upper strand of this apron which she had seen as they approached from outside.

Sir William's experiments employed a considerable number of men. These, she learned, were lodged in the stables, and neither they nor any of the domestic staff were permitted to pass beyond the inner paling.

On the coast side there was a high wire entanglement—electrified.

There were moments when Jane was cold with fear, and moments when she told herself that Renata was a little fool who had had nightmare.

CHAPTER VII

When Jane stood at her window and looked across the sea, she saw what might have been a picture of life at Luttrell Marches during those first few days. Such a smooth stretch of water, pleasant to the eye, where blue and green, amethyst, grey and silver came and went, and under the play of colour and the shifting light and shade of day and evening, the unchanging black of rocks which showed for an instant and then left one guessing whether anything had really broken the beauty and the peace.

Over the surface all was pleasant enough, but incidents, some of them almost negligible in themselves, kept recurring to remind Jane that there were rocks beneath the sea.

The first incident came up suddenly whilst she was writing Lady Heritage's letters on the second day.

She had beside her a little pile of correspondence, mostly about trifles. Upon each letter there was scrawled, "Yes"—"No"—"Tell them I'll think it over," or some such direction.

Presently Jane arrived at a letter in French, upon which Lady Heritage had written, "Make an English translation and enclose to Mrs. Blunt." Mrs. Blunt's own letter lay

immediately underneath. It contained inquiries about some conditions of factory labour amongst women in France.

The French letter was an excellent exposition of the said conditions.

Jane sat looking at it, and wondering whether Renata could have translated a single line of it, and how much ignorance it would behove her to display.

After a moment's thought she turned round and said timidly, "May I have a dictionary, please?"

Lady Heritage looked up from the papers before her. She frowned and said:

"A dictionary?"

"Yes, for the French letter."

"You don't know French, then?"

Jane met the half-sarcastic look with protest.

"Oh yes, I *do*. But, if I might have a dictionary——"

Lady Heritage pointed to the bookcase and went back to her papers.

An imp of mischief entered into Jane.

She took the dictionary and spent the next half-hour in producing a translation with just the right amount of faults in

it. She put it down in front of her employer with a feeling of triumph.

“Please, will this do?”

Lady Heritage looked, frowned, and tore the paper across.

“I thought you said you knew French?”

Jane fidgeted with her pen:

“Of course I know I’m not *really* good at it, but I looked out all the words I didn’t know.”

“There must have been a good many,” was Lady Heritage’s comment, and the imp made Jane raise innocent eyes and say:

“Oh, there *were*!”

She went back to her table, and Lady Heritage spoke over her shoulder to Mr. Ember, who appeared to be searching for a book at the far end of the room. She spoke in French—the low, rapid French of the woman to whom one language is the same as another.

“What do they teach at English schools, can you tell me, Jeffrey? This girl says she knows French, and if she can follow one word I am saying now——” She broke off and shrugged. “Yet I dare say she went to an expensive school. Now, I had a Bavarian maid, educated in the ordinary village school, and she spoke English with ease, and French better

than any English schoolgirl I've come across. Wait whilst I try her in something else."

She turned back to Jane.

"Just send the original to Mrs. Blunt—I haven't time to bother with it—and make a note for me. I want it inserted after para three on the second page of that typewritten article that came back this morning."

Jane supposed she might be allowed to know what a "para" was. She turned over the leaves of the typescript and waited for the dictation. The last sentence read, "Woman through all the ages is at the disposal and under the autocratic rule of man, but it is not of her own volition."

She wondered what was to come next, and waited, keenly on the alert.

Lady Heritage began to speak:

"Write it in as neatly as possible, please; it's only one sentence: 'It is Man who has forced "das ewig Weibliche" upon us.'"

Jane wrote, "It is man——" and then stopped. She repeated the words aloud and looked expectant.

"'Das ewig Weibliche'"—there was a slight grimness in Lady Heritage's tone.

"I'm afraid—" faltered Jane.

“Never heard the quotation?”

“I’m so sorry.”

“You don’t know any German, then?”

“I’m *so* sorry,” said Jane.

“My dear girl, what did they teach you at that school of yours? By the way, where was it?”

“At Ilfracombe.”

“English education is a disgrace,” said Lady Heritage, and went back to her papers.

It was next day that she turned suddenly to Jane:

“By the way, you were at school at Ilfracombe—can you give me the name of a china shop there? I want some of that blue Devonshire pottery for a girls’ club I’m interested in.”

Jane had a moment of panic. Renata’s shoes had fitted her too easily. She had felt secure, and then to have her security shattered by a trifle like this!

“A china shop?” she said meditatively; then, after a pause, “It’s awfully stupid of me—I’m afraid I’ve forgotten the name.”

Lady Heritage stared.

“A shop that you must have passed hundreds of times?”

“It’s very stupid of me.”

Lady Heritage smiled with a sudden brilliance. “Well, it is rather,” she said.

It was on the fourth day that Jane really caught her first glimpse of the black rocks.

She was writing in the library, dealing with an apparently endless stream of begging letters, requests for interviews, invitations to speak at meetings or to join committees.

In four days Jane had discovered that Lady Heritage was up to her eyes in a dozen movements relating to feminist activities, women’s labour, and social reform.

Newspapers, pamphlets, and reports littered a table which ran the whole length of the room. Jane was required to open all these as they came, and separate those which dealt with social reform and the innumerable scientific treatises and reviews. These latter arrived in every European language.

Jane sat writing. The day was clear and lovely, the air sun-warmed and yet fresh as if it had passed over snow. April has days like this, and they fill every healthy person with a longing to be out, to stop working, and take holiday.

The windows of the library looked out upon the gravel terrace above the sea. The sun was on the blue water.

Jane put down her pen and looked at the hyacinths in the grey stone urns. They were blue too. A yellow butterfly

played round them. She sat up and went to the window.

Lady Heritage and Mr. Ember were walking up and down the terrace, Lady Heritage bareheaded, all in white with not even a scarf, and Jeffrey Ember with a muffler round his neck, and the inevitable fur coat. They were coming towards her, and Jane stood back so that the curtains made a screen. She watched Raymond Heritage as she had watched the sea and the flowers, for sheer joy in her beauty.

Raymond's face was towards her, and she was speaking.

Not a word reached Jane's ears, but as she looked at those beautiful lips, their movements spelt words to her —words and sentences. She would have drawn back or looked away, but the first sentence that she read riveted her attention too closely.

"Are you satisfied about her Jeffrey?"

Ember *must* have spoken, but his head was turned away. Then Raymond spoke again.

"Nor am I—not entirely. She seems intelligent and unintelligent by turns, unbelievably stupid in one direction and quick in another." They passed level with the window, and so on to the end of the terrace. Jane went round the table to the other side of the window and waited for them to come back.

Ember's face was towards her when they turned, too far away for her to see anything. But, as they came nearer, she saw that he was speaking. Not easy to read from, however,

with those straight, thin lips that moved so little. There was only one word she was sure of—“overheard.”

It was too tantalising. If she had to wait until they reached the far end of the terrace and turned again, what might she not miss?

As the thought passed through her mind Lady Heritage stopped, walked slowly to the grey stone wall, and sat down on it, motioning to Ember to do the same.

Jane could see both faces now, and Raymond was saying, “If she overheard anything, would she have the intelligence to be dangerous?—that is what I ask myself.”

Ember’s lips just moved, but the movements made no sense.

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Lady Heritage; “despise not thine enemy.”

She changed her position, leaned forward, displaying a statuesque profile, and appeared to be speaking fast and earnestly. Then Jane saw her lips again, and they were saying, “Anything but Formula ‘A.’”

Jane gripped the curtain which she held until the gold galon which bordered it marked her hand with its acorn pattern.

“Formula ‘A’!” everything swam round her while she heard Renata’s gasping voice:

“He said ‘With Formula “A” you have the key. When Formula “B” is also complete, you will have the lock for that

key to fit; then the treasures of the world are yours.'"

The mist cleared from her eyes; she looked again.

Raymond Heritage had risen to her feet. Ember and she looked out to sea for a moment, then crossed the gravel towards the house. They were talking of the sunshine and the spring air.

"My bulbs have done well," Lady Heritage said.

They passed out of sight.

Two days later Jane, coming down the corridor to the library, was aware of voices in conversation. She opened the door and saw Jeffrey Ember with his back to her. He had pulled a deep leather chair close to the fire, and was bending forward to warm his hands. Lady Heritage stood a yard or two away. She had a large bunch of violets in one hand; with the other she leaned against the black marble mantel.

She and Ember were talking in German. Both glanced round, and Raymond asked:

"What is it?"

"The letters for the post," said Jane.

They went on talking whilst she sorted and stamped the letters.

"Which of us is the better judge of character, it comes to that." Speaking German, Lady Heritage's deep voice

sounded deeper than ever.

“Do we take different sides then?”

“I don’t know. I thought your verdict was inclined to be ‘Guilty, but recommended to mercy,’ whereas mine——” She hesitated—stopped rather—for there was no hesitation in her manner.

Ember made a gesture with the hand that held his cigarette.

“Expound.”

“I doubt the guilt. But if I did not doubt, I should have no mercy at all.”

Jane went out with the letters, and when she was in the corridor again she put out her hand and leaned against the wall. It would be horrible enough, she thought, to be tried in an open court upon some capital count, but how far less horrible than a secret judgment where whispered words made unknown charges, where the trial went on beneath the surface of one’s pleasant daily life, and every word, every look, a turn of the head, an unguarded sigh, a word too little, or a glance too much might tip the scale and send the balance swinging down to—what?

Next day Lady Heritage was deep in her correspondence, when she suddenly flashed into anger. Pushing back her chair, she got up and began to pace the room. There was a letter in her hand, and as she walked she tore it across and across, flung the fragments into the fire, and pushed a blazing log down upon them with her foot.

Jane and Ember watched her—the former with some surprise and a good deal of admiration, the latter with that odd something which her presence always called out. She swung round, met his eyes, and burst into speech.

“It’s Alington—to think that I ever called that man my friend! I wonder if there’s a single man on this earth who would translate professions of devotion to one woman, into bare decent justice to all women.”

“What has Lord Alington done?” asked Mr. Ember, with a slight drawl.

Jane, with a thrill, identified the President of the Board of Trade.

“Nothing that I might not have expected. It is only women that are different, Jeffrey. Men are all the same.”

“And still I don’t know what he has done,” said Jeffrey Ember.

“Oh, it’s a long story! I’ve been pressing for women inspectors in various directions. It seems inconceivable that any one should cavil at a woman inspector wherever women are employed. You have no idea of what some of the conditions are. Stewardesses, for instance; I’ve a letter there from a woman who has been working on one of the largest liners—not a tramp steamer, mind you, but one of the biggest liners afloat. All the passengers’ trays, all the cabin meals had to be carried up a perpendicular iron stair like a fire-escape—not a permanent stair, you understand, but a ladder

that is let up and down. Those wretched women had to go up and down it all day with heavy trays. They said they couldn't do it, and were told they had to. And that's a little thing compared to some of the other conditions. I want an inspector for them."

"And Alington?"

Lady Heritage came to a halt by the long, piled-up table. She struck it with her open hand. "Lord Alington is just a man," she said. "He stands for what men have always stood for, the sacred right of the vested interest. What man ever wants to alter anything? And why should he when the existing order gives him all he wants? It doesn't matter where you turn, what you do, how hard you try, the vested interest blocks the way; you are up against the Established Order of what has always been. My God, how I'd like to smash it all, the whole thing, the whole smug sham which we call civilisation!"

Jane stared at her open-eyed. She had never dreamed that the statue could wake into such vivid life as this. The colour burned in Raymond's cheeks, the sombre eyes were sombre still, but they held sparks as if from inward fire.

Ember touched the hand that was clenched at the table's edge. A sort of tremor passed over her from head to foot. The colour died, the fire was gone. With a complete change of manner she said:

"Alington was hardly worth all that, was he?" Then without a change of key, but in German:

“Thank you, Jeffrey, the child’s eyes were nearly falling out of her head. It was stupid of me; I forgot. These things carry me away.”

The door opened on her last words, and Sir William came in. He was frowning, and appeared to be in a great hurry.

“Ridiculous business, ridiculous waste of time. These damned departments appear to think I’ve nothing to do with my time except to answer their infernal inquiries, and entertain any interfering jackanapes that they choose to let loose on me.”

“What is it Father?” said Lady Heritage—“Government inspection?”

“Nonsense,” said Sir William slowly. “Henry March wants to come down for the night.”

Jane bent forward over her papers. No one was looking at her, no one was thinking of her, but she had felt her cheeks grow hot, and was glad of an excuse to hide them.

She did not know whether she was very much afraid or very glad. A feeling unfamiliar but overwhelming seemed to shake her to the depths. She was quite unconscious of what was passing behind her.

At Henry’s name, Raymond Heritage uttered a sharp, “Oh no!” She came quickly forward as she spoke and caught the letter from Sir William’s hand.

“He can’t come—I can’t have him here—put him off, Father; you can make some excuse!”

“Nonsense!” said Sir William again. “It’s a nuisance, of course—it’s an infernal nuisance—but he’ll have to come, confound him!”

Then, as she made a half-articulate protest, he went on with increasing loss of temper:

“Good heavens! I can’t very well tell the man I won’t have him in what is practically his own house.”

It was Ember, not her father, who saw how frightfully pale Raymond became. In a very low voice she said:

“No, I suppose not.”

Sir William was fidgeting. He looked at Jane’s back.

“Of course, he’s coming down on business.”

Then he broke off and stared at Jane again.

Lady Heritage nodded.

“Miss Molloy,” she said. “You can take half an hour off.”

CHAPTER VIII

Henry arrived on the following day and was shown straight into Sir William's study.

Half an hour later Sir William rang the bell and sent for Lady Heritage. He hardly gave her time to shake hands before he burst out:

"I said you must be told. I take all responsibility for your being told. After all, if I am conducting these experiments, something is due to me, though the Government appear to think otherwise. But I take all responsibility; I insist on your being told."

He sat at his littered table, and all the time that he was speaking his hands were lifting and shuffling the papers on it. At his elbow stood a tray with tantalus and glasses and a syphon. Only one glass had been used.

"What is it?" said Raymond.

Her eyes went from her father to Henry.

Sir William's hand was shaking. Henry wore a look of grave concern.

“What is it?” she repeated.

“It’s Formula ‘A’”—Sir William’s voice was just a deep growl. “He comes here, and he tells me that Formula ‘A’ has been stolen. I’ve told him to his face, and I tell him again, that it’s a damned impossibility.”

The shaking hand fell heavily upon the table and made the glasses ring.

“Formula ‘A’?” said Raymond—“stolen? Henry, you can’t mean it?”

“I’m afraid I do,” said Henry, at his quietest. “I’m afraid there’s no doubt about it. We have the most indisputable evidence that Formula ‘A’ has been offered to—well, to a foreign power.”

The flush upon Sir William’s face deepened alarmingly. Under the bristling grey brows his eyes were hard with anger. He began to speak, broke off, swept his papers to one side, and, taking up the tantalus and the used glass, poured out a third of a glass of whisky. He let a small quantity of soda into it with a vicious jerk, and then sat with the glass between his hands, alternately sipping from it and interjecting sounds of angry protest.

“The information is, I’m afraid, correct.”

Henry’s tone, though studiously moderate, was extremely firm. “There is undoubtedly a leak, and, in view of Formula ‘B,’ it is vital that the leak should be found and stopped.”

He addressed himself to Lady Heritage:

“Sir William tells me that all employés correspond with the list in my possession, that none of them leave the enclosure, and that all letters are censored. By the way, who censors them?”

“Ember,” growled Sir William.

Lady Heritage elaborated the remark.

“Mr. Ember—Father’s secretary.”

She and Henry were both standing, with the corner of the writing-table between them. She saw inquiry in Henry’s face. He said:

“Who does leave the premises?”

“Father, once in a blue moon, I when I have any shopping to do, and, of course, Mr. Ember.”

“And when you go you drive, of course? What I mean is—a chauffeur goes too?”

Sir William made a sound between a snort and a laugh; Lady Heritage smiled. Both had the air of being pleased to catch Henry out.

“The chauffeur is Lewis, who was your uncle’s coachman here for twenty-five years. Are you going to suggest that he has been selling Formula ‘A’ to a foreign power? I’m afraid you must think again.”

“Who is Mr. Ember?”

Sir William exploded.

“Ember’s my secretary. He’s been my right hand for ten years, and if you’re going to make insinuations about him, you can leave my house and make them elsewhere. Why, damn it all, March!—why not accuse Raymond, or me?”

“I don’t accuse any one, sir.”

There was a pause, whilst the two men looked at one another. It was Sir William who looked away at last. He drained his glass and got up, pushing his chair so hard that it overturned.

“You want to see all the men to check ’em by that infernal list of yours, do you? The sooner the better then; let’s get it over.”

Later, as the men answered to their names in the long, bare room which had once been the Blue Parlour, Henry was struck with the strangeness of the scene. Here his aunt had loved to sit doing an interminable embroidery of fruits and flowers upon canvas. Here he and Anthony had lain prone before the fire, each with his head in a book and his heels waving aloft. Memories of Fenimore Cooper and Henty filled the place when for a moment he closed his eyes. Then, as they opened, there was the room all bare, the windows barred and uncurtained, the long stretcher tables with their paraphernalia of glass retorts, queer, twisted apparatus, powerful electric appliances, and this row of men

answering to their names whilst he checked each from his list.

“James Mallaby.” He called the name and glanced from the man who answered it to the paper in his hand. A small photograph was followed by a description: “5 feet 7 inches, grey eyes, mole on chin, fair complexion, sandy hair.” All correct. He passed to the next.

“Jacob Moss—5 feet 5 inches, dark complexion, black hair and eyes, no marks....”

“George Patterson—5 feet 10 inches, sallow complexion, brown hair and beard, grey on temples, grey eyes, scar....”

The man who answered to the name of George Patterson stepped forward. He had the air of being taller than his scheduled height. His beard and hair were unkempt, and the scar set down against him was a red seam that ran from the left temple to the chin, where it lost itself in grizzled hair. He stooped, and walked with a dragging step.

Henry, who for the moment was speaking to Sir William, looked at him casually enough. He opened his list, and in turning the page, the papers slipped from his hand and fell. George Patterson picked them up. Henry went on to the next name.

Jane had keyed herself up to meeting him at teatime, but neither Henry nor Sir William appeared.

“Captain March is an extremely conscientious person,” said Lady Heritage. It was not a trait which appeared to

commend itself to her. “I should think he must have interviewed the very black-beetles by now. Have you been passed, Jeffrey?”

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Ember, “but it hasn’t taken away my appetite for tea.”

In fact it had not. It was Raymond who ate nothing.

Jane and Henry did not meet until dinner-time. As she dressed, Jane kept looking at herself in the glass. She was pale, and she must not look pale. She took a towel and rubbed her cheeks—that was better. Then a little later, when she looked again, her eyes were far too bright, her face unnaturally flushed.

“As if any one was going to look at you at all—idiot!” she said.

After this she kept her back to the mirror.

In all the books that she had ever read the secretary or companion invariably wore a dinner dress of black silk made, preferably, out of one which had belonged to a grandmother or some even more remote relative. In this garb she outshone all the other women and annexed the affections of at least two of the most eligible men.

Renata did not possess a black silk gown.

“Thank goodness, for I should look perfectly awful in it,” was Jane’s thought.

With almost equal distaste she viewed the white muslin sacred to prize-givings and school concerts. Attired in this garment Renata had played the “Sonata Pathétique” amidst the applause of boarders and parents. With this pale blue sash about her waist she had recited “How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.” Jane tied it in a vicious knot. Her only comfort as she went downstairs was that it was impossible to look more like a schoolgirl and less like a conspirator.

Sir William and Henry were in the hall—Mr. Ember too, close to the fire as usual.

Sir William jerked his head in Jane’s direction and grunted, “Miss Molloy, my daughter’s secretary.” Henry bowed. Jane inclined her head.

Next moment they all turned to watch Raymond Heritage come down the stair.

She wore black velvet. Her neck and arms were bare. A long rope of pearls fell to her knee.

Jane wondered whether the world held another woman so beautiful, then looked quickly at Henry, and the same thought was visible upon Henry’s face.

Dinner was not a cheerful meal. Lady Heritage hardly opened her lips. Sir William sat hunched forward over the table; when addressed, the remark had to be repeated before he answered; he drank a good deal.

Jane considered that a modest silence became her, and the conversation was sustained with some effect of strain by Captain March and Mr. Ember. They talked fitfully of politics, musical comedy, the weather, and the American Exchange.

It was a relief, to Jane at least, when she and Lady Heritage found their way to the drawing-room.

Henry wondered at their using this large, formal room for so small a party. His aunt, he remembered, had kept it shut up for the most part. The sense of space was, however, grateful to Jane. The small circle of candlelight in the dining-room had seemed to shut them in, forcing an intimacy for which no one of them was prepared.

The Yellow Drawing-Room was a very stately apartment. The walls were hung with a Chinese damask which a hundred years had not robbed of its imperial colour. Beneath their pagoda-patterned blue linen covers Jane knew that the chairs and sofas wore a stiff yellow satin like a secret pride. Electric candles in elaborate sconces threw a cold, steady light upon the scene.

Lady Heritage sat by the fire, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in her hand. Her eyes were on the page and never left it, but she was not reading. In fifteen minutes her glance had not shifted, and the page remained unturned.

Then the door opened, and the two younger men came in. Lady Heritage looked up for a moment, and then went back to her *Revue*. She made no attempt to entertain Captain

March, who, for his part, showed some desire to be entertained.

“You are using the big rooms, I see. Aunt Mary always said they were too cold. You remember she always sat in the Blue Parlour, or the little oak room at the head of the stair.”

Raymond’s lip lifted slightly.

“I’m afraid the Blue Parlour would not be very comfortable now,” she said without looking up.

Henry possessed a persevering nature. He produced, in rapid succession, a remark about the weather, an inquiry as to the productiveness of the kitchen garden, and a comment upon the pleasant warmth of the log fire. The first and last of these efforts elicited no reply at all. To the question about the garden produce Lady Heritage answered that she had no idea.

Mr. Ember’s habitual expression of cynicism became a trifle more marked.

Jane had the feeling that the pressure in the atmosphere was steadily on the increase.

“Won’t you sing something, Raymond,” said Henry. His pleasant ease of manner appeared quite impervious to snubs.

Lady Heritage closed the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and, for the first time, looked full at Captain March. If he was startled by the furious resentment of that gaze he did not show it.

“And what do you expect me to sing, Henry?” she said—“the latest out of the *Jazz Girls*?”

“I don’t mind; whatever you like, but do sing, won’t you?”

Raymond got up with an abrupt movement. Walking to one of the long windows which opened upon the terrace, she drew the heavy yellow brocade curtain back with a jerk. Beyond the glass the terrace lay in deepest shadow, but moonlight touched the sea. She bent, drew the bolt, and opened half the door.

“The room is stifling,” she said. “Jeffrey, it’s your fault they pile the fire up so. I wish you’d sometimes look at a calendar and realise that this is April, not January.”

Then, turning, she crossed to the piano.

“If I sing, it will be to please myself, and I shall probably not please any one else.”

Ember came forward and opened the piano. He bent as he did so, and said a few words very low. She answered him.

Henry, left by the fireside with Jane, leaned forward conversationally, the last *Punch* in his hand.

“This is a good cartoon,” he said. “Have you seen it, Miss Molloy?”

And as she bent to look at the page, he added in that low, effaced tone which does not carry a yard:

“Which room have they given you?”

“I like the line,” said Jane in her clear voice, “and that very black shadow.” Then, in an almost soundless breath—“The end room, south wing.”

“Don’t go to bed,” said Henry. “Wonderful how they keep it up, week after week. I mean to say, it must put you off your stroke like anything, knowing you’ve got to come right up to time like that.”

“Your department doesn’t work by the calendar, then? You don’t have to bother about results?”

Ember strolled back to his favourite place by the fire as he spoke, and Lady Heritage broke into a resounding chord. She played what Henry afterwards described as “an infernal pandemonium of a thing.” It appeared to be in several keys at once, and marched from one riot of discord to another until it ended with a strident crash which set up a humming jangle of vibrations.

“Like that, Henry?” said Lady Heritage.

“No,” said Henry, monosyllabic in his turn.

“No one ever likes to hear the truth,” said Raymond. “You all want something pleasant, something smooth, something like this”—her fingers slipped into the “Blue Danube” waltz. She played it exquisitely, with a melting delicacy of touch and a beautiful sense of rhythm. After a dozen bars or so she stopped suddenly, leaned her elbow on the keyboard, and through the little clang of the impact said:

“Well?”

“That’s topping,” said Henry. He looked across at her admiringly—the long sweep of the ebony piano, the white keyboard with the black notes standing clear, Raymond in her velvet and pearls, and behind her the imperial yellow of China.

“Soothing syrup,” she said. “You’re not up to date, Henry, I’m afraid. The moderns show us things as they are, and we don’t like it, but the soothing syrups lose their power to soothe once you find out that they are just ... dope.”

“I wish you’d sing,” said Henry.

She looked across him at Ember, and an expression difficult to define hardened her face.

“This isn’t modern, but will you like it?” she said, and preluded. Then she began to sing in a deep mezzo:

> “The Worldly Hope Men set their Hearts upon
> Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
> Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty Face
> Lighting its little Hour or two—is gone.
>
> Here in this battered Caravanserai,
> Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
> How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
> Abode his destined Hour, and went his Way.”

The notes came heavy and tragic. In her voice there seemed to be gathered all the tragedy, all the emotion

of human life. The sound fell almost to a whisper:

> "The Worldly Hope Men set their Hearts upon
> Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
> Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
> Lighting its little Hour or two—is gone."

Suddenly the voice rose ringing like a trumpet, a great chord crashed out:

> "Waste not your Hour!"

The deep octaves followed. Then she passed into modulating phrases and began to sing again.

"Her voice is nearly as beautiful as she is," thought Jane, "but somehow—she shakes one."

> "Ah Love, could you and I with Fate conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
> Would we not shatter it to bits, and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire?"

With the last word she rose, turned from the piano and the room, and went out to the terrace.

Henry got up, strolled casually across the room, and followed her. She was standing by the low parapet looking over the sea. The night was still, the scent of hyacinths was heavy on the air, but every now and then a breath—something not to be called a wind—came up from across the water and brought with it cold, and a tang of salt.

The moon was still behind the house, but near to clearing it, and though they stood in the dusk, Henry could see Lady Heritage's features as though through a veil.

Her icy mood was broken; the tears were rolling down her cheeks. She turned on him with a flame of anger.

"Why did you come? Why did you come? Do you know what Father said to me yesterday? I said I wouldn't have you here, and he said—he said, 'Good heaven! how can I keep the man away from what is practically his own house?' Is it yours now?—have you come to see your property?"

Henry looked at her gravely.

"No, it is not mine yet," he said, "and I came for a very different reason, as I think you know."

"And you expected me to welcome you ... as if it wasn't enough to be here, to live here—without——" She broke off, gripping the rough stone of the parapet with both hands. "You ask me why I don't use the Oak Room—do you forget how you and I and Tony used to roast chestnuts there, and tell ghost stories—till we were afraid to go to bed? If there were no worse ghosts than those.... Do you know, every time you come into the room I expect to see Anthony behind you, and when you speak I catch myself listening for his voice?... Do you still wonder why I don't use the Oak Room? What are men made of?"

“I don’t know,” said Henry. “Did I hurt you, Raymond? I’m sorry if I did, but it wasn’t meant.”

She sank down upon the parapet. All the vehemence went out of her.

“You see,” she said in a whispering voice—“you see, I can’t forget. God knows how hard I’ve tried. Every one else has forgotten, but I can’t forget. If I could, I should sleep—but I can’t. Henry, have you ever tried very hard to forget anything?”

“Yes,” said Henry.

“Will you tell me what it was?”

“I’m afraid I can’t.”

“Oh well, it doesn’t matter, and if you really understand, you know that the more one tries the more vivid it all becomes.”

“It’s Tony?” asked Henry.

“Yes, it’s Tony,” said Raymond, in an odd voice—“but it’s not because he’s dead—I don’t want you to think that. I could have borne that; I could have borne anything if I could have seen him once again, or if he had known that I cared, but he went away in anger and he never knew.”

“I didn’t know,” said Henry—“I’m sorry.”

Lady Heritage looked away across the sea. The moonlight showed where the jagged line of rocks cut sharp through the sleeping water.

“There’s a verse in the Bible—do you ever read the Bible, Henry? I don’t, but I remember this verse; one was taught it as a child. ‘Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.’ I let the moon rise and go down on mine.” She spoke very, very quietly. “Anthony stood there, just by that urn. He said, ‘You’ll have all the rest of your life to be sorry in....’ That was the last thing he said to me. He never forgave, and he never wrote. I didn’t think any man would let me go so easily, so I married John Heritage to show that I didn’t care. And, whilst we were on our honeymoon, I saw Anthony’s name in the list of missing. Now, do you wonder that I hate you for coming here, and for being alive, and taking Tony’s place? And do you wonder that there are times when I hate everything so much that I’d like well enough to see this whole sorry scheme shattered to bits—if it could be done?”

“I’m not so keen on this shattering business, Raymond,” said Henry. “Don’t you think there’s been about enough of it? There are a lot of rotten things, and a lot of good things, and they’re all mixed up. If you start shattering, the odds are you bring down everything together.”

“Well?” said Raymond, just one word, cold and still.

There was a little pause. Then she laughed.

“Is Henry also among the preachers?” she said mockingly. “You should take Orders; a surplice would be becoming.”

Henry was annoyed to feel that he was flushing.

“Shall I go on preaching?” he said, and as he spoke, Mr. Ember came through the open glass door with a cloak over his arm.

“I am a relief expedition,” he announced. “You must be frozen. Never trust a moonlight night.”

He put the wrap about Raymond’s shoulders, but she did not fasten it.

“I’m coming in,” she said.

She and Ember passed into the lighted room. Henry stood still for a minute, listened acutely; then he followed them.

There was a hedge of stiffly growing veronica bushes at the foot of the terrace wall. After Henry had gone in, the man called George Patterson came out from behind the bushes at the far end of the terrace. He walked slowly with a dragging step, keeping in the shadow of the house, and he made his way to the far end of the north wing.

Inside the Yellow Drawing-Room Henry was bidding his hostess good-night, and announcing his intention of taking a moonlight stroll.

Presently he emerged upon the terrace, descended the steps on the right, and made his way in the direction taken by George Patterson.

CHAPTER IX

When Jane reached her own room, she stood a long time in front of the glass frowning at herself. It might be safe to look so exactly like a schoolgirl, but it was very, very humiliating. Henry had never glanced at her once. That, of course, was all in the line of safety too. Also, why should Henry look at her? Why should she wish him to do so? She was not in love with him; she had, in fact, refused him—could it be that there was a little balm in this thought? What did it matter to her how long he looked at Raymond Heritage?

She took off the white muslin dress and put it away.

The worst part of being Renata was, not the risk, but having to wear Renata's clothes. All the things were good, horribly good, and they were all quite extraordinarily dull. "If your shoes want mending, and your things are threadbare, every one knows it's because you're poor, and not because you like being down at heel and out at elbows. But Renata's things must have cost quite a lot, and, of course, every one thinks they are my choice."

By some deflected line of reasoning "every one" meant Henry.

Jane folded up the pale blue sash and shut it sharply into a drawer. Then she put on Renata's dressing-gown. It was made of crimson flannel, very thick and soft, with scalloped edges to the collar and cuffs—"exactly like one's grandmother's petticoat."

She rumpled the bedclothes and disarranged the pillows. Then she put out the light, sat down on the window-seat, and waited.

The blind was up; she had slipped behind the chintz curtains. The terrace lay beneath her, only half in shadow now. There was no sound in the house, no sound from the sea. The line of shadow moved backwards inch by inch.

When Jane sat down to wait, she told herself that she would not listen and strain; she would just sit there quite peacefully, and if anything was going to happen—well, let it happen. But as she sat there, she became afraid against her will, aware once more of that sense of pressure which had come upon her in the drawing-room. It was as if something was steadily approaching not her alone, but all of them—as if their thoughts and actions were being, at one and the same time, dictated by an outside force and scrutinised—watched—spied upon.

With all her might she resisted this sensation and the fear that it suggested. But, as the night passed to midnight and beyond, a strange feeling of being one watcher in a slumbering household detached itself from the general confusion, and she began to long with great intensity for something—anything—to happen.

Once something moved in the foot-wide strip of shadow against the house. Jane caught her breath and then saw that it was only a cat, a half-grown kitten rather, beloved of the cook. It came out into the moonlight and walked solemnly the entire length of the terrace with delicately taken steps and a high waving tail. It was as soundless and black as the shadow out of which it had come, and presently it was gone again, and second by second, minute by minute, slow, interminable, the night dropped away. In the hall a clock struck the quarters. The silence, shattered for a moment, closed again.

When the rapping came, it brought the oddest sense of interruption. Jane sprang to her feet, stood for a moment catching at her self-control, and then went noiselessly to the door. She listened before opening it, and could hear nothing; and, as she listened, the knocking came again, but from behind her.

Bewildered, she edged the door open and looked out. A shaded light burned far away to the left. The long, dim corridor was empty. She shut the door.

Some one was knocking—somewhere—but where?

She turned and stood facing the windows. Up in the far corner a large cupboard filled the angle and blunted it. Jane had hung her serge dress there hours and hours ago. The knocking seemed to come from the cupboard, just where the room was at its darkest because next the lighted window.

Jane crossed the floor very slowly, put both hands on the cupboard doors, and flung them wide. For a moment everything was quite black, then, with a most unpleasant suddenness, a narrow white ray cut the dark, and Henry's voice said, "It's only me."

Jane's hand went to her lips, pressing them firmly. She would not have admitted that this action alone saved her from screaming. After a moment she gave a little gasp, and located Henry, or rather Henry's head, which was almost under her feet.

In the cupboard floor there was a square black hole, and, just above floor-level, Henry's face looked up at her, tilted at an odd angle, whilst his one visible hand manipulated a small electric torch.

"Wait," said Jane, in a whisper.

She went quickly to the door, locked it, removed the key, and put it in one of the dressing-table drawers. She did not know quite what made her do this, only suddenly when her eyes saw Henry, her mind had a vivid impression of that long corridor with its one faintly glimmering light.

Then she sat down on the cupboard floor, close to Henry's head, and breathed out:

"Henry!—how on earth?"

Henry, who appeared to be standing upon a ladder or something equally vertical, came up a few steps, sat down on the edge of the hole, and switched off his torch.

“I had to see you,” he said. “This was my room in the old days, and Tony and I found this passage. It leads down to another cupboard in the garden room where they keep the tennis and croquet gear. How are you?—all right?”

“Yes, quite all right.”

“That’s good. Now which of us is going to talk first?”

“I think I had better,” said Jane. “You see, I saw Renata, and she told me things, and I think, if you don’t mind, Henry, that I had better tell you everything that she told me.”

“Yes, please.” He hesitated. “One minute, Jane, I just wanted to say, you don’t mind talking to me like this, do you? I wouldn’t have asked you to if there had been any other way —what I mean to say is....”

Jane gave a very small laugh, which was instantly repressed. She reflected that it was pleasanter to suppress a laugh than a scream.

“What you mean to say is, there aren’t any chaperons in this scene. You needn’t apologise, Henry. Sleuths never have chaperons—it’s simply not done; and, anyhow, I’m sure you’d make a beautiful one. Shall I go on?”

It may be doubted whether Henry really cared about being described as a chaperon. His tone was rather dry as he said:

“Go on, please.”

As for Jane, who had prodded him on purpose just to see if anything would happen, she certainly felt a slight disappointment accompanied by a sense of increased respect.

“You saw Renata. What did she tell you?”

“She told me what she overheard,” said Jane, speaking slowly. “Henry, if I tell you what it was, will you promise me not to let any one guess that you know? If they were certain that I knew, I shouldn’t be alive to-morrow; and if they thought you knew the secret, you’d never get back to London alive.”

“Who is ‘they,’ Jane?” said Henry.

“I want to tell you about Renata first. She really did walk in her sleep, you know. She must have waked when she opened the door. She said the first thing she knew was the cold feel of the hall linoleum under her feet. The door was open, and she was standing just on the threshold. There was a screen in front of her, and beyond the screen a man talking. She heard every word he said, and I am sure that what she repeated to me was just exactly what she heard. The first words that she caught were ‘Formula “A.”’”

Henry gave a violent start.

“Good Lord!” he said under his breath. “You’re sure?”

“Quite. Then he went on, and this is what he said: ‘You all have Formula “A.” You will go to your posts and from your directions you will prepare what is needful according to that formula, carrying out to the last detail the cipher instructions

which each of you has received. As soon as the experiments relating to Formula “B” are completed, you will receive a summons in code. You will then assemble at the rendezvous given, and Formula “B,” with all instructions for its employment, will be entrusted to you. With Formula “A” you have the key. When Formula “B” is also complete you will have the lock for that key to fit; then the treasures of the world are yours. The annihilation of civilisation and of the human race is within our grasp. When the key has turned in the lock we only shall be left, and....’ Just then, Renata said, some one else cried out, ‘The door! The door!’ They pushed the screen away and pulled her in. She nearly fainted. When she revived a little, her father and Mr. Ember were trying to find out what she had heard. Fortunately for herself, she told me, at first it was all confusion. The only thing that stood out clearly was that shout at the end, but afterwards, when she was alone, it all came back. She said it was like a photographic plate developing, hazy at first, and then everything getting clearer and sharper until each detail came out. She repeated the whole thing as if it were a lesson.”

“Wait,” said Henry. “My head’s going round. I want to sort things out.”

Jane waited. She had been prepared for Henry to be impressed or incredulous. What took her by surprise was the puzzled note in his voice. “Lord, what a mix-up!” she heard him say.

Then he addressed her again.

“Did you ever play ‘Russian Scandal,’ Jane?” he said.

“Yes, of course. But if you had heard Renata—the sort of queer mechanical way she spoke, exactly like a gramophone record—why, the words weren’t words she’d have used, and all that about Formula ‘A’—do you think that’s the sort of thing that a schoolgirl makes up?”

“No,” said Henry unexpectedly. “I think it is quite possible that she overheard something about Formula ‘A,’ and I’d give a good deal to know just what she did hear.”

“I’ve told you what she heard,” said Jane. “Jimmy always said I had a photographic memory, and I said the whole thing over to myself until I had it by heart. You see, I didn’t dare to write it down.”

“Can you say it again?” said Henry. “I’d like to get it down in black and white, and have a look at it. At present it makes me feel giddy.”

“You mustn’t write it down,” said Jane breathlessly. “Oh, you mustn’t, Henry! It’s not safe.”

Henry turned on his torch, propped it against the wall, and produced a notebook and a pencil. The cold, narrow beam of light showed his knee, the white paper, a pencil with a silver ring, and Henry’s large, brown hand.

“He has a *horribly* determined hand,” thought Jane.

“Now,” said Henry, “will you start at the beginning and say it all over again, please?”

Jane did so meekly, but her inward feelings were not meek. Once more she repeated, word for word, and sentence for sentence, the somewhat flamboyant speech of Number Four.

Henry's hand travelled backwards and forwards in the little lane of light, and, word for word, and sentence by sentence, he wrote it down. When he had finished, he read over what he had written. If he had not a photographic memory, he was, at any rate, aware that Jane in her repetition had not varied so much as a syllable from her first statement.

He went on looking at what he had written. At last he said:

"Jane, I think I must tell you something in confidence. Sir William, as you know, is conducting important experiments for the Government. How important you may perhaps have gathered from the extraordinary precautions which are taken to prevent any leakage of information. These experiments have resulted in two valuable discoveries represented, for purposes of official correspondence, by the terms Formula 'A' and Formula 'B.' Within the last week we have had indisputable proof that Formula 'A' has been offered to a foreign power. That is the reason for my presence here. Now these are facts. Let them sink into your mind, then read over what I have just taken down, and tell me how you square those facts with Renata's statement."

Jane picked up the notebook, stared at the written words, set Henry's facts in the forefront of her mind, and remarked candidly:

"It does make your head go round rather, doesn't it?"

Henry assented. They both sat silent. Then Jane put down the notebook.

“Never mind about our heads going round,” she said. “Let me go on and tell you the rest of it. It isn’t only what Renata heard; it’s the things that keep happening—little things in a way, but oh, Henry, sometimes I think they are more frightening just because they are little things. I mean, supposing you know you’re going to be executed, you brace yourself up, and it’s all in the day’s work, but if you are out at a dinner-party and you suddenly find poison in the soup, or a bomb in the middle of the table decorations, it’s ... well, it’s unexpected—and, and *perfectly beastly*.”

Jane’s voice broke just for an instant.

Henry’s hand came quickly through the torchlight, and rested on both hers. It was a satisfactorily large and heavy hand.

She told him about her interview with Ember at the flat, and one by one she marshalled all the small happenings which had startled and alarmed her.

Henry waited until she had quite finished. Then he said:

“This lip-reading—you know, my dear girl, it’s a chancy sort of thing; it seems to me that there are unlimited possibilities of mistake.”

“Some people are much easier to read from than others. Lady Heritage is very easy. I’m sure I was not mistaken; she was saying, ‘If she overheard anything, would she have the intelligence to be dangerous? That is what I ask

myself,' and she said, 'Despise not thine enemy,' and 'Anything but Formula "A."' Now Mr. Ember is very difficult. I can't really make him out at all. His lips don't move. It's no use not believing me, Henry. Look here, I'll show you."

She caught up the little torch, and turned the light upon his face.

"Say something," she commanded.

Henry's lips formed the words, "Jane, I love you very much indeed"—and Jane switched off the light.

"Henry, you're a perfect beast! Play fair," she said, in a low, furious whisper.

"Sorry. Wasn't it all right? Try again."

Jane allowed the ray to light up Henry's mouth and chin. The hand that held the torch was not quite steady. This may have been the result of anger—or of some other emotion. As a result the light wavered a good deal.

Henry's lips moved, and Jane read aloud, "A sleuth should never lose its temper."

Henry's hand caught the little shaking one that held the torch, and gave it a great squeeze.

"How frightfully clever you are, and—oh, Jane, what a goose!"

“I’m not,” said Jane.

“But don’t you see that, with Renata’s story in your mind, you would be looking out for things? You couldn’t help it.”

“What do you think, then, of Lady Heritage saying that Mr. Ember’s verdict was inclined to be ‘Guilty, but recommended to mercy,’ whereas she said that she herself doubted the guilt, but that if she did not, she would have no mercy at all? Do you know, that frightened me almost more than anything. I don’t know why. That wasn’t lip-reading; I heard the words with my own ears.”

“But—don’t you see——” He paused. “Let’s get back to facts: Formula ‘A’ has been stolen and offered for sale. Renata, undoubtedly, overheard something relating to Formula ‘A.’ Now, supposing Mr. Molloy or one of his friends to be the person who is doing the deal, don’t you see that the possibility of Renata having overheard something compromising would be sufficient to account for a good deal of alarm?

“If Molloy and his friends had stolen Formula ‘A’ and were trying to dispose of it, it would naturally be of the highest importance to them to find out how much Renata knew, and to take steps which would ensure her silence. They would almost certainly try and frighten her—that’s how it seems to me.”

“Then where does Mr. Ember come in?” said Jane. “He was there.”

“Are you sure?”

“Renata described him,” said Jane. “She said he was the worst of them all.”

“She knew him by name?”

“No. But ... but”—a little chill breath of doubt played on Jane’s certainty—“she called him the man in the fur coat. The others spoke of him as Number Two.”

“But you don’t know that it was Ember?”

For a moment Jane felt that she was sure of nothing; then, with a swift revulsion, her old fears, suspicions, certainties, received vigorous reinforcement.

“Henry,” she said, “listen. You’re on the wrong scent —I know you are. I can’t tell you how I know it, but I’m quite, quite sure. If you were an anarchist, and wanted to produce some horrible thing that would smash civilisation into atoms, how would you set about it?—where would you go? Don’t you see that the very safest place would be somewhere like this, somewhere where you could carry on your experiments under the cover of real experiments? It’s like the caterpillars that pretend to be sticks—what do you call it?—protective mimicry.”

“Jane!” said Henry.

“I’m sure that’s what they have done. I’m sure that there is something dreadful going on in this house. And if you can’t square what Renata heard with what you know of Formula

‘A,’ why, then I believe that there must be more than one Formula ‘A.’ Don’t you see how cunning it would be for them to take the name of a real Government invention to cover up whatever horrible thing it is that they are working at?”

There was a dead silence.

“Another Formula ‘A’?” said Henry slowly. Then, with an abrupt change of manner:

“Leave it—all of it—and tell me some things I want to know. Sir William, for instance—he was put out at my coming down, I know—but what is he like as a rule? He does not always drink as much as he did to-night, does he?”

“I think he does. Henry, I think he takes too much—I do, really; and he’s frightfully irritable. But that’s not what strikes me most. The thing I notice is that he doesn’t seem to do any work. Mr. Ember is supposed to be his secretary, but he really does all his work with Lady Heritage. She goes on all the time. She spends hours in the laboratories. I believe she works there till ever so late, but Sir William just sticks in his study and broods. I thought how strange it was from the very first day.”

“And Lady Heritage? Put all this mysterious business on one side and tell me what you make of her?”

Jane hesitated.

“She’s—she’s disturbing. I think she has too much of everything, and it seems to upset the balance of everything

she touches. She's too beautiful for one thing, and she has too much intellect, and too much, far too much, emotion. I think she is dreadfully unhappy too, with the sort of unhappiness that makes you want to hurt somebody else. You know what she sang this evening. I think she really feels like that, and would like to smash—everything. That's why...." Jane broke off suddenly; her voice dropped to the least possible thread, "Oh, what's that—what's that?"

As she spoke, her hand met Henry's on the switch of the torch. The light went out. Jane clung to one of the hard, strong fingers as she listened with all her ears. She heard a footstep, light and unmistakable, and it stopped upon the threshold.

There were about twenty seconds of really terrifying silence, and then the handle of the door turned slowly. Jane heard the creak of the hinge, the minute rattle of the latch. Then the handle was released, but slowly and with the least possible noise. There was another silence.

Jane pinched Henry as hard as she could, and though this, of course, relieved the strain she felt dreadfully afraid that she would scream unless something broke through this dreadful quiet.

Something did break through it next moment, for there came a low knocking on the door, and with the first sound of that knocking Jane recovered herself. With an extraordinary quickness and lightness she was on her feet and out of the cupboard, the cupboard was shut, and Jane, her shoes noiselessly discarded, was sitting on the side of a rumpled

bed, a fold of the sheet across her mouth, inquiring in sleepy, muffled accents:

“What is it? Who’s there?”

The knocking had gone on steadily. Now it stopped, and a voice said, “It is I, Lady Heritage. Open the door.”

Jane threw back the bedclothes so as to cover the chair at the bed-foot—a chair upon which there should have been a neatly folded pile of clothes—pulled off her stockings, and took the key out of the dressing-table drawer.

“Oh, what is it?” she said, and fumbled at the lock.

Next moment the door was open, and she saw Lady Heritage in her white linen overall and head-dress, the latter pushed back and showing her hair.

Lady Heritage saw a startled girl in a red flannel dressing-gown. Between the moonlight and the light from the passage there was a sort of dusk. Lady Heritage put her hand on the switch, but did not pull it down. Instead, she said quickly:

“I saw a light under the door. Are you ill?”

Jane rubbed her eyes.

“A light?” she said.

Raymond crossed the room quickly and felt each of the electric bulbs.

“A light?” said Jane again.

Lady Heritage went back to the door and turned all the lights on.

“Do you always lock yourself in?” she said. “And why did you take the key out of the door?”

“Was it wrong? They say that if you lock your door and put the key away, even if you walk in your sleep, you don’t go out of the room. I shouldn’t like to walk in my sleep in a big house like this, and perhaps wake up in a cellar or out on the terrace.”

Lady Heritage did an odd thing. Something flashed across her face as Jane was speaking, and she put both hands on the girl’s shoulders and pulled her round so that she faced the light.

Jane met, for a moment, a most extraordinary look. It did not seem to go through her as Mr. Ember’s scrutiny had done, but it shook her more. She looked down and said shakily:

“What is it? Oh, please tell me if I have vexed you—oh, please....”

Lady Heritage took her hands away.

“I had forgotten you walked in your sleep,” she said. “I don’t like locked doors as a rule, but I suppose you had better keep yours fastened. I shouldn’t like you to walk into the sea and get drowned, or break your neck falling off the terrace. Get

back to your bed. I'm just going to mine. I've been working late."

She went out, and it was a long, long time before Jane, who had heard the soft footfalls die away in the distance, dared open the door and take a hasty look along the corridor. It was quite empty.

After another pause she went to the cupboard door and opened it. The flooring stretched unbroken; there was no square hole, and no Henry. She sat down on the floor, hesitated, and then knocked lightly.

Under her very hand a board rose with a little jerk—a line of light showed, and Henry's voice said softly:

"All clear?"

"Yes, be quick, I daren't wait."

"Who was it?"

"Lady Heritage."

"What did she want?"

"I don't know. She said she saw a light. Henry, she frightens me, she really does."

The board rose a little higher.

"A sleuth who gets frightened is no earthly——" said Henry firmly. "Now look here, Jane, I can get you out of this quite

easily if you want to come. You are the only person in the house whom I haven't interviewed. Mr. Ember said that of course I shouldn't want to see you, as you did not get here until after the leakage must have taken place. I made no comment at the time, but it is perfectly open to me to insist on seeing you, to say that I am not satisfied with the interview, and to take you back to London for further interrogation."

Henry had opened the trap door about a foot. His face, lighted from below, looked very odd with the chin almost resting on a board at Jane's feet and the trap held up by one hand and only just clearing his hair. Jane would have wanted to laugh if his last suggestion had appalled her less.

"Oh, you mustn't," she said. "If you do that, it's all up. Mr. Ember would never, never, never, allow you to interview me. He'd be afraid of what I might say, and he'd find some awful way of keeping me quiet. As to letting me go off to London with you, well, if we started we'd certainly never get there. And oh, Henry, please, please go away. I'm sure they suspect something, and if she comes again, or if he comes—oh, Henry, do go."

"All right," said Henry. "Now, Jane, look here. I'm off before breakfast, but I can make an excuse to come down at any time if you want me. If anything is going wrong, or you get frightened, or if you want to get out of it write for patterns of jumper wool to the Misses Kent, Hermione Street, South Kensington. It's a real wool shop and they'll send you real patterns, but Miss Kent will ring me up the minute she gets

your letter. I'll come down straight away, and you look out for me here."

"Do you mean you'll come and stay? Won't they suspect something?"

"They won't know," said Henry. "Don't ask me why, but send for me if you want me, and be very sure that I shall come. Got that address all right?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll be off."

"Yes, please go."

As a preliminary to going, Henry came up a step higher, set the torch on the floor, and took Jane by the hand.

"Don't get frightened, Jane," he said. "I hate you to be frightened."

"I'm not, not really."

Henry came up another step; the trap now rested on his shoulders.

"Oh, Henry, *please*...."

"I'm going," said Henry. He continued to hold Jane's hand and appeared immovable. Jane could of course have taken her hand away and left the cupboard, but this did not occur to her till afterwards.

Quite suddenly Henry kissed her wrist, and a piece of the red flannel cuff. The next minute he was really gone. Perhaps it had occurred to him that he was a chaperon.

Jane lay awake for a long time.

CHAPTER X

Henry went away by an early train, and Jane came down to what, as a child, she had once described as a crumpled kind of day. She remembered “darling Jimmy” looking at her in a vague way, and saying in his gentle, cultivated voice:

“Crumpled, my dear Jane? What do you mean by crumpled?”

And Jane, frowning and direct:

“I mean a thing that’s got crumps in it, Jimmy darling,” and when Mr. Carruthers did not appear to find this a sufficient explanation, she had burst into emphatic elucidation:

“I was cross, and Nurse was cross, and you were cross. Yes, you were, and I had only just opened the study door ever so little; and I didn’t mean to upset the milk or to break the soap-dish; and oh, Jimmy, you must know what a crump is, and this day has been just chock-full of them. That’s why I said it was crumpled.”

The day of Henry’s departure was undoubtedly a crumpled day. To start with, a letter from Mr. Molloy awaited Jane at the breakfast table. It began, “My dear Renata,” and was signed, “Your affectionate father, Cornelius R. Molloy.” Mr.

Ember remarked at once upon the unusual circumstance of there being a letter for Miss Molloy, and Jane, acting on an impulse which she afterwards regretted, replied:

“It’s from my father. Do you want to see what he says?”

“Thank you,” said Jeffrey Ember. He glanced casually at the bald sentences in which Mr. Molloy hoped that his daughter was well, and expressed dislike of the climatic conditions which he had encountered on the voyage. His eyes rested for a moment upon the signature, and quite suddenly he cast a bombshell at Jane.

“What does the ‘R’ stand for?” he said.

Jane had the worst moment of panic with which her adventure had yet provided her. She was about to say that she did not know, and take the consequences, when Mr. Ember saved her.

“Is it Renatus?” he asked. Jane broke into voluble speech.

“Oh no,” she said, “my name has nothing to do with his. I was called Renata after an aunt, my mother’s twin sister. They were exactly alike and devoted to each other, and I was called after my Aunt Renata, and her only daughter was called after my mother.” Here Jane bit the tip of her tongue and stopped, but she had not stopped in time. Mr. Ember’s eyes had left Molloy’s signature and were fixed upon her face.

“And your mother’s name?” he said.

“Jane,” faltered Jane.

“And are you and your cousin as much alike as your mothers were?”

Jane stared at her plate. She stared so hard that the gilt rim seemed to detach itself and float like a nimbus above a half-finished slice of buttered toast.

“I—I don’t know,” she replied. “I don’t remember my mother, and I never saw my aunt.” Once again she bit her tongue, and this time very hard indeed. She had been within an ace of saying, “My Aunt Jane——”

“But you have seen your cousin; by the way, what is her surname?”

“Smith—Jane Smith.”

“You have seen your cousin, Jane Smith? Are you alike?”

“I have only seen her once.” Jane grasped her courage, and looked straight at Mr. Ember. He either knew something, or this was just idle teasing. In either case being afraid would not serve her. A spice of humour might.

“You’re frightfully interested in my aunts and cousins,” she said. “Do you want to find another secretary just like me for some one? But I’m afraid my Cousin Jane isn’t available. She’s married to a man in Bolivia.”

At this point Lady Heritage looked over the edge of *The Times* with a frown, and the conversation dropped. Jane

finished her buttered toast, and admired herself because her hand did not shake.

Lady Heritage seemed to be in a frowning mood. This, it appeared, was not one of the days when she disappeared behind the steel grating with Ember, leaving Jane to pursue her appointed tasks in the library. Instead, there was a general sorting of correspondence and checking of work already done, with the result that Jane found herself being played upon, as it were, by a jet or spray of hot water. The temperature varied, but the spray was continuous. A letter to which Lady Heritage particularly wished to refer was not to be found, a package of papers wrongly addressed had come back through the Dead Letter Office, and an unanswered invitation was discovered in the "Answered" file. By three o'clock that afternoon Jane had been made to feel that it was possible that the world might contain a person duller, more inept, and less competent than herself—possible, but not probable.

"I think you had better go for a walk, Miss Molloy," said Lady Heritage; "perhaps some fresh air...." She did not finish the sentence, and Jane, only too thankful to escape, made haste from the presence.

Ember had been right when he said that the grounds were extensive.

Jane skirted the house and made her way through a space of rather formally kept garden to where a gravel path followed the edge of the cliff. For a time it was bordered by veronica and fuchsia bushes, but after a while these ceased and left the

bare down with its rather coarse grass, tiny growing plants, tangled brambles, and bright yellow clumps of gorse. The path went up and down. Sometimes it almost overhung the sea. Always a tall hedge of barbed wire straggled across the view and spoilt it.

The fact that a powerful electric current ran through the wire and made it dangerous to touch added to the dislike with which she regarded it.

It was a grey afternoon with a whipping wind from the north-west that beat up little crests of foam on the lead-coloured waves and made Jane clutch at her hat every now and then. She thought it cold when she started, but by and by she began to enjoy the sense of motion, the wind's buffets, and the wide, clear outlook. At the farthest point of the headland she stopped, warm and glowing. The path ran out to the edge of the cliff. On the landward side the rock rose sharply, naked of grass, and heaped with rough boulders. A small cave or hollow ran inwards for perhaps four feet. In front of it, in fact almost within it, stood a stone bench pleasantly sheltered by the overhanging rock and curving sides of the hollow. Jane felt no need of shelter. Instead of sitting down, she climbed upon the back of the bench and, steadying herself against a rock, looked out over the wire and saw how the cliff fell away, sheer at first, and then in a series of jagged, tumbled steps until the rocks went down into the sea.

After a time Jane scrambled down and was hesitating as to whether she would turn or not when a sound attracted her attention.

The path ended by the stone bench, but there seemed to be quite a practicable grassy track beyond.

The sound which Jane had heard was the sound made by a stone which has become displaced on a hillside. It must have been a very heavy stone. It fell with a muffled crash. Then came another sound which she could not place. She looked all round and could see nothing.

Something frightened her.

All at once she realised that she was a long way from the house and quite out of sight. Turning quickly, she began to walk back along the way that she had come, but she had not gone a dozen paces before she heard scrambling footsteps behind her. Looking over her shoulder, she saw the man George Patterson standing beside the stone seat which she had just left. He made some sort of beckoning sign with his hand and called out, but a puff of wind took away the words, and only a hoarse, and as she thought, threatening sound reached her ears.

Without waiting to hear or see any more she began to run, and with the first flying step that she took there came upon her a blind, driving panic which sent her racing down the path as one races in a nightmare.

George Patterson started in pursuit. He called again twice, and the sound of his voice was a whip to Jane's terror. After at the most a minute he gave up the chase, and Jane flew on, pursued by nothing worse than her own fear.

Just by the first fuchsia bush she ran, blind and panting, into the very arms of Mr. Ember. The impact nearly knocked him down, and it may be considered as certain that he was very much taken aback.

Jane came back to a knowledge of her whereabouts to find herself gripping Mr. Ember's arm and stammering out that something had frightened her.

"What?" inquired Ember.

"I—don't—know," said Jane, half sobbing, but already conscious that she did not desire to confide in Jeffrey Ember.

"But you *must* know."

"I don't."

With a little gasp Jane let go, and wished ardently that her knees would stop shaking. Ember looked at her very curiously.

Jane had often wondered what his queer cold eyes reminded her of. Curiously enough, it was now, in the midst of her fright, that she knew. They were like pebbles—the greeny-grey ones which lie by the thousand on the seashore. As a rule they were dull and hard, just as the pebbles are dull and hard when they are dry. But sometimes when he was angry, when he cross-questioned you, or when he looked at Lady Heritage the dullness vanished and they looked as the pebbles look when some sudden wave has touched them. Jane did not know when she disliked them most.

They brightened slowly now as they fixed themselves upon her, and Ember said:

“Do you know, I was hoping I might meet you. We haven’t had a real talk since you came.”

“No,” said Jane.

Her manner conveyed no ardent desire for conversation.

“Shall we walk a little?” pursued her companion; “the wind’s cold for standing. I really do want to talk to you.”

Jane said nothing at all. If Ember wished to talk, let him talk. She was still shaky, and not at all in the mood for fencing.

“Well, how do you like being here? How do we strike you?”

Ember spoke quite casually, and Jane thought it was strange that he and Henry should both have asked her the same question. Her reply, however, differed.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“Don’t you? My dear Miss Renata, what a really extraordinary number of things you—don’t know! You don’t know what frightened you, and you don’t know whether you like us or not.”

Jane’s temper carried her away.

“Oh yes, I do,” she said viciously, and looked full at the bright pebble eyes.

Ember laughed.

“What do you think of Lady Heritage? Wonderful, isn’t she?”

“Oh yes,” said Jane. “She’s the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen. Too beautiful, don’t you think?”

If she desired to interest Jeffrey Ember, it appeared that she had succeeded. His attention was certainly arrested.

“Why too beautiful?”

Jane had an impulse towards frankness.

“I think she’s too ... everything. She has so many gifts, it does not seem as if there could be scope for them all.”

Ember looked at Jane for a moment. Then he looked away. In that moment Jane saw something—she could not really tell what. The nearest that she could get to it was “triumph.” Yes, that was it, triumph.

As he looked away he said, very low, “She will have scope enough,” and there was a little tingling silence.

He broke it in an utterly unforeseen manner. With an abrupt change of voice he asked:

“Ever learn chemistry?”

“No,” said Jane, and then wondered whether she was telling the truth about Renata.

“’M—know what a formula is?”

Jane put a dash of ignorant conviction into her voice:

“Oh, I think so—oh yes, of course.”

“Well, what is it?”

She looked puzzled.

“It’s difficult to explain things, isn’t it? Of course I know ‘formulate,’ and er—‘formal.’ But it’s—it’s something learned, isn’t it?”

Ember’s sarcastic smile showed for a moment. With a horrid inward qualm Jane wondered whether she had overdone Renata’s ignorance.

“A formula is a prescription,” said Ember slowly. “If you remember that, I think you’ll find it all quite simple. So that Formula ‘A’ is simply a prescription for making something up, labelled ‘A’ for convenience’ sake.”

Jane let her eyes become quite round.

“Is it?” she said in the blankest tone at her command. “But ... but what is Formula ‘A,’ Mr. Ember?”

“That, my dear Miss Renata, is what a good many people would like to know.”

“Would they? Why?”

“They would. In fact, some of them—person or persons unknown—wanted to know so much that they have gone to the length of stealing Formula ‘A.’ That, at least, is Captain March’s opinion, and the reason for his visit here. So I should be careful, very careful indeed, about betraying any knowledge of Formula ‘A.’”

Jane whisked round, stared blankly, and said in largest capitals:

“ME?”

Then, after a pause, she burst out laughing. “What do you mean?”

“You either know, or you don’t know,” said Jeffrey Ember. “If you don’t know, I’m not going to tell you. If you do, I have just given you a warning. A very valuable Government secret has been stolen, and if Captain March were to suspect that you were in any way involved—well, I suppose ... I need not tell you that the consequences would be serious beyond words.”

Jane gazed at him in a breathless delight which she hoped was not apparent. The day had been singularly lacking in pleasantness, but it was undoubtedly pleasing to receive a solemn warning of the dreadful fate that might overtake her if Henry should suspect that she knew anything about Formula “A.”

“But I haven’t the slightest idea what Formula ‘A’ can be,” she said. “It sounds frightfully exciting. Do tell me some

more. Was it stolen? And how could anything be stolen here?”

“Who frightened you?” he said suddenly.

Jane caught her breath.

“It was a stone,” she said. “I don’t know why it frightened me so. It fell over the edge of the cliff and gave me a horrid nightmare-ish sort of feeling. I started running and then I couldn’t stop. It was frightfully stupid of me.”

They walked on a few paces. Then Ember said:

“Captain March will probably come down here again. I managed to save you from an interview with him this time, but if he comes again, and if he sees you, remember there is only one safe way for you—you know nothing, you never have known anything, as far as you are concerned there is nothing to know. You shouldn’t find that difficult. You have quite a talent for not knowing things. Improve it.” He paused, smiled slightly, and went on, “You said just now that it was frightfully stupid of you to be frightened. Sometimes, Miss Renata, it is a great deal more stupid not to be frightened. Believe me, this is one of those times.”

They walked home in silence.

CHAPTER XI

Whilst Jane was running away from fear, down the gravel path of the cliff's edge, Captain March was about midway through an interview with his chief.

Henry's chief was a large man who strongly resembled a clean and highly intelligent pig. A very little hair appeared to grow reluctantly on his head; his face was pink and clean-shaven. He had inherited the patronymic of Le Mesurier, his parents in his baptism had given him the romantic name of Julian, and a grateful Government had conferred upon him the honour of knighthood. It is, perhaps, unnecessary to add that, from the moment that he emerged from the nursery and set foot within the precincts of his first preparatory school, he had been known exclusively as "Piggy."

There is a story of a débutante who, at a large and formal dinner-party, was discovered during a sudden silence to be addressing him as Sir Piggott. The dinner-party waited breathlessly. Piggy smiled his benign smile and explained that it had not been his good fortune to be called after his aunt, Miss Piggott.... "I expect you have heard of her? She left all her money to a home for cats, whereas, if my parents had done their duty and invited her to be my godmother, I should be paying at least twice as much income

tax as I do now. Never undervalue your relations, my dear Miss Browne." The aunt was, of course, apocryphal; and after dinner each of the older ladies in turn took the débutante aside, and told her so—as a kindness. To each of them she made the same reply, which was to the effect that "Piggy" was a darling. She married him two years later. But all this has nothing to do with Henry's interview with his chief.

Sir Julian was speaking:

"It's very unsatisfactory. You say they have been complying with all the suggestions in the original Government instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

Sir Julian frowned.

"It's very unsatisfactory," he repeated. "Sir William ... well, it's six months since I saw him, and he looked all right then."

"He looks all right now," said Henry. "He is all right except on his own particular subject. He'd discuss politics, unemployment, foreign affairs, or anything else, and you wouldn't notice anything, but the minute he comes to his own subject everything worries and irritates him. He's lost grip. As far as I can make out, he leaves everything to his daughter and the secretary. They are competent enough, but...." Henry did not finish his sentence.

"Ah yes, the secretary," said Sir Julian. "What's his name? Yes, Ember, Jeffrey Ember...." He turned an indicator under

his hand, and spoke rapidly into the telephone beside him. “As soon as possible,” he concluded.

“This girl now,” he said, looking at Henry. “I don’t see how this statement of hers can be squared with any of the facts as we know them.”

As he spoke he picked up the notes which Henry had taken in the dark cupboard.

“She made a suggestion herself,” said Henry. He paused, and looked with a good deal of diffidence at Sir Julian.

“Well?”

“It is just within the bounds of possibility that the Government experiments are being used as a blind. That was her suggestion, sir.”

Sir Julian was busily engaged in drawing on his blotting-paper. He drew in rapid succession cats with arched backs and bottle-brush tails, always beginning with the tail and finishing with the whiskers, three on each side. Henry rightly interpreted this as a sign that he was to continue.

“The conversation which was overheard at Molloy’s flat referred to a Formula ‘A,’ which cannot possibly be the Formula ‘A’ which we know. There may be a Formula ‘A’ of which we know nothing, and it may constitute a grave danger. Ember”—Henry paused—“Ember is not only in a position of great responsibility with regard to our—the official Formula ‘A,’ but he also appears to be mixed up with

this other unofficial and possibly dangerous Formula ‘A.’ The question, to my mind, is, ‘What about Ember?’”

Sir Julian continued to draw cats. Suddenly he looked up, and said:

“How long has Patterson been there?”

“A fortnight,” said Henry. “We recalled Jamieson, you remember, and sent him down.”

“Then, if there were unofficial experiments, they would be before his time?”

“Yes,” said Henry.

“Would it be possible—no, I’ll put it another way. Officially Luttrell Marches is impregnable, but unofficially—come March, the place practically belongs to you—is there any way in which there might be coming and going that would defy detection? You see, your hypothesis demands either wholesale corruption of Government workmen, or the introduction of other experiments.”

There was a pause. Then Henry said:

“In confidence, sir, there *is* a way, but, to the best of my knowledge, it is known only to myself and one other person.”

“It might be discovered.”

“I don’t think so. It never has been.”

“Well, I would suggest your ascertaining, in conjunction with the other person, whether there is any evidence to show that the secret has been discovered and the way made use of.”

The telephone bell rang. Sir Julian lifted the receiver and listened.

“Yes,” he said—“yes.” Then he began to take notes. “Spell the name, please—yes. Nineteen hundred and five? Is that all? Thank you.”

He hung up the receiver, and turned to Henry.

“Ember’s dossier,” he said. “Not much in it at first sight. ‘Born 1880. Son of Charles Ember, partner in Jarvis & Ember—manufacturing chemists; firm liquidated in 1896. Education till then at Harrow, and subsequently at Heidelberg, where he took degrees in medicine and science. From 1905 to 1912 at Chicago, U. S. A., as personal assistant to Eugene K. Blumfield of Nitrates Ltd. Engaged as secretary by Sir William Carr-Magnus during his American tour in autumn of 1912. Total exemption during War on Sir William’s representations.’ ’M—blameless as a blancmange—at first sight. We wouldn’t have him here at all if we hadn’t been told to get the record of every one employed at Luttrell Marches. Well, March?”

Henry looked up with his candid, diffident air.

“Heidelberg—Chicago—nitrates,” he said, with a little pause after each word. Then—“I wonder if it was in Chicago that

he met Molloy. Molloy was a leading light of the I. W. W. there in 1911."

Piggy looked up for a moment.

"'M, yes," he said. "Did you get on to the subject of Molloy at all?"

"I had to be very careful," said Henry, with a worried air. "I was introduced to Miss Molloy, so I felt that it would look odd if I asked no questions. On the other hand, I was afraid of asking too many. You see, sir, if there's really some infernal, underground plot going on, with the general smash-up of civilisation as its object, that girl is in a most awfully dangerous position. I wish to Heaven she was out of it, but I'm not at all sure that she isn't right when she says that the most dangerous thing of all would be for her to give the show away by bolting."

"'M, yes," said Piggy. "Your concern for the young lady's safety does you credit—attractive damsel in distress, eh? Nice, pretty young thing, and all that?"

Henry blushed furiously, and said with some stiffness, "As I told you, sir, we are old friends, and I think, it's natural——"

"Entirely, entirely." Piggy waved a large, fat hand with a pencil in it. "But to get back to Ember—what did you ask him?"

"Well, I said I had known one or two Molloys, and asked whether Miss Molloy was the cricketer's daughter. Ember was quite forthcoming, rather too forthcoming, I thought.

Said he'd met Molloy in the States, and that he was a queer card, but good company. Explained how surprised he was when he ran into him at Victoria Station after not seeing him for years. Then, quite casually and naturally, gave me to understand that Molloy had put him up for a couple of nights. He really did it very well. Said the daughter was a nice little thing just from school, that he thought she would suit Lady Heritage, and how grateful Molloy was, as he was just off to the States, and didn't know what to do with the girl. The impression I got was that he was taking no chances—not leaving anything for me to find out afterwards." Henry hesitated for a moment, and then said, "The thing that struck me most was this. I didn't ask to interview Miss Molloy because I didn't want to make her position more dangerous than it already is. That is to say, I assumed that there *was* danger, which really means assuming a criminal conspiracy. Now, if there were no danger and no criminal conspiracy, why on earth did every one make it so easy for me not to interview Miss Molloy? It seems a little thing, but it struck me—it struck me awfully, sir. You see, I took a roll-call of the employés first, and checked them by the official list. Then I went down to the stables with Sir William, and we went through all the outdoor servants. And I finished up in Sir William's study, where I saw the domestic staff—and Mr. Ember. From first to last, no one suggested that I should see Miss Molloy. In the end, I thought it would be too marked not to bring her in at all, so I said to Lady Heritage, 'What about your secretary?' and she said, 'Why, she's only just come ... you don't need to see her.' I got nervous and left it at that. I think now that I ought to have seen her, with Lady Heritage and Ember in the room; then they couldn't have suspected her of telling me anything."

Piggy looked up from his cats, and looked down again. Very carefully he gave each cat a fourth whisker on the left-hand side. Then he fixed his small, light eyes on Henry and said:

"*They?*"

* * * * * * * *

At 9.30 that evening Sir Julian marked a place in his book with a massive thumb, glanced across the domestic hearth at his wife, and observed:

"M' dear."

Lady Le Mesurier raised her charming blue eyes from the child's frock which she was embroidering.

"I have news to break to you—news concerning the lad Henry. Prepare for a shock. He is another's. You have lost him, my poor Isobel."

"I never had him," said Isobel placidly.

"His mamma thought you had. She did her very best to warn me. I rather think she considered that your young affections were also entangled. I said to her solemnly, 'My dear Mrs. March—I beg your pardon—my dear Mrs. *de Luttrelle* March—of course he is in love with Isobel. I expect young men to be in love with her. I am in love with her myself.'"

"Piggy, you didn't!"

“No, m’ dear, but I should have liked to. She is so very large and pink that the temptation to say it, and to watch the pink turn puce, was almost more than I could resist. But you have interrupted me. I was about to break to you a portentous fact. Our Henry is in love.”

“Oh, Piggy!” said Isobel.

“Yes,” continued Henry’s chief—“Henry is undoubtedly for it. Another lost soul. It’s always these promising lads that are snatched by the predatory sex.”

“Piggy—we’re not——”

“M’ dear, you *are*. It’s axiomatic, beyond cavil or argument. Like the python in the natural history books, you fascinate us first, and then engulf us.”

Isobel allowed a fleeting smile to lift the corners of her very pretty mouth.

“Oh, Piggy, what a mouthful you would be!” she murmured.

“Henry,” pursued Sir Julian—“Henry is in the fascinated stage. He blushed one of the most modestly revealing blushes I have ever beheld. The whole story is of the most thrillingly romantic and intriguing nature, and I regret to say, m’ dear, that I cannot tell you a single word of it.”

Lady Le Mesurier took up a blue silk thread.

“Oh, Piggy!” she said reproachfully.

Sir Julian beamed upon her.

“My official duty forbids,” he said, with great enjoyment. “Dismiss the indecent curiosity which I see stamped upon your every feature. Upon Henry’s affair my lips are sealed. I am a tomb. I merely wish to have a small bet with you as to whether Henry’s mamma will queer his pitch or not.”

“But, Piggy darling, how can I lay odds if I don’t know anything? Tell me, is she pretty?”

“Isobel, is that the spirit in which to approach this solemn subject? As an old married woman, you should ask, Is she virtuous? Is she thrifty? Is she worthy of Henry? And to all these questions I should make the same reply—I do not know.”

Isobel leaned forward, and still with that faint, delightful smile she pricked the back of Sir Julian’s hand sharply with the point of her embroidery needle.

“The serpent’s tooth!” he said, and opened his book. “Isobel, you interrupt my studies. I merely wish to commend three aspects of the case to your feminine intuition. First—Henry is in love; second—he has yet to reckon with his mamma; third—I may at any time ring you up and instruct you to prepare the guest chamber for Henry’s girl.”

Lady Le Mesurier began to work a blue ribbon bow round the stalks of some pink and white daisies.

“You’re rather a lamb, Piggy,” she said.

CHAPTER XII

It was next morning, whilst Jane was sorting and arranging the papers for the library table, that she caught sight of Henry's first message. She very nearly missed it, for the fold of the paper cut right across the agony column, and what caught her eye was the one word that passed as a signature, "Thursday." It startled her so much that she dropped the paper, and, in snatching at it, knocked over a pile of magazines.

Lady Heritage looked over her shoulder with a frown, tapped with her foot, and then went on with her writing in a silence that uttered more reproof than words could have done.

Jane picked everything up as silently as possible. As she put the papers on the table, she laid *The Times* out flat, and, bending over it, read the message:

"You will receive a letter from me. Trust the bearer. Thursday."

She put all the papers neatly in their places, and went to her writing-table with an intense longing to be alone, to be able to think what this might mean, and to wonder who—who would be the bearer of Henry's letter. She hoped ardently that Lady Heritage would have business in the laboratories, and

whilst these thoughts, and hopes, and wonderings filled her mind, she had to write neat and legible replies to the apparently inexhaustible number of persons who desired Lady Heritage to open bazaars, speak at public meetings, subscribe to an indefinite number of charities, or contribute to the writer's support.

When, at last, she was alone in her own room, she was tingling with excitement. At any moment some one, some unknown friend and ally, might present himself. It was exciting, but, she thought, rather risky.

For instance, supposing Henry's letter came, by any mischance, into the wrong hands—and letters were mislaid and stolen sometimes—what a perfectly dreadful chapter of misfortunes might ensue. She frowned, and decided that Henry had been rash.

It was with a pleasant feeling of superiority that she put on her hat and went out into the garden to pick tulips.

The weather had changed in the night, and it was hot and sunny, with the sudden dazzling heat of mid-April. In the walled garden the south border was full of violet-scented yellow tulips, each looking at this new hot sun with a jet-black eye. A sheet of forget-me-nots repeated the sheer blue of the sky.

Jane picked an armful of tulips and a sheaf of leopard's bane. Strictly speaking, she should then have gone in to put the flowers in water for the adornment of the Yellow Drawing-

Room. Instead, she made her way to the farthest corner of the garden and basked.

At first she looked at the flowers, but after a while her eyelids fell.

Jane has never admitted that she went to sleep, but, if she was thinking with her eyes shut, her thoughts must have been of an extremely engrossing nature, for it is certain that she heard neither the opening nor the shutting of a door in the wall beside her. She did feel a shadow pass between herself and the sun, and opening her eyes quickly she saw standing beside her the very man from whom she had fled in terror yesterday.

The sunlight fell from upon him, showing the shabby clothes, the tall, stooping figure, the grizzled beard, and that disfiguring scar.

With a great start Jane attempted to rise, only to discover that a wheelbarrow may make a very comfortable chair, but that it is uncommonly difficult to get out of in a hurry. To her horror the man, George Patterson, took her firmly by the wrist and pulled her to her feet. She shrank intensely from his touch, received an impression of unusual strength, and then, to her overwhelming surprise, she heard him say in a low, well-bred voice, “I have a letter for you, Miss Smith.”

“Oh, hush!” said Jane—“oh, please, hush!”

“All right, I won’t do it again. Look here, I want to say a few words to you, but we had better not be seen together. Here’s

your letter. Stay where you are for five minutes, and then come down to the potting-shed. Don't come in; stay by the door and tie your shoe-lace."

He went off with his dragging step, and left Jane dumb. There was a folded note in her hand, and in her mind so intense a shock of surprise as to rob her very thoughts of expression.

After what seemed like a long paralysed month, she opened the note which bore no address, and read, pencilled in Henry's clear and very ornamental hand, "The bearer is trustworthy.—H. L. M."

When she had looked so long at Henry's initials that they had blurred and cleared again, not once but many times, she walked mechanically down the path until she came to the shed. Beside it was a barrel full of rain-water. Into this she dipped Henry's note, made sure that the words were totally illegible, poked a hole in the border, and covered the sodden paper with earth. Then at the potting-shed door she knelt and became occupied with her shoe-lace.

"Henry saw me after he saw you," said George Patterson's voice. "He thought it might be a comfort to you to know there is a friend on the spot; but I'm afraid I gave you a fright yesterday."

"You did," said Jane, "but I don't know why. I was a perfect fool, and I ran right into Mr. Ember's arms."

“Did you tell him what frightened you?” said Patterson quickly.

“No, I wasn’t quite such a fool as that. Please, who are you?”

“My name here is George Patterson. I’m a friend of Henry’s. If you want me, I’m here.”

“If I want you,” said Jane, “how am I to get at you?”

Mr. Patterson considered.

“There’s a wide sill inside your window.” (And how on earth do you know that? thought Jane.) “If you put a big jar of, say, those yellow tulips there, I’ll know you want to speak to me, and I’ll come here to this potting-shed as soon as I can. You know they keep us pretty busy with roll-calls and things of that sort. I only got back yesterday by the skin of my teeth—I had to bolt.”

“Did you—you didn’t pass me.”

“No, I didn’t pass you.” There was just a trace of amusement in Mr. Patterson’s voice.

Jane pulled her shoe-lace undone, and began to tie it all over again.

“Hush!” she said very quick and low. “Some one is coming.”

Just where the path ended, not half a dozen yards away, the red-brick wall was pierced by a door. Two round, Scotch rose-bushes, all tiny green leaf and sharp brown prickle,

grew like large pin-cushions on either side of the interrupted border. Bright pink nectarine buds shone against the brick like coral studs. The ash-coloured door, rough and sun-blistered, was opening slowly, and into the garden came Raymond Heritage, pushing the door with one hand and holding a basket of bulbs in the other. She was looking back over her shoulder, at something or someone beside her.

From inside the potting-shed came Patterson's voice—just a breath:

"Who?"

"Lady Heritage."

Jane was up as she spoke and moving away. She reached the door just as Raymond closed it and, turning, saw her.

"Oh, Miss Molloy—I was really looking for you. Is Garstin anywhere about?"

"I haven't seen him," murmured Jane, as if the absent gardener might be blooming unnoticed in one of the borders.

"He's not in the potting-shed? I'll just look in and see. I want to stand over him and see that he puts these black irises where I want them to go. They come from Palestine, and the last lot failed entirely because he was so obstinate. I'll get a trowel and mark the place I think." She moved forward as she spoke, and Jane, horror-struck, stammered:

"Let *me* look. It's so dusty in there."

She was back at the door of the shed, but Lady Heritage was beside her. “I want a trowel, too,” she said, and Jane felt herself gently pushed over the threshold.

They were both just inside the door. It seemed dark after the strong light outside. There was a row of windows along one side, and a broad deal shelf under them. There were piles and piles of pots and boxes. There were hanks of bass and rows of tools, There were watering-cans. There was a length of rubber hose. But there was no George Patterson.

Jane put her hand behind her, gripped the jamb of the door, and moved back a pace so that she could lean against it. The pots, the tools, the bass and the rubber hose danced before her bewildered eyes.

Lady Heritage put her basket of bulbs down on the wide shelf and said:

“Garstin ought to be here. He’s really very tiresome. That’s the worst of old servants. When a gardener has been in a place for forty years as Garstin has, he owns it.”

“Shall I find him?” said Jane.

“No, not now. I really want to talk to you. I’ve just been speaking to Jeffrey Ember, and he tells me you had a fright yesterday. What frightened you?”

“Nothing—my own silliness.”

Jane felt as if she must scream. George Patterson had disappeared as if by a conjuring trick. Where had he gone to?

Where was he? It was just like being in a dream.

Raymond Heritage seemed to tower before her in her white dress. Her uncovered head almost touched the low beam above the door.

“Jeffrey said you were blind with fright—that you ran right into him. He said you were as white as a sheet and shaking all over. I want to know what frightened you?”

“A stone—it fell into the sea——”

“What made it fall? A man? What man?”

Jane leaned against the door-post, her breath coming and going, her eyes held by those imperious eyes.

“A stone,” she said; “it fell—I ran away.”

“Miss Molloy,” said Lady Heritage, “you walked to the end of the headland, out of sight of the house. Whilst you were there something gave you a serious fright. Something—or somebody. This is all nonsense about a stone. Whom did you see on the headland, for you certainly saw somebody? No, don’t look away; I want you to look at me, please.”

“I don’t know why I was so frightened,” said Jane. “It just came over me.”

Lady Heritage looked at her very gravely.

“If you saw any stranger on the headland, it is your absolute duty to tell me. Where secrets of such value are in question it

is necessary to watch every avenue and to neglect no suspicious circumstance. If you are trying to screen any one, you are acting very foolishly—very foolishly indeed. I warn you, and I ask you again. What frightened you?”

“I don’t know,” said Jane in a little whispering voice. “Why, why do you think there was any one?”

“I don’t think,” said Lady Heritage briefly. “I know. Mr. Ember went up to the headland after he left you, and there were footmarks in the gravel. Some man had undoubtedly been there, and you must have seen him. Mr. Ember made the entire round and saw no one, but some one had been there. *Now* will you tell me what you saw?”

“Oh!” said Jane. Rather to her own astonishment she began to cry. “Oh, that’s why I was frightened then! The stone fell so suddenly, and I didn’t know why—why——”

The sobs choked her.

Lady Heritage stood looking at her for a moment.

“Are you just an arrant little fool,” she said in a low voice, “or....”

“Oh, I’m not!” sobbed Jane. “Oh, I’ve never been called such a thing before! I know I’m not clever, but I don’t think you ought to call me a f—f—fool.”

Lady Heritage pressed her lips together, and walked past Jane and out into the sunshine. She stood there for a moment tapping with her foot. Then she called rather impatiently:

“Miss Molloy! Dry your eyes and come here.”

Jane came, squeezing a damp handkerchief into a ball.

“Bring your flowers in; I see you’ve left them over there to die in the sun. I’m driving into Withstead this afternoon and you can come with me. I have to see Mrs. Cottingham about some University extension lectures, and she telephoned just now to say would I bring you. She has a girl staying with her who thinks she must have been at school with you or one of your cousins. Her name is Daphne Todhunter.”

Jane stood perfectly still. Daphne Todhunter? Arnold Todhunter’s sister Daphne! Renata’s friend! But Daphne must know that Arnold was married? The question was—whom *had* Arnold married. Had his family welcomed (by letter) Jane Smith or Renata Molloy to its bosom? If Renata Molloy, how in the world was a second Renata to be explained to Miss Daphne Todhunter?

“Miss Molloy, what’s the matter with you?” said Lady Heritage.

Jane could not think quickly enough. Supposing Lady Heritage went to Mrs. Cottingham’s without her; and supposing Daphne Todhunter were to say that her brother Arnold had married a girl called Renata Molloy?

It was too much to hope that Arnold had carried discretion to the point of telling his own family that he had married an unknown Jane Smith.

Jane suddenly threw up her chin and squared her shoulders. The colour came back into her cheeks.

“Nothing,” she said, with a little caught breath. “I’m sorry I was so silly, and for crying, and if I was rude to you. It’s most awfully kind of you to take me into Withstead.”

If there were any music to be faced, Jane was going to face it. At least the tune should not be called behind her back.

CHAPTER XIII

A feeling of exhilaration amounting to recklessness possessed Jane as she put on the white serge coat and skirt sacred to the Sabbath crocodile. Attired in it Renata, side by side with Daphne Todhunter, had, doubtless, walked many a time to church and back. In front of her two white serge backs, behind her more white serge, and more, and more, and more. Jane's head reeled. She detested this garment, but considered it appropriate to the occasion.

They drove into Withstead across the marshes. The sun blazed, and all the tiny marsh plants seemed to be growing and stretching themselves.

Mrs. Cottingham lived in a villa on the outskirts of the town, and was ashamed of it. She had married kind little Dr. Cottingham, but imagined that she had condescended in doing so. Her reasons for thinking this were not apparent.

Jane followed Lady Heritage into the dark, rather stuffy drawing-room, and beheld a middle-aged woman with a rigidly controlled Victorian figure, a tightly netted grey fringe, and a brown satin dress with a good many little gold beads upon it. She had a breathless sense of the extraordinary way in which the room was overcrowded. Every inch of the

walls was covered with photographs, fans, engravings, and china plates. Almost every inch of floor space was covered with small ornamental tables crowded with knick-knacks. There was a carved screen, and an ebonised overmantel with looking-glass panels. There was a Japanese umbrella in the fireplace.

Jane's eyes looked hastily into every corner. There were more things than she had ever seen in one room before, but there was no Daphne Todhunter. Mrs. Cottingham was shaking hands with her. She had a fat hand and squeezed you.

"And are you Daphne's Miss Molloy?" she said. "She was *wildly* excited at the prospect of meeting you, and I said at once, 'I'll just ring up Luttrell Marches, and ask Lady Heritage to bring her here this afternoon.' I thought I *might* do that. You see, I only happened to mention your name this morning, and Daphne was so *excited*, and she goes away to-morrow, so it was the only chance. So I thought I would just ring up and ask Lady Heritage to bring you. I said to Daphne at once, 'Lady Heritage is so kind, I'm sure she will bring Miss Molloy.'"

Jane saw Lady Heritage's eyebrows rise very slightly. She moved a step, and instantly Mrs. Cottingham had turned from Jane:

"Why Lady Heritage, you're standing! Now I always say *this* is the most comfortable chair."

Her voice went flowing on, but Jane suddenly ceased to hear a word she said, for a door at the far end of the room was flung open. On the threshold appeared Miss Daphne Todhunter.

In common with most other Daphnes, Cynthias and Ianthes, she was short and rather heavily built. Her brown hair was untidy. She wore the twin coat and skirt to that which was adorning Jane.

With an exclamation of rapture, she rushed across the room, dislodging a book from one little table and an ash-tray from another.

("Her eyes are exactly like gooseberries which have been boiled until they are brown," thought Jane, "and I *know* she's going to kiss me.")

She not only kissed Jane, she hugged her. Two stout arms and a waft of white rose scent enveloped Jane's shrinking form.

After a moment in which she wondered how long this embrace would last, Jane managed to detach herself. Mrs. Cottingham's voice fell gratefully upon her ears:

"Daphne, Daphne, my dear, come and speak to Lady Heritage.—She's wildly excited, as I told you—the natural enthusiasms of youth, dear Lady Heritage, so beautiful, so quickly lost; I'm sure you agree with me.—Daphne, Daphne, my dear."

Daphne came reluctantly and thrust a large hand at Lady Heritage without looking at her. Raymond looked at it for a moment, and, after a perceptible pause, just touched the finger-tips. Mrs. Cottingham never stopped talking.

“So it *is* your friend, and you’re just too excited for words. Take her away and have a good gossip. Lady Heritage and I have a great deal to talk about.—You were saying....”

“I was saying,” said Lady Heritage wearily, “that you must write at once if you want Masterson to lecture for you next winter.”

Daphne dragged Jane to the far end of the room.

“Oh, Renata, how perfectly delicious! But how did you come here? And what are you doing, and where’s Arnold, and why aren’t you with him?” She made a pounce at Jane’s left hand, and felt the third finger.

“Oh, where’s your ring?” she said.

“Hush!” said Jane.

They reached a sofa and sank upon it. Immediately in front of them was an octagonal table of light-coloured wood profusely carved. Upon it, amongst lesser portraits, stood a tall photograph of Mrs. Cottingham in a train, and feathers, and a tiara. The sofa was low, and Jane felt that fate had been kinder than she deserved.

“Oh, Renata, aren’t you married?” breathed Daphne.

She breathed very hard, and Jane was reminded of Arnold on the fire-escape.

“Oh, Renata, tell me! When she ... Mrs. Cottingham said, ‘Miss Renata Molloy,’ I nearly died. I said, ‘Miss Molloy?’ And she said, ‘Yes, Miss Renata Molloy,’ and oh, I very nearly let the cat out of the bag.” She grasped Jane’s hand and pressed it violently. “But I didn’t. Arnold told me not to, and I didn’t, but, of course, I’m simply *dying* to know all about everything. Now, darling, tell me ... tell me everything.”

Never in her life had Jane felt so much aloof from any human creature. There was something so inexpressibly comic in the idea of pouring out her heart to Daphne Todhunter that she did not even feel nervous, only aloof—aloof, and cool. She looked earnestly at Daphne, and said:

“What did Arnold tell you?”

“It was the greatest shock,” said Daphne, “and such a surprise. One minute there he was, moving about at home, and not knowing when he would get a job, and perfectly distracted with hopelessness about you; and the next he rushed down to say good-bye because he was going to Bolivia, and his heart was broken because you wouldn’t go too....” She stopped for breath, and squeezed Jane’s hand even harder than before. “And then,” she continued, “you can imagine what a shock it was to get the letter-card.”

“Yes,” said Jane, “it must have been. What did it say?”

Daphne opened her eyes and her mouth.

“Didn’t he show it to you? How perfectly extraordinary of him!”

“Well, he didn’t” said Jane. “What did he say?”

“I know it by heart,” said Daphne ardently. “I could repeat every word.”

“Well, for goodness’ sake do!”

“Renata! How odd you are, not a bit like yourself!” Fear stabbed Jane.

“Tell me what he said—tell me what he said,” she repeated.

With an effort she pressed the hand that was squeezing hers.

“What, Arnold, in the letter-card? But I think it was just too weird of him not to have shown it to you—too extraordinary.”

Jane felt that she was becoming dazed.

“What did he say?”

“I know it all by heart. I could say it in my sleep. He said, ‘Just off; we sail together. We were married this morning, and I’m the happiest man in the world. Don’t tell any one at present. If you love me, not a word to a soul. Will write from Bolivia.—ARNOLD. P. S.—On no account tell Aunt Ethel.’ So you see why I nearly died when she said

Miss Renata Molloy, for of course I thought you were in Bolivia with Arnold, and oh, Renata, where is he and what has happened? Tell me everything?”

She flung her arms about Jane’s neck as she spoke and gave her a long, clinging kiss. Jane endured it under pressure of that, “You are not a bit like yourself.” When she had borne it for as long as she could, she drew back.

“Listen,” she said.

“Tell me—tell me the worst—tell me everything. Where is Arnold?”

“Arnold is in Bolivia,” said Jane.

“And why aren’t you with him?”

Jane produced a pocket-handkerchief. It was a very little one, but it sufficed. In her own mind Jane described it as local colour.

“We have parted,” she said, and dabbed her eyes.

“Renata! But you’re married to him!”

“No,” said Jane, quite truthfully.

An inward thankfulness that she was not married to Arnold supported her.

Daphne stared at her with bulging eyes.

“You’re not! But he said, ‘We were married this morning.’ I read it with my own eyes, and I could repeat it in my sleep. I know it by heart....”

Jane checked her with a look that held so much mysterious meaning that the flood of words was actually stemmed.

“He didn’t marry *me*,” said Jane, in a tense whisper. She looked straight into the boiled gooseberry eyes, and then covered her own.

“He didn’t marry you?” repeated Daphne, gasping.

“No,” said Jane, from behind the handkerchief.

“But he’s married?”

“Y—yes,” said Jane.

“Oh, Renata!”

Miss Todhunter cast herself upon Jane’s neck and burst into tears. The impact was considerable and her weight no light one.

“Daphne, please—please—Lady Heritage is looking at us. Do sit up. I can’t tell you anything if you cry. There’s really nothing to cry about.”

Daphne sat up again. She also produced a handkerchief, a very large one with “Daphne” embroidered across the corner in coral pink. A terrific blast of white rose emerged with the handkerchief.

“But he was so much in love with you,” she wailed. “I don’t understand it. How *could* he marry any one else and break your heart!”

“My heart is not broken,” said Jane.

“Then it was your fault, and you’ve broken his, and he’s got married just to show he doesn’t care, like people do in books. I don’t believe you love him a bit.”

Jane looked modestly at the carpet, which was of a lively shade of crimson.

“I’m afraid I don’t,” she said, in a very small voice.

An unbecoming flush mounted to Daphne’s cheeks.

“I don’t know how you’ve got the face,” she said.

Much to Jane’s relief, she withdrew from her to the farthest corner of the sofa, and then glared.

“Poor Arnold! Aunt Ethel always did say you were sly. She always said she wouldn’t trust you a yard.” She paused, sniffed, and then added, in what was meant for a tone of great dignity:

“And please, whom *has* Arnold married?”

“Her—her name is Jane, I believe,” said Jane, with a tremor.

At this moment she became aware that Lady Heritage had risen to her feet. Mrs. Cottingham’s voice clamoured for

attention.

“Oh, Lady Heritage, not without your tea! It won’t be a moment. Indeed, I couldn’t dream of letting you go like this. Just a cup of tea, you know, so refreshing. Indeed, it would distress me to think of your facing that long drive without your tea.”

Raymond stood perfectly still, her face weary and unresponsive.

“I am afraid my time is not my own,” she said, and crossed the room to where the two girls were sitting. They both rose, Daphne with a jerk that dislodged a photograph frame.

“I am afraid I must interrupt your talk,” said Lady Heritage. “Were you living school triumphs over again? I suppose you swept off all the prizes between you?”

If there was irony in the indifferent voice, Miss Todhunter was unaware of it. She laughed rather loudly, and said:

“Renata never won a prize in her life.”

“Oh!” said Raymond, with a lift of the brows. “I am surprised. I pictured her always at the head of her class, and winning everything.”

Daphne laughed again. She was still angry.

“I’m afraid she’s been putting on side,” she said. “Why, Miss Basing would have fainted with surprise

if she had found Renata anywhere near the top of anything. Or me either," she added, with reluctant honesty.

"Miss Molloy," said Raymond, "ask Mrs. Cottingham if she will let Lewis know that we are ready;" and as Jane moved away, she continued, "I should have thought her languages now...."

Daphne's mouth fell open.

"Oh, my goodness," she said, "she *must* have been piling it on. Why, her languages were rotten, absolutely rotten. Why, Mademoiselle said that I was enough to break her heart, but when it came to Renata it was just, 'Mon dieu!' the whole time; and then there were rows because Miss Basing thought it was profane. Only, somehow it seems different in French —don't you think?"

Lady Heritage looked at Daphne as though she had some difficulty in thinking about her at all.

"I see," she said gravely, and then Mrs. Cottingham bore down upon them.

"Tea should have been ready if I had known," she said. Her colour had risen, and her voice shook a little. "If I could persuade you ... I'm sure it won't be more than a moment. But, of course, if you must ... but if I had only known. You see, I thought to myself we would have our talk first, and then enjoy our tea comfortably, and indeed it is *just* coming in—but, of course, if you are *obliged* to go...."

“Thank you very much; I am obliged to go. Good-bye, Mrs. Cottingham. You’ll write to Masterson and let me know what the answer is? I think I hear the car.”

Miss Todhunter, who had embraced her friend so warmly half an hour before, parted from her with a tepid handshake; but if neither Daphne nor Mrs. Cottingham considered the visit a success, Lady Heritage seemed to derive some satisfaction from it, and Jane told herself that not only had a danger been averted, but a distinct advantage had been gained.

CHAPTER XIV

Jane ran straight up to her room when they got back, but she was no sooner there than it came into her mind to wonder whether she had put away the files which she had been working on just before she went into the garden. Think as she would, she could not be sure.

She ran down again and went quickly along the corridor to the library. The door was unlatched. She touched the handle, pushed it a little, and stood hesitating. Lady Heritage was speaking.

“It’s a satisfaction to know just where one is. Sometimes I’ve been convinced she was a fool, and then again ... well, I’ve wondered. I wondered this afternoon in the garden. That man on the headland gives one to think furiously. Who on earth could it have been?”

“I ... don’t ... know.”

“But I don’t believe she saw him. I don’t believe she saw anything or knew why she was frightened. She just got a start ... a shock—began to run without knowing why, and ran herself into a blind panic. She looked quite idiotic when I was questioning her.”

“Oh,” thought Jane. “It’s horrible to listen at doors, but what am I to do?”

What she did was to go on listening. She heard Lady Heritage’s rare laugh.

“Then this afternoon—my dear Jeffrey, it would have convinced you or any one. The friend—this Daphne Todhunter—well, only a fool could have made a bosom friend of her, and, as I told you, even she had the lowest opinion of her adored Renata’s brains.”

“I don’t know,” said Ember again. “You say she’s a fool, I say she’s a fool, her friend says she’s a fool, but something, some instinct in me protests.”

“Womanly intuition,” said Lady Heritage, with a mocking note.

There was silence; then:

“These girls—were they alone together?”

“No. They conducted what appeared to be a curiously emotional conversation at the other end of Mrs. Cottingham’s dreadful drawing-room, which always reminds me of a parish jumble sale.”

Ember’s voice sounded suddenly much nearer, as if he had crossed the room.

“Emotional? What do you mean?” he said quickly. Lady Heritage laughed again.

“Mean?” she said. “Does that sort of thing mean anything?”

“What sort of thing? Please, it’s important.”

“Oh, hand-holding, and a tearful embrace or two. The usual accompaniments of schoolgirl *schwärmerei*.”

Jane could hear that Ember was moving restlessly. Her own heart was beating. She knew very well that in Ember’s mind there was just one thought—“Suppose she has told Daphne Todhunter.”

“Which of them cried?” said Ember sharply.

“I think they both did—Miss Todhunter most.”

“And you couldn’t hear what they were saying?”

“Not a word.”

“I must know. Will you send for her and find out? It’s of the first importance.”

“You think....”

“She may have told this girl what we’ve been trying to get out of her. I must know. Look here, I’ll take a book and sit down over there. She won’t notice me. Send for her and begin about other things, then ask her why her friend was so distressed....”

Jane heard Ember move again and knew that this time it was towards the bell. She turned and ran back along the way by

which she had come. Five minutes later she was entering the library to find Lady Heritage at her table and Ember at the far end of the room buried in a book.

“I want the unanswered-letter file.” Lady Heritage’s voice was very businesslike.

Jane brought it over and waited whilst Raymond turned over the letters, frowning.

“I don’t see Lady Manning’s letter.”

“You answered it yesterday.”

“So I did. Miss Molloy—why did your friend cry this afternoon?”

“Daphne?”

“Yes, Daphne. Why did she cry?”

“Oh, she does, you know.”

“But I suppose not entirely without some cause.”

“She was angry with me,” said Jane very low.

“Yes? I noticed that she did not kiss you when you went away.”

“No, she’s angry. You see”—Jane hung her head—“you see, she thinks—I’m afraid she thinks that I didn’t treat her brother very well.”

“Her brother?”

“Yes. She wanted me to be engaged to him, but he’s married some one else, so I think it’s rather silly of her to be cross with me, don’t you?”

“I really don’t know.”

Out of the tail of her eye Jane saw Mr. Ember nod his head just perceptibly. Lady Heritage must have seen it too, for she pushed the letter file over to Jane.

“Put this away. No, I don’t want anything more at present.”

Tea came in as she spoke.

Afterwards in her own room Jane sat down on the broad window ledge with her hands in her lap, looking out over the sea. The lovely day was drawing slowly to a lovelier close, the sun-drenched air absolutely still, absolutely clear. The tide was low, the sea one sheet of unbroken blue, except where the black rocks, more visible than Jane had ever seen them, pierced the surface.

Jane did not quite know what had happened to her. Her moment of exhilaration was gone. She was not afraid, but she felt a sense of horror which she had not known before. She had thought of this adventure as *her* adventure, her own risk. Somehow she had never really related it to other people. For the first time, she began to see Formula “A,” not as something which threatened her, but as something that menaced the world. It was ridiculous that it was Mrs.

Cottingham and Daphne Todhunter who had caused this change.

It is one thing to think vaguely of civilisation being swept away, and *quite* another to visualise some concrete, humdrum Tom, Dick, or Harry being swept horribly out of existence. Jane's imagination suddenly showed her Formula "A"—The Process, whatever they chose to call the horrible thing—in operation; showed it annihilating fussy Mrs. Cottingham, with her overcrowded drawing-room and her overcrowded talk; showed it doing something horrible to fat, common Daphne Todhunter. The romance of adventure fell away, the glamour that sometimes surrounds catastrophe shrivelled and was gone. It was horrible, only horrible.

Jane kept seeing Mrs. Cottingham's ugly room, and Raymond Heritage standing there, as she had seen her that afternoon, like a statue that had nothing to do with its surroundings. All at once she knew what it was that Lady Heritage reminded her of—not Mercury at all, but Medusa with the lovely, tortured face, stone and yet suffering.

As she looked out over that calm sea she had before her all the time the vision of Medusa, and of hundreds and hundreds of quite ordinary, vulgar, commonplace Mrs. Cottinghams and Daphne Todhunters being turned to stone. A tremor began to shake her. It kept coming again and again. Then, all at once, the tears were running down her face. It was then it came to her that she could not bear to think of Daphne as she had seen her at the last, with that hurt, angry, puzzled look.

“She’s a fat lump, but Arnold is her brother, and Renata is her friend, and she thinks they’ve failed each other and been horrid to her. I can’t bear it.”

At that moment Jane hated herself fiercely because Daphne’s tears had amused her.

“You’ve got a brick instead of a heart, and, if you get eliminated, it’ll serve you right.”

She dabbed her eyes very hard, straightened her hair, and ran downstairs to the library again.

Ember was the sole occupant, and Jane addressed him with diffidence:

“Mr. Ember, do you think I might ... do you think Lady Heritage would mind ... I mean, may I use the telephone?”

“What for?” said Ember, looking at her over the edge of his paper.

“I thought perhaps I might,” said Jane ... “I mean, I wanted to say something to my friend, the one who is staying with Mrs. Cottingham.”

“Ah—yes, why not?”

“Then I may?”

“Oh yes, certainly. Do you want me to go?”

Jane presented a picture of modest confusion. It was concern for Daphne Todhunter that had brought her downstairs, concern and the prickings of remorse, but at the sight of Ember, she experienced what she would have described as a brain-wave.

“If you wouldn’t mind,” she said. “I’m so sorry to disturb you, but I did rather want to talk privately to her.”

“Oh, by all means.” Ember’s tone was most amiable, his departure most courteously prompt.

Jane would have been prepared to bet the eighteen-pence which constituted her sole worldly fortune to a brass farthing that upon the other side of the door his attentive ear would miss no word of her conversation.

She gave Mrs. Cottingham’s number, and waited in some anxiety.

The voice that said “Hullo!” was unmistakably Miss Todhunter’s, and Jane began at once:

“Oh, Daphne, is that you? I want to speak to you so badly. Are you alone? Good! I’m so glad.”

At the other end of the line Daphne was saying grumpily:

“I don’t know what you mean. There are three people in the room. I keep telling you so.”

“Good!” said Jane, with a little more emphasis. “I want to speak to you most particularly. I’ve been awfully unhappy

since this afternoon; I really have. And I wanted to say—— I mean to ask you not to be upset about Arnold. It's all for the best, really. Please, please, don't think badly of him. It's not his fault, and I know you'll like his wife very much indeed. He'll tell you all about it some day, and you'll think it ever so romantic. So you won't be unhappy about it, will you? I hate people to be unhappy."

Without waiting for Miss Todhunter's reply, Jane hung up the receiver. After a decent interval she opened the door. Mr. Ember was at the far end of the passage, waiting patiently.

CHAPTER XV

Jane waked that night, and did not know why she waked. After a moment it came to her that she had been dreaming. In her dream something unpleasant had happened, and she did not know what it was. She sat up in the darkness with her hands pressed over her eyes, trying to remember.

The vague feeling of having passed through some horrifying experience oppressed her far more than definite recollection could have done.

She got up, switched on the light, and began to pace up and down, but she could not shake off that feeling of having left something, she did not know what, just behind her, just out of sight. She looked round for the book she had been reading, but she remembered now that she had left it downstairs. She looked at her watch. It was three o'clock. The house would be absolutely still and empty. It would not take her two minutes to fetch the book from the drawing-room. She slipped on Renata's dressing-gown, put out her light, and opened the door.

With a little shock of surprise she saw that the corridor was dark. Some one must have put out the light which always burned at the far end. Instead of the usual faintly rosy

glow, there was darkness thinning to dusk, and just at the stairhead a vivid splash of moonlight. After a moment's hesitation Jane slipped out of her room, leaving the door ajar. Somehow she had not reckoned upon having to cross that brightly lighted space. She came slowly to the head of the stairs and looked down into the hall. It was like looking into the blackness and silence of a vast well. She could see nothing—nothing at all. The moon was shining in through the rose window above the great door. There was a shield in the window, a shield with the Luttrell arms, and the light came through the glass in a great beam shot with colour, and struck the portrait of Lady Heritage and the vine leaves and grapes on the newel just below. The window and the portrait were on the same level, and the ray seemed to make a brilliant cleavage between the silvery dusk above and the dense gloom below.

Jane descended the stairs, walking carefully so as to make no noise. At the foot she turned sharply to the left and passed the study door, the fireplace, and the steel gate which shut off the north wing. The door of the Yellow Drawing-Room was straight in front of her. She opened it softly and went in.

The book would be on the little table to the right of the fireplace, because she remembered putting it there when Lady Heritage made an unexpectedly early move. She stood for a moment visualising the arrangement of the chairs, and then walked straight to the right place. The book was where she had left it, put down open, a bad habit for which Jimmy had often rebuked her. She was back at the door with it, and just about to pass the threshold when she heard a sound. Instantly she stood still, listening. The sound came from the

other end of the hall, where the shadows lay deepest round the massive oak door.

“But there can’t be any one at the door at this hour,” said Jane—“there can’t, there can’t possibly.”

The sound came again, something between a rustle and a creak, but so faint that no hearing less acute than Jane’s would have caught it.

“It’s on the left of the door, underneath Willoughby Luttrell’s picture....”

Jane suddenly pressed her hand to her lips and made an involuntary movement backwards, for there was an unmistakable click, and then, slow and faint, a footfall. Jane stood rigid, staring into the darkness of the corner. She thought she heard a sigh, and then the footsteps crossed the hall, coming nearer. At the stair foot they paused, and then began to ascend.

Jane gazed into the deeply shadowed space where the footfall sounded, but nothing—not the slightest glimpse of anything moving—came to her straining sight.

She looked up and saw the level ray of moonlight overhead. Whoever climbed the stair must pass up into the light and be visible, but from where she stood she could only see the side of the stair like a black wall. But she must see—she must. If some one had come out of the darkness where there was no door she must know who it was. Her bare feet made no sound as she moved from the sheltering doorway. Step by

step she kept pace with those slow mounting footsteps. She passed the steel gate, and, feeling her way along the wall, came to a standstill by the cold black hearth. Then, with her whole body tense, she turned and looked up. There was a darker shadow among the shadows, a shadow that moved upwards, towards the beam of moonlight. Jane watched, breathless, and from where The Portrait hung, the sombre eyes of Raymond Heritage seemed to watch too. Out of blackness into dusk a something emerged; one step more and the moonlight fell on a dark hood. Up into the light came a cloaked figure, draped from head to foot, shapeless.

On the top step it turned. Jane caught her breath. It was Lady Heritage. She stood there for a long minute, her left hand just resting on the newel post with its twining tendrils and massive overhanging grapes. The light shone full upon her, and her face was sharpened, blanched, and sorrowful. Her eyes seemed to look into unfathomable depths of gloom. The amber, the rose, and the violet of the stained glass fell in a hazy iridescence upon the black of her cloak.

In front the cloak fell away and showed the straight white linen of an overall, and cloak and overall were deeply stained with dull wet smears. A piece of the stuff hung jagged from a tear.

Jane looked, and could not take her eyes away.

“Oh, she’s so unhappy,” she said to herself.

With a quick movement Raymond Heritage pushed the hood back from her hair. Then she turned, faced her own portrait

for a moment, and passed slowly out of sight. Jane heard a door close very softly.

She stood quite still and waited, gathering her courage. She would have to mount the stair and pass through that light before she could reach the safely shadowed corridor. Just for a moment it seemed as if she could not do it. Her feet seemed to cleave to the ground. Five minutes passed, and another five.

Jane felt herself becoming rigid, and with a tremendous effort, she took one step forward, but only one, for as her foot touched a new cold patch of floor, some one moved overhead.

For an instant a little pencil of electric light jabbed into the darkness and went out again. The next moment Mr. Ember stepped into the moonlight. He too wore a linen overall, and in his left hand he carried the mask-like head-dress which was in use in the laboratories. His right hand held a torch.

He came down the stairs, walking with astonishing lightness. Half-way down the torch came into play again. He sent the little ray in a sort of dazzle-dance about the hall. With every leaping flash Jane's heart gave a jump, and she only stopped her teeth from chattering by biting hard upon the cuff of Renata's dressing-gown. She had covered her face instinctively, and peered, terror-stricken, between her fingers.

The light skimmed right across her once, and but for the crimson flannel, she would certainly have screamed aloud. If Mr. Ember had been looking, he could have seen a semicircle

of white forehead, two clutching hands, and a quivering chin. But his eyes were elsewhere, and the dancing flash passed on.

Ember crossed the hall to the far corner out of which Lady Heritage had come. Suddenly the light went out.

Jane heard again the very, very small creaking noise which she had heard before. It was followed by a faint click, and then unmitigated silence. The seconds added themselves together and became minutes, and there was no further sound. The minutes passed, and the beam of moonlight slipped slowly downwards. Now The Portrait was in darkness, now the newels were just two black shadows. It was a long, long time before Jane moved. She climbed the staircase with terror in her heart. At the edge of the moonlight she waited so long that it moved to meet her. When the edge of it touched her bare, hesitating foot she gave a violent start, and ran the rest of the way.

The dark corridor felt like a haven of refuge.

She came panting to her own door, and suddenly there was no haven of refuge anywhere. The door was shut. She had left it ajar. It was shut.

Jane stood with her outstretched hand flat on the panel of the door. She kept saying over and over to herself:

“I left it open, but it’s shut. I left it open, but it’s shut.”

Once she pushed the door as if it could not really be shut at all, but it did not yield; the latch had caught. It was shut. At

last she turned the handle slowly and went in. A gust of wind met her full. Perhaps it was the wind that had shut the door. She left it ajar, moved to the middle of the room, and waited. For a moment there was a lull. Somewhere in the house a clock struck four. The sound came just over the edge of hearing, with its four tiny distant strokes. Then the wind rushed in again through the open window, and the door fell to with a click.

CHAPTER XVI

By next morning the wind had brought rain with it. A south-west gale drove against the dripping window-panes, and covered the sea with crests of foam.

Jane, rather pale, wrote a neat letter to the Misses Kent, Hermione Street, South Kensington, mentioning that she would be much obliged if they would send her patterns of jumper wool by return. She hesitated, and then underlined the last two words.

“I always think big shops do you better,” was Lady Heritage’s comment, and Mr. Ember added, “Do you knit, Miss Renata? I thought you were the only girl in England who didn’t”—to which Jane replied, “I want to learn.”

It was after the letter had been posted that she found Henry’s second message, “Hope to see you to-day, Friday.” She could have cried for pure joy.

At intervals during the day, the thought occurred to her that Henry was a solid comfort. She wasn’t in love with him, of course, but undoubtedly he was a comfort. She had plenty of time to think, for she spent the entire day by herself. Sir William had gone to town for three or four days. Lady Heritage disappeared into the north wing at eleven o’clock,

and very shortly after, Mr. Ember followed her. Neither of them appeared again until dinner-time. Jane went to sleep over a book and awoke refreshed, and with a strong desire for exploration.

If only last night's mysterious happenings had taken place anywhere but in the hall. The dark corner from which Raymond had emerged and into which Mr. Ember had vanished drew her like a magnet, but not until every one was in bed and asleep would she dare to search for the hidden door.

"If I were just sitting here and reading," she thought to herself, "probably no one would come into the hall for hours; but if I were to look for a secret passage, all the servants would begin to drift in and out, and the entire neighbourhood would come and call."

When the lights had been turned on, she wandered round, looking at the Luttrell portraits. This, she thought, was safe enough, and if not the rose, it was at least near it. Willoughby Luttrell's picture hung perhaps five feet from the ground and about half-way between the hall door and the corner. Jane had always noticed it particularly because Henry undoubtedly resembled this eighteenth century uncle.

Mr. Willoughby Luttrell had been painted in a Court suit of silver-grey satin. He wore Mechlin ruffles and diamond shoe-buckles. He had the air of being convinced that the Court of St. James could boast no brighter ornament, but his face was the face of Henry March, and Henry's grey eyes looked down at Jane from beneath a Ramillies wig.

After an interval Jane stopped looking at Mr. Luttrell's eyes, and reflected that the click which she had heard the night before came from a point nearer the corner. She did not dare go near enough to feel the wall, and no amount of staring at the panelling disclosed any clue to the secret.

Jane went back to her book.

By sunset the rain had ceased to fall, or, rather to be driven against the land. The wind, lightened of its burden of moisture, kept coming inland in great gusts, fresh and soft with the freshness and softness of the spring. The entire sky was thickly covered with clouds which moved continually across its face, swept on by the currents of the upper air, but these clouds were very high up. Any one coming out of an enclosed place into the windy night would have received an impression of extraordinary freedom, movement, and space.

Henry March received such an impression as he turned a pivoting stone block and came out of the small sheltering cave behind the seat on the headland above Luttrell Marches. At the first buffet of the gale he took off his cap, and stuffed it down into the pocket of the light ulster which he wore, and stood bareheaded, looking out to sea. His eyes showed him blackness and confused motion, and his ears were filled with the strange singing sound of the wind and the endless crash and recoil of the waves against a shingly beach.

He stood quite still for a time and then turned his wrist and glanced at the luminous dial of the watch upon it, after which he passed again behind the stone seat and was about to re-enter the blacker shadows when a tall figure emerged.

“Have you been here long?” said a voice.

“No, I’ve only just come. How are you, Tony?”

“All right. I didn’t think you’d be down here again so soon. It was touch and go whether I could get here.”

“Piggy’s orders,” said Henry. “Look here, Tony, don’t let’s go inside. It’s a topping night, and that passage I’ve just come along smells like a triple extract of vaults—perfectly beastly. I don’t suppose our friend Ember is addicted to being out late. He doesn’t strike me as that sort of bird somehow.”

“All right,” said Anthony Luttrell. He sat down on the stone seat as he spoke, and Henry followed his example.

“Piggy sent you down, did he? What for?”

Henry was silent. It seemed like quite a long time before he said:

“Tony, who knows about the passages beside you and me?”

“No one,” said Anthony shortly.

“Uncle James told me when he thought the Boche had done you in. He said then that no one knew except he and I. He drew out a plan of all the passages and made me learn it by heart. When I could draw it with my eyes shut, we burnt every scrap of paper I had touched. I’ve been into the passages exactly three times—once that same week to test my knowledge, again the other day, and to-night. I’ll swear

no one saw me go in or come out, and I'll swear I've never breathed a word to a soul."

"Are you rehearsing your autobiography?" inquired Anthony Luttrell, with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"No, I'm not. I want to know who else knows about the passages."

"And I have told you."

"Tony, it is no good. I had my suspicions the other night, but to-night I've got proof. The passages have been made use of. Unfortunately there's no doubt about it at all. I want to know whether you have any idea—hang it all, Tony, you must see what I'm driving at! Wait a minute; don't go through the roof until you've heard what I've got to say. You see, I know that Uncle James gave you the plan when you were only sixteen, because he thought he was dying then, and I've come down here to ask you whether any one might have seen you coming and going as a boy, or whether ... Tony, *did* you ever tell any one?"

"I thought you said that it was Piggy's orders that brought you down here."

"Yes, it was," said Henry.

"Am I to gather then that Piggy has suggested these damned impertinent questions?" Mr. Luttrell's tone was easy to a degree.

Henry, on the verge of losing his temper, rose abruptly to his feet, walked half a dozen paces with his hands shoved well down in his pockets, and then walked back again.

“Tony, what on earth’s the good of quarrelling?”

Anthony Luttrell was leaning back, his head against the back of the stone seat, his long legs stretched out in front of him. He appeared to be watching the race of clouds between the horizon and the zenith. He said something, and the wind took his words away.

Henry sat down again.

“Look here, Tony,” he said, “you’ve not answered my question. Did you ever tell any one? Damn it all, Tony, I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t have to!... Did you ever tell Raymond?”

A great gust swept the headland, another and more violent one followed it, battered against the cliff, and then dropped suddenly into what, after the tumult, seemed like a silence.

“Piggy speaking, or you?” said Anthony Luttrell quite lightly.

“Both,” said Henry.

“You sound heated, Henry. Now I should have thought that that would have been my rôle. Instead, I merely repeat to you, and you in your turn, of course, repeat to Piggy that I have told no one about the passages, and, after you have

admired my moderation, perhaps we might change the subject."

"I'm afraid it can't be done," said Henry. "Tony, do you mind sitting up and looking at this?"

As he spoke he placed "this" on the seat between them and turned a light upon it, holding the torch close down on to the seat so that the beam did not travel beyond its edge. Mr. Luttrell turned lazily and saw a small handkerchief of very fine linen with an embroidered "R" in the corner. He continued to look at it, and Henry continued to hold the torch so that the light fell upon the initial. Then quite suddenly Anthony Luttrell reached sideways and switched off the light. His hand dropped to the handkerchief and covered it.

"No, I don't want it," said Henry, "but I thought you ought to know that I found it in the passage behind us, just where one stoops to shift the stone."

"It's one I found and dropped," said Anthony, putting it into his pocket.

Henry said nothing at all.

A somewhat prolonged silence was broken by Luttrell. "I'm chucking my job here," he said. "I've written to Sir Julian. Here's the letter for you to give him." He pushed it along the seat as he spoke, and Henry picked it up reluctantly. "I've asked to be replaced with as little delay as possible. You might urge that point on him, if you don't mind. I want it made perfectly clear that under no circumstances will I stay

on more than three days. I will, in fact, see the whole department damned first."

He spoke without the slightest heat, in the rather cold, drawling manner which Henry had known as a danger-signal from the days when he was a small boy, and Anthony a big one and his idol.

"Are you giving any reason?"

"No, there's no reason to give."

"Piggy," said Henry thoughtfully, "will want one. It's all very well for you, Tony, to write him a letter and say you're going to chuck your job without giving a reason. I've got to stand up at the other side of his table and stick out a cross-examination on the probable nature of the reasons which you haven't given. You're putting me in an impossible position."

"It's that damned conscience of yours, I suppose! I cannot tell a lie, and all that sort of thing."

"Not to Piggy about this."

"All right," said Anthony, getting to his feet, "tell him the truth. Why should I care? I suppose, in common with everybody else, he is perfectly well aware that I once made a fool of myself about Lady Heritage. Well, I thought I could stick being down here and seeing her, but I can't. It just comes to that. I can't stick it."

"Does she know you're here?"

“No, she doesn’t. She sees me in an overall and a mask. She has been pleased to commend my skill. This afternoon she leaned over my shoulder to watch what I was doing. Well, I came away and wrote to Piggy. I can’t stand it, and you can tell him so with the utmost circumstance.”

Henry was leaning forward, chin in hand. He looked past Anthony at the black moving water.

“Why don’t you see Raymond?” he said. “No, Tony, you’ve just got to listen to me. What you’ve been saying is true as far as it goes, but it doesn’t go very far. You wouldn’t chuck your job just for that. You know, and I know that you’re chucking it because you are afraid that Raymond is involved. If you know it, and I know it, don’t you think Piggy will know it too? That’s why I say, see Raymond. If she’s let herself get mixed up with this show, it’s because she’s had a rotten time and wants to hit back. She said as much to me—oh, not à propos of this, of course; we were just talking.”

“I heard her,” said Anthony Luttrell. He paused, and added with a distinct sneer, “You displayed an admirable discretion.”

“Thank you, Tony. Now what’s the good of you clearing out? If you do, Piggy will send some one else down here, and if Raymond has got mixed up with any of Ember’s devilry, she’ll get caught out. For the Lord’s sake, Tony, see her, let her know you’re alive! I believe she’d chuck the whole thing and go to the ends of the earth with you. Nobody would press the matter. We should catch Ember

out, and you and Raymond could go abroad for a bit. I don't see any other way out of it."

"You seem to me to be assuming a good deal, Henry," said Anthony Luttrell.

"I'm not assuming anything"—Henry's tone was very blunt. "I know three things."

"Yes?"

"One"—Henry ticked his facts off on the fingers of his left hand: "the passages are being used. Two: they've been wired for electric light. Three: Raymond has been through them, and quite lately. Those three facts, taken in conjunction with a deposition stating that something of a highly dangerous and anti-social nature is being manufactured on these premises, and under cover of the Government experiments—well, Tony, I don't suppose you want me to dot the 'i's' and cross the 't's.'"

"It never occurred to you that my father might have had the place wired, I suppose?"

"He didn't," said Henry. "It's no good, Tony. You can't bluff me, and I hate your trying to. There's only one way out of this. You've got to see Raymond."

Anthony made an impatient movement.

"You assume too much," he said, "but I'll put that on one side. From the cold, official standpoint, where does my interview with Lady Heritage come in? Wouldn't it rather

complicate matters? You appear to assume that there is a conspiracy, and then to suggest that I should warn one of the conspirators."

"No, I do not. I ask you to let Raymond know that you are alive, nothing more. In my view nothing more is necessary. She'll naturally think you are here to see her, and you can let her think so. As to the cold, official standpoint, the last thing that the department would want is a scandal about a woman in Raymond's position. Piggy would say what I say—for the Lord's sake get her out of it and let us have a free hand. She's an appalling complication."

"Women always are," said Anthony Luttrell in his bitter drawl.

He moved a pace or two away, and then turned back again. "You're not a bad sort in spite of the conscience, Henry," he said. "From your standpoint, what you've just said is sense—good, plain common sense—in fact, exactly the thing which one has no use for in certain moods."

"Scrap the moods, Tony," said Henry, in an expressionless voice.

Anthony laughed, rather harshly.

"My good Henry," he said—there was affection as well as mockery in his tone—"does one ask for one's temperament? Look here, I haven't seen Raymond because I haven't dared—I don't know what I might do or say if I did see her. Now that is the plain, unvarnished truth. When I was in Petrograd

I once hid for three days in a cellar with a temperamental Russian lady. There was nothing to do except to talk, and we talked endlessly. She told me a lot of home truths—said my nature was like a glacier, cold and slow, and that once I had got going I had to go on, even if I ground all my own dearest hopes to powder in doing so."

"In other words, if you've got a grouch, you're a devil to keep it," said Henry. "It's quite true; you always were. But, look here, Tony, why all this to my address? Why not get it off your chest to Raymond, and if you *will* deal in geological parallels, well—she's rather in the volcano line, or used to be, and I don't mind betting she'll blow your glacier to smithereens?" Henry looked at his watch.

"I must go," he said. "Think it over, Tony, and same place, to-morrow, same time."

He turned, without waiting for an answer, and walked into the darkness of the cave.

CHAPTER XVII

Jane went to her room that night, but she did not undress. Two entirely opposite lines of reasoning had ended in inducing one and the same decision. On the one hand, it might be argued that Lady Heritage and Mr. Ember, having passed the greater part of last night abroad upon their mysterious business, would be most unlikely to spend a second sleepless night so soon, and Jane might, therefore, count on finding the coast clear for a little exploring on her own account. On the other hand, an equally logical train of thought suggested that these midnight comings and goings might be part of a routine, and that Jane, if on the watch, might acquire some very valuable information.

She therefore locked her door and proceeded to consider the question of what she should wear with as much attention as if she had been going to a ball. Neither barefoot nor with only stockings would she go into any passage which had left those unpleasant dark stains upon Lady Heritage's overall. A really heartfelt shudder passed over her at the very idea. No, Renata possessed slippers of maroon felt. Misguided talent had stenciled upon the toe of one a Dutch boy in full trousers, and upon the toe of the other a Dutch girl in full petticoats. Jane had a fierce loathing for the slippers, but they had cork

soles and would at once keep out the damp and be very silent. She therefore placed them in readiness.

Prolonged hesitation between the claims of the crimson flannel dressing-gown and an aged blue serge dress resulted in a final selection of the latter. She decided that it would flap less, and that if it got stained and damp the housemaids would be less likely to notice it.

“Of course, on the other hand,” said Jane to herself, “if I’m caught, it absolutely does in any excuse about walking in my sleep, but I don’t think that’s an earthly, anyhow. If I’m caught, they’ll jolly well know what I was doing. The thing is not to be caught.”

At half-past eleven precisely she made her way down to the hall.

To-night there was no patch of moonlight to pass through, only a vague greyness which showed that the moon had risen and that the clouds outside were thin enough to let some of the light filter through.

Jane felt her way downstairs and across the hall to Sir William’s study. The study door afforded the nearest point from which she could watch what she called Willoughby Luttrell’s corner without exposing herself to detection.

She made up her mind that she would wait until she heard twelve strike, and then explore the corner. She had so thoroughly planned a period of waiting that it was with a feeling of shocked surprise that she became aware, even as

she reached and crossed the threshold of the study, that some one was coming down the stairs behind her.

If she had been one moment later, if she had stayed, as she very nearly did stay, to look out of the window and see whether the night was fair, they would have walked into one another at the top of the stairs. As it was, she had escaped by the very narrowest margin.

The door opened inwards, and she had just time to get behind it and close all but a crack, when through that crack she saw Raymond Heritage pass, wrapped in the same black cloak which she had worn the night before, only this time she wore beneath it, not her linen overall, but the dress she had worn for dinner. She held an electric lamp in her left hand.

As soon as she had passed the door, Jane opened it a little wider and came forward a step.

Lady Heritage went straight to the corner of the hall. She put the torch down upon a chair which stood immediately under Willoughby Luttrell's portrait. Then she went quite close to the wall and reached up, with her arms stretched out widely. Her right hand touched the bottom left-hand corner of the portrait and her left rested in the angle of the corner.

Jane heard the same click which she had heard the night before.

Lady Heritage stepped back, took up her light, and, going to the corner, pushed hard against the wall.

Jane watched with all her eyes, and saw a section of the panelling turn on some unseen pivot, leaving a narrow door through which Raymond passed. For a moment she stared at the lighter oblong in the wall; then there was a second click and the unbroken shadow once again.

Tingling with excitement, Jane stepped from her doorway and came to the corner. She must, oh she must, find the spring, and find it in time to follow. Raymond stood here and reached up, but she was tall, much taller than Jane. She stood on her tiptoes and could not reach the lowest edge of the portrait.

With the very greatest of care she moved the chair that was under the picture a yard or two to the left. It weighed as though it were made of lead instead of oak, and she was gasping as she set it down, but she had made no noise. Renata's cork soles slipped as she climbed on to the polished seat, but she gripped the solid back and did not fall.

Raymond had pressed something in the wall with both hands at once. Jane began to feel carefully along the lower edge of the portrait until she came to the massively foliated corner with its fat gilt acanthus leaves. A cross-piece of the panelling came just on the same level. She felt along it with light, sensitive finger-tips. There was a knot in the wood, but nothing else. "If there is another knot in the corner, I'll try pressing on them," she thought to herself, and on the instant her left hand found the second knot. She pressed with all her might, and for the third time that evening she heard the little scarcely audible click. This time it spelt victory.

In a curiously methodical manner Jane got down, put the chair carefully back into its place, and pushed against the wall as she had seen Lady Heritage do. The panelling yielded to her hand and swung inwards.

There was a black gap in the corner. Jane passed through it without any hesitation, and pulled the panelling to. She meant to leave it just ajar, but her hand must have shaken, or else there was some controlling spring, for as she stood in the black dark she heard the click again. She drew a long breath and stood motionless for a moment, but only for a moment. She had come there to follow Raymond Heritage, and follow her she would.

She put out a cautious foot and it went down, so far down that for a sickening instant she thought that she must overbalance and fall headlong; then, just in time, it touched a step, the first of ten which went down very steeply. At the bottom she felt her way round a corner, and then with intensest thankfulness she saw, a good way ahead, a moving figure with a light.

The passage that stretched before her was about six feet high and four feet wide. The air felt very damp and heavy. At intervals there were openings on the left-hand side where other passages seemed to branch off. Jane began to have a growing horror of these other passages. If she lost Lady Heritage, how would she ever find her way back, and—yet more horrid thought—who, or what, might at any moment come out of one of those dark tunnels behind her? It was at this point that she began to run, only to check herself severely. “She’ll hear you, you fool. Jane, I absolutely forbid

you to be such a fool; and Renata's slippers will come off if you run, nasty sloppy things, and then you'll tread in green slime, and get it between all your toes. *It will squelch.*" The horror of the black passages was eclipsed; Jane stopped running obediently, but she took longer steps and diminished the distance between herself and her unconscious guide.

The passage had begun to run uphill. Jane wondered where they were going. At any moment Lady Heritage might turn. If she did so, Jane must infallibly be caught unless she were near enough to one of the side tunnels. She went on with her heart in her mouth.

A line from one of Christina Rossetti's poems came into her head:

> "Does the road wind uphill all the way?
> Yes, to the very end."

"The sort of cheery thing one *would* remember," thought Jane to herself; and she continued to climb the endless slope, her eyes fixed on the dark, moving silhouette of Lady Heritage.

At last there was a pause. The light ceased to move. Jane crept closer, but dared not come too near. Next moment she saw what looked like a slab of stone in the passage wall swing round on a pivot as the panelling had done. Lady Heritage passed out of sight through the opening, and at the same moment a great breath of wind from the sea drove into the passage, clear, fresh, exquisite.

Jane hurried to the opening and looked out. She saw first the dark, curving walls of a small cave, and, immediately in front of her, the black outline of a bench, beyond that a stretch of uneven ground, a tangle of wire, and the black movement of the sea. The moon behind the clouds made a vague, dusky twilight, and the wind blew. Lady Heritage was standing just on the other side of the stone seat. It startled Jane to find that she was so near. She stood quite still looking at the shadowed water and the cloudy sky.

Then, without any warning, a tall, dark figure came into sight. To Jane it seemed as if it rose out of the ground. Afterwards she thought that, if any one had been sitting on the grass and then had risen, it would, of course, have looked like that. At the time she leaned against the rock for support and had much ado not to scream.

It was Lady Heritage who called out, with an inarticulate cry that mingled with the wind and was carried away.

The dark figure stood still just where it had so suddenly appeared, and in an instant Raymond had turned her light upon it. In the circle of light Jane saw a man—a tall man, bareheaded. He had thrown up his arm as if to screen his face, but it only hid the mouth and chin. Over it his eyes looked straight at Raymond Heritage.

And Raymond gave a great cry of “Anthony!” The light dropped from her hand, fell with a crash on the stones, rolled over, and went out. Anthony Luttrell did not stir, but Raymond began to move towards him after a strange rigid

fashion, and as she moved, she kept saying his name over and over:

“Tony—Tony—Tony—Tony.”

Her voice fell lower and lower. As she reached him it was nearly gone.

Jane turned from the stone wall where she was leaning, and stumbled back along the dark passage with the tears running down her face.

At that last whisper of his name, Anthony spoke:

“I’m not a ghost, Raymond. Did you think I was?”

They were so close together that if she had stretched out those groping hands another inch they would have touched him. Something in his tone set a barrier between them and Raymond’s hands fell empty. The world was whirling round her. Life and death, love and hate, their parting and this meeting were merged in a confusion that robbed her of thought and almost of consciousness. It seemed to her as if they had been standing there for a long, long time, or, rather, as if time had nothing to do with them, and they had been cast into a strange eternity. Out of the turmoil of her thought arose the remembrance of the last time she and Anthony had trysted in this place—a sky almost unbearably blue and the sea brilliant under the noonday sun. Now there was no light anywhere.

Anthony was alive. That should have been joy unbelievable. All through the years since she had read his name in the list

of missing with what an overwhelming surge of joy would her heart have lifted to the words, “Anthony is alive.” Now she said them to herself and felt only a deeper, more terrible sense of separation than any that had touched her yet. They stood together, and between them there was a gulf unpassable—and no light anywhere.

Raymond moved very slowly back along the way that she had come. She came to the stone seat, caught at the back of it with a hand that suddenly began to shake, and sat down. A few slow moments passed. Then she bent and began to grope for the torch which she had dropped.

Anthony came towards her.

“What is it?” he said, and she answered him in a low, fluttering voice:

“My light—I dropped—it’s so dark—I want the light.”

The strong, capable hand groping without aim stirred something in Anthony. He said, almost roughly:

“I’ll find it.”

Then a moment later he had picked it up, found it intact save for a crack in the glass, and, switching it on, put it down on the seat beside her.

He was not prepared for her immediately flashing the light on to his face. An exclamation broke from him, and to cover it he said:

“I am changed out of knowledge.”

“Changed—yes—Tony, that scar.”

Her voice trembled away into silence. Her hand fell. The dusk was between them.

“Ugly, isn’t it? But I haven’t the monopoly of change, have I? You, I think, have changed also.”

“Yes.”

With an impulse she hardly understood, she raised the light and turned it until her face and her bare throat were brilliantly illuminated. The dark cloak fell away a little. The dark eyes looked at him with defiance and appeal. Her beauty, seen like that, had something that startled; it was so devoid of life and colour, and yet so great! After a long, breathless minute Anthony said in his slow voice:

“You have changed more than I have, Lady Heritage, for you have changed your name.”

He saw the last vestige of colour leave her face. She put the lamp down, and her silence startled him.

“No one would have known me,” he said after a pause that was all strain.

“I knew you,” said Raymond very low.

“Only because the lower part of my face was hidden. You’d have passed me in daylight. You have passed me.”

She winced at that, turned the light full on to him again, and said:

“You are working in the laboratory—that’s—that’s why....” She broke off for a minute and went on with a sort of violence, “You say that I didn’t know you, but I did—I did. All this week I’ve been tormented with your presence. All this week I’ve felt you just at hand, just out of reach. I kept saying to myself, ‘Tony’s dead,’ and expecting to meet you round every corner. It was driving me mad.”

“It sounds most uncomfortable,” said Anthony dryly.

Raymond saw a mocking look pass over his face. She turned the light away and set it down. If she had not felt physically incapable of rising to her feet, she would have left him then. This was not Anthony at all, only the anger, the bitterness, the cold resentment which she had hated in him. These, not Anthony, had come back from the grave.

He was speaking again:

“Perhaps I shouldn’t ask, but ... are you expecting to meet any one here? Am I in the way?”

She answered him with a sort of heartbroken simplicity quite beyond pride:

“I don’t know what I expected. You were haunting me so. I came here because ... oh, Tony, don’t you remember at all?”

“I remember something that you appear to have forgotten, Raymond. When like a fool, and a

dishonourable fool at that, I gave you the secret of these passages, I remember very well the rather enthusiastic terms in which you asserted your conviction that the secret was a sacred trust, and one that you would keep absolutely inviolate. As, however, I broke my own trust in giving you the secret, I can, I suppose, hardly complain because you have imitated my lack of discretion."

Raymond did rise then.

"Tony, what do you mean?" she cried.

"My dear Raymond, you know very well what I mean."

"I do not." Her voice had risen; this was more the Raymond of their old quarrels, a creature quick to passionate anger, vehement and reckless.

"I say you know very well."

"And I say that I do not. That I haven't the shadow of an idea —and that you must explain, Tony; explain."

"Oh, I'll explain all right!"

The last word was almost lost in a battering gust of wind. He waited for it to die away, and then:

"How soon did you give away the secret to Ember?" he said, and heard her gasp.

"To Jeffrey—you think I told Jeffrey?"

Anthony laughed. It needed only her use of Ember's name.

"I know that you told Ember," he said in a voice like ice.

Raymond put her hands to her head. She pressed her throbbing temples and stared at this shadow of Anthony. It was beyond any nightmare that they should meet like this. She made a very great effort, and came up to him, touching his wrist, trying to take his hand.

"Tony, I don't know what you're thinking of. I don't know how you can speak to me like this. I don't know what you mean—I don't indeed. Since you went I have only been into the passages twice, last night and to-night. I went there because—oh, why do people go and weep upon a grave? I had no grave to go to, but I thought that, if I came here where we used to meet, perhaps the you that was haunting me would take shape so that I could see it, or else leave me. I felt driven, and I didn't know what was driving me."

In the breathless silence that followed she heard him say:

"I *know* that you told Ember"—and quite suddenly all the strength went out of her.

CHAPTER XVIII

When Jane turned, and ran back down the dark passage, she had just the one thought—to get away out of earshot. That she, or any one but Anthony Luttrell, should have heard that breaking tone in Raymond's voice shocked her profoundly. She felt guilty of having intruded upon the innermost sacred places of another woman's life. It shocked and moved her very deeply. Tears blinded her, and she ran into the dark without a thought for herself. It was only when, looking back, she could not see even a glimmer of outside twilight that she halted and began to think what she must do.

The practical was never very long in abeyance with Jane. She began to plan rapidly, even whilst she dried her eyes. She would feel her way to the foot of the stairs. If she kept touching the left-hand wall, there would be very little risk of losing her way. Only one passage had led off in that direction and that one diverged at right angles, so that she would not run the risk of going down it unawares. When she came to the foot of the stairs, she would turn back again and wait in the first cross-passage until Raymond passed. Then she would follow her up the steps and watch to see how the door opened on this side.

Jane was very much pleased with her plan when she had made it. It made her feel very intelligent and efficient. She began to put it into practice at once, walking quite quickly with her right hand feeling in front of her and the left just brushing the wall. Of course the stone was horrid to touch—cold, damp, slimy. She was sure the slime was green. Once she jabbed her finger on a rock splinter, and once she touched something soft which squirmed. The dark seemed to get darker and darker, and the silence was like a weight that she could hardly carry.

Her little glow of self-satisfaction died down and left her coldly afraid. Then, quite suddenly, she came to the cross-passage. Her fingers slid from the stone into black air, groped, stretched out, and touched—something—warm, alive.

Jane's gasping scream went echoing down the dark. A hand came up and caught her wrist, another fell upon her right shoulder.

"Jane, for the Lord's sake, hush!" said Henry's voice.

Jane caught her breath as if she were going to scream again.

"Henry, you utter, utter, *utter* beast!" she said, and incontinently burst into tears.

Henry put his arms round her, and Jane wept as she had never wept in her life, her face tightly pressed against the rough tweed of his coat sleeve, her whole figure shaking with tumultuous sobs.

Presently, when she was mopping her eyes and feeling quite desperately ashamed, she exclaimed:

“I had just touched a slug, and you were worse. I didn’t think anything could be worse than a slug, but you were.”

Henry had kissed the back of her neck twice while she was crying. Now he managed to kiss a little bit of damp cheek.

“You’re not to,” said Jane, in a muffled whisper.

“Why not?” said Henry, with the utmost simplicity. “You don’t mind it, you know you don’t.” He did it again. “Jane, if you had minded, you wouldn’t have clung to me like that. Jane darling, you do like me a little bit, don’t you?”

“Oh, I don’t! And I didn’t cling, I didn’t.”

“You did. Take it from me, you did.”

Jane made a very slight effort to detach herself. It was unsuccessful because Henry was a good deal stronger than she was and he held her firmly.

“Henry, I really hate you,” she said. “Any one might cling, if they thought it was a slug or Mr. Ember and then found it wasn’t.” Then, after a pause, “Henry, when a person says they hate you, it’s usual to let go of them.”

“My book of etiquette,” said Henry firmly, “says—page 163, para. ii.—‘A profession of hatred is more compromising than a confession of love; a woman who expresses hatred in words has love in her heart.’ And I really did see that in a

book yesterday, so it's bound to be true, isn't it?—isn't it, darling?"

"Henry, I told you to stop," said Jane; "I simply *won't* be kissed by a man I'm not engaged to."

"Oh, but we are," said Henry. "I mean you will, won't you?"

Jane came a very little nearer.

"We should quarrel," she said, "quite dreadfully. You know there are some people you feel you'd never quarrel with, not if you lived with them a hundred years; and there are others, well, you know from the very first minute that you'd quarrel with them and keep on doing it."

"Like we're doing now?" said Henry hopefully. Jane nodded. Of course Henry could not see the nod, but he felt it because it bumped his chin.

"All really happily married people quarrel," he said. "The really hopeless marriages are the polite ones. And you know you'll like quarrelling with me, Jane. We'll make up in between whiles, and there won't be a dull moment. Will you?"

"I don't mind promising to quarrel," said Jane. "No, Henry, you're positively not to kiss me any more. I'm here on business, if you're not. How did you get here? And why were you lurking here, pretending to be a slug?"

"Suppose you tell me first," said Henry. "How did *you* get here?"

“I followed Lady Heritage. I’ve got an immense amount to tell you.”

She leaned against Henry’s arm in the darkness, and spoke in a soft, eager voice:

“It really began yesterday. I woke up and couldn’t go to sleep again, so I came down for a book, and just as I was at the drawing-room door, I saw Lady Heritage come out of the corner by Willoughby Luttrell’s picture. Did you know there was a door there, Henry?”

“Yes. Go on.”

“She went upstairs, and I was trying to screw up my courage to cross the hall when Mr. Ember came down the stairs and disappeared into the same corner. Of course then I *knew* there must be a door there, so I made up my mind to come down to-night and look for it.”

“Jane, wait,” said Henry. “You say Ember came down the stairs and went through the door. Do you think Lady Heritage left it open? Or do you think he watched her come out, and then found the way for himself?”

“No,” said Jane; “neither. I mean I’m quite sure it wasn’t like that at all. She shut the door, for I heard it, and it certainly wasn’t the first time Mr. Ember had been that way. Why, he even put his light out before he came to the wall, and any one would have to know the way very well to find it in the dark.”

“Yes. Then what happened?”

“I went back to bed. Henry, you simply haven’t any idea how much I hated going up those stairs. There was a perfectly fiendish patch of moonlight, and I felt as if I couldn’t go through it and perhaps be pounced on by some one just round the corner. If it hadn’t been for the housemaids finding me in the morning, I believe I should just have stuck where I was.”

Henry’s arm tightened a little.

“Well, to-night I hid in the study quite early, but I had hardly got there when Lady Heritage came down. I watched to see what she did, and as soon as she had gone through the door and shut it, I hauled that great heavy chair along and climbed on to it, and found the spring. Your old secret door was made for much taller people than me, and I was just dreadfully frightened that some one would come and find me standing on the chair in the corner, and looking like a perfect fool. Oh, I *was* thankful when I really got into the passage and found that Lady Heritage was still in sight.”

“I think it was frightfully clever of you,” said Henry, “frightfully clever and frightfully brave; but you’re not to do it again. You might have run into Ember or any one.”

“Then you do believe there’s something dreadful going on,” said Jane quickly.

“I don’t know about what I believe, but I know that the passages are being used, and that they’ve been wired for electric light. I haven’t explored them yet, but people don’t do that sort of thing for nothing. Now go on. I may say that I saw Raymond pass, and you after her. What happened next?”

Jane hesitated.

“I’ll tell you,” she said. “She opened another door, and went out—why, it’s been puzzling me, but of course I know now, the passage leads to the headland. And the other day, when I was so frightened, Mr. Patterson must have come out of it; and he was there to-night.”

“Yes, go on. Did they meet?”

“Yes,” said Jane, in a queer, shy voice. “I couldn’t help hearing. I ran away at once, but I couldn’t help hearing her call him Tony. It’s your cousin, Anthony Luttrell, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s Tony,” said Henry. “Thank the Lord they’ve met. I’d just left him there after jawing him about seeing Raymond.”

“Oh, I hope they’ve made it up,” said Jane. “She looked so dreadfully unhappy last night that I felt I simply couldn’t bear it. It’s so dreadful to see people hurt like that, and not be able to do anything. Do you think they’ll make it up?”

“I hope so,” said Henry not very hopefully. “Tony’s a queer sort of fellow, you know—frightfully hard to move, and a perfect devil for hugging a grievance. He’s had a rotten time of it too. What with Raymond marrying some one else, and then getting knocked out himself, and coming round to find himself a prisoner—well, there wasn’t much to take his mind off it. He escaped three times before he actually got away, and then he went to Russia and had the

worst time of the lot. So that he's got a good deal of excuse for sticking to his grouch."

Jane suddenly pinched Henry very hard, put her lips quite close to his ear, and breathed:

"Some one's coming."

As she spoke Henry drew her noiselessly back a yard or two. The faint glow which Jane had seen brightened until it seemed dazzling. The arched entrance to the tunnel in which they stood became sharply defined. The light struck the opposite wall, showing it rough and black, with patches of dull green slime.

Instantly Jane felt that her finger-tips would never be clean again. As the thought shuddered through her mind the light went by. That's what it looked like, the passing of a light. Raymond's dark figure hardly showed behind it. The lighted archway faded. The darkness spread an even surface over everything again.

Jane laid her face against Henry's sleeve, pressed quite close to him, and said in a little voice that trembled:

"Oh, they haven't made it up—they haven't. He'd have come with her if they had."

"I'm afraid so."

"Of *course* he'd have come with her. You wouldn't have let me go by myself, you know you wouldn't. No, they haven't made it up, they can't have, and—oh,

Henry, why do people quarrel like that? You won't with me, will you—ever? I mean that dreadful world-without-end sort. I couldn't bear it. You won't, will you?"

Jane was shaking all over. Henry put his arms round her very tight, laid his cheek against hers, and said:

"Not much! It's a mug's game."

After a little while Jane said:

"I must go. You know she came to my room before, and last night when I got back I found the door shut. I had left it open so as not to make any noise, but it was shut when I got back. That frightened me more than anything, but now I think it must have been the wind that shut it. I think so, only I'm not sure. It might have been the wind, or it might have been ... somebody. It's much more frightening not to be sure. So I'd better go, hadn't I?"

"Yes, you must go," said Henry. "I'll come with you and show you how to get out. And you must promise me, Jane, that you won't come down here by yourself?"

"How can I promise? I might have to."

"Why?"

"I don't know why," said Jane, "but I might have to. Supposing they were murdering some one, and I heard the screams? Or suppose I knew that they were just going to blow the house up?"

“Well,” said Henry, with strong common sense, “I don’t see what good you’d do by getting murdered and blown up too, which is what it would come to. You really must promise me.”

“I really won’t.”

Henry gave her an exasperated shake.

“Look here, Jane,” he said, “the whole thing’s most infernally complicated. Tony’s chucking his job here, says he can’t stand it, and I must go back to town and see Piggy about that.”

“Who on earth is Piggy?” said Jane.

“Sir Julian Le Mesurier, my chief. Every one calls him Piggy. I must see him about Tony, and I also want to report what I told you about the passages being wired and in use. I’ll try and see Tony again before I go. You see the thing is, I don’t know how far Raymond is involved, and I want to get her out of the way. Tony’s the only man who can get her out of the way. I suppose I ought to go through all the passages to-night, but I’m not going to. I shall tell Piggy why. As a matter of fact, he’ll be just as keen as I am on getting Raymond out of it. Once she’s clear, we can come down on Ember like a cartload of bricks and smash up any devilry he may have been contriving. Now do you see why you must keep clear? I can’t possibly do my job if I’m torn in bits about your running into danger. And next time you went feeling along these passages you might really run into your friend Ember, you know.”

“I won’t unless I’ve got to,” said Jane. “You don’t imagine I like green slime, and slugs, and the pitch dark, do you? But I won’t promise. Now I’m going. Good-bye, Henry.”

“You’re an obstinate little devil, Jane,” said Henry.

Jane gave a little gurgling laugh.

“We haven’t made an assignation yet,” she said. “When are you coming back?”

“Well, I’ve made an appointment with Tony for to-morrow night, but I’ll try and catch him now and put that off for twenty-four hours. If for any reason I have to come down sooner, I will come and tap on your cupboard door. If I’m not there by midnight to-morrow, don’t expect me. But I’ll be there for certain the following night—let me see, that’s Sunday.”

“But if you don’t come?”

“I will.”

“Well, just supposing something prevented you?”

“It won’t,” said Henry cheerfully.

CHAPTER XIX

Henry found Anthony Luttrell sitting on the stone bench and so oblivious of his surroundings that it needed a hand on his shoulder to rouse him. Then he said vaguely:

“Oh, you’re back.”

“Rouse up a bit, Tony. It might have been Mr. Jeffrey Ember, you know. He was in the passages last night, and, for all I know, he may be there every night. I came back to say that I shan’t be down to-morrow. Make our appointment Sunday night instead.”

“I want to be out of this by then,” said Anthony. “I’ll go sick if there’s no other way. Stay here another forty-eight hours I cannot, and will not. I tell you I can’t answer for myself.”

Henry gave an inward groan. Jane had evidently been entirely right. They had not made it up.

“You’ve seen Raymond. I saw her pass.”

“I’ve seen ... Lady Heritage. Henry, will you tell me what the devil women are made of? She seemed to expect to take things up exactly as if the last seven years had never been at

all, exactly as if there had been no breach, no war, no John Heritage, and no Jeffrey Ember. Oh, damn Jeffrey Ember!...”

“And I suppose you stood there and fired off sarcastic remarks at the poor girl, instead of thanking heaven for your luck. What’s the good of brooding over the past, Tony, and letting it spoil everything for you now? Raymond cares a heap more for you than you deserve, and if she’s got into a mess, it’s up to you to get her out of it. After all, you don’t want a scandal, do you?”

“I’ve got to get away. It’s no good, Henry.”

“I’ll give Piggy your letter,” Henry went on, “and tell him how you feel. He’ll recall you all right. But I know he’s very strong on your coming to life again. You ought to have done it ages ago; when you came back from Russia, in fact. Look here, Tony, be a reasonable being. Shave off your beard, and take the artistic colour off that scar. Turn up in London as yourself, and wire Raymond to come up and meet you. I want her got away from here.”

“Then get Piggy to wire to her, or her father. There are a dozen ways in which it can be done. I refuse quite definitely to have anything to do with it. If Piggy hasn’t recalled me by Monday, I shall simply go. You can tell him that, if you like; and you can tell him that I shall probably kill some one if I stay here.”

Without another word he got up, walked round the seat, and disappeared into the passage.

A little later Henry emerged from a cave upon the seashore. There were a number of these caves, some large, some small, under the far side of the headland.

The boundary of Luttrell Marches lay a quarter of a mile behind.

Henry walked briskly along the shore, keeping close to the cliff so that he might walk on rock instead of shingle. Presently he left the beach and climbed a steep zigzagging path. Twenty minutes' walk brought him to a small inn where he picked up his car and drove away.

Next day in Sir Julian's room he unburdened himself and delivered Anthony's letter.

"'M, yes; I'll recall him," said Piggy frowning. "He's no good where he is, if that's his frame of mind. But it's a pity—a pity. It bears out exactly what I've always said. He has extraordinary abilities; I suppose he might have made a brilliant success in almost any profession, but he's *impayable*.... I don't think we've got a word for it in English ...; he lacks the vein of mediocrity which I maintain is indispensable—the faculty of being ordinary which, for instance, you possess."

Henry blushed a little, and Sir Julian laughed.

"I think I'll send him abroad again. Of course it's high time he came to life, as you say, if it's only for the sake of getting you out of what must be an extremely awkward position. My wife tells me that match-making mammas of her

acquaintance regard you with romantic interest as the owner of Luttrell Marches. Well, I'll see him when he comes up. Meanwhile, I've had Simpson's report. He says that, according to reliable information, two men were concerned in the sale of Formula 'A.' One is a man called Belcovitch, the other, who seems to have kept in the background, is described as a big good-looking man—florid complexion, blue eyes, either English or American, though he passed under the name of Bernier and professed to be Swiss. Does that fit your friend Ember by any chance?"

"No," said Henry, "but it sounds very much like Molloy."

"Molloy was supposed to have gone to the States, wasn't he?"

Piggy had been drawing a neat brick wall at the foot of a sheet of foolscap. He now sketched in rapidly two fighting cats. It was a spirited performance. Each cat had wildly up-ended fur and a waving tail.

"Well, he and Ember told Miss Smith that he was going to the States. I don't know that that goes for very much."

"'M, no," said Piggy. "Well, Bernier passed through Paris yesterday, and is in London to-day. Belcovitch has gone to Vienna. Now, if Bernier is Molloy, he'll probably communicate with Ember. I was having him shadowed, of course, but the fool who was on the job has managed to let him slip. I'm hoping to pick him up again, but meanwhile...."

Piggy was putting in the cats' claws as he spoke, his enormous hand absolutely steady over the delicate curves and sharp points.

"There's nothing more about Ember?" said Henry.

Sir Julian shook his head, and went on drawing. "He wore the white flower of a blameless life in Chicago, and was absolutely unknown to the police," he said. "There's a three-volume novel about Molloy, though. You'd better have it to read. Now you go off and have some sleep, and ... er, by the way, if Miss Smith ... what's her other name?"

"Jane," said Henry.

"Well, if she wants to get away at any time, my wife will be very pleased to put her up."

"Thank you awfully, sir," said Henry.

When he had gone, Sir Julian asked the Exchange for his private number. He sat holding the receiver to his ear and touching up his cats until Isobel's voice said:

"Yes, who is it?"

Then he said:

"M' dear, in the matter of Henry."

"Yes? Has anything happened?"

“In the matter of Henry,” said Piggy firmly, “I should say, from his conscious expression, that he had brought it off. Her name is Jane Smith.”

“And I mayn’t ask any questions?”

“Not one. I just thought you’d better know her name in case she suddenly arrived to stay with you. That’s all. I shall be late.”

He rang off.

CHAPTER XX

It was not till next day that Jane missed her handkerchief. When she reached her room after saying good-bye to Henry she had rolled the serge dress, the wet felt slippers and the damp stockings into a bundle, and pushed them right to the back of her cupboard. She was so sleepy that she hardly knew how she undressed.

The instant her head touched the pillow, she slept, a pleasant, dreamless sleep, and only woke with the housemaid's knock.

It was when she was drinking a very welcome cup of tea that she began to wonder whether she was engaged to Henry or not. On the one hand, Henry undoubtedly appeared to think that she was; on the other, Jane felt perfectly satisfied that she had pledged herself to nothing more formidable than a promise to quarrel. A small but very becoming dimple appeared in Jane's cheek as she came to the conclusion that Henry was possibly engaged to her, but that she was certainly not engaged to Henry. It seemed to her to be a very pleasant state of affairs. It was, in fact, with great reluctance that she transferred her thoughts to more practical matters.

Having dressed, she extracted the bundle of clothes from the cupboard, and decided that the serge dress

might be hung up. There were one or two damp patches and several green smears, but the former would dry and the latter when dry would brush off.

“But the slippers are awful,” she said.

They were; the cork soles sopping wet, the felt drenched and slimy. She made a brown paper parcel of them, and put it at the extreme back of the cupboard. The stockings she consigned to the clothes basket.

“I can wash them out later on,” she thought.

It was at this point that she missed her handkerchief. She had had a handkerchief the night before. She was sure of that, because she remembered drying her eyes with it after she had cried.

A little colour came into her face at the recollection of how vehemently she had wept on Henry’s shoulder with Henry’s arm round her, but it died again at the insistently recurring thought:

“I had a handkerchief. I dried my eyes with it. Where is it?”

Not only had she dried her eyes with it, but after that she remembered scrubbing the finger-tips that had touched the slug. The handkerchief must be horribly smeared and wet. It was one of Renata’s, of course, white with a blue check border, and “R. Molloy, 12” in marking-ink across one corner. Imagine buying twelve horrors like that! Mercifully Renata must have lost most of them, for Jane had only inherited four.

She brought her thoughts back with a jerk. Where was it? If she had dropped it in the house it would have been either in the hall, on the stairs, or in the corridor, and one of the housemaids would have brought it to her by now. It must have fallen in the cross-passage where she had stood with Henry, and if it were found....

Jane moved a step or two backwards, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Of all the first-class prize *idiots*!" she said, and there words failed her.

If she had dropped it in the cross-passage, it might lie there until Sunday night when she could get Henry to retrieve it, or it might not. Ember—Lady Heritage—Anthony Luttrell, any one of these three people might have business in that cross-passage, in which case a handkerchief, even if stained, was just the most unlikely thing in the world to pass unnoticed. Even if no one went up that passage, it might be seen from the main tunnel. Of course, if it were Anthony Luttrell who found it, it would not matter. But it was so very much more likely to be one of the others.

At intervals during the morning, Jane continued to argue the question, or rather two questions. First, the probabilities for and against the handkerchief being discovered; and second, should she, or should she not, go and look for it herself in defiance of Henry's prohibition? She had spoken the truth, but not the whole truth, when she told Henry that she hated the idea of going into the passages alone. She hated going, but she wanted to go. Most ardently she desired to find

things out before Henry found them out. It would be nice and safe to sit with her hands in her lap whilst Henry explored secret subterranean caverns, and unravelled dangerous conspiracies—safe but hideously dull. When Henry had finished exploring and unravelling, he would come along frightfully pleased with himself and want her to be engaged to him, and he would always, always feel superior and convinced that he had done the whole thing himself. It was a most intolerable thought, more intolerable than green slime and being alone in the dark. It was at this point that Jane made up her mind that she would go and look for her handkerchief herself without waiting for Henry.

Having made her decision, she found an unlooked-for opportunity for carrying it out, for at lunch Lady Heritage announced her intention of putting in several hours of laboratory work, whilst it transpired that Ember was going out in the two-seater car which he drove himself, and that he was quite uncertain when he would be back. Jane at once made up her mind that, as soon as the coast was quite clear, she would slip down into the passages. She would wait until lunch had been cleared and the servants were safely out of the way. No one was likely to come into the hall, and the whole thing would be so much less terrifying than another midnight expedition.

Ember excused himself before lunch was over, and she heard him drive away a few minutes later; but Lady Heritage sat on, her untasted coffee beside her. She sat with her chin in her hand, looking out of the window, and it was obvious enough that her thoughts were far away. She was probably unconscious of Jane’s presence, certainly undesirous of it,

and yet, for the life of her, Jane could not have risen or asked if she might go. Once or twice she looked from under her lashes at Raymond's still white face. There was a new look upon it since yesterday. She was sadder and yet softer. She looked as if she had not slept at all.

After a very long half-hour she turned her eyes on Jane. There was a flash of surprise and then a frown.

"You needn't have waited," she said in a cold voice, and then got up and went out without another word.

Jane took a book into the hall and sat there.

Presently she caught a glimpse of Raymond's white overall in the upper corridor, and heard the clang with which the steel gate closed behind her. She sat quite still and went on reading until all sounds from the direction of the dining-room had ceased. Silence settled upon the house, and she told herself that this was her opportunity.

She ran up to her room, changed into the serge dress, and put on a pair of outdoor shoes. She did not possess an electric torch, and the question of a light had exercised her a good deal. The best she could do was to pocket a box of matches and one of the bedroom candles which was half burnt down. She then went downstairs, and, after listening anxiously for some moments, she once more moved the heavy chair and, climbing on it, began to feel for the knots on the panelling. As her fingers found and pressed them, she heard, simultaneously with the click of the released spring, a faint thudding noise. With a spasm of horror she knew that some

one had passed through the baize door that shut off the servants' wing. The sound she had heard was the sound of the door falling back into place, and at any other moment it would have gone unnoticed.

Fortunately for herself Jane was accustomed to a rapid transition from thought to action. She was off the chair, across the hall, and sitting with a book on her lap when the butler made his usual rather slow entrance.

She had recognised at once that it would be impossible for her to replace the chair and escape discovery. It stood in the shadow, and she hoped for the best.

Blotson crossed the hall and disappeared into Sir William's study.

Jane gazed at a printed page upon which the letters of the alphabet were playing "General post." After some interminable minutes Blotson reappeared. He shut the study door, approached Jane, and in a low and confidential voice inquired would she have tea in the hall, the drawing-room, or the library.

"Oh, the library," said Jane, "the library, Blotson." And with a majestic, "Very good, miss," Blotson withdrew.

Blotson's "Very good" always reminded Jane of the Royal Assent to an Act of Parliament. It was doubtless a form, but how stately, how dignified a form.

When the chill superinduced by the presence of Blotson had yielded to a more natural temperature, Jane went on tiptoe

across the hall and replaced the chair. It was a comfort to reflect that it had escaped Blotson's all-embracing eye. With a hasty glance she swung the panel inwards, slipped through, and closed it again.

She descended all the steps before she ventured to light her candle, and she was careful to put the spent match into her pocket. Renata's dress really did have a pocket, which, of course, made the dropping of the handkerchief quite inexcusable.

The passage was much less terrifying when one had a light of one's own instead of the distant glimmer of somebody else's and the horrid possibility of being left at any moment in total darkness, with no idea of one's whereabouts or of how to get out.

Jane's spirits rose brightly. To dread a thing and then to find it easy provides one with a pleasant sense of difficulty overcome. In great cheerfulness of spirit Jane walked along until she came to the cross-passage on her right. She turned up it, walked a few steps holding her candle high, and there, a couple of yards from the entrance, lay the handkerchief rolled into a wet and very dirty ball. She picked it up gingerly, and put it into her convenient pocket.

"And I suppose I ought to go back at once; but what a waste, when every one is safely out of the way, and I've got through the really horrid part, which is opening that abominable spring."

Jane hesitated, weighing the duty of a swift return against the pleasure of exploring and perhaps getting ahead of Henry. The recollection that Henry had forbidden her to explore turned the scale—towards pleasure.

She had four inches of candle and a whole box of matches. She had at least two hours of liberty, and, most important of all, she felt herself to be in a frame of mind which invited success. The question was where to begin.

On the right-hand side there was only this single passage. Jane did not feel attracted by it. She was almost sure that it must lead to the potting-shed, and to descend from conspiracies to garden lumber would indeed be an anti-climax.

On the left there were four passages. Jane walked back along the way she had come. The first passage left the main tunnel at an acute angle which obviously carried it back under the main block of the house. Jane decided to explore it. She held her candle high in one hand and her skirts close with the other. The passage was low, and she had to bend a little. After half a dozen yards she came to a flight of steps. They were wet, slippery, and very steep. Jane stood on the top step and looked down.

The walls oozed moisture, the candlelight showed her a pale slug about five inches long—Jane said six to start with, but, under pressure from Henry, retreated as far as five and would not yield another half-inch; she also said that the slug waved its horns at her and was crawling in her direction. Right there, as the Americans say, she made up her mind that this

would be a good passage to explore with Henry, later on. She caught a glimpse of another slug on a level with the fifth step, whisked round, and ran.

“The *one* point about slugs is that they can’t run,” she said as she came back into the main corridor.

Without giving herself time to think, she plunged into the next opening on the left. It ran at right angles to the central passage, and was comparatively dry. It kept on the same level too, and Jane, trying to make a mental plan, thought that it must run under the house, cutting across the north wing. It occurred to her that there might be vaults of some kind under the terrace, and that this passage would perhaps lead to them. If this were so, it must soon either curve gradually to the left or take a sudden sharp turn. She wished she had thought of counting her steps, but it was difficult to pace regularly on a slippery floor and in such a poor light.

Just as she had begun to think that the passage must run out to sea, she came to the sharp turn which she had expected. A wall of black rock faced her, to her right a tunnel ran in at a sharp angle, and to her left there was a dark stone arch, a few feet of a new sort of tunnel built of brick, and then a steel gate exactly like the gates which shut off the laboratories in the house above.

Jane stared at the gate as if she expected it to dissolve into the surrounding darkness. The candlelight danced on the steel. It was rusty, but not so very rusty, and therefore it could not have been for very long in its present position. She came closer and touched it. It was real.

Her amazing good fortune almost overcame her. What a thing to tell Henry! What a justification for flouting his orders!! *What a score!!!*

Jane transferred the candle to her left hand, put out a right hand which trembled with excitement, and tried the gate. It was open. For a moment she drew back. Like the child who sits looking at a birthday parcel, the mere sight of which provides it with so many thrills that it cannot bring itself to cut the string and unwrap the paper, Jane stood and looked at her gate, her discovery—hers, not Henry's.

As she looked, her eyes were caught by a small knob on the right-hand wall. It was about four feet above the floor and quite close to the steel bars. It was made of some dull metal and looked exactly like an electric-light switch. By going quite close to the gate and looking through she could see that a cased wire ran along the bricks on the same level, and she remembered that Henry had said the passages were wired.

Had Henry been first on the field after all? She turned, held her light high, and looked back. The wire went up to the roof and ran along until she lost it in the darkness. She reflected hopefully that Henry might have seen the wire much farther along, and turned back again.

Her fingers were on the switch when a really dreadful thought pricked her. Suppose the switch controlled some horrible explosive! It might turn on a light, most likely it did; but, on the other hand, it might let loose a raging demon of destruction that would blow the whole place to smithereens. It was an unreasonable thought, the sort of thought that one

dismisses instantly in the daylight, but which by candlelight in an underground tunnel assumes a certain degree of credibility.

“The question is, am I going on or not?”

The silence having failed to supply her with an answer, she said viciously, “You’re a worse rabbit than Renata,” shut her eyes, held her breath, and jerked the switch down.

Through her closed lids came a red flash. She clung to the switch and waited. A drop of boiling wax guttered down upon her left forefinger. She opened her eyes and saw the steel gate like a black tracery against a lighted space beyond. With a quickly drawn breath of relief she pushed the steel gate, took one step forward, and then stood rigid, listening to the muffled yet insistent whir of an alarm bell. After one horrified moment she pulled the door towards her again. The sound ceased. Jane considered.

As a result of her consideration she turned out the electric light, opened the gate, slipped through, and closed it again so quickly that the bell was hardly heard. She did not allow it to latch, and, stooping, set a piece of broken brick to hold it ajar. The candlelight seemed very inadequate, but she decided that she must make it do, and holding it well up in front of her, she came through a brick arch into a long chamber with walls of stone.

Jane looked about her with ignorant, widely opened eyes. She had never been in a laboratory, but she knew that this must be one. The printed page does not exist for nothing. The

vague yellow light flickered on strange cylindrical shapes and was flung back by glass jars and odd twisted retorts. A great many appliances, for which she could find no name, emerged from dense shadow into the uncertain dusk.

“It’s like a mediæval torture chamber—only worse, colder—more calculating! It’s a sort of torture chamber. I *hate* it. It gives me the grues,” said Jane.

She moved slowly down the room. It was quite dry in here. There was no slime, and there were no slugs.

“I hate it a thousand times more than the passages,” she said.

Her feet moved slowly and unwillingly. In the far corner there were two more arches. She thought she would just see what lay beyond them and then return. She took the one on the right hand first. It ran along a little way and then terminated in a small round chamber which was full of packing-cases. She returned and went down the second passage. She was just inside it when with startling suddenness she found herself looking at her own shadow. It lay clear and black on the brick floor in front of her. Some one had turned on the electric light.

Jane’s candle tilted and the wax dropped. Her horrified eyes looked about wildly for a place of refuge. The light showed her one. Within a yard of the entrance there was an arched hollow. With a sort of gasp she blew her candle out and bolted for the shelter. The whir of the electric bell sounded as she gained it, sounded and then ceased. She heard Ember say, “Quite a good run, wasn’t it?” and a voice which

she did not expect answer, “Well enough.” The voice puzzled her. It was a pleasant voice, deep and rich. It had something of a brogue and something of a twang.

A most unpleasant light broke upon Jane. It was the voice of the Anarchist Uncle. It was the voice of Mr. Molloy.

Jane got as far back into her hollow as she could. It was not very far. There had evidently been a tunnel here, but the roof had fallen in, and the floor was rough and uneven with the débris.

She heard the two men moving in the room beyond, and she experienced a most sincere repentance for not having attended to the counsels of Henry.

“And now we can talk,” said Ember. “You’ve got the cash?”

“Not with me,” said Mr. Molloy.

“Why not?”

“Oh, just in case....”—a not unmelodious whistle completed the sentence.

“They paid the higher figure?”

“They did,” said Mr. Molloy. “Belcovitch was for taking their second bid, but I told him ‘No.’ Belcovitch has his points, but he’s not the bold bargainer. I told him ‘No.’ I told him ‘It’s this way—if they want it they’ll pay our price.’ And pay it they did. I don’t know that

I ever handled that much money before, and all for a sheet or two of paper. Well, well——”

“You should have brought the money with you. Why didn’t you?”

In the now brightly lighted laboratory Molloy sat negligently on the end of a bench and lifted his eyebrows a little.

“Well, I didn’t,” he said.

“Where is it?”

“In a place of safety.”

Ember shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, we’ve pulled it off,” he said. “By the way, the fact of the sale is known. We’ve had an interfering young jack-in-office down here making inquiries, and Sir William has gone up to town in a very considerable state of nerves.”

“The Anarchist Uncle,” said Jane to herself, “has been selling the Government Formula ‘A.’ He doesn’t trust Mr. Ember enough to hand the money over. Pleasant relations I’ve got!”

Molloy whistled again, a long-drawn note with a hint of dismay in it.

“I wonder who let the cat out of the bag,” he said.

“These things always leak out. It doesn’t really signify. With this money at our command we can complete our arrangements at once, and be ready to strike within the next few weeks. You and Belcovitch had better keep out of the way until the time comes. He should be here in four days’ time, travelling by the route we settled; then you’ll have company. You must both lie close here.”

“That’s the devil of a plan now, Ember,” said Molloy. “We’ll be no better than rats in a drain.”

“Well, it’s for your safety,” said Ember. “They’re out for blood over this business of Formula ‘A,’ I can tell you, and there’s nowhere you’d be half so safe.”

Jane was listening with all her ears. She decided that Mr. Ember’s solicitude was not all on Molloy’s account. “He thinks that if Molloy and Belcovitch are arrested, they’ll give him away over the big thing in order to save themselves. I expect they’d be able to make a pretty good bargain for themselves, really.” She heard Molloy give a sulky assent. Then Ember was speaking again:

“I want to check the lists with you. Not the continental ones —I’ll keep those for Belcovitch—but those for the States and here. I’ve got them complete now, but I’m not very sure about all the names. Hennessey now, he’s down for Chicago, but I don’t know that I altogether trust Hennessey.”

“It’s late in the day to say that,” said Molloy.

“Well, what about Hayling Taylor?”

Jane listened, and heard name follow name. Ember appeared to be reading from a list. He would name a large town and follow it with a list of persons who apparently acted as agents there. Sometimes these names were passed with an assenting grunt by Molloy, sometimes there was a discussion.

There are a great many large towns in the United States of America. Jane became stiffer and stiffer. At last she could bear her constrained half-crouching position no longer. Very gingerly, moving half an inch at a time, she let herself down until she was sitting on the pile of broken bricks which blocked the tunnel. The names went on. It was dull and monotonous to a degree, but behind the dullness and the monotony there was a sense of lurking horror.

“It’s like being in a fog,” said Jane—“the sort you can’t see through at all, and knowing that there’s a tiger loose somewhere.”

One thing became clearer and clearer to her. Those lists that sounded like geography lessons must be got hold of somehow. Henry must have them.

After what seemed like a long time Ember folded up one paper and produced another. If Jane had been able to watch Mr. Molloy’s face, she would have noticed that, every now and then, it was crossed by a look of hesitation. He seemed constantly about to speak and yet held his peace.

“I’d like you to check the names for Ireland too,” said Ember. “Grogan sent me the completed list two days ago.

You'd better look at it."

Molloy took the paper and ran his finger down the names, mumbling them only half audibly. His finger travelled more and more slowly. All at once he stopped, and threw the paper from him along the bench.

"What is it?" said Ember, in his cool tones.

Molloy frowned, got up, walked to the end of the room, and came back again. He appeared to have something to say, and to experience extreme difficulty in saying it. His words, when he did speak, seemed irrelevant:

"That's a big sum they paid us for Formula 'A,'" he said. "Did you ever handle as much money as that, Ember?"

"No," said Jeffrey Ember, short and sharp.

"Nor I. It's a queer thing the feeling it gives you. I tell you I came across with fear upon me, not knowing for sure whether I'd get away with it; but there was a lot besides fear in it. There was power, Ember, I tell you—power. Whilst I'd be sitting in the train, or walking down the street, or lying in my bed at an hotel, I'd be thinking to myself, I've got as much as would buy you up, and then there would be leavings."

"What are you driving at, Molloy?" said Ember.

Molloy's florid colour deepened. He narrowed his lids and looked through them at Ember.

“Maybe I was thinking,” he said, “that there’s a proverb we might take note of.”

“Well?”

“It’s just a proverb,” said Mr. Molloy. “It’s been in my mind since I had the handling of the money—‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’”

Ember’s eyes lost their dull film. They brightened until Mr. Molloy was unable to sustain their glance. He shifted his gaze, and Ember said very quietly:

“Are you thinking of selling us?”

Molloy broke into an oath. “And that’s a thing no one shall say of me,” he said, with a violence that sent his voice echoing along through the open arches.

“Then may I ask you what you meant?”

“Why, just this.” Molloy dropped to an ingratiating tone. “There’s the money safe—certain—in our hands now. What’s the need of all this?”

He came forward with two or three great strides, picked up the list from where he had thrown it, and beat with it upon his open hand.

“All this,” he repeated—“this and what it stands for. You may say there’s no risk, but there’s a big risk. It’s a gamble, and what’s the need to be gambling when we’ve got the money safe?”

“In plain English, you want to back out at the last moment?”

“I do not, and I defy you to say that I do.”

“Then what’s come to you?”

“Here’s the thing that’s come to me. It came to me when I ran me eye down this list. See there, and that’ll tell ye what has come to me.”

He thrust the list in front of Ember.

“It’s Galway you’ve got set down there.”

“Well, and what of it?” said Ember.

“What of it?” said Mr. Molloy. “I was born in Galway, and the only sister I ever had is married there. Four sons she has, decent young men by all the accounts I’ve had of them. If I haven’t been in Galway for thirty years, that’s not to say that I’ve no feeling for my own flesh and blood. Why, the first girl I ever courted lived out Barna way. Many’s the time I’ve met her in the dusk on the seashore, and she half crying for fear of what her father would do. Katie Blake her name was. They married her to old Timmy Dolan before I’d been six months out of the country. A fistful of gold he had, and a hard fist it was. I heard tell he beat her, poor Katie. But ye see now, Ember, it’s the same way with your native place and your first love, ye can’t get quit of them. Now I hadn’t been a month in Chicago before I was courting another girl, but to save my neck I couldn’t tell ye what her name was, and ye may blow Chicago to hell to-morrow and I’ll not say a word.”

“But not Galway?” Mr. Ember’s tone was very dry indeed.

“You’ve said it. Not Galway. I’ll not stand for it.”

Ember laughed. It was a laugh without merriment, cool, sarcastic.

“Molloy, the man of sentiment!” he said. “Now doesn’t it strike you that it’s just a little late in the day for this display of feeling? May I ask why you never raised the interesting subject of your birthplace before?”

“Is it sentiment that you’re sarcastic about?” said Molloy. “If it is, I’d have you remember that I’ve never let it interfere with business yet, and I wouldn’t now. Many’s the time I’ve put my feelings on one side when I was up against a business proposition. But I tell you right here that when I see my way to good money and to keeping what I call my sentiment too it looks pretty good to me, and I say to myself what I say to you, ‘What’s the sense of going looking for trouble?’”

Ember laughed again.

“I will translate,” he said. “From the sale of the Government formula you see your way to deriving a competency. You become, in a mild way, a capitalist. Luxuries before undreamed of are within your grasp—romantic sentiment, childhood’s memories, the finer feelings in fact. As a poor man you could not dream of affording them, though I dare say you’d have enjoyed them well enough. Is it a correct translation?”

“It is,” said Molloy.

“Molloy the capitalist!” Ember’s voice dropped just a little lower. “Molloy the man of sentiment! Molloy the traitor! No you don’t, Molloy, I’ve got you covered. Why, you fool, you don’t suppose I meet a man twice my own size in a place that no one knows of without taking the obvious precautions?”

Molloy had first started violently, and next made a sort of plunge in Ember’s direction. At the sight of the small automatic pistol he checked himself, backed a pace or two, and said:

“You’ll take that word back. It’s a damned lie.”

He breathed hard and stared at the pistol in Ember’s hand.

“Is it?” said Ember coolly. “I hope it is, for your sake. I’d remind you, Molloy, that no one would move heaven and earth to find you if you disappeared, and that it would be hard to find a handier place for the disposal of a superfluous corpse. Now listen to me.”

He set his left hand open on the lists.

“This is going through. It’s going through in every detail. It’s going through just as we planned it.” He spoke in level, expressionless tones. He looked at Molloy with a level, expressionless gaze. A little of the colour went out of the big Irishman’s face. He drew a long breath, and came to heel like a dog whose master calls him.

“Have it your own way,” he said. “It was just talk, and to see what you thought of it. If you’re set on the plan, why the plan it is.”

“We’re all committed to the plan,” said Ember. “You were talking a while ago as if you and I could do a deal and leave the rest of the Council out. Setting Belcovitch on one side, weren’t you forgetting to reckon with Number One?”

“Maybe I was,” said Molloy. “And come to that, Ember, when are we to have the full Council meeting you’ve been talking of for months past? Belcovitch and I had a word about it, and he agrees with me. We want a full meeting and Number One in the chair instead of getting all our instructions through you. It’s reasonable.”

“Yes, it’s reasonable.” Ember paused, and then added, “You shall have the full Council when Belcovitch comes.”

Jane on her pile of débris leaned forward to catch the words. Ember’s voice had dropped very low. She was shaking with excitement. Her movement was not quite a steady one. A small piece of rubble slid under the pressure she placed on it. Something slipped and rolled.

“What’s that?” said Ember sharply.

“Some more of the passage falling in,” said Molloy, “by the sound of it.”

“Just take a light and see.”

“It might have been a rat,” said Molloy carelessly.

There was a pause. Jane remained absolutely motionless. If they thought it was a rat perhaps they would not come and look. She stiffened herself, wondering how long she could keep this cramped position. Then, with a spasm of terror, she heard Molloy say, “I’ll have a look round. We don’t want rats in here,” heard his heavy footfall, and saw a brilliant beam of light stream past the entrance of her hiding-place.

Before she had time to do more than experience a stab of fear, Molloy walked straight past. She heard him go up the passage, heard him call out, “There’s nothing here.” Then he turned. He was coming back. Would he pass her again? It was just possible. She tried to think he would, and then she knew that he would not. The light flashed into the broken tunnel mouth. It flashed on the sagging roof, the damp walls and the broken rubble. It flashed on to Jane.

Jane saw only a white glare. She knew exactly what a beetle must feel like when it is pinned out as a specimen. The light went through and through her. It seemed to deprive her of thought, volition, power to move. She just stared at it.

Mr. Molloy using his flashlight cheerfully, and much relieved at a break in his conversation with Ember, received one of the severest shocks of his not unadventurous life. One is not a Terrorist for thirty years without learning a little elementary self-control in moments of emergency. He did not therefore exclaim. He merely stared. He saw a sagging roof and damp walls. He saw a muddled heap of broken bricks unnaturally clear cut and distinct. He saw the shadows which they cast,

unnaturally black and hard. He saw Jane, whom he took to be his daughter Renata. His brain boggled at it. He passed his hand across his eyes, and looked again. His daughter Renata was still there. She was half sitting, half crouching on the pile of rubble. Her body was bent forward, her elbows resting on her knees, her hands one on either side of her colourless cheeks. Her face was tilted a little looking up at him. Her mouth was a little open. Her eyes stared into the light.

Jane stared, and Mr. Molloy stared. Then, with a sudden turn he swung round and passed back into the laboratory. As he went he whistled the air of "The Cruiskeen Lawn."

Jane remained rigid. The beetle was unpinned. The light was gone. But the darkness was full of rockets and Catherine-wheels. Her ears were buzzing. From a long way off she heard Ember speak and Molloy answer. The rockets and the Catherine-wheels died away. She put her head down on her knees, and the darkness came back restfully.

CHAPTER XXI

The clang of the steel gate was the next really distinct impression which Jane received. In a moment she was herself. It was just as if she had been asleep, and then, to the jar of a striking clock, had come broad awake. She listened intently.

That clang meant that the gate had been shut. One of the men had gone, probably Ember. One of them certainly remained, for she could see that the lights in the laboratory were still on. If it were Molloy, he would come and find her. But it was just possible that it was Jeffrey Ember who had remained behind, so she must keep absolutely still, she knew.

At this moment Jane felt that she had really had as much adventure as she wanted for one day. She thought meekly of Henry, and soulfully of her tea. Blotson would be laying it in the library. There would be muffins. She was dreadfully thirsty. Jane could have found it in her heart to weep. The thought of the slowly congealing muffins unnerved her. She would almost have admitted that woman's place is in the home. There is no saying what depths she might not have arrived at, had the return of the Anarchist Uncle not distracted her thoughts. The heavy tread convinced her that it

was not Mr. Ember, but she did not stir until he came round the corner and flashed the light upon her face. Jane blinked.

“Holy Niagara!” said Mr. Molloy. “It was the fright of my life you gave me.”

Jane scrambled to her feet. She was not quite sure what the situation demanded of her in the way of filial behaviour. Did one embrace one’s Anarchist Parent? Or did one just lean against the wall and look dazed? She thought the latter.

Molloy turned the light away, and then flashed it back again with great suddenness. Jane shut her eyes. Mr. Molloy pursed his lips and emitted a whistle which travelled rapidly up the chromatic scale and achieved a top note of piercing intensity. Without a word he took Jane by the arm and brought her out of her hiding-place into the lighted laboratory. He then pushed her a little away, took a good look at her, and repeated his former odd expletive:

“Holy Niagara!” he said in low but heartfelt tones.

Jane felt a little giddy, and she sat down on the bench. Her right hand went out, feeling for support, and touched a sheaf of papers. Through all the confusion of her thought she recognised that these must be the lists from which Ember had been reading.

“What is it?” she said faintly.

Molloy put down his electric torch, came quite close to her, bent down with a hand on either knee until his face was on a

level with hers, and said in what he doubtless intended for a whisper:

“And *where* is me daughter Renata?”

Jane leaned back so as to get as far away from the flushed face as possible. She opened her mouth without knowing what she was going to say, and quite suddenly she began to laugh. She leaned her head against the brick wall behind her, and the laughter shook her from head to foot.

“Glory be to God, is it a laughing matter?” said Mr. Molloy; “whisht, I tell you, whisht, or you’ll be having Ember back.”

He straightened himself, and made a gesture in the direction of the roof.

“It’s crazy she is,” he said.

Jane put her hand to her throat, gasped for breath, and stopped laughing.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “It was—you were—I mean, what did you say?”

“I said, where is me daughter Renata?” said Molloy in his deepest tones.

Jane gulped down a gurgle of laughter.

“Your daughter Renata?” she said.

“Me daughter Renata,” repeated Mr. Molloy sternly. “Where is she?”

Jane felt herself steadying.

“Why do you think—what makes you think——?”

“That you’re not my daughter? They say it’s a wise child that knows its own father, but it’s a damn fool father that wouldn’t know his own daughter.”

“*How* do you know?” said Jane.

Molloy laughed.

“That’s telling,” he said; “but I don’t mind telling you. You’re my niece Jane Smith and not my daughter Renata Molloy; and, even if I wasn’t her father, I’d always know you from Renata, the way I could always tell your two mothers apart when no one else could. Your mother had a little mole on her left eyelid, just in the corner where it wouldn’t show unless she shut her eyes. My wife hadn’t got it, and that’s the way I could always tell her from her sister. And my daughter Renata hasn’t got it, but you have; and when you blinked, in yonder, I got a glimpse of it; and when I flashed the light on to you again and you shut your eyes, I made sure. And now, perhaps you’ll tell me where in all the world is Renata?”

Jane’s gaze rested intelligently upon Mr. Molloy. The corners of her mouth lifted a little. The dimple showed in her left cheek.

“Renata,” she said in a very demure voice, “is in a safe place, like the money you went abroad for.”

Molloy looked at her uncertainly; in the end he laughed.

“Meaning you won’t tell me,” he said.

“Meaning that I’m not sure whether I’ll tell you or not.”

“Maybe it would be better if I didn’t know. That’s what you’re thinking?”

“Yes, that was what I was thinking.”

“Well, well,” said Mr. Molloy. Then he laughed again. “I’ve the joke on Ember anyhow,” he said. “He thinks he’s got a patent for most of the brains in the country, and here he’s been led by the nose by a slip of a girl just out of school. And what’s more, he was taken in and I wasn’t. He’ll find that hard to swallow, will Mr. Jeffrey Ember. You’d not have taken me in, you know, even if I’d not had the mole to go by. And one of these fine days I shall twit Ember with that.”

“Are you so sure you’d have known me?” said Jane. “Why?”

“My dear girl,” said Mr. Molloy, “if you knew your cousin Renata, you’d not be asking me that. If I find a girl in an underground passage all in the dark, well, that girl is not my daughter Renata. And if, by any queer sort of chance, Renata had been in that hole where I found you, she’d have screamed blue murder when I turned the light on her. Then, at an easy guess, I should say you had Renata beat to a frazzle in the matter of brains. I’m not saying, mind you,

that I'm an admirer of brains in a woman. It's all a matter of opinion, and there's all sorts in the world. But you've got brains, and Renata hasn't, and Ember's had you under his nose all this time without ever knowing the difference."

Jane laughed.

"Perhaps I didn't exactly obtrude my superior intelligence on Mr. Ember," she said. Her eyes danced. "You've no idea how stupid I can be when I try, and I've been trying very hard indeed."

"The devil you have?" said Mr. Molloy. "Well, you had Ember deceived and that's a grand feather in your cap, I can tell you. He's a hard one to deceive is Ember."

Jane gurgled suddenly.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I deceived you, too. Yes, I did, I really did. You know the morning you went off to America, or rather the morning you went off *not* to America? At the flat? You said good-bye to me, not to Renata."

"And where was Renata then?"

Jane twinkled.

"In the safe place," she said.

"I'll swear it was Renata the night before," said Molloy.

"Yes, that's clever of you. It was."

Molloy was thinking hard.

“And which of you was it in the night when we thought the roof had fallen in, and came into Renata’s room to look out of the window? I’d my heart in my mouth, for I thought it was a bomb. Was it you or Renata sitting up in bed like a ghost?”

“That was me,” said Jane. “You couldn’t have been nearly so frightened as I was.”

“Then you changed places between eight and eleven that night?”

“We changed places,” said Jane, “just as you and Mr. Ember came home. I shut Renata’s door just as you opened the door of the flat. I was in the hall when the lift stopped.”

“Then I think I know how you did it,” said Molloy. He seemed interested. “But I’d like to know who put you up to it; and I’d like to know who gave the back entrance away; and I’d like to know how Renata, who hasn’t the nerve of a mouse, got down that blamed fire-escape alone.”

Jane dimpled again.

“You do want to know a lot, don’t you?” she said.

There was a pause. Then Jane said:

“And now, what happens next, please?”

“That,” said Molloy, “is just what I’m wondering.”

“I ought to be getting back, I think,” said Jane.

“Ah, ought you now?” said Mr. Molloy thoughtfully.

There was another pause. Jane thought she would leave Mr. Molloy to break it this time. She sat considering him. Her eyes dwelt upon him with a calm scrutiny which he found extremely embarrassing. The longer it continued, the more embarrassing he found it. In the end he said:

“You want me to let you go?”

Jane nodded.

“And not tell Ember?”

Jane gave another nod, cool and brief.

“Oh, the devil’s in it,” said Molloy, with sudden violence.

“You don’t need the devil; you’ve got Mr. Ember,” said Jane.

“And that’s true enough, for it’s the very devil and all he is, and, if I let you go, I’ll have him to reckon with—some day. I’d rather face the Day of Judgment myself.”

“I tell you what I think,” said Jane. “I think Mr. Ember is mad. That is to say, I think he is the sort of fanatic who sees what he wants and sets out to get it, without knowing half the difficulties and obstacles that block the way. When he does begin to know them he doesn’t care, he just goes along blind. Where a reasonable man would alter his plan to suit the

circumstances, this sort of fanatic just goes on because he's made his plan and will stick to it whatever happens. He isn't governed by reason at all. He doesn't care what risks he runs, or what risks he makes other people run. He goes right on, whatever happens. If the next step is over a precipice he'll take it. He must go on. Mr. Ember is like that. I think he is mad."

Mr. Molloy stared hard at Jane, then he nodded slowly three times.

"Now you're not like that," said Jane. "You're reasonable. You don't want to run appalling risks when there's absolutely nothing to be gained by it. Of course, every one's willing to run risks if it's worth while. I'm sure you are. I'm sure you've done awfully dangerous things."

"I have," said Mr. Molloy, with simple pride. "There's no one that's done more for The Cause, or run greater risks. I could tell you things—but there, maybe I'd better not."

Jane clasped her hands round her knees. She leaned back against the wall and regarded Mr. Molloy with what he took to be admiration.

"Now do tell me," she said—"when you speak of The Cause, what do you mean?"

In her heart of hearts Jane had a pretty firm conviction that, to Mr. Molloy, The Cause stood for whatever promoted the wealth, welfare, and advancement of himself, the said Molloy.

“Ah,” said Mr. Molloy reverentially. He spread out his hands with a fine gesture. “That’s a big question.”

“Well, what I mean,” said Jane, “is this. What do you really call yourself? You know, I always used to call you ‘The Anarchist Uncle,’ but the other day some one said that there were no Anarchists any more, so I wondered what you really were. Are you a Socialist, or a Communist, or a Bolshevist, or what?”

A doubtful expression crossed Mr. Molloy’s handsome face.

“Well, now,” he said, “it would depend on the company I was in.”

Jane had a struggle with the dimple and subdued it.

“You mean,” she ventured, “that if you were with Socialists, you would be a Socialist; and if you were with Bolshevists, you would be a Bolshevist?”

“Well, it would be something like that,” admitted Mr. Molloy.

“I see,” said Jane. “And, of course, whatever you were, you’d naturally want to be sure that it was going to be worth your while. I mean you’d want to get something out of it?” She waited a moment, and then went on, with a complete change of voice and manner, “What are you going to get out of this?” She spoke with the utmost gravity. “If you don’t know, I can tell you. Disaster—at best a long term of imprisonment, at the worst death, the sort of death one doesn’t care about having in one’s family. The question is, is

it worth it? You're not in the least mad. You're not a fanatic either. You are a perfectly sane and reasonable person, and you know that what I'm saying is the sane and reasonable truth. Isn't it?"

"Faith, and wasn't I saying so to Ember myself," said Molloy in gloomy agreement. "We've got money enough, and we can live on it retired, so to speak. The life's all very well when you're young, but a man of my age isn't just so keen on taking chances as he was, and that's the truth. Then there's the old times come over him, and he thinks of the place where he was born, and he thinks, maybe, he'd like to see it again. Why, with the money I've got," said Mr. Molloy, "it's a fine house I could have in Galway, and a car, and a horse or two. That's what I'd like."

Jane saw his face light up.

"It's a fine town Galway," he said, "and there are people I'd like to see there, and places too. The people would be changed, I'm thinking, but not the places. I'd like well enough to go up the river past Menlough again. It's the grand woods there are there, and then there's a place where you'd see nothing but reeds, and no way at all for a boat. But let you push through the reeds and a way there is, and you come out to the grey open water and the country round it just as bare as if you'd taken sand-paper to it. They used to say that the water went down to hell, but I'm not saying that I believe it; but deep it is, for no one's ever touched the bottom. Many's the stone I've dropped in there, and wakened in the night to wonder if it was still sinking; and many's the time I've played truant, and gone there fishing for the great

pike that they said was in it. Hundreds of years old he is by the tales, and once I could swear I saw him, only maybe it was only a cloud that was passing overhead. What I saw was just a grey shadow, and all at once it come over me that I should be getting back to my work. I was black frightened, that's the truth, but I couldn't tell you why."

Jane looked at Mr. Molloy, and experienced some very strange sensations. He might sell her to Ember next moment, but for this moment he was utterly sincere and as simple as a child. His sentiments were not hypocrisy. They represented real feeling and emotion; but feeling, emotion, and sentiment had been trained to take the wall obediently at the bidding of what Mr. Molloy would call business. For all her youth, Jane felt a rush of pity for anything so played upon from without, so ungoverned from within as this big handsome man who stood there talking earnestly of his boyhood's home.

"Why don't you go back and see it all again?" she said.

"Well, I'd like to," said Mr. Molloy, "but what good'll my house in Galway do me if I waken up some fine night with a knife in me heart or a bomb gone off under me bed?"

It seemed a difficult question to answer.

Molloy began to pace the room.

"I must think," he said.

All the time that Jane had been talking, part of her mind had been continually occupied with the question of the lists,

those lists of towns and the agents in each who were to be entrusted with the work of destruction. It might not be so difficult to get hold of them, but to get hold of them without their being missed by Ember ... that was the difficulty. She had only to drop her right hand to the bench on which she sat and it touched the flimsy sheets.

Whilst Molloy was discoursing of his birthplace, she considered more than one plan. She must not precipitate Ember's suspicions until she could place this evidence in Henry's hands. If she took the lists and Ember missed them, he would suspect and accuse Molloy, and Molloy would most certainly exonerate himself at her expense. On the other hand, if she let the lists slip when they were under her hand, who was to say whether the opportunity would recur. Ember would return. He already distrusted Molloy, and what would be more likely than that he would remove such incriminating papers from Molloy's care?

Then, quite suddenly, Jane knew what she must do. She didn't want to do it, but she knew she must. She must get the papers now, she must copy them, and she must put them back before daybreak whilst the Anarchist Uncle was asleep. Jane had never contemplated anything which frightened her half so much as the idea of putting those papers back in that discouraging hour before the dawn, but she knew that it must be done.

As Mr. Molloy walked up and down frowning intently, there were moments when his back was turned towards Jane. The first time this happened Jane's hand took hold of the thin papers and doubled them in half. The next time that it

happened she doubled them again. She went on doubling them until the large thin sheaf had become a small fat wad. Then whilst Molloy's back was turned she lifted her skirt and pushed the wad down inside her stocking top. When Molloy faced her again her hands were folded on her lap.

"I really must be going," she said.

He threw her an odd, sidelong glance. It made Jane feel a little cold.

"Since you heard so much just now, I don't doubt you heard Ember tell me just how convenient this place would be for putting some one that wasn't wanted out of the way?"

"Yes, I heard what he said," said Jane, "but I'm afraid Mr. Ember doesn't know everything. As far as I remember, he described these passages as a place no one knew anything about."

"He did," said Molloy, staring.

Jane gave a little laugh, and felt pleased with herself because it sounded steady.

"Well, to my certain knowledge, three other people know the way in here," she said.

Molloy showed signs of uneasiness.

"Meaning you and me and ... since you heard the rest, I'm supposing you heard me name Number One."

“Oh, I didn’t mean you and me at all,” said Jane. “I was thinking of two quite different people, and as to Number One, I could answer that better if I were sure who Number One was. The third person I’m thinking of may be Number One, or may not. I’m not sure.”

“I’m thinking,” said Molloy—“I’m thinking you know too much. I’m thinking you know a deal too much.”

Jane met his eyes full. Her own were steady, his were not.

“Are you going to tell Mr. Ember, and let him ‘eliminate’ me?”

Molloy gave a violent start.

“Where did you hear that?” he said.

“It wasn’t I who heard that, it was Renata. It was one of the things that made her so anxious to change places with me.”

“And what made you willing to change with her?” Molloy’s voice was harsh with suspicion.

“I hadn’t a job, or any relations to go to. I had exactly one-and-sixpence in the world. I didn’t know where I was going to sleep that night—that’s pretty awful for a girl, you know; and then ... Renata was so frightened.”

“She would be,” was Molloy’s comment. “And weren’t you frightened now?”

“I suppose I was,” said Jane.

“You had need to be.” The something that had made Jane feel cold before was in Molloy’s look and voice. “You had need to be more afraid than you’ve ever been in your life. Renata would have stayed quiet, but nothing would serve you but you must push, and poke, and pry. What were you doing here at all now, will you tell me that? Who showed you how to get down here? You say there are others who know the secret—who are they? Tell me that, will you ... who are they?” Molloy’s sudden passion took Jane by surprise. Her heart began to beat, and she had difficulty in controlling her voice.

“Which question am I to answer first?” she said. “Shall I begin at the beginning? I found the passages by accident....” Molloy gave an impatient snort. “Yes, I did really, on my word of honour. I couldn’t sleep and came down to get a book. I was standing in the shadow and I saw some one come out of the panelling. Next night I thought I’d try and find the place. The same person came downstairs and went through the door in the wall. I followed.”

“Was it Ember?”

“No, it wasn’t Mr. Ember.”

“Who was it?”

“I believe you know,” said Jane, speaking slowly.

“Was it a woman?” said Molloy. He dropped his voice to a whisper and looked over his shoulder.

Jane nodded.

“Glory be to God!” said Molloy. “Did you see her face?” Jane nodded again. Molloy came quite close, bent down, and whispered:

“Was it the old man’s daughter? Was it”—his voice dropped to the very edge of inaudibility—“was it Lady Heritage?”

Jane nodded for the third time.

Molloy spun round, went straight to the steel door, and, opening it, looked up the passage. After a moment he came back.

“You saw her face? Will you swear that you saw her face?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then you’ve seen more than I have. Do you know, I’ve never been sure. I’ve never really been sure. Ember’s talk, and—it was her face you saw, not that mask thing they wear in the laboratory, for that’s all I’ve seen? You saw her face?”

“Yes, I saw her face quite plainly,” said Jane. In her own mind something seemed to say with cold finality, “Then Lady Heritage is Number One.”

“Well.... Well.... Well.... Well....” said Mr. Molloy.

There was a long pause. He seemed lost in thought, but suddenly he turned on Jane with the question which she hoped he had forgotten:

“You were saying that there were two others who knew the secret—you saw them down here?—down here in the passages?”

“Yes,” said Jane, without hesitation, “I did. They were men. One of them had a beard. I couldn’t tell you their names or describe them any more than that.”

Molloy looked desperately puzzled.

“Ember may know,” he muttered.

“He may,” said Jane. “I should ask him.”

Molloy gave a grunt and began to walk up and down again. The simile of the rat in the drain which he had made use of in conversing with Ember came back upon him with unpleasant force. His thoughts were confused by an access of unreasoning fear. Every time the question of what to do with Jane presented itself, he shied away from it. Jane knew too much. There was no doubt about that. She knew too much.

In the circles frequented by Mr. Molloy self-preservation dictated a certain course with regard to the person who knew too much. After thirty years Molloy still disliked the contemplation of that course of action. He was of those who pass by upon the other side. He had a well-cultivated faculty for looking the other way. It occurred to him that, after all, Jane was Ember’s affair. Let her go back to the house, she was Ember’s affair, not his. He became instantly very anxious to see the last of Jane.

Just as she was wondering how long this rather horrid silence was going to last, he walked up to her in a purposeful manner, put his hand on her arm, and pulled her to her feet.

“You’d best be getting back,” he said shortly.

Jane felt as if some one had lifted a heavy weight off the top of her head. The weight must have been fear, and yet she did not know that she had been afraid.

At the gate Molloy turned to her.

“Can you get into the hall?” he said. “Without being seen, I mean.”

“I’m not sure, it’s awfully risky. But I could walk home from the headland, that would be much safer, and if I’ve been missed, it would account for my absence.”

Molloy bent a sulky look on her.

“The headland—you know that too?” he said. Then, with an impatient jerk he switched off the light, turned on his torch, and walked ahead of Jane in silence.

CHAPTER XXII

Never in all her life had Jane seen anything so beautiful as the clear rain-washed sky, the grey rain-stilled sea. The little thud of the stone closing between her and Mr. Molloy was one of the most delightful sounds that she had ever heard. She felt as if she had never really appreciated the daylight before. There were nice woolly clouds on the horizon. The damp air was fresh, not like the air in those abominable passages. There was a gorse bush with about two and a half yellow flowers on it, rather sodden with the rain. Jane regarded them with intense affection.

She walked down the gravel path, drawing long breaths and ready to sing with pure relief—"Ease after toyle, port after stormie seas." She frowned, remembering the next line. After all, they were not out of the wood yet. An unpleasant proverb succeeded Spenser's line—"He laughs longest who laughs last."

"Rubbish," said Jane out loud, and she began to run.

She came in with such a glowing colour that Mr. Ember, who met her in the hall, was moved to remark upon it.

"You seem to have enjoyed your walk. Where have you been?"

“Round by the headland,” said Jane.

The roll of typed paper pricked her knee beneath her stocking top. In her arms she carried a sheaf of yellow tulips. She made haste to her room and set the flowers in a jar on the broad window ledge where they could be plainly seen from the terrace. With all her heart she prayed that George Patterson, who was Anthony Luttrell, would see them. She did not know that George Patterson had ceased to exist, and that Anthony Luttrell, having taken the law into his own impatient hands, was on his way to London.

There had been an encounter with Raymond in the laboratory—her hand for a moment on his arm, his muscles rigid under her touch; not a word spoken on either side, not a word needed. The scene carried Anthony to his breaking-point. At the next roll-call George Patterson was missing. Meanwhile Raymond was behind a locked door, and Jane set yellow tulips on her window-sill.

Having made her signal, Jane turned her mind to the lists. She was afraid to keep them on her, and she was afraid to hide them anywhere else. If Molloy missed them, and had any means of communicating with Ember, she would be searched, and her room would be searched. Whatever happened to her, they must not recover the lists until she had copied them.

She remembered the trap-door in the cupboard, but it was just possible that Ember knew about it, not likely but possible. After five minutes’ profound thought, she went to a

drawer into which she had emptied a quantity of odds and ends.

Renata, it appeared, had a mild taste for drawing. There were pencils, indiarubber, a roll of cartridge paper, and some drawing-pins. Jane took out the cartridge paper and the drawing-pins. She extracted the lists from her stocking top and smoothed them out flat. Then she opened the cupboard door, mounted on a chair drawn as close to the cupboard as possible, and pinned the lists on to the cupboard ceiling with a sheet of cartridge paper covering them. They just fitted in between two rows of hooks. Jane got down with a sigh of relief and unlocked her bedroom door.

The evening passed like a dream. Lady Heritage did not appear at all, and Jane found a strange unreality in the situation which kept her talking to Mr. Ember in set schoolgirl phrases whilst he condescended to her with more than a hint of sarcasm. She was glad when she could take a book and read.

It was eleven o'clock before she dared begin her night's work, but she came up to her room with her plan all ready. First she took off her dress and put on a dressing-gown, just in case any one should come to the door. Then, having turned the key and switched off the light, she took a candle into the cupboard, set it on a shoe box, and took down the lists. She put a cushion on the floor, fetched Renata's fountain pen and some sheets of foolscap which she had taken from the library, and began her work of copying. With the cupboard door shut there was no chance that any one would see her candle.

She wrote steadily, town after town, name after name. More towns, more names. As she finished each sheet, she checked it very carefully by its original. It was weary, monotonous work; but the weariness and the monotony were like a grey curtain which hung between her and something which she dreaded inexpressibly.

The idea of descending into the passage again, of creeping up to the laboratory in order to put back the lists before they were missed, filled her with shuddering repugnance. To allow her mind to dwell upon this idea was to become incapable of carrying it out. She therefore held her attention firmly to the endless names, and drove an industrious pen. She had to get up twice for more ink. Each time, as she stretched herself and walked the few paces to the table and back, the thought came to her like a cold breath, "It's coming nearer."

At last, in the dead stillness of the sleeping hours, the lists were finished. She pinned the copies on to the cupboard ceiling in the same way that she had pinned the originals, carefully covered with a piece of cartridge paper. Then she took the originals in her hand and faced the necessity for action. Her feet and hands were very cold. She felt as if it were days since she had had anything to eat. She wanted most dreadfully to go to bed and sleep. She wanted to have a good cry. What she had to do was to go down into slug- and possibly rat-haunted passages and risk waking an Anarchist Uncle out of his beauty sleep. Jane gave herself a mental shake.

“Don’t be a rabbit, Jane Smith,” she said. “It’s got to be done. You know that just as well as I do. If it’s got to be done, you can do it. Get going at once.”

She got going. First she put the lists back in her stocking top. Then she put on the old serge dress. Her fancy played hopefully with the thought that some day she would give herself the pleasure of burning that abominable garment. She extracted the maroon felt slippers from the paper parcel to which she had consigned them. They were still sopping. She put them on. They felt limp, damp, and discouraging, but they had the merit of making no noise. Then she took a good length of candle and a box of matches and opened her door.

“Well, here goes,” said Jane, and stepped into pitch darkness. This time she shut the door behind her. As she took her hand off the handle she felt as if she were letting go of her last hold on safety, an idiotic thought, as she instantly told herself. She knew by now just how many paces took one to the place where the light should have been burning, and just how many more to the stairhead. The rose window showed like a pattern painted on the dark. It gave no light, but it marked the position of the door.

Jane felt the soles of her feet stick and cling to the damp slippers as she crawled down the stairs. They just didn’t squelch and that was all; they only felt like it.

She hated moving the big chair in the dark, but it had to be done. Suppose she dropped it with a crash, suppose she pulled Willoughby Luttrell’s picture down when she was

feeling for the catch; suppose a mouse ran over her foot—there is no end to the cheerful suppositions which will throng one's brain in circumstances like these.

Jane did not drop the chair with a crash, neither did Willoughby Luttrell's picture fall down, nor did a mouse run over her foot. She passed through the panelled door, shut it behind her, groped her way to the foot of the steps, and lighted the candle. It was then that the cheering thought that she might perhaps encounter Henry came to her, only to fade as she remembered how long past midnight it now was. However, if she had not Henry she had at least a light. It is much harder to be brave in the pitch dark even when, as in the present case, the darkness is really a protection.

Jane walked quite blithely up the second passage on the left until she came to the point where she knew that she must put the light out again. Molloy might be awake. She blew out her candle and began to feel her way forward. She came to the corner, and passed it. Moving very slowly and cautiously, she crept up to the steel gate and stood with her finger-tips on it, listening, and thinking hard. She could feel that the door was ajar. That struck her as strange, very strange. If there ever was a man badly scared, Molloy was that man when she had said that the secret of the passages was not confined to himself and Ember. Yet he had gone to sleep leaving the gate ajar. Had he? Jane's mind gave her a clear and definite answer. He hadn't, he wouldn't. She had been so sure that the gate would be shut, so ready with her plan. She was going to unfold the papers, push them between the bars, and jerk them as far across the room as possible. Molloy might think they

had fallen from the bench, or, if he had his doubts, might well wish to avoid letting Ember know that Jane had been in the laboratory. All this she had so present in her thought, that to feel the gate give to her hand staggered her and set her shaking. She quieted herself and listened intently. Not a sound.

She did not somehow fancy that Molloy would be a quiet sleeper. She had anticipated snores of a certain rich bass quality. Here was silence in which one might have heard an infant draw its breath, a silence undisturbed, inviolate.

It was not only the silence which spoke to Jane. That odd, dim, only half-understood sense which some people possess, clamoured to her that the place was empty. As she stood there, and the seconds dragged into minutes, this sense became so insistent that she found herself resolving to act in obedience to its dictates.

She pushed the gate and heard the alarm ring. With all her ears she listened for the sound of a man stirring, waking, and starting up. At the first movement she would have been away, and Molloy, new roused from sleep, would never have caught sight of her. There was no movement. The bell went on ringing, a little continuous trickle of metallic sound, not loud but as confusing as the buzzing of a mosquito.

Jane switched on the light, slipped round the gate, and closed it. The bell stopped ringing. The jarred silence settled slowly, as dust settles when it has been stirred. There was no one there. The unshaded light showed every corner of the

chamber. Molloy's bag was gone. Like a flick in the face came certainty. "He's gone. Molloy's gone too."

Slowly, almost mechanically, Jane extracted the rolled-up lists from her stocking. She was still holding the unlighted candle in her left hand. The lists bothered her. She moved towards the bench to put them down, but first she laid the candle carefully on its side so as not to stub the wick, and, sitting down, began to smooth the papers out upon her knee. It was whilst she was doing this that she saw the note.

It lay on the end of the bench propped up against a book. It was addressed to Jeffrey Ember, Esquire. The capital E's were magnificent flourishes; an underlining like an ornamental scroll supported the superscription. Jane, like other well-brought-up people, was not in the habit of opening letters not addressed to herself. It may be said, however, that no solitary scruple so much as raised its head on this occasion. She tore open the tough linen envelope, and unfolded a lordly sheet. Molloy wrote a good, bold hand and legible withal. Every word stood clear.

> "My dear Ember,—I'm off. The place is getting altogether too crowded. I've seen Renata, and she tells me that there are two men use the passages. One has a beard, but she couldn't tell me their names or describe them further. She knows all about the passages herself. She confessed to having found them through following Number One. She has also seen you come in and go out. I don't think this place is very healthy, so I'm making my get-away whilst I can. Drop the whole thing and get out

quick is what I advise. I'm staunch, as you'll find. Why did you take the lists after saying you'd leave them for me to look through? I'll not work with a man that doesn't trust me. You can write me at the old place."

The letter was signed with a large Roman three. It appeared that Mr. Molloy was more careful over his own identity than over that of Mr. Jeffrey Ember.

Jane sat looking at the letter. It made her feel rather sick. If she had not come down, if she had shirked putting the papers back, if the letter addressed to Jeffrey Ember, Esquire, had reached Jeffrey Ember's hands—well, it was a good enough death-warrant, and Molloy must have known that very well when he wrote it.

"It's exactly like a Moral Tract," said Jane. "I hated coming back, and I did it from a Sense of Duty, and this is the Reward of Virtue."

She put the Reward of Virtue down rather gingerly on the bench beside her. She felt about touching it rather as she had felt when she touched the slug. She wanted to wash her hands. An odd creature Molloy. He had given her away exactly and completely, yet he had left her any small shred of protection which she might be supposed to derive from passing as his daughter.

Jane turned her thoughts from Molloy to the more pressing consideration of her own immediate course of action. Ember would come in the morning, and would find Molloy gone,

and no word to say where he had gone, or why. The idea of following in Molloy's footsteps presented itself vividly before Jane's imagination. Why should she stay any longer at Luttrell Marches? The idea of getting away set her heart dancing. And what was there to stay for? She had all the evidence necessary to procure Ember's arrest and the smashing of the conspiracy. The sooner she was out of Luttrell Marches and with her precious papers in a place of security the better. For a moment she contemplated taking the originals of the lists; Ember would naturally conclude that it was Molloy who had gone off with them. But on second thoughts she decided that it would be in the highest degree unwise to put Ember on his guard. His distrust of Molloy might be so great as to induce flight. She decided to leave the originals and to take the copies—but she had left the copies in her room pinned to the cupboard ceiling. Go back for them she could not. Even if she could have forced herself to the effort, the risk was too great. They must stay where they were, whilst she found Henry. The sooner she got off the better. She had no watch, but the night must be very far spent, and if Ember were to take it into his head to come back——

The bare idea brought Jane to her feet. She picked up her candle, lit it, and with feelings of extreme satisfaction set fire to Molloy's letter, making a little pent roof of it like the beginning of a card house on the stone floor. She had often admired the way in which masses of compromising documents are consumed in an instant by the hero or heroine of the adventure novel. She used four matches before she considered that this particular letter was really harmless. The envelope took two more. Then she

collected the ash very carefully, crumbled it up well, and scattered it amongst the rubble in the broken-down passage where Molloy had found her. Then, having taken a good look round to make sure that nothing compromising remained, she picked up her candle and passed through the gate, leaving the laboratory in darkness behind her. When she came to the turn she hesitated, and finally went straight on, following the passage which she had not yet explored, down which Molloy and Ember had come the day before. She was almost sure that it would lead back into the main corridor just short of the headland exit; but she had not gone more than a yard or two along it when she heard something that brought her heart into her mouth.

Almost as the sound reached her she had blown her candle out and was pinching the glow from the wick. For a moment the darkness was full of phantom tongue-shaped flames; then she stopped seeing them and saw instead a faint glow coming from the direction in which she herself had come on her way to the laboratory. Somebody was coming along the passage. If she had gone back by the same way that she had come, she would have met this somebody. As it was, she might escape notice. If the person were going to the laboratory, he would have to take a sharp turn to the left, a right-angled turn. The passage in which she was ran off at an acute angle, and the person approaching would have his back to her as he passed.

The glow became a beam. Next moment Ember passed without turning his head. Jane saw the back of his shoulder dark against the light from his torch, and caught a fleeting glimpse of his profile, just enough for recognition and no

more. Indeed, it was the fur coat that she recognised as much as the man. She stood quite still whilst he switched on the electric light and passed into the laboratory, then she turned and walked away as quickly as she dared, feeling her way by the wall till a turn in the passage gave her enough courage to light her candle. She put the spent match in her pocket, looked ahead, and drew a sharp, almost agonised, breath.

About two feet from where she stood, and exactly in her path, was the black mouth of an uncovered well. Jane looked at it, and quite suddenly, she had no idea how, found herself sitting on the floor with hot wax running down her hand from the guttering candle. It seemed to be quite a little time before she could make sure of walking steadily enough to skirt the well. She went by it at last with averted head and fingers that, regardless of slime, clung to the wall.

As she had expected, the passage ran suddenly into the main corridor. She passed the headland exit, and once more was on unknown ground. The passage swung round to the right and began to slope downhill. Jane held her candle high and looked at every step; but there were no more traps. She quickened her pace almost to a run as the dreadful thought came to her that Ember might follow Molloy. The passage sloped more and more. Finally there were steps, smooth, worn, and damp, that went down, and down, and down. At the bottom of the steps a yard or two of peculiarly slimy passage, and then a blank stone wall. Obviously Jane had arrived.

She looked at the stone wall, and the stone wall presented a front of uncompromising blankness. She looked up and she

looked down, she looked to the left and she looked to the right, she gazed at the ceiling and she gazed at the floor. Nowhere was there any sign of a catch, a knob, a spring, or a lever. There must be one, but where was it? She tapped the wall and stamped on the floor, but with no result. The door in the panelling opened from inside with an ordinary handle. She had not been close enough to Lady Heritage to see what she did to pivot the stone behind the bench on the headland. In any case, this exit might have been quite differently planned.

A most dreadful sense of discouragement came over her. To have got so far, to have been, as it were, half-way to safety and Henry, and to have to turn back again! Then for the first time it occurred to her that, even if she had got out and got away, she had no money and no hat. She looked down at the maroon slippers, and pictured herself descending ticketless upon a London platform in bedroom slippers whose original colour was almost obscured by green slime.

Jane wanted to laugh, and she wanted to cry. She did not know which she wanted most, but presently she found that the tears were running down her face. She kept winking them away, because it is not at all easy to climb slippery stone steps by the light of a guttering candle if your eyes keep filling with tears. The tears magnified the candle flame, and sometimes made it look like two or three little flames, which was dreadfully confusing. Jane stood still, wiped her eyes with determined energy, and then climbed up more steps and back along the way that she had come.

At the headland exit she stood still, taking breath and thought. Nothing would induce her to pass that well again. She would keep to the main passage, and, horrid thought, she would have to put out her light in case Ember should suddenly emerge from the side passage.

“Thinking about things makes them worse, not better,” said Jane to herself. “It’s perfectly beastly; but then it’s all perfectly beastly.”

She blew out the candle and moved slowly forward.

It seemed ages before she came past the opening where she had run into Henry to the foot of the steps. She went up three steps, raised her foot to take the fourth, and felt a hardly perceptible check. Instantly she drew back a shade, set her foot down beside the other, and put out a tentative, groping hand. There was a thread of cotton stretched from wall to wall at the level of her waist. If her movements had been less gentle she would have brushed through it without noticing. Then, as she stood there thinking, the thread between her fingers, something else came to her. The last yard of passage just at the stair foot had felt different—dry, gritty.

Jane descended the three steps backwards, and, crouching on the bottom one, put down her hand and felt the floor of the passage. There was sand on it, dry sand which had not been there when she came down, and in the dry sand her footprints would be clearly marked. Obviously Mr. Ember had his suspicions and his methods of verifying them: “Though what

on earth he'd make of cork soles I don't know," said Jane. She decided not to worry him with this problem.

It was horribly dangerous, but she must have a light. She set her candle end on the step above her and struck a match. It made a noise like a squib and went out. She struck another and got the candle lighted.

The sand was yellow sand off the beach, but nice and dry. Two and a half of her footprints showed plainly on its smooth surface. Jane leaned forward and smoothed them out. Then she blew out her candle and felt safer. Feeling for the thread of cotton, she crawled beneath it, then very, very slowly up the rest of the steps, her hand before her all the way till she came to the door in the panelling. She opened it and slipped through into the hall.

The grey, uncertain light was filtering into it. Everything looked strange and cold. Jane closed the door, and never knew that a loose strand of cotton had fallen as she passed. Neither did she know that at that very moment Jeffrey Ember was standing by the open well mouth, the ray from his powerful electric torch focused upon a little patch of candle grease.

CHAPTER XXIII

Anthony Luttrell caught a slow local train at Withstead—the sort of train that serves little country places all over England. It dawdled slowly from station to station, sometimes taking what appeared to be an unnecessary rest at a signal box as well. It finally reached Maxton ten minutes late, thereby missing the London express and leaving Anthony Luttrell with a two hours' wait.

Waiting just at present was about as congenial an occupation as being racked. He walked up and down with a dragging, restless step, and tried unsuccessfully to shut off his torturing thoughts behind a safety curtain. The time dragged intolerably. Presently he left the platform and went up on to the bridge which ran from one side of the station to the other. Here he began his pacing again, stopping every now and then to watch a train come in or a train go out. From the bridge one could see all the platforms.

When an express rushed through, the whole structure shook and clouds of white steam blotted out everything. It was when the steam was clearing away, and the roar of the receding train was dying down, that Anthony noticed another local running in to the Withstead platform. He bent over the rail and watched the passengers get out—

just a handful. There was a young woman with two children, two farmers, three or four nondescript women, and a big man with a suit-case. Anthony looked at the big man and went on looking at him. Something about him seemed vaguely familiar. The man came along the platform and began to mount the steps that led up to the bridge. Half-way up he put down his suit-case, took off his hat for a moment as if to cool himself, and stood there looking up. Then he replaced his hat, shifted the suit-case to the other hand, and came up the rest of the steps. He seemed hot.

He passed Anthony and went down the steps on to the London platform. Anthony followed him.

When the big man stood still and looked up, eight years were suddenly wiped out. Memory is a queer thing, and plays queer tricks. What Anthony's memory did was to set him down in the year 1912, in the gallery of a hall in Chicago. There was a packed and rather vociferous audience. There was a big man on the platform, a big man who seemed hot. His speech was, in fact, of a sufficiently inflammatory nature to make any one feel hot. It breathed fire and fury. Its rolling eloquence must have involved a good deal of physical exertion. Suddenly, after a period, the speaker stopped and looked up at the gallery for applause. It came like a veritable cyclone. The meeting was subsequently broken up by the police.

Anthony remembered that the speaker's name was Molloy. If Mr. Molloy had come from Withstead, it occurred to Anthony that his destination would probably be of interest.

The London train was due in ten minutes. When it came in, Molloy got into a third-class carriage, and Anthony followed his example.

It was at seven-thirty on Sunday morning that Mrs. March's cook, who was sweeping the hall, was given what she afterwards described as a turn by the arrival of an odd-looking man who would give no name and insisted on seeing her master.

"Awful he looked with that 'orrid scar and his 'air that wild, and not giving me a chance to shut the door in his face, for he pushes in the moment I got it open—that's what give me the worst turn of all—and walks into the dining-room as bold as brass, and says, 'I want to see Captain March—and be quick, please.'"

When Henry came into the dining-room he shut the door behind him very quickly and looked as if he also had had a turn.

"Good Lord, Tony, what's happened?" he said.

"Nothing," said Anthony, with nonchalance.

"Then in Heaven's name, why are you here?"

"I'm through, that's all. You can't say I didn't give notice."

"It's not a question of what I say, it's what Piggy'll say."

"Oh, I've got a sop for Piggy. I've been doing the faithful sleuth. I've trailed a man from Withstead to a highly genteel

boarding-house in South Kensington; and as I last saw the gentleman addressing an I. W. W. meeting in Chicago, I imagine Piggy might be interested."

"Who was it?" said Henry quickly.

"Molloy."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Good man. You're in luck. Molloy, under the interesting *alias* of Bernier, has just been selling the Government Formula 'A.' He was trailed over here with the swag and then lost sight of. For a dead cert he's been to Luttrell Marches by the back way and seen Ember."

Anthony turned away.

"There's the devil to pay down there," he said.... "No, no, the girl's all right.... This is something I ought to have told you when you were down. I ought to have told you the whole thing. I couldn't bring myself to."

"Sit down, Tony. What is it?"

"No, I can't sit." He walked to the window and stood there, looking out. His hands made restless movements. He spoke, keeping his back to Henry:

"You didn't go through all the passages?"

“No, I was going to to-night.”

“I ought to have told you. The big place under the terrace, you know—they’ve turned it into a laboratory. Molloy may have been working there, for all I know; he had the name of an expert chemist.”

“Yes, go on.”

“You’d have found it yourself to-night, but I couldn’t let you go blundering in unwarned. Ember might be there—any one might be there. It’s damnable, Henry, but I believe she’s up to her neck in it.”

Henry was silent. There seemed to be nothing to say. He also believed that Raymond Heritage was up to her neck in whatever secret enterprise was being developed at Luttrell Marches. He remembered the passion in her voice when she said, “I should like to smash it all,” and he remembered how she had sung, “Would we not shatter it to bits, and then re-mould it nearer to the heart’s desire?” Whatever the thing was, he believed she was in it up to her neck. So he was silent, and Anthony was grateful for his silence.

The silence was broken by a tapping, and a rustling, and the turning of a handle. The door opened very abruptly, and Mrs. de Luttrelle March made a precipitous entrance. She wore a pink silk *négligé* and a boudoir cap embroidered in forget-me-nots, also an expression of extreme terror—the cook’s description of their early visitor having prepared her to find Henry’s corpse stretched upon the hearth-rug. When a living and annoyed Henry confronted

her, she clung to his arm and gazed round-eyed at the long, thin man who had swung round at her entrance. Uncertainty succeeded fear. Henry was saying, “Do go back to your room, Mother,” but it is doubtful whether she heard him.

Gradually her grasp of his arm relaxed. She walked slowly across the room, and stared with horrified amazement at Anthony.

He looked over her head at Henry, shrugged his shoulders just perceptibly, and made as if to turn back to the window again. Either that shrug, or the faintly sarcastic lift of the eyebrows that accompanied it, brought a sort of broken gasp to Mrs. March’s lips. She put out her hand, touched his coat sleeve with her finger-tips, and said:

“Anthony—it’s Anthony—oh, Henry, it’s Anthony!”

She backed a little at each repetition of the name, looked wildly round, and sinking on to the nearest chair, burst into tears.

“Henry—oh, please somebody speak,” she sobbed.

“It’s all right, Aunt Rosa. I’m not a ghost,” said Anthony in his driest voice.

Henry experienced a cold dread of what his mother would say next. She had talked so much and thought so incessantly of Luttrell Marches. Latterly she had been so sure of Henry’s ownership, and so proud of it. What would she say now—as she dropped her hands from her face and

gazed with streaming eyes at Anthony, who regarded her quizzically?

“Tony, you’re so dreadfully changed. That fearful scar—oh, my dear, where have you been all this time? We thought you were dead. I don’t know how I recognised you. And you were *such* a pretty little boy, my dear. I used to be jealous because you had longer eyelashes than Henry, but you haven’t now.”

“Haven’t I?” said Anthony, with perfect gravity. He took his aunt’s plump white hand and gave it a squeeze and a pat. “It’s very nice of you to welcome me, Aunt Rosa. The scar isn’t as bad as it looks, and Henry’s going to lend me a razor and some clothes.”

It was later, when Anthony could be heard splashing in the bathroom, that Mrs. March beckoned Henry into her room, flung her arms round his neck, and burst into tears all over again.

“My poor boy,” she sobbed, “it’s so hard on you—about Luttrell Marches, I mean—do you mind dreadfully?”

“Not an atom. Besides, I knew Tony was alive; I always told you he would turn up.”

“I couldn’t think of any one but him at first,” said Mrs. March, sniffing gently. “Then afterwards it came over me Henry won’t have the place—and I couldn’t help crying because, of course, one does get to count on a thing, with every one saying to me as they did, ‘*Of course* your son

comes into Luttrell Marches, such a beautiful place,'—and so it is, and I did think it was yours, and what I felt about it was, if I feel badly about it, what must Henry feel? You see, don't you?"

Henry endeavoured to disengage himself.

"Yes, Mother, but you needn't worry—you really needn't. Look here, you dress and don't cry any more. I've got to telephone."

Mrs. March clasped her hands about his arm.

"Henry, wait, just a minute," she said. "That Miss Smith—you're not still thinking about her, are you?"

Henry laughed.

"I am," he said.

"Well——" said Mrs. March. She fidgeted with Henry's coat sleeve, bridled a little, and looked down at her mauve satin slippers. "Well—you know, my dear boy, I didn't want to be *unkind*, but I simply couldn't picture her at Luttrell Marches—as its mistress, I mean—and I'm sure you did think me unkind about it; but now that it's all different—Tony coming back like this does make a difference, of course, and what I was going to say about it is this. If you really do care for her and it would make up to you for the disappointment, I wouldn't hold out about it, not if you really wanted it, my dear, and really cared for her, only of course you'd have to be quite sure, because once you're married you're married, and there's no way out of it except divorce, and, whether it's the

fashion now or not, I always have said and always will say, that it's not respectable, it really isn't, and it's not a thing we've ever had in our family—not on either side," added Mrs. March thoughtfully, after a slight pause for breath.

"I really do care for her, and I really am sure," said Henry. He kissed his mother affectionately, and once more attempted to detach himself from her hold.

Mrs. March let go with one hand in order to dab her eyes with a scrap of pink-and-white chiffon. Then she looked up at her son fondly.

"Your eyelashes are *much* the longest," she said.

Henry made an abrupt departure.

"Piggy'll see you as soon as you can get there," he told Anthony five minutes later—"at his house. I'm off to Luttrell Marches. I was going down anyhow to-night, but, things being as they are, I think I'll get a move on. Piggy's sending some one to the address you gave, to keep an eye on Molloy. He doesn't want him arrested yet, as he's in hopes that Belcovitch will roll up—that's the other man concerned in the actual sale of the formula. He went to Vienna, but was in Paris yesterday. Good Lord, Tony, I'm glad you've got rid of that beastly beard!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Sir Julian Le Mesurier's study was an extremely pleasant room, friendly with books, and comforted by admirable chairs.

A Sabbath peace reigned outside in the deserted street. Within there was no peace at all. A crocodile hunt was in progress. Piggy, as a large and very fierce crocodile, was performing a feat described by himself as "trailing his sinuous length" across the floor, his objective a Persian carpet island upon which a small fat girl of three in a fluffy Sunday dress was lifting first one plump foot and then the other, whilst at regular intervals she uttered small but piercing screams. Upon the crocodile's back sat a thin, determined little boy of six who battered continuously upon the crocodile's ribs with the heels of a new pair of boots, whilst he shouted his defiance at the foe. At the far end of the room sat Lady Le Mesurier with a book. At intervals she looked up from it to say helplessly, "Piggy, it's Sunday"—or "Baby's got a new frock on, and I expect nurse will give notice if you tear it."

"Not tear," said the fat little girl, patting her skirts. Then she shrieked, for the crocodile made a sudden snap at the nearest ankle.

Upon this scene the door opened.

“Mr. Luttrell,” said an expressionless voice, and Anthony entered.

Lady Le Mesurier gathered her baby and her book, the crocodile unseated the small boy and arose, dusting its trousers. A well-trained family vanished, and Sir Julian shook hands and waved his visitor to a chair.

“Come up to report?” said Piggy.

“Not primarily,” began Anthony, but was cut short.

“You followed Molloy. Yes, I think I prefer to have it that way, if you don’t mind. You followed Molloy to this South Kensington address. How do you know he’s stopping there?”

“I asked the servant who was cleaning the knocker whether they had a room, and she said, ‘No’—that the gentleman who had just come in made them quite full up.”

“Well, I’ve sent a man to watch the place. Now, what have you to report from Luttrell Marches?”

Anthony looked straight over Sir Julian’s shoulder with a hard, level gaze, and spoke in a hard, forced voice:

“There are a number of secret passages and chambers under the house at Luttrell Marches. One of the passages has an exit outside the grounds on the seashore about a mile and a half from Withstead. The secret has been very carefully preserved until now. Each successive owner told his heir. No

one else was supposed to know. My father told me. When he thought that I was dead, he also told my cousin, Henry March. Until I went to Luttrell Marches the other day I had no idea that any one else had discovered the secret. I have to report that the passages have not only been discovered, but made use of in a way which points to something of an illegal nature. One of the chambers is a fair-sized one: it has been turned into a laboratory——”

“Any sign that it has been used as such?”

“Every sign. Power has been diverted from the dynamos which were installed for the Government experiments and the passages have been wired, and some of the chambers fitted with electric light. The whole thing has been going on under Sir William’s very nose.”

“M’, I’ve had him here to see me—terribly gone to pieces, quite past his job, also very much annoyed with me for having sent Henry down. Now the question is, who’s been wiring the passages and using the laboratory?”

“Oh, Ember; there’s no doubt about that, I think.”

“And the sale of the formula? Ember?”

“I’m sure of it.”

“Must have proof. No earthly good my being sure, or your being sure, or Henry’s being sure. We’ve got to have something so solid that, after Sir Dash Blank, K.C., has done his best to tear it into shreds, what’s left of it will convince a jury. Now who else is in it besides Ember and Molloy? In the

household, I mean, down there at Luttrell Marches? Any one else?”

Anthony continued to look over Sir Julian’s shoulder. He remained silent. Piggy got up and walked to his writing-table. When he reached it he swung round, and asked again sharply:

“Any one else, Luttrell?”

There was still silence. Then Piggy said dryly:

“I take it that there is somebody else involved. I don’t wish to cross-examine you, but I must know one thing. Is it suspicion, moral certainty, or proof?”

“Moral certainty,” said Anthony Luttrell. He passed his tongue across his dry lips. Piggy did not look at him.

“Now, look here,” he said, “it seems to me that Luttrell Marches is about to be the centre of some unpleasant happenings. I think, I rather think, it would be advisable to induce any ladies who may be there to leave the place. Lady Heritage is there, is she not, and er, er, Miss...?”

“Miss Molloy.”

“Exactly. Miss—er, Molloy. Now I consider that these two ladies should leave at once. When I say at once I mean to-day. I should like you to go down—by car, of course, there won’t be any Sunday trains—and er, fetch them away, using such inducements and persuasions as you may think

expedient. Only they must leave. You understand, they must leave to-day."

Anthony rose stiffly.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said, "that I must decline the responsibility. The reasons which made me leave Luttrell Marches make it impossible for me to return there."

"I see," said Piggy. He picked up a piece of indiarubber, and occupied himself for about a minute and a half in endeavouring to balance it upon the edge of a handsome brass inkstand with an inscription on it. When the indiarubber fell into the ink with a splash he fished it out, using a pen with a sharp nib as a gaff, dried it carefully on a new sheet of white blotting-paper, and turned again to Anthony.

"I'd like just to put a hypothetical case to you," he said. "Government puts a certain very important and confidential piece of work into the hands of an eminent man, a man of European reputation and unblemished probity. Evidence comes to hand of things entirely incompatible with the secrecy and other conditions which were an honourable obligation. Worse suspicions of illegality and conspiracy. Cumulative evidence. Arrests. A public trial. Now, my dear Luttrell, can you tell me what would happen to the Government which had displayed such incompetence as, first, to commit a vital undertaking to a person capable of betraying it; and second, of permitting the consequent scandal to become public property in such a manner as to make this country a laughing-stock in the eyes of the world?

It’s not a question that requires a great deal of answering, is it?”

“Sir William is not involved,” said Anthony harshly.

“My dear Luttrell, I was putting a hypothetical case. But if you wish to talk without camouflage I will do so—for five minutes. I will do so because I consider that the situation is one of the most serious which I have ever had to deal with. Sir William is not involved, but Sir William has become incompetent to control his household and incapable of perceiving that a dangerous conspiracy is being carried on under his roof. It’s not only the matter of the stolen formula. Your report of a hidden laboratory certainly tends to corroborate the very grave allegations made by Miss Molloy. A situation so entirely serious justifies me in demanding the sacrifice of your personal feelings and inclinations. I repeat, Lady Heritage and Miss Molloy must leave Luttrell Marches to-day. I don’t care what inducements you use. They must leave. I believe you can get them to leave. I don’t believe any one else can. I am detaining Sir William in town—it was not difficult to do so. What more natural than that his daughter should join him. My wife is expecting Miss Smith to pay us a visit. There must be no delay of any kind. You understand, Luttrell?”

There was a short tense pause.

Anthony stood as he had been standing during all the time that Sir Julian talked. He looked moodily out of the window. Now and then his face twitched, now and then he moved his

hands with a sort of jerk. At last he said in a constrained voice:

“I—understand.”

“Very well,” said Piggy briskly. “Then you’d better be off. From the fact that you have shaved and returned to civilised raiment, I imagine that George Patterson is now obsolete, and that Mr. Luttrell has ceased to be a corpse in some unknown grave?”

“Yes, I’ve come back.” A pause—then, “Sir Julian—this—this duty is particularly unwelcome. If I undertake it, will you send me abroad again as soon as possible? England is distasteful, impossible—but, of course, I realise that I couldn’t go on being dead—there are too many legal complications, and it wasn’t fair on Henry.”

“Henry,” observed Piggy, “was becoming the object of most particular attentions from matchmaking mammas. My wife informs me that his stock has been very high for some months past. Gilt-edged, in fact. I’m afraid there will be a slump as soon as your resurrection is established. Henry, I think, will bear up. Well now, about sending you abroad—I can’t say for certain, but I rather think it could be managed, if you still wish it, you know. I wouldn’t be in a hurry, if I were you, Luttrell, about going abroad, but as to the matter in hand—well, hurry is the word. You’ll find a car outside with Inspector Davison. Take him along. I hope he won’t be needed, but—well—take him along.”

CHAPTER XXV

Mr. Ember was spending a busy Sunday. As he stood in the empty laboratory, realising Molloy's defection and all that it involved, there was no change in his impassive face. The web of his plan was broken. Like some accurate machine his brain picked up the loose ravelled threads and wove them into a new combination.

Molloy himself was no loss. His place could be filled a dozen times over. As to any harm that he could do, unless he had gone straight to the police, he could be reached—reached and silenced. And Ember knew his Molloy. He would not go straight to the police. If he meant to sell them, he would set about it with a certain regard for appearances. There would be *pourparlers*, some dexterous method of approach which would save his face and leave him an emergency exit. Ember checked over in his mind the four or five places to which Molloy might have retreated. Then there was the money. That they must have; but Molloy, once found, could be scared into giving it up.

Ember let his eyes travel around the laboratory. The lists lay upon the bench where Jane had put them not five minutes before. He frowned and picked them up, stared at them, and frowned more deeply still. They had been

folded and refolded, doubled into a small package since he had last handled them. Who had done it? The sheets had been smooth from the typewriter when he gave them to Molloy. They had been handled and creased, with the creases that come from tight folding. Had Molloy meant to take them with him, and then at the last moment been afraid? It looked like it. He turned over the pages, counting them. Suddenly his eyes fixed, his fingers tightened their hold. There was a fresh smudge of ink on the top of the fifth page—a smudge so fresh that the blue ink had not yet turned black. That meant two things: Molloy had copied the lists before he left, and he had only been gone an hour or two—that at the outside, probably less.

In the moment that passed before Ember laid the papers down, Mr. Molloy received his death sentence as duly and irrevocably as if it had been pronounced by an Assize Judge in scarlet and ermine, white wig and black cap.

Ember gave just a little nod, opened a safe that stood in the corner, pushed the papers into it, and pocketed the key.

It was a little later that he found the first spot of candle grease. It was half-way up one of the side passages, on the spot where Jane had been standing when he and Molloy entered the laboratory the evening before. He looked at it for a long time very thoughtfully before he took his torch and proceeded to a systematic search of the passages.

He found no living person, but came upon dropped wax in three more places, at the edge of the well, by the headland exit, and half-way down the steps to the beach.

He came slowly back along the main passage, and stood for some time with his light focused on the sand which he had spread at the foot of the stair. There was no footmark upon it, but he was prepared to swear that it was not as he had left it. He had scattered the sand loosely, and it was pressed down and too smooth. He thought that it had been smoothed by a hand passing over it. He mounted the first two steps. The thread of cotton which he had fastened across the stairway was still there. He bent beneath it, came to the top, and threw his light full upon the back of the panelled door. The second piece of cotton was gone.

He flashed the ray upon the floor once—twice. The third time he found what he was looking for, a fine black thread lying across the threshold. It ran out of sight under the door. Some one had gone out that way since Mr. Ember had come in. Who? Not Molloy—impossible that it could have been Molloy.

Ember passed through the panel, closed it behind him, and walked slowly and meditatively along the corridor to the library, still pursuing his train of thought. Molloy would have blundered through that first piece of cotton without ever feeling it at all, just as Molloy's foot in its heavy boot would have been unaware of the sand. If it was a woman who had passed—now who would have used a candle in the passages? Not Raymond. She had more than one electric torch which she used constantly for night work. But Renata, the little soft-spoken stupid mouse of a thing, if she had a fancy to go spying, she'd take a candle; yes, and let it gutter too.

Mr. Ember's instinct for danger had always reacted to this question of Renata Molloy. Over and over again there had been the tremor, the response, the warning prick. An extreme regret that he had not arranged for a convenient accident to overtake Renata possessed Jeffrey Ember. The omission, he decided, should be rectified with as little delay as possible. He locked the library door and went to the telephone.

It took him half an hour to get the number that he wanted, but he betrayed no impatience. When at last a man's voice came to him, along the wire, he inquired in the Bavarian dialect, "Is that you, Number Five?" The voice said, "Yes," whereupon Ember gave a password and waited until he had received the countersign. He then began to issue orders, using an unhurried voice. Every now and then he shivered a little in the early morning cold, and shrugged his coat higher about his ears.

"You are promoted. You go up to Four and come on to the Council. I will notify you of the next meeting. Number Three is a traitor. He left here last night with copies of lists containing names of all agents. It is believed that it is his design to sell us. He has secreted a large sum of money, the property of the Council. Before he is eliminated he must be made to hand this over. Take down the following addresses; he may be at any one of them. Put Six and Seven on to finding and dealing with him immediately." He read out the addresses, and paused whilst they were repeated. He then continued speaking:

“I shall require the motor-boat off Withstead Cove at nightfall. Yes, to-night, and without fail. A change of base is imperative. Proceed first to ...”—he gave another address—“and communicate also with Ten. If Belcovitch has arrived tell him that he is promoted to Three, and bring him with you. The Council can then meet, as Number One is here.”

A very slight gleam of something hard to define broke for a moment the dull impassivity of Ember’s voice as he pronounced the last words. Then he added:

“Repeat my instructions.”

He listened attentively whilst the voice reproduced his own words. Then he said:

“That is all. We shall meet to-night,” and rang off.

He had breakfast alone with Jane, and ate it with a good appetite. He talked very pleasantly too. Jane wondered why every succeeding moment left her more afraid. She had been up all night, of course. It must be that, yes, of course, it must be that. She faltered in the middle of some inane sentence and stopped. Ember’s eyes were fixed on her with an entire lack of expression, yet behind those blank windows she felt that there were strange guests. It was like looking at the windows of a haunted house, quite blank and empty, and yet at any moment out of them might look some unimaginable horror.

“You seem a little tired this morning, Miss Renata,” said Ember gently. “Why didn’t you follow Lady

Heritage's example and have your breakfast upstairs? You don't look to me as if you had had much sleep. You haven't been walking in your sleep again by any chance, have you?"

Jane clenched her foot in Renata's baggy shoe.

"Oh, I hope I haven't," she said. "I don't always know when I've been doing it. What made you think of it?"

"It just crossed my mind," said Ember. "It's a very dangerous habit, Miss Renata."

Jane pushed her chair back and rose.

"I'm going into the garden," she said; "this room is too hot for anything. It's like...." A little devil suddenly commandeered her tongue. She reached the door, opened it, and flung over her shoulder:

"It's like the snake house at the Zoo, Mr. Ember."

She ran straight out into the garden after that, and stayed there. She had the feeling that it was safer to be in the open. She wanted to keep away from walls, and doors, and passages. She saw no one all the morning, and came back to lunch with her nerve steadier. As soon as lunch was over, she went out again. The hour in the house had brought her fears back with reinforcements. She began to count the hours before Henry could arrive. It was only half-past two, and perhaps he would not come till midnight.

The thought of the dark hours after sunset was like a black cloud coming nearer and nearer. If she could

hide, if she could only get away and hide until Henry came. She felt as if it was quite beyond her to go back into the house and sit for hour after hour, perhaps alone with Jeffrey Ember, his blank eyes watching her, or to endure Raymond Heritage's presence, and, looking at her, remember the line in Molloy's letter: "Renata followed Number One." It was Raymond she had followed. She had told Molloy that she had followed Raymond. Then Raymond, beyond doubt or cavil, was the Number One of that horrible Council. She could not bear it. She thought of Raymond's voice breaking when she said "Anthony," and she could not bear it. If she could only get away and hide until Henry came.

She went into the walled garden and walked up and down. Perhaps Anthony Luttrell would come to her as he had come once before. Presently she came to the tool-shed, stopped for a moment hesitating on the threshold, and then went in. There was a way into the passages from here; she was quite sure of it. If she could find the spring, she believed that she would be able to reach the cross-passage where she had run into Henry. She did not believe that Ember used it. Why should he, since it would be of no use to his schemes? If she could get into the passage and hide there, she need not go back to the house. She could wait there for Henry and catch him as he passed. She would be able to warn him too, and it came to her with startling suddenness that he stood very much in need of warning; so much had come to light in the forty-eight hours since he left.

It took Jane an hour to find the spring. She might not have found it then, but for the chance that made her slip and throw all her weight upon one place just under the wide potting-

shelf. There was a creak, and one of the boards gave a little. She found a trap-door and steps beneath it.

There were some old sacks in the shed. Jane took one of them, climbed down the steps, and shut the trap-door again. She felt her way down to the level, spread the sack on the second step, and sat down. She felt utterly forlorn and weary.

CHAPTER XXVI

Mr. Ember, having completed all his arrangements, went in search of Lady Heritage. She had sat silently through lunch and disappeared directly afterwards. Having failed to find her downstairs, Ember was about to pass along the upper corridor to the steel gate which shut off the north wing, when he noticed that the door of the small Oak Room on his left was standing ajar. He thought he heard a movement within, and, after pausing for a moment to listen, he pushed the door wide and looked in. As far as his knowledge went, Lady Heritage had never entered this room during the time that they had been in the house. He accepted the fact and could have stated the reasons for it. It had been the playroom, and the walls were covered with Anthony Luttrell's school groups. The book shelves held his books, the cabinets his collections. In a very intimate sense it was his room.

Raymond Heritage stood at the far end of it now. She wore a dress of soft white wool bound with a plaited girdle from the ends of which heavy tassels swung. She had taken one of the groups from the wall and was looking at it with an intensity which closed her thought to all other impressions. She stood half turned from the door. Ember looked at her and, looking, experienced some strange sensations. This was Raymond Carr-Magnus, a younger,

softer, lovelier woman than Raymond Heritage. The curious cold something, like transparent glass or very thin ice, which seemed to wall her from her fellows, was gone. It was as if the ice had dissolved leaving the air misty and tremulous.

The little flame which always burned in him took on brightness and intensity, and a second flame sprang up beside it, a flame that burned to a still white heat of anger because this change, this softening, was for Anthony Luttrell and not for Jeffrey Ember.

There was no sign of emotion, however, in face or expression as he moved slightly and said:

“Are you busy? May I speak to you for a few minutes?”

It was characteristic of Raymond that she did not appear in the least startled. She turned quite slowly, laid the photograph on the open front of the bureau by which she stood, and said:

“Now? Do you want me now?” A softness was in her voice as she spoke, and a dream in her eyes.

Her beauty struck Ember as a thing seen for the first time. He had to use great force to keep his answer on a note of indifference.

“If you can spare the time,” he said.

Raymond looked round her. There was a caressing quality in her glance.

“Yes; I’ll come downstairs,” she said.

This was Anthony’s room. She would not talk to another man in Anthony’s room. The thought may have been in her mind. The breath of it beat on Ember’s flames and fanned them higher still. He led the way downstairs and into Sir William’s study.

Raymond Heritage had passed from the despairing mood of her first interview with Anthony. Then to know him alive and to feel him unforgiving had stabbed her to the quick. But that phase had passed. During the many hours that she had spent alone the one amazing radiant thought that he was alive had come to dominate everything. The cold finality of death had been lifted. Instead of a blank wall, there opened before her an infinite number of ways, any one of which might lead her back to her lost happiness. She began to live in the past, to go over the old times, to make a dream her companion.

She came into the study with Ember and waited to hear what he wanted, giving him just that surface attention which he recognised and resented. His first words were meant to startle her.

“Lady Heritage,” he said, “you know, of course, that there are certain passages and rooms under this house?”

She did start a little, he thought. Certainly her attention deepened.

“Who told you that, Jeffrey?” she said, and hardly heard her own voice because Anthony’s rang in her ears insisting, “I *know* that you told Ember.”

“Mr. Luttrell told me,” said Ember.

She exclaimed incredulously. At least her thoughts were not wandering now. Ember felt a certain triumph as he realised it. He went on speaking quite quietly:

“It was when Sir William and I were down here the year before Mr. Luttrell died. He, Mr. Luttrell, was taken very ill and I sat up with him. In the night he was delirious. It was obvious that he had something on his mind. He began to talk about the passages and to say that the secret must not be lost. He took me for his nephew Henry March, and nothing would serve him but he must show me the entrance in the hall. He got out of bed, and was so much excited that I thought it best to give way. When he had shown me the spring he calmed down and went quietly back to bed. In the morning he had forgotten all about it.”

Raymond listened, frowning.

“Why do you tell me this?” she said. “I knew Mr. Luttrell had told Henry.”

“Henry March knows?” said Ember.

“Yes, I think so. Yes, I’m sure he does. Why, Jeffrey?”

Ember was too busy with his thoughts to speak for a moment. What an appalling risk they had run. If Henry

March knew of the passages, then they had been on the very brink of the abyss all along. He spoke at last, very seriously:

“I want you to come down with me into the passages if you will. There’s something I want to show you—something which I think you ought to know.”

“Something wrong?”

“I think you ought to see for yourself. I’d rather not say any more if you don’t mind. I’ll show you what I mean. I really think you ought to come and see for yourself. This is a good time, as the servants are safely out of the way and Miss Molloy seems to have taken herself off.”

“Very well, I’ll come. I must get a cloak though, or I shall get into such a mess. Those passages simply cover one with slime.”

Ember stood still with his hand on the half-opened door.

“You’ve been down there?”

“Why, yes, once or twice.”

“Lately?” His voice was rather low.

“Yes, quite lately.”

Ember gripped the door.

“And how did you know—oh, I beg your pardon.”

“Yes, I don’t think we need go into that.” She spoke gently but from a distance. As she spoke she passed him and went through the hall and up the stairs. The heavy tassels of her girdle knocked softly against each shallow step.

Ember went on gripping the door until she came down again wrapped in a long black cloak. When he dropped his hand there was a red incised line across the palm. He saw that the cloak was smeared with green. How near to the edge they had been, how horribly near!

He opened the door and lighted her down the steps in silence, and in silence walked as far as the laboratory turning. When he turned to the left and flashed his light ahead of them, Raymond spoke:

“I’ve never been along that passage,” she said. “I know there are holes in some of them, and I’ve never liked the look of these side tunnels.”

“This one’s quite safe,” said Ember, and led the way.

Jane heard the murmur of their voices, and for a moment saw the faint glow of the light. Then the glow and the voices died again. It was dark, she was alone, she was cold, she wanted Henry, oh, how she wanted Henry.

At that moment Jane’s idea of Paradise was to be able to put her head down on Henry’s shoulder and cry. It was not, perhaps, a very exalted idea, but it was very insistent.

When Ember switched on the light, swung open the steel gate, and stood aside for her to pass, Lady Heritage uttered a sharp exclamation.

“Jeffrey, what’s this?” she said.

“That is what I wanted you to see,” replied Ember.

She crossed the threshold, walked a pace or two into the room, and looked around her with eyes from which all dreaminess had vanished. Bewilderment took its place.

“Who did this? What does it mean?” she asked.

Ember did not answer her until he too was within the chamber. He pushed the steel gate with his hand and it fell to with a clang.

“It is, as you see, a well-equipped laboratory,” he said —“worth coming to see, I think.”

“Yes, but, Jeffrey——”

“You are interested? I thought you would be; won’t you sit down?”

She looked about her with puzzled eyes.

“Do sit,” said Ember in his quiet, friendly way. “You will find this chair more comfortable than the benches.”

He brought it forward as he spoke—a high-backed chair with arms. It struck her then as a curious piece of furniture to find

in a laboratory.

“Brought here on purpose for you,” said Ember.

But Raymond did not sit. Instead she rested her hands lightly on the back of the chair, and, looking across it, said:

“Jeffrey, what does all this mean?”

“I’m going to tell you,” said Ember seriously. “I have brought you here to tell you, only I wish you would sit down.”

“No, thank you. Jeffrey, what is this place?”

“A laboratory,” said Ember. “As you see, a laboratory, and the scene of some extremely interesting experiments.”

“Carried out by you?”

“Carried out by me ... and some others.”

“You have brought other people in here? Jeffrey, I think that was inexcusable.”

“I have not yet attempted to excuse myself.”

For a moment his eyes met hers. She saw something, a spark, a flash, from the flames within. It was her first hint that there was, or could be, a flame there at all. It startled her in just the same degree that an actual spark touching her flesh would have startled her—not more.

He spoke again at once.

“Just now I called this place a laboratory. If I were a poet”—he laughed easily—“I might have used another word. I might have said, ‘This is the crucible out of which has come the new Philosopher’s Stone.’”

Raymond lifted her eyebrows.

“You’ve not been touched by that mediæval dream?” she said. “This is the twentieth century, Jeffrey.”

“Yes,” said Ember slowly. “Yes, the twentieth century, and I said ... ‘a *new* Philosopher’s Stone.’ The mediæval alchemists dreamed of something that would turn all it touched to gold, that would transmute the baser metals. I have found something which will touch this base civilisation, this rotten fabric with which we have surrounded ourselves, and dissolve it. And when it is in solution there will be gold and to spare.”

“What do you mean?” said Lady Heritage.

Ember met her frown with a smile.

“Was it a week ago that I heard you say, ‘If I could smash it all’? And didn’t you sing:

> “‘Ah Love, could you and I with Fate conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
> Would we not shatter it to bits, and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire?’

You sang that as if you meant it, Raymond. You sang it with all your heart in your beautiful voice. Well, Fate has conspired for you and given this sorry scheme of things into your hands to shatter—to shatter and re-mould."

Raymond had been leaning a little forward over the back of the chair, touching it lightly. She straightened herself when Ember used her name, and looked at him with a sort of grave displeasure. He laughed a little.

"Do you begin to understand?" he said.

"I don't think, Jeffrey, that I want to understand," said Lady Heritage.

"How like a woman," said Mr. Ember. "Here is what you cried out for. Here is opportunity, power, the greatest adventure that ever has been or ever will be, and you are afraid to face it. I offer you the throne of the world—and you don't wish to understand."

The extreme quiet of his voice was in sharp contradiction to the flamboyant words. Raymond looked at him in some anxiety.

"You're not well," she began, and then stopped before the sarcasm of his glance.

"I'm not mad," he said. "This is a business proposition. You've had poetry, but I can give you prose if you prefer it. I have discovered something—I won't at this moment go into details—which enables me to smash up civilisation as you'd smash a rotten egg. Every city, every town of the so-called

civilised world is accounted for, divided amongst my agents. They only await my signal. Those alone whom we mark for survival will survive, the rest are eliminated. Remains a world at our disposal to recreate. In that world I am supreme —and you. Is that plain enough?"

Her face showed deep distress and concern.

"Jeffrey, indeed you're not well," she repeated.

"Am I not?"

He came a step towards her and saw her draw back, as it were, involuntarily. "Have I not made you understand yet? Perhaps a little documentary evidence will assist you?" He took a quick step towards her, looked at her full, and said in a different voice, "Raymond, I'm in dead earnest—dead sober earnest." Then with a sudden movement he turned away and went across to the safe in the far corner of the chamber. With his back to Raymond he unlocked it, and occupied himself for a minute or two with the picking out of some papers. When he turned she was at the gate with her hand on it. He spoke at once in his most ordinary voice:

"That's a safety-catch. It won't open without the key."

"Will you open it, please?"

He said, "No, Raymond," in a tone of cool finality, and she lost colour a little.

"Jeffrey," she began, then paused and bit her lip.

“Raymond.”

A scarlet patch of anger came suddenly to her cheek and she was silent until it had died again. Long years of self-control do not go for nothing. When she spoke at last there was only sadness in her voice:

“Jeffrey, I have valued our friendship—very much.”

“I hope,” he said, “that you will value my love even more.”

Her hand dropped from the door. She did not answer. The hope of moving him died. She drew her cloak about her, crossed the floor slowly, and seated herself in the chair. She did not look at Ember.

When the last faint murmur of voices ceased, and the dark silence closed about her, Jane sat quite still for a while. It is very difficult indeed to keep one’s eyes open in the dark. Jane found that her lids dropped, or else that the blackness became full of odd traceries that worried and disturbed her. She felt as if she had been there for hours and hours; and she knew that it really might be hours before Henry came.

She got up and walked slowly to where the passage came out into the main corridor. She stood under the arch and looked towards the laboratory turning. She had only to feel her way as far as that, turn up it, and she would come within sight of the lighted chamber where Ember and Lady Heritage were talking. The laboratory drew her, and the light drew her. She began to move cautiously along the corridor. She had on light house-shoes which made no sound.

The little glow which presently relieved the blackness cheered her unreasonably. It was a danger signal and she knew it, but it cheered her.

“One would rather be doing something dangerous than just mouldering in the pitch dark,” she told herself, and edged slowly nearer and nearer to the light.

She was now at the corner, and could look round it and through the steel bars into part of the laboratory. The disadvantage of her position was that she might be taken in the rear by any one who came along either the passage that she herself had come up or the slanting passage with the well in it which ran into the other at an acute angle, about six feet from where she was standing.

Jane, however, knew of no one who was at all likely to arrive except Henry. She therefore did not trouble about her rear, but looked with all her eyes into the laboratory. She saw Lady Heritage sitting in a tall chair, a little turned away. Her right elbow rested on one arm, and her chin was in her hand. Her eyes were downcast. She was speaking in a cold, gentle voice:

“I have not many friends—I thought you were my friend. Was it all lies, Jeffrey?”

Mr. Ember came into view for a moment. He must have been at the far end of the room. He came down it now, walked past Lady Heritage, and turned to face her. Jane saw his profile. He was smiling faintly.

“I am not fond of lies,” he said; “they are very entangling—so hard to keep one’s head and remember what one has said. Now the truth is so simple and easy; besides, you may believe it or not, I really do dislike lying to you. I have always told you the truth where it was humanly possible to do so. Even in the matter of Miss Molloy——”

Lady Heritage exclaimed suddenly and sharply, lifting her chin from her hand and throwing her head back:

“Renata Molloy! She’s in this wretched conspiracy of yours, I suppose?”

Ember laughed.

“No,” he said.

“Then what is she?”

“I wish I knew,” said Ember, speaking soberly enough.

“But what you told me wasn’t true?”

“Some of it was. I was really rather pleased with my neat dovetailing. I’ll run over it, and you’ll see that I told the truth whenever I could. All that about my having known Molloy in Chicago—solid fact. Then I think I said that I ran across him again in London, and found he had taken Government service with Scotland Yard—that was fiction, and so was the yarn about his warning me that foreign agents were on the track of the Government formula. But it’s perfectly true that he has a daughter, and that she sometimes walks in her sleep. When I told you that she had come in—sleep walking—

during an important conversation about the Government formula, and that neither Molloy nor I was sure how much she had heard, I was mingling fact and fiction. Renata Molloy happened in on a meeting of The Great Council—that is the Council of the managing agents from all the countries within the scope of our operations, and no one knew what she had heard, or what she understood. When I told you that I thought she would be safer down here under my own eye, and that I was not sure whether she had been got at, I was speaking very serious fact indeed. They'd have killed her then and there if corpses were just a little easier to dispose of in London. I now very much regret that we didn't chance it."

A trembling bewilderment had descended upon Jane. She saw Raymond stare for a moment at Ember with a curious horrified look and then drop her chin upon her hand again. Ember came a step nearer.

"Having disposed of that," he said, "I should be glad if you would just look at these papers. Documentary evidence, as I said just now, is convincing. This is a short summary of our plans which has been issued to all managing agents. This is a list of those agents. They form The Great Council. These four names"—he paused—"I should have told you that there was an Inner Council. It is the Inner Council which really runs everything. There are four members. I come Second, Molloy was Third, and Belcovitch, who will be here presently, is Number Four."

Jane's heart beat faster and faster. She heard that Belcovitch would be there presently, but she could not tear herself away.

She saw Raymond Heritage put out her left hand for the papers and glance at them indifferently, saw her brow contract as she read, saw her drop the first two papers upon her lap and lift the third. There was a dead silence whilst she read it. It was the list which gave the names of the Inner Council. She let it drop from her hand and an extraordinary rush of colour transformed her.

“What is my name doing there?” she said. Her voice was not loud, but it rang.

Ember turned upon her a face from which all blankness and coldness had vanished.

“Your name?” he said. “Why, the whole thing has been built up round your name. The head of the Council, the inspiration of the movement, the driving force—you, you, Raymond, you. You are as indissolubly knit with the plan as if you had conceived it. The whole Council, The Great Council, knows you as Number One of The Four who are the Inner Council. The work has been done here under your auspices.” His air of excitement vanished suddenly, his voice dropped to an ordinary note. “I told you it was a business proposition. I assure you that it has been most adequately worked out. In the painful and improbable event of criminal proceedings, you would be cast for the chief rôle. A wealth of corroborative detail has been provided. In business, as you know, one has to think of everything. I’m showing you the penalty of failure, but we shan’t fail. I’m showing what success will mean. Think of it—the absolute power to say, ‘This shall be done.’ The absolute power to impose your will! The absolute power to blot out of existence whatever

crosses it!” A gleam came into his eyes like nothing that Jane had ever seen before. “Raymond, I’m not a visionary or a madman. The thing is within my grasp. I’m offering it to you. It’s yours for the taking.”

Raymond did not speak. She only lifted her eyes and looked at him. It was a long look. Whilst it lasted Jane held her breath. Raymond looked down again; there was silence.

Into the silence came a distant sound—a faint dragging sound.

CHAPTER XXVII

Henry left his car at The Three Farmers on the Withstead road, and proceeded with energy towards the beach. He was glad enough to walk after the long drive.

The day was chilly, the air full of moisture, and a thin, cold mist was rising off the marshes. What breeze there was came from the land and took the mist only a few hundred yards out to sea. The motor-boat telephoned for by Mr. Ember earlier in the day ran into it as she came into Withstead Cove to land a passenger. The passenger, who was Mr. Belcovitch, was very glad indeed to be landed. He had no nautical tendencies, and would have preferred danger on dry land to safety at sea. He made his way up the beach and, confused by the mist, went into the wrong cave. As he turned to come out of it, having discovered his mistake, he heard footsteps, and promptly sheltered himself behind a convenient buttress.

Henry walked briskly past and, as Mr. Belcovitch stared after him, disappeared into the next cave. He disappeared and he did not return. Belcovitch heard a familiar sound, the sound made by the pivoting stone as it swung back into its place. He recognised it, and became a prey to some rather violent emotions, of which fear, hatred, and a desire to annihilate Henry were the chief. Henry was

unknown to him, therefore Henry was not one of them. His walk, his carriage, his whole appearance marked him out as belonging to that class which Mr. Belcovitch made a profession of detesting. He possessed the secret of the passages, and was therefore in the highest degree dangerous.

Belcovitch followed him as rapidly and as silently as a man can follow whose very existence has for many years depended on his proficiency in these respects. He closed the stone behind him with a good deal more care than Henry had taken, and, having done so, went up the steps at a surprising rate and in a moment had his quarry in view. Henry had switched on a torch and was proceeding at a moderate rate down the main passage. Belcovitch, moving after him like a cat, did some rapid thinking. It would be very easy to shoot, but it would make a noise. He fingered a length of lead piping in one of his pockets and thought with impassioned earnestness of the back of Henry's neck. Yet, supposing that Ember knew of Henry's visit—he did not want any unpleasantness with Ember. It would probably be better not to kill Henry in case it should prove that Ember would rather have him alive. It was always better to be on good terms with Ember. Molloy had fallen out with him, and it appeared that at this very moment two comrades were on their way to eliminate Molloy. All this very rapidly.

He decided not to kill Henry. It was a pity, because there was a most convenient well into which he could have dropped him. He decreased the distance between them and unfastened the black silk muffler which he wore instead of collar and tie.

Henry pursued his unconscious path, his mind occupied with Jane, and plans, and Jane, and Ember, and Anthony, and Raymond, and Jane again. It is to be regretted that he did not look behind him. The villain ought not to be able to steal upon the hero in the dark without being heard, but Henry had not had Mr. Belcovitch's advantages. The latter had all the tricks of the half-world at his command, and Henry had not.

Just before the laboratory turning Belcovitch came up with a quick run, and that was the first that Henry heard of him. The next instant he felt himself tripped, struggling desperately to keep his footing, slipped in the slime, and came down choking, with a black silk muffler tightly knotted about his throat. Belcovitch was a very neat operator. First the trip, then the twist, and then the chloroform bottle. He had never made a crisper job of it. He took Henry by the heels and proceeded to drag him along the passage towards the laboratory, Henry being mercifully oblivious of what was happening.

When Jane heard that faint dragging sound, she had just about half a minute to decide which passage it came from, and to get away down the other one. It really took her less than thirty seconds to realise that some one was coming by the way that she herself had come, and to dart into the slanting passage which held the well. A yard or two down she turned and stood where she had stood to see Ember pass the day before. Whoever was coming had no light. Of course they could see the light from the laboratory and were steering by it. It was a man coming; she could tell by the tread. He

was dragging something—something heavy. What? Or who? Jane sickened.

A dark figure passed between her and the glow that came from the laboratory. She took three light steps, and saw that what he dragged behind him was a senseless man—senseless or dead.

She heard Ember call out, “Belcovitch, is that you?” And a voice with a strong foreign accent answered.

Then a great many things seemed to happen at once: the steel gate opened; the helpless man was dragged in; and, as the gate fell to, there came Raymond Heritage’s scream.

Jane shook from head to foot. The scream cut like a knife. Why did she scream like that? Who was it? Who was it? Who *was* it? She got her answer in Raymond’s gasp of “Henry!”

An inner blackness, much, much worse than that intolerable dark which had oppressed her, swept between Jane and everything in the world. When Raymond said, “Henry!” the light went out of her world and left it black. She heard Ember say, “Is he dead?” but she could not see Belcovitch’s shrug and shake of the head. She leaned against the wall and could not move. I suppose that in that moment she knew that she really loved Henry. It hurt—dreadfully.

Then she heard Raymond’s voice again:

“What have you done to him? Devils, devils!” And Ember:

“My dear Raymond, calm yourself. He’s not dead, nothing so crude. Mr. Belcovitch is an artist, and Captain March will come round in a minute or two and be none the worse. I’m sorry you had a shock.”

Light, dazzling light flooded Jane’s consciousness. Henry wasn’t dead. The dark was only a dream, and she was awake again. She was very much awake, and her whole waking thought was bent upon the necessity of getting help for Henry before that dream came true.

Ember and Belcovitch would murder him if they had time. Raymond would make what time she could, but in the end they would murder him unless Jane could get help.

She turned, holding to the wall, and moved along the passage. When she had taken a step or two something happened which she could never think of without self-abasement. Her nerve went suddenly, and she began to run. It was only for a dozen steps; then her self-control came into play. She pulled up panting, and, after listening for a moment, crept the rest of the way, reached the steps, and came out into the empty hall, dirty, wet, and as white as a sheet.

As soon as she had the panel shut she ran across the hall and down the corridor to the library. She shut the library door with a sharp push, and was across the room and taking down the telephone receiver before the sound of the bang had died away.

“Exchange!” she said, “Exchange!” and clenched her hand as she waited for the reply. It came with a dreamy accent, the voice of a girl disturbed in the middle of Sunday afternoon. Nobody should be telephoning in the middle of Sunday afternoon.

“Can you look up a London number for me? Sir Julian Le Mesurier”—she spelt it. “Please be very quick; *please*, it’s important.”

“Righto,” said the dreamy voice incongruously.

Silence fell. Jane held on to the telephone, and tried to control her breathing, which came in gasps. The room seemed full of mist; she shut her eyes.

When Jane started to run down the laboratory passage Jeffrey Ember was superintending the removal of the black silk muffler from Henry’s neck. When they rolled Henry over on to his face he groaned, and when they tied his hands behind his back with the muffler he tried to kick, whereupon Ember produced a piece of rope and they tied his ankles too.

The sound of Jane’s running feet had come very faintly upon Ember’s ear. Henry was groaning and kicking, and Belcovitch was cursing in a steady undertone. It was not until he rose to get the piece of rope that his mind took hold of that faint sound and began to analyse it. There had been a sound in the passage outside—some one moving—some one running. Yes, that was it, some one running, light foot and very fast.

Ember finished tying Henry up and got to his feet.

“There was some one in the passage just now,” he said. “I must go and see. There was something; I heard something. It was like some one running.” He spoke as if to himself, and then turned to Raymond.

“You will stay where you are in that chair—otherwise....” He swung round to Belcovitch.

“If she moves, shoot Captain March at once,” he said, and was gone, leaving the gate ajar behind him.

In the library Jane waited for her call. It came with startling loudness—a bell that seemed to ring inside her head—and then the dreamy voice drawling, “Here y’are.”

In Piggy’s study Isobel Le Mesurier said, “Hullo!”

“Is that Lady Le Mesurier?” said Jane.

“Yes, speaking.”

“Please tell your husband——”

And Isobel’s charming, friendly voice, “He’s here. Won’t you speak to him yourself?”

Jane’s hearing, always acute, was strung to an extraordinary pitch. She could hear the girl at the exchange speaking to some one; she could hear Isobel saying, “Piggy, you’re wanted”; and behind these sounds, on the extreme edge of what was perceptible, she heard the click of the panel and

Ember's footsteps as he crossed the polished floor. She knew that they were Ember's footsteps, and she heard them coming nearer.

Sir Julian was speaking:

"Who is it?"

Jane heard her own voice, and it sounded small and far away.

"Jane Smith, speaking from Luttrell Marches. They've got Henry in the passages. He's hurt. They've got a motor-boat in Withstead Cove. Help as quickly as you can. Some one's coming."

Ember was half-way down the corridor. Piggy was speaking:

"Anthony Luttrell's on his way—should be with you any minute."

Ember turned the handle. Jane called out:

"Oh, can't you get me that number—oh, can't you get it quickly?..." And, as the door opened sharply, she dropped the receiver and turned.

Ember came in—a new Ember. There was something terrifying in his look, and he said harshly:

"What are you doing?"

"Trying to telephone," said Jane. "They take such ages."

Mr. Ember's look was terrifying, but Jane was not terrified. As she dropped the receiver something happened to her which she did not understand. Within the last half-hour she had felt an extremity of fear and sudden anguish, violent relief, and again intensest fear and suspense. From this moment none of these things came near her. She moved among them, but they did not touch her at all. The thing was like a play in which she had her part duly written and rehearsed. There was no sense of responsibility, only a stage upon which she must play her part; and she knew her part very well. She did not have to think, or plan, or contrive. She knew what to do, and how and when to do it. From the moment that she dropped the receiver at the telephone she never faltered for an instant.

Ember looked at her with eyes which saw every tell-tale stain upon her dress and hands. The something in his gaze which should have been frightening became intensified.

"Lady Heritage wants you in the study," he said.

Jane knew very well that he said the study because the study was next to the door in the panelling. If she refused to go, he would stun her or shoot her here. She did not refuse, and walked down the corridor by his side in silence. They crossed the hall, and Ember kept between her and the stairs. Jane walked meekly beside him with downcast eyes until he passed ahead of her to open the study door. In that moment she turned on her heel, sprang for the stairs and raced up them, running as she had never run in her life.

Ember would not risk shooting her in the hall—she felt sure of that—but he was after her like a flash, and she had very little start. She reached for the newel at the top and jumped the last three steps, with Ember about two yards behind. Then down the corridor with a rush and into her room, and the door banged and locked as he reached it.

Jane wasted no time. She thought that Ember would hesitate to break down the door until he had at least tried promises and threats, but she was taking no chances. She heard him speaking as she opened the cupboard door and locked herself inside it. His voice was only a murmur as she heaved up the trap-door in the floor and climbed carefully down the ladder upon which Henry had stood that night which seemed like weeks and weeks ago. The catch in the wall at the bottom was a simple handle like the one behind the panelling. She emerged into the garden room, opened the window, dropped out of it, and ran quickly and lightly along the terrace, keeping close to the wall of the house.

Ember talked through the door for five minutes. His remarks ranged from persuasive promises to threats, which lost nothing from being delivered in a chilly whisper. At the end of the five minutes he put his shoulder against the lock and broke it. He found an empty room and a locked cupboard. When he had broken the cupboard door and discovered nothing more exciting than Renata's schoolgirl wardrobe, he went to the open window and stared incredulously at the drop to the terrace. Jane had turned the corner of the house and was out of sight.

Ember came downstairs with the knowledge that he must complete his business quickly if he meant to bring it to any conclusion other than disaster.

He went straight to the library and rang up the Withstead exchange.

“The young lady who was telephoning just now, did she get the number she wanted? She did? Would you kindly tell me which number it was?”

There was a pause, and then the information came: Sir Julian Le Mesurier! There was certainly no time to be lost. Molloy and his daughter both traitors, both spies, both in Government pay! Molloy should be reckoned with by now, and some day without fail he would reckon with Renata.

He came into the hall, and released the spring of the hidden door. As the panel turned under his hand, he heard the purr of a motor coming nearer. It drew up. The bell clanged. Mr. Ember stepped into the darkness and closed the panel behind him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Anthony Luttrell's distaste for his errand had certainly not lessened during the long drive from town. He stood now on his own doorstep facing a strange butler, and heard a formal "Not at home," in response to his inquiry for Lady Heritage.

"And Miss Molloy?" he asked.

"Not at home," repeated Blotson.

If this was a reprieve it was an unwelcome one. Anthony would very much have preferred to get the thing over.

"I will wait," he said briefly, and walked past Blotson into the hall. "I am Mr. Luttrell," he explained, and Blotson's resentment diminished very slightly. After a moment's hesitation he threw open the study door and ushered Anthony into the room.

"If Lady Heritage is in the house she will see me," said Anthony. "If she is out I should like to see Miss Molloy or, failing her, Mr. Ember." He walked to the window and stood there looking out until Blotson returned.

"Lady Heritage is out, sir, and Miss Molloy is out. Mr. Ember was in just now, but he must have stepped out again."

“I will wait,” said Anthony for the second time.

When Blotson had gone, he stood quite still, following out a somewhat uneasy train of thought. As the minutes passed, uneasiness merged into anxiety.

Jane ran the whole way to the walled garden. Once inside its door she made herself walk in order to get her breath. When she came into the potting-shed she knew just what she was going to do, and set about doing it in a quiet, businesslike way. From a stack of pots she took about half a dozen, broke all but two of them, and gathered the sherds into the lap of her dress. She put the two unbroken pots on the top of the sherds. Then she took a sharp pruning-knife from the shelf, opened the trap-door, and went down the steps.

As soon as she came into the main corridor she began to put down the broken sherds, taking care to make no noise. She laid a trail of them up to the laboratory turning, and then all along the turning itself, disposing them in the middle of the fairway in such a manner as to ensure that they should not fail to be seen by any one flashing a light along the passage. She put the last two or three sherds in a little pile about a yard short of the arch leading to the slanting passage with the well in it. As she bent down there she heard Belcovitch maintaining an impassioned Slavonic monologue within the laboratory.

She stood in the archway, threw her two unbroken pots against the opposite wall with all her might, and then ran back down the well passage until it turned.

Everything happened just as she knew that it would happen.

Belcovitch stopped talking and swore. It was a polysyllabic curse, very effective. Then the steel gate was flung open, and in three languages Mr. Belcovitch demanded of the silence an account of what was happening. His voice ran away into a hollow echo, and died miserably.

Jane heard him stamp back into the chamber, cursing, and return. This time he flashed a light before him. Flattened against the wall, Jane saw its glow reflected from the side of the passage in which she was. Belcovitch had seen the sherds and was exclaiming and muttering. She heard him pass the arch.

Jane stole to the mouth of the slanting passage. Belcovitch was two yards away on her left, flashing his light down the tunnel, seeing more broken pots, and more and more, and swearing all the time, not loudly but with considerable earnestness. Jane slipped like a shadow across behind him and round the corner. The steel gate was wide open. She ran through it and into the lighted laboratory.

Henry lay on the stone floor in front of her, bound hand and foot. He had rolled over on to his side and was staring at the gate. Raymond had risen to her feet, and was taking a half-step towards Henry as Jane came running in.

“Shut the gate,” said Henry in a sharp whisper.

“There’s another way out, and I don’t think they know it. Quick, Jane, quick!”

Jane slammed the gate. She had the pruning-knife in her hand, and she was down on her knees and at work on the black silk muffler before the sound of the slam reached Mr. Belcovitch. When it did reach him he spun round and came back at a run with a revolver in his hand and murderous fury in his heart.

Jane cut through the last shred of silk, and because Belcovitch's hand was shaking with rage his first bullet missed her and Henry handsomely.

"Get up against the wall, quick!" Henry commanded.

As he spoke he was himself half rolling, half scrambling towards the wall. His ankles were still tied, but his arms were free. The second bullet just missed his head. Jane cried out, and then they were both out of the line of fire. Henry was breathing hard.

"Give me the knife," he panted, and began to saw at some of the toughest rope he had ever come across.

Raymond had remained standing. She had retreated almost to the end of the room and wore a look of extreme surprise.

"Why do you call her Jane?" she asked. Her deep voice came through the racket with strange irrelevance.

Belcovitch continued to make the maximum amount of noise in which it is possible for a man and a revolver to collaborate. He banged the steel gate in the intervals of firing, and he cursed voluminously.

The rope gave, and Henry was half-way on to his feet when there was a sudden cessation of all the sounds. Raymond gave a warning cry, and Henry caught at Jane's shoulder and straightened himself. The steel gate was opening.

Jane said, "Henry—oh, Henry darling!" and there came in Mr. Jeffrey Ember, very cool and deadly, with his little automatic pistol levelled. Just behind him came Belcovitch, a silent Belcovitch, at his master's heel.

"Touching scene," said Ember. "Captain March, if you don't put your hands up at once I shall shoot Miss Molloy. From her last exclamation, I should imagine that you'd rather I didn't. Miss Molloy, go across to the opposite wall and stand there. Belcovitch, kindly keep your revolver against that young lady's temple, but don't let it off till I give you leave. Raymond, I should be glad if you would resume your chair. A brief conversation is, I think, necessary, and I should prefer you to be seated."

He stood not far from the entrance, dominating the room. The gate had been closed by Belcovitch. Ember waited till his instructions had been carried out; then he came a little nearer to Lady Heritage and said:

"Time presses, Raymond. I must go. I wish that there were more time, for indeed I would rather not have hurried you."

Jane, with the muzzle of Belcovitch's revolver cold against her temple, found her attention caught by Ember's words. Time ... yes, that's what they wanted—time. Piggy had said that Anthony might arrive at any moment. When he did

arrive and found that they were all mysteriously absent, surely his first thought would be to search the passages. She raised her voice and said insistently:

“Mr. Ember.”

Ember threw her a dangerous look.

“Be quiet,” he said shortly.

“There was something I wanted to tell you,” said Jane.

“Out with it then, and be quick.”

“You called me Miss Molloy just now....”

“No, Jane, *no*!” said Henry violently.

Mr. Ember echoed the remark made by Lady Heritage.

“Why do you call her Jane?” he inquired.

“That is what I was going to tell you,” said Jane.

“You called me Miss Molloy, and I just thought I would like you to know that I’m not Renata Molloy. It would make an untidy sort of finish if you went away thinking that I was, and I hate things untidy.”

“You’re a little devil,” said Ember ... “a little devil.”

Jane stuck her chin in the air.

“Well, I’m not Renata Molloy anyhow,” she said. “No one would ever have called her a devil. She was a white rabbit—a nice, quiet, tame white rabbit.”

Jane’s voice failed suddenly on the last word. Yet Mr. Ember had not looked at her again. His eyes went past her to Belcovitch, and it was to Belcovitch that he spoke.

“No, not yet,” he said, “but if she speaks again you can shoot.”

A long, slow shudder swept Jane. She leaned against the wall and was silent, and she shut her eyes because she could not bear to see Henry’s face. Ember turned back to Raymond.

“I’m sorry to hurry you.” His voice was low and confidential. “What I have to offer, you know. It is yours for the taking. Please don’t make any mistake. I have to change my base, it is true—I have even to change it with some haste—but neither that nor anything else can now affect my purpose and its achievement. What I offered is, without any shadow of uncertainty, mine to offer and yours to take, if you will ... if you will, Raymond?”

Raymond’s sombre gaze dwelt on him as he spoke.
The whole scene affected her as one is affected by something which is taking place at a great distance. She did not seem able to adjust her mental focus to it. Her mind seemed to be divided into two parts. One of them was entirely and unreasonably preoccupied with the relationship between Jane and Henry, and the reason why Henry should have addressed Renata Molloy as Jane. These thoughts

seemed to circle as continuously, and with as little aim, as goldfish in a glass bowl. The other part of her mind was bruised and sick because Jeffrey Ember had been her friend. When he said, “Will you, Raymond?” she did not speak. She looked at him in silence, and presently made a slow gesture of refusal.

Ember came a step nearer.

“I told you,” he said, “that I was in dead earnest. Perhaps you don’t realise just what I mean by that. I’ve played for a high stake, and I mean to have what I’ve played for or nothing. I’ve played for you, and if....” He broke off. “Let me put it this way. Either we make the future together or there’s no future for either of us. I’m speaking quite soberly when I tell you this. Think well before you answer, but don’t be too long. If there is to be no future our present will end here and now. This place is mined, and if I press that unobtrusive knob, which you may notice above the safe, the end will be quite a dramatic one. I have always had some such contingency in view, and this makes as good a stepping-off place as any other. Think before you refuse, Raymond.”

She shook her head again. Her eyes never left his face. Ember made an impatient gesture.

“Are your friends going to thank you?” he said. “You are taking the heroic pose, and forgive me if I say that it’s a little unworthy of you. I expected something less obvious. Take my offer, and I guarantee to leave Captain March and Miss Molloy here unharmed. Can any woman

resist sacrificing herself? Come, will you save them, Raymond?”

Lady Heritage spoke for the first time:

“I suppose that I must be a fool because I trusted you.... I did trust you, Jeffrey ... but I don’t know what you have ever seen in me to make you suppose that I am such a fool as to trust you again ... now.”

Her words and her voice caused a change in Ember, a change as difficult to define as to describe. It is best realised by its effect upon those present. Some impression of shock was received in varying degree by them all. Henry March had, perhaps, the most vivid sense of it. In Belcovitch it bred panic.

Whilst Ember was speaking the hand that held the revolver to Jane’s temple had become more and more unsteady. The muzzle knocked cold against her cheek bone and jabbed against her ear. Jane wondered when the thing would go off. So, it is to be imagined, did Henry, for he was grey about the mouth and his forehead was wet.

Ember did not speak for a moment. Then he said:

“Touché!” in a queer, bitter voice.

Belcovitch began to mutter in an undertone that gradually became louder. His hand shook more and more.

“Sure, Raymond?” said Jeffrey Ember. “Quite, quite sure?”

He came up quite close, and laid his right hand lightly on her shoulder. It was the first time that he had touched her.

She said just the one word, “Yes.” For a moment his hand closed hard upon her. Then he sprang back with a laugh.

“All right, then we go up together.” And, as he spoke, he made for the corner where a little vulcanite knob showed above the steel safe.

With a sort of howl Belcovitch whirled to meet him. They crashed together and grappled, Ember silent, Belcovitch torrential in imprecation and fighting as a man frenzied with terror does fight. His revolver dropped from his hand, and Ember stumbled over it.

Like a flash Henry had Raymond by the arm, whilst his eyes commanded Jane and he pointed to the passage that led out of the laboratory on the extreme right. It was the one that Jane had explored first, and as she ran into it she remembered that it ended in a small chamber full of packing-cases. In a panting whisper she said:

“It’s full of boxes.”

“Then we must shift them,” said Henry, and, groping in the almost dark, he began to pull the cases away from the right-hand wall.

“A light—he can’t find the spring without a light.”

Raymond heard her own voice saying this, and then she ran back down the passage and into the laboratory.

Belcovitch had put his torch down on the bench from which Jane had taken the lists. Its exact position was, as it were, photographed on Raymond's consciousness. She reached, snatched it, and was back again in the least possible space of time. As she came, she saw Ember and Belcovitch swaying, struggling—horribly near the corner. And as she went she had an impression of Belcovitch falling and, as he fell, dragging Ember down with desperate, clawing hands. Then she was trying to steady her hand and throw the light upon the wall space which Henry had cleared; but the beam wavered and shook, shook and wavered; and Jane took the torch out of her hand, setting it on one of the packing-cases.

"It should be here. It should be just here"—Henry spoke in a muttering whisper; then with sharp irritation, "Nearer with that light, Jane."

Jane held it closely to the wall. Henry's hands slid up and down, feeling ... pressing. Once they heard Belcovitch shout, and all the time the sound of the struggle filled their straining ears. Some one fired a shot—and Henry found the spring. A slab of stone swung outwards, pivoting as the other doors had done.

Henry pushed Jane through the opening, flung his arm round Raymond, dragged her through and slammed the stone into place. They were in the narrow alley-way between the row of veronica bushes and the terrace wall, on the spot where Mr. George Patterson had stood listening to Raymond's voice.

The air, the daylight, the mist, seemed wonderful beyond words. Jane never again beheld a mist without remembering that joyful lift of the heart which came to her when the stone shut and she drew her first long, free breath. Henry gave her no time to savour the joys of freedom.

“Run, run like blazes!” he shouted.

Jane ran. Once she started she felt as if nothing would ever stop her. She heard Henry just behind her; she heard him urging Raymond on, and they came out of the alley-way round the end of the terrace, round the side of the house.

Then it came.

The ground shook; there was a muffled thud and a long, heavy rumble that died slowly. Then with a terrific crash two of the stone urns along the terrace wall fell and broke. As the noise ebbed there came the tinkling sound of splintered glass falling upon stone.

Jane stopped running as if she had been shot, and reeled up against Henry, who put his arms round her and held her tight. Up to that very moment the feeling of unreality, of playing a part in a play for which she had no responsibility whilst her real self looked on remotely—this feeling had dominated her. Now it was as if the curtain fell and she, Jane, was left groping amongst events that terrified her. She trembled very much, and clung to Henry, who was at that moment the one really safe and solid thing within reach.

Raymond did not pause or turn her head, but walked straight on towards the house.

CHAPTER XXIX

The last rumble of the explosion had hardly died away before Anthony Luttrell had flung open the study door, and was making his way at a run towards the Yellow Drawing-Room.

At the glass door which led on to the terrace he halted, opened it wide, and stood on the step looking out. Some glass was still falling from the broken windows on this side of the house. All the terrace on the right of where he stood was like a drawing in which the perspective has gone wrong. There was a great bulge in one place, and some of the paving-stones were tilted aslant, whilst others had fallen in, leaving a gaping hole over which a cloud of dust was settling.

Anthony turned his back upon all this and came back with great strides into the hall. Without so much as a look behind him to see whether he was observed, he loosened the spring, pushed open the door in the panelling and there halted, suddenly remembering the need of a light. He went back for a torch, and then passed down the steps without waiting to close the door.

That something appalling had happened was obvious. With the self-control without which it is impossible to

meet an emergency Anthony kept his thought focused upon what he was doing. At the bottom of the steps the way was still clear. He saw Jane's broken pots and wondered what on earth they were doing there. Then he turned into the laboratory passage, flashing the light ahead of him. Half-way along the passage the roof had fallen in.

Anthony turned, came back into the main corridor, ran along it until he came to the place where the well passage joined it. Here he turned off, made his way cautiously past the well, and again found a mass of stone and rubble blocking his path. A cold horror came over him, and all those thoughts to which he had barred his mind came insistently nearer, pressing past those barriers and taking his consciousness by storm. He came back into the hall and shut the door in the panelling.

The hall was quite empty, but the voice of Blotson could be heard at no great distance. It was raised in exhortation and rebuke. Obviously he rallied a staff which inclined to hysteria, for one could hear a woman's sobs and a subdued chorus of perturbation and nervous inquiry.

Anthony went to the front door and flung it open. His car stood at a little distance, the inspector and the chauffeur in close conversation. Anthony did not see them. He only saw Raymond Heritage, who was coming slowly up the steps. She was bareheaded, and her face was very pale. She wore a white dress with a black cloak over it. She stumbled twice as she climbed the steps and, if Anthony was only conscious of seeing her, she did not appear to be conscious of seeing any one at all.

It was only when the hand which she put out in front of her actually touched Anthony that she lifted her eyes and looked at him. Then she said in an odd, piteous sort of voice:

“Tony.”

“What is it? What has happened, Raymond? Are you all right?”

“I must speak to you—I must,” she said, catching at his arm and drawing him towards the study. They went in, and when the door was shut she turned to him with the tears running down her face.

“Tony, you heard? I think he’s dead. That place downstairs was mined, and he tried to kill us all, only we got away, Henry, the girl, and I. But Jeffrey’s dead—yes, I think he must be dead, and I know now what you thought. I didn’t know what you meant before, but I know now. You were wrong, Tony. Oh, Tony, won’t you believe me? I didn’t tell him about the passages, and I didn’t know anything until to-day. They can tell you I was speaking the truth—Henry and Miss Molloy; but, oh, Tony, can’t you believe me, just me?”

Anthony looked at her, and looked. His face was twitching. As her voice broke on the last two words he dropped to his knees, flung his arms about her, and hid his face in the folds of her cloak.

By the time that Jane and Henry came into the house Blotson had set all his machinery running once more. He himself presented a magnificent front to two of the most dishevelled

people whom he had ever been called upon to receive. It was not until afterwards when it came home to Henry how much green slime there was in his wildly ruffled hair, and how little the original colour of his collar could be discerned, that he realised how marvellous had been the unflinching calm of Blotson. He referred neither to the explosion nor to Henry's appearance. In point of fact, what were emergencies and accidents that Blotson should notice them? The hour being five o'clock, it was his business to announce tea. He announced it.

"Tea is served in the library," he said, and passed upon his way.

But in the library the tea cooled while Henry, very much relieved to find that the wires had not been cut, galvanised the Withstead exchange and got on to a distinctly relieved Sir Julian.

They arranged, speaking in Italian, that an explosion had occurred in the course of an important experiment in Sir William's laboratory. It was agreed to notify Sir William and the press. The loss of two lives was greatly to be deplored. When this was finished Piggy became less official.

"That girl of yours is a brick; you can tell her so from me. She's all right, I hope?"

Henry said "Yes," that Jane was quite all right. He sounded a trifle puzzled.

Piggy laughed.

“Didn’t you know she had rung me up to say you’d been nobbled? Most businesslike communication I’ve ever had from a lady in all my life. Told me they’d got a motor-boat in Withstead Cove. And, thanks to her, we ought to have gathered it in. I got through to the coastguard station at once. Now look here, what’s the likelihood of laying hands on Ember’s papers?”

“Ember’s papers?” repeated Henry. “Well, there was a safe down there, and that’s where he’d be most likely to keep them; but I expect they’re all gone to blazes, as the door was open.”

At this point Jane’s voice came in breathlessly:

“Henry, wait, keep him on the line!” she said, and was gone.

“It’s Jane, sir,” said Henry. “I think she’s gone to get something.”

In the middle of Piggy’s subsequent instructions Jane came back. She held a bundle of closely written sheets. She spread them before Henry’s eyes, holding them fan-wise like a hand at cards.

“I’d forgotten them till you said that about the papers—I’d actually forgotten them. It’s lists of his agents in all the big towns everywhere. I sat up all night copying them because I didn’t dare keep the originals. I keep forgetting you don’t know what’s been happening. But tell him, Henry, tell him we’ve got the lists.”

Henry told him.

Jane heard Sir Julian answer, and then Henry hung up the receiver and hugged her.

“What did he say? Henry, you’re breaking my ribs! What did he say?”

“Jane, you’re a brick, and a wonder, and a darling, and he said—he said, ‘Bless you, my children!’”

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

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- In the text versions, delimited italics text in _underscores_ (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
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- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.

[The end of *The Astonishing Adventure of Jane Smith* by Patricia Wentworth]