

**A
Silver Rattle**



SYLVIA THOMPSON

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By SYLVIA THOMPSON

THE HOUNDS OF SPRING
THE BATTLE OF THE HORIZONS
CHARIOT WHEELS
PORTRAIT BY CAROLINE
SUMMERS NIGHT
UNFINISHED SYMPHONY
BREAKFAST IN BED
A SILVER RATTLE

A SILVER RATTLE

By
SYLVIA THOMPSON

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DEDICATED TO KONRADIN
(In Memory of the Rabbit!)

The house was empty before they came
For twenty years.
No ghost remained. The house was quiet when they found it,
No fears
Beset its doorways. No name
Made a legend round it.
It stood, shutters closed,
Pear and jessamine
Grown thick on brick port wine
In color. A fanlight
Above the door. And pale and bright,
On the ridge of the roof, the pigeons
Spreading their tails fanwise.

Men and women had gone out of it,
Leaving a sweet wood-smelling emptiness;
Leaving no thoughts
To haunt its elegiac drowsiness.

So that they, man and woman, coming into it,
Opening the door (he and Francesca opening the door . . .)
And letting in the light
And pausing under the dome of the rising stair,
Saw their own day's sun on the floor
And heard the flight
Of wings in a scare.
(So long since a door opened
Or a shadow moved.)

They went from room to room,
Stirring the shuttered light
With their voices;
Scattering their delight
In the silver-dusted gloom;
Wedding their words, their deep and gay words,
In each room.

Their words
Made life again
In the house. Their thoughts quickened
The forgetting dusty floors,
And the elegant doors,
Closed and thickened
With cobwebs. They went and came
And the shutters—
That hadn't heeded the persistent rain,
Or the wind's mutters,
Or the love-making sun—
Opened again.

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A Silver Rattle

I

FRANCESCA

Truth pierces between sleep and waking, and lies across the sense like a rod of light slipped between curtains.

If “awake” and “asleep” could be drawn apart, she, Francesca, lying dead-still, would see that gold spear widen, until, until—her body dead-still—she began to stir, to feel, to know by its flooding rising light . . .

For that thin ray that leaves a thin dying-out sear across the darkened sense is the beginning of knowing. . . .

But there is the wall.

The pallid shadow-carved paneling.

There, on the chest of drawers, the white lilac, the photograph of Frederick. . . . There, on the chimney piece, the narcissus. . . . And the box from Steinmann on the chaise longue.

And now the certainty that, the other side of the screen, the door handle is moving, the door is opening, and Nurse Forbes, whose intention-of-coming was already in the room, waking her patient—on the other side of the painted screen Nurse Forbes is listening and, as she listens, shutting the door silently after her.

Now her starched skirts whisper, hovering behind Francesca. Now the skirts cross the carpet on silent steps, and are over by the windows; and there is a clinking, the faintest peal of curtain rings, and a breathing of hangings moved and fallen together. The leaning towers of lilac pale and darken again to silver. The transparent shadows flicker and return to the room.

Francesca lies, isolated, veiled in her sleepiness as in mosquito nets.

The steps come inaudibly, the skirts reverently, hesitantly, towards the bed.

Francesca speaks, hardly opening her lips. Nurse stands beside the bed now, her face an oval shadow in the white veil.

“I wasn’t sure if you were awake . . .”

She offers her the cool, clear sentence like a glass of water; not giving it to her directly, but setting it beside her in case just a sip of that coolness, that matter-of-fact yet miraculous reassurance, was what she might need.

Francesca murmurs: “What’s the time?”

“A quarter to four. . . . Baby’s in such a beautiful sleep. . . . I’ve just left her out there under the tree.”

Francesca has wide-open gold eyes flecked with green; black hair; a white skin.

Her coloring, thinks Nurse Forbes, is what is so beautiful about Mrs. Howard. (The sketch of her down in the library doesn’t do her justice—makes her look older.) She has, Laura Forbes thinks, a sort of lighted-up quality; and when you touch her (how too well Laura Forbes knows the touch of people’s bodies!) her skin is healthy and cool.

The little boy, Robin, has those same hazel eyes and black hair—but not his mother’s skin. For his nose is freckled, his cheeks pink; and he has a square little face and funny quivering little nostrils. Maud, the sewing maid, says that the boy has his “Daddy’s shaped face.” But, “Let’s hope he’ll take after his Mummie more than his Daddy,” Maud says. Laura Forbes understands that Mrs. Howard’s first husband, Mr. Morant, was a weak character. “At least Mr. Howard is devoted heart and soul to his wife,” Maud said. (“At least—” thought Nurse Forbes.)

Laura Forbes likes Mr. Howard.

“And anyone can see that Mrs. Howard is head over heels in love with him . . . though they’ve been married two years, Mrs. Howard said.”

Nurse Forbes went away, leaving Francesca with her face washed and her hair combed, like a good child.

“I shall give you your tea,” she said, “before Mrs. de Briac comes. Otherwise you will have nothing to eat. I remember quite well when she used to come and see her own daughter, poor Mrs. Beverley never got anything!”

“I think nurses are recording rather than ministering angels,” said Francesca.

She took up a book.

It was a copy of *Une Vie* which Robin had brought for her from the library this morning, with various others (selected by him on some obscure principle of color and shape). Opening it, she saw the dedication, “Francesca from Adrian, 1924.” . . . She remembered his buying it for her, at Aix-en-Provence, on their honeymoon.

It struck her as absurdly symbolic of her life that Adrian should have given it to her, and Frederick have had it bound. An implication of the whole way in which Adrian had been an impulsive, but inconclusive force in her existence; whereas Frederick was so definitive, producing in her a much more complete coördination than he could achieve in his own character. (Producing, indeed, such order in her that she could only hope, in return, to be, perhaps, the “one tidy room” in the labyrinthine and lovely mansion which was himself.)

Adrian’s writing had for her now the quality of any inanimate thing so long familiar as to be, automatically, nostalgic. And his voice on the telephone, and Robin’s tricks of gesture, and the resembling shape of his eyelids when he was asleep, gave her that same reflex emotion. Nor was this nostalgia qualified by the fact that Adrian’s writing, and voice, and features, were associated as much with her most vital defeats as her most primal happiness. For what she felt (hearing his voice again or kissing his son’s eyelids) wasn’t a nostalgia of present longing, but of remembrance; a reaction—of a complex, painful, but blessedly remote sort—to lost time.

For he had been seven years of her life.

Only when she saw him face to face now those seven years blanked out, and she found herself talking to a tired, indeterminate young man, whom she was, a little absently, sorry for.

They had met at the Slade School.

Adrian began one day, after a class:—

“I wonder if I could look at your drawings sometime?” looking at her with faintly troubled shining green eyes.

She said, “They’re very bad,” thinking about his eyes and forehead and eyebrows, and speaking curtly. Then she asked to see his drawings, to make

up for her curtness, and they went out and sat on the steps with their portfolios, and smoked gold-tipped cigarettes from a new box which Adrian took out of his pocket.

His drawing was certain and sensitive. She said, "But you needn't admire mine in return, because I'm no good at all, but I don't know what else to do." (She didn't add "until I fall in love and marry," which was what she wanted to do, and was waiting for.)

He asked her where she lived and she said, "In Trevor Square, because my mother still believes I ought to be able to get straight into the Park in the mornings—Where do you live?"

He told her he had a studio in Mecklenburgh Square, but that his parents lived near Dorking. He said, "My father is a merchant who tills the soil."

She thought this funny. She found that he said an oddly funny thing every few months.

They met again every day that week and he asked her to come and have tea with him and see his studio. She said she was going away to the country that afternoon, but would be back in ten days' time. He said "Oh dear," vaguely, and walked away.

Two days later she had a letter from him forwarded to Warwickshire, where she was staying with the Vernons:—

DEAR MISS STAVERTON,—

In spite of the fact that you don't feel it would be very amusing to come to tea with me, you might like to go to the 1920 Club's Fancy Dress Party on the nineteenth. Anyway here is a ticket if you'd like to use it, and there will be several other people in our party, so you may not be bored.

Yours sincerely,

ADRIAN MORANT

Francesca wrote back and accepted. When she had posted the letter herself, in the box at the village post office, she realized that "the nineteenth" was written up in her mind. She thought a great deal about what dress to wear, and decided to wear one out of *Carnaval*, a white ballet dress and a green poke bonnet, a black mask and short black gloves.

She decided not to go back to the Slade before the nineteenth, and wrote a note to Adrian Morant telling him this; but adding how much she was

looking forward to the ball. She asked him if he would dine at her parents' house beforehand. He wrote back saying he would like to dine at Trevor Square, and saying that he couldn't decide whether to go as a matador or, at her suggestion, as something out of the Russian Ballet. She wrote back "Prince Igor" on a postcard (because his image in her mind already had an exotic but chill quality). She felt, long before she came to realize it, that his gentleness came from detachment more than from kindness; and that under his charming, beautifully mannered shyness he might be emotional, sensual, and even relentless. It was her disturbing sense of these qualities hidden in him which made him so attractive.

Her father was out at a public dinner the evening of the nineteenth. Francesca was glad of this, as he had a way of pronouncing elaborate judgments on people after a first meeting, based on his observation of quite small mannerisms. Thus he would say, "I never trust a man who stands with his hands in his pockets," or "I never like a woman who uses a cigarette holder," or "There's always something queer about a man who prefers Madeira to port." Francesca had only discovered in the last few years that her father, however brilliant an archæologist, was limited in his understanding of human motives—That, for instance, he still believed his wife's love for him was admiring, whereas—Francesca had long seen this—it was supremely protective (to the point of never letting him see that she didn't admire him at all). He might, Francesca thought, very well seize on Adrian's trick of flicking imaginary dust off the lapel of his coat and begin, to-morrow morning at breakfast: "I'm afraid I never feel quite sure of a young man who . . ." and so forth. She felt defensive and hot at the thought of this.

Her mother, on the other hand, could be relied on to like Adrian, and make him feel this. She would like him for being young, and want to take away his shyness; and she would be charmed by his manners and his tall, romantic, yet almost childish beauty. And, above all, she would want to make them both, Francesca and her guest, feel that this particular evening was, out of all the evenings there had ever been, the most festive and the most fitted for delight. (For her own mother, the Viennese Bérénice, had said of her, "Helena finds every walk a holiday, every acquaintance a friend, and every *Jause* [tea party] a court ball.")

Francesca was alone in the drawing-room when Adrian arrived. She hadn't yet put on her mask and bonnet. Adrian was dressed as one of the men in *Carnaval*, in pale grey frock coat and grey trousers buttoning under the insteps, and a stock and an elegant waistcoat. He carried a mask and a

grey top hat. He looked incredibly slender and romantic. They stood staring at each other, and when he spoke his voice was curt and choked. He said:—

“What a lovely dress!”

She looked down at its enormous white tarlatan circumference.

“Do you like it?”

“*Awfully!*”

She said, “You look—fearfully picturesque. You never told me you were coming to ‘match with me.’ . . . Won’t you sit down? . . . *Do* have a cigarette. There are some in that glass box.”

He sat down on the edge of a chair, holding his top hat on his knees. He said:—

“I thought it would be rather fun to have something out of the same ballet.”

“It *is* fun. I like the way you’ve added side whiskers.”

He said, “Oh, that’s just burnt cork, of course!”

Then they couldn’t speak again until she said:—

“Have you been working hard?”

“Yes, fairly.”

“I feel I’ve been fearfully slack.”

She took a cigarette and lit it.

He said—“I *should* like to draw you in that dress.”

She said, “Yes, it is picturesque—like a Degas!”

“Yes, *exactly!*”

“What time does the thing begin to-night?”

“About ten. It’s in a house in Portman Square that somebody’s lent.”

“How lovely!”

“Well, I hope it will be.”

When Francesca’s mother came in Adrian got up, and Francesca saw at once that she liked him, and they all three began to enjoy themselves. At dinner Mrs. Staverton made him tell her about his painting, and why he had left Cambridge instead of finishing there, and what he meant to do. She

made him talkative and amusing and friendly—which Francesca had felt he essentially wasn't. (Her mother never came to believe in his essential unfriendliness. She always maintained that Francesca didn't understand him, and that he needed a more sustained and sensitive love than Francesca gave him.)

But during this dinner Francesca began to see him through her mother's eyes as well as through her own. So that the qualities which already attracted her were suddenly made paradoxical, and therefore more interesting, by an innocence of heart and sweetness of disposition conjured from their negative state to a positive appearance by her mother's imagination. And Mrs. Staverton's swift "What a *darling* he is!" murmured when her daughter was putting on her cloak upstairs, became later on, in Francesca's memory, a definite point of departure.

Adrian had his car with him, and they drove through the frosty lit-up streets, she in her green bonnet and he in his grey top hat. Their exhilaration broke out every now and then in inconsequent talk and laughter. But part of the time Francesca sat silent, feeling such a sweet and strange delight that she knew she must be in love.

If she had ever, for a moment, felt this before, there had never been anyone there for her to be in love with. Now there was Adrian. And as he helped her out of the car she was so moved by her sudden gratitude that she couldn't even smile at a remark he made, and was glad that she had her mask on.

But when they went in, and found the crowd and lights and music and began to dance, she felt gay again. More madly gay than she had ever felt in her life. They had a table with several other people, including a gondolier, a fat creature in a yashmak, and a Napoleon. But Francesca and Adrian danced together, and had supper together. He drank champagne; but she couldn't eat or drink—only sipped, and nibbled olives.

As the evening went on they couldn't stop looking at each other, and when they danced together they didn't speak any more. And when the music stopped they slipped slowly out of each other's arms and stood trembling, and waiting for the music to begin again. And when the last dance had been played, and it was two o'clock, they went out into the square, arm in arm, and got into the car without speaking or letting go of each other's hands. Then he said, looking away from her:—

"Well, I suppose I'd better drive you home?" and she said "Yes," her gayety gone, and a pain across her chest.

He started the car. And then he said:—

“You wouldn’t like to come back to my studio for a little?—I can’t *bear* to take you back yet.”

“Yes, please.”

They could smile for a moment in their relief from the pain of leaving each other.

When they got to the studio, its pallor and silence embarrassed them. She said, “What an enchanting room,” and put her bonnet on a table; and he went to the stove and rattled something and said, “I’m glad you like it.” He added, “There’s rather a good view from the windows over the square.”

He pulled back the long silver curtains and they stood looking out, but not seeing the lamplit trees below, and the façades of the houses, and the policeman marching his shadow to and fro. They stood still, until she touched his hand. Then they put their arms round each other, and he kept saying, “Darling, you’re so lovely,” and she looked and looked into his face, as if her eyes were as thirsty as her heart, and could never be satisfied. Then he said, “May I kiss you, darling?”—and she couldn’t speak, but he began to kiss her on the mouth and she held on to him, drinking his kisses with a violent stillness, her eyes shut but streaming with tears. They went on kissing until they were sick and drained of strength, so that they sank down, apart, on the window seat, and sat looking at each other between the low yellow radiance of the room and the dim glare from the street lamps below. Then he said, but not touching her again:—

“I love you so much, darling—”

“And I love you.”

He said, his voice husky, putting out his hand and touching hers:—

“I can’t *bear* to let you go.”

She said, “We needn’t ever let each other go,” and thought how they would go on like this all their life—and laughed and caught his hand in hers—“*Never*,” she said.

He stared, whispering, “You’re *so* lovely, Francesca,” and drew her towards him again, and they stayed close together, on the window seat, cheek to cheek, speechless and afraid to move.

Only when the sky began to grow pale and spill a watery light into the square, she stirred and said:—

“Now I must go . . .”

“I wish you were staying here. I wish you could sleep here with me and we could wake up together in the morning!”

He stood there in his absurd frock coat and stock, his dark hair pushed back and untidy, his eyes hurt and luminous in his so strangely beautiful face.

She got up, smoothing out her great white skirts, and went to him and put her arms round his neck and said:—

“Soon we will sleep together, darling. And wake up every morning together all our lives . . .” But then she said, “Perhaps it would be lovelier never to wake up . . .”

But he said, “Isn’t that rather morbid?” and smiled, and kissed her, and got her cloak for her. And she was relieved at his not understanding; and didn’t, herself, really believe what she had said.

II

ROBIN

Robin was allowed to show the baby to Mrs. Hedges when she came to see it. It was five days old then. He took her to the pram under the chestnut tree. They stood watching it together. He said:—

“Don’t you think her face is indeed like a rose petal!”

“Yes,” said Ellen Hedges, absently, but with a half smile sideways at him.

“Only rose petals,” he said, “begin smooth and become crumpled; while she began crumpled and has become smooth.”

“Oh well, Mr. Robin, we all crumple again later on.”

“You mean wrinkled? But you aren’t, Ellen. You have a nice smooth moon-face—only reddish.”

“A harvest moon, I expect you’re thinkin’ of, Mr. Robin.”

Robin laughed. He laughs like his mother, Ellen thought—bright and sudden, and then such a serious look again.

They both looked back at the baby.

“*Well*, Miss Howard!” said Robin, his brown dirty forefinger creeping over the starched coverlet.

“Now then—” said Ellen. “Nurse Forbes said you wasn’t on any account to touch her.”

“I was touching the cover,” said Robin. But he colored up to the freckles on his nose, and withdrew his finger slowly, and put his hands in the pockets of his blazer.

“What is she really to be named?” Ellen asked.

“Charlotte Rose. D’you like the names?”

“I like Rose all right,” said Ellen. “But I don’t fancy Charlotte so well.”

“I said to *Mummie* you might as well call her *Apple* Charlotte” (or Charlotte Russe, he’d said to Mummie, but couldn’t repeat that because Ellen might be embarrassed at not knowing French).

“Indeed you might,” said Ellen. “Are you fond of babies, Mr. Robin?”

He hesitated. “She’s my first experience, you see—My father, you know, didn’t much like babies. So they only had me. Maud says that’s why Mummie wasn’t very happy and they separated.”

Maud has no business saying such things to him, thought Ellen. Talkin’ to a nine-year-old boy like that.

“But Mummie says,” Robin added, “that not nearly all men, or even women, like them. And now my father likes me very much.”

Ellen couldn’t resist asking:—

“Do you see him often?”

Robin thought. “About every year. He came to London last summer and took me to the Russian Ballet and luncheon before at a restaurant where practically the whole of one side is one whole sheet of glass.”

“My!!” said Ellen. This information—something or other Russian (“No good,” Mr. Bennet, the carrier, said, “ever came out of Russia—first Rasputin and now the Reds”) and a queer “restaurant”—seemed to go with the things they said about Mr. Morant—about his living in Paris and having Japanese servants and goodness knows what else. . . .

The baby turned its head and gave a little cluck, but didn’t open its eyes.

“*Isn’t* she sweet, Mrs. Hedges?”

“She is indeed, Mr. Robin.”

“Why don’t you and Hedges have one?”

Ellen’s face got even redder. “Well, ’s a matter of fact, I am expectin’ one meself—in—in a day or so.”

“Oh—*are* you, Ellen—I do hope you’re pleased,” he added, politely.

“You may be sure I am!”

“What will you call yours?”

Ellen said, well, she hadn’t thought yet, but probably Frank after its daddy, if it was a boy.

“Is Hedges pleased?”

“Yes,” lied Ellen, who knew that Hedges was nothing but afeard these days.

“Now,” said Robin, “as you’re here I daresay you’d like to see my rabbit’s young ones.” He added, with one of his inward hovering smiles, “You know Frederick—my stepfather, you know—says that the whole place is *burgeoning*—” (“Burgeoning!” he repeated to himself, his eyes bright under his brown-feather lashes.)

Ellen followed him to the stable yard, where Maud, his mother’s maid, in her eternal uniform of white silk blouse and brown skirt, was talking to Hilton the chauffeur, while he washed the car. She came over to talk to Mrs. Hedges and ask her how she was.

“I daresay you’ll be glad when it’s over,” said Maud, pursing her pale, kindly lips and patting at her fringe. “It’s never quite the same at your age, is it?” she said.

“Oh, I’m healthy enough,” said Ellen.

“Still,” said Maud, patting down her muslin apron in the light wind, “it isn’t like one that’s *had* several already.”

But Robin shouted to Ellen to come quick and see the rabbits, and Maud went back to her talk with Hilton.

Robin showed the rabbits and the mice and took her to see Heather, his pony, and tried to hide his disappointment when Ellen, who was tired, said she must be getting along home.

He said good-bye and wandered down the orchard, a little oppressed by a feeling about the general lack of staying powers in grown-up people. He thought of it, pausing to look at the double cherry blossom, as “always wanting to do something different.” Even Frederick was like that, and Mummie sometimes, and Adrian used to be particularly, looking fearfully interested for a moment, in what you told him, or what you were doing, and then getting up and looking for a cigarette, or fidgeting round until he had a book or a whiskey and soda. Of course, now he went to school, every day in term time, he got lots of what Maud called “companions of his own age.” But he would have preferred to have a brother or sister of his own age. When he was little he had invented “Zara.” But he had decided to stop her after he was five.

He liked school. He liked riding there, starting after an early breakfast and taking the track across Darrow Hill round by Esford. He liked arriving rather in a hurry, and getting into the big light beeswax-smelling classroom just in time. He admired his form master, and he liked the boys (except two) and all the lessons except Latin grammar. He made friends with most of the

boys, and enemies with only two. (One a bully, and the other a sneak who stole India rubbers.) But, though he'd been there five terms now, his life with them there went on being "outside" him, like a story in a book which he read with intense interest but knew, quite clearly, wasn't "real life."

Frederick had asked him, after the first term, if he liked school. He seemed relieved when Robin said, "Oh yes, quite." He said he hadn't liked prep school himself, partly because he was a boarder and was unhappy at being away from his mother.

Robin asked Frederick if he and his mother had been great friends. Frederick said, "Yes, in a lot of ways. I think I was always hoping we should become more friends than we were. She was very strict."

Robin liked to hear about grown-ups when they were children, and asked Frederick to tell him more about his mother and father and his pony, and his brother and his brother's "carpentering shop." He liked hearing about Frederick's father, "the General," who never had a hot bath and grumbled whenever his sons did. Frederick's father had been in Westminster Abbey at two Coronations, King George V's and King Edward VII's. (Aunt Juliette had a photograph of King Edward VII in her boudoir, but not in a crown.) Frederick's father had a grandfather who fought against Napoleon. When Robin first heard this his loyalty to Frederick conflicted with his hero worship of Napoleon. But Frederick assured him that, though his great-grandfather had fought Napoleon, he must certainly have admired him, all the same.

Robin built himself up a picture of Frederick's childhood, glamorously haunted, though a little overawed by an enormous general in a scarlet uniform. He said to Frederick once, "I suppose your parents were satisfied with each other?" And Frederick said they were, very.

Robin didn't secretly think Mummie's childhood nearly so glamorous. She hadn't ridden much, except on hired horses, and seemed always to have been traveling. The most interesting bit seemed to him when she ran away from the awful school at Cheltenham they sent her to when her mother had to go away (where they gave her boiled chicken-food to eat) and she arrived at Aunt Juliette's house in London in the middle of a big dinner party, dressed up as a garden boy, and Aunt Juliette laughed, in the end, and they made an extra place for her at the table.

One of the "different" things about his own father, Robin thought, was that he never seemed to want to remember about anything. Robin used to wonder if Adrian really didn't want to, or couldn't. Finally he worked out a

theory that his father had had a “sad life,” and naturally wouldn’t want to remember it. When he couldn’t fit in the theory quite with the photograph of Adrian (on Mummie’s writing table), aged six, laughing on a sand castle, he had decided that the sad part must have been after he was six. Robin knew that his father had been brought up in the grey-turreted house near Dorking where Robin went for visits of a week at a time to his Morant grandparents, who were sad, elegant, affectionate people, who seemed to find it difficult to laugh (except at pictures in *Punch*). Robin enjoyed staying with them because he had always known the house. But he was sorry when Mummie stopped coming with him, after the divorce. And he wasn’t always sure Adrian would stay out the appointed week with him, so that often he was left alone with his father’s mother, who had a worrying way of looking up from her embroidery at him, and sighing crossly, and then asking him more questions about what he did at home and, whatever he answered (about the house, or Mummie, or his pony, or his school), saying “Dear me” in a tight voice to herself, and sighing again.

III

ADRIAN

There is no morning for Adrian Morant. There is dawn, sometimes.

Coming back through the streets of Paris, of Vienna, of New York, of Berlin once.

But he hated Berlin and the Prussians, he couldn't believe that his German governess (whom he had loved steadily and passionately with his once unmessed-up soul) could have come out of Berlin, or Christmas trees out of Germany—In the city streets he sometimes smells dawn, or sees it, in streaks over chimney pots. But mostly his head is empty and swimming and his eyes stupefied. Or else he is bored, chill, and in a hurry to get to bed after making love and having to dress again.

He goes to bed—in his *appartement* in the Place des Vosges—or in the Lafayette (where he stays because of the coffee); or in the Bristol, Wien (because he stayed with his Aunt Georgiana when he was fourteen and they heard *Così Fan Tutte* and saw the Emperor); or in his lodgings on the Grand Canal, Venice (because he has gone to the same room, in Venice every year since he left Francesca—Venice being a place they'd never been to together); or in the Château Frontenac; or in a Turkish Bath in London. (In England he wears a polo sweater in Bond Street, eats in pubs, goes back to Eton on the fourth of June, and doesn't speak all day except to the ticket collector at Slough.)

But mostly, seven or eight months of the year, he goes home to a high-ceilinged seventeenth-century room whose windows see the morning lighten on the face of the Musée Carnavalet on the opposite side of the square. He sleeps until eleven, until twelve—until Chang, his Annamite servant, knowing the moment for this, as he knows the moment for everything and the reason for most things, sets down the Bromo Seltzer, the cigarettes, the ash tray, on the *guéridon* by the divan. And as Adrian, his mouth rancid, his gentle unhappy glance peering between sticky lids, pulls himself on to his elbow, leans up in his darned cotton pyjama jacket, and sips, and fidgets out a Lucky, Chang—miniature, golden-faced, and springy-stepping-looking, in a white jacket, as if he were going to champion Asia in a world fencing match—brings in the *Times* (yesterday's), *Le Journal*, *Le Matin*, the *New York Herald* (Paris edition)—

Then the coffee.

“*Bonjour, Chang.*”

“*Bonjour, monsieur.*”

“*Où est Richard?*”

“*Richard est dans la salle à manger—*” Chang opens the door. “*Richard!*” Lets in the bobtailed sheep dog. “*Nous avons fait une bonne walk.*”

The animal, a creature made out of huge grey chrysanthemums, comes affectionate and unsteady across the parquet, rests its greyish-white beard on Adrian’s sheets, stares up through its hair into his face.

Chang lights Adrian’s second cigarette and puts the *briquet* back in his trouser pocket.

“*Monsieur déjeune ici?*”

“Yes.”

Occasionally Adrian has luncheon alone, at Fouquet’s, at the Rond-Point, at the Deux Magots. . . . Occasionally he lunches with his friends. But he likes being alone, and at home. He doesn’t usually meet his friends until six.

Chang and Richard live together when Adrian is away. Living year in, year out, in the Place des Vosges (except that summer when they both went with Adrian and Marise to Deauville), they have a complex, silent, faintly smiling relationship. Marise said they were complementary. She used to buy *jambon de Parme* for Richard, cigars for Chang. (Adrian always thought it was Chang who got her cocaine for her because they both swore he didn’t. He thought Chang went to see her even now,—somewhere off the Place de Clichy she lived,—for Chang smelt, once or twice, of her scent. But then, any woman—any of Chang’s unspoken-of loves—might use that light chypre that hung about on your finger tips, in your nostrils . . .)

Chang’s cooking was so good that Victorine refused to let Adrian ever take her out to restaurants. She liked to come in after a *thé* or a *concert* or one of her lectures at the Sorbonne or the Louvre or the American Women’s Club, and have a tomato-juice cocktail (Victorine didn’t drink alcohol because of her skin and figure) and make love while Chang cooked dinner.

She knew Chang disliked her. But that was one of the things that made her laugh, showing her big lovely teeth and darkening her long-lidded blue

eyes. She would lie on the bed beside Adrian, one of her minute cigarettes smoking away between forefinger and middle finger, her knees crossed,—she rouged them just over the bone with the same color she used for her cheeks,—her profile, Swedish-negroid, tilted right back because the pillow was rolled under the nape of her neck, and say, “Prahbably he’s grinding the glass now—” or “I *think* I can hear Chang shaking the arsenic bottle.”

Adrian knew that Chang disliked her because he never mentioned her, and never put roses and a comb and glass or iced water by the bed, and clean sheets whenever she was coming, as he had for Marise, and Léonie, and even for Sybil. Adrian thought the reason was that Victorine had come directly after Marise, and had made it easier for Adrian to break with Marise entirely. For Chang knew, what Adrian knew about himself, that Adrian was incapable of saying a direct “No,” except when he was in a temper—which was rare—or forced to a negation by some other person. Victorine, as she explained to him when at first she read his hand to him (her technique of seduction was as simple and traditional as her amorous efficiency was complex, if a little book-learnt), had “more will-power than intuition.” In that, she said, she was rather masculine. She told Adrian that he needed a “female with a masculine viewpoint,” whereas she needed a “male with feminine subtlety.” Adrian knew that he wasn’t really subtle, or at all feminine—and that what she liked to take for subtlety in him was simply his being English and untheoretical. When she made generalizations he neither agreed nor disagreed, but looked at her with his long bright eyes, smiling his rather lost smile which, like his glance, never quite reached the person it was meant for.

Victorine never comes for luncheon because she studies l’Art du Moyen Âge in the daytime. She studies the Moyen Âge until four o’clock every day except week-ends. She is always planning to go to Basel and take Adrian with her, because Adrian knows the director of the art gallery there, and Victorine could talk to him about Holbein.

Victorine has a theory about Holbein and is going to write a treatise on him. The theory has a Freudian basis. She often explains it to Adrian, but he doesn’t listen so obviously that, at last, the blood rising under her rice-paper skin, she accuses him of having a “reactionary attitude towards women,” or imagining “just because he happened to go to Eton and Oxford that women aren’t scholarly.” She says, “Everybody acknowledges now that Leonardo’s art was due to his fixation about his mother, so why shouldn’t it be equally true that Holbein—” and then she begins again proving the theory that came to her in Bar Harbor and she has come to Paris to substantiate.

Adrian has never listened attentively to any woman talking, except Francesca. He listens enough to make mild ironical fun of them in his own mind. The kind of fun Francesca would have enjoyed. Even now he finds himself thinking a description of something Victorine said, or Marise thought, for Francesca.

The last time he saw Francesca was when she came to fetch Robin at Brown's Hotel, after he and Robin had been to the Ballet. When he saw her coming across Dover Street he was startled, as usual, into believing that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She came into the hotel, not smiling at all at him, but holding out her hand to Robin. Adrian wanted her to stay and have a drink; but she said she couldn't, they had to get down to the country. He felt she was still more unfamiliar than the last time he'd seen her. Even her voice seemed to come from a long way off. He couldn't believe he had ever been able to kiss her whenever he liked or woken up with her every morning in their green bedroom in Cheyne Row. She had become such a different person now that it seemed strange that she still used the same eyes and mouth and body. Talking to her, in the hall of Brown's Hotel, he felt her so changed that he couldn't even conjure up his old jealousy. This woman, married to Frederick Howard, wasn't Francesca who had lived those six years with him. This woman, with Francesca's face grown a little thinner, Francesca's body grown somehow narrower, hadn't any of the vague ironical anger that used to haunt Francesca's manner. Most of all her serenity made her strange.

When she said good-bye she gave him her gloved hand. Robin kissed him and stood after that, looking up at him and into every corner of his face. Adrian thought that Robin probably understood him better than he understood Robin. He felt even less sure with children than with older people. But when Robin got into the taxi with his mother, Adrian felt sick with misery and ordered a double whiskey in his room and packed, and went out and walked across Berkeley Square and up to the Running Horse, where he had another drink and met a man he'd once met in Charleston, and they went on talking and occasionally drinking together; and he only left, to go back to Paris, the next day.

Adrian dreams about Francesca.

She is real, in his dreams, as she wasn't in Brown's Hotel. Once, when Marise was there, he fell asleep and woke up trying to say Francesca's

name, and the tears running out of his eyes. Then he saw Marise's funny cat-face close above his—"What is it, *mon petit*?"

Once Léonie saw Francesca's photograph in a suitcase when they were packing to go to St. Tropez and said, "*Je vois bien que tu l'aime encore.*" But he said no, he didn't even miss her now any more. He hadn't missed her the first months after the divorce, and only thought about her angrily. But the second year had been unhappy, and he kept thinking about her, and when he saw her at the Gare du Nord with Frederick that time, he had wanted to go and knock Frederick down and strangle him slowly. And all that winter (it was the winter Sybil Bevan was living with him in the Quai d'Orléans *appartement*) he dreamed about torturing Frederick Howard. But now, if he thought about Frederick, it was with the vague misanthropy that he felt for most people who lived orderly and elegant lives. He was, in fact, apt to think of order and elegance as what Frederick had "brought Francesca to." But he thought this with no special resentment.

But once when Léonie, flushed and quick-fingered, picked up the photograph, asking who she was, he snatched it from her. (And Léonie ran at him and bit his hand, and he had to take her out to the Bœuf that evening to make her feel chic and good-tempered again.)

Now the photograph is on the lacquer cabinet in the salon. Chang put it there one day in a frame, soon after Victorine began to come.

Adrian had never spoken of Francesca to Chang, but last winter, when he had grippe badly, he heard Chang telephoning, spelling out "King's Norton . . . 53." Chang admitted that he telephoned each evening to Madame Howard to tell her of Monsieur's progress.

"How did you know her number?"

He said that Madame wrote Monsieur once a postcard with a stamped address. He had telephoned the first night, after the doctor came. Madame had asked him to telephone again. After that a parcel of books had come from Galignani's, and Valentine's Beef Juice was delivered from Robert's twice a week for three weeks.

Victorine looked at the photograph once and said it reminded her "of a portrait by Holbein, or by Raphael, perhaps?" When she asked who it was, he said, "My ex-wife." When she saw the snapshot of Robin on a pony she asked who he was, and Adrian said, "A small cousin of mine." Victorine said that English children had a wonderful life, but she thought corporal punishment in the public schools was terrible. She asked Adrian if he had

ever been “caned.” He said yes, several times, and when he was captain of his house he had “tanned” other people. She said she couldn’t understand it: it was worse than beating colored people. Adrian said it wasn’t half as bad; and that it was infinitely less boring for children to be beaten than talked to. Then Victorine became morally high-hat and wouldn’t eat or undress all evening, and sat about reading Dante in translation. She said there was something cold about English people when you got to know them. Adrian smiled and had more Pernod and went out to a movie, and to look for his friends. When he got back at three in the morning, he found a note, and reread it again next morning. It said, “I’m through with this!” But she did come back the next night, with gin inside her for once, which made her laugh a lot.

Victorine didn’t belong, as Sybil did, to his friends. (He met Victorine with Lebrun at a *vernissage*.) Sybil he still saw most days, with the others, at the Colisée, or the Rond-Point Footit’s Bar, and she was always pleased—sometimes bluff, sometimes maudlin-pleased—to see him, and made him sit by her and held his arm while she ordered him a drink. She took no trouble now about dressing. Her tall broad-shouldered body was always belted in that same blue reefer coat, except in very hot summer, when she wore a navy-blue dusty polo shirt open and the skirt of a suit she’d had from Schiaparelli when he lived with her. . . . Her gold straight hair was pushed back in a mop from her bony shiny face, whose slight lopsidedness gave her an El Greco look. Her lipstick was usually over the edge of her wide, oddly charming mouth. People always said “poor Sybil” about her, for in spite of her high spirits she had a crucified look about her eyebrows and lent them all money and never asked for it back. Jimmy Cloud, who was democratic now that his drinking stopped him being any use as a snob, said that “Sybil was what comes of having a British baron for your father.” Jimmy often lived on Sybil, and once borrowed her flat to seduce an Indian prince in. He had smutty eyelashes round gentian-blue eyes and a family in Boston and debts in London. Roger Vandenberg, who had been in the American Embassy and left it, was always with Sybil and Jimmy Cloud and Adrian, too. Roger got fatter and more silent every night. Not that any of them spoke much, after about nine o’clock, except Sybil—and Wanda Lafarge, who often came and sat down at their table and talked on and on about French politics. (Her second husband was a *Député*; her first had been a German interior decorator in Chicago.) Wanda would sit there in one of her black dresses and black tulle eye veils, fidgeting with her broad diamond bracelets while she talked. But when Wanda wasn’t there and by any chance Sybil was lugubrious, which happened when her indigestion was too bad or more

money hadn't come, then they went from one café or *boîte* to another, sitting at tables, and just making a remark now and then about the cabaret, or the other people, and ordering more drinks. Once Roger Vandenberg broke out chortling, and laughed so that his little bloodshot eyes began to disappear under his eyebrows; and when he could explain he said, " 'All silent and all damned'—where's that quotation from?" But they were all rather glassy-eyed and couldn't remember, or bother to.

Marise used to be with them for a time. But she was uncomfortable with them. She said to Adrian that she didn't really belong, because, though she too could drink all night, she hadn't started life in a nursery with a Nannie. Marise's mother was an Australian actress and her father had been in the French navy. Marise doted on his memory (though he was still alive somewhere) and read Loti. Adrian said that he didn't suppose Jimmy Cloud had a Nannie either. But Marise said that, on the contrary, Wanda Lafarge had described *la famille Cloud*, of Boston, and that they were extremely *bien vue*, and were in what Wanda called "Codfish Camp."

Victorine once met Adrian when he was with "them." Victorine tells Adrian that he is ruining himself. He doesn't answer this sort of remark either. When she says, "Darling-sweet, d'you *warnt* to kill yourself this way?" he smiles, his shining long eyes staring through her. He shakes his head. "I hope to live a good many years."

"But what *good* is this sort of a life, darling?"

He smiles more, stares harder, says in his gentlest emptiest voice, "What 'good' is anything?" And she gets indignant.

But about midday, when he wakes up, he thinks—with the Bromo Seltzer in his mouth, and then the cigarette, and then the coffee—quite clearly about his life now. And if he doesn't make himself read *Le Journal* or yesterday's *Times*, or the *New York Herald*, he begins to remember back and back until he gets to the time when a great many things were good.

Those first years with Francesca seemed good enough. That first winter (before she began having Robin—and he took that job in Bernstein's and they went to Cheyne Row)—when they had the cottage near Stow and used to walk or ride all day, and come back in the lovely winter dusk to a big fire. And even at first in London (though even then Francesca cried once and said that towns killed you and she hated parties) they used to be so in love with each other, and Francesca used to sit beside him in the evenings while he read to himself. But he remembered saying lightly, "Darling, you make me feel embarrassed when you watch me like that!" And she had got up and

said nothing, and fetched herself a book. And then, much later, she'd said that his feeling embarrassed had begun to explain to her what was wrong.

But now, still, he wonders what *was* wrong? Now, in his high bedroom in the Place des Vosges, he doesn't understand the wrongness. She became unhappy, and so he did. Her unhappiness made her restless, resentful, curiously cruel in the end, so that when she hurt him he sat reading and reading or went out to be alone.

But when they went away to the country, or for that April in Florence, then she was happier again, and so he was untroubled. In a way he was happier during those times of breaking away than in the first year, because she didn't expect (there had been a strain he hadn't bothered to analyze in that) all sorts of indefinable understandings and loyalties. She didn't ask him, any more, what he was thinking about. And, though he liked the child and thought it funny and pretty, he was relieved to be away from a nursery and the nurse in white, and Francesca always having the child downstairs and wanting him to look at it.

But Chang makes it easy for Adrian not to think too long about it all. "*Le bain est prêt, m'sieu.*"

Adrian gets up, his long legs a little stiff, pulls on the dressing gown Francesca once made him, sees himself in the glass, turns away, for he doesn't want to think about his liverish color and his hair going back. But as he goes into the bathroom he remembers, for no reason, Francesca saying as they were passing the Hyde Park Hotel in a taxi on a summer evening, "Darling, we're dying from not *being* enough." They had been to the opera with Madame de Briac, and Francesca had on that silver dress and her face was pale because she was angry; and then she cried sitting up straight and trying to stop, and kept on saying, "Don't you *feel* something wrong with yourself?" . . . He thought she was hysterical, but he was sorry for her. For he was always in love with her, in his way that somehow didn't do for her. That night he thought how lovely she looked and wanted to make love to her. But he didn't tell her that she was lovely, or that he wanted her. When they got home he went into the drawing-room and read the *New Yorker*, and when he came up later she was asleep. He knew that if he woke her she would put her arms round him and they would be all right, anyway until morning, and even the next day would be better. But an impulse of revenge made him leave her asleep.

"Doesn't anything seem important to you?" Victorine wants to know.

“Why,” Victorine says,—her eyes so close that he can see the stripes in the iris like the spokes of little wheels,—“I don’t believe even *I* do?”—and smiles. But her smile is too near and wide and bright. “I don’t believe you’d care, one bit, darling-sweet, if I went off and left you!”

He jerks his head back, as if her question were a wasp. “Of course I should care,” he murmurs, standing still while her hands move down his arms. “Liar,” she says, but believing him. “Chang—what about a nice little *sirop* for me?” The telephone rings. Jimmy Cloud’s voice says, “If I come round right away can you lend me five hundred francs? I’ll pay you back next week.”

He comes in a few minutes from the Quai d’Orléans, where he has just had a row with Sybil. He sits down by Victorine and she likes his smutty blue eyes and wants Adrian to see that she does. Jimmy calls out, “What about a cocktail, Chang—that’s what you meant to say, didn’t you, Adrian?”

Adrian is always a little timid with Jimmy, who is so loudly and ironically sure of himself. He says, “Of course, Jimmy—” and goes to fetch the five hundred francs.

“I’m off to Cannes for a rest,” Jimmy says. But even Adrian has noticed that Jimmy never leaves Paris, except when he’s given his yearly first-class round-trip to New York by his family at home. He used to have people who would take him away most week-ends, but he has worked through them.

“D’you like Cannes?” he asks Victorine.

“Ye-es,” she says, looking into her pocket mirror.

“Why don’t you come too?—And you too, of course, Adrian?”

“N-no, thanks. I always hate it.”

“Could I get to Cannes via Basel, Adrian?”

“I suppose you can get anywhere via anywhere if you can afford it.”

Jimmy says, “It’s just a question of what shape you like your triangle. You can make it equilateral and go to London via . . .”

“Amsterdam?”

Victorine says, “You see I *have* to go to Basel because—” and begins telling Jimmy about Holbein’s fixation.

Adrian doesn’t listen, and picks up the *Times* from the table and takes his Pernod from Chang. He sees “Howard” at once, on the outside in the

“Births” column (though he never reads those columns, as he doesn’t care who is born, marries, or dies). *Howard. To Frederick and Francesca Howard, of Ferris Court, Chipping Norton, a daughter. Charlotte Rose.*

“. . . to-morrow morning?” says Victorine.

“You won’t be up.” Jimmy is looking in her eyes and thinking her too white-negroid about the mouth, but thinking she has an interesting fruity smell like cooked cherries.

“Up! Why, I’m always up by 7.30. I’m out in the Bois horseback riding by eight and at work by ten! It’s only people like you and Adrian that have no morning!”

Adrian is getting the *Times* open with his beautiful unsteady fingers.

IV

TULIPS FOR MRS. RAMAGE

Allston stopped at the third of the blue-covered beds.

“Well, Mrs. Ramage. How are you to-day?”

Bessie Ramage grinned.

“All right, thank you, doctor.”

“And the baby?” He bent over the cradle swung transversely across the end of the bed, like a blue-covered lifeboat.

“’E’s fine, thanks.”

Allston turned to the Sister.

“Baby doing all right?”

“Yes, Mr. Allston.”

“How many does that make?” he asked Bessie.

“Five altogether, sir—I expect there’ll be the half dozen before I’ve done!”

Bessie spoke with her slapdash cheerfulness. She had lank, bobbed, thatch-colored hair with a fringe, and a square face with plump cheeks. The face of a common lively little boy set on a round soft female neck. (Her parents used to call her Buster Brown. “Buster” had stuck at home.)

Bessie’s grin—she gave Allston another as he moved on to the next bed—was such a hilarious, provocative, lighting-up grimace that she had got a husband with it. She had never, even when she was still in service and not so clumsy and spread in the body, been pretty! And she had always been slovenly in her dress, and would go out, not caring who saw, with holes in her stockings and even her best blouse safety-pinned rather than sew a button on. But she did her grin at Reginald Ramage when he was calling for orders (and she was supposed to be upstairs doing out the day nursery)—and they were married within the year.

Reginald Ramage, a reliable young man with an affectionate nature and store of more or less reactionary “opinions” absorbed from the newspapers, kept on his job with Ellis, the greengrocer, and he and Bessie settled in a

house in Blenheim Street, Chelsea (at the “poor” end of the street, where there weren’t yet, in the name of “reconditioning,” yellow or Reckitts-blue doors, and bathrooms inside—and rents round about two hundred a year).

Reginald had “prejudices” and Bessie was “never a one to bother about details”—with the result that they had four children, three girls and a boy, in four years. It didn’t worry Bessie if she had three, or four. She didn’t find even babies “much trouble,” partly because she didn’t take “much trouble,” partly because the children themselves were tough, sturdy, tousled little things, so near each other’s ages that they were more like a club than a family. (A ladies’ club with a rather honorary gentleman member.) Bessie hauled them about and laughed at them. Until each of them was past a year old—when their regular meals already consisted of bread and butter, tea, bacon, and anything else—Bessie suckled them, partly as a sedative and partly to stop herself starting another. (Though she always had already.)

She wasn’t so well after a fall over a potato skin on the kitchen floor (before the fifth), so she started going to a clinic the other side of the King’s Road. The last month she felt pretty rotten and her sister, Rosie, came to give her a hand every day, and finally it was decided she was to go into Queen Charlotte’s for her confinement, in spite of Reginald going round and telling the Sister at the clinic that he liked his children born in his own home. After a quarter of an hour of bathos about “home” and a “father’s rights” the Sister was brutal and said:—

“Would you like your wife to die in your own home?”

Reginald grumbled and shut up. He told Bessie that he was pretty sure “all them Sisters was Roman Catholics but didn’t let on. . . .”

Bessie never argued with him, and only listened to the things he told her that she wanted to hear, like what the new cashier was like at Ellis’s, or the chances of a “rise,” or the football news. . . .

The second day in hospital when Allston stopped to talk to her he happened to ask her why she wanted to be up by the twenty-second. She said she’d been sent two tickets for a film first night—by the lady-where-she-used-to-work! He asked her if the movies were her chief relaxation. She said that if her ship came in she’d go to the movies twice a day and never be without flowers!

Bessie went to the movies whenever she had the time and money to spare. She went with Reggie every Saturday night, bundled in her old brown coat with the moth-eaten collar, and no hat. (People in the street said

“Buster” Ramage’s appearance was a scandal, but they all liked her. She always had time to talk, and, though she was full of fun, she never had a hard word to say of anyone.)

Sometimes she took the children on a Thursday afternoon, and sat with a baby in her arms, rocking to and fro in a plush stall, her gaze fixed on the screen and the other children, with their cheeks stuck out with toffees, each side of her. They often didn’t get back until after Reggie was home and getting his own tea. But he didn’t mind doing that or anything else for Bessie and the children. He was almost as devoted to the children as to Bessie herself, and he liked them to have their bit of fun. He bought Bessie *Motion Pictures* every Wednesday. Quite often he got flowers cheap, left over at the shop, and brought them back to her. His “views” were something quite separate from his real life. (They were “just his talk,” Bessie said.) His militarism, his anti-Catholicism, his dislike of America, and his applause of Sir Oswald Mosley were simply induced by reading newspapers. By character he was peaceable, neighborly, unsuspicious, and had no more real grudge against America than he had any real faith in a lot of ne’er-do-weels in Black Shirts.

When Bessie went into the hospital, the children went to her mother and her father in Walham Green, and Reginald had the house in Blenheim Street to himself. He didn’t quite believe it when he got the message—he was waiting downstairs at the hospital—that Bessie was all right. As he told Bessie’s mother, he had read too much in the papers about the goings-on in hospitals. They were liable “to leave more inside you than they took out of you,” he said. But Bessie’s mother laughed, and said, “Well, at any rate that wouldn’t be likely in Bessie’s case!” which made her son-in-law go off in a nervous huff after telling her she had “a funny idea of humor.”

But when he was allowed to go and see Bessie and found her looking putty-colored, but as cheerful as ever, and she told him how she liked Mr. Allston (who seemed to like a joke) and how good all the nurses were to her, he said, “Well, I daresay some hospitals is better than others”—looking still a little gloomily round the light quiet ward, as if he couldn’t be sure that behind all this blue-and-whiteness there wasn’t some sort of “deception.” But he was delighted with the baby, which was sufficiently like the other four to convince him that there hadn’t been any “tricky work” changing the babies round.

For he had read of such things!

When Graham Allston was talking to Francesca about the hospital she asked him if they liked having flowers sent. In this connection he mentioned Mrs. Ramage, and her two avowed passions—for the movies and flowers.

Francesca began to ask questions about her, and Nurse Forbes said, “You know, Mr. Allston, Mr. and Mrs. Howard collect facts about people—even people they don’t know.” Francesca said, “Yes. Frederick’s collection is one of the best in the world. It’s a vice, like all collections. We’re like the couple in *Sylvestre Bonnard* who went round the world collecting match boxes!”

Allston said he didn’t know much more about Mrs. Ramage, except that she now had five children under six and really didn’t seem to mind. He told Francesca about the first-night tickets. Francesca said:—

“I shall send her some flowers. The tulips are best just now. Nurse, remind me! I forget everything. (That’s motherhood.) Write down on my block, *Tulips for Mrs. Ramage*, Nurse.”

Robin came in to talk, carrying one of the young rabbits. He sat on the end of the bed and asked Francesca if she’d slept after luncheon and whether he could go in the car to meet Frederick this evening at the station. She asked him what he had been doing all the afternoon. He gave her one of his clear accounts of what seemed to her a typical expenditure of his time. He had watched Edwards clip the hedge at the end of the rose garden. He had read a story called “The Sire de Maletroit’s Door,” he couldn’t remember who by. He had “liked it very much.” He had done tests with pink and blue litmus papers, to see what happened to them in ink, in barley water, in eau de Cologne, in beer. He had gone to look for Mr. Hedges, who was supposed to be making a new coal shed, and hadn’t been able to find him, so he had gone to fish a little in the lily pond. “And then,” he said, “I looked at my watch and saw it was nearly four, and thought you would be awake by now. So I came to see you.” He put out a quick brown hand and touched hers. Then he said:—

“D’you know what I’ve been wishing?”

She held his small hard hand.

“*Well*—that, now we’ve got Charlotte, we could arrange some way of strengthening my bike.”

“Your bike?”

“*Then*, you see, I could bicycle, slowly, of course, and have the pram attached, and so we could exercise together a bit.”

“I think it would be rather heavy. I should wait a year or so.”

He didn’t answer. He sat thinking. He often sat, slipping silently from one train of thought into another. When he spoke he said:—

“Is she just what you hoped she would be like?”

“Charlotte? . . . Yes, very much.”

“Did you want her to have fair hair?”

“I didn’t really mind.”

“Supposing you *had* wanted her to be dark, could you have done anything to darken her—by eating or drinking things—while she was inside you?”

“No.”

“Maud said, you know, Mummie, that the baby would be fanciful because you read so much.”

Francesca said, “Maud isn’t very scientific.”

“No,” said Robin. He looked at his mother without speaking. Then he said, “It does seem *peculiar*, the way people make more people.”

“Yes,” said Francesca. “It is.”

“The master at school,” said Robin, “Mr. Thornton, you know, said the mating instinct was very beautiful. But when he got the guinea pigs, and they mated, they looked simply silly!”

“A lot of things are silly,” said Francesca, “if you *think* about them; but lovely and exciting if you feel about them. . . . For instance, cricket!” she added.

“Yes,” said Robin eagerly. “And—and *beagling*?—and going on a scenic railway!” He paused, thinking, and looking absently at Francesca.

Then he said: “But things can be exciting and not be ‘beautiful’!”

“Well, I think excitement is beautiful in itself,” said Francesca. “Like an engine when it’s going very fast.”

“I see. . . . What sort of engine?” said Robin.

“Oh—well, any engine. . . . I really meant a steam engine.” Robin nodded; then he spoke again. He said, “D’you know the engine of the 3.40 is called Maid of Lincoln?”

“I didn’t know.”

“No. Nor did Frederick. Nor did Maud.” He slid off the end of the bed. “What did you want me for, Mummie?”

“Will you do something for me?”

He said “Of course,” looking at her softly and absently from under his eyelashes. “Frederick,” he added, “says that the coaches used to have names—before there were trains, you know.”

“Could you take the basket and scissors and cut me some tulips?”

“Oh yes!” (He still had a childish liking for using the long garden scissors.) “How many?”

“Oh—a big bunch. Nice ones.”

“About three dozen?”

“Yes.”

He stopped by the screen.

“Who are they for?”

“A woman called Mrs. Ramage.”

“Do I know her?”

“No—she’s a poor woman in a hospital in London that Mr. Allston told me about. She’s just had a baby too.”

Robin was interested. He liked hearing about people, especially poor ones. (He liked Maud’s stories about her own relatives much better than her stories about Mummie’s relations.)

“What’s her name?”

“Mrs. Ramage.”

“Is she pleased about the baby?”

“I’m sure she is.”

He said, “Even if she’s poor?—Perhaps she has many hungry mouths to feed already.”

“Oh, Robin!”

“Why are you smiling?”

“I don’t know. Go and get her tulips, anyway.”

He went. He came back again.

“When I come in shall I say the speech before Agincourt again?”

“Yes please, darling.”

He ducked his head.

“All right! I will.”

And went.

Nurse Forbes came in as he went out. She said:—

“Mrs. Howard—a Mrs. Macarthy is on the telephone, and wants to know if she might *just* drop in and see baby this afternoon?—I suppose that’s the Mrs. Macarthy who sent the lilac?”

“Yes,” said Francesca. “Hester Macarthy,” she said—saying her name because she was thinking of Frederick’s remark, “Hester Macarthy’s one of these creatures that seem to have missed all the intermediate stages of evolution, and gone straight from being ‘protoplasm’ to being ‘county’!”

“Tell her,” said Francesca, “to come, of course—It was nice of her to send the lilac,” she added, thinking how often one got pleasant things through unpleasant people—and what a disturbing fact this was.

As she thought this she remembered, amused, that her own attitude towards Frederick had, in the beginning, been influenced by the fact that she met him at dinner at the Whichfords’.

(She frequented them at this time to prove to Adrian that she preferred “the vulgar rich to the vulgar poor,” Adrian having subjected her to a series of pub-haunting friends whom he defended on the score of their poverty.)

There were half a dozen other people that evening, and the glass-walled dining room, whose lighting was designed to make people seem like strange fish in an aquarium, was so dim that it only succeeded, Francesca thought, in making them look like chicken in aspic. As they went in to dinner Avril Whichford said to Francesca, “I’m afraid you’ll have a ghost beside you to begin with. Frederick Howard telephoned to say he’d be late.”

A Spanish professor of Chinese art was on Francesca's right, but he wouldn't speak either of Spain or of China, but kept telling the names of titled Englishwomen like a rosary, so that Francesca was driven to inventing a duchess of whose charms (detailed by Francesca) he pretended to have heard. He listened attentively while Francesca described her, her house, her odd mixture of drugging and piety, and her interest in crustaceans which led her to keep live lobsters in her *bidet*, and let them run about the drawing-room "with practically nothing on."

While she was talking Francesca saw, at the end of the table, a youngish man leaning over Avril Whichford and apologizing. A minute later Francesca felt him sit down on her left and Avril, already rather vague and losing her shoulder straps, shouted to introduce them, "Francesca, you must get Frederick to tell you about his island with real savages on it."

He said, apologetically, "I'm afraid it's only a small one with a Corsican family and my secretary on it."

Francesca asked him about the small island. He began to tell her, turning towards her as he talked.

"No slaves?" she asked, prompted by a sudden image of him ruling luxuriously in an eighteenth-century Jamaica. (His peculiar elegance, and, she suspected, hauteur and self-indulgence, being so out of the Whichford picture, and so in a picture which included in the distance a stuccoed Palladian house, a lazy sea, and palm trees and negroes.)

He said, "No slaves, I'm afraid."

They had a long conversation about traveling after that. Francesca said she had traveled so much as a child that her idea of sensation was to stay in one place. He asked her which place she stayed in and she said Chelsea, and he seemed amused. Then she asked him what he did and he said "Nothing." Then she said why did he have a secretary if he did nothing, and he said to make him feel as if he did something. He added that he had, in fact, got a sort of vague book on hand and said, "I'm afraid I'm driven to digging for other people's talents, as I have none of my own to bury."

"And does the secretary help you to dig?"

He said, "Oh no. I dug up the secretary. He's a sort of incarnation of secretarial talent. But he had no one to work for."

Francesca asked what his name was.

"Fortnum," said her neighbor, taking a peach.

“How very distinguished,” said Francesca.

“Only moderately,” he said.

When Francesca got home Adrian was playing the gramophone and reading Gibbon. He asked her about her dinner. She said it had been fun, and there was an amusing young man there called Frederick Howard, who had a small island. “I suppose the Whichfords like him because of his island,” she said. “He’s not really a bit their *kind* of person,” she added.

Adrian put on “You’re the Cream in My Coffee,” and said:—

“I like you in that frock. You always look enchanting in white.”

“If it weren’t a bother,” she said, “you would put down that book and kiss me.”

She never knew when, in those two years between that evening at the Whichfords’ and Adrian’s going away, she fell in love with Frederick.

She only knew that he got her sometime in those two years and without her knowing.

Got her cell by cell and thought by thought; so that there was no one stage at which she could feel what was happening. Possessing her by the silent cumulative violence of a hundred momentary assaults on her nerves, her heart, her senses; by an inflection of voice, a flash of mind, a swift meaningless touch of hand or shoulder. . . .

She thought of that evening when he’d been dining with them at Cheyne Row. After dinner they sat in the drawing-room upstairs. Adrian sat smoking cigarette after cigarette and reading to himself. She got up and went to the bookshelf to look up some quotation they’d been, desultorily, arguing about, and realized that Frederick had got up too and was standing beside her. She said:—

“I can’t find it. But I can tell you when I’ve been to the Bevans’, next week—they’ve got a copy.”

He said, “I’m going to Egypt next week.”

She sat down on the back of the sofa. “How lovely for you.”

When he had gone she knelt at the window until Adrian said he was going to bed. She followed him upstairs, feeling that Egypt was farther away than any place in the world.

The night before he went he came to say good-bye to her. Adrian was out and she was trying to read a life of Marie Antoinette, but really doing nothing. They sat and talked about some mutual friends, and when he got up to go, and to say good-bye, she said with an emphasis intended to sound a little insincere, and therefore not betraying, how “desolated” she was to feel that he was going. He hesitated, and for a second she wondered if he minded going. Then he said, “I shall be back in the spring,” and perhaps for a moment he saw what she felt, because he put his hand on her shoulder and said, “I shall write to you, darling,” and then went out of the room and downstairs, and she heard the front door bang after him.

That winter even Adrian noticed that she looked tired.

He used to come and put his hand on her shoulder and suggest they should go and walk in the country for a week-end. Sometimes they did. They used to walk side by side, silent and friendly because they were so separate now. She never knew—nor cared by then—what he thought about. And he had never thought of asking her. Sometimes, at night, she got into his arms to try and feel comforted. Sometimes she was. But it was difficult to cheat herself. Adrian used to say, gentle and surprised, “How sweet of you, darling,” and then go to sleep while she lay for hours, thinking endless shapeless thoughts and crying without moving.

Once she dreamed that she woke and found Frederick beside her, and she could just see him in the dawn whiteness that came in between two high curtains. But when he woke he stared and then began to laugh and laugh at her and say horrible things she couldn’t understand.

That spring she realized she couldn’t go on sleeping with Adrian any more.

When she told him that she thought it was unsatisfactory for them both, sleeping together any more, he didn’t seem surprised, but kissed her and said, “I expect you’re quite right, darling.”

She said, somehow laughing, because it was all so pompous and they were oddly fond of each other:—

“I seem to have got so *bad* at making love.”

And he smiled and kissed her again and said, “You have, rather.”

So the next Monday she had sheets put on his bed in his room. But that night she couldn’t sleep and cried and cried, and at last she got up and went into his room and got into his uncomfortably small bed with him. And for an hour she was in love with him again.

But in April she decided to go away, for a time, and to stay with her cousin Ronnie de Briac and his Californian wife at Fiesole.

They were peaceful to stay with. Ronnie read a lot and let her go into Florence by herself without offering to accompany her. Mrs. Ronnie was healthily beautiful and rather silent, and gardened.

While Francesca was there Frederick came to stay “on his way back from Egypt.” He seemed surprised to find Francesca there and told her he hadn’t had her letter in which she said she was going to stay with her cousins.

He came the last week of her visit, so they arranged to travel back together, as she had arranged to join Robin and his governess at Quenton, where they were staying with Aunt Juliette.

During that last week at Fiesole she went several times with Frederick down to Florence. She tried not to show how much she enjoyed sight-seeing with him (she would have enjoyed seeing the Albert Hall with him), in case he should imagine that she was in love with him.

It seemed to her that her pretense of indifference must be quite as convincing to him as his amiable unpretended coolness was to her. They established, by the end of that week, a quite easy workable friendliness, so that that last evening in London, before he went away, seemed to have happened to two other people. The friendliness was so convincing to her now that she began to wonder if she had ever been in love with him.

The last day, when they were walking on a lower terrace of the gardens before luncheon, he said:—

“Do you know the *Lys Rouge*?”

“Quite well.”

He said, “Miss Bell’s villa must have been very like this one.”

She said, “Oh, I don’t think so—except its situation”—for she had got into the habit of disagreeing with him.

He said, shading his eyes with his hand and looking away over the view: “I’ve always thought she must have been a maddening woman really. She managed the affair so stupidly.”

“*He* was stupid! As stupid as Othello, with less excuse.”

“If she’d been an intelligent woman she’d have realized that jealousy is a disease you’ve got to take precautions against before it begins.” He bent down and picked three grape hyacinths.

She said, “If you can be sure the other person loves you, you ought to be prepared to accept physical *tromperies* at their proper value—”

He put the grape hyacinth in his buttonhole. “Weren’t you ever jealous of Adrian?”

She hesitated. “Yes. Horribly. But then I was young.”

He said, “I should think it’s more horrible when one’s older—because it destroys the things you need most in love—when you need them most.”

She saw Ronnie coming out of the villa. “What things?” she asked.

“There’s Ronnie,” he said. And as they went up the paving steps he said, “Certainty—and hope.”

They left Florence in a snowstorm. Frederick suggested that Francesca should spend the rest of the day with him in his compartment, which was empty. The other sleeper in her compartment was taken by a woman who looked like a theatrical dresser and had gold-stopped teeth, and said to Francesca, “There’s plenty of room for your things, dear. Fancy snow here! And there was bright sunshine in Rome!”

Frederick was in good spirits at luncheon in the restaurant car. This made him so charming that her slowly built up indifference to him was shaken. She sat after luncheon staring out of the carriage and wishing he hadn’t come to Fiesole. He shut his eyes and went to sleep. She watched him when he was asleep. She tried to make out the individual “trick” in his features and expression which marked him off from any other well-fed, overcared-for Englishman. She could have sat opposite any other dozing representative of this sort and inspected him with irony. It was the special “trick”—called Frederick Howard—which evoked in her, instead of irony,

an irrational and curiously exhausting emotion—an unwinged passion that dragged, instead of elating her.

When he opened his eyes she shut hers.

After the Swiss customs men had gone, they stood in the corridor of the *wagon-lit*, looking out at the obviously beautiful blue lake and the mountains rising up from it on the further side with their undeniably glamorous snow on the top of them.

Frederick smoked and only looked up occasionally, and read the *Journal de Genève*, which he had bought at the frontier. She held on to the rail staring and staring at the blue lake, the high mountains, the sky above it beginning to get pink with tatters of gold cloud.

She said, “What a lovely sunset!”

Frederick looked up, and glanced at the sunset as if it were a horse he hadn’t backed winning a race.

“Yes—What time d’you want to dine?”

“The *premier service* is always too early, and the *second* one always smells of the *premier*.”

Frederick looked impatient and bent his head and went on reading the *Journal de Genève* in the same uncomfortable standing-up posture.

“Well, you’d better decide,” he said, without looking up.

The tinkling tinkling and the little man came along: “*Prenez vos places pour le premier service. . . .* (tinkle, tinkle, tinkle) *Prenez vos places. . . .*”

Francesca went back into the carriage and sat down in her corner. She took up *The Housing Problem* and put it down again. She glanced at the latest Keynes, which she had bought before starting. She leaned over and examined Frederick’s literature. Two detective novels and the *New Yorker*, and a P. G. Wodehouse in Tauchnitz. She reflected that one of the things that showed the fundamental difference between her character and Frederick’s was that he always traveled with books that were too stupid for him, and she with books whose subjects were, not beyond the capacity, but outside the activities of her intelligence. (Frederick really read, at home, what she forced herself—and sometimes pretended to herself—to read when she was traveling.)

She went out and stood in the corridor again and smoked.

It seemed less and less likely, as the Swiss evening transformed itself slowly, and according to every romantic precedent (afterglow on the mountains, rose-colored burnishing of the purple lake water, lights coming out in twinkling succession along the dark lake shore), into Swiss night, that anything she could say would make Frederick, in his turn, say or do anything that would ease her violent sensation of unhappiness.

Standing beside him and not looking at him, except every now and then to see, sideways, the glow of his cigarette end, it seemed, second by second, less likely that if she were, in a moment of aphasia, to find herself saying, "I'm so dreadfully in love with you," he would do anything more than glance at her, for a moment, with his special personal mixture of irritation and nervous boredom, and go back into the carriage and begin reading *Murder at the Plaza* again.

But even as she thought this, she found herself wondering if, indeed, love was what she did feel (love?), when merely standing beside him like this, and not speaking, could make her so angry with him.

She felt him look up.

"I'm going to bed soon," she said.

"So am I."

"I'll take my things now. Then the man can make up your bed."

"Thank you."

She asked, collecting her things:—

"D'you want any of my books or papers?"

"No, thanks. Can I lend you any of mine?"

"No, thank you. I shall be asleep in quarter of an hour."

He looked into her face dispassionately as she passed him to get out into the corridor again.

"You won't have washed then!"

She disliked him.

"Of course I shall have washed!"

When she got into her compartment she found the other woman was already in a purple kimono putting her hair into a net.

The woman got into her lower berth, took off her *pince-nez* and snapped them into a case.

“Now you can go ahead and undress, dear,” she said. “I can’t see anything with me glasses off.”

Francesca slept in snatches, and whenever she woke up she remembered that Frederick was in the train too.

When she went into the breakfast car at half-past eight Frederick was drinking his coffee and reading *Le Temps* (yesterday’s), which he had bought at Dijon.

He stood up while she sat down.

“How did you sleep?”

“Perfectly.”

She ordered her coffee.

They had a conversation about French country. Francesca said that it was tiresome that she always saw the French countryside as Corots or van Goghs, and their *plages* as Boudin’s in the North and London group in the Riviera.

Frederick said, “Oh, do you? I don’t. How uncomfortably unnatural. Like the people who always see Dickens types in station waiting rooms.”

“I never wait in them,” said Francesca. She took one of his cigarettes.

“Where do you wait, then?”

“I don’t.”

“But, my dear, you *must*. Everybody waits sometimes.”

“Not if they arrange their lives properly.”

He said, “I wish I were as sure as you always are that I arranged my life properly—” He added, looking out at the Corots flying past: “Sometimes I feel as if my whole life had been spent in waiting rooms. First-class ones.”

Francesca said: “You seem to enjoy them.”

Frederick smiled unamiably and took up *Le Temps* again.

Francesca had brought a volume of Faulkner’s stories which she had got out of her hatbox. She read, too. She reflected what a good Faulkner could be made out of the story of Three Blind Mice. The Farmer’s Wife, in the rotting sunlit South, lynching those three Mice, one after the other, and then

coming back into the House (where all her children, white and colored, had been born) and laying the carving knife on the table—And those three Tails hung up, dripping, on the stable door out in the yard—She thought of telling Frederick this. But she suddenly felt she couldn't bear it if he looked at her again without interest and without affection.

Aunt Juliette's car was to meet her at Dover, and Frederick was going through to Victoria.

At the customs Francesca pushed through the crowd to say good-bye to him.

She found him flustered and preoccupied, and though he asked her how long she was going to be at Quenton, he didn't seem to listen to her answer.

As she went along the covered way to the cars she thought that she would stop seeing him.

While the chauffeur was strapping on her luggage she heard the London train go off, and felt so gutted with unhappiness that she lay back and shut her eyes and her handbag slipped from her fingers on to the floor.

The chauffeur leaned in and picked it up and arranged the rug over her knees.

At Quenton she found Robin and Mademoiselle Jollivet, and a letter from Adrian saying he had gone to motor with some friends in the Dolomites, and given up the job at Bernstein's. Robin said that Daddy had come down to say good-bye and brought a lady and man with him. Aunt Juliette said:—

“Yes—He came for luncheon last Sunday and brought a—Mr. and Mrs.—I forget their name—anyway, the people he's going to motor with.”

“What were they like?” said Francesca.

Her aunt, who was going for her after-tea walk round the gardens, pulled on her gloves and said she hadn't found them very “interesting or amusing.”

“The lady called me Sonny,” said Robin.

Mrs. de Briac looked at her niece.

“Did you enjoy yourself in Florence?” she said. “And how was my idle son?”

Francesca gave an account of him and his wife, but perfunctorily. She was angry with Adrian, though she didn't know why.

“—and was anyone else staying?” asked her aunt.

“No,” said Francesca. “No one of interest. If you'll come now, Robin, I'll read to you.”

V

NURSE FORBES

“Even when Lady Newman was in labor,” said Nurse Forbes, “she went to Woolworth’s.”

“*Perfect*,” said Francesca; “I must tell Frederick,” and she rolled up her manicure case. “But how could she?”

“Oh, you see she’s very slow beginning, Mrs. Howard. Not like you are.”

“I see. She goes during the ‘first stage.’ ”

Laura Forbes smiled, shut the drawer, and brought three of the dressing jackets.

“Which to-day?”

“It’s Aunt Juliette to-day. I must be grand. She’s always so reassured if she thinks one’s rich.”

“This one then. All that lace ought to please Mrs. de Briac.”

“Yes. And one of the new pillow slips. What are Lady Newman’s pillows like?”

“Well—as you’d expect, very actressy. Absolutely encrusted with lace and blue satin ribands slotted under and over, and bows in the corners. And monograms on them, too. ‘F.A.’ on everything, even her washing gloves. She used to say herself that when a surgeon in New York took her appendix out he found her monogram on it in diamonds.”

“And what does she get at Woolworth’s?”

“Oh, everything imaginable. Fire irons and dish cloths and jewelry,—she was always getting new rings there, although she had a boxful of real ones,—and even ices. She liked to sit at the counter and eat ice creams and talk to the girls. She began in a shop herself once, you know; what she always calls ‘a dry-goods store,’ called ‘Lacy’s in New York.’ ”

“And Sir Franklin? Frederick says I haven’t told him anything yet about Sir Franklin.”

Laura Forbes went to the door and took Francesca's tea tray from Briggs. "Didn't he begin by being American?"

"Yes. And then he naturalized, during the war, you know. He's a funny little man; like a curate rather, to look at, with *pince-nez*. He told me—now I want you to eat up *all* that bread and butter, and to try to take some of the Devonshire cream, too. Mr. Allston also says you're much too thin."

"*What* did Sir Franklin tell you?"

"Oh yes. Well, he told me that he naturalized because he was ashamed that his country wasn't fighting for Shakespeare's country. He originally came over, you know, to dig for some Shakespeare manuscript or other that he thought was buried in a box. Lady Newman told me that he still goes digging at week-ends."

"Where?"

"All up the Thames Valley, I believe. It *does* seem strange, doesn't it," Laura Forbes added (the same ironical sweetness in her surprise as when she said to Maisie, the new little housemaid, "Maisie, *can* this be dust on our bathroom window sill?").

"Does he dig over the Thames Valley spadeful by spadeful?"

"I believe so. Wherever he can get permission. Lady Newman says he finds a lot of worms."

"But no manuscripts."

"Not yet, I believe. Now another piece?"

Francesca obeyed.

"But he doesn't lose faith?"

"Oh dear me, no. He's buying a house near Oxford so as to have what he calls a 'strategic centre' for his work. *Now* some cream, Mrs. Howard—"

"How did he manage to capture Florida Ames?"

"Well, that's what Mr. Howard asked me at dinner the other night—when he'd quite exhausted all my information about young Mrs. Dicky's mother-in-law—"

Francesca choked a little and put down her cup. "Frederick says you said that old Mrs. Dicky sat up with *all* the lights on smoking cigars and drinking champagne with the confinement going on in the room above. But go on about the Newmans."

“Just let me fill up the teapot. Now what about a piece of cake?—*Good*. I *do* so want you to get up not *all* skin and bone. Poor Lady Newman’s problem is always the other one. She had the masseuse *twice* a day after the first week. What was I telling you—Oh yes: how they married. Well, I don’t know if you remember—it was in the papers—that she insured her legs. Well, he insured them. That’s how they met. I think he has something to do with insurance and all sorts of things as well as his ‘Vitacol.’—That was the year she came over here in *Honey*.”

“I remember,” said Francesca. She had gone with Adrian. They had gone on to the Embassy afterwards with a lot of people and seen Frederick there. And Adrian had said, “Frederick always looks like a tailor’s advertisement”; and Sebastian Lee, who was with them, said, “Anyway, an advertisement of the sort of tailor that doesn’t advertise.” And she said,—she remembered thinking it as she said it,—“I think he looks like the Count de Morny.”

Nurse took the tray. “Don’t you remember her singing ‘Baby Blue Blues’—in a white muslin dress, all frills, with a pale blue sash and shoes?”

“Yes—She looked enchanting.”

“Well, she has that same dress still, and about a fortnight after the baby they had one of their celebrating parties, in the bedroom, and Sir Franklin dressed up in that dress! It *trailed* on the ground! And he stood up beside the bed, on the dais it’s on, and sang that song! It really *was* rather funny, only I had to be a little severe when they wanted to take my baby out of its cot and put its father in!”

She took the tray and put it down on the table against the wall. While they were talking the sun had begun to come straight in at the three windows, filling the room with primrose-colored light. Francesca noticed how this light gave a sculptured entity to Nurse Forbes’s face and its surrounding coif—so that her irregular charming features and the folds of her veil looked as if they had been carved out of one block of yellowish marble. Francesca also saw that she looked tired and said, “What about your off duty to-day?”

“Well—I didn’t want to go before. But as a matter of fact I have asked Maud if she would just keep an eye on Baby for the next hour.”

“But you ought to be off *two* hours, at least. You know Maud’s free specially for that!”

“Well, I know, but—Well, anyway, I will go for this next hour, as—” she hesitated, and her look changed from outward to inward—“I have rather an

important letter to write.”

Laura Forbes closed her patient’s door behind her and went across the landing to the room she shared with the baby.

She glanced out of the window. She saw Maud, on the far side of the lawn, sitting sewing on a camp stool by the pram.

Laura Forbes took off her veil and her mauve uniform dress and put on the mauve marocain wrapper that she had made for herself, with its white ruffles round the neck and wrists. She let down her curling, oak-apple-colored hair, and brushed it out, and knotted it up again, loosely, at the nape of her neck. Then she put on her purple leather traveling slippers (that Mrs. Dicky had given her) and sat down at the writing table in the bow window.

She wrote her first letter to her mother in Manchester.

DEAREST MOTHER,—

Thank you for your lovely long letter of yesterday. I am pleased the tulips are coming up so well and that you have got the mower in order *at last!*

Everything goes smoothly here. The baby is a darling, very good at nights and has the loveliest big hazel eyes, like the mother, and is going to be fair, otherwise like her father, I think. As I told you, Mrs. Howard is *very* nice indeed and can be full of fun. She is really beautiful, to my mind, not just a doll, but something *in* her face. She was married before, but I believe unhappily. There is a child, a little boy of nine, by her first marriage, who is a *darling*, and comes every morning to see me bath baby. Mrs. Howard’s maid, who looks after the boy too, who has been years with this family, told me that the first husband cared so little about the boy that when he was ill at four years, he didn’t even bother to come back from his holiday somewhere. Not like Mr. Howard will be, I should say. He is always looking at baby (though *he* says she isn’t pretty at all!) and seems extremely pleased with her. Altogether they are a devoted couple, and Maud (the maid) says they can hardly bear to be separated for two days at a time. Mr. Howard reminds me a little of a soldier type, very “English looking,” though there is something foreign about his manners.

I had a card from old Mrs. Dicky to-day, from Broadstairs, saying the baby is getting on very well and that her son has bought an 80 H.P. speed boat. I expect they’ll all disagree over that too.

Remember me to Agatha and look after yourselves properly. No going out and “just doing a little weeding” after supper. Remember what I said about keeping quiet, *with* your feet up, after meals.

Ever your loving,
LAURA

When she had finished she put the letter in its envelope. When she had addressed it she sat still, staring out of the window. The sun was behind a cloud and the garden was chill. At last she set a sheet of notepaper on the blotter.

“Dear Mr. Watson,” she wrote.

She looked out of the window again.

The cloud had moved, and the lawn was gold-green, and the tulips like rows of little colored lamps. (Robin crossed the lawn going towards the far end of the tulip beds with a basket on his brown arm.) Laura Forbes wrote again.

“You must forgive my slowness in answering your letter, which was a great surprise to me. . . .”

Laura Forbes was nineteen when the war began. She had left the high school the year before and was living at home with her mother and father in Fallowfield, Manchester. (Her father was a typesetter on the *Guardian*.) They had a little house with an iron front gate and a laburnum in the front garden whose cascading yellow flowers became greyed over with smuts before they had finished blooming.

That summer of the war Laura put her hair up and went out to tennis parties in white piqué skirts and white hair-cord blouses she made herself. Her hair was wavy and curly and she had a downy skin with a glow of pink under her cheeks which made her longish, irregular features charming; and her light grey eyes, under the soft thick brown eyebrows, had an expression of delight tempered by intelligent irony.

In June 1914 she became engaged to Charlie Clay.

Old Clay was business manager in one of the Ehrmann mills. Clay was on the advertising side. The Clays had a biggish house with two tennis courts, a garage, and a rock garden. Mrs. Clay had been at school with Mrs.

Forbes and they'd stayed friendly, in spite of the difference in their husbands' incomes. They were both pleased at the engagement. So was Old Clay, who said Laura was "a girl in a hundred." Laura's father made no comment about Charlie, but he said he didn't believe in professions where a young man didn't serve a proper apprenticeship.

Charlie looked (though he wasn't one) like the pictures of public-school boys on boys'-magazine covers—fresh complexion, blue eyes, square flat brow, square cleft chin, a slightly downward crinkle at the outer corners of the eyes, which gave an effect of good humor. He had a pink mouth with a square underlip and he was six feet high. He fell in love with Laura chiefly because of her figure and because she obviously worshiped him. She listened whenever he spoke; her look had no irony when she turned to him. She played tennis with him, and lost, as long as he wanted to.

They were to be engaged for a year. Meanwhile they saw each other at their homes. Charlie was always a little condescending to her family, but Laura took this to be merely an extension of his natural superiority to herself. She made herself two new voile dresses after her engagement was announced, one pale pink, one pale blue, with little round cream net collars.

Charlie treated her chivalrously. He respected girls of his own set, and went to the brothel in the town when he wanted anything else.

When he went up to London in connection with his advertising work, Laura wrote to him every day to the Russell Hotel, Russell Square, and he wrote her a letter from the Hotel Cecil, where he had been to some advertising conference, and brought her back a vanity bag in blue leather. He told her that they would go to London for their honeymoon and stay at the Hotel Cecil.

All her friends thought Charlie Clay very smart, and considered her in luck. She began embroidering initials on pillow slips, and she lay awake at night feeling such a sweetness and violence of emotion for Charlie Clay that she would wonder how she would get through the next day until six o'clock when she would be seeing him again. She spent the day trying to think of little things that would please him. She made him a new cover for his tennis racket, and covered a cushion in red brocade for the room in his parents' house that he called his "den."

In August, of course, Charlie joined up. He joined the R.A.F. When he came back in khaki with a flying cap on, he seemed taller and rosier and more good-looking than ever. Laura, who was working in a canteen in the town every evening, believed that she mustn't show him how frightened she

was for him. When he took her out to luncheon at the Grand Hotel in Manchester she was so proud of him, and secretly so miserable, that she couldn't eat. He said she might at least be sporty and look as if she was enjoying herself—even, he ragged, if she *was* too busy to bother to spend her evenings with him. He added, teasing, "I expect you enjoy giving the glad eye to all the chaps at the canteen!" She tried to laugh at this.

She wrote to him every day while he was in camp and he wrote quite often, describing how he was getting on and the dances given for them all in the neighborhood.

When he came back for a few days' leave, after Christmas, he looked brown from his out-of-door life, and seemed in tearing spirits. His parents gave a New Year dinner party for him (with ten courses and hired menservants). Laura had a new dress specially for it and sat on Charlie's right, and Milly, the big black-eyed sixteen-year-old Denham girl, on his other side. He and Milly joked a lot, and he called her the "Flapper Queen" and she pushed a spoonful of ice pudding down his back, and he retaliated by dropping a spoon down the front of her yellow silk frock, which made her giggle and scream even more, so that Mr. Clay shouted down the table at them to behave themselves.

Afterwards they danced. Laura wasn't a good dancer, she was too stiff from being afraid of being too heavy. She pretended to herself that it was natural that Charlie, who was considered one of the best dancers in Fallowfield, should want to dance a good deal with Milly, who danced awfully well, though she was fat.

But after Charlie went back to camp and she got his letter breaking off the engagement and asking for his ring, she wasn't altogether surprised. She kept on working at the canteen, but in March she had a breakdown and was in bed for five weeks. When she got up her mother took her away to Llandrindod Wells for three weeks. (Mr. and Mrs. Clay insisted on paying for the whole thing, and Mrs. Forbes let them, simply because she was so afraid for Laura's health.)

By the end of that summer Laura was quite well, but wanted to get away from Manchester. She arranged to go and live with her aunt in Brighton and work as a V.A.D. Her aunt, the widow of a dentist, thought her very pale and changed, and wrote to Laura's mother that the girl had "lost her looks."

The war had been on a year and a half now, but Laura had never been inside a hospital. She had only seen the wounded soldiers outside, on crutches or in bath chairs, in their blue clothes and scarlet ties.

For the first week she couldn't get used to those long light-walled wards, where in bed after bed there was a face (sometimes only eyes) watching from the pillow, and a body, terrifyingly bandaged, under the red blankets. She couldn't stop thinking about them, even when she was back in her aunt's parlor sitting on the horsehair sofa and winding the khaki wool for those endless "comforters." She used to dream about those rows and rows of red-blanketed beds and the heads on the pillows, and the bandages being undone. Once she dreamed that the Sister was away and she was helping one of the doctors, and standing by the bed of a man with his face bandaged except for his nose, and the doctor kept unwinding and unwinding a bandage, and when she saw the face it was nothing but bloody gristle except for Charlie Clay's blue eyes looking up at her and glittering with laughter.

After a time she got used to the hospital life itself, the speeding, rubber-treading comings and goings, the whispering and the smell of ether in the corridor, the rushed morning with the clanking in of the doctors, the rattling and tinkling and cabbage-smelling dinner time, the suddenly quiet long afternoons when the men lay staring or with wax lids shut, and the sun came in wide slants down on to the wooden floors of the wards, its warmth bringing out the disinfectant smell of the air—and there wasn't any sound except, now and again, the rustle of a paper or someone groaning behind a white cotton screen.

By the spring of '18 Laura Forbes had become a qualified Sister and was in charge of a ward. By this time they were getting the gassed men who coughed and coughed and, when they could sleep, shrieked in their dreams.

What had happened to her through Charlie Clay seemed far off now; a sentimental hurting little episode compared with what she saw happening to lives every day. When she went home, in March 1918, the house seemed very small and remote, and her mother strangely unaware of what was happening, except that she had an allotment and was anxious about the retreat and read Lloyd George's speeches to keep her courage up. Laura was relieved to get back to her hospital again. The "retreat" had reached Brighton and was beginning to choke the wards.

When, in May, she was asked to help supervise an Officers' Convalescent Home near Tonbridge, she agreed. She knew her own strength by now, and neither her nerves nor her body would have stood another fortnight at the hospital.

She took a week off and didn't go home, but went down to a farmhouse in Gloucestershire with another nurse. There she sat in the garden and realized that summer was beginning. She remembered the title of a German song she had learned (years ago it seemed now, from her singing teacher in the high school), called "Im Wunderschönen Monat Mai." She and the other nurse used to have their tea brought out on to the little patch of lawn on the edge of the little orchard. They had good weather all the week they were there. The village was called Redicote. In the afternoons, when a grass-scented wind sprang up, the clouds would form themselves into big shell-tinted caves lighted up in the lower sky. In the evenings the sunsets made Laura remember, not Charlie Clay himself, but what she had felt for him.

Once, after sunset, she saw a white owl flying low over the fields. She came in and told her friend, the other nurse, who was crocheting a jumper, that she had seen the white owl, and her friend said, "Did you, dear?" Laura went and stood at the window, to look at the night fields and the stars coming out, one by one, in the sky that was still ivory pale in the horizon and higher up like a dense grape bloom.

When she arrived at the Officers' Home near Tonbridge she found it was a millionaire's house lent for this purpose. The last assistant matron had left because she had quarreled with the housekeeper, who, like the rest of the staff, had been lent with the house and had to be kept. Luckily the housekeeper, a Mrs. Braddock, liked Laura, who had great tact, and could not be suspected of wanting to "carry on" with the officers.

At first Laura thought that being away from the mutilated or ill men in hospital would be a relief. At least the idea of convalescence was an optimistic one. None of the officers at Bracken Park were in bed, and only two of them used crutches.

But when she began to know them individually and perceive what was behind the noisiness of one, the vagueness of another, the silence of another, she got a worse feeling of hopelessness than at the hospital when she was on night duty and heard the gassed men coughing.

They were all more or less shell-shocked. More than half of them were physically well again, but couldn't sleep without a drug or sedative. One of them, who had never been wounded at all but sent home by the regimental doctor, was taken away to "a home" the second week she was there.

During June she had to stay up at night on the floor where they put the worst "shocked" cases. There was a boy of nineteen (he seemed to her much

more than four years younger than herself) who used to start crying at night and not be able to stop, and beg her not to go out of the room.

In July a broad-shouldered, grey-faced man in the Rifle Brigade came. He was recovering, very slowly, from a stomach wound. He was silent and sat about in the gardens by himself, with books and newspapers which he never seemed to read. His name was Watson. Occasionally he had a letter addressed “Captain J. F. Watson,” with the Edinburgh postmark. He had set straight features and a moustache with grey in it, but his eyes were quick moving and brown with light under them.

Laura noticed his eyes and his buttonhole. (He picked a rose every day and wore it in his battered-looking Norfolk jacket.) One day he spoke to her as she passed his long chair on the terrace that overlooked the lake.

“Sister Forbes?”

She stopped, surprised that he knew her name.

“Certainly,” she said, standing at the foot of his chair.

“Would you find out something for me?”

“Ye-es—of course, Captain Watson.”

“There is a ghost in my room. Would you find out if the room—number eleven, you know, on the second floor—is supposed to be haunted?”

He spoke as if he were asking for a box of matches to be put in his room.

She stood hesitating, the wind blowing her veil, murmuring that she was *quite* sure there was nothing for him to worry about.

He gave a shrug of his big shoulders. “It seems unlikely I should imagine such a thing!” His words had the faintest Scottish inflection, a hardly detectable singsong, and the roughened overtones of a voice seldom used. “Still, you needn’t bother if you don’t want to. I’m not afraid of spirits.” He looked down at the lake, and the park beyond. “I really prefer them to people,” he said. “They’re more peaceable.”

He took up and seemed to want to read a gilt-titled edition of the *Arabian Nights*.

Laura left him. Later in the day she went up to his room to look, she thought to herself, for his silly ghost! The room, which was furnished in an expensive Anglo-Chinese manner, combining lacquer and cretonne, was neat and bore no marks of Captain Watson’s individuality except a

photograph of a handsome old man in a leather frame, a Bible, and an Army and Navy Stores catalogue on the table beside the bed.

The next morning Laura stopped on the terrace and spoke to him.

“I asked the housekeeper, Mrs. Braddock, and she says you may be quite sure that room isn’t haunted. She says Miss van Diemen herself sleeps in your room when the family are here. And she’s never complained of anything!”

His bright, soft, animal eyes looked at her.

“I wasn’t complaining,” he said.

“Well, then—”

“Far from it. He’s a pleasant ghost.”

“You’re joking, Captain Watson.”

“No. I don’t joke about ghosts.” He pointed to the chair beside him. “He’s especially pleasant as he’s given me an excuse to speak to you. Won’t you stay a minute?”

Laura felt herself color. “I’m sorry. I can’t now. I’m afraid I’m awfully busy.”

He nodded. “Come back later then.” He took up the *Arabian Nights* again.

She spoke to him at tea time, when they were all out on the lawn. He asked her to sit down by him, and began a long circumstantial narrative of his life—in Edinburgh as a child, at Loretto, at school, and so on. This was so surprising after his weeks of silence that she thought he must be shell-shocked. As she thought this he said, “You’re wrong. My nerves *are* bad, but I’m not shell-shocked.” He explained that he often knew what people were thinking. She said:—

“What an embarrassing person you must be.”

He said, “Anyway, you’d never need to be embarrassed.” He went on to say that he was much more intuitive since he’d been in France and his health had been so bad.

He managed to talk to her every day for the rest of the summer. She liked his shrewdness and curious sensitiveness, but she condemned all his ideas about psychic selves and transmigration of souls as “claptrap” and “nonsense.” Before he left, just after the Armistice, he told her he was

probably going out to join an uncle's business in Canada. He asked her to marry him and come with him, but he added that he didn't suppose she would. She was touched by his way of saying this and wished she did care enough for him. He said, "I think you're still in love with that boy." This startled her, as she had never mentioned Charlie Clay. She said she wasn't in love and that she had decided to go on with nursing, and was going after Christmas to do a maternity training.

He nodded. Then he said in his tense but oddly mystical manner, "Well, mind you deliver the souls as well as the bodies, my dear."

She looked at him and said, "You *are* a queer character, Captain Watson!"

But she felt that this vague mystical side of his character would prevent his feeling his disappointment about her refusal to marry him.

She did her maternity training at Queen Charlotte's.

She chose the work because she believed in its importance. She expected to dislike, at first, the practice, and enjoy the lecture and technical side of the work. She felt she was now used, or at any rate conditioned, to scenes of spiritual and physical outrage, and to what her fellow nurses sometimes referred to, cheerfully, as "the unpleasant side of nursing."

But she wasn't prepared to be, as she was in the first weeks, unnerved by the whole thing. She hadn't expected every birth (after all, just "another case," as the others said briskly)—every "case"—to be a drama that she went through taut-nerved and as if any relaxation, a momentary inattention on her part, might give even the least advantage to the Menace that she felt always there. She hadn't expected to go on feeling every time, beneath her own swift reliable efficiency, that vague horror of the birth itself, and in reaction (beneath her own rapid executive silence) that clear and perfect moment of relief when the child was in her arms, and the mother could lie still.

As she grew familiar with the homes in "the district" (rooms with the tattered layers of wallpapers, blotchy children, damp-rotten sticks of furniture, not even a spare basin for water) and helping women in their matter-of-course torments produce the children of their casual or matter-of-fact couplings, she was exasperated by contradictions which she couldn't express even to herself, but which affected her as tragic. She couldn't have explained why except in phrases like "those women's marvelous courage" and "the *smell* of those places." . . . She was perpetually conscious that these

children were helped, with all the skill she could give them, into a society where their chances of adventure or beauty were nil, and even their expectation of health or contentment negligible. She wrote to her mother: "I can't help feeling how *hopeless* all these poor little mites' lives are going to be." And when the women, for one or another reason, came into the hospital, so that all the skill of the surgeons should be there to make sure that Mrs. X should survive to spend another thirty or forty years in two crowded rooms, and her baby should have its "life" (a certainty of breathing, growing, and decaying) saved too, Laura (shaking a thermometer, obeying an order, bending over a woman in the labor room) felt that perpetual subquestioning: Is it worth while? Why save? Save what? Save them—for what? And once the great Allston, scrubbing his hands, dipping his fingers, muttered next to her, "We ought to shut half the wards and teach contraception—More merciful than anæsthetics—better politics too—"

Soon after her training she went to a case—a Mrs. Rendall, in West Kensington. The mother was a pretty, pretentious little woman who showed great courage during the birth of the baby, and coyly demanded pity, in retrospect. The baby was uninteresting and the father looked like the baby, small-eyed and fair. He sometimes tried to catch Laura Forbes round the waist when he met her alone on the landing.

The second day that Mrs. Rendall was allowed to see visitors she told Nurse Forbes her cousin, "a very wealthy man," was coming to see her.

The maid announced:—

"Mr. Clay."

And a tall stout man in a brown suit with a greyish-fair moustache walked in as if he expected to be acclaimed. Laura realized at once that it was Charlie Clay, but he didn't see her—and even after he had held Mrs. Rendall's hand with tender *bonhomie* and given her a bunch of anemones, he didn't think of glancing in the nurse's direction, and Laura watched him as her heartbeats slowed down, first incredulous, then perplexed—that anyone could so have changed in ten years. As she went out of the room he looked up at her. But she saw at once that he didn't recognize her. She supposed that she must have changed too, or that her nurse's uniform, in itself, constituted a disguise.

As she went down to the garden to see if the baby was asleep, she reflected that the course of her life had been determined by a passion for that

pompous, prematurely stout man, sitting upstairs beside Mrs. Rendall's mahogany bed.

VI

MAUD

“‘This day is called the feast of Crispian!’ ” said Robin, standing with one leg straight and the other dirty bare knee bent and watching, but not seeing, Maud lay the table.

“He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named . . .”

“What about a bit of hot buttered toast?” Maud always spoke as if she were trying to hold pins between her lips. She had come to speaking like this long ago, because she thought it sounded “like an educated person.”

Robin and Maud shared the feeling that there was no time of year or day when hot buttered toast wasn’t delicious.

“Yes,” said Robin. “Oh yes, Maud.”

He went over to the fireplace, leaned over the high fender, and took the toasting fork off its hook beside the kettle holder.

“Can I make it?”

“If you laik, Mr. Robin!”

Maud cut the bread, holding the loaf against her flat white-bloused chest, and cutting towards herself.

“And rouse him at the name of Crispian!
He that . . .

“Oh bother, it’s twice the same, only not exactly. ‘He that shall live this day, and see old age.’ ”

“Here you are,” said Maud, taking the toasting fork from him and sticking the bread on to it. “It isn’t much of a toasting fire, but I think we’ll manage all right.”

While he was toasting she put the kettle on and stuck the tongs in to curl what she referred to, and had referred to for more than thirty years, as “my everlasting fringe.”

“Everlasting” meant Maud’s attitude of mind to the fact that her fringe never stayed curled for more than three hours on end.

Maud's room was the housekeeper's room. It had linoleum on the floor, a rose-flowered wallpaper, maroon-plush curtains, a round table in the centre under an electric light with a brimmed red silk shade edged with a bead fringe. The room seemed cramped because all its furniture was too big for it—being relegated Victorian “pieces,” including a yellow polished-wood linen press that covered nearly the width and height of one wall. The room smelt warmly of ironing, and its characteristic sound was the singing of a kettle on the hob of the coal grate. There were pictures on the wall: a colored print of “Bubbles,” a sepia-tinted picture of a lady in Greek robes and bare feet looking for shells alone on a shore (called “The Sea Hath Her Pearls”), a Charles Dana Gibson called “How Happy Could I Be with Either,” and oblong photographic groups, hung one above the other.

Robin pored for hours over the groups. In each of them he knew where to detect Frederick. Frederick in his prep-school second eleven; Frederick in his various house groups at Eton; in enormous groups taken at Cambridge, after college balls; and in small groups of fat-faced, proud-eyed youths in “clubs.” There was also a pair of foils belonging to Frederick crossed over the mantelpiece.

Maudie kept her own photographs on the mantelpiece, and on “her piano” there was the photograph, in a red velvet frame, of her mother and father on their silver wedding; and of her sister Bessie, and of her brother Alick and his wife and baby, and her Aunt Carrie May (who had died on the very stroke of the New Year of a last attack of “the wind”).

There was also Maud's group, in a silver frame, of the mysterious, equivocal, “forever-hiding-from-the-bailiffs” Harridge family, where Maud had had her “first place”—where the father was a portrait painter (of birds and dogs), and the children had “real lace on everything,” and the mother was grand even in her photo, moulded into a satin dress and with a “Merry Widow” hat and spectacles. When the Harridges (“Mr. Harridge painted ever such lovelee pictures, you could see it was real feathers”) left a place they always went in a hurry, leaving no address. They owed even the paper man! “Poor Mrs. Harridge, you could see how it worried her. I used to be sorry for her, and the children was kept lovely, and the little one, Patricia that was, had ringlets. Mrs. Harridge used to make them herself, just damping them—with water, of course, and brushing them round a hoopstick—”

Robin often asked about the Harridges. He wasn't so interested in Mr. Isaacstein—“A Jew, you know, dear, but ever such a kind man, who lived next door to us, a big house he had with a conservatory.” (“Us” was Robin's

grandparents—Francesca’s parents, the Stavertons.) The only thing that interested Robin about him was the phonetic charm of “*Mr. Isaacstein had a Bechstein—a grand, you know, dear!*” It was like Alice—“Do Isaacsteins have Bechsteins? Do Bechsteins have Isaacsteins? . . .” Maud said that Robin’s grandmother, Mrs. Staverton, was kind to Mr. Isaacstein because she was sorry for him, losing his wife like that.

Maud had come as sewing maid to look after Francesca when Francesca—“your sweet dear of a mother”—was a girl of fifteen. She had stayed on as housemaid when Francesca married Adrian Morant.

Ever since Robin could remember Maud had been making a verbal tapestry for him, depicting scenes and characters in his family. His mother was the figure that occurred most often, embroidered in the aniline colors and melodramatic poses which Maud perceived in “human nature.” Whenever they had a tea time or walk together, Maud added a few stitches, amending some old scene or adding a new one.

With Francesca, either injured or heroic, Maud’s artistic sense was in need of a villain. But partly her consideration for the child, partly a real perception of something warped and therefore pitiable in Adrian, prevented her giving him a sinister significance. She talked of Adrian always as “your poor father”—or “that poor father of yours”—or even “your silly man of a father.” But what she did make out to Robin was his mother’s worth and his father’s worthlessness. His father was “all very well in his way . . . spoke to one nicely enough . . . seemed fond enough of your poor darling mother—in his way of course!” But she embroidered Francesca with an elaboration of pity and drama that Robin found puzzling. To him his mother was, if he could have made an objective picture out of his feelings for her, a beautiful and interesting lady who was always ready to read a new book or elaborate a new joke. Maud’s stories about her “locked in her room crying her heart out” and “going to that there law court white as a sheet and with that black hat she had that winter makin’ her look as if she was goin’ to be tortured or something” (the association in Maud’s mind being with *tricorne* hats and the Spanish Inquisition) made Robin feel uncomfortable, but unbelieving. He remembered the divorce quite well. Nobody had seemed to mind about it. That was the time Mummie was reading him *Robin Hood*.

“Mr. Howard,” Maud said, “has been the saving of your poor mother.” Robin himself felt very safe with Frederick, who never looked through him (as his own father did) as if he weren’t there. Robin liked to go out with Adrian, but he never knew, had never known, when his father would stop hearing what he said and start humming deep in his throat or reading the

nearest thing to read—whether it was a book or an advertisement. But Robin didn't see—he had thought about this—what Frederick had saved her from. She had been quite all right, as far as he remembered, in Cheyne Row. It hadn't been such a good way of living as now (it had been lovely coming to live in the country and not just going there for short times), and of course,—Robin had thought that out,—although Adrian was his father, Frederick *had* bought him the pony and made Mummie stop “believing in spinach.” Really, he thought, it was *he* who had been saved by Frederick from several things—from that visit to the Children's Hospital, for instance, and that yellow aertex shirt. But Mummie, really, had more troubles in one way, because she was always thinking about Frederick's liver and preventing him getting chills on it.

Robin remembered that his father had had a liver, too. But it must have been less of one, or else Mummie didn't mind so much. But Mummie's mother, who came every year to Aunt Juliette's for Christmas, said that “all men had livers, but Englishmen made a privilege of them.” She said this (whatever it meant really) at Aunt Juliette's long table, and looked down the table, through her gold lorgnon, at Frederick, who laughed and made a remark back which Robin couldn't remember. But after it Grannie said, with her funny Austrian accent, across the table to Mummie, “Your second husband is more witty than your first.” And Great-Uncle Jean said, “Helena thinks that wit is the highest quality in the world.” Then Grannie asked Great-Uncle Jean what he thought was the most important quality in people, and Robin supposed he'd say “being kind,” because he was kind himself. Then Robin asked Great-Aunt Juliette, as he was sitting beside her, what she thought. She said to all the table, “I think not being a bore is the most important quality.” Aunt Juliette often talked about people being boring. But she was always nice to Robin and called him “my polite great-nephew”—so he supposed she didn't find him “a bore.”

“Your Great-Aunt Juliette is coming to see your Mummie to-day,” said Maud, taking the kettle off. “Is your toast all right, dear?”

“Yes, thank you, Maud.”

“Coming to see the new edition to the family! Sweet pet. She was *ever* so sweet while I had her this afternoon! Slept like a lamb and only opened her eyes just before Nurse came back to take her over, and then she looked up at me with such a cheeky sort of a look as much as to say, ‘Is that you, you old Maudie?’ ”

“Was I like her when I was a baby?” said Robin.

“You? Well—not exactly. Darker, you were. (Bless me! there’s my tongs fallen out!) But I used to take you in the Park sometimes, Battersea Park usually, though yer Mummie did always say she hated Battersea Park and wanted Nannie to go all the way to Kensington Gardens with you. Once I did take you up there though, and we was going round the Round Pond and a lady, ever such a sweet-looking lady, stopped me and said, ‘What a lovely baby!’ (I should think that tea ought to be drawn now).”

“And *then* what did she say?”

“Who, dear?”

“The lady who stopped you?”

“Oh well, dear, I don’t exactly remember. I don’t s’pose she did say anything else—Bother that Violet, she’s forgotten to fill up my sugar bowl again!”

“Violet has got a new friend,” said Robin.

“Always has,” said Maud. “If she thought less about boys and more about her work it’d be better for all concerned.”

“Mrs. Jennings said to Edwards that Violet would come to a Bad End.”

“Mrs. Jennings has no business to say such a thing in front of you—even though I shouldn’t be surprised if she was right.”

“D’you mean Violet’ll be murdered, Maud?”

“Gracious, no. Bless your heart! I should hope *not*—Not that one doesn’t hear of terrible things happening all the same—there was a girl in my paper only the other day that was found under a haystack, dead as that hearth rug.”

Robin looked at the black fur hearth rug with new interest. Ever after it remained in his mind as a character that had come to a bad end.

“—which reminds me,” said Maud, “there was a bit in my paper too about yer Mummie, with a photograph too—and saying about her having had a baby. I cut it out and sent it to my sister Bessie.”

“What a funny thing to put in a newspaper. Will they put it in when Mrs. Hedges has her baby?”

“Good gracious, no.”

“Why not?”

“Well, dear, Mrs. Hedges is just a working woman.”

“Oh.”

Maud poured out another cup of tea.

“But Maud—that girl that was found murdered under a haystack—”

“Now dear, you just forget about that.”

“—was *she* a working girl?”

“Yes, dear, of course. Under a *haystack*! Why, of course, dear.”

“But *she* was in your paper, Maud?”

“Yes, dear. But then, it was a murder, you see.”

“Oh.”

VII

ELLEN HEDGES

Frank Hedges crouched forward reading his paper by the firelight. His wife sat at the kitchen table, by the lamp.

Every now and then he looked up at her. But she was knitting. Her face was rosy; her hair rolled back over its comb was smooth, a gleam here and there in the brown, like the grain in wood. She was always a big woman, and in her black cardigan and blue apron she looked much as she had nine months ago.

As she knitted her hands hardly moved. His pale fingers turned the pages of the *Herald*, touched at his collar band, felt out every quarter of an hour or so for the packet of Gold Flakes. When he had taken out a cigarette he set it in his sensitive fish-like mouth, tore another strip off the middle page (he kept the back page for the tips and lists of horses), twisted a spill, and lit it between the bars of the oven grate. Ellen spoke once, her mouth stolid, and the corners of her eyes crinkling:—

“Why not use the same one again?”

He didn’t answer. But he looked at her and then again bent to his reading.

When the grandfather clock, set in order by himself, had chimed ten, he said:—

“Felt anything more?”

“Nothing to speak of.”

“Sure?”

“Yes.”

He folded the paper, got out of his chair, and went, with his uneven walk, to the door. He unlatched it, opened it, and looked out.

“Plenty of stars to-night,” he said. He stood outside on the step. After a minute he whistled and the retriever came from across the yard. “Come in, Prince.”

The dog came into the warmth of the kitchen and went to Ellen. She smiled down at him.

“There’s your supper in the corner.” She added, “Something special to-night. Thornly give us an extra bit for him—”

Her husband shut the door and bolted it. Then he went to each of the windows and pushed between the lace curtains to feel if the latches were secured. He had made the outside shutters himself, but these old windows were in when they came, and hardly fit for a carpenter’s house. He had meant to replace them for the last six years. But thick glass was costly; as well leave it as get the cheaper stuff. As he withdrew his hand across the deep window sill he touched a hyacinth.

“This white one’s come out since this morning,” he said. “You’ll be able to have it when you’re upstairs.”

She nodded, rolling up her knitting now. “That’s what I thought—if—”

She broke off. She put the knitting down on the table and kept her hand stiff over it. He stood watching her, and when her hand relaxed, he said:—

“You felt it again then? Didn’t you?”

She nodded, and her look, which had been fixed, met his with a secret startled delight.

He limped to the table and stood so that the lamplight caught his peaked chin and made arched shadows above his big, light blue, pale-lidded eyes.

“That’s three times then? Ain’t it?” He had a sweet-toned voice and a hesitant way of pronouncing his words.

She folded the knitting into a square of red and white checked cotton.

“Three’s lucky.” She got up and went to the dresser, moving her capacious body with alacrity. Her slippers patted the flagstones.

“I think I’ll run round and just let Mrs. Hervey know—”

She turned and smiled at him over her shoulder.

“*What?* For a few niggling pains!”

She spoke with an easy and tolerant experience. Even if she’d had to wait eleven years for her baby, she’d been in to help most of the mothers in the village during and after their confinements. . . . “Why, I might go on like this for another two or three days,” she added, taking the alarm down from the shelf.

“Nevertheless, it wouldn’t do any harm to give Mrs. Hervey a warning!”

Ellen wound up the clock.

“Let Mrs. Hervey sleep till she’s needed.” She said this with the comfortable merriment that had given Frank Hedges, when he was twenty, his first experience of spiritual ease. “And I’m goin’ up now. And so are you, Frank,” she added.

He began, by habit, turning down the lamp. The ceiling dimmed, the shadows softened into pools, the five strips of fire in the oven grate reddened. She said:—

“How sweet those hyacinths smell!”

“I don’t think I’ll come up yet.”

“Oh *come* on, dear. . . . Turn that lamp out. . . .”

He obeyed her, but slowly, shortening down the double tongues of yellow flame until they were broad and orange as nasturtium petals. Then he snuffed them with a click of metal.

She lit a candle.

The retriever lifted his head and then sank it on his paws. Ellen went out by the further door. Her husband followed her, keeping close behind her on the stairs that mounted, narrow and steep, to the landing under the skylight. She went into their bedroom, a wide low room above the kitchen, with the ceiling sloping down to the two deep-set windows, whose sills were a few inches above the stained planks of the floor. The whiteness of the room, for it was mostly ceiling, made it light with even one candle. Ellen set the candle down on the dressing table and went to draw the dim-patterned curtains. He took off his wrist watch and put it, hesitantly, on the chest of drawers which stood at his side of the big brass bed.

She pulled off the counterpane, folded it, and laid it on the chair. “We’ll be wanting a new eiderdown next winter,” she said. “Good thing the summer’s coming. This one’s pretty near wore out—”

“Did you make the bed up in the other room?”

She nodded. “Tired of me, are you?”

He shook his head without smiling and began to undress. As he was hanging his coat up on the door, she let herself down on the bed. Her back was turned to him, but he felt and started at a change in the quality of her silence.

“Ellen?”

When she answered she said shortly, "It's all right—" but keeping her hand pressed against her back below the knot of her apron.

He took his coat down off the hook again. She turned and saw. "Oh—all right then." Her voice was full and calm again.

"You get into bed and I'll go downstairs for a bit." He struck a match and lit a second candle. He let the match drop, alight, and then stamped on it. She watched him as he fastened his braces again, and put on his coat.

"I wish you *wouldn't* fuss so," she said in a tone that was a push and a caress. He gave a sharp little nod as he took up his candlestick, and looked towards and then past her. As he went out she called after him:—

"I'll be asleep when you come up."

She undressed methodically, folding her blouse, her skirt, her blue petticoat, across the chair; turning her brown woollen stockings inside out ready for the morrow. When she had put on her big nightdress of flannel, washed to a primrose yellow, she stood before the glass and took out the combs and let down her hair. As she brushed it she frowned, thinking. She didn't like the idea of Frank sitting down there by himself. It was his way to be overanxious about everything. Dr. Awkwright had said there was no reason why she shouldn't have an easy time, even if she wasn't quite so young. "Why, you're made to be a mother, Mrs. Hedges," he'd said. She stretched her arms up and back uncomfortably to divide her hair at the nape of her neck. She plaited it into two plaits and tied the ends with the pieces of tape that hung on the mirror above the cornet-shaped hair tidy. As she combed out the brush she wondered if she ought perhaps, all the same, to put some of those things in the drawer to air, downstairs. After all, there was no harm in airing things. And she'd had those little good-for-nothing pains that she hadn't told Frank about going on, off and on, ever since early this morning. Only if Frank once saw flannels and shawls and everything out on the horse she'd never get him to bed.

She decided to lie down, but not to put out the candle. Soon after she had lain down the pain came again, a blunt pain pressing through from front to lower spine and leaving a long twinge across the lower breadth of her back. She lay on her elbow until it went. Then she looked at the clock. Thirty-two minutes past ten. The last one couldn't have been more than twenty minutes ago.

She got up, slowly, and went to the chest of drawers. She opened the top long drawer and, after hesitating, took out two small piles of flannel and

cotton and laid them on the bed. Then she took out an infant's white jacket edged with blue, the last one she had finished, and, after another moment of hesitation, the shawl Mrs. Howard had given her, and a blue and white pair of woollen boots. She held these for a moment between her hands, feeling their softness and looking at their smallness. Then she laid them, too, on the bed.

She took her long coat off the door and put it on over her nightgown and sat down, glancing again at the clock.

She sat waiting, her hands folded. The candlelight, steady now as the ticking of the clock, varnished her bulky rosy face, touching the serene lips, the blunt nose, the deep, alert, untroubled eyes. Behind her, her shadow (because of the slant of the ceiling) seemed to crouch above her strangely big.

The pain came again just after the quarter to. It was no worse than the last, but when it was over she got up and, with a deliberateness lightened by elation, picked up the clothes, went to the door, and, very slowly, down the stairs to the kitchen.

Frank was by the fire. He started up as she came in. His eyes looked like pale blue glass.

"You're worse?"

She grumbled, laughing, "Go on, you! You don't deserve to be a father. I want to air some things. . . . Fetch me the horse and make yourself useful."

He went out into the scullery and fetched it and set it by the fire. She put her free hand on his arm. "You can go to Mrs. Hervey now if you like—" She spread out a head flannel and hung it over the top bar. "Tell 'er I've had one or two proper pains. But nothin' much yet. . . ." But as he pulled his hat on she added, "Tell her I think they're real, all right. . . . Not 'wind' nor 'fancies' like Nancy Bradman."

He went as she spoke, leaving the door open on to the yard. She went to shut it and paused for a moment to feel the night air and glance at the crescent moon above the top of the barn. Someone was passing down the road; she saw a torch flick a disk of radiance on the churchyard wall and down into the road again. The steps stamped and crunched away down the hill. She came back in and decided to stay downstairs, for a time at any rate. She put some more coal on, but didn't light the lamp. She spoke to Prince and patted him and went on hanging out the towels and clothes.

When a pain came again she held on to the back of Frank's armchair. She'd left the clock upstairs, but it certainly didn't seem more than a quarter of an hour since the last. She began to move about the kitchen, partly on principle, partly from excitement. She thought of going up and fetching the cradle from the spare room, but an unacknowledged superstitiousness prevented her. She told herself there wasn't such a hurry as all that!

She paused and looked at the calendar hanging on the dresser from the same hook as the scissors. Wednesday to-day. . . . Well, Thursday wasn't a bad day. . . . (Thursday's child has far to go. . . .) Mrs. Howard's baby was born on a Thursday too—a fortnight to-morrow. Mrs. Howard had started early on the Thursday morning, Maudie said. Still, at her age, Ellen thought, and it being the first, she might be quite a time. Dr. Awkwright had said she was normal enough, but she couldn't expect it to be quite as if she was twenty-five, and being a bit on the stout heavy side . . .

She put on the kettle and set out three cups and saucers, and got the ginger cake she'd made yesterday out of the cupboard. She hesitated between the brown and the lustre teapot and chose the brown, thinking that what Mrs. Hervey would care chiefly about would be the tea itself.

A few minutes later she heard Frank's voice out in the yard. She lit a third candle. He came in followed by Mrs. Hervey, who said, "Well, it was just a chance I hadn't gone to bed. P'raps I had a presentiment, Mrs. Hedges! Well, anyway, here I am, lock, stock, and barrel."

She was a spare, broad-shouldered woman with a handsome, high-cheekboned face, light-irised eyes that moved quietly in their sockets. She had a look of cleverness, which was nearly cunning. She had black eyebrows, smutty eyelashes, and an Alexandra fringe, and wore an expensive-looking brown mackintosh. She often told people that her husband was proud of her.

She took off her mackintosh and went on addressing Ellen in her country words and curiously urban, faintly whining tones.

"So things are moving, are they? I *said* it would be Thursday or Friday. I said so to Hervey only on Monday—I'm not so often wrong. *Well*, now—you're airing the things, I see. That's given us something to do, anyway—only I wouldn't have that horse quite so near the fire, if I were you. There, I'll just move it a bit."

Ellen smiled. "Oh, come on, Mrs. Hervey. *They're* all right. I thought maybe you'd like a cup of tea.—And you too, Frank."

Mrs. Hervey rearranged the clothes on the horse, but turning her head archly to Frank and saying:—

“Mrs. Hedges and me both know what fathers are on these occasions!”

Frank was relighting the lamp.

“Always fidgeting,” Ellen said to him.

“I don’t like these candles,” he said, and snuffed them, one by one, with his fingers.

Ellen stopped dead with the canister in her hand. Mrs. Hervey watched her.

“Did you count from the last pain?” she added, when Ellen let go the edge of the table.

Ellen took the lid off.

“It’s about twenty minutes, I think.”

“Got the cradle ready?”

Ellen said it was upstairs.

“Well then, Mr. Hedges had best fetch it and I’ll see it’s all aired and ready.”

“I aired the covers every day.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Hervey, smoothing down her blue-cotton white-spotted pinafore. “Nevertheless I like to see to everything myself.”

“Bless you, we all know you do! Go on then, Frank, obey orders. Fetch the cradle.”

Mrs. Hervey took the kettle from Ellen and started making the tea. She had hands like a man, with a signet ring on her little finger; but her movements were deft. When Ellen started looking in her bag, a small cane valise, she stopped her with a smile that darkened her fine unfriendly eyes and showed her regular teeth (which were her own).

“Now then,” she said, professionally playful, though she and Ellen Hedges had been “on the job” together (and treated other patients to their joint playfulness).

“I was just lookin’ for the baby,” said Ellen, winking at Frank. He was sitting at the table now and gave her a queer upward glance. She saw how he was feeling, and when he refused the cup of tea set before him by Mary

Hervey, she knew he was in one of his states when anything started him vomiting. She went over to him and put her hand on his shoulder and said, "It's no good forcing him, Mrs. Hervey. You let him alone and we'll get the bed ready upstairs."

So they drank their tea and Mrs. Hervey ate two slices of ginger cake. Ellen watched her, amused; for if there was one thing certain about Mary Hervey,—that all the village knew,—it was that if she could eat in another house, even a biscuit or a piece of bread, she would do so. Her "saving" was a thing that Frank had against her. But Ellen said you must take people as they come (though it did seem queer, even to her, sometimes, to think that with Timothy Hervey earning all he did now, and their having no children, Mary Hervey should keep on with this job, just for the sake of a bit more money! When you'd think she'd be glad to sit at home and have a bit of peace now—for they'd had a hard enough time in the beginning).

When they went upstairs and started to put the mackintosh on the bed, and the other things ready on the dressing table, and got the "receiver" ready pinned to the end of the bed, Mrs. Hervey asked Ellen if she had seen the new baby up at the Court. Ellen described how she'd been to see it and said it was the very image of its father—blue eyes and fair.

"And is Mrs. Howard about yet?"

"Not yet, I don't think."

"Ah well—a week for a working woman, a fortnight to three weeks for a lady, as we always say. Well, I suppose she's happy all right? You know they say she was carrying on with him long before he married her."

Ellen's face got redder.

"For one thing I don't believe it. . . . And even if she was she's not the only one in this village—"

Mary Hervey, who had got Timothy twelve years back by a pretended pregnancy, gave Ellen a look, and then a sardonic, but unruffled smile.

"Well, I s'pose we mustn't blame the gentry and excuse ourselves. Did you know Bob Price's girl's bin sleeping rough with some unemployed fellow from the other side of Warwick this last two months—Are you bad again? That was worse, wasn't it?"

Ellen's lips were pressed tight together and her eyes were shut. Her words came on a jerked-out breath:—

"I'll be all right in a minute."

“Keep moving if you can,” said Mrs. Hervey.

Ellen whispered “Yes,” sitting on the edge of the bed, her stare stayed fixed on the candle flame. Those last three had been pretty bad. “Things ought to be gettin’ goin’ soon,” she said.

“Oh well, it’s no good our being impatient. It’s not midnight yet. I don’t believe in anything being done too quick,” said Mary Hervey. She looked at herself in the glass. “I think I’ll go and get your husband to get a bit of rest.”

“I’d be glad if you could. He wears himself out so.”

Mrs. Hervey went out. When she came back Ellen’s bulk was lying stomach and face down, across the bed. When she looked up her face was patchy and glistening.

“I’d take off your coat now if I was you,” said Mary Hervey. Her clever look scanned Ellen’s face. “Is the pain still across the back?”

Ellen nodded.

“What about Frank?”

“Obstinate as a donkey. He won’t move . . . perhaps it’s as well having him down there instead of next door. He’s sittin’ at the table reading his paper. . . . Why don’t you try gettin’ a little rest between the pains now? I’ll sit down on the chair too and have a doze.”

Ellen understood. “These aren’t doing no good! Are they?”

“No,” said Mrs. Hervey, “not yet.”

She sat down on the cane-bottomed chair. The candlelight shone on the back of her light brown hair, which was coiled twice round her head inside the net. Her strong, vaguely equivocal face was in shadow.

“Try and shut your eyes,” she said.

Ellen obeyed. She tried to think about the baby and not about the next pain. She was thinking about what color its eyes would be when the pain came again, coiling and pressing through her and, when she thought it was going off, stabbing slowly through into the bottom of her spine.

When she dared to unclench her teeth and relax her bent-up knees, she felt Mary Hervey watching her.

“Rest again,” she said. “You’ll need your strength.”

After the next two pains she got up and came over and examined Ellen. Then she put back the bedclothes and looked at the clock and went back to her chair. Ellen wanted to ask her if she hadn't better get up and walk about, when the next started, and the same slow agony writhed through from front to back, and then downward, then paused, then pierced deeper and downward behind her pelvic bones and forked in two long jabbing pains to her knees. She felt Mary Hervey come and stand over her. When she could speak she whispered:—

“What's the time?”

“Five minutes to one.”

“That one was pretty bad.”

“I know. But it wasn't any good. You may still go on for a bit this way. You wouldn't like to get up again?”

Ellen shook her head.

“D'you think I ought?”

“Well—it might help matters. When did you say you started?”

“Oh well—they small good-for-nothing pains about this time last night.”

“I'd get up for a bit.”

The door opened. Frank Hedges looked in like a hobgoblin.

Ellen sat right up.

“Well, you old busybody!”

His face stared and stared at Ellen, but he didn't bring his body in. He said, with his sweet hesitant speech:—

“You all right, dear?”

“Right!” said Ellen, “I'm as right as rain. It's you who'll want nursing if you don't get your sleep this night. He'd best get off to bed, hadn't he, Mrs. Hervey?”

Mrs. Hervey nodded.

“I'll promise to call you when you're wanted,” she said, offhand, her glance not quite off her patient.

He went out, shutting the door without a sound. They heard his steps go downstairs again and into the kitchen below. Mary Hervey went to the

window and pushed aside the curtains.

“I thought I heard it raining,” she said. “I said to Hervey only this morning we should have rain within twenty-four hours.”

“There was ever such lovely stars earlier,” said Ellen, her hand creeping to the bars at the top of the bed, her fingers slipping round a bar, and then grasping it, and then gripping it until the red fingers were green-white and swollen.

Mary Hervey didn’t turn. But she looked at her watch. The candle flame shot up and the low white room jumped higher and wider, and then, as the flame steadied, contracted again.

“I’m doubtful if we’ll get a steady spell of sunshine,” said Mary Hervey, “until the new moon.”

It was still raining at seven when Frank Hedges started in his chair and saw Mrs. Hervey coming in through the kitchen door.

“How is she?”

Mary Hervey gave him one of her rare straight glances:—

“She isn’t doing anything yet; nothing that’s any good. I’m going to make her some tea. Then I’d like you to run over to Dr. Awkwright’s.”

“What’s the matter? I’d got an idea last night already—”

“Now, Frank Hedges, don’t you go getting ideas. All I want is for Dr. Awkwright to come and just see it’s all quite all right.”

“But you’ve as good as said—”

“It isn’t my business to say or not to say! All I can say is that your wife isn’t the only one that ‘takes her time’ in these matters.”

Frank was out of the room and up the stairs while she was talking. When he got up to the bedroom door he stopped and laid his ear against the door and heard a low crying moaning sound that went on and on and sounded like an animal howling very far away. He pushed the door, hesitating again, and then went in.

Ellen was a humped-up shape under the white counterpane, her head pushed down, forehead first, into a pillow, her right hand clenched round one of the bars above her head, her left arm turned under the pillow. He moved on tiptoe, very slowly, round the post of the bed, but she didn’t hear him, or didn’t look as if she did, and he could hear words: “. . . much longer

—God—stand much more—Oh God, help me—” He was by the bed now, shaking so that he could hardly say her name.

“Ellen?—*Ellen!*”

She lifted her head with a sort of drugged slowness. Her face was blotched grey and her eyes red and swollen.

“Frank!!”

“It’s all right . . . dear. . . . I’m going to fetch doctor now. . . . You’ll be all right—when he comes. . . .”

“Frank—I . . .” her words whispered and broke into a long crying moan, and he ran from the sound, down the stairs and out of the house, and across the yard (with Mrs. Hervey calling something after him), and up the street and across the allotments.

Dr. Awkwright was at breakfast.

A rasher of bacon and bad coffee and thick soggy toast in a room that hadn’t been dusted and smelt of dry rot. The room was full of cumbrous mahogany furniture that they, he and his wife, had brought from Manchester. The daffodils on the table were faded. He was an astigmatic, small-built North Country man with a thin nose, a kindly but nervous glance, and the sarcastic pathetic mouth of a little character perpetually engaged in trying to bluff big difficulties. He greeted Frank Hedges, who came in panting hard, with:—

“Well, Hidges, well, well? The waif, I s’pose?” (He had, in an attempt to cover his North Country speech, evolved a strange hybrid accent.)

“Yes, sir. She’s ever so bad, doctor—Mrs. Hervey sent me.”

“Sit daown, Hidges, sit daown.”

“Please, doctor, Mrs. Hervey says she’d like you to come at once.”

“Sit daown, Hidges. You husbands always come along with terrible stories! I expict she’s being somewhat slow? Is she? You know you can’t expict things to be quait—er—well, *quait* normal at her taim of life.” Dr. Awkwright spread some margarine on his toast, and glanced over his *pince-nez* at Frank, who stood with his hat in his hand, fingering and fingering its brim. “After all,” said Dr. Awkwright, “she’s thirty-six, isn’t she?”

“Thirty-seven, doctor.”

“Exactly!” The doctor poured himself out his coffee. When it mixed with the milk it looked dark grey.

“—Mrs. Hervey said if you would come as speedily as possible, doctor? I reckon she can’t go on as she is much longer. . . . Them pains—”

“Pains not doing anything, I expect,” said Dr. Awkwright, reaching out for the marmalade jar and taking off its sticky paper top with a forefinger and thumb. “That isn’t aout of the way, you know. I’ve known wimin go on for three days laik that, and had a naice healthy baby at the end.”

“Three days?”

Mrs. Awkwright looked in. A lumpy, tired-faced woman in a soiled overall.

“Telephone, Jack!”

“Who is it?”

“*I* don’t know. . . . They’re waiting.” She went away with a hurried heavy tread.

When the doctor came back Frank Hedges said, “Had we best be goin’, doctor?”

The doctor put his hand on Frank’s arm.

“Naow then, Hidges. Don’t you fret. She’ll be as rait as rain. I’ll just finish my coffee and then I’ll run down to your place with you in the car.”

The doctor’s old Morris Cowley was out in the yard. His child, a boy of seven, with thatch hair and a dirty mouth, said:—

“Can oi come with yer, Dad?”

“No, Herbert.”

“Oroight. I’m goin’ with ’Arold then!”

“Do as you laik,” snapped the doctor, unaware of how much he disliked the boy (whose coming had spoilt even what he had in the way of happiness with his wife, for after the child’s birth money troubles were worse and she got more irritable and slovenly).

Frank Hedges sat staring before him as they drove down the village. He got out first and saw Mary Hervey’s face at the upstairs window. But her face flicked away from between the curtains and she came running down and met them at the door of the kitchen and spoke to the doctor with

primmed-up lips and curved-up nostrils and her eyes like agates in the morning light.

“I’m glad you’ve come, doctor.” She checked the vehemence of her own tone and said professionally, “We’re not getting along quite as we might.”

“What’s the trouble?” he asked, direct now. He stepped into the kitchen and put his hat and bag on the table, while Mrs. Hervey gave her account, brief but detailed, of the night, and ended up: “I daresay” (she glanced at Frank, who stood by the gone-out stove and didn’t seem to be hearing or noticing), “I daresay you’ll have to do something—And she keeps on and *on* crying out for chloroform now. I’ve bin tellin’ her I thought maybe you’d let her have just a whiff.”

Dr. Awkwright took up his bag and left his hat. His nervous mouth line set.

“If these wimin didn’t know about chloroform they wouldn’t start screaming for it.”

Leading him upstairs, Mary Hervey said, though she knew his prejudices, “If she could have just a whiff, doctor, maybe she might gather a bit of strength—and do the job herself. She’s—” She stopped at the sound from the bedroom.

Downstairs Frank heard the sound lengthening out into searching quivering screams that spent themselves, slowly, to a shorter and shorter moaning. When the moaning stopped, Frank could hear the footsteps overhead, and the drip of the tap out in the scullery, and, through the open door, the whirring down of the pigeons on to the wet yard, and the roll and creak of a farm cart passing down the road.

He went and stood in the doorway. The steps went on upstairs, and then Ellen again. . . . And that seemed to go on, and on, but it was only twenty minutes later when Dr. Awkwright came downstairs.

He said, “She’s having a tough taim, but she’ll be all rait, Hidges. . . . Ai’ve told her I’m coming back in half an hour.”

“You aren’t *goin’*, doctor?”

“My dear Hidges, we’ve got to let Nature do something, you know!”

“But Mrs. Hervey said you—”

The doctor had gone out.

The sounds upstairs were different now. No screaming now, but a moaning that dragged on and on.

It was an hour later when the doctor came back, saying:—

“Looks laik rain, doesn’t it?”—went past Frank, smelling of whiskey, and upstairs and banged the door.

When Mary Hervey came down she said, “’E’s decided ’e’s got to interfere now,” and went through to the scullery to boil a kettle on the oil stove, because the range had gone out.

Frank was afraid to ask her anything. As she went up she said, “You’d better get that range lighted again.”

He got up, and began to get the sticks and some newspaper. As he was kneeling in front of the grate and getting out the ashes, the dog, Prince, who had been lying all day in the corner between the dresser and the wall, lifted up his head and howled, and then stopped, and laid his head down again on his paws.

Frank went on laying and lighting the fire, but listening all the time, his eyelids half closed, as if to be half blind helped him to hear.

He could hear nothing now. No cries, no moaning, nothing but an occasional step or a mutter of the doctor’s voice. Once something metallic fell; once there was a rattle like a metal thing falling on a tin. Then the steps became more frequent but short, and in one place. And then, it seemed after hours, he heard the door open upstairs and footsteps, Mrs. Hervey’s, coming down, slowly. (Slowly, what for . . .?)

She pushed the door and came in carrying a bundle in her arms. But she didn’t come to him. She went straight over to the cradle by the fire and laid it in—and then glanced over her shoulder at him, her eyes wide-open, saying, “It’s living all right—it may live—”

“Ellen?”

“She ain’t come round yet. It’s fairly ripped ’er to pieces. Here—fill this bottle for me, Frank. There’s no heat in it.”

“Is Ellen *all right*, Mary?”

Mary was bending over the bundle rubbing and chafing, and said without looking round, “She’ll be all right. She’s all right. He’s seeing to her now, while she’s still ‘under.’ *Don’t you go up*. . . . It isn’t fit for you to see.”

He obeyed her. But he couldn't make himself go near the cradle yet.

"It's a boy," said Mary. "That bottle ready?"

"Is it?"

"Ellen'll be pleased."

He stared at Mary Hervey and repeated, stupefied:—

"Ellen? Is Ellen all right, Mary?"

"Don't you trust the doctor, you fool?"

"*No*," he said.

She gave him one of her queer glances and muttered something he didn't bother to hear, but he knew she didn't either.

"Nevertheless," she added, "you needn't worry about Ellen—"

"What's he *done* to her?"

"Oh well—" she was suddenly professional, taking the bottle from Frank, wrapping it down into the cradle. "It don't do fer me to explain such things. But he got afeard, her being in such pain, you know (when you think of it she was lying there more 'n twenty hours with those pains)—and he started givin' her the chloroform and yet he was afraid to 'do' anything. (They don't like it, y'know, it's tricky—they're always a bit afraid.) But then, of course, it stands to reason, he *had* to in the end—and with her, poor dear, he must have known he'd have to—"

Frank hadn't heard or understood more than half of it.

"Why's that baby so quiet?" he asked.

"It's weak."

The door was opened upstairs. The doctor came down.

"Well, Hidges, your waif'll be all rait now! She's a pretty tough taim, but she'll do, I think—" He turned to Mary Hervey. "She's come round now, Mrs. Hervey. . . . She's all rait for the moment."

"I'll go up, doctor, and just tidy up a bit."

"That's rait, Mrs. Hervey. Then we can let the 'proud father' go up!"

Frank smelt the chloroform on him now. He watched him go over and look at the child.

"Fine specimen, Hidges. Wonderful limbs."

Frank came halfway over to the cradle, and stopped. He did and didn't want to see it. He had a feeling of not wanting to set eyes on his child while his heart was set against it.

Frank sat over an hour upstairs by her pillow. Then the doctor came up.

The doctor stopped a little way from the bed.

"Mrs. Hidges?"

She didn't open her eyes.

"—Mrs.—*Hidges*?"

Frank knew already. He had known before Dr. Awkwright spoke; before the doctor came into the room; before he started coming up the stairs, slow like that. . . .

She opened her eyes, but her look was stupefied, with the drugs, with her need of sleep, with (deep under the wreckage of pain, of fear and exhaustion) her immense relief.

Frank put up his hand, like a policeman stopping a sudden vehicle. He fixed his aquamarine eyes on the doctor and shook his head.

Dr. Awkwright hesitated, frightened, and fierce, and grateful for the reprieve.

Her eyes were shut again.

Frank's finger was pointed to the door. He said, "Go out and I'll follow you"—the pupils of his eyes dilated, his finger stiffened, pointing—"go *out*, go OUT, go **OUT!**"

The doctor went.

Frank's hand dropped. Getting on tiptoe, he prepared to move after him. He touched Ellen's head. She didn't stir and as he went out she was giving uneasy snoring breaths.

Frank came into the kitchen after the doctor.

"It's dead, doctor?"

"Ai'm afraid so, Hidges. Ai'm terribly sorry."

Mary Hervey was sitting on the chair against the clothes horse. Frank hadn't seen her when he came in because her head was bent down and she

was holding her apron up against her face.

“Where’s the child?” he asked.

The doctor nodded to the cradle standing over by the range on the other side of the hearth from Mary.

He went over to it.

Mary had laid a shawl over its face. He put out his hand and lifted the shawl, very carefully.

He stood looking at it, only just aware that behind him the doctor was saying sharp troubled sentences. He kept on looking at it, at its little wet clay face, its ears, its hands, its finger nails.

“—I suppose you could see—see about—er—the coffin—Hidges?”

Frank drew the shawl with a slow, hardly breathing gentleness over the baby’s face.

Then he came away from the cradle and spoke to the doctor.

“Yes,” he said. “I’ll see to the coffin.”

Mary started sobbing aloud.

The doctor said in his edgy voice, his look shooting here and there:—

“Pull yourself together, Mrs. Hervey.—You’d best go up and attend to Mrs. Hidges now!” He added, “Ai’ll come back in about an hour. Ai’m . . .”

Frank Hedges said:—

“I’m not going to have anyone telling her yet. And when she’s told it’ll be me that tells her. I’ve got to tell her,” he added, flatly, and to himself. He turned and went out of the kitchen into the yard, not troubling to wait for their answer, as if he were sure that they—the little jumpy doctor standing there, and Mary Hervey staring up bleary and swollen-lidded—would obey his orders.

“Well,” said the doctor to Mary, “Ai’ll be back as Ai said. Ai daresay she’ll sleep,” he added.

Frank told her, next morning. He sat with her all the morning, holding her hand and hardly ever looking at her face. For if he had he couldn’t have stayed quiet, which was all he could do for her—stay beside her, and keep hold of her hand, and look through the window at the bright rain.

Dr. Awkwright came after two (but in a hurry, for it was Saturday and he was on his way to the races at Westcote). But he went up and had his talk that he wanted to have with Ellen.

And then Frank went up again. . . .

She said, later on in the afternoon:—

“Maybe, as doctor says, it was the will of God.”

He took in her words without turning away from the window.

The rain had stopped, and a pale sunshine lay on the thatch of the barn, giving the straw a brown and purplish gloss like the plumage of a pigeon.

He thought of the child that Mary Hervey had lifted out of the cot and laid in the elm-wood coffin he'd made for it. He thought of the way the eyelashes closed down on its cheeks, which looked like the petals of an anemone. He saw its hands, which Mary Hervey had crossed on its chickenlike breast, and the way its hair lay in dark curled threads.

The will of God? . . .

VIII

CHARLOTTE ROSE

Nurse Forbes was lifting the baby out of the pram when Maud came across the lawn. She came rapidly, saying, "Nurse!—Nurse," before she reached her. And as she came up to her, she said:—

"Mrs. Hedges's baby's dead. Have you heard, Nurse?"

"—Mrs. Hedges?"

"Yes," said Maud, "you remember that big rosy-faced sort of a woman that came up to have a look at Baby about a week ago . . ."

"Y-yes."

"Well, Mrs. Briggs (that's Briggs's wife, you know—I daresay you've seen her about, she always wears glasses—not *pince-nez*, proper glasses, y' know)—well, she met Mrs. Craven (that's Mrs. Hervey's sister—Mrs. Hervey's the midwife, you know) in the Coöp, just after lunch it was, and Mrs. Craven told her all about the whole business."

Laura Forbes held the Howards' drowsing baby against her shoulder. "Poor woman!"

"Yes, pore thing," said Maud. "Pore thing, it's terrible for her!—Mrs. Craven told Mrs. Briggs—we heard, y' know, she had started her 'time,' y' know, two days ago, and then somehow with that business of my finger going wrong, and Cook's earache and everything, it slipped my mind—of course I *meant* to ask . . ." Maud told the story Mrs. Briggs had heard from Mrs. Craven, who had just been with her sister Mrs. Hervey. "It seems even that queer-faced Mrs. Hervey's quite upset about it. It seems she came home crying ever so. You know, Nurse, I don't know what you think, but I should say it would be best Mrs. Howard shouldn't know—not just yet, anyway. She's been ever so good to Mrs. Hedges and was so interested in her, specially as her baby was expected just about the same time."

"No," said Nurse Forbes, "Mrs. Howard must *certainly* not be told."

Across the lawn they saw a car coming out of the vault of beech trees into the open drive.

"That must be Mrs. Macarthy," said Nurse Forbes.

“Mrs. Macarthy!” said Maud, as she walked beside Nurse Forbes and Baby toward the house. “There’s a woman that’s very different from Mrs. Howard!” As she spoke the baby opened its eyes and Maud, as if assuming that they had opened in inquiry about Mrs. Macarthy, changed her voice from its usual genteel modulations to an affectionate and saccharine singsong:—

“Yes, you pretty sweet, *very* different from your own darling mother! . . . Still,” Maud added as she followed Nurse and Baby in at the side door and past “the slab,” “I daresay” (she no longer spoke to the baby), “I daresay she has something to put up with with that husband of hers!—*Skirts!!!*” said Maud—“talk about *skirts*!—But then,” said Maud, holding back the swing door for Nurse Forbes to pass into the hall, “I daresay she, Mrs. Macarthy you know, has made it a bit hard for *him*—not being what you call very—loving and all that—at home!”

Charlotte Rose stared past Maud.

Hester Macarthy didn’t know she was unhappy because she had never been happy.

She had, in her own estimation, quite a good time. She hunted three days a week and they were fairly well off, though she thought and talked a lot about “affording” and economizing. And of course, Charles was very successful, and the only thing she’d ever really hated was having the baby—and, of course, before that, when she had to let Charles do the usual thing, but, thank God, Mr. Allston had said she wasn’t to have another. (Allston had never given her or Charles his reason, but they had both been, Hester openly and Charles secretly, relieved.) After that she stopped being afraid of Charles. (And the child had nurses and then governesses, whom Hester selected by taking the one who would come for the smallest salary and only wanted a fortnight’s holiday a year.)

She didn’t mind Charles being rude to her or ignoring her. She settled down to that. Occasionally he would speak to her with an odd compunction, and show a tenderness which terrified her in case it might lead him to want to come into her room one night.

Hester’s parents had been rich people without much education who took “cures” all over Europe. They had the characteristic, inherited by Hester, of mildly disliking their children. Hester and her brother spent their childhood in Grand or Palace Hotels in Baden, in Marienbad, in Vienna, in Aix, in

Plombières, segregated with some sort of governess, staring out of hotel windows or playing in gardens with trees in pots, and parterres of geraniums, and green iron tables; or being taken for walks in public gardens where bands played.

Hester's only memory, which might have been a happy one, was mixed up with the lilting air of "Püppchen" played by a German band in one of those many too bright and unending *parcs*. . . .

There was a little girl called Rosina (Hester never knew her other name) staying in the same hotel (Grand Hôtel du Casino). She was older than Hester, and had long fair curls, and a dimpling face, and a way of saying quite ordinary things that made them seem funny and playing everyday games so that they became suddenly delightful. Rosina smiled at Hester the first day she arrived, and came up and spoke to her the next. Rosina wore white openwork socks and a white sailor dress with a scarlet collar, and a straw hat with a scarlet riband with "H.M.S. Dreadnought" on it in gold letters. She was so friendly and gay that she didn't even notice Hester's stiffness and anxiety about what her governess would think. And, Hester saw with amazement, Rosina made friends with the governess (a new one and silent), and even made her brother Eric laugh when he was at the beginning of a "tantrum."

Hester played with Rosina every day. For the first and last time in her life, she woke up in the mornings and sat straight up thinking, "*To-day—How lovely*"—and wriggling her toes with longing to be up. Then, one morning, Rosina said, "Isn't it sad that we're going to-morrow?"—and Hester went on staring at one of Rosina's soft shining long curls, staring and not being able to bear to look up.

In that moment Hester felt—what she was never to feel again—eternity ebbing from her veins, and the everyday blood coming back, drop by thick, agonizing drop.

For years after she dreamed about Rosina, seeing her face, laughing under the sailor hat, with the scarlet riband and "H.M.S. Dreadnought." And once, without knowing it, shortly after her marriage, she passed by Rosina in Regent Street. Hester couldn't have known it, for Rosina was unrecognizable. (She had long ceased to be gay, and dyed her hair to keep its gold.)

When Hester left her finishing school her parents took a big, gloomy, expensive, furnished house in South Audley Street "to bring her out." But she didn't get married that summer and after that they just went on traveling

about with her. Her brother was in the City by this time. But they didn't think of giving Hester an allowance and making her independent. And if they had she wouldn't have known what to do, but would have just gone on anyway, traveling with her parents from Aix-les-Bains to Paris, from Paris to Acqui, from Acqui to Baden, from Baden to Harrogate.

Charles Macarthy met her at Bath, at tea with an aunt of his. He saw that she was one of those thin, dull, attrited girls (becoming rarer) out of which repressed Englishmen make inhibited Englishwomen. And Hester had money. He called on her parents amid the plush and aspidistra splendor of the Pump Room Hotel, and, after a fortnight, proposed to Hester—who habitually accepted what was proposed to her, as long as it did not seem to involve thought, or expenditure of money.

He was already in Parliament and considered “promising.” While he was engaged to Hester and she was in London, at the Langham Hotel with her parents, choosing a trousseau, Charles took her to the theatre or out to luncheon. Sometimes he sat alone with her in her parents' private sitting room and put his arm round her flat, carefully corseted waist. When he did this, or kissed her within half an inch of her pallid but nicely shaped lips, she showed signs of faintly irritable agitation. He didn't kiss her on the lips until two days before the wedding, and when he did he reflected that it was rather like finishing the remains of a cold chicken. When he had done it she said, in her toneless crackly way, “Dear me, Charles—” and wiped her mouth.

Francesca heard Hester Macarthy's voice. Her words were like dried leaves in a gust of wind. They had, Francesca thought, like everything about Hester, that dry, curiously pitiable quality.

Hester came round the screen and stood there in her tweeds with a look that was meant to be a smile on her neat little smudge of a face.

“*Well*, Francesca? How are you? Getting on all right?”

Francesca held out her hand and thanked her, as the small gloved hand dropped out of hers, for the white lilac. “It's *so* lovely,” she said. “So lovely getting lilac so early! Like getting a first helping of summer.”

Hester sat in the chair by the end of the bed.

“I'm glad you liked it! I always think it's such a bore when people send you things for the baby, isn't it? One never has any use for them. At *least* flowers fade, don't they!”

Francesca said, “Do smoke, won’t you?”

“Sure you don’t mind? Won’t upset you or anything? I should hate to make you feel rottener. One feels bad enough anyway.”

“Please *do*—As a matter of fact I do feel very well.”

Hester put her cigarette into a holder.

“Do you? Well, I s’pose you’re one of these fortunate women who do feel quite all right after. I must say *I* didn’t. Allston (you’ve got him too, haven’t you?) had to give me injections and I don’t know what else. I was an absolute wreck.” The little nervous staccato phrases went on—“Couldn’t stop crying, y’know. Dreadful. I told myself I’d never go through that again. Awful, I think, that women have to go through that at all. Not *cottage* women, of course, and poor women—it’s all right for them. They don’t feel it so much, either. Don’t seem to think anything *of* it. Do they?—What sort of a time did you have?”

Francesca accepted the inevitable question. Nine out of every ten female visitors asked, “What sort of a time—” (as if she had been to Blackpool).

“Quite all right, thanks.”

A light that was almost like vitality showed in Hester Macarthy’s eyes. She leaned just perceptibly forward.

“Instruments?” she asked.

“No,” said Francesca.

Hester sat back. “*I* had, you know!—I just screamed and screamed until he jolly well *had* to give me chloroform and do the work himself! Anyway, what does one pay a specialist for (they get much too much anyway!) if he isn’t goin’ to *do* anything. Might as well have that common little beast Awkwright and pay him ten!”

“I suppose a specialist’s really a form of insurance,” said Francesca.

“Insurance! Well, I call it a jolly heavy premium!—Did Allston try and make you feed the child? They all *do*, of course! It’s the fashion now. Of course I simply refused. For one thing I wanted to hunt that winter, and anyway I think it’s disgusting—But then, of course,” said Hester Macarthy, “it’s *all* so disgusting really.”

“Oh, not so very,” said Francesca (wondering whether the people who found their physical life disgusting were any more tiresome than the people who found it “beautiful”). “And anyway,” Francesca added, giving way to

an impulse to prick her visitor, “being suckled doesn’t seem to disgust the baby.”

“No—*horrid* little things,” said Hester. “They jolly well seem to enjoy it.”

At this moment Nurse Forbes brought in Charlotte Rose. But Hester was quite gracious to her and said, “Her eyelashes are all right, aren’t they? Rather jolly, brown eyelashes and that fair hair. Is your husband pleased with her? I suppose he is. Men always *do* seem so pleased—don’t they, Nurse?”

“Most of them,” said Laura, and to Francesca: “If I let you have her for a little while you must promise to give her back. You can’t keep her until Mrs. de Briac comes or she’ll get spoilt.”

Hester said, “Is Mrs. de Briac your aunt? She is, isn’t she? I saw she sold a picture the other day, at Christie’s—I forget who by.”

“Degas,” said Francesca.

“I daresay it was. I don’t know a thing about pictures. They bore me, except a jolly print or something. And these modern pictures never seem to look like anything. Still, other people seem to like them. Well, I must be going. I’ve got to go and call on a female who’s come to live over near Oxford. Breeds cockers, I believe. Well, so long. Glad to find you looking so fit. Remember me to your husband. You must both come and dine when you’re up and about again—”

After she had gone Francesca was alone with the baby.

She thought, amused but a little resentful, that this was the first time she and the baby had been alone together, except at feeding times, since it was born. (“*Les parents sont les gens qu’on ne fréquente pas entre les repas*—”)

It lay still in her arms, looking up at her. It had dark cloudy blue eyes, and a beautifully shaped head, like a baby by Delia Robbia, and its cheeks looked as if they were lit from inside by a pale pink light. She bent down several times and touched its head with her lips. It stirred all over when she did this, as if it felt that something pleasant but inexplicable was happening to it.

Francesca could have lain so for hours, holding her child close in her arms, and watching its absurd face with cheeks like blown-out petals; and

looking into its eyes, where she could see, already, the Person who wasn't hers.

Hester told Charles at dinner that she had been to see Mrs. Howard and the new baby. When she had got him to ask how they were, she answered they were "very fit and cheerful." She added, "I didn't see him. I gather he was up in London for the day."

"I like Howard," said Charles. "Clever fellow. He could do anything with his brains. And does nothing!—I'm not sure," he added, thinking aloud, "that I don't rather like that. The world's stiff with go-getters—like meself!"

"They've got a chair in the hall I've never seen there before," said Hester. "I wonder if they've just bought it. It looked like an antique."

"They're unlikely to have *made* it then," said Charles. He added, "You might ask them to dinner soon."

Hester agreed.

The Howards interested her, not only because she suspected them of what she thought of as "that" almost every night; but because she had heard that *before* their marriage they had both (hadn't Francesca had another husband who lived in Paris now with a Chinese woman?) been very hot stuff indeed.

IX

THE MACARTHYS

Charles Macarthy was writing late. He hadn't got back from the House until midnight, and he wanted to get some letters done so as to get down to King's Norton in time to hunt, next day. Albany was so quiet that he could hear the drip of the rain just outside his window, falling each side of the covered way that separated the two halves of the court. His servant had gone, before Charles came in, leaving the fire piled up as usual, and the decanters and glasses on the table.

Charles smoked a pipe while he wrote. The pipe suited his face. A knobby red face with a squirrel's eyes; red-brown hair thinned back on his skull, but hardly grey, although he was forty. He bent forward as he wrote. He had a thick-set body with springy movements; small hands and feet; thick-haired wrists; ears with lobes sloping into the brick-colored neck.

He was sealing an envelope when he heard steps coming up the covered gangway outside the window. He picked up the seal. The light steps slowed, hesitated outside. Then he heard them approach the foot of the stone staircase outside the door of his flat.

He put down the seal and added the letter to the pile.

The steps came to his door. He heard the bell ring down in the kitchen.

He got up, crossed the room, and went out into the hall. He opened the door.

"Dorothy?"

When she came in he shut the door quickly after her, and when she put her hand, in its kid glove soiled with wet, on his arm, he shook it off and went into the room in front of her. He faced her then. "What d'you want?"

The light was straight in her face.

"Why d'you come here?"

She had a peony mouth, and earrings, and her neat smartness was tashed by rain and fear.

"Charlie, I had to come—I *had* to."

She had on a black silk mackintosh and still held her umbrella.

“Why didn’t you write to me? At the usual address. Or even telephone?”

“You never answered. I *did* write.”

“I told you I was going away. I only came back last week.”

“I *did* phone you! I phoned you *here*, three times. And that man of yours said you were out! And I even thought of calling you down in the country.”

He rapped out, “You *didn’t*?”

She started. “No—no I didn’t . . .” She kept staring at him. “No—I was too afraid maybe She’d answer—”

He demanded, less violently:—

“Why have you come?”

She slumped her umbrella on to the table so that the handle knocked the edge of the brass tray.

“I should think you might ask me to take a seat now I *am* here!”

“Sit down on the sofa.”

She sat down, opening her mackintosh and looking up at him, even at this moment, with a sort of shuddering coyness.

He knew what was coming.

She had to start crying hysterically before she could tell him. She said, “At first I didn’t think anything about it . . . But when I realized what might be the matter . . .”

Charles watched her shaking and sniveling and pushing her red nails to and fro along her knees.

He didn’t suppose the child was his. It might be. But he often thought she had another string or two. But he couldn’t prove that. And she had her proofs—about him. That week-end at Bournemouth—the letters. This *would* happen while he was trying to cut loose. (Probably why she’d let it happen?) He’d destroyed her last two letters to him at the Club, unread.

“How far gone did you say you were?”

She was drying her eyes and gave a sort of uneasy titter at his phrase.

“Well, last time—the second time—you know what I mean—ought to have been a fortnight ago—”

“I see.”

He began pacing to and fro, moving round the table and back again to the fireplace. She watched him, her manner a mixture of hostility and a cringing amorousness. She watched his expression, his body, his smallest movements.

She started when he spoke again; and then gave a sniff and began dabbing at her eyes.

“Look here,” he said. “Look here, Dorothy. I can’t help you. Or rather I won’t help you, except in one way—”

As he spoke she began giving little hysterical gasps.

“*Except*,” he said, stopping in front of her, “that of course I’ll see you through on the financial side—”

Her gasps became sobs and she rocked herself to and fro, sniffing with her handkerchief against her eyes and muttering, “You got to, you got to help me—” and then her mutters became snarls of “You *got* to, d’you hear? You shan’t leave me in the lurch—I won’t let you! You gotto *pay* the same as *I* have,” and then, starting to her feet and sniveling and sobbing, “You dirty brute—you filthy——, you dirty filthy beast—”

Charles shut the window and then came and seized her shoulders. “Stop that damned noise or I’ll have you thrown out.”

The sharp futile threat worked.

She gave a long gasp, and then ducked down her head so that her mass of brown curls shook over her face. “*Now*,” he said, “*sit down and be quiet*.”

She obeyed.

Then he sat down beside her and altered his tone. “Now look here, Dorothy—If you listened to me, instead of making all this fuss, we should soon get things straight—” She kept her head turned away. “I’ve just said I’ll see you through as far as covering expenses is concerned. But—” he paused, and she half looked round. “But the long and the short of it,” he said in his reasoned House of Commons manner, “is that I can’t help you to—to—well, not to put too fine a point on it, to have the child ‘scrapped,’ because I literally don’t know anyone who—who’ll do it.”

“Well, you can find out, can’t you? There’s plenty of men that *your* sort of women go to when they’re in a fix! You bet there are—though they *cost* something.”

“I assure you, my dear, they haven’t been in—er—my experience.”

“Then your classy girl friends have been lucky, I expect!” She started sobbing again.

“Look here,” he said, brutal again to check her; though sitting by her like this he couldn’t help a sort of pity and had an impulse to pat her shoulder.

“Look here—I’m certain one or two of your friends could help you.”

“*What* d’you take my friends for?”

He went on. “You see, my dear, it’s so much easier for a woman to find out—er—these things.” (He couldn’t send her, he thought, to the one “safe man” he knew of, because she herself wasn’t to be trusted.)

“*Easy*, is it?” she snarled. But she said after a moment, “Well—Vahlet—the girl I share my flat with—she *might* be able to find out.”

“I’m sure Violet could help you,” said Charles. (He had seen her.) He got up and went over to the desk, and unlocked a drawer.

“Now look here—Here’s this to go on with—” he gave her ten pound notes “—and then, when you’ve found out what it’ll be and everything—let me know—”

She took the money listlessly and stuffed it in her bag. She wasn’t mercenary. This always surprised him. (He understood many types and liked to see each person conforming to theirs.) He bent over the back of the sofa and put his hand on her shoulder, genial at having dealt with a situation which was risky in more ways for him than for her.

“You must go home now, my dear. And perhaps to-morrow you’ll have a talk with Violet . . .”

She caught his hand against her shoulder, bending back her head so that her curls fell back, her mouth opened a little, her darkened lids flickered:—

“Charlie?”

His hand stiffened on her shoulder, but didn’t leave it.

“Yes—my dear?”

“Charlie dear?”

“Yes—Dorothy?”

“You—” she pulled his shoulders down so that his red face was close above her powdery white one. “You don’t *hate* me, dear?—Because of what happened, dear?—It’ll—It’ll be all right afterwards—won’t it, dear?”

“Yes,” he whispered, not seeing her face any more, only breathing hard and knowing the smell of her, knowing it too well and wanting it, again.

She whispered, “You *do* love me, dear?”

“*Come* on,” he whispered. “Come on into the other room—”

She asked Violet.

Violet was pulling a purple beret on the side of her head, to go out. She told her. She added, “You’re a fool to have gone so long!”

She wrote down an address on a bit of paper.

“—But mind you, Dolly—don’t you tell anyone, no matter who, not even that aristocratic old boy friend of yours, that *I* gave you the address! As a matter of fact I haven’t ever been there meself.” She slipped a look round at Dorothy. “I just happen to know. *That’s* all! *See?*”

“Yes,” said Dorothy, reading the address slowly because the paper shook so in her hands.

“Thanks ever so much,” she said as Violet was going out.

“Oh, don’t mention it,” primmed Violet. “But mind you forget who told you. *That’s* all!”

Dorothy went on sitting on the cheap silk orange eiderdown, staring at the address.

“Mrs. Duke, 19 Linden Road, Hammersmith (near Olympia).”

She decided to go off at once and try and make an appointment. She felt sick thinking of it, but then she felt sick anyway now. She dragged herself up and went over to the glass and dabbed at her face with Violet’s rouge. She wondered if she’d write a note to Charlie before she went, but she felt too listless and rotten to do anything extra, and anyway he’d be down in the country, wherever it was,—Gloucestershire or somewhere,—by now. He always went down there Fridays.

She’d told them at the office she might be having to have an operation one of these days, and Miss Curwin had been ever so kind and said she’d been quite worried about the way Dorothy was looking, and that she’d keep her place for her even if it turned out she had to have a bit of a holiday.

Dorothy put on her old felt hat and looked in her bag to make sure she had the money.

The woman was prim and raddled, with a tar-black fringe and sharp glances that kept coming sideways at Dorothy. She listened, impatient but silent, to Dorothy's explanations—about her husband being out of a job and her own heart being bad, saying mostly “—Mm—— mm” through her lips, and keeping her back to the door. When she had the money she took Dorothy straight away into another room at the back of the house. The room was fusty, low-ceilinged, and the carpet was torn. There was a bed in the corner, and a table with bottles and things. When the woman switched on the strong bulb, tied sideways with string to hang above the bed, Dorothy saw the bits of rubber sheeting and stains on that and the floor and nearly ran out. But the woman seemed to expect her to, for she said, “Don't be a little fool. Get yer skirt off.”

Dorothy didn't know how she ever got herself to lie down under that glaring light bulb, with the woman, the other one, with the overall, who came in, chinking away with things on that table. And anyway, first of all, she went off in a faint. . . .

And then afterwards when she couldn't stop howling the other one stuffed her hand over her mouth and leaned over her, swearing and breathing at her so that she stopped howling, but just went on letting the tears come. But it wasn't only the soreness, it was the women and the burning-bright electric bulb and having no pillow (“Can't I 'ave a pillow?” she choked—“*I wanta pillow*”) and knowing she'd got to get up, any minute, soon . . .

“Now,” said the first woman, “you can go all right.”

But when she got up they saw the state she was in, even with all the strapping and gauze and everything.

And when she saw on their faces that they were frightened stiff she began screaming, holding on to the end of the bed and screaming, “I shall *die*, I shall *die*—”

And for a long flash they were stock-still, side by side, staring at her, livid under their rounds of rouge, and then both of them rushed at her and seized her arms, and dragged her to the door, and the one with the tar-black fringe kept gurgling under her breath, “You can't die *here*! You can't die *here*!”

Hester Macarthy looked her best, sitting there on the sofa in her black habit, eating a boiled egg between firelight and dusk.

The waisted-in coat made her thin torso look as if it might have breasts, tucked up somewhere under the lapels; and the light from the crackling logs gave varying, if not definite, expressions to her face, which, with its rice-papery skin and doll's nose and duck's eyes, usually looked like a child's niggly drawing of a face smudged before it was finished.

When her husband came in, still in his pink coat but with his boots off, she said:—

“*I’ve* taken the brown egg! I hope you don’t mind! Anyway, there are *two* white ones for you!”

She said this in the brittle, slightly grudging way in which she spoke to everyone except her dogs.

Charles didn’t answer. She was right when she told strangers, in tea-party conversation, that Charles never answered her unless she spoke to him twice! He pulled a chair up to the other side of the tea table. As she handed him his tea he looked over her head out of the window, thinking how jolly the garden looked in the frosty dusk, framed by the red curtains.

“Well,” she said in a tone that was crackling but not cheerful, “good day, wasn’t it?”

Charles nodded. He turned his head to look at the fire.

“*Jolly* those logs smell!”

“Well, all I can say is I wish they’d try and get ’em a bit *dryer* before they bring ’em in!”

He cracked his egg. “They’re burning all right.”

“Oh well, yes, they are *now*,” she admitted.

There was a crack, and a fountain of sparks.

“Dasher?” said Hester Macarthy gently. “Dasher, old boy?”

She poured out the milk into the basin and set it down by the sofa. The liver and white spaniel got up from by the fire and came to her. She smiled down at him. Her smile had square corners, as if, when she was smiling, she were ready to be afraid.

“Well, Dasher,” said Charles mechanically. He started his second egg.

Becky came in. A leggy twelve-year-old with two plaits, in a gym tunic. She had her father's vitality and her mother's small face. She was out of breath. She came and stood by Charles and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Miss Goss is looking for me," she said with satisfaction. "You look like the King and Queen in the *Rose and the Ring*!—At least the eggs do! What sort of a day did you have? You might've taken me; you *are* mean!"

Hester said, "You've got a hole coming in the knee of that stocking, child! Please tell Miss Goss—"

Becky took a hanky out of her sleeve and scrubbed her father's shoulder. "You *are* dirty, Daddy! Disgraceful. By the way, I've started reading *Nicholas Nickleby*."

"She'd much better stick to her own books," said Hester. "She hasn't read half the Annuals she got at Christmas yet. What's the use of giving her Dickens? Nobody reads Dickens now, anyway, I believe."

"Are you enjoying it?" said Charles to his daughter.

"Yes, *awfully*."

"There's Miss Goss calling! Run along now," said Hester.

Charles watched her go out of the room. He called after her, "Come down after your tea, and we'll have a game of chess."

"Yes, lovely," she called back. Hester bent to pick up the spaniel's bowl. She patted its head.

The butler came in.

"A personal call from London for you, sir!"

Charles got up. The firelight tinged his face and coat orange in the dusky room.

"From London?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it switched to my study?"

"Yes, sir."

The study was nearly dark. He banged the door after him and didn't stop to switch on the light. He said:—

"Charles Macarthy speaking."

A woman's voice.

"This is Dorothy's friend speaking—Violet."

"Yes?"

"You've got to come at once. Hullo? C'n you hear? For goodness' sake come at once."

"What is it?"

"She's terribly ill. She had—a operation last night."

"What's the matter with her?"

"God's sake, don't you understand me, you've got to come at once."

He cut in, the receiver shaking in his hand.

"I see—she's seriously ill?"

"You bloody fool, she's dying."

They were cut off.

He kept dead-still, thinking. Then he switched on the reading lamp on the desk and looked up Graham Allston's number. When he got through he got Allston himself.

"This is Charles Macarthy speaking. I—I don't think we've met since you looked after my wife—a few years ago—"

The even voice said, "Yes, of course." Charles cleared his throat and spoke fast. "This is a case I want you to go to if you can, this minute. I know this must seem—"

"The name and address?"

Charles gave it. He said, "I shall be there myself within two hours."

Allston rang off.

Hester came in and began to ask him something, but he walked past her, and while he was changing and explaining to Becky, and getting out the car, he kept thinking, "Dorothy mustn't die—She mustn't die!"

Violet was on the landing outside the two rooms they called the "flat." She was in floral pyjamas and a musquash coat and looked ghastly yellow, and pulled him into the sitting room, whispering.

She whispered, pointing, "He's in theah. . . . He came soon after I phoned you. (I went out to a call box so the 'cat' downstairs shouldn't know, but she suspects something!) He's got a nurse with him. He says he may save her; he's put an injection in or something (you know—a needle in her arm!). She came here late last night in a taxi in a terrible state—" Violet dropped her voice and pushed her flashy exhausted face nearer Charles, and began telling him details, and about the night, and "all to-day," and she didn't "dare send for a doctor—you never know who'd make trouble."

But she stood back in a corner when Allston came out. He came to Charles.

"I think we'll save her—" He was calm and unfriendly.

Charles began, "As a matter of fact she's a little typist whose family I happen to know—"

Allston stopped him. He said:—

"She's had a narrow escape, I think." He stood, unperturbed but grave. "Dreadful things these cases," he said.

Charles began asking—But Allston checked him. "I think we've arranged to fix her up—of course it'll be a question of time—nursing—proper convalescence. These things take time."

Charles said, "Naturally I shall pay for all that."

Allston nodded, without even looking at him. "Bad luck—for her," he said. He refused a cigarette.

"Shall I see her?"

"You can see her now if you like. She's asleep."

Charles followed him into the cheap gay room, too warm and reeking of lysol. The nurse was busy at the washstand.

Dorothy was in the further bed. Charles hardly recognized her. The cement-white bony face, bluish-lipped, with the brown hair screwed back, looked like a boy's face—a deadly ill adolescent face, with something about the pinched end of the nose, and the sodden curve of the underlip, that marked a bone-and-flesh, pitiable vulgarity. Charles couldn't see the face as Dorothy's. He saw it as a symbol, a horror, a reproach, and came out hating it.

Violet was huddled over the gas fire, smoking.

When Allston came out again Charles whispered:—

“You really think she’ll pull through?”

Allston said, “I think you can feel reasonably safe about her.”

Charles wondered afterwards if he imagined a pause between “safe” and “about her.”

Three weeks later when Dorothy and Violet were in Margate (on Charles’s regular checks paid by his bank), Violet said as they started to walk back along the Pier:—

“Wonder what sortova baby you’d ’ve *had*?” (She sometimes had “ideas” and “notions.”)

“There’s no need to be disgusting,” said Dorothy, her glance slipping round towards a good-looking young man in a brown suit they’d noticed already yesterday in the Winter Garden.

Charles Macarthy dismissed the car and walked across Dean’s Yard. A policeman saluted him. Above the Gothic turrets the stars looked very fine. Big Ben struck a quarter past.

The Minister of Transport was making a statement when Charles took his place on the Government Benches.

Charles crossed his arms, and stuck out his feet, and leaned back.

X

JULIETTE DE BRIAC

In 1870, Juliette Mayer was driven across Paris on her fourth birthday, avoiding the Tuileries and the Concorde because of the rioting. Juliette and her French nurse—with starched streamers hanging from her high-perched little bonnet—left Paris the same evening, of September 4, that the crowd broke down the railings and the Empress Eugénie slept hidden in the house of her American dentist. Juliette’s nurse talked and talked to other people in the train about “*la guerre*” and “*les allemands*.”

Juliette was sad because she hadn’t wanted to leave her grandmother in Cannes, which was like a little white-gold town in a fairy story, with its flower market and sapphire-blue sea, and oranges and lemons growing on trees in Grand’mère’s garden. She had been sent there in the spring when her father died. Her mother had come for a time, but had gone away again because of the heat and her *grand chagrin* (and because Toinette, the nurse, said Madame la Grand’mère de Juliette was too strict with her daughter and would force her to take that *consommé madrilène* when poor Madame had no *envie* to eat). So Madame la Mère de Juliette had gone to her sister (who was married, in Vienna, to an uncle whom Juliette had never seen, who worked in a theatre called the “Burgtheater”). Mamma sent postcards from Austria, and Grand’mère said “Elsa will kill herself,” and that after a *grand chagrin* one must eat and rest and not listen to music or drive among mountains or talk all night with Tante Bérénice, who was, herself, much too emotional.

But Juliette enjoyed the *consommé* and slept like a little plump cat. Sometimes she talked to her nurse about her dead father, so that she worked herself into tears. But she mentioned him less and less often as the summer passed. (Though she would not go out in the streets except in the bonnets that had black ribands. And would have liked *grand deuil* with black gloves and veil, but didn’t dare to ask Grand’mère, who had a way of saying, in her brisk voice with its French accent: “Anozere fancy! You will grrrow upp worrsse zan your Mamma!”)

Grand’mère, who knew much less about human beings than about food and silks and laces, did not perceive that Juliette was likely to grow up to be like herself.

When Juliette went to France again she was fifteen (it was 1881, and she and her mother went to Dizzy's funeral two days before they left London). She went with her mother to stay with a cousin of Grand'mère's, her Great-Aunt Mélanie, who had a château near Dinan, built in the centre of miles and miles of forest. Tante Mélanie was a heavy, square old maid, who wore a black riding habit all day and had kind but quick-seeing brown eyes. She rode out every morning at seven to visit her tenants and inspect her Children's Hospital in the village. The château itself was tall-roomed and rather dark, and was conducted with a mixture of grandeur and austerity. There were long meals served by a very old manservant in darned cotton gloves. Juliette tasted snails there for the first time, and unleavened bread sent to her great-aunt by an old Madame de Rothschild, who was spoken of with great respect. The unleavened bread tasted nice with butter and honey. . . . On Mondays and Fridays a wood fire was lit under the huge bath, in a room like a pine-paneled chapel, and there Juliette and her great-aunt and her mother bathed in turn, a clean sheet being put in the bath to receive each new lot of water. In the evenings Great-Aunt Mélanie and her secretary and an old friend of Aunt Mélanie's, called Mademoiselle Sophie, sat at the round table with the tall oil lamp in the centre of it, and sewed or knitted for the poor. They all wore black silk dresses (with bustles) and high buttoned-up bodices with narrow white frilling or collars round the neck. Juliette and her mother sat with them. Her mother loved Great-Aunt Mélanie, but Juliette was afraid of her. Her kindness, her quick tongue, and her integrity made Juliette feel uncomfortable. She was glad to leave Mamma there and go to stay with Grand'mère in Paris, and be taken out to walk with her in the Parc Monceau and the Champs-Élysées. Juliette did imitations of *ces vieilles filles* at the château with their sewing and their flat backs and their *politesse*, which made Grand'mère laugh. She said:—

“*Cette pauvre Mélanie* be'aves as if she is *ancien régime* because she is so *liée* with *les Rothschilds*.”

Juliette and her Grand'mère and an old Monsieur de Briac used to drive out in the Bois on those May afternoons and go afterwards to a *pâtisserie*, where Monsieur de Briac—in a stock and a high grey top hat—would drink cup after cup of black coffee, while Juliette and her grandmother ate *éclairs* and *babas-au-rhum*, and ices and *millefeuilles*. When they got home after these *petits goûters*, her grandmother would call Juliette into her Louis XV blue and grey bedroom, which always, like Grand'mère herself, smelt of *violettes de Parme* and vanilla, and pour her out six drops of *eau de menthe de Ricquies* with a wineglass of water.

Juliette always remembered Grand'mère standing in her high bedroom, shuttered from the Paris summer, wearing a muslin *matinée* jacket and a petticoat of bottle-green taffeta whose double frills trailed on the Aubusson carpet. Juliette thought her very handsome, with her puff of white hair above her forehead and her clear blue eyes and small white hooked nose and the diamond drops in her ears. And old Monsieur de Briac once told Juliette that her grandmother looked like Marie Antoinette. Then he glanced at Juliette herself and told her that she had something of the same likeness and resembled the portrait of Marie Antoinette as a girl, sitting at the piano.

That year,—Juliette was sixteen,—her mother moved from the little Queen Anne house with the garden, at Hatfield, to a Regency Terrace in Cheltenham, so as to send Juliette to the Ladies' College. This was a new vast Gothic structure ruled over by Miss Beale. Here Juliette had a "higher education for women" and a great many colds because of the bad climate and the chill stuffy classrooms. She was bored by the other girls, except one or two pretty ones with inferior characters; and by the rules, and the High Church religion which her mother, who was a freethinker, made her adopt because she said it would seem polite and be convenient.

But on Sundays, at home, her mother read Shakespeare and Shelley and Byron and Browning to her. Juliette listened sometimes. At other times she stared out into the gardens of their Terrace and thought about clothes and "flirts" and her future. When it was fine they drove in the carriage out of the town and up Cleeve or Leckhampton Hill. In summer her mother would take luncheon—cold eggs with a *sauce verte* in a glass dish and York ham in *Brötchen*, and strawberries or raspberries and cream—and they would picnic together, Juliette eating a lot, and her mother biting into things with her lovely teeth and always, always reading to herself. Juliette used to watch her and think how handsome she could make herself look if she would only take the trouble. But she scraped her hair back in a plain knot, wouldn't wear a fringe, and though in summer she wore a fresh *broderie anglaise* dress every day, and had her winter dress once a year from Russell and Allen, she never looked smart, as Grand'mère did. Grand'mère often reproached her daughter for not making "an effort to please." But Mamma only looked up from a book, opening her big grey eyes wide and cold under her black eyebrows, and said, "I don't want to please anyone but you and Juliette. I hope I do that?"—and went on reading. She could indeed claim to please them, for she was an attentive and forbearing daughter, an excellent housekeeper, and an entirely loyal mother. She loved Juliette, though she saw they were too different in character ever to be intimate. She admired Juliette's prettiness, and tolerated her specious intellectualism and her precocious sense of

worldly values. But she talked more, and read less, when she was with her sister Bérénice, who came over often from Vienna (bringing her black-eyed madcap little girl Helena). Aunt Bérénice and Juliette's mother had fantastic jokes together that Juliette couldn't understand, and used an odd language that they had invented in their childhood. Their daughters sat and listened to them, Juliette with exasperation, the ten-year-old Helena with delight. The Christmas they were all in Vienna, when Juliette was seventeen, Grand'mère came too, bringing Monsieur de Briac. They went to the Stefanskirche on Christmas Day and young Walter Goessl saw Juliette there, and fell in love with her, and sent her roses every day for a week to her uncle's house, where she was staying. She asked her aunt about him. Aunt Bérénice said, "He is poor." "But how can he send such expensive roses?" asked Juliette.

"The Viennese," said Bérénice, "they spend on roses."

Juliette stopped answering his *billets-doux*.

That year Grand'mère insisted on her going to a finishing school at Saint-Cloud to remedy, she hoped, any marked defects of speech and deportment caused by education in England. While she was there her grandmother's English brougham fetched her every Sunday after Mass, and brought her back in the evening. When she left she went to spend a fortnight with her grandmother in the *appartement* in the Rue St. Florentin. She had an evening dress from Worth, white satin, moulded to her figure.

She wore it for a little dinner given in her honor, and a *coiffeur* came to do her hair, braiding its goldy-brown mass round her small head, and arranging the front in flat curls across the forehead called *accroche-cœur*. She wore small pink roses stuck all among the braids, making a coronal, and a bunch of them to match in the corsage of her dress. Jean de Briac, Monsieur de Briac's nephew, was asked to the party and fell in love with her; as her grandmother had hoped. Jean de Briac was with the Rothschilds then in Paris, and hoped the following year to be moved to London.

Juliette encouraged him. There was a picnic at Saint-Cloud, a party to the opera to hear *Le Prophète*. Jean de Briac was interested in modern pictures and invited her, chaperoned by Grand'mère, to exhibitions where Grand'mère was bored, and Juliette became quite interested.

When her mother came to join them in Paris from staying with Tante Mélanie at Dinan, Jean de Briac called on her and asked her permission to propose to her daughter. He was surprised by the freshness and gravity of Juliette's mother. (He told Juliette afterwards she was like a Renoir, but

Juliette said, "If only she would let someone put her hats on for her. She has no *chic*.")

When Jean de Briac asked for Juliette, her mother, Elsa, said, "I expect Juliette has already decided."

When Juliette was married her mother made over to her twenty thousand pounds so that the Briacs should not see too clearly that Juliette was marrying the good and charming and eager Jean for his money. Elsa kept about ten thousand pounds for herself and went to live part of the year in Aix-en-Provence, and part with Bérénice in Vienna. When Juliette had her babies Elsa came to England twice a year to see them. She was happier as a grandmother than she had been as a mother. She thought that Juliette's children were cared for, but not loved enough.

The second year of their marriage, Juliette and Jean took a house in Curzon Street and Juliette began to make what her grandmother called *des bonnes relations*. She entertained a great deal, giving musical parties where Savasate played the violin or some new singer was launched. One of the "social" paragraphs of *Truth* remarked: "It is unusual, if one drops into pretty Mrs. de Briac's house in Curzon Street for one of her famous parties, not to find some young 'Lion' learning to roar!"

She began to read a great deal so as to talk about the books she read. She knew enough about modern pictures by this time to seem authoritative. Jean bought a Monet, which he hung in his study, and a Cézanne, and a Degas which they hung in the drawing-room. Juliette had two drawings by Daumier in her white boudoir. She had a set of eighteenth-century engravings in her bathroom which she thought were improper. She had a negligée copied from the costume of one of the ladies (who was tumbling out of bed in a disarranged petticoat, a charming fur-trimmed jacket, and a lace cap). In her dressing room, which was white with a white carpet, like her boudoir, she had an engraving of the picture of Marie Antoinette at the piano. She always had pink roses in every room all the year round and often wore them.

In 1889, she and Jean went to Paris for the Exhibition, with a party of friends, including Ernest Cassel and Eric Jefferson, the portrait painter. They all stayed at the Grand Hôtel. She went out a great deal while she was there, attending the fashionable "five o'clock," where she was amused at being offered "tea" with rum in it as an English *spécialité*. While she was there Jean arranged that Jefferson should paint her portrait when they returned to London, as he didn't like the Helleu silverpoint of her he had had done the

year before. She and Jean returned via Dieppe, where the two children, Betty and Ronnie, and their German nurse, met them.

When they were back in Curzon Street in the autumn, Juliette went to Jefferson every day for a sitting. She wore a dress of blue and white striped silk for this portrait, with a lace bertha, and her hair dressed like Marie Antoinette's and a long double rope of pearls round her neck. She flirted with Eric Jefferson and he used to kiss her hand and pay her a great many compliments. He called her "La Dame aux Malmaisons," because an American beau of hers was in the habit of sending them to her at this time, and she made a little eccentricity of preferring them to roses and saying roses were banal. Jefferson put three of them in her hand, in the portrait.

This was the beginning of her "friendship" with Eric Jefferson. When, the following year, Jean took a country house for her near Leighton Buzzard, Jefferson helped her to furnish it, and choose the carpets and pictures. She always referred to him as "my *cicisbeo*," but was very careful not to get talked about. But the winter he went to America she got thinner for a time, and stopped reading poetry, and got Jean to take her to Egypt, while the children spent the winter at Margate. On the way back she stayed alone for the first time in Paris—at the Hôtel de Castille. She went to Worth's and Callot's Collections, and ordered clothes, and bought *broderie anglaise* dresses for Betty. She spent most of the day with her mother and Grand'mère. Grand'mère looked ill and over-rouged, but wished to know all about the people Juliette had met in Egypt and of what exactly her London *milieu* now consisted. Old Monsieur de Briac was still away in Monte Carlo. Juliette found it difficult to talk to her mother, who seemed more remote than ever from normal life, and was writing a monograph on Rousseau.

The night after Juliette got back to London Jean took her to see Lily Langtry in the *Queen of Manoa*. They went round to her dressing room afterwards. Jean told her that in the last act Lily's jewels were worth £60,000 and were all her own! On the way home Juliette pretended to be jealous because Lily had told Jean the date of her birthday. But Jean kissed her and laughed, and the next evening he brought her a brooch from Spink's, an emerald set in little diamonds.

That summer she stayed very little in London, but had house parties in the country at Quenton. George Erridge, whom she had met in Egypt, stayed very often. She wasn't really attracted by him, but she always needed a cavalier, and he was distinctly a "swell." He used to take her for drives in his phaëton and get certain invitations for her that she hadn't managed to arrange. That November, when Jean went with Alfred Rothschild to the

Silver Conference in Brussels, Juliette saw Erridge nearly every day. Then there was a “scene”—and for a time she didn’t see him at all. But she made it up after Christmas, and he came so much the next year that Jean nicknamed him “Fidelio.” Jean never showed any jealousy or suspicion of her “flirtations.” He demanded that Juliette should be a good wife and efficient mother. He did not ask her if she was faithful to him as a mistress. He had a Frenchman’s view of the matter, and though he became a naturalized Englishman (his mother had been English), he never liked either the English breakfast or the English sex morality. Juliette sometimes wondered what “little affairs” he had. Once she found a milliner’s bill which wasn’t hers in his pocket. But the idea of his infidelity amused her; and she grew to trust him in every other way, and never even chose a ball dress or made an important move without consulting him.

Both of them became very fond of Quenton and spent more and more time there. Jean liked shooting, and took up golf, and made a private golf course. He brought the pictures down from London, except the Degas, and hung them in the long west room, which Juliette called the music room, though it was more often used for theatricals or dancing. Juliette herself took up skirt dancing. She went for lessons with a mixed feeling of “naughtiness” and temerity to a ballet girls’ class near Leicester Square. She had a pink accordion skirt and used to dance on Sunday evenings at Quenton when they had house parties.

Juliette never gardened herself, but she began to be interested in her garden. She had an excellent head gardener called Berry, of whom she was a little afraid. They planned out new rose gardens and a Japanese water garden. And in ’96, on the tenth anniversary of their marriage, Jean gave her a check to have a swimming pool made.

That was the summer she was beginning to take up politics. She had what her mother called “Conservative bathing parties” on Sundays and luncheons for forty people afterwards. She took up young Edgar Ridley, the Tory candidate for their part of the world, and gave a garden party to his constituents and drove round in her high dog cart speaking at village meetings for him, but always taking the children and a governess, or, when she could, Jean himself, with her. She used to joke and touch young Ridley on the arm and say she “wouldn’t like your constituents to think I was another Mrs. O’Shea!”

The children, Betty and Ronnie, were delighted with the pool. In the summer holidays they bathed half the day, with a French governess screaming at them that they would get an *apoplexie*! But when Juliette came

down (in a violet grosgrain bathing dress, with short puffed sleeves and black silk stockings), accompanied by a group of other grown-ups (men in white suits with cigars and fly whisks and straw boaters), they would rush to dress. They were afraid of their mother.

That same summer Juliette gave a party in London at which Sarah Bernhardt and Coquelin acted a play. They brought with them the young French novelist, Stefan Lemaître, who had just made his name as the author of *La Femme Désenchantée*, published by the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. He was a slender dark young man with black eyes, whose rapid amusing speeches and smile and manner captivated Juliette at once.

She invited him to Quenton for a week-end in August. He came and enchanted the ladies by his singing, and his compliments, which seemed almost too witty to be serious, and almost too serious to be merely wit. The men liked him less, partly because he wore a salmon-pink tie and a hat ribband round his boater to match. When one of them—a Major Crawshay—told him that it was a *Leander tie*, he said, “Good! I am delighted. But where is Hero?”

Juliette immediately established with him one of those provocative flirtations in which she excelled. She persuaded him to stay on for a few days after the week-end. She invited him to her boudoir to see her books, and her Daumier, and her new flower painting by Fantin-Latour. She lay in the hammock under the cedar tree letting her ankles, in openwork black silk stockings, show from under the frothing and ribboned frills of her petticoats. She let him hold her parasol over her. She snipped roses and dropped them into the basket he held for her. She bathed with him and sat side by side with him afterwards, on the garden seat by the swimming bath, occasionally, with an air of intense naughtiness, taking a “whiff” at his cigarette (after which he would put it back between his lips, keeping his glance on her face)—or laying her bare arm, for a second, next to his and saying, “How brown you are! I believe you’re really Spanish or Persian or something thrillingly exotic like that!”

He made up some verses to her when he left, which she made him copy into her “Commonplace Book.” She told him she was coming to Paris in October. He kissed her hand and held it and said that then it was only a question *de mourir un peu*. She was beginning a diary at this time, and she wrote in it, after he had gone, that he had said that. She added: “A charmer. But *dangerous!!!*”

The day after he had gone back to London she received a box of mauve orchids from him with a card scribbled, "A tribute to an exotic? taste! S.L."—and a week later a flat round blue-satin box of chocolates arrived from Marquis' in Paris.

They wrote to each other, he addressing her as "Hero" and signing himself "Leander." He wrote partly in French, partly in English. Sometimes he sent her little verses, in French, and she kept the poems of Verlaine and Baudelaire beside her bed and used quotations from them (but always with the lightest touch).

Jean told her she had never looked so pretty as that summer, and she laughed and said "the swimming did her good," and Jean laughed at her and said teasingly that there must be something magic in the water—they had better establish a spa for fading beauties!

That autumn they went to Rome, where Juliette did all the sights with her Baedeker and met d'Annunzio. On the way back Jean left her in Paris, as she had planned.

When they arrived at the Ritz she found a box of her favorite pink carnations and a note from Stefan Lemaître.

He called upon her the next morning, when she was just dressed to go and make her visit to Grand'mère, who was now unable to leave the *appartement* in the Rue St. Florentin. She felt absurdly fluttered when he was announced, and ran back into her bedroom and told her maid to say that she would be dressed in a few minutes. Then she changed her hat, and dabbed just a suspicion of rouge on her cheeks, and changed her brooch. She was wearing a Worth grey facecloth "coat and skirt" with leg-of-mutton sleeves (which made her waist look small), and she had changed a blue hat for the deep pink velvet with the grey wings on it.

When she went in Stefan came forward and took both her hands, saying, "*Chère, chère amie. . .*"

Then he kissed the fingers of each hand in turn, looking into her eyes as he did so, and smiling, and she thought what beautiful teeth he had. He was so enchanted, so gay, so complimentary, and, for a moment, almost (she thought) caressing, at seeing her again that she was at a loss (when she was writing in her diary that evening) to understand why she had been obscurely disappointed. He drove her to the Rue St. Florentin, and waited in the *fiacre* while she was there.

She found Grand'mère more frail, more rouged, more inquisitive, more tyrannical, more preoccupied with ideas about nourishing food and social values, than ever. She was sitting up in one of her enormous Louis XVI *fauteuils*, her feet, in rose-colored satin slippers, on a gilt footstool. Her entire person was wrapped in an embroidered Chinese coat which she told Juliette "poor Monsieur de Briac" had left her, and a lace cap was set high and surmounted by a bow on her carefully dressed pompadour of white hair. She said she hoped Juliette wasn't allowing herself to be influenced by any of the modern slimming crazes and said, "*Il n'y a que le bon beurre qui conserve la beauté d'une femme!*" She said she had read several accounts, in her English papers, of the parties Juliette gave in London. There had been, especially, one in *The Lady*—which mentioned the turquoises, which had been *très bien*.

She asked Juliette whom she was going to see in Paris, and Juliette gave her a list of her engagements—which Grand'mère interrupted with comments: "Yes, yes, they are all right. *Pas riches. Mais de bonne famille!* . . . You waste your time going there, the——s know nobody. They are *des parvenus*, but unsuccessful ones. . . . *Voilà une maison où il faut aller.*" When Juliette got up to go, and bent over Grand'mère to kiss her forehead, the old woman took Juliette's plump little hand, fragrant with *Suc de Camélias*, in her clawlike little hand, fragrant with *Suc de Camélias*, and asked her to come back before she left Paris. Juliette was touched and promised to come every day.

Stefan came back to luncheon with her at the Ritz and they made all sorts of plans for her visit. He talked, as they drank their coffee, about books and plays and his new novel that was about to be published, and complimented her on her clothes. He promised to introduce her to his artistic and literary friends.

While she was in Paris that week Stefan introduced her to Reynoldo Hahn, whose songs he had sung to her at Quenton in the summer, and to André Gide (whom she found silent and tiresome) and Jacques Emile Blanche, the young portrait painter, who promised to come and see her when he next came to London. She also met, at the house of her cousins by marriage, the Labouchères, the painter Boldini, who made her promise to come and sit for him. (This she did the next year.) When she was dining at the Labouchères' she mentioned Stefan Lemaître to her host. She said, "He's the young man who wrote *La Femme Désenchantée*, you know."

Her host said, smiling slightly, that he was afraid that Lemaître might well *désenchanter une femme*.

She thought he meant Stefan was a Don Juan. But this was one of the qualities that made him attractive to her. She was incapable of wanting a thing unless she was sure that other people valued it too. (Her mother had said to Jean, on a recent visit, “I believe if turquoise were to go out of fashion Juliette would have her famous ones fried for the servants’ breakfast.”)

When Juliette went back to England, taking a trunkful of new clothes, bibelotic books, and so forth, Stefan came to see her off at the Gare du Nord. He was delightfully sentimental—a sentimentality half real, half mocking. He said, “I shall come then at Christmas, to stay with you—but do not have too many Guardsmen and Tories this time!”

She laughed and promised him it should be a “Bohemian Christmas.”

“—A *Bohème Galante*?”

“Don’t be naughty!”

“I won’t be—*too* naughty!”

When she got to Victoria, Jean was waiting to meet her. He kissed her with great affection, and told her (she didn’t ask) that the children were well, and when the overweight he had to pay for her “big luggage” proved to be £21, he only shrugged his shoulders, kept her hand tucked over his arm, and said, “Juliette, you are incorrigible!”

Stefan didn’t come over for Christmas, but Juliette consoled herself (after her first tearful chagrin) with his letters (which she kept locked up in an inlaid ivory and ebony box in her dressing room) and a series of parties and distractions in London and at Quenton.

Her Christmas party, as she wrote to Stefan, *was* nothing but “Guardees” and Tories,—and *des femmes comme il faut*,—and she assured him she had enjoyed it all very much, and that anyway she was sure “*Englishmen* were more faithful! than Frenchmen (except darling Jean, who is, as he says, an Inglefrank).” In return Stefan sent her a drawing of Hero looking petulantly out of her tower, while Leander, halfway across the Hellespont, has, unperceived by her, got one of his feet in the jaws of a ferocious shark.

However, he came over in April, and came with her and Jean to the performance of *John Gabriel Borkman* at the New Century Theatre, and to supper at the Carlton afterwards. Jean was frankly bored by the play, but Stefan talked about Ibsen as a “morbid” but significant genius, and said it

was time the English audience stopped relying for their moral guidance on Pinero, and for their jokes on Gilbert. Jean de Briac said he liked at a play to be amused or improved.

“*Phèdre* or *Les Folies-Bergère*?” said Stefan.

Jean laughed. He liked his wife’s new *galant*. And when Stefan returned to Paris, Jean assured him that if he himself could not come over later he would commit Juliette to his charge.

By the following year Juliette had settled down to a chronic flirtation *dangereux* (as Jean called them) with Stefan. He wrote and sent presents, and when he came to stay she walked with him in the garden after dinner, and when she went to Paris, he came shopping with her and took her, secretly, out to dine in restaurants of which the Labouchères, for instance, would have disapproved.

That hardly definable disappointment in Stefan that she had felt on her first stay in Paris (when she had come in in her grey Worth costume expecting—exactly what?—in his manner that wasn’t there), that dim, quickly dismissed chagrin had never returned. If one side of her nature had wanted, or rather secretly resigned itself to the prospect of an intrigue in the Maupassant manner (if she had expected to scatter hairpins in crimson-brocaded bedrooms in the less chic quarters of Paris—to stand naked before vast cheval glasses, to savor the Sweets of Sin in monstrous four-posters and a *crépuscule* created by drawing dust-laden plush curtains in the middle of a fine afternoon), she had, in any case, renounced such expectations without difficulty, and even with an essential relief. Her strong little brain resumed, with all the force of habit, its mastery over her greedy (but by no means starved) little senses. Jean was uxorious, and Stefan always dangerous—and never fatal. (It added to his charm for her when she heard that the lovely Madame Seurat had shot herself for him.)

Meanwhile as Juliette settled herself into, at any rate partial, country life, she continued her political activities, lent the cricket pavilion for outdoor Conservative teas, had meetings in the music room, and whenever there was a well-known speaker in the neighborhood entertained him for the night. She became interested in the Women’s Movement, and, in London, joined the crowd of women who celebrated the Boer War with charity balls, matinées, and so on, and in the summer of ’99 gave a big *fête* at Quenton, with tea and strawberries and cream, for two thousand people, and a Silver Band which played “Soldiers in the Park” and “The Boys of the Old Brigade.” She had a passion for *tableaux vivants*—and the New Year of 1900 she got Stefan to

come over and help her organize a series of “New Century Tableaux”—which were to represent Beauties Past, Present, and Future. (One of the “Future” ones showed three beautiful women wearing men’s evening clothes and silk hats and walking out of a back cloth of the House of Commons. Another showed the “Cleopatra of 1950” sitting, in a leather helmet, in a balloon.)

That autumn Ronnie had just gone to Eton, Betty had a series of governesses at home, and Juliette began to think of herself as a mother, and read Ruskin aloud to them in the holidays, and talked about Education at women’s luncheon parties. Betty was now a rather taciturn thirteen-year-old, with long black hair and a bow on the top of her head. Juliette took her to see Tree as Malvolio—in *Twelfth Night*. Betty seemed unimpressed. Her mother thought disappointedly that the only thing Betty cared about was horses and small children. Ronnie was gayer and more sociable and liked to be allowed to stay up to dinner and wear a white waistcoat with his Etons, and sip champagne out of the glass of some lovely lady with an expanse of bosom and her hair wound high into a knot on the top of her head. When Juliette gave her famous Austrian supper (during the Austrian Exhibition) and the Hotel Bristol did the catering and sent in, Ronnie, who was on “Long Leave,” persuaded his mother to let him sit up for it. Betty was down at Quenton with the Italian governess. Aunt Bérénice was over from Vienna. She had hoped to come with her daughter (who had married an English archæologist in Rome), but it seemed Helena was expecting a baby. (“Really,” Juliette said to Jean, “like Rachel! Helena must be well over thirty!”)

Bérénice wrote in February to her niece Juliette, to say that Helena’s baby was a girl, and had been christened Francesca, and that Helena and her husband might be leaving Rome in a year or two to live in England. She hoped Juliette would then see something of them. Juliette wrote and congratulated Helena and hoped noncommittally to see them all “when they came to England.” Juliette had never heard the name Staverton (the name of Helena’s husband) and did not mean to be too *liée* with an obscure archæologist. Later on Juliette asked her mother, on one of her brief visits to Quenton, what Helena’s husband was like. Elsa said, “You would be bored by him, my dear.”

“And the belated baby?”

“Nice,” said Elsa. She added,—having just stayed in Rome with the Stavertons and seen the two-year-old baby Francesca, loved with an excess,

a brilliance, a complexity of delight and consideration,—“But I’m afraid they are spoiling that child’s digestion for mediocrity!”

In fact Helena’s husband came over for the Coronation, leaving Helena and the baby girl, Francesca, in Rome.

Juliette met him, by chance, at a party given for the Duse after the first night of *Hedda Gabler*. He was much more elegant than she had imagined, and the mixture in him of erudition and a slightly self-conscious courtliness impressed her. She was surprised that Helena (whose dowdiness and unreasonable high spirits had always bored Juliette) should have chosen so interesting a husband. Juliette invited him to come with her party to the Coronation.

She also took the children. Betty enjoyed it because of the horses, and Ronnie because of the grandeur. Betty enjoyed it so much that she looked quite pretty, and one of Juliette’s young beaux, a Captain Beverley, said, “By Jove, I believe that girl’s going to be as pretty as her mother!”

Ronnie teased Betty after this about her “old masher” (who was, in fact, only twenty-five—and five years later proposed to Betty and married her).

Juliette’s mild chronic flirtation with her cousin’s husband dated from that summer. She liked to think that he contributed to her intellectual development and that her interest in his work inspired him. She made him take her drives to see “Roman remains,” and in London they went together to the British Museum and had tea together afterward in a tea shop, which Juliette thought very Bohemian. He returned to Rome in the autumn, and that winter Juliette was busy with her new interest, the White Slave Traffic—inspired partly by *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* and partly by a very pretty smart friend, Mrs. St. John Carritt, who held meetings in her drawing-room to talk about venereal disease. But the next summer Henry Staverton came back with Helena and the baby and Jean lent them the cottage at Quenton, which was at the far end of the Park by the river (and was really a comfortable little villa with its own boathouse).

Helena, who had got plump since the baby’s arrival, and looked dowdier and seemed livelier than ever, was unperturbed by her husband’s relationship with her cousin Juliette. And Jean said one day, “I really think Helena likes you to take the learned Henry off her hands.”

“Helena is nothing but a mother,” said Juliette. “That comes of having children late in life.”

Soon after, when they went over to Paris for a party given by Melba at the Ritz, Jean told Stefan that Juliette had forgotten him for an *archéologue un peu maniéré* . . . and Stefan sent her some verses reproaching her for her infidelity, beginning “Dust has filled Juliette’s eyes”—which she thought very clever. She rang him up and thanked him and asked him to take her to tea at Rumpelmayer’s. He was very busy rehearsing his new play, but he came, all the same, and fetched her at the Louvre (where she had promised Henry Staverton to go) and drove with her down the Rue de Rivoli. He talked to her, complimenting her on her hat and dress, and teasing her about all her hypothetical *affaires* in London, while she ate her favorite *babas-au-rhum* and sipped the hot chocolate which she could never resist. After tea, as they walked up the Rue St. Florentin, she felt a little sick, and the sight of the windows of Grand’mère’s *appartement* made her sentimental, so that she put her arm through Stefan’s and dabbed her eyes. He patted her hand and consoled her all the way to her *coiffeur*. . . .

The success of “Young Liberalism” in 1906 claimed Juliette’s allegiance and steadied her at a moment when Betty’s “coming out” seemed more bother than it might be worth. For Betty showed almost no interest in her new frocks, sulked about her presentation, and went to Lord Rosebery’s ball in tears because her fox-terrier puppy had colitis.

Juliette began to go to the House to listen to debates, gave Liberal receptions in Curzon Street, and gradually damped down her political activities in the country, devoting herself, at Quenton, only to such impartial benefits as flower shows, jumble sales, and the promotion of lectures on hygiene to village school children. Jean described this as “hunting with the Tory hounds and running with the Liberal hare.” But he subscribed to the Liberal Party funds to an extent which pleased Juliette when, in 1908, he refused a baronetcy.

After Betty’s marriage, in the autumn of 1908, Juliette went abroad to Caux for a rest. She was soon bored, and moved on to Monte Carlo to stay with Stefan, who had just bought a villa there. He had an amusing collection of people staying, including an old Baron Altstadt who took Juliette out in his Daimler motor car and tried to make love to her, and an American called William B. Goodman, who invited Juliette and Jean to come and stay with him in his château in Pennsylvania, and presented Juliette with a lizard made out of an emerald which he had had specially made for her because she said she would like to be one of the little lizards that slipped about the terraces of

the “Villa Lemaître.” Stefan told Juliette that Mr. Goodman was going to finance the production of his last plays in New York. Baron Altstadt and Mr. Goodman discussed the future of the cinematograph. Mr. Goodman said he was putting money into it; but Baron Altstadt said you would never get educated audiences to be interested. Stefan said that the cinema was, so far, a “medium” and not an art.

The following summer Stefan came back to London from America. He was arranging about the translation of a new play. He came down for a week-end to Quenton by the seven o’clock train from King’s Cross, and when he arrived Juliette had just come downstairs before dinner in a dress that was all frills cascading down into a train over a foundation of pale rose taffeta. She looked so youthful and so very pretty—she was so fragrant, so *soignée*, so well-fed, so, in her setting of the high lovely hall, assured and satisfied, her teeth, as she smiled, were so small and white, her eyes so untroubled and clear blue—that, possibly for the first and last time in their relationship, his exclamation of pleasure was completely sincere.

“You are—magical!” he said.

The rosy lips remained parted. The little teeth glinted.

“Oh, Stefan—you always say such nice things!”

“*Chère amie*—you must be—how old are you? We—” he kissed her hand—“we need have no secrets from each other!”

She admitted, with the coyness of her tradition, “I’m, *well*—I’m just a teeny weeny little bit more than thirty-eight!”

(He knew she was forty-one.)

“And you look twenty-five!”

She tapped him on the arm with her lorgnon. “Run and change, naughty boy! You’ll be late for dinner anyway, and I’ve got several charming people to meet you!—D’ you like my dress?” she asked. “Doucet—”

“Magical too!—Pink magic. It—” he kissed his hand to her over the banister—“it expresses you perfectly, Juliette!”

They sat out on the terrace after dinner. The smoke of the men’s cigars drifted and rose in the warm dusk. As they talked the air darkened and the ends of the cigars became a constellation.

When Juliette, who had lingered in the music room, rejoined them, she could hardly see their faces.

“. . . How delicious the heliotrope smells,” someone was saying (a woman’s voice).

“I always call it cherry pie—” The tulle round the speaker’s shoulders had a phantom gleam. “—but cherry pie doesn’t really . . .”

Indoors, inside the long gold windows, Stefan began playing the waltz from *Véronique*.

“I *still* adore that—” Betty’s voice.

“I got engaged to that waltz,” said a voice.

“A waltz is always a romantic adjunct.”

“Look at the moon now,” said Jean’s voice. “Talk of ‘romantic adjuncts’!”

“New?” said someone. “One should wish!”

“—not new”—Jean’s voice. “But one can always wish!”

“Ah, Monsieur de Briac, do one’s wishes ever come *true*?”

“All yours—Estelle—I am sure—”

“Such a night! And that enchanting music!” (It was an old woman’s voice.)

A man’s voice, “On such a night as this . . .”

The waltz changed; changed to another waltz; and an “Ah!” came on the same low, hardly perceptible breath from them all—“The Blue Danube!”

“. . . *Die Blaue Donau*—”

“. . . how beautifully he plays it” (whispered).

A dress rustled, a foot shifted on the gravel.

“. . . *ça me serre le cœur*—”

Someone said, “First—at a ball in Vienna—”

(“Juliette—?” spoken low and quick.)

(“Yes . . .?”)

(“*Juliette, do come.*”)

The old woman's voice said, "Think of all the couples in love who must have danced to this—"

"Yes—and been betrayed by it!" A young voice.

"... what's the line?—'Better to have loved and lost'—"

"—'than' " (it was Jean) " 'never to have loved at all—' "

("Juliette?—Juliette, won't you come?")

"Look at the moon now! Look, she's got an eye!"

"—and a dinky little nose!"

"Ah, my dear, he's playing—whatever is it—I know it so well. I adore it
..."

"*Rosenkavalier*."

"Ah—*Rosenkavalier*—"

The music came from the gold windows, unreal and sweet and insistent,
as though it were in their own hearts.

("Juliette?")

("—No.")

("Darling—*five minutes*.")

("No, no—")

"There's no dew in July!" someone said.

"... like the South—like Italy."

"Are you going—this year?"

("Juliette darling—a minute!")

("Impossible!")

("Then you—")

"... which are the *bands* of Orion? Sounds like a *German* band!"

"... it makes me want to dance."

"The grass—one's shoes—"

("—*you only flirt*—")

("Ssh—")

(“—by daylight.”)

(“Ssh—Be quiet.”)

“Ah, that heavenly, heavenly waltz.”

“I wish he’d play something of his own—”

“Won’t you ask him to, Juliette dear?”

A chair scraped back on the gravel. A shirt front glimmered. A man’s shape hovered and vanished.

“Ask? What?” Juliette’s voice, hesitant, a little sharp.

“Ask Monsieur Lemaître to play something of his own.”

“Ask him—” Jean’s voice—“to play that song he composed for you, darling?”

“Which one?”

“The last—with that charming refrain.”

Her chair scraped.

“I will.”

It was in 1913 that Jean took her, on their return from Carlsbad, to the first night of *Milestones*.

When they came slowly out with the crowd into the Haymarket, she had her arm through his. And as they stood on the pavement waiting for the motor, she said, “Let’s go straight home.”

He heard and turned with amazement, startled, for he had never heard her say that; indeed in any words suggest they should ever—while there was a chandelier alight, a door open, a violin out of its case—go home. In all their years. He looked into her face, which he had thought so pretty for so many years; and saw it still, with the elegant soft silver hair curled and swerving above the white brow, and the still heart-shaped face with its pink cheeks, reddened lips—still so very, very pretty. And then saw that she was crying.

He had never seen her cry. In all their years together he had known her occasionally petulant, sometimes depressed, and once or twice angry. But he had never seen her tears. And now their sudden glittering on her lashes, on

her rouge, affected him with a sudden and shocked emotion that was like fear, so that his voice was uncertain when he answered her.

“Of course, my darling, we will go home.” Once they were in the car she lay back pressing her handkerchief to her nose and eyes. But as they passed a street lamp in Pall Mall he saw that the tears were running down her cheeks. He took her hand.

“*Qu’as tu, chérie?* That play? My dear!”

She let him hold her hand. For a moment, the ringed fingers moved and caught hold of his. She gave a shaky, low sob, and then, trying to control herself, whispered something he couldn’t hear.

“What is it, darling?”

The car swerved quickly out of St. James’s Street into Piccadilly.

“—that play,” she gasped. “It’s absurd. But it makes one think—”

“*Think*—darling?”

He felt the rings move under his palm, and saw her other hand clench on the lace scrap of handkerchief.

“*Jean!*” she caught his arm now. “Jean—” She was sobbing now, her head bent, her cloak slipped from one shoulder, her pearls trembling in the passing lights. “I don’t want to get *old*—”

He put his arm round her. “Darling—”

“Terrible to think of that woman—All the things in her life over.” . . . And then he heard her questioning and uncertain—“Has one—missed anything?” she said.

He felt one of her tears fall, hot and sudden, on his hand.

“It makes one think—”

And then another strangling, hoarse, touching little sob—and he heard her whisper, “—It makes one think about being old—”

“*You?*” he questioned, from gallantry, from impulse, from sheer disbelief that she could ever be anything but a charming, fragrant, luxurious (but poised and common-sense) little *femme du monde*. “You ‘old,’ my darling?”

“I’m almost fifty.”

“Fifty!” he said. But the word frightened him, for her.

But now they were in Curzon Street, the motor slowing down. The chauffeur got out, was at the door. The door opened. And sitting up, straight and waiting, and not looking at each other, while the chauffeur opened the door of the car, lifted out the rug, and stood back so ceremoniously holding the door,—they saw the familiar interior of the hall, lighted like a scene in a play: the “Claude” between the sconces; the lacquer cabinet they had bought in Paris; the table Jean had brought from Venice; the card bowl; the carnations—

“Come, *chérie*,” he said, and touched her arm.

She didn’t see the chauffeur opening the door.

She didn’t, for a moment, feel Jean’s touch—She was thinking of an evening at Quenton . . . the crescent moon above the trees, the scent of heliotrope in the night air, the waltz from *Véronique*—and that low urgent “*Juliette?*”

(Had she missed anything?)

“Come,” said Jean. “We’re home, my dear.”

XI

A SILVER RATTLE

"I've brought just a teeny weeny present for the new arrival," said Aunt Juliette. She fidgeted in her bag while Francesca began thanking her. She found the tissue paper parcel and undid it clumsily with her little pointed fingers.

"A rattle!" said Francesca. "What a heavenly thing! How too pretty—coral and silver! You are a darling."

"It's an old one," said Aunt Juliette. "Eighteenth-century, I believe." She sat down on the "visitor's chair," slipped her fur a little off her shoulders, and began unbuttoning her gloves.

"Every baby," said Aunt Juliette, "ought to have a silver rattle. . . . In the old days they all did."

"All of them?" said Francesca.

"Are you nursing her yourself?" asked Aunt Juliette, unscrewing her gold lipstick case which hung on the long chain round her neck, together with a lorgnon, a gold pencil, a vinaigrette, a seal with "J.B." cut in lapis, and a minute lizard made out of an emerald.

"Yes."

"Quite right. They should all be nursed for two or three months." Juliette rerouged the bow of upper lip. "It gives them a better chance and isn't long enough to spoil your figure. What did it weigh?"

"Eight and a half. She's gained three ounces since."

"And what sort of a time did you have?" She rescrewed the lipstick. "You had to have instruments with Robin, didn't you?" she added, her glance brightening.

"Oh, this time was lovely. I had a good new anæsthetic. It drugs the pain without sending you to sleep."

"How very interesting. I should like some of it when I have to have my daughter-in-law to dine with me. You must tell me all about it. When I was young we thought chloroform was a luxury. . . . And the ordinary little *bourgeoise* didn't have it at all. Terrible, really. And of course my mother

never dreamed of it. She and my father thought it wrong. I must say I think women—however ‘sheltered’ they were—used to have more character. The modern girl seems to me to get off everything. Were you a long time?”

Francesca was thinking, “There *is* something very becoming about pink tulle.” “Not very,” she said. “I only missed breakfast and luncheon, and had my ‘nice cup of tea’—Maud herself brought it me—at five o’clock.”

“And you like your nurse?”

“*Very* much.”

“Some of them are so tiresome. The one I had last winter when I had bronchitis was always offering to play draughts with me and wishing that I had a radio. You must give me this one’s name. And Allston is your doctor? You had him last time—for Robin, didn’t you? Women, these days, seem more faithful to their doctor than their husbands—Ah, *tea*—how *nice*! As a matter of fact I’m not allowed to eat anything, so you—” she put up her lorgnon and leaned a little forward as Briggs set the tray on the small table beside her chair—“you will have to eat all these quite delicious-looking sandwiches—and *brioques*! My dear, does your cook make *brioques*? *And* —” She bent over the third plate like a cat over a fish pond “—and—ah, my favorite *petits-fours*!”

“I’ve had tea, Aunt Juliette. I have mine early. . . . You must have a sandwich anyway.”

Juliette put out a grey suède hand. She nibbled.

“Foie gras! . . .”

“Sugar, Aunt Juliette?”

“No, thank you—But if you would look, please,” she turned to Briggs, “in my bag, there’s a little box—a small round box—yes, the little gold one, that’s right!—with saccharine in it. Put in just one. Thank you. And now, my dear, tell me more.”

(“Tell me more” she always said, almost sitting up on her corseted little haunches for a scrap of gossip, a morsel of scandal.)

“What can I tell you?” said Francesca, thinking that nothing from her aunt’s point of view seemed to have “happened” beyond the amorous delinquencies of the chauffeur’s Scotch terrier.

“What do you hear of Adrian?” asked her aunt.

“He’s still in Paris.”

“Still with that same woman?”

“I don’t think they’re ever the same.”

“All the worse,” said her aunt, looking pleased. “And does he still have that Japanese servant you told me about?”

“Oh yes.”

“A Japanese man or a Japanese girl, did you say?”

“A man.”

“Oh, I see. (Still—from what one hears nowadays that may not be any better!) And how is Frederick?”

“Very well. He was so sorry to miss you. He had to go to London for the day.”

“Business? Not that he really has any, but I suppose he has investments and so on to attend to.”

“I suppose so.”

“My dear, you surely must know?”

Francesca confessed that she didn’t.

“Or perhaps he’s gone up to see that exhibition of manuscripts that’s just opened. I hear it’s very interesting.”

“I don’t know,” said Francesca. “I only know he was going to have his hair cut.”

“Where does he go?”

“I forget its name.”

“Ah well—I daresay he likes to have a bachelor day in London now and then?—But he’s coming back to-night—you said?”

“Yes,” said Francesca. “Another sandwich, Aunt Juliette?”

“Thank you, dear. I will have just one more—I always think Frederick so *very* amusing. I like a man who takes trouble to amuse one. So few modern young men do. In my day a man really took trouble about one and sent one flowers and chocolates, and wrote verses to one. Sometime I must show you some of the poems Stefan Lemaître used to send me. Poor Stefan. He has to spend all his winters in the South now. He was terribly in love with me, you know. I’m sometimes afraid I ruined his life.”

“One of these *petits-fours*, Aunt Juliette?”

“Thank you, dear. . . . But you see, I never could have left Jean. In my day women didn’t, you know. One had more—more sense of duty, I suppose it was.” Juliette licked the tips of two fingers and her thumb, hesitated, and then, with a gesture so swift as to deceive herself, took an almond biscuit. “But sometimes I wonder,” she said, tilting her head and with it her pretty winged hat a little on one side, “whether perhaps we weren’t wrong. . . .”

“Wrong?”

“Yes. Well, wrong not to—”

“To elope, darling?”

“Well, yes. That kind of thing. Still, sometimes I can’t help thinking our way was more romantic. And at least in my day if a woman *did* have an *affaire*, she only talked about it at night in her bedroom.”

“—when she was brushing her hair?”

Robin came in suddenly with his hair plastered down with water, by Maud.

“Well, Boy? How are you?”

“Very well, thank you.”

“Working hard at school?”

“Yes, Aunt Juliette. At least moderately well.”

“Adrian’s eyes, hasn’t he? How d’you like your little half-sister?”

“Very much, so far.”

“Am I to be allowed to see her, Francesca?”

Robin said, “Nurse Forbes is just bringing her, in a minute.” He shifted to a different foot. “By the way,” he said, “Aunt Juliette?”

“Yes, Boy?”

“Would you like me to say you the speech before Agincourt?”

“Very much. Very much indeed. I like children to recite.”

Robin put his hands behind his back, turned out his toes, squared his shoulders, and took a deep breath. Aunt Juliette quickly took the last sandwich.

“‘This day,’ ” said Robin, very loud and looking above Aunt Juliette’s hat—“ ‘is called the Feast of Crispian—’ ”

He said it all. Francesca looked at her finger nails. She could hear him getting out of breath at the end.

Aunt Juliette thanked him. She said, patting his shoulder, “I like a young man who takes the trouble to entertain me.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” said Robin.

Nurse Forbes came in carrying Charlotte Rose in a pale pink shawl. Aunt Juliette made her usual baby-visiting remark. “Ah—here’s the Heir of the Ages—or rather the Heiress!”

“Mrs. de Briac has brought Baby the most lovely silver rattle, Nurse!”

“Oh,” said Laura Forbes, with the charming insincerity she reserved for Baby’s visitors, “won’t Baby be pleased?”

Aunt Juliette held the rattle above Charlotte Rose’s face until it was in the direct line of her profound and truculent stare. Robin moved nervously from one toe to the other. Aunt Juliette shook the little silver bells, but the baby continued to stare.

“I think,” said Robin, “you know she’s just getting used to it, Aunt Juliette.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Nurse Forbes, “we don’t get silver rattles given us *every* day! Do we, miss?”

Charlotte Rose blew a bubble on her own lips.

“*Oh*,” said Robin, higher on his toes than ever, “that *means* she’s pleased! At least I’m pretty sure it does.”

XII

FLORIDA AMES

Florida Ames was a mother before she was a Folly. (Not literally, because she never got into that sort of trouble. First she was too careful; and later she knew enough.)

But she always loved babies. When she was a little girl in Greensboro, North Carolina—where her father kept the drug store and her mother did nothing much except cook and crimp her hair, and wonder how she could keep Florida in order (and fail at this)—in Greensboro, Florida Ames visited families, white or colored, who had new babies, and stopped being so interested in these families after the baby was about four years old, if there wasn't a new one.

Her mother and father tried to stop her going into the colored section of the town, just as they tried to stop her running off into the near-by woods by herself, or taking ice creams from the drug store. They were glad when she went to school, and didn't care if she worked there or not. When she was sixteen she faded them out of her life by taking the train to New York. She borrowed exactly two dollars from each of her friends,—she had a quantity,—and wrote each of them a postcard with a picture of the Flatiron Building on it, saying she had a job and would pay them back soon.

The "job" was in a high-up crowded workshop where she made hats and breathed sweat-smelling air for sixteen hours a day in the rush season, and was turned off, to live on the savings of six dollars a week, until the wholesale trade started getting ready again (to feed the retail trade and cater for the big-store female public that bought cheap smart hats twice a year to be in the fashion).

Florida lived with a family in the Bronx. The daughter was a school-teacher. She introduced Florida to her fiancé, Harry, who was working in a silk factory in New Jersey. He persuaded Florida, who was half-starved by this time, and liked men, to run off with him. He married her and they lived in one room rented them by a dentist, in a clanging tram-ridden street near the factory where he worked.

Then Florida's career began to be copy for all subsequent write-ups about her. One day she went to fetch Harry as usual from the factory and a man who had been in giving orders for patterned silks for lining coats saw

her. He asked the foreman who she was. The foreman knew, as he had his eye on her already. Then the man who had been placing orders went up to her and gave her his card, and said if she ever wanted a job in Lacy's he might be able to help her.

She did want work. She went to Lacy's with his card. They put her in the children's boot and shoe department. So she commuted to New York every day, and the man who had given her the card (it had "Beresford J. Kapp" written on it, copperplate) used to wait for her outside Lacy's every evening and go across the ferry with her. Just when he was beginning to be difficult, and Florida, who liked men but one at a time, and was in love with her husband, was wondering if she'd have to give up Lacy's (though she couldn't afford to), her difficulty was solved for her—in the children's footwear department at Lacy's.

Isaac Baumann went in to order six pairs of white boots for his four-year-old little girl (by a wife who'd just left him and gone to Paris with a German count). He was served by Florida. She wore a black alpaca dress with a basque and buttons down the bodice and skirt, a "Peter Pan" clean muslin collar, and her curling maize-colored hair was divided in the centre into two puffs over her Greek brow, and padded out at the back, and coiled round and round the padding out, so that her whole head looked too big, in the fashion of the year—1912. Baumann gave his address, on Park Avenue, and then asked her if she'd ever been in a show, or if she'd like to be? She thought he probably meant a burlesque show, so she said curtly, but smiling and showing her perfect teeth to show him she wasn't really "insulted," "No, tha-anks. D' you wanta pay for those *now*?"

But Baumann, who always got what he wanted, at any rate for a time, explained who he was. Florida thought she'd heard his name. But she had only been twice to the theatre since she came to New York, once to a sentimental play that made her cry (it had a baby in it), and once to hear *Tristan* at the Metropolitan Opera House. She looked at Baumann with her ink-blue eyes whose lashes curled backwards on to the lids that were like long transparent sea shells, and took his card and said she'd let him know. That evening she showed the card to her husband. He went crazy with excitement and said she must go and see Baumann the next day. She didn't really want to go, because she hoped, just that week, that she was starting a baby.

But she went. (And she didn't start a baby. She never could with Harry, which was why she let him divorce her later on.) And Baumann received her in an enormous room hung with tapestries. He was standing in front of a

baronial-style stone fireplace smoking a cigar, and his first sentence was, “I suppose you know you’ve got a face like Helen of Troy. Let’s have a look at your legs.”

Her legs were all right. She was a bit tall, he said, but that didn’t matter, only she’d better put on a little flesh. He told her he was going to have her taught to dance. She told him she could sing. She sang some songs she’d learned from a colored girl at home. He didn’t say anything but “You’ll do” after that. And when she went he gave her a ten-dollar bill to get herself a dress. She thought that meant that he would bother her like most men did. But Baumann never did, all the four years she was in his show. He only kissed her once, and that was the night they were at the same supper party together when America went into the war.

But from that evening her life became better and better copy. Harry divorced her in 1915, when she was living with George Day, who was her dancing partner in *The Golden Phoenix*, and when she came back to New York—in 1916—Ziegfeld offered her a job in the *Follies*. Her lovely face, with its serious expression and Greek features, appeared in all the illustrated papers. Her fan mail was so big she had to have a secretary in every day. When she went into restaurants people turned round and said to each other, “There’s Florida Ames.” She had an apartment on East Eighty-First and Park Avenue, and a cottage down in Connecticut. The hunting and racing set on Long Island took her up, and she bought a horse, and fell in love with Peter Stuyvesant, and was almost happy until he went to France, where he was killed flying. He had meant to come back and marry her, and then she could have left the stage and settled down and had a beautiful home and a family. She went into mourning after he was killed and was terribly unhappy, and used to cry and cry in her dressing room between the acts—even more because she’d lost a home than her lover. (She enjoyed men sensually, but she never felt affectionate towards one of them except when she hoped to marry him and settle down and make him a father.)

After Peter Stuyvesant she went into legitimate for a time. But even “her public” could see she couldn’t act. In 1920 she went back into musical stuff playing lead in *Nights Out*. It was that year that she insured her legs for fifty thousand dollars, and met Franklin Newman, a bank-clerk-looking little man who had an interest in the insurance company and said he came to see what they were insuring, but really as an excuse to meet her. She hardly noticed him. She went to London soon after that and met him again there. At this time she could have had almost any man in Europe or America, especially any old rich man, as a husband.

Florida saw other girls who had been in the *Follies* with her settling down, as countesses in Paris, and as prominent society leaders in London or New York. Several of them had babies. Florida used to go and see their babies. “Callista,” who had married an English baronet, lived in Grosvenor Square and had twins. While Florida was playing in *The Girl Friend* in London she used to go and see Callista and the babies, and on the grand brown-uniformed nurse’s afternoon out Florida made Callista (who was always on chaises longues being massaged for fat, or having her toe nails done) let her take the twin babies in the Park. So every Wednesday Florida entered Hyde Park by Stanhope Gate, looking like Venus herself in a sable coat pushing a white pram.

But Florida was afraid of marrying. For a long time, ever since her marriage with Harry, she’d had a secret conviction that she couldn’t start a baby. (She hadn’t tried to, on purpose, since then, just because she wasn’t married and thought illegitimacy shocking.) But this conviction about her own probable sterility had developed into a secret obsession. And she was afraid of marrying, because if she married she would know if that was justified. And if it was and she didn’t have a child, then she’d be stuck with a husband.

Franklin Newman proposed to her twice during the year she was in London. He added that as he was naturalized and did so much for Shakespeare’s Memory, there was every chance of his getting a knighthood in the following spring. Florida scoffed. “I c’d ’ave bin ten duchesses if I’d wanted.” (She could have been one.)

But one day Franklin met her in the Park wheeling Callista’s twins.

(He had a way of skipping preliminaries.) He said, “Fond of kids?”

“Nope. These are Pekingese.”

“If you marry me we could have a family!”

“D’you think you’re the only one?”

“Why don’t you marry then?” (They were standing by the railings of Rotten Row, with the brown leaves blowing over her patent pumps and his bright brown boots.)

“Anything more you want know?”

He put his hand on her sable sleeve and looked at her, worried. He looked so sympathetic and plain in his *pince-nez*—and there was an east wind—that she began to cry and sniff.

Franklin Newman, who was no fool (except in his digging for Shakespearean manuscripts up and down the Thames Valley), didn't say anything more, but took the pram and wheeled it for her while she dried the Rimmel round her eyes and powdered her nose and put her handkerchief away.

But he went back to his apartment in Cleveland Row and thought about her; and three days later she got a letter, typewritten from the Red Lion Hotel, Stratford-on-Avon!

DEAREST FLORIDA,—

With reference to our conversation in the Park on the 10th inst. If you would ever like to try out a marriage I would promise to let you divorce me (making a settlement on you, of course) if we didn't have a baby within two years from the date of marriage.

Think over this. This offer is open indefinitely.

FRANKLIN

Florida didn't answer; but she put the letter in her jewel case. That winter she went back to New York. And then she had a breakdown of sorts, she did a World Cruise, and by the time that was over she had half forgotten about Franklin's letter and anyway was never sure if it weren't a rotten sort of joke.

She started dancing again in New York in *Honey*. When she came to London with it she got orchids from Franklin on the opening night. On his card was typed, "The offer is still open."

She called him up to thank him.

He came to see her in her dressing room the third night, and took her out to supper at the Savoy Grill afterwards. He sat and ate nothing while she ate her favorite dish of sausages and fried eggs and bacon. When she had finished eating he said with a white face and steady voice:—

"Florida, you're grand in that show, and you're still perfectly beautiful. But you must be thirty-five, and you can't hope to stay beautiful forever, and you can't go on dancing for the rest of your life. What's more, I know very well you don't want it." He paused and sipped his brandy. "That offer I made you—"

She nodded, watching his eyes behind his *pince-nez*. The pupils were big, but they seemed to be looking at nothing at all. "That offer I made you

will be open for another—” he hesitated, turned his eyes suddenly to her without moving his square spare little face—“another five years! After that I won’t marry you. I want a family. And I like to make reasonably sure of what I want.”

Then he paid the bill, and sent her back to her flat in Curzon Street by herself, in his car. (She watched him walk away, by himself, down the Strand, his opera hat on one side.) He didn’t write or telephone again. At New Year she sent him a telegram saying she would marry him. In June, when the show came off, she married him. By October she was sure she was going to have a baby. By January she was in love with him. The baby was expected the following June.

Nurse Forbes, who came in on the fifteenth, found Florida in a room too full of orchids and lace pillows and glazed chintz and bows and bearskin rugs, sitting on the arm of a chair and hemming flowered organdie frills for the cradle. Florida wore one of her famous blue ribands tied in a bow on top of her head and a man’s Jaeger dressing gown and blue satin mules. She had a silver tray beside her on a low table, with a cup of tea poured out and steaming. When Nurse Forbes came in Florida smiled enormously (and Nurse Forbes remembered she had never seen her smiling in any of the photographs, and scarcely ever on the stage) and said, “Have some tea, too? It’s Indian. I can’t stand China. Ring that bell, there’s a dear—or you can have it iced if you like!”

Florida wouldn’t let Nurse Forbes sew frills with her. She explained she couldn’t bear to have anyone but herself trim her baby’s cradle. She didn’t even let her colored maid, Saddle, help, who’d been with her eleven years. She was in a great hurry to get the cradle done in time. She said, “I always seem to put off everything till the last minute, even motherhood!”

Nurse Forbes was surprised at Sir Franklin when she first saw him. He was so small and beetly and a little shy. She was even more surprised when she observed that this golden goddess of a woman was so in love with him that she sat about looking at the clock whenever he was expected home.

He was almost as excited about the baby’s coming as Florida herself. Florida said, “It’s a good thing really he’s gaht his diggin’ or he’d have had it out of me at seven months, he’s so mad keen to set eyes on it!”

He and she used to sit doing an experiment he’d seen done with cows in Bordeaux. They hung a gold ring on a thread and she held it suspended in front of her stomach. He said if the ring started swinging in circles the baby was a boy; if it swung to and fro like a pendulum it was a girl. Nurse Forbes

thought it did one thing one time and one another. But Franklin said, "Look at it swing round—it certainly is a boy—the trick always works with cows!"

When Nurse Forbes got to know Sir Franklin she found he had unexpected talents. He would pick up pins with his toes and play a ukulele accompaniment to his songs—which were a job lot, including "Swanee River," the "Waltz Song," "Dreaming Awake,"—Florida's great success in *The Golden Phoenix*,—"Tipperary," and various Blues that all sounded alike. He and Florida used to sit on the white satin eiderdown on their great canopied Louis XV bed and sing to Nurse Forbes until after midnight, when Franklin would order in champagne for her "because she must be dazed with listening to them." In the daytime during this "waiting about" Florida used to order the white Hispano and make the chauffeur drive down into Surrey to find rough roads to "ginger up baby a bit." They nearly always went to Woolworth's on the way there, and even on the day baby started Florida insisted on going into Woolworth's for a "last little squander."

Nurse Forbes had never known anyone so gay in labor. Florida called up the doctor herself to tell him she hoped to need him in an hour or so. She trailed about the room in her awful old Jaeger dressing gown with that blue ribband round her swirled-back curls, putting on the gramophone and smoking cigarettes and humming and cracking jokes with Franklin, who was almost as elated as herself. She was slow getting to what she called the "honest-to-goodness pains" and amused herself by heating pennies and dropping them out into Mount Street for people to pick up. When the pains got more serious she swore while they were on and went on talking nonsense or putting one of her kohl-eyed vulgar dolls in the cradle or drinking Indian tea between times.

She was white in the face but putting on "You Are My Heart's Delight" when the doctor came; and Franklin looked a little shrunk and kept letting his cigar go out. But at the sight of the anæsthetist, a round little man in a dove-grey waistcoat, she gave an enormous smile and kissed him on both cheeks, saying, "You're the very man I've been wanting to see!"

After that Franklin was sent out into the Park, and she got a little drunk with the gas, and laughed and managed to make the anæsthetist laugh, making bawdy jokes and comments on the "act" she was "playing in." She got a calming whiff of chloroform at the end, and came round asking, "Gal or boy?"

"Boy."

"Swell!"

“Nine pounds,” said Nurse Forbes.

“Good. Nine’s my lucky number. Where’s Franklin?”

“Looking at baby next door with doctor.”

When they brought in the baby she stared like an infant at a Christmas tree. She held out her arms. When she had it lying in her arms she bent over it and laid her cheek against its head. When she looked up the tears were streaming down her face. She caught hold of Nurse Forbes’s hand, her other one clasping the baby. “What a fool—I’ll be all right in a minute. It’s just I’m struck all of a heap by my own infant!—Yes, dawling, *do* please get me a hanky, get me a bath sheet—Gosh, Franklin, isn’t he *sweet*—sweet an’ absolutely hideous, isn’t he? He’ll be like you, darling! *Look*, at his *hands*. Did you ever see anything so small and made to look like real? Gosh! It’s wunn’erful what they can do nowadays. An’ look at his *eyelashes*—*curled*, too! Well, even if he’s plain he’s got that ‘certain something’—What, dawling?—I know, Frankie sweetheart, but I *can’t* stop, there’s a leak in the tear duct or something. Say, doctor, what did that sweet pet of an anæsthetist give me? Was it tear gas?”

Within an hour the reporters began. And Franklin had to keep on giving interviews to keep them off Florida. Nurse Forbes said, “No press for the first week,” so gently and slightly smiling that the young reporter from the *Evening Chronicle* who tried to slip in behind Franklin was startled to feel a hand on his arm and Nurse Forbes saying, with the same smile but something hypnotic in her glance, “I don’t think you quite understood me. If you will just come out of Lady Newman’s dressing room—it’s *rather* near the bedroom, isn’t it?—I’ll just explain—” However, the young reporter got back at her by his write-up headed “Florida Ames’s Mystery Baby.” But the second day Nurse Forbes allowed the *Illustrated Press* people to snap the pram with baby (invisible) in it; and there were captions: “Honey’s Baby”; “Florida Ames’s Bonnie Boy.” The American newspapers (they reached Franklin in sheaves before the baby was a week old) announced: “Newman Junior Arrives on the Scene”; “Florida Says She’s ‘Dreaming Awake’ Now”; “Baby Boy for Famous Folly”; “Florida Ames a Mother”; “Florida Presents Heir to British Baronet Husband.” The *Paris Daily Mail* had: “La Fameuse Vedette Florida Ames avec Son Fils” and the faked picture (that was going the round of the illustrated papers) of Florida in bed, in white ostrich feathers, with a melodrama bundle-baby in her arms. The next evening after the baby was born the *Daily Clarion* rang up to know if Miss Ames would tell them what she felt about motherhood. Nurse Forbes answered, for

Franklin was out in the pantry with the colored maid arranging the flowers which kept arriving.

Nurse Forbes said:—

“I don’t know if her Ladyship wishes to make any statement.” She covered the receiver with her hand (the telephone was beside the bed), and asked, as grave as she could keep—one eyebrow almost touching the front of her veil:—

“What do you think about ‘Motherhood,’ Lady Newman?”

Florida had the baby (rare privilege) in her arms, and was trying to make it look at her.

“Motherhood? Oh, well—I think it’s *swell*.”

“You want me to say so?”

“Why, of course.”

Nurse took her hand off the receiver.

“Miss Ames,” she said in her gentle, finely pronounced English, “thinks motherhood is swell.” . . . She repeated the next question. “Is it your most beautiful experience?”

Florida nodded, dead serious. “Yes—it is.”

“It is her most beautiful experience,” said Nurse Forbes into the mouthpiece. . . . “Do you mean to go back to the stage?”

“Nope—you bet I don’t.”

“Miss Ames doesn’t mean to . . . He wants to know what you want your son to be later on?”

“Oh. Gosh!” said Florida. “Hi! Whadyou wanter be, angel face? He doesn’t *know*—Tell him a gangster or a preacher and to stop worrying me—Tell him I’m a nursing mother and not s’posed to think so hard!”

“Miss Ames says she hasn’t decided yet what baby is to be—And as she’s a little tired, perhaps you would excuse her answering any more questions.”

Franklin came in carrying a sheaf of American Beauties as big as himself.

“Hello, Summertime! Who’re those from?”

“Callista.”

“Aren’t they *lovely*! All the same Callista’s—what d’ you call it?—she’s the fly in my muscle oil—She’s got *twins*. Nurse! Two a penny! ‘*A boy fer you! A gal fer me!*’ ” she sang, a little out of tune, as she always did. She picked off a rose and brushed it slowly across the baby’s forehead. He moved his head and sneezed.

“Mercy! A real live sneeze!” said Florida, looking at Franklin to make sure he was proud too.

The colored maid brought in a box of orchids and a gold basket of red roses.

“There’s a reporter outside wanster know what Miss Florida’s goin’ ter call de cheild?”

Franklin and Florida looked at each other and then at the baby.

“Shakespeare,” said Franklin, suddenly vitally grave.

“*Shakespeare Newman?*” said Florida, doubtful but impressed.

He answered, sure after thinking—“That’s it.”

“Shall I tell de young feller dat?” asked Saddle.

“Yep,” said Sir Franklin.

“—Oh, all right,” said Florida, smiling wide and stroking the baby’s head with her big, gentle, scarlet-nailed hand.

Saddle went out and they heard her calling down from the landing:—

“You can go right back an’ tell ’em dat Shakespeare is de name!”

XIII

MRS. HOWARD AND MRS. RAMAGE

Graham Allston left his car at the gates, allowing himself the luxury of approaching a beautiful house slowly, since most of his work consisted in entering houses without time or thought for their façade.

William and Mary was the period he especially liked. (His own collection of furniture was late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century stuff.) He envied the Howards their house, in the sense of liking them the more for having found it. Or rather their house affirmed his old liking for her, and his new friendliness toward Howard himself.

As he got near the house, an eye on the details of the fine door and fanlight, his sense of its small, and therefore endearing, stateliness increased by the way the afternoon sunshine laid a veneer over the whole picture, he thought, too, of his first meeting with Mrs. Howard and, with a sudden distinctness, of her expression when, sitting in his consulting room in Wimpole Street, she'd said, "I think I shall be contented when I have this baby." He'd asked her if she found contentment so difficult. And she'd answered that she felt she needed "something nice and warm" in her life, and that the baby would be, she hoped, just this "sort of hot-water bottle."

It was only when he'd met Morant once or twice that he understood what she meant. Allston never felt that Morant ever trod on real ground. He was an attractive young man. But there was something about him that was both pathetic and annoying. He seemed too pleased with himself to be humble, and not pleased enough to be happy. An uncomfortable character, Allston thought. Least comfortable perhaps for himself. They had divorced, Allston had heard, five or six years after the child was born. Then later he'd heard—from some patient—that Francesca Morant had married again.

And now this baby.

He hadn't, for a moment, recognized her when she came to see him about it, last year. Astonishing how women, some women anyway, were changed by the men they lived with. She was one sort of instance. And then that wretched little Mrs. Macarthy—who lived somewhere in this part of the world—was another. A bad misfit there. A money marriage and the decent possibilities in both of them choked out. (Nasty affair Macarthy and that girl had been . . .!)

He went into the house.

He met Nurse Forbes in the hall and she took him upstairs. He asked her some questions, but they were both, unconsciously, a little perfunctory in their discussion of their patient, since she had so little claim to be, except for her supine state, a patient at all. Her health was, in a sense, one of the qualities they both admired in her.

“So beautifully healthy” they’d agreed a dozen times. It was a quality which made her,—Laura Forbes had begun vaguely to perceive this,—at moments, curiously insensitive or lacking in sympathy. The news, for instance, of the death of the Hedges baby, which reached her by mischance through a remark of the housemaid’s, seemed hardly to have distressed her. She had looked grave, murmured, “How terrible, poor thing—how awful for her”—and then sunk again into one of her long silences when she lay, contented in the clear *ambiance* of her own well-being, pleased by her delicate and vivid sense of what lay visibly or fragrantly about her, soothed by the stillness of her own limbs, yet awake to the sweet steady beat of her life in her veins. . . .

As they went, Allston and Nurse Forbes, into the bedroom, it was just this impression they caught of her—of a beautiful, curiously health-enchanted detachment. She was leaning back against her pillows, a book in her hand; but lying so perfectly still that their coming in seemed to them to be altogether too much of a stir, so that Allston stopped short of the bed, saying:—

“I’m afraid I’m disturbing you.”

He felt the distance her mind returned in the second before she answered him.

“But I’ve been waiting for you.”

Her gold-irised eyes were transparent in the light, and her voice tranquil. It struck him, taking her hand and answering her question about his journey down, that her voice had changed since he knew her. She had had, in those other days, nervous tones and small diffident gestures.

“—and the daughter?” he asked.

“She’s most creditable—to all three of us—”

Laura Forbes agreed. They talked, for some more professional moments, of the infant’s progress. He said, “You see I feel I have no right at all to be

here—It's just a holiday for me—in the middle of a pretty bad week, I must say.”

“I'd rather be a holiday than a patient! And I wanted you to see the house. When I made you move me here last week I pretended to myself that it was to show you the house. It *is* lovely, isn't it?”

“Perfect”—he got up and went to the window and came back again. “Mrs. Howard has the perfect life, hasn't she, Nurse?”

“It doesn't seem to spoil her!”

(She was their patient again: “Mrs. Howard has a-perfectly-normal-temperature . . . a-perfect-William-and-Mary-house—all most satisfactory.”)

Francesca said as much. “Do you,” she asked, “treat Mrs. Ramage like this?”

He sat down again, his square-shouldered silhouette against the window. He smiled.

“There's less ‘treating’ Mrs. Ramage altogether. Nothing like this for her to go back to next week—”

“What's the moral?”

He hesitated, considering Francesca Howard, as he might have considered a fine painting, a good piece of jade—as something well achieved by a certain kind of civilization. Set in the golden, flower-scented freshness of her room, she seemed to him to have nothing more in common with Bessie Ramage than their approximation of sexual machinery. Indeed, at this moment, it did strike his imagination as faintly amusing that this so deliberately rarefied creature should reproduce her kind after the fashion of the tow-headed and cheerful Bessie.

“The moral's too obscure. I doubt if there is one.”

“But isn't it only too obvious that I have too much and Mrs. Ramage too little?”

He said—“You can force a moral out of anything. If you take her case it's particularly difficult to make a parable, though. She's a happy woman—enjoys her life, likes her half-dozen children, and worships her husband—”

“In fact she fits her conditions.”

“—And you fit yours.”

“Which means happiness?” she asked.

“I should have thought so.”

“But other women of her sort aren’t happy.”

“Nor of your sort.”

“With less excuse.”

He said, “I don’t know—I don’t mean I can pretend that their poverty is defensible. I know as well as anyone what it does mean—One sees its poison at work—But it isn’t the only evil.”

“Well, if you won’t allow me to martyrize your Mrs. Ramage, will you anyway take her back some flowers from me?”

He thanked her, adding, lightly, that the other women in the ward would be envious.

“Yes,” she said, “but she’s the one who interests me!”

He said, “I see you think nothing of creating privilege?”

“I never said, just now, that I was against privilege. Only against privation!”

“They tend to go together.”

She smiled, stretching back deliciously against her pillows: “Oh! I hate theories. . . . And I suppose really there’s nothing one quite so much wants to hand on to one’s children—as privilege, of every possible sort.”

“Here are the tulips, Mrs. Howard.”

Nurse had gone and come back.

The big ward was quiet and in twilight. When the women lying in their beds looked through the windows they could see by the light, flooding rose and gold up the sky, that there must be a “lovely sunset.”

A Sister came stepping rapidly and quietly down the ward, her arms clasped round a sheaf of tulips.

“Something for you, Mrs. Ramage.”

The women’s heads turned, looked round, looked up.

“Fer *me*, Sister? . . .”

“Yes indeed, Mrs. Ramage!”

“Fer *me*. Them tulips fer *me*?”

Down the ward the glimmering faces, the dark eyes in them, were turned towards Bessie Ramage’s bed. Lying on the coverlet, the tulip heads looked like a lot of dim-gleaming Easter eggs, pinkish, ivory, mauve, black-red.

“There seems to be a card,” said the Sister.

Bessie took it, staring puzzled at her. “—a card—*Whoever*?”

“I should read it,” said the Sister.

Bessie held it closer to read it.

“We might have some more light,” said the Sister. She turned the switch; and the sky outside darkened, the bed covers turned blue, the faces pinkish, and the tulips ceased to be magic eggs and had stalks and bright satin colors, pink, yellow, mauve-crimson—

Bessie read, “ ‘Mrs. Frederick Howard’—Mrs. Howard? I never heard of one! ‘With her best wishes and Congratulations!’—and flowers!—why, that’s the sort of stuff the toffs hand out to each other, Sister! *Mrs.—? Howard?*” she reverted. “ ‘Ow did the toolips come here?’”

“Ah,” said the Sister, “that’s to be kept a secret.”

“Oh go on, you might tell!”

She wouldn’t.

The girl opposite Bessie said, “Well, some people has all the luck!”

Bessie threw back, “Now then, Ginger!”

“We must find you a vase,” said the Sister.

Bessie said quickly, “*Not* that one, Sister, with Reggie’s anemones in it. . . .”

Allston, going his rounds the next morning, stopped to speak to Bessie.

“Look,” she said, “what’s been sent to me.”

Allston explained in full the coming of the tulips.

“Well I never!” said Bessie—flattered but amused. “What an idea—you talking about me like that, doctor, and her takin’ a fancy to send them. It’s like something in a picture—only the lady oughter be a swell young man!—that comes callin’ upon me, all dressed up, shortly afterwards!”

Bessie by some trick of glance and tilt of shoulders managed to convey to the entire ward a picture of top hat, white spats, malacca cane—A giggle ran across the beds.

“—I bet Reggie’ll have something to say when I tell ’im. . . . But look here, doctor, jokin’ apart, I’d like to write an’ thank the lady! I was ever so pleased really when they come.”

“Yes,” said the Sister, “and you’d better get the letter written to-day, Mrs. Ramage, as you’ll be going out to-morrow.”

“That’s right,” said Bessie. “And once I’m up an’ about again, there won’t be any time for *writing*!”

Allston moved on.

Bessie wrote out her letter twice.

DEAR MADAM,—

I wish to thank you for the Tulips—they are beautiful you may be sure I am ever so pleased to have them. Doctor told me of your Kind Thought and I thank you. I trust you are well and Baby is getting on nicely.

Yours faithfully,
BESSIE RAMAGE

XIV

MRS. DICKY

Old Mrs. Dicky was born and brought up off the Westbourne Grove.

Young Mrs. Dicky was born (twenty-two years later) and brought up in West Kensington.

Old Mrs. Dicky was one of eleven. She was the fourth (coming after Edwin, who died of the diphtheria), so she pushed and dragged and scolded the little ones about until she was fourteen, when she left school and went as scullery maid to Mrs. O'Brien, who lived in Holland Park Crescent and kept a butler and a carriage-and-pair and was highly religious.

Young Mrs. Dicky was an only child, called Pearl—and went to a little school where all the children, as her mother used to say, came from “refined homes.” She stayed there until she was eleven, and then went daily to an Anglican Convent School, where the girls came also from “nice homes” and there Pearl learned smatterings, and gossiped with the other girls, and respected the girls whose parents were better off than her own (Pearl’s mother kept two maids), and was cool or a little sarcastic to the ones who came from homes where there was only a “general.” (If any came from homes that only had “a woman-in” they didn’t say so.) Pearl thought a lot about her appearance while she was at the Convent, and took to being religious and manicuring her nails and having sniggering talks about sex. She left when she was eighteen (in 1926), and although her mother “couldn’t afford to finish her,” she could afford her daughter not having to work, so Pearl lived at home and went about with different boys (but never went any lengths with them because she was religious and believed it was wrong)—and made herself dresses with Vogue patterns and never told anyone that she dusted her own bedroom.

Old Mrs. Dicky—“Aggie” she was called until she was twenty (in 1906), when she became housemaid, at Highgate, to the Levinsons, who called her Agatha—didn’t manicure her nails until long after she was married, and then she had them done for her, at Emile’s, once a week. When Aggie became Agatha she still went home on her Wednesdays to see her mother and father in the same rooms with the stained red wallpaper and the aspidistra on the wicker table in the bay window. (The street was all dirty-grey tall houses with areas and bay windows on the ground floor.) But after

a time Agatha took to going home only every other Sunday, and when her mother, bent-backed and grey-haired now she was getting on for fifty, but as inquisitive and sharp-eyed as ever, said “Our Aggie’s got a boy,” Agatha said, defiant, that she had, and he meant to marry her, too! She had that defiant way with her parents, as if she still expected to have her ears boxed and be locked up in the dark shed in the yard.

Agatha told them about Herbert Dicky, who was working with a builder and contractor over in Hampstead Garden Suburb and getting quite a decent wage—fifty-eight shillings a week and wanted them to get married at Christmas. He was just on thirty, she said.

Her father advised her to take her chance when she got it. “When oi married yer ma I were gettin’ twenty-five bob a week and we thought ourselves lucky. It was orlright, too, before the kids come along.”

“If yer take my advice y’ll stop single,” said her mother.

She married Herbert Dicky that Christmas and they took one of the new workman flats built by the company Herbert was working for—two rooms and a kitchen, with a bath sunk in the floor. The Levinsons gave Agatha a complete cabinet of electroplate and she went the week before she was married to the new Birth-Control Clinic (but never telling her mother of course), because, as she said to Herbert, who started having “scruples of conscience,” it wasn’t any use telling her that kids were a gift of heaven, “because as far as pore people were concerned they came from the opposite place!”

But when, by 1910, Mr. Dicky was getting four pounds a week, she had Harold.

By the time Harold was six and ready for school the Great War had been on a year; old Mr. Bream, the head of the building and contracting firm, had died, and his son had been killed. Herbert Dicky, who had been refused by the recruiting officers on account of his lungs, had already risen from foreman to manager and had a considerable share in the business.

They sent Harold to a little private school in the Hampstead Garden Suburb. Agatha took him and brought him back. When he was eight they started sending him to Mr. Bennett’s Private School over the other side of the Heath and taking him to Broadstairs (where they got a house cheap on account of the raids) for his holidays. (And where Herbert too could get the sea breezes the doctor ordered.)

By 1918, Dicky was worth half a million and they had bought up a big Victorian Gothic mansion called Cedarlawn, cheap, in Frognal Lane, and had a Daimler and glasshouses, and Agatha started breeding Skye terriers and dieting for her weight.

In 1920 they sent Harold to Harrow.

In 1925 Harold went to Christ Church. He was a tall, black-eyed, sleek-skinned boy with a good figure, a little moustache over his slack mouth, a nice, slightly nervous smile, and a loud drawling way of speaking. Herbert Dicky was impressed by his son's way of speaking. But Agatha was irritated by what she called his "having no 'go' in him."

When Harold met Pearl at a party at a roadhouse and motored her out to Cedarlawn next day for luncheon, Agatha said afterwards to her husband, "I sh'd've thought 'Arold could have found something a little more classy!"

When Harold married, his father handed over Cedarlawn to him. He himself had just finished the house he had been building for Agatha and himself on the North Foreland, at Broadstairs. He and Agatha liked Broadstairs. (Its air had certainly made a new man out of Dicky.) He called the house Cedarbluff, and put money and experience into it. He built it in the Tudor style, with a bathroom to every bedroom, a sun-ray lamp to every bathroom, the best Wilton pile everywhere (except in the gymnasium), and a minstrels' gallery in the drawing-room.

Agatha was satisfied with it. She wasn't easily satisfied with anything. From a young woman with smallish, quick grey eyes, she had grown, in middle age, into a Buddha-like figure whose eyes moved in their small sockets with surprising agility. At forty she had stopped going out, except in the car. At nearly fifty she walked with a shooting stick which she sat down on whenever she stopped.

At Broadstairs she seldom left the gardens of Cedarbluff. In fine weather she sat in one of the patent garden chairs, dressed in pale pink woollen clothes made for her by Worth or Fortnum and Mason, her Skyes at her feet, and a table beside her with a tray of bottles and glasses, and illustrated papers. Dicky himself liked a stroll on the beach, and would take a walk along Joss Bay and return by the "Captain Digby." Agatha only began to come down to the sands after they built the hut there—a yellow and red pavilion in the Chinese style, with a verandah, up a flight of steps, from which Agatha faced the sea. The hut had four cabins, hot and cold water,

shower baths, a kitchen, an ice box, and a grandfather clock containing bottles and ingredients for cocktails. There were wire baskets hung from the ceiling of the verandah, stuffed with ferns and pink geraniums.

In winter Agatha sat in the sun parlor at Cedarbluff. Sometimes she drove to London for a *matinée* (she preferred to do her shopping at Margate). She didn't read much, except magazines. But she looked after all the household accounts, and quarreled with the tradespeople by telephone whenever she thought they were trying to "do" her. She wouldn't let Miss Kaye, the secretary, even see the account books. "You moind them dogs an' the flowers and let me alone!" Miss Kaye found Mrs. Dicky's outbursts less disturbing than her brooding silences, when her bloodshot little grey eyes looked and looked out to sea. Sometimes she would say nothing the whole day except, "Fetch me a cigar" or "Where's the *Mirror*?" or "Which of them girls" (meaning the servants) "is 'off' to-day?"

She and Dicky spoke very little to each other. But then they never had. They liked to inspect the greenhouses together, or tap the barometer in the hall, or listen to the radio during meals.

When the doctor prescribed "a winter in the South" for Dicky, she listened to his account of what it would cost. When he had finished figuring it out (on a used envelope) for her, she nodded and said, "I'll stop 'ere."

"Right you are," he said. He added, "I daresay Egyp'll be a bit 'ot for you." Furtively he rather liked the notion of traveling alone, and had half an idea he wouldn't be alone very long.

("There was always girls . . .")

There were.

That winter Agatha Dicky was alone at Cedarbluff with Miss Kaye until young Mrs. Dicky, who was expecting a baby, had the flu, and Harold rang up to say the doctor wanted her to spend her convalescence at the sea. His mother said, "Orlright. *Let 'er come!*"

She came. Seven months gone, wrapped in mink, too much rouge on her peaky face, a more than ever aggressive little manner, and a frightened look in her soup-brown eyes.

She was frightened stiff. She hadn't wanted a baby. She didn't see how it could have happened.

She'd been sick with fright when she wasn't being sick with pregnancy. She tried everything, quinine, calomel, riding, lifting up her Alsatian (so that he bit her), ginger wine, and baths so hot that she came out like a prawn, but still pregnant.

She was too frightened to have "anything done"—except by "one of those doctors." And that would have cost money, and she'd have had to ask Harold, who, of course (men *always* do—*they* don't have anything to go through, *they* aren't risking their lives, you *bet* they wouldn't!), *wanted* the baby!

She'd tried to get the doctor to say her heart was bad. But he talked about "fancies" and plenty of fresh air and exercise. She had hysterics and threatened to kill herself and the child. But Harold was vain as well as obstinate—and though he was afraid of her tempers, he'd got the idea into his head that a son was due him. So he set his weak mouth under its little brown moustache and said, "Dawling, do for *God's* sake pull yourself togethah!"

Once arrived at Cedarbluff, Pearl decided to stay and have the baby there. (She didn't like her friends in London seeing her as she was. And in Broadstairs she knew no one.)

Harold, who came for week-ends, went to the sun parlor and asked his mother if Pearl could stay for "the event."

"Orlright," said Agatha, not taking her gaze off the horizon. "*Let 'er* stay!"

So for the next six weeks Pearl and Agatha sat in different rooms. Except at mealtimes, when, in the "modernistic" dining room, they sat on steel-and-canvas chairs, with the radio playing from behind a grating in the wall and, at dinner, the lights blazing down from every corner and up from crystal bowls set on four pillars covered with green plush (Dick's last birthday present to his wife). Agatha's most cherished extravagance was high-candlepower electric bulbs. Her economy was that they should not be shaded.

Miss Kaye sat and sat while they ate. It seemed to her that young Mrs. Dick must be "eating for six," while old Mrs. Dick was making up for what Miss Kaye had come to suspect were some pretty lean years.

Pearl hardly ever spoke, because she was sulking.

And though Agatha made occasional remarks like “Don’t seem so blowy to-day” or “Did you read in the paper about that fire they had at Hayward’s Heath?” to Miss Kaye, she behaved as if her daughter-in-law weren’t there. The only direct remark she spoke to Pearl during those weeks was when Pearl said at tea time (in the Tudor lounge):—

“I wonder if we might have some little serviettes, Mother?”

Agatha looked at her.

“*What*,” she said, “napkins at *tea*?”

“Yess, dear!” said Pearl, lifting her upper lip a little.

“Givin’ yerself airs!!!” said Agatha. “But as we happin to be on the subject I’ll just tell you one thing—*English* people don’t ’ave napkins at tea time! Not in the ’ighest circles they don’t! Only Frenchies do—”

(—“and Americans,” said Miss Kaye, gently delighted.)

—“and people that live in ‘West Ken,’ I s’pose,” said Agatha.

“I’ve never been so insulted in my life!” said Pearl, trying to get up.

Agatha didn’t look at her again.

“Gimme another cup of tea, Miss Kaye, please.”

After tea Pearl had hysterics and Miss Kaye had to persuade her to dine in bed.

When Nurse Forbes arrived and Miss Kaye took her to her room, the yellow dressing room leading out of young Mrs. Dicky’s green bedroom, Nurse Forbes, unstrapping her valise, said:—

“Excuse me. But I just like to know. Is this my patient’s own house? Or is this the mother-in-law’s house?”

“The mother-in-law’s,” said Miss Kaye. “I’m afraid the situation may be—a little difficult.” She looked at Nurse Forbes and, recognizing another white woman, added, “You see it’s impossible to say which of them wants the baby least. It’s the only thing they agree about.” She smiled, for the first time, overtly, since August (when she had been on holiday), and looked twenty-five again (which was her age). “Not that the baby has taken the least notice of them.”

“Babies are apt to be like that!” said Nurse Forbes, opening the lid of her valise. “As a matter of fact,” she added, laying out her white veil and mauve dress on the bed, “I thought perhaps Mrs. Dicky wasn’t very pleased when she sent me an order to go and choose everything for baby for her.”

“Nurse! *Nurse!*” called Pearl from the next room.

“Yes, Mrs. Dicky?”

“For goodness’ *sake* come and *talk* to me!”

Old Mrs. Dicky sat alone in the drawing-room, the light of the fifty-candlepower bulbs pouring at her from every side, so that her brooch blazed and even her eyes, deep in her Buddha-like face, glittered.

She sat dressed in pink lace, smoking one of her Romeo and Juliet cigars and listening to young Mrs. Dicky screaming up above.

Every now and then Harold Dicky came in, looking damp and uncertain, in a dinner jacket. His mother took no notice of him. The curtains were drawn back and she seemed to be staring out at the blackness that lay behind the reflection of the room. She only spoke once, when the beam of the lighthouse swept, and paused, and swept away again across the night:—

“That’s what I like to see!” she said.

She recrossed her feet, in their tight, pointed, brown satin slippers. The screams started again upstairs. She could hear them so clearly because the door in the minstrels’ gallery led into Pearl’s room.

“Oh God, Oh *God!*” shrieked Pearl’s voice. “I *can’t* bear this—I *can’t*—I *can’t*! Oh *Nurse*—”

“Mother?” muttered Harold, sitting on the piano stool in the corner.

Miss Kaye came in, bringing the evening paper. She glanced at Mrs. Dicky and went out again. Harold pulled himself together and, standing up, went out after her.

“Oh—*Nurse*—When is *doctor coming?*”

Agatha couldn’t hear the answers. After a series of shrieks a door shut and there was the grumbling sound of a man’s voice. And then Pearl’s cracked gurgling tones. “Oh God! Oh G-a-a-ahd . . .” and then the doctor’s voice, then, breaking in: “For God’s . . . chloroform—” and then the doctor’s voice again.

Agatha touched the yellow enamel bellpush on the table beside her. When the butler came she told him to bring the whiskey. Then she called him back. "Bring a bottle of champagne instead."

"Which champagne, madam?"

"*Any* champagne! It's *all* meant fer drinkin'!"

"Very good, madam."

When he brought it Agatha poured herself out a glass. As she was sipping it Miss Kaye came back.

Agatha took a gulp and set down her glass.

"—'ear that?"

"Yes," said Miss Kaye.

"Not screamin' with pain," said Agatha with a knowing sententiousness. "She 'asn't got ter much of that, yet. Them screams is because she's *frightened*!" She took up the glass again and held it, lifted it slowly so that it shone like a topaz in the blazing light. "Screamin' for chlorerform," she said with a slow detached contempt. She brought the glass to her lips.

Miss Kaye left her.

Agatha opened the evening paper. She heard the doctor's voice up there, and then a sort of chill muttering and gasping from Pearl, and then Nurse Forbes's voice, clear for the first time, but soothing, saying, "That's right, dear—Now that'll help you—"

When Miss Kaye came in to fetch the Skyes, Agatha said:—

"Not so much chewing the rag now!" She nodded towards the minstrels' gallery.

"N-no," said Miss Kaye, uncertainly.

Agatha filled up her glass. "My mother," she said, "had eleven kids in fourteen years."

"Yes?" said Miss Kaye. "Come along, Floss! Come along, Dannie!"

She went out, the little tasseled creatures slithering and scratching after her over the parquet.

Harold came in, looking scared (and "common-as-you-make-'em," thought his mother).

"I say," he said, "I think I'll have a little fizz too! I feel as if I need it," he added, ringing for a glass.

"You look as if yer did!"

He stood near her chair, pulling at his starched cuffs.

"The doctor says he'll—he'll—er—have to use—instruments."

Agatha's underlip pushed up the upper one in a grimace of "Well, I'm not surprised," but she only said:—

"Forceps, eh?"

"Yerss."

There was a sudden but stifled groaning from upstairs and the doctor's voice coming in quick sentences, and a door banging again, and then Nurse Forbes's voice, very light and soothing, "That's it—that's right, dear—take it slowly—a *deep* breath—" And then silence.

Harold sat down plump on the sofa and laid his forehead in his hands.

"Anyway she's out of pain now," he said.

"Lot more use if she was *in* it!" said his mother. "Ah!" she exclaimed as the lighthouse beam swerved, lilted, and vanished again outside.

Miss Kaye came back. "Come along, Dannie! Come *on*, Flossie!"

"Well, have they been good doggies?" said Agatha.

"Yes, Mrs. Dicky."

Miss Kaye glanced at Harold, who looked like a figure blown sideways out of Austin Reed's window.

"She'll be all right now," she said quickly.

"*She* may be," said Agatha, taking another cigar, and lighting it. "*She may be—*"

There was a sudden high crying, "Eeh—eeh—eeeeh—" from upstairs.

Harold's hands dropped. Miss Kaye's face whitened and colored.

Agatha blew out her match and threw it on the floor.

"Well," she said, "*there* it is."

Miss Kaye turned and ran out of the room, the Skyes skipping and yapping after her.

“—Eeeh—eeeeh—eeee-eh-eh,” came the high new crying.

Harold got up, shaking all over, and started going to the door, but stumbling a bit and muttering to himself.

Agatha slowly turned her head and stared after him.

“—eleven in fourteen years,” she muttered to herself.

(As for Harold’s birth, she couldn’t remember much about it now.)

She sat for a long time, puffing at her cigar. Chloroform indeed! Forceps! . . . And what was a baby anyway? (Look at Harold, when you thought what his father’d spent on him!) What was a child anyway—when all was said and done?

There was a tap at the door.

It opened.

Nurse Forbes came in. She was carrying the baby.

“A boy,” she said. “He’s quiet now.”

She came and stood by Agatha’s chair and, bending down, drew back the flannel from the dark pink head.

“Would you like to see him, Mrs. Dicky?”

Agatha hesitated. Then she put down her cigar and held out her large red arms.

“Give ’im ter *me!*” she said.

XV

FREDERICK

Robin came bringing her a hyacinth. He said, "I dug it up and put it in a pot for you so that you could have it near you, for the scent."

She thanked him, kissing his hot pink cheeks.

"By the way?" he said.

"Yes?"

"You don't think Frederick'll mind that I used his typewriter. I put everything back the same."

"I'm sure he won't."

"You see, I thought if I was to type out that speech before Agincourt I shouldn't forget it *and* it would help me to learn to typewrite—"

"What a good idea!"

"Now I must go to the garage or I won't be in time to go to the station. . . . Do you want anything in the village?"

"No, thank you, darling."

"By the way, I had a postcard from Daddy with a picture of the Grand Canal, Venice, on it. Wasn't that nice of him?"

"Very."

"Now I must go. Good-bye till I come back."

"Good-bye, my sweet."

She thought how tall he was getting and that there was something very moving about his childish physical vivacity and the grave and sensitive qualities emerging in his character.

He was these days visibly complicating. At moments his lovely zest for life was checked by his perception of some dim, perfectly unaccountable wrongness grimacing suddenly in his radiant world. It was so much easier, she thought, to make a child understand that life might be tragic than that it could be, at moments, through human influence, so small and ugly. Easier to explain pain than cruelty, danger than brutality, death than boredom, since

pain and danger and death were part of life, and a child, afraid or unafraid, accepted them. But to explain that human beings were mean, lying, cruel, petty—and miserable for no reason but that they were obsessed with many petty powers and rivalries . . .

She could even wonder if in some way her happiness, hers and Frederick's, might in the end be a vitiating effect in Robin's life—setting him too high a standard.

She remembered his saying a few weeks ago that he would like all their lives to go on always exactly as they were now. And when she asked him why, he said, "Well, it used to be sadder at Cheyne Row, so I didn't always enjoy it very much." "And now?" she'd asked him. He said, "Well, I like it *best now*," and changed the subject.

The phrase had stuck in her mind. For she didn't only "like it best," but her life now had such a "rightness" that she could find herself believing that all the rest of her life had been wrong. She could remember exactly the moment, long before she was even in love with Frederick, when she had realized this "rightness"—this sense of breathing deeply and moving easily which he gave her.

It was the autumn that Adrian was doing his "secretarial job" at Bernstein's Galleries. He had, on this particular day, warned her that he might go in after six o'clock to a cocktail party at Cleopatra Craddock's. (It was the year that Cleopatra, who was, as Frederick remarked, "a convenience to all men and a danger to none," "took Adrian up.") That same morning Frederick telephoned to say he was back in England, and she'd asked him to come to tea. He came late, just after Robin had gone up to bed. She was sitting on the sofa by the fire, reading, and had already supposed—with a sense of disappointment that prevented her enjoying her book—that he wasn't coming after all.

Then he came, making some sort of apology for his lateness which neither of them supposed to be true. She'd got already into the habit of accepting the alternation, which was like a pattern in his character, of larger truths and minor falsehoods—of incidental unreliability and essential integrity.

He stayed for half an hour or so. She could never remember afterwards what, in that particular half hour, they talked about, though usually she could remember, looking back, each one of his sentences, and all his changing tones and masked expressions. But she kept afterwards this especially distinct vision of him, sitting opposite her in the green armchair on the other

side of the firelight—and, with this vision, a curiously bright sensitive perception of his simply “being in the room.”

When he had gone a feeling of deprivation so took hold of her that it became a bodily emptiness. She began to move about the room, nervous of this hunger that obscurely tormented her, and yet seemed, to her imagination, so unreal.

She went upstairs and fetched a coat; for she was suddenly cold. When she came down again she could smell his cigarettes in the room and his peculiar personal aroma which, exquisite and disturbing, seemed to her at this moment an essence of his whole character.

She went over to the fire for its comfort and turned her back on the room. She crouched down, but soon she was looking at her right hand, which he had held when he went.

She found herself thinking that if she could hold his hand again, keeping it in hers, even for a long minute, she could feel quiet again. The thought struck her as absurd. For since she was, thank goodness, so little in love with Frederick Howard that she could be diverted by his love affairs, the effect on her of his going was, after all, the aftereffect of any stimulant. She got up, reassured. The thing was, of course, not to let oneself become “addicted.”

“Addicted” to Frederick Howard! She could tell him that. Suggest lightly enough that she should, perhaps, disintoxicate herself.

And then, that evening, Adrian had come in and, finding her melancholy, and being himself gay and impulsive after the Craddocks’ cocktail party, he’d persuaded her to come out with him and go to some film or other. They’d dined at Kettner’s and she’d got a little drunk too; and so they’d enjoyed themselves and felt they adored one another. And when they got in there was a telephone message written out for her: “Mr. Howard wants to know if Mrs. Morant will lunch with him on Tuesday.” She’d read it with Adrian looking over her shoulder, and he laughed and said, “I shall soon begin to be jealous of Howard!” And she crumpled up the paper and said, smiling and rather deliciously drunk—“Darling, you might as well be jealous of the National Gallery—”

The next morning she didn’t ring up Frederick—partly out of a sense of loyalty to her evening with Adrian, partly because, as the morning passed, she began to feel the same emptiness that Frederick had left in her, yesterday, before Adrian’s return. She didn’t want to feel this. So she didn’t ring up and answer his message about lunching with him until late evening,

after dinner. He was out then. And only rang her back the next morning, to say he was glad that she could come on Tuesday, and that he hoped Adrian, of course, would come too. He added that “Cleo” Craddock was coming. Francesca said:—

“But I thought you disliked her?”

He said—“Not nearly enough not to ask her to luncheon.”

Nurse Forbes came in, bringing some letters. There was one from Adrian.

“And there’s one for you, Nurse!”

Nurse Forbes took it, and slipped it into the pocket of her apron.

“You’d better go and read it at once,” said Francesca.

“Thank you, Mrs. Howard. Are you sure you don’t want anything?”

“Yes.” She added, “You’d better accept him this time.”

Laura Forbes colored.

“You know everything, Mrs. Howard.”

“Only a good deal—Go and read it in peace, before ‘your baby’ wakes.”

Nurse Forbes went out.

Adrian’s letter had a Venetian postmark.

She thought, troubled, that his writing looked low-spirited. It began, as nearly all his letters did: “Dearest Francesca—I don’t know why I am writing to you.” And went on:—

But I’m sitting in the sun outside Florian’s and have nothing to do. (This doesn’t make my letter seem very complimentary. But I’m not sure that I want it to be.) Thank you very much for the parcel of books which reached me just before I left Paris. Chang is now living at leisure with the hound until I go back. But I don’t really know when I shall go back, or if I shall—I might wander off to Constantinople—where, at least, I have never been.

Of course it is lovely here. Isn’t it funny that we somehow never went to Venice together? Last night I was thinking that perhaps it might have been all right if we had. But I expect that is nonsense. I can imagine you here. But then very likely we should

have quarreled about something and then Venice would have been spoilt too.

I have sent Robin a postcard. Please give him my love.

A.

P.S. By the way, I saw you had a daughter. I expect that pleases you.

She read the letter twice, that quick nostalgic pain jabbing her heart.

She could see him, as he wrote it, sitting in the Venetian sunshine, his shoulders bent as he wrote, his hand holding the pen stiffly, a cigarette in the other hand. She saw him nearer now—his wide forehead, his drawn-down eyebrows, his intent brilliant gaze, his troubled, petulant mouth; and as she watched him his mouth and brow grew clearer and younger, his shoulders slackened, and when he looked up, shading his eyes against the golden light (that wasn't Venice now, but light and sky and summer), she saw that he was quite young again, and that he was looking straight at her, and smiling, as if nothing had ever happened wrong. . . .

She tore the letter up and let the pieces drop to the floor.

Once—when Frederick had accused her (with an amiability that made her realize he was angry) of never being quite out of love with Adrian—she'd pointed out that most people are always a little in love, in retrospect, with their own youth, and that Adrian had been hers. . . .

But weren't they still "youngish"? Frederick said.

"But twenty," she maintained, "or up to twenty-five—is really young."

Strange, she reflected, to have come to realize this. To know, as she did in this slow minute, that she would never be "quite young" again; and that Adrian, writing to her at a table on the piazza, was only youngish now—with a long, idling, faintly resentful middle age to look forward to; and nothing more left of his youth than his looks and a sort of disused sweetness.

Looking back now ten years, being twenty seemed a kind of madness. Had she, really, in this same body that she had now, lain a summer's afternoon in the grass still with happiness?

Had she (Francesca Howard) begun days by running to the window to taste the morning and feel its tang as part of her own enormous exhilaration, or run downstairs in a sleeping house, and out into the garden, driven by the delight of being awake again? Or gone, alone, at night to bathe (bathe this same body) in the pool at Quenton—plunging to break the moon, returning over the unbreathing lawns and sequined shadows of the night trees?

Had this same hand of hers (with Frederick's ring on it) touched Adrian's hand for the first time?

Nurse Forbes returned.

"I'm just going to bath Baby now, and then I shall be bringing her in to you!"

Francesca called her back.

"Shall you accept him—"

"He really needs me, I think, Mrs. Howard."

"And you?"

"Oh well—I suppose any woman wants to be wanted—needed, I should say—"

Francesca said: "If you want him to want you—then you must be in love with him."

"Perhaps—a little."

"And you've decided?"

"Yes, Mrs. Howard."

"—To marry him, I mean?"

"Of course, Mrs. Howard."

"Come in!—Oh, you, Maud?"

"Yes, madam. Here's your laundry, madam. Laundry!—Well, of course, if one likes to call that place (place, I call it!) a laundry! This is the third time they haven't sent one of Mr. Howard's evening dress shirts back! The third time! I put a note in last week telling them what I thought of them—"

“All laundries are one’s natural enemies, Maud! They always have been. You know that quite well—”

Maud opened a drawer and began folding and putting away.

“I daresay. Certainly that one we went to in Chelsea—well, both of them, really, wasn’t up to much . . . (I don’t think much of the way they’ve done those frilled pillow slips of yours this week—Of course, you didn’t ought to have them, really, they charge ever so for them!) Well, as I was saying, that *second* one we had in Chelsea—(I gave the vanman a bit of my mind. ‘*Jackass*,’ I said to him—one of those cheeky fellows—he was after the girl in the chemist’s at the corner—*French*, I always thought she was—) Well, never shall I forget the way they sent back your poor husband’s evening waistcoat one week—(Mr. Morant, I mean, of course)—*Black*, it was, or nearly so. And he come up to my room—Mr. Morant did, you know, and said to me, ‘*Maud*,’ he said, ‘they haven’t made a very good job of my white waistcoat.’ . . . I can remember how he said it—just before the divorce, I think it was—or just the autumn before, I think—anyway, I said to him, ‘You give it to me and I’ll give that jackass of a vanman what for, *which* I did—’ ” Maud shut the drawer. “I always wondered what *did* happen about him and that girl in the chemist’s. I daresay he wasn’t up to much good with her, but then, as I always say, it’s as often as not the woman’s fault, and those French sort of girls don’t care what they do—”

“Give me my brush and comb, Maud.”

“Here you are, dear—madam, I mean—I never seem to get used to your being married, though I s’pose I should by now. However, I daresay it seems strange to yourself sometimes, don’t it?”

“Yes,” said Francesca. “My glass, Maud.”

“Here you are, dear. Well, what did Mrs. de Breck think of our baby?”

“She thought she was charming. Please, my lipstick, Maud?”

“Goodness me!—Here you are—Well, I don’t wonder! And brought her a present, too. Sister showed me. I remember a rattle very similar to that, that poor Mrs. Harridge had, put away in a velvet box (blue velvet it was), but there, of course she had to pawn it—like everything. Not that you’d get much for a rattle like, but still—”

“Still,” said Francesca, “it may be something ‘in hand’ for Charlotte Rose to pawn.”

“Gracious,” said Maud. “Fancy you speaking like that about your own baby, poor lamb! Pawnshop indeed!”

“Pawnshop indeed,” said Francesca vaguely, combing her hair.

After the decree was made absolute she'd had a letter from Frederick, from the island, suggesting that she and Robin should go and stay with him. The letter was friendly, but its very friendliness made him seem remote. The letter arrived when she was moving out of the house in Cheyne Row. She read it on a chill rainy morning in the dining room, where the carpets had already been taken up. The sentence, “I feel it would be peaceful for you here,” made her so angry that she tore the letter across and threw it into a packing case half full of books, and went to the telephone and cabled to Clara Maine in New York that she would come over and stay for a month. She thought that she might as well make an attempt to amuse herself, as Robin had gone to Quenton and the ticket would be her only expense. And she had so little money since the divorce that it seemed absurd to deny herself luxuries now that she could no longer afford necessities.

So she went down to stay for a week with Aunt Juliette and then sailed for New York. She was very unhappy on the voyage because she had too much time to think about Frederick. One evening she went down to the bar meaning to get drunk. But the men there had such ludicrous expressions that it was too like a nightmare. She went back to her cabin and put on an overcoat and went out to walk up and down, alone, on the dim-lit covered decks. She climbed several iron ladders and found herself on a high deck near the funnels, where a black wind sprang at her, tearing her hair and banging her eyes shut, and ripping open her lips and nostrils, and knocking her into nothing but a “creature” blinded and caught between the thundering vibration of the ship and the enormous hissing darkness of the night.

Clara Maine rushed her round to cocktail parties and luncheons, teas and plays. She also gave a dinner for her and invited several people, including a young man called Jack Sheffield.

When Francesca came into the room she noticed him at once. He was very good-looking, dark, with handsome snubby features and bright grey eyes. He had a beautiful figure and clothes to show this, but in the English manner. He looked like the American ideal of an Englishman. When Francesca was introduced to him she saw that he was instinctively as

interested by her as she by him. She sat next to him at dinner and he talked about Italian sixteenth-century art, and Colonial architecture, and English furniture. She discovered that he owned a small picture gallery in New York, another in Chicago, and spent half the year in Europe. His slightly elaborate good manners, his brilliant smile, and a definite physical quality he had, which was partly warmth and partly a sort of fragrance, made her feel that he had, perhaps, a real knowledge of art. Every now and then a standard of really knowing (which was Frederick's) made her see the flaw in a generalization or criticism; but as dinner went on, and they drank their bootlegged champagne, she found it easier to believe in his intellectual powers.

After dinner they sat on a sofa with a blonde silver-clad Mrs. Macready on the other side of him who instituted a conversation about a slimming diet. She said, "I watch myself like a lynx." Then Clara called Mrs. Macready away to play bridge and said, "Jack, I'm afraid you'll have to amuse Mrs. Morant, as she doesn't play bridge," and he made some gallant and appropriate answer.

Then he began to talk again, more rapidly—in a rather louder tone than at dinner, about Spanish art and El Greco, leaning towards her as he talked. He didn't seem to want her to say more than "Yes, I agree" or "Exactly"—and when she did give any opinion he watched her face, fixing her with an exhilarated smile that seemed to be caused, not by his sense of humor, but by his vitality. She had an impression that he only half, if at all, took in the sense of what she said, before starting again on one of his high-powered succession of sentences. Whenever his words did cease the air vibrated a little, as if a big car had just gone past.

Once, when she dropped her handbag and he picked it up, his hand touched her arm and she breathed sharply.

When he went he asked her when she would dine with him.

The next evening he fetched her at Clara's apartment. She had on the new Chanel dress she had got before starting, and he said, "You look simply swell—I can tell that dress comes from Paris. Vionnet, I should say."

She felt dispassionate about him and not at all like last evening, and this remark struck her as characteristic of his tendency to be satisfied with his own, he clearly felt "special," information. She said:—

"Chanel, as a matter of fact."

But he simply said—"Curious. It's more Vionnet's style," and smiled, examining her with his warm brilliant glance.

He took her to a speak-easy in East Sixty-Second Street, where he told her there was French cooking and some wines you could really drink. He sat close beside her and ordered the food as if he were laying each *plat* at her feet, and the wine as if she were an enchanting child who was going to be given just what was good for it.

While they dined he talked a lot, not about art but about himself, telling her, in a long narrative, his life and experiences and thoughts, which he interrupted only to fill her glass or touch her arm or pay her some incidental compliment. ("I love the way you wear your bracelet—" touching her wrist—"right down next to your hand.") He told her, with what seemed to her, until she was a little drunk, a disproportionate intensity, about his boyhood and his mother and his school days and his college days ("those were happy days, Francesca—I may call you Francesca?") and what Italy meant to him and the glamour of Paris, and his reading. ("D' you know, sometimes I go off for two or three weeks at a time to some lonely spot on the coast of Maine or up in the Alleghany Mountains and take a whole lot of books and just read!")

While they were having their coffee and crème de menthe he told her all about a long love affair with a girl who had turned out to be "utterly materialistic." He said, "You see, Francesca, there just wasn't anything there—one of those doll women—" He said, so close to her that she could see how finely grained the skin was round his eyes and temples, "Well—that was just a boy's dream shattered—sounds sentimental, doesn't it, my dear? But all the same I know myself now—goodness, I ought to when I think I'm getting on for thirty-five—and I know that I've got to have a woman that's got something in her—" After a pause he said, "Look here, Francesca dear—what'd you like to do after this? We don't want to sit here, in this wretched sophisticated atmosphere, all evening! How'd you like to drive over the Bridge and see the Hudson by moonlight? Remind us of the Seine, mightn't it?"

Francesca, with his hand over hers, agreed even about the Seine.

So he drove her through the water-cold air and everything looked clear and enormous but quite unreal, and then he suggested she might come back to his apartment and see all his books he'd been telling her about. He said, "There are several first editions I'd love to have you see, Francesca dear,"—looking serious and sentimental—and then he added in a sort of inward

voice, "You know you can trust me, dear." (And she thought, "Oh God, is he going to be difficult?")

He had a lovely apartment and a lot of books, and she took off her coat and looked at them. He came and stood beside her and kept taking out different volumes and showing them to her, explaining how he'd got them in high emphatic tones, but she couldn't read them properly. Then she sat down on the sofa and he offered her a drink and fetched photographs of his mother and his aunt's villa near Florence to show her. And then he fetched another photo of a foxhound puppy belonging to an English cousin of his, who he said lived in a very old manor house, and when she gave it back to him he took her hand and said, "Francesca dear, you're so beautiful, I shall never forget your coming here. It's been terribly sweet of you." . . . But she kept his hand and didn't answer, but just kept looking at him until his look clouded and darkened and he could only say in a choked, different way:—

"Can I kiss you just once before you go?"—and he did, and after that he stopped talking, though she could see, with some dim, far-away, amused part of her, that he was shocked when she insisted on going into the bedroom instead of making love in the drawing-room.

But after that she lost any sense of his identity and it was only sometime in the early morning that she felt that vague, faintly irritated amusement at him when he said:—

"You're very passionate, Francesca."

"Lust," she said, "is the Anglo-Saxon word."

"I hate to hear you say that, dear," he said.

Clara had to go south to Florida soon after, and so Francesca took a small apartment for a fortnight. She didn't see Jack much in the daytime, as he was busy, and so by six o'clock she always wanted him again.

One evening they were dining at another speak-easy when she noticed an elegant, still-young-looking woman come in, followed by Frederick. Jack said, "Gosh, darling, do be careful of your glass—"

"Sorry."

"Whatever's the matter?"

Frederick had sat down without seeing her.

“Nothing. I feel rather rotten to-night. I think I’ve been drinking too much.”

But then Frederick saw her and there was a moment during which she didn’t know if he felt anything except the surprise followed by emphatic pleasure which showed on his face. And when he came straight over to her and took both her hands there was an only too convincing amiability in his:

“Darling—how lovely to find you—I heard you were in New York, but I was baffled as to how to find you. . . . I decided that the only sensible thing was to climb the Empire State Building and fish for you with a pin—”

“I thought you were in Corsica.”

“I was.”

“Like Napoleon,” said Jack.

Francesca introduced him.

“Where are you living?” said Frederick.

She gave him the address and telephone number of her apartment. She said:—

“And you?”

He said, “I’m staying with Mrs. Madison—Mrs. Sydney Madison. She’s taking me this evening to see my first speak-easy. She assures me I must while I can, as Prohibition will soon be over.”

“Is that she?” said Francesca.

“Certainly that’s Mrs. Sydney Madison,” said Jack.

When Frederick had gone back to her, Jack said, teasing, but looking admiringly after him, “Who’s your beau?”

“He’s not my beau!”

“Well—Mrs. Madison’s beau then?”

“His name’s Howard.”

“I like his clothes. You can see he’s English in a moment. The very minute he came in I could see he was English—there’s something about an Englishman you can’t mistake. . . . Though as a matter of fact I have been taken for an Englishman myself—quite often really.” He smiled, showing his white teeth. “Why, in Italy they always refer to me as *il signore inglese*.”

Francesca glanced at him sideways.

“No English person would ever take you for an Englishman,” she said.

Frederick came next day to see her in her apartment. He kissed her on both cheeks and said the room was like a setting for a Coward comedy. She said:—

“That’s what it’s used for.”

He smiled. “So I supposed. What lovely ‘scrapers’ you can see from here!—Who was the young man you were dining with?”

“Jack Sheffield.”

“Very good-looking.”

“Yes, *very*.”

“He seemed charming.”

She said, “He is—fairly.”

“Only fairly?”

“Mm. . . . What are you doing in New York—museums and things?”

“Not yet.”

“No secretary with you?”

“Not yet.”

“I see.”

He went on moving round the room as usual, touching things vaguely and glancing at them intently, but so quickly that he seemed not to have looked at all. He said:—

“What an ingenious radio! No one could tell it wasn’t a night commode!—And *what* a lovely bearskin!”

“I think it’s an elk skin—Jack gave me.”

“How lovely. I wish I had a friend who gave me elk skins.”

“That well-preserved lady you were dining with last night—wouldn’t she give you one?”

“No, my dear—I’m not sufficiently attractive.” He took out a cigarette and offered her one. She wanted to hit him or throw herself into his arms

and cry. But she took a cigarette and said—"It was a reward, not a bribe."

"What was, darling?"

"The elk skin."

"I see. What a curious form of gratitude!"

He sat down on the end of the divan and asked:—

"When are you going back to England?"

"Next week."

"Alone?"

"Yes—"

"How depressing for you."

"Not at all. We can't all have secretaries."

"—But bearing back the elk in triumph—*et dona ferens*—"

She stood with her back to him, her elbows resting on the low white chimney piece among the glass elephants. But she could see him in the square of dark looking-glass. He was leaning on the divan on one elbow and seemed pleased with the way he had been manicured.

"What nice little ash trays," he said—"like human ears. Were they a reward too?"

"No. They belong to the apartment."

She turned and put her cigarette down in one of them. She felt too choked to go on smoking. He said, in the same manner but a different tone:

"Sit down and talk to me."

She shook her head.

"Sitting's too broadening."

She saw in the glass that her refusal, at least, disconcerted him. But he said, "Of course. I forgot."

She thought, "If I cry, all this getting on so amusingly together will be broken up, and I shan't even have that—and he'll go out of this room and I shall be left alone."

"What news of Robin?" he said.

“He’s at Quenton.”

“And Adrian?”

“I don’t know where he is—probably in the South of France. . . . He . . .” as she spoke she saw him, in the glass, take his half-smoked cigarette and put it on the ash tray, and take hers, which lay there, and then, with a hardly perceptible hesitation, put it between his lips.

She turned round. For a long moment she stood looking at him. Then she knelt down beside him and took the cigarette out of his mouth.

Nurse Forbes knocked and came in and round the screen. The glow in the room touched her veil and hand. She said:—

“I just wanted to tell you, Mrs. Howard, that She’s asleep.”

They looked at each other, their lips grave, their eyes faintly smiling; satisfied.

Alone again she lay still; her mind at rest because the baby was asleep.

Asleep, and full, and warm. . . .

Asleep, in a white nursery in a quiet house. . . .

For white rooms and quiet were its heritage.

“The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground . . .”

(She saw the church at Quenton, the glass window with the blue and topaz Saint Ursula; the sun on the lead monks in the aisle; Aunt Juliette’s hat with the ostrich feathers.) *“Yea, I have a goodly heritage . . .”*

Firelight in winter . . . The shade of trees in summer . . .

A fair ground. . . .

The baby was asleep.

And he would come soon.

The sky opposite the windows dyed the stillness in the room, burnished the mirror, flamed the lilac, painted Robin’s hyacinth purple.

The hyacinth's frightening-sweet fragrance kept breathing and mixing in with her sense of her own too sweet, too heavy and affrighting happiness.

When would he come?

How soon?

She heard the horn, far off, and then the coming swerving rush of the car up the drive. And then Robin's voice, below the window, out in the evening.

"I'll just go round to the garage, if you don't mind, Frederick."

She heard Frederick's voice, and felt that lift-going-down emptiness (always as if she were in love with him for the first time).

He was crossing the hall now—taking off his coat, putting his hand on the banisters, coming upstairs . . .

She shut her eyes.

. . . upstairs now and his footsteps coming across the landing.

She opened her eyes.

He was outside the door. . . .

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *A Silver Rattle* by Sylvia Thompson]