Helen of Troy and Rose

by

Phyllis Bottome

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HELEN OF TROY
And
ROSE

"I want you" said Miss Lestrange, "to let my boy go."

HELEN OF TROY

And

ROSE

BY

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

Author of “The Dark Tower,” “The Second Fiddle,” “The Derelict and Other Stories,” etc.

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TO
MARJORIE AND GEORGE

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ILLUSTRATIONS

HELEN OF TROY

I

Horace Lestrange was intent upon his occupation; he was throwing stones into the lake. He did it with skill and success; he made each stone jump four times, but he was using only his outer layer of attention; his inner self was turning over and over again a personal problem; he would have said he was thinking it out, but this was a mistake. The case was very plain and required no thought; he was only feeling it over, probing sensation to find how much weight it would bear, and at what point his heart would cry out to him to stop. Ten years ago he had lost his wife, after one year's marriage. Perhaps, if she had lived, he would have grown tired of her; but she was very beautiful, and she had died when love was new and every golden day of her presence a thing divine and separate, intolerable to lose.

She had left him something; instead of her love and her ripened youth, she had given him a baby son; he had put the child in his sister's care and gone abroad.

Annette used to go to church very devoutly, and Horace went to please her. He tried to suppose that Providence was in the right, but he said to his oldest friend (and this was the only comment he was heard to make upon his grief):

"It seems to me, Bambridge, love is rather a let in."

Bambridge cleared his throat sympathetically.

"A deuced lot of things are," he muttered.

Annette had always thought Bambridge rather cynical.

Time heals wounds, but it leaves scars. Ten years had done a great deal for Horace Lestrange. There was no mark of his great grief left; but although time works very well as a narcotic, it is not stimulating; it had not renewed Horace's youth. He did not think of love now; he thought of marriage—comfortable, consoling marriage.

The girl who had suggested this idea to him was a thoroughly nice girl, pretty, well-educated, and kind-hearted. She had been very good to Horace; they had rowed on the lake together, and her ways were energetic without

hardness, and swift with grace. They had climbed some of the surrounding peaks side by side, and she had shown admirable characteristics—quietness, pluck, instantaneous obedience, and endurance. She was a good companion (she challenged no comparison with Annette, who was helpless, clinging, and thoroughly silly, the kind of woman whom—if she dies soon enough—a man never forgets). Edith's hair and eyes were dark; she had a full sweet mouth and a round chin. She was quite thirty and she wouldn't expect romance. . . .

The last stone failed to jump four times; perhaps it didn't agree with Horace that there is a time limit for romance.

"It would be an excellent thing for the boy," said Lestrange, putting his hands in his pockets. "Etta of course is a good woman; clever, plenty of tact, but she is so managing. I never knew such a woman; she sponges one up. She has been everything to the little chap though for the last eight years. I hope he won't make a fuss at leaving her. I don't think he will; Edith is good with kids. Well, I'll go and look her up."

He went to look her up. She was usually easy to discover when Lestrange wanted her. She did not run after him, as a sillier woman would have done, neither did she run away from him, as young girls sometimes run from their lovers, but when he looked for her she was there. She sat under a big ilex tree on the terrace of the hotel garden. It was not easy to remember that it was an hotel, for once it had been an old Italian palace, and something of its ancient dignity remained. The lake lay at its foot, a vast and shimmering expanse of silver and azure. The mountains were half withdrawn into vague shadows; sometimes moonstone and sometimes purple, and when the wind blew aside their thin veil of mist, the sun shone over slopes vivid, luminous and green.

Around Edith Walton were huge bushes of camellias, red and white and very splendid. A mad riot of roses flung itself over a pergola. In the distance a magnolia tree slowly opened wonderful flowers to the sun—flowers that seemed like the birth of spiritual treasures, white cloistered buds filled with aromatic fragrance.

Edith sat quite still with her hands in her lap; there was something expectant in her appearance; it seemed part of the general hush. The wind had dropped suddenly and the tiny village lay embosomed on quivering water lines.

Edith knew who was coming towards her, as flowers know the quickening soft rain of spring, and as the ocean knows the dominance of the tides.

"You've got an awfully jolly corner," said Lestrange rather awkwardly.

"There are so many awfully jolly corners here," said Edith. Then she smiled at him, the tender smile of a woman who laughs in secret triumph at the

man she loves; she lets him think he is concealing his purpose from her, but she smiles.

"I wish you weren't going away to-morrow," Lestrange began. He thought he was leading up to his goal with extraordinary skill and subtlety. "Must you really?"

Edith hesitated; he would have to put it better than that.

"I think my aunt has made all her arrangements," she said. Then she looked away towards the lake over his shoulder. "I shall be sorry to leave—all this," she murmured quietly.

"I don't see why you can't stay with me," said Lestrange, sitting down on the seat beside her. "I mean always."

He was certainly not putting it very well. Edith tried to believe that he was; she wanted to believe it. She looked at him, and her lips quivered. She was not an emotional woman; he had taken good care to find that out, but her dark eyes looked strange and stormy. She seemed as if she was feeling something strongly, almost more than she could bear.

"Do you want me very much?" she murmured.

Well, of course he wanted her. If you ask a woman to marry you, you must want her unless you are a young fool under the influence of glamour. There was no glamour. Horace had never pretended in his life, and he did not pretend now. He simply said:

"It would make me very happy if you would be my wife, Edith."

"I should like so much to make you very happy," said Edith. Then, suddenly, inconsequently, and very foolishly, she burst into tears.

"Don't, my dear—don't," he exclaimed hurriedly. He tried to take her hands from her face, but she would not let him. He looked at her in bewilderment; she shook with these astonishing sobs; and she was a most sensible woman, and thirty. He could not understand her.

He kissed the clenched hands which covered her face, and almost as suddenly the sobs ceased. She drew in her breath with a quick sound. He walked to the balustrade and began to whistle. They were in a very secluded part of the gardens, but one never knew. No! fortunately there was no one in sight. What an extraordinary, lovely scene it was! Perhaps Edith would stop crying soon.

She did; she brushed the tears from her eyes and laughed.

"Oh, how silly you must think me!" she said. "And I'm thirty—you know I'm thirty?"

"I think this is the third time that you have told me you are," cried Horace.

He came and sat down beside her again. She did not make him feel uncomfortable any more.

“Do smoke,” said Edith quickly. “I know you’re dying to.”

“Thanks, if I may.” He lit a cigarette. And she saw with a sudden sinking of her heart that his hands were steady.

“There is the little chap at home,” he said, turning his eyes to her with a restored friendliness. “You’re sure you won’t mind him?”

“Oh, I shall love him!” said Edith. “Do you know—you must not be jealous, but that is half the reason why I am so—why I am going to marry you, you know!”

Horace was not jealous. He was very pleased, and he said so.

“But what,” Edith asked anxiously, “will your sister say, Horace?”

“Oh, my sister!” stammered Lestrange. “Do you think she will mind very much?”

“You darling stupid!” cried Edith. “She’ll mind most horribly.”

Then she blushed; she hadn’t meant to call him “darling.” She looked at him anxiously, but he had not noticed it.

“By Jove, I believe she will; you’re right, Edith. I’m afraid she’ll cut up frightfully rough! I thought I had managed to think it all out—about you, you know, and the little chap and me—and Annette, my dead wife.”

He spoke these last words in a voice she had never heard him use before. But he spoke them bravely and honestly, with his eyes on hers. Her courage leapt to meet his.

“My dear,” she said quickly, “I want you to behave as if I had loved her too. I want you to talk to me of her, to let her share our life, or rather to let me share yours and hers. I want you never to be afraid that I do not understand. I come to you to give you all the help and comfort that I can, but I come to you knowing that she has your heart.”

Then Lestrange kissed her. The last hesitation fell away from this new purpose, the last cloud melted. His heart went out in friendship and gratitude to this woman who did not seek to rob him of his past. There was a moment’s splendid recognition between them, as strong as passion and as kind as love. Then the breathless hush of the air broke in a chill and sudden shower; they passed through the drenched garden quickly into the big hotel.

II

When Miss Lestrange received the announcement of her brother's engagement she replied by return of post, congratulating him on his prospective happiness. She called it prospective, but she allowed that it was happiness. She offered to give up her residence at Mallows, Horace's place in the country, and suggested that perhaps she could take a villa by the seaside.

"This," she wrote, "would be very suitable for Leslie as well." She took entirely for granted that she should keep the boy. Then she said to herself: "Edith Walton! What extraordinary people Horace picks up! One has never heard of her! There was a Lady Walton I remember meeting at Bournemouth; her husband probably got knighted for patent biscuits, or some vulgar charity; the Lindleys knew her. I will call on the Lindleys."

When Horace returned to London he found his home, as usual, the perfection of order. He was not a rich man, and he did not desire luxury or extravagance. He had never needed to desire them, for his sister had that genius for management which results in other people's comfort. She oiled the wheels of life for her brother, and as yet she had charged him nothing for the oil. She was dressed for going out, but on his arrival she laid her card-case and parasol on the table and gave him her cheek to kiss. Miss Lestrange had been a plain, angular girl, without charms; but she was a distinguished-looking middle-aged woman with a pleasant manner. Her pleasant manner entirely hid from the world that she had a will of iron and an absorbing passion for her little nephew. She was famous for her kind heart, and made an excellent *confidante*; people talked of her as "a dear, kind old thing."

Her brother looked at her a little nervously.

"You have received my letter?" said Miss Lestrange, sitting down again, and drawing on her gloves. "But, of course, there is a great deal to be talked over, isn't there? We needn't begin now. Do you want a meal or anything? Or do they give it to you on the train? It is so long since I have been on the Continent, but I understand that in America you can be shaved and have your corns cut, probably simultaneously, as you travel."

"I think I'll ring for tea," said Horace. "Where is the boy?"

"I am afraid he is out with Mr. Flinders. I should have kept him in, of course, to meet you; but Mr. Flinders said it was such a perfect afternoon it seemed a pity to keep him in, and I never like to interfere with the tutor's arrangements. Leslie sent you his love."

"Thanks," said Horace, a little dryly. He fidgeted about the room; he hardly knew quite what he expected from Etta, but, by Jove! she needn't go on smoothing her gloves—it made him feel cold between the shoulders.

“I hope the cake is not heavy,” said his sister, rising to pour out his tea. “Mrs. Devon can’t make cakes—it is her only weakness; but there are some rather nice pink things over there from the confectioner’s.”

Horace cleared his throat.

“I wish you would take off your things, Etta,” he said with sudden irritation, “or not look as if you were being kept in by force, and meant to go out the moment I had swallowed my tea; it makes me nervous.”

“Nervous, my dear boy? Lestranges are never nervous. What is the matter with you? I was going out calling, and I supposed you would want to go upstairs and tidy after your journey. But, of course, if you are nervous, and have anything on your mind —”

Etta began unbuttoning her gloves. Her brother groaned.

“No, hang it all, Etta; I’d rather wait till after dinner!”

“Just as you like,” said Miss Lestrange. “I hope Miss—er—Walton, isn’t it?—is quite well?”

“Oh, yes, Edith is all right, thanks. You might tell them, Etta, to let the little chap come into my study when he gets in from his walk.”

“Oh, of course, Horace!”

It may have been intention, or it may have been one of those fortunate accidents which happen to well-trained fighters, but Miss Lestrange’s attention was suddenly caught by a crooked picture. She turned back to a portrait of Annette hanging over the mantelpiece.

“It is not hung quite straight,” she said in her pleasant, commonplace voice. “There, that’s better! Is there anything more you want, Horace?”

Her brother’s answer was made from his teacup; it sounded very like “Damn!”

Horace continued to be extremely nervous. He had meant to go and see Edith after dinner; she and her aunt, Lady Walton, had returned to town with him, but he couldn’t go to Edith, having arranged nothing whatever, and not even having mentioned that he intended to keep his boy.

All through dinner Etta held the conversation and guided it as she chose. Mr. Flinders, the tutor, responded admirably.

Miss Lestrange had a perfect tone with the tutor; she treated him with that deference which marks the difference in social value. Her delicate flattery was a restraint; it put him at once on the footing of an inferior position where she could afford to be delightful to him without his ever meeting her on her own level. It was too fine for condescension, too gracious for patronage; it was an “invulnerable nothing”; and yet you could no more have passed it than have

walked through bayonets; and there was this added attraction, that the bayonets were garlanded with flowers.

"It was such a pity Leslie behaved so badly this afternoon," Miss Lestrange began. "Mr. Flinders felt that such direct disobedience must be punished, especially when it led to such a decided risk as the boy's playing with whooping-cough children in the Park. So instead of being allowed to come and see you, Horace, he had to be packed off, supperless, to bed; but you will go up after dinner, I suppose?"

"I should have gone up before," interrupted Horace, "but they said —"

"Yes, I think authority must be upheld," said his sister. "You see, dear Horace, Mr. Flinders had already warned Leslie about the punishment."

She looked across at her brother, as if to say that the punishment was an absurd blunder of Mr. Flinders, which they must overlook, because although he was a very clever fellow, of course, and a clergyman's son, and really quite a gentleman, still —

Horace understood the look, and dropped the subject. He was a man who took almost everything very easily; but not quite everything.

Mr. Flinders began to make some explanation, which Miss Lestrange promptly checked. She asked his advice about a book, and somehow or other Leslie's punishment remained the tutor's blunder, though this was the first time he had ever heard of it. He had probably misunderstood something Miss Lestrange had said to him; she had often observed that she was not a lucid talker; there were certain advantages which Mr. Flinders had had, and she had not, and this made it such a comfort to listen to him! Possibly this was one of the occasions in which the disadvantages had told.

After dinner Horace went upstairs to see his boy; there were traces of tears on the child's face, and he looked pathetically like his dead mother. He flung his arms around his father's neck and began to sob. Leslie had inherited Annette's weak constitution; he was a highly-strung, delicate little boy.

"Oh, daddy, don't—don't—don't!" he sobbed. "Oh, please, dear daddy, don't! I will be good if you won't marry her!"

His father's face grew suddenly very stern; he had meant to be the first to tell his son about Edith.

"My dear old chap," he said tenderly, sitting down on the bed beside the boy. "Edith is such a jolly girl; you will like her. Why, she's pretty and kind, and awfully fond of boys! You have no idea what fun we'll have. She has asked you to go with her to-morrow to the Zoo."

"I have been to the Zoo," said Leslie.

A firm little line came around his mouth. It used to come round his mother's when she meant to get her way and she did not find it easy. Horace had not seen it often enough to remember it.

"Oh, daddy, don't make me go with her; I want to go away with auntie—oh, I do want to go away with auntie!" The sobs began to shake him again. "I have always had auntie," he cried. "You see, daddy, I've always had auntie!"

"But, boy, you don't want to go away from me?" asked his father.

There was a moment's constrained silence, and then the child dragged himself out of his father's arms and threw himself face downwards on his pillow.

"Yes, I do," he muttered petulantly. "I won't stay with this new woman! I do want to go away!"

The lines of pain on Horace's face deepened. His heart seemed to contract as he looked at the golden curls on the pillow, and remembered those long golden curls he had played with and kissed. For a moment he turned away, regretful, sick, and undesirous as the child himself of "this new woman." Then his manhood reasserted itself, and he remembered that this was after all only a childish fit of ignorant tears.

He was not angry with the child; it did not occur to him to ask him who had given him this cruel fear of Edith. There were a good many things that never occurred to Horace Lestrange. They might have been convenient things to do; possibly they might have made life easy and happy for him, only he did not do them, that was all; he could not make the child tell tales.

There was some one to be very angry with; that was a simplification. It might be Etta, but Lestrange was slow to think so. Hadn't she congratulated him at once? And besides, he couldn't think that Etta could poison a child's mind. Perhaps it was that fool Flinders; he seemed a perfectly incompetent chap, and he might possibly have some sentimental theories on step-mothers. Anyhow, he would go downstairs and talk to Etta; meanwhile he stooped over the child and shook his shoulder gently.

"Don't cry, old man," he said quietly. "I promise you, you will like this new friend. She doesn't want to take your mother's place, or anything; she is just a new friend. To-morrow you shall see her, and tell me what you feel. You needn't go to the Zoo. Aunt Etta isn't going away at present, and you shall see her whenever you like."

"Mr. Flinders said there was going to be great changes," sobbed the boy.

The father closed his lips suddenly; there was going to be one great change—and that would be Mr. Flinders. He recalled his sister's glance at dinner; evidently Etta thought the man a fool too. He felt vaguely relieved to have

found out that it was Flinders.

III

Etta was sitting in the library doing church embroidery on a frame; it was a thing she did extremely well; in fact, she was a woman who never did anything badly; if there were possibilities of ignorance in her, she avoided those fields in which they might be betrayed. Horace did not want to talk to her while she worked; he was never quite sure that he had her whole attention; she might be counting stitches or planning patterns, and so miss his points. He knew, however, that it does not do to start an important conversation with a woman by establishing a grievance, so he did not ask her to stop; he merely found refuge in a succession of cigarettes.

"Was it a surprise to you, Etta," he began in an off-hand tone, "to hear of my engagement?"

Etta took up a thread of pink silk, and then decided for pale blue.

"I don't know that engagements ever surprise me," she replied. "If men can afford to marry, and there is no other impediment, they generally do; and if they are attractive to women, they always do."

"You mean if women attract them?" he interjected.

"My dear boy," said his sister, moving the frame slightly more under the electric light, "it never does to confuse cause and effect. If women want to marry a man, he marries. In your case, of course, there was some protection provided you remained at home; the rest was merely a question of time."

Horace did not like this way of putting the matter at all; in the first place, it was an insult to Edith, and in the second place it was an insult to his own intelligence. He had thought the thing out so often, and had acted so entirely as a free agent; and yet the more emphasis he laid on this fact, the more plainly he saw the pleasant, unconvinced smile upon his sister's face; besides, it wasn't the point of the discussion; they seemed strangely incapable of reaching the point of the discussion.

"I am sure when you see Edith," he said at last, "you will feel that I have made a most desirable choice." He tried to put it as baldly as possible, for he did not wish Etta to think he had been swayed by glamour.

"Walton!" said his sister slowly: "who are the Waltons? Has the yellow silk skein fallen at your feet, Horace?"

"I don't know that they are anybody in particular," said Horace, vaguely uncomfortable; "she's an orphan, you know, and Lady Walton, her aunt, is an

extremely clever, amusing woman. Edith has not gone in for Society much, she's so fond of travel, and her aunt's rather an invalid, so I imagine they have always lived extremely quietly."

"I can't remember," said Etta, "whether it was biscuits or soap the Lindleys told me; perhaps it was soap."

"What was soap?" said Horace, now thoroughly irritated.

"What the man Walton, you know, was knighted for," said his sister, calmly stitching at a wild rose. "Is she a lady by birth?"

"The question did not arise," said Horace rather grimly, "and if such questions do not arise, the references are usually satisfactory."

"Usually," agreed his sister, "but not always, Horace."

"You speak in a very mysterious way, my dear. May I ask if you have a secret up your sleeve—what do they call those things in the 'Family Herald'?—'an ugly secret.' Have you discovered that Lady Walton's name was Smith?"

"I don't know what her name was," said Miss Lestrange, and for a moment she pushed the screen away from her. "The whole family seem slightly obscure, but I supposed Miss Walton's aunt could hardly be a person of much discrimination (I am sure I can be revealing no secret to you, my dear Horace, as you must know all about the thing already)—but how could any one who was a lady allow her niece to compromise herself quite as madly on the eve of her first London season? People of our sort don't do that kind of thing."

"Pray explain yourself, Etta," said Horace, getting up and standing in front of the mantelpiece, where he could look down on his sister. "I know nothing of what you say. Perhaps you have heard some malicious or stupid gossip which it is your duty to tell me, and mine to contradict."

"I hardly think you could do anything so foolish as to contradict gossip, my dear Horace, unless you wish to revive it; but I will certainly tell you what the Lindleys told me, and doubtless Edith will find it easy to explain. She was found staying on the Lake of Como—at the same place, I believe, where your engagement took place—with a disreputable woman—a woman about whose career there was no shadow of doubt. The Lindleys knew all about her, and this woman and Miss Walton were requested to leave the hotel. The peculiar part of the whole story is that the aunt and Miss Walton's maid left previously, having apparently discovered the character of Miss Walton's companion, and leaving the niece alone with her. I told the Lindleys, of course, that there must be some perfectly obvious explanation, but the fact remains the girl never did come out, and that she and her aunt have traveled about more or less ever since. I am, I must confess, a little disappointed that you have not got an

explanation for me."

"There will be no difficulty about that," said Horace quietly.

"None, of course," said his sister in courteous agreement. Then there was a pause.

Etta continued to embroider, but she felt flushed and uncomfortable. So far she had simply skirmished; the real battle lay ahead. She had counted on her brother opening the subject, but he opened nothing. He stood before the closed door of her future apparently with far more comfort and unconcern than she did. Even a clever woman is at a disadvantage with a silent man; she has no weapon to pierce his armor. Her final onslaught had not disconcerted him so much as she had hoped. Evidently she was going to have to deal with an intelligent woman; no mere fool could have won such entire confidence from her brother, and without any of the distortions of love. Miss Lestrange saw perfectly well that Horace was not in love with the girl; she had guessed this from his letter—but she knew it the moment she saw him. It gave her unconcealed satisfaction, but at the same time it was puzzling that he seemed unshaken after her little story; she was certain of all the facts. She knew the importance of the unembellished, and she never risked an exaggeration with her brother. Lestranges did not understand exaggeration—at least, the male branch never did; if they found you inaccurate they had a tiresome habit of never accepting what you said without proof. Horace had never found Etta inaccurate; he had only once or twice thought she was mistaken.

Miss Lestrange fidgeted for a few minutes, then she said:

"Do you think that a woman, however innocent, who is under such a cloud, is fit to be in the position of mother to Annette's boy?"

"I will make every inquiry," said Horace reflectively, "and, by the bye, Etta, Flinders must go. I don't approve of Flinders."

"I think myself," said Etta, "that he has taken rather too much upon his shoulders lately. You see, you were so long abroad, and yet you were his master. Whereas I was hardly in a position to dictate to him."

"I shall speak to him to-night," said Horace.

Miss Lestrange put down her embroidery and faced her brother.

"Horace," she said, "I hope you found Leslie reconciled to the idea of this great change? I did not like to speak to him about it myself. I am not an emotional woman, but my feelings for you and for your boy have been very strong. I did not trust myself to say much. I told Mr. Flinders that nothing must be said to prejudice him against his future step-mother, and then I left the subject to you to explain."

“He does not seem to have carried out your orders, Etta.”

“Oh, my dear Horace,” she cried with a sudden note of anxiety in her voice, “how dreadful—how *very* dreadful!”

“It is exceedingly tiresome, of course, but I fancy the boy will soon take to Edith; she is clever with children.”

Miss Lestrange rose to her feet; she looked agitated, plain, and awkward; her hands trembled and she gathered her sewing materials together. (There was the making of an excellent actress about Miss Lestrange.)

“My dear boy,” she said solicitously, “I haven’t liked to bother you about it while you were away—these things are so intangible—but Dr. Bossage isn’t quite pleased with Leslie’s health, his constitution is so delicate; he takes after Annette. You know I have been almost excessively careful of him. I spoke to Bossage last week about the impending change, and he said it would be a very serious matter unless the boy really took to her. I blame myself, Horace, for not having conquered my feelings and spoken to Leslie strongly in her favor; but the Lestranges have always been sincere; there was this story against her. I was too cautious. I waited. I am afraid I may have done incalculable harm—” She stopped breathless. Horace eyed her gravely.

“Is that all?” he asked as she finished.

“You had better go and see Bossage yourself,” said Miss Lestrange; “he strongly advised my taking the boy to live in the country or by the sea for a year or two, till he becomes definitely strong. I daresay you remember my having mentioned it to you in my last letter? Of course, should you think it best, I will take him with pleasure. I have already told you that I will send to Mallows for all my little things.”

“You know you needn’t do that, Etta; Mallows is as much your home as mine. Edith and I will run down when we like, but I most certainly wish you to remain there,” interrupted her brother.

Miss Lestrange bowed her head.

“That is like your generosity, Horace,” she replied slowly. “I accept. Now I am sure you wish to go and see Edith before it is too late.” (“Edith” was a distinct concession, but Miss Lestrange knew the value of inconclusive concessions.) “By-and-by you will tell me what you two are going to do about the boy. I hope, even if you decide to disregard Bossage, you will let him come away with me after your marriage, till you get settled, and it is convenient for you to have him back.”

After all, she hadn’t put him in a corner—she hadn’t tied him down nor asked him for a promise, or made a scene. She had done none of the things he had feared; she had merely given him “rope enough to hang himself,” and then

let him go to accomplish the performance.

Horace did not know what had happened; he felt, indeed, vaguely uncomfortable. There was the strange story about Edith—pure folly but still strange—and there was this news of his boy's health and his evident frightened horror of the new relationship. He might go and see Bossage, but he had a horror of going to see doctors—a horror born of terrible useless hours, while hideous, unavailing efforts were being made to stop the feeble ebbing of Annette's little life. No, he wasn't going to see doctors! But Edith was so keen to have the little chap. It was hard on Edith. (He did not consider it was hard upon himself—he was not apt to take that view of misfortune.) They had talked about him for hours, and it had all been so natural and right and easy—their future life together had been built around Annette's son; the picture seemed suddenly a piece of vacant canvas brushed out by ineffaceable hygienic whitewash.

There was only one thing to be done. He would dismiss Flinders.

Mr. Flinders had, perhaps, some right to consider himself in after years an ill-used man. He had been given notice with implacable and relentless abruptness; no explanation had been given or listened to. If Lestrange had not been so extremely quiet, Mr. Flinders would have thought he was dealing with a man who was in a dangerous rage; as it was, he merely clung to the idea (which was not originally perhaps his own) that Lestrange was a well-meaning fool, governed by a tyrannical and scheming adventuress.

Miss Lestrange, who was most sympathetic about it next morning, assured him of the fact.

"It is natural," she said graciously, "for people like yourself, Mr. Flinders, with your high ideals and great independence of spirit, to be surprised at such strong and regrettable influence wielded over a man like my brother, but the Lestranges are well known to be, as a family, very susceptible to women. I regret your going extremely. I spoke to my brother for you, but I am sorry to say I found him quite intractable on that and many other subjects. You must write and let me know how you are getting on. Life is so difficult, isn't it?"

Miss Lestrange was fond of speaking of Life or Destiny as being gigantic monsters with invincible powers, and yet there were times when she manipulated these great forces very easily. Mr. Flinders left her more struck than ever by her genuine qualities.

"I daresay she will miss me too," he said to himself with pleasant regretfulness. "I may have been of some use to her," and there was no doubt that in this particular deduction Mr. Flinders was right.

IV

Lady Walton was a woman who never did anything with her hands. She was content to sit for hours at a time thinking—"doing nothing," her acquaintances called it. Certain hours in the day she read, but she never opened a modern book of any kind.

"I have a feeling," she said to her niece, "that they would revive a very painful experience I once received of a kitchen-maid in hysterics. People used to accept life and make their appeal to the intellect; now they spend their time screaming at natural laws and living for the emotions. It is a mysterious modern compulsion which used to be called selfishness. When I hear you begin to talk of your temperament, my dear Edith, I shall cease to ask you to run my errands."

Edith stroked her aunt's hand and smiled at her; but she was preoccupied; she was expecting Horace.

"Sometimes, Edith, you disappoint me. I have an impression that all the wisdom of all the ages, including my own, would have less effect upon your intelligence than the sound (I suppose they have no creak) of an ordinary pair of Bond Street boots."

"Well, he is rather late," said Edith.

"He is talking with his sister," suggested Lady Walton. "I must congratulate you, my dear, in having chosen a husband who has complete ignorance of women. It is a very valuable attribute nowadays, when women have no restraint and men no manners. Horace is doubtless explaining to Miss Lestrange what an excellent arrangement his marriage will be for everybody concerned; and Miss Lestrange is turning his attention to awkward details. I hope you are prepared for complications, Edith; the maternal instinct of maiden aunts is a very fierce thing to combat. Do you realize that she may refuse to let the boy go?"

The girl moved restlessly.

"Oh, she can't!" she murmured. "After all, Horace is very strong; he's not a weak man, auntie."

"There is nothing so vulnerable as some kinds of strength," said Lady Walton, with a sigh, "or so invulnerable as some kinds of weakness. What is tyranny but weakness playing on generosity, and how long do you suppose it can last? It can last as long as the generosity."

Edith shivered a little.

"But he'll think of me," she said. "He knows how I want his child."

“He’ll think of you,” said her aunt very slowly; “yes, he’ll think of you, Edith; but thought doesn’t compel—there is only one compulsion.”

It was surgery for the sake of healing, but the knife struck deep.

Lady Walton sat quite still; she did not attempt to touch or soothe the girl; she did not even look at her. After a while she said reflectively:

“If you had been ten years, or even five years younger, Edith, I should have forbidden this marriage; but you have learnt self-control; you know what you are marrying for—and you won’t fail to receive it, because you are not fool enough to spend your time crying for the moon. Crying for the moon is an injurious element in married life. It is not the kind of thing one gets.”

Edith lifted her eyes to her aunt’s.

“I have asked myself sometimes why I am doing it,” she said, and her voice sounded hard and strained. “I am not a fool of twenty, as you say—but Horace could have given me the moon, only he has given it already. And—and what is so much more, auntie, I could have given him back the moon’s equivalent. I could have filled his life with happiness, and he can’t take it!”

“Well,” said Lady Walton, “do you regret what you are going to do?”

Edith hesitated a moment. Then she said: “Yes, and I’m going to do it.”

“I think I hear the taxi which is the preliminary of the Bond Street boots,” said her aunt, “and if you will excuse me, my dear, I will go to bed. It is a quarter to ten; you will send him away at half-past, cry for half-an-hour, and then go to bed.”

“Oh, I sha’n’t cry!” said Edith, rising and resting her head on the mantelpiece. “I don’t cry.”

“Ah!” replied Lady Walton, “that’s a great pity, my dear, because in that case you won’t sleep. However, we each have our own method.”

It seemed a long time to Edith before the owner of the Bond Street boots came upstairs.

She was a woman with a strong sense of humor, and so she spent the time laughing because it seemed so extremely amusing to receive a man who is going to marry you with a little more than the kindness of a friend and a little less than the freedom of a lover. What made it seem so especially funny to Edith was that she loved him; and it did not occur to her any the less sad because it was funny, or any the less funny because it was sad.

Horace entered, looking glum; he was feeling—as he phrased it—“a bit of a fool.” An ecstatic or an anxious welcome would have annoyed him. Edith met his eyes smiling, but she did not rise from her chair nor did she burst into nervous questions; she merely said:

“My aunt told me to tell you, Horace, that she was suffering from an acute attack of discretion, so that she would be unable to see you this evening; it is usually followed by a relapse into curiosity, which she expects to take place to-morrow; and you may stay until half-past ten.”

Horace sat down beside her and smiled. It was really very peaceful and jolly; the place seemed full of flowers; it was almost like their being together at Como. Edith was dressed in pale soft green; he liked it extremely. He took her hand and held it.

“Well, I’m rather glad we’re alone,” he said. “I’m afraid I’m awfully late, but I couldn’t help it. Etta kept me such a confounded time—bush-beating—and then I had to send off the tutor, who’s a beast—and has frightened the little chap silly about you; and altogether it’s been rather a rough passage.”

“Poor Horace,” said Edith softly, “what a shame! But you mustn’t be worried; we’ll straighten it all out between us somehow.”

“But you won’t like it—you won’t like it, Edith!” he exclaimed, looking at her with helpless, appealing eyes.

It was a look which women who love know how to answer—when they are loved in return. Edith drew a sudden quick breath, then she said:

“My dear boy, I didn’t expect we’d get everything all at once; it wouldn’t be any fun if we did. Why, it’s a regular campaign, and this is the first skirmish.”

“No, it’s defeat, Edith,” he said, more quietly. “I’m afraid it’s defeat.”

“Then tell me,” she answered. “I can bear defeat, Horace.”

He looked into her honest, gallant eyes and blessed her; he blessed her for her courage; and he might have kissed her if he had thought about it. He told her about the boy’s delicacy and the doctor’s orders. She asked him one question:

“If you hadn’t met me, could you have lived with him in the country?”

“Oh, no!” said Horace. “I couldn’t get up to town and back from Mallows for my work—we should have had to be parted.”

They were both silent for a little, then she drew his hand up against her cheek.

“We’ll go down all your holidays to Mallows,” she said. “Every single one, Horace!”

“But don’t you—don’t you mind?” he stammered, puzzled.

Edith turned her eyes on his, still smiling.

“We’ve got to mind,” she murmured; “but may I just see him first?”

“Yes, of course, to-morrow,” said Horace quickly. “I think the whole thing’s rather devilish, you know, Edith. I can’t quite follow it. They never told me before about the little chap, and they seem to have turned him against the very idea of you and all that, you know; and he’s such a loving little fellow really, and he said he wanted to go away and leave me —”

Horace’s voice broke and Edith winced. She looked away from him, and he recovered himself in a moment.

“And Etta has got hold of some wild tale about you,” he went on. “I don’t like to speak to you about it, dear—it’s all a stupid bottomless impertinence—but, of course, I had to tell her I’d ask you.”

“You may ask me anything you like, Horace.”

“Thank you, darling! Do you know I always thought you were awfully sensible, but I never knew how sensible you were before to-night.”

Edith gave a long, low laugh.

“Sensible? I’m so glad you think I’m sensible, Horace!” she murmured.

“Yes, I do,” he said with admiring emphasis. “I think you’re the most sensible woman I ever met.”

Edith stopped laughing.

“And the story, Horace?”

“Well, were you ever on the Lake of Como staying with rather an odd person—ten years ago?” he began. He had released her hands now and sat looking red and foolish and staring in front of him. Edith leaned back in her chair and regarded him with a twinkle in her eye.

“Yes,” she said, “I was. I stayed at Bellagio ten years ago with my aunt and her maid —”

“And that’s all?” he asked, glaring at the carpet.

“No—that’s not all,” said Edith in a low voice. “It’s a long story, and I thought perhaps I wouldn’t tell you; my aunt wanted me to, but it was a very sad story, and it happened so long ago I hoped people had forgotten; although I might have known that people’s memory for the unfortunate lasts as long as their oblivion of the happier star. You have observed to-night that I am a sensible woman, Horace; what is your definition of a sensible woman?”

He hesitated.

“Well, hang it all, I don’t know how to define things, but I suppose I meant a woman who wasn’t foolish—never made a fuss, or scenes, or mistakes, or did—well, stupid things, you know.”

“Then,” said Edith, smiling demurely, “as a girl I think I must have

answered to your description of a foolish woman, Horace. I don't know that I made scenes, but I certainly did what people call foolish things, and I behaved, as my aunt would no doubt tell you, as an idiot; at the time you mention she called me a suicidal idiot!

"To begin with, I must tell you I am very susceptible to beauty. I probably shouldn't have tolerated you nearly as well if it hadn't been for your extremely handsome nose—you needn't blush—it is handsome, and I know it is through no effort of your own that you have acquired this undoubted beauty. When I reached Bellagio I saw there the most beautiful human being I have ever seen in my life (you need not jog your foot, Horace); she was a woman, and she was exquisitely beautiful. If you ask my aunt, she will tell you that a girl as beautiful as that ought to be immured for life behind walls. However, she wasn't immured, she was walking along on the shores of the lake with a loathsome man I hated, and she had a mouth that made your heart ache to look at, with the mere maddening beauty of it! She was very tall, and everything about her was slender that ought to be slender—and every curve that ought to be full was full—and her head was poised like a flower, and her skin was soft as the tenderest little petal of a new bud, and colored like light through a cloud, and her eyes were dark and stormy like a black lake in the mountains—and unutterably sad. I could go on describing her all night, but you've got to go at half-past ten. The absurd part of the whole story is that she was in love with the silly little scrap one might call a man, I suppose, if we had to label him as a specimen, and he—was tired (if you please) of her! Plainly, Helen of Troy, the Venus of Milo—or whatever you choose to consider within a thousand miles of her—no longer suited his convenience!

"At this moment he caught diphtheria, and I sincerely hope he suffered abominably; but, needless to say, he hadn't the decency to die. No one in the hotel was any the wiser. It was too early in the season, and the man had money, so 'Helen of Troy' nursed him in their particular part of the hotel behind a carbolic sheet, and we were told he had *bronchitis*.

"My aunt is one of the most plucky and altogether delightful women I know, but she has a pronounced terror of infectious disease, and if she had guessed what lurked in that distant wing I might never be telling you this story. One morning as I was crossing the hotel lounge I saw the unpromising specimen of manhood in front of the bureau. He had quite recovered and was giving notice for his departure that day. He added that Madame could not accompany him; she had better be removed to the hospital, as he was unable to continue to offer her his protection. I heard him say this in the quick French, which he no doubt calculated could hardly reach the intelligence of an English miss. Then I went over to the bureau and told the manager that I would be

responsible for Madame, and that I would nurse her and undertake her expenses. He seemed very unwilling to accept my offer, and finally under promise of secrecy he told me the nature of the trouble. There was no one in the hotel but ourselves. I told my aunt what I intended to do, and that as bronchitis was occasionally infectious I should not come out of my patient's room for some weeks. (Did I ever tell you that I had worked previously in a London hospital for a year? I meant to be a nurse, but my throat wasn't strong enough, so I never finished my training.) Well, my aunt appealed to my common sense, to my affection for her, and finally to her authority; and then I kissed her and reminded her that she had always told me to consider my life my personal property, and how long Helen of Troy's eyelashes were, and what an ineffable brute the man must have been. She said I was a suicidal idiot, and that I could send her a daily message. But of course I never did, because you might be able to carry that kind of bronchitis in notes.

"Well, the end of the story was that my aunt met the doctor, and whether she had had her suspicions or not before, I don't know, but the doctor couldn't stand against her; she got the truth out of him, left the hotel in a panic, and wired to me to leave instantly, get quarantined somewhere, and then join her.

"I had been by this time a fortnight with Helen of Troy; she was recovering, but she had found out that I wasn't the man, and her heart was broken. I don't expect you know anything about women with broken hearts, Horace, but I think you would agree with me, you can't leave them. So I didn't leave Helen of Troy. We stayed on together long after she had actually recovered. I slept in a room leading out of hers, and I was glad I was a strong woman, because on three occasions she tried to commit suicide, and you need a good deal of muscle to stop a person who wants to commit suicide as much as she did. After her illness was over we used to wander up and down the garden by the lake-side. The season had begun there, and all kinds of people kept turning up. One day some strange men spoke to us in the garden. One of them was a friend of the 'unpromising specimen,' and before we had time to make ourselves perfectly plain to them the hotel gossip scuttled off like a rabbit from almost under our feet to the manager, and he told us the next morning very politely that unfortunately our rooms were wanted.

"We left, of course, and Helen of Troy went back to America (did I tell you she was half-Jewish and half-American?). She had a friend on the stage who had offered her a part. She never told me her real name. I always called her 'Helen,' and though she promised to write to me I have never heard from her since. I expect she thought I might try to trace her.

"That is the whole and entire story of Helen of Troy, and I'm afraid, my dear Horace, that you can no longer consider me the most sensible woman in

the world."

Horace took her hand in his and kissed it.

"I wish I had married you ten years ago," he said gently. Then he remembered Annette. He let her hand drop suddenly, and walked quickly to the window.

"It's half-past ten," said Edith, and then she moved past him and ran hastily upstairs, because she did not wish him to say good-night to her while he was remembering Annette.

Miss Lestrange's comment on the story was characteristic.

"Dear me, Horace!" she said. "What an extraordinary tale! How strange those kind of people are! I suppose it never occurred to either the aunt or the niece to hire a trained nurse for the creature?"

And Horace hung his head, because there are some explanations which the children of light are ashamed to put to the children of this world, who are so much wiser.

V

Miss Lestrange called the next day upon her future sister-in-law. She took a chair with the resigned manner of a woman who will try to be as comfortable as she can, and she talked to Edith with a detached but patient cordiality.

"Bayswater is such a charming part to live in," she began. "I felt as I came away from stuffy little Curzon Street quite as if I were on a picnic or a summer excursion. It must be so nice to live here; I wonder why nobody does?"

Edith smiled pleasantly.

"Oh, 'nobody' does," she replied, pouring out tea; "and it's only the 'somebodies' who don't! You see, Miss Lestrange, you must pay the penalty of greatness."

"Dear me—witty!" thought Miss Lestrange, and she used the word with as much disapproval as if she meant "wild." Aloud she merely murmured something irrelevant about Kensington Gardens. It was one of Miss Lestrange's great social gifts that she could allow an awkward silence to take place without any of the awkwardness adhering to herself. She would sit staring through a tortoiseshell *lorgnette* with an air which plainly said:

"This silence is nothing to me; I can break it whenever I choose—only I don't choose."

Unfortunately, Edith had the tea-things, which did almost as well.

“I think the Lindleys knew your aunt,” said Miss Lestrange at last. “It is so pleasant, is it not, to discover a mutual acquaintance?”

“Very,” said Edith. “It’s almost as exciting as making a new relation. Do you take sugar?”

“One lump, please. I was delighted to hear of my brother’s impending marriage,” continued Miss Lestrange; “delighted. Of course, I had been expecting it for some time. I have but little faith in inveterate bachelors, and none at all in inveterate widowers. Besides, a sensible marriage for a man of my brother’s age is very desirable. He settles down, the phase of romance is over, and the phase of domesticity sets in; and, of course, it is always a relief when one knows for certain that one’s brother won’t marry a barmaid.”

“I can’t fancy Horace marrying a barmaid at any time,” said Edith, smiling.

“When you are my age, my dear, you will no doubt live to see, as I have seen, all the things you cannot imagine taking place,” said Miss Lestrange, putting down her tea, which she had not finished, as if she did not like it.

There had been things in their conversation which had not pleased her, but this last hit had told (if you go on hitting long enough, some hit generally does). She had expected to find Miss Walton good-looking and good-humored; she had not expected to find her unembarrassed and well-armed. However, Miss Lestrange always dealt with the unexpected as if it was perfectly ordinary, so that no one ever discovered her mistakes.

“I believe you are to be introduced shortly to your step-son!” Miss Lestrange began reflectively. “I hope you will take to the poor child.”

“I always love children,” said Edith gently.

“Ah!” said Miss Lestrange, “that is a refreshing change from the modern note. Annette’s child, however—I refer to my brother’s former wife—is peculiar. Annette was highly sensitive, like a spring blossom, and her son takes after her. I shall be delighted to help you in any way I can upon the subject.”

Edith said:

“He is coming at five o’clock; I hope very much he won’t dislike me.”

“My dear, why should he?” said Miss Lestrange, rising to her feet and holding out her hand. “He is not old enough to remember his mother, fortunately—I mean, of course, there will be no soreness of comparison as there might be with an older child. We will meet again soon, shall we not? Good-bye.”

Edith suddenly found that she could say nothing more; a slow paralysis of icy cold seemed to be numbing her limbs and brain. She could find no more words; this woman—pleasant, courteous, heartless—seemed to have pelted her

to death with innumerable hailstones. She stood breathless and quivering in the doorway, and there Lady Walton found her.

"My dear!" she said quickly. "What is the matter?"

Edith began to laugh.

"Horace's sister is a very clever woman, auntie," she said. "Now, if I were a man I would swear loud and long, and then go and take a sherry cobbler or a gin sling, or whatever is the strongest American drink, to give me fresh courage to meet my small step-son, for I believe she came just now simply to unnerve me for the ordeal, for I have a feeling as if there were worse to follow. She spoke of Horace throughout as 'my brother,' in a tone which gave me fully to understand that he would always be far more extensively her brother than my husband."

Lady Walton looked at her carefully.

"Go and take a cup of tea," she said; "your nerves are shaken, but depend upon it, child, you didn't collapse when she was there. I should have received her with you, only I did not like her to think that you needed to call up your reserves. Let us hope the men of the family are less alpine. I shall be out till dinner."

Lady Walton kissed her niece; she was very fond of her, rather sorry for her, and extremely proud of her. On the whole she considered Edith over-sensitive; she would have dearly enjoyed a tussle with Miss Lestrange herself, but Edith was too tender-hearted for prolonged warfare. She could take the defensive, but she couldn't hit back. Lady Walton knew this, and it annoyed her; in her heart of hearts she was rather cruel, and she despised people who could not be a little cruel too. Still, Edith was undeniably plucky, so she patted her cheek and went out cheerfully for a drive.

Half an hour later, with eager palpitating heart Edith gazed out of the window at a pair of figures coming up the steps. Horace was leading a small curly-headed boy, to whom he was talking nervously in that tone of eager and would-be cheerfulness in which parents seek to ingratiate themselves in order to overcome the inflexible judgment of a child. Leslie said nothing; he was using enormous self-control, but it did not reach to speech. That morning his beloved tutor had been spirited away—a whim of this new invisible monster. Who knew how soon his Aunt Etta, or even his father himself, would follow, and he (Leslie) would be left without protection or assistance, face to face with the unendurable? His father's words fell upon his ears like the well-meaning patter of a nursery rhyme. Talking made no difference; it could not cover up the fact that they were going to see Her, and that she lived—this crushing monster of iniquity—in this very house whose stiff and odious steps they were

now climbing. There were flower-boxes in the windows full of pink geraniums. Leslie was very fond of flower-boxes. He was an imaginative little boy, and he said fiercely to himself:

"They are not really flower-boxes, they are pretend boxes, put there like wicked witches pretend to put things in fairy tales to take you in."

Horace cleared his throat.

"You will try to be nice to her, won't you, my boy, for your old father's sake?" he asked as he rang the bell. This was a mistake; he should have let Leslie ring the bell. Aunt Etta always did. Leslie said so in a tone of ruffled uneasiness. His father apologized but repeated his question.

"Oh, yes, I shall be polite!" said Leslie. "Aunt Etta said Lestranges are always polite."

"Well, I hope you'll be kind too," said his father. Leslie said nothing; he had not been told that Lestranges are always kind—besides, he was examining the carpet. It was nice and thick, and he thought there were birds on it, but they were not going slowly enough to make sure. A door opened, and in a bower of late spring flowers stood a woman—a tall, dark woman with lips that laughed and eyes that swam in tears, and outstretched hands and a low, sweet voice like music—saying his name very quickly and paying no attention to his father at all.

Leslie stopped perfectly still and looked at her. There was no doubt about it, she was worse than a witch—she was an enchantress! He knew no spell to change her back into a snake or a pig. He could only stand and look at her with grave and disapproving eyes, and then hold out his little slender hand with the stately politeness of a well-mannered child—the severest rebuke in Nature.

"How do you do?" he said gravely; then he looked round for his father. His father was gone. For a moment he had a wild thought of darting after him, of screaming for help and flying down those soft, broad covered passages. Horror shook his quivering nerves, but pride restrained him. His father had deserted him. Perhaps she had the power to make his father invisible. At any rate, she should not make a Lestrange a coward, so he sat down politely and looked at her.

"I hope you will like these little cakes I have got for your tea," said Edith, and her hand shook a little. "They are all in the shape of fishes. I have a very nice cook, and she made them for me, and we put eyes in—and everything."

"It was very kind of you," said Leslie, "but I would rather not eat them."

"But you will have some tea, won't you?" she pleaded; "and all these buns have got hundreds and thousands on them, and they are buttered."

There was no doubt about it, she knew how to put things, this enchantress; the hundreds and thousands were a distinct point.

“Thank you, I had my tea before I came,” said Leslie. “I won’t take anything to eat—at least I’d rather not.”

“Oh, I don’t want you to do anything you’d rather not!” cried Edith quickly. “I want you to be happy; don’t you think—don’t you think, Leslie, we might be friends?”

Leslie eyed her fixedly. She had not laughed at him, nor asked how old he was, nor offered to kiss him; she had done nothing really wrong, and there was something quite friendly and shining in her eyes—probably magic—but certainly shining.

“I don’t think it’s possible,” said Leslie slowly. Then he added politely:

“Shall we talk of something else?”

Edith went to the window. Her eyes did not shine so much when she came back—perhaps his courage and self-command were overcoming the magic. It seemed like it, for her voice was not so gay. To begin with, it had sounded very gay, as if she would like to dance and play games. This was probably what she had done with father. She had bewitched him completely. Mr. Flinders had said so.

“Your father told me, Leslie,” said Edith when she returned from the window, “that you were very fond of soldiers. I, too, am very fond of soldiers, so I thought perhaps you would like to see some I bought this morning—they are two cavalry regiments; both the generals have cocked hats and swords.”

“Are there guns?” asked Leslie with forgetful rapture.

“Yes, there are guns and gun-carriages. Shall I clear this table? There, you know how to fasten them on perhaps! Will you show me how?”

Leslie regained his knowledge of the situation.

“They are very easy to put on,” he said. “You run them along like this. Are they imitation, or can they go off?”

“They can go off with peas,” said Edith kindly.

Leslie’s face flushed—real guns that could go off with peas were excellent and sane amusements even for an enchantress. By-and-by he forgot her profession, and began to order her about. They played contentedly for an hour, then the clock struck six. Leslie counted it. “Shortly after six, my poor dear boy, they will let you come home,” his Aunt Etta had said. He put down the general and pushed the table away; his lips quivered.

“You’re—you’re almost nice,” he said. “I wonder you can break up a home.”

“Oh, my dear, my dear!” cried Edith, but she did not offer to touch him; she only turned shining and appealing eyes to him. Her eyes were too much; they should not have been so kind when she was so wicked.

“I shall never see the soldiers again,” he said mournfully.

“But, Leslie, they are yours; I bought them for you,” she pleaded “Indeed, indeed, I bought them for you this morning.”

“Lestranges don’t take bribes,” said Leslie coldly; still he looked at the general and the best gun—it was a very good gun.

“But it isn’t a bribe,” explained the enchantress. “Won’t you even take the general and the gun —”

Leslie’s chest heaved. He looked across the table at her.

“Will you give up my father?” he asked. “If you’ll give him up I’ll take—I’ll take both the general and the gun.”

“Oh, but, Leslie, I couldn’t—he’d be so unhappy —”

“No, he wouldn’t,” said Leslie firmly. “He’d get used to it in time; there are lots of things he has—me and Aunt Etta, and a new cuckoo clock I gave him for his last birthday. Oh, give him up—give him up—!”

The tears came suddenly now; all the controlled terrors, the pent-up agony, the puzzled situation, the fearful prospects, rushed to the top of the child’s mind: it was like the over-filling of a cup. He flung himself face downwards on the sofa, dragging the tablecloth after him and covering the carpet with defeated soldiers. Edith knelt beside him trying to soothe and comfort him, but his little clenched hands pushed her away. The general with his cocked hat and the best gun lay on her lap, and bitter tears fell on them—bitter, unavailing tears; and so Horace found them shortly after six.

He carried his sobbing little boy away, and Edith sat and wept over the soldiers alone and uncomforted.

“I wonder how she can have managed to upset him so,” said Etta; “but I thought this afternoon that she hardly looked as if she could manage a delicate highly-strung child. She has sent him into a really dangerous fit of crying.”

As for Horace, he went to his study and smoked a strong cigar. He was puzzled and disappointed. Edith had been so certain she could win the little chap over, and the boy hadn’t cried while he was there. Edith must have done something stupid; she had been upset enough herself, poor girl; but he did not go back and comfort her—she must have done something stupid.

VI

"It all depends upon what you mean by a successful marriage," Lady Walton remarked earlier in the day. "You have now, my dear Edith, been married ten years; you look ten years younger than you are; your husband spends all his evenings at home, and you have an excellent staff of servants. I really do not see what more you can ask!"

"I don't suppose we often see why other people should ask more than they have," Edith replied. "Other people ought to be satisfied, and yet other people aren't."

"I don't wish to talk metaphysics," said Lady Walton; "it reminds me of the time when I fell downstairs on the back of my head and had concussion of the brain. I suppose you mean you haven't any children? Neither had I, and I have never regretted it."

Lady Walton was one of those people who always thought that what she did not object to was not objectionable; she felt this very strongly.

"My own faults, which I can excuse quite easily and always see reasons for," she went on after a pause, "would annoy me excessively in a younger generation—even my virtues would seem weak and tame imitation in some pudding-faced young girl. I should have known better what to do with a boy who would have been certain to die if he had been satisfactory, and equally certain to live if he was not. No, my dear Edith, let us be thankful we have both been spared a tiresome and difficult vocation. An unhappy marriage is often made bearable by such additions, but a really happy marriage can dispense with them."

"Oh, a really happy marriage!" Edith had murmured.

"My dear," her aunt had replied briskly, "you are one of those unfortunate people who ask too much, and do not take steps to get it. You should do one or the other. What your husband needs is something to shake him. It is a pity you are not a delicate woman; you might try nerves. I suppose you are too high and mighty to stoop to flirtation."

"I should do it so badly," said Edith, laughing, "and besides I'm forty."

"You have such a tiresome habit of remembering your own age," her aunt replied; "it even makes me remember mine. I will take a nap."

Edith had left her and gone home. It was something, she reflected, to have a home, and—every one would have agreed—such a comfortable home.

She had had a difficult life these past ten years; she had not only to make her husband happy which had been her unswerving purpose from the first, but she had had to watch her failure, and accept the lower level of opportunity allowed to her—and make him contented; she had, at least, done this.

Miss Lestrange had taken Leslie slowly and vaguely away; there was still a talk of his return home—there would always be a talk of it. Meanwhile the boy, his aunt, and an excellent tutor (almost as amenable as Mr. Flinders) divided their time between Mallows and Brighton. The boy had been definitely delicate; a determined effort to send him to Harrow failed, and he was taken away once more by his aunt and tutor. Oxford remained; he was now quite strong enough for Oxford. Still Miss Lestrange held him back; she could not follow him to Oxford.

From time to time he visited his father. The tie between them had never ceased to be strong; but for Edith there had never been a second chance. The boy was beautiful as his mother had been, and suspicious with all the hard, cramping suspicion of a weak nature. Edith's unvarying sweetness and companionableness roused a sharp antagonism in him; she was "trying to get round him," as his aunt had said. He fought Edith because he could so easily have loved her; he pushed her away from him because he wanted to confide in her. He treated her with a studied polite insolence which made her dumb before him.

Horace Lestrange looked from one to the other wistfully; something was wrong. Etta said it was Edith's fault, and Edith said nothing, and the boy said nothing; so it ended in Horace saying nothing too. He merely went down by himself for week-ends to Mallows, and felt that his marriage had been, not a failure exactly, but not very definitely a success.

He had indeed frequently felt tenderness for his wife, and he always felt friendship. She was his most delightful fireside and holiday companion; they read the same books, laughed at the same things; but they hardly lived the same life. He missed his boy with a kind of dull ache that would have been difficult to fathom; and if it wasn't Edith's fault—well—it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for her. Edith stood with her hand on the mantelpiece gazing into the study fire; on one side of it sat her husband, glancing through the evening paper; and, on the other, the boy on one of his occasional visits (lately they had been much more frequent) to his London home. He was half-smoking cigarette after cigarette, and as Edith turned her attention to him she was struck afresh by the expression in his eyes. It was the tyrannical selfish face of a pleasure-seeker. She compared it, with a sharp pang of disappointment, to the controlled, honest manliness of her husband's expression. Couldn't they have made his boy more like him—have put something better than hungry discontent into Leslie's beautiful eyes?

"I'm going out," said the boy suddenly.

His father looked up from his paper with evident disappointment.

“I thought Esdaile was coming in for bridge?” he said quickly.

“I think, if you will excuse me, I’ll go out,” his son repeated, with a politeness which did not conceal his evident intention.

His father eyed him curiously for a moment, then he said:

“Musical comedy?”

The boy flushed scarlet.

“Do you wish to know where I am going, sir?” he asked with angry irony.

Edith interposed quickly.

“If you are going, Leslie,” she said, “would you mind telephoning for me, to Esdaile, not to come? It’s no use his coming if we aren’t going to play bridge.”

Leslie never willingly looked at Edith; he did not do so now. He merely raised his eyebrows, because he was annoyed at being asked to do anything for anybody else, and replied:

“Most certainly, if you wish it.”

His father returned to the newspaper; the boy stalked in a turmoil of offence and pricked conscience out of the room. If you want to be very angry, people who attempt to meet you with patience and kindness are mere fuel for the flame. Leslie had broken up a bridge four; he was going to do something wrong; and nobody told him not to, or attempted to interfere with him in any way. It was all extremely tiresome.

The two left together exchanged a long look of sympathy and understanding.

“He’s very young,” said Edith softly. “That’s all, Horace—only very young.”

“He’s confoundedly cool,” said his father gloomily, “spoiling a bridge four like that, and got up specially because he said he wanted it! It’s so deuced difficult to know what the fellow does want nowadays.”

“What made him blush like that, Horace, when you said ‘musical comedy’?” said his wife, sitting opposite him, and holding up a fire-screen between her face and the fire.

“Oh, it’s some nonsense Etta’s been writing me; she thinks he comes up here to meet a woman. No doubt he’s got some queer boy adoration in his head, but it can’t be anything serious at his age.”

“Is it a—what kind of a woman?” asked his wife.

“Oh, some wonderful American beauty, old enough to be his mother—the star of some touring company. It seems she has turned the heads of all the

London youths together. I told Etta she'd far better leave the matter alone. It isn't as if the boy's prospects were dazzling; he'll have plenty, of course, in time, but he's got nothing now but his mother's money, and this person isn't likely to marry him for five hundred a year. In three years' time, well—he'll have forgotten her name."

"But—but her influence mightn't be good?" Edith persisted.

"I don't know," said Horace reflectively. "Some of her type are quite unscrupulous, no doubt, but not all of them. Anyhow, I did do something; I sent her a note, just giving the facts of the boy's expectations quite plainly, and asking her what she meant to do about it. I might have called to see her—Etta wanted me to—but I didn't see the good. Musical comedy ladies are not in my line."

"And you didn't tell me, Horace?"

Edith lifted the fire-screen a little; he could not see her face; in her voice there was a touch of reproach, not more—the friendly reproach of a comrade who has been left out of a consultation.

"No. I don't know why I told you now, but it seemed natural somehow when you asked."

"I am glad it seemed natural," said Edith quietly.

In most married lives there is one who understands, and one who is content to be understood. Edith read her husband's mind as if it were a well-known book. She knew his motives, his honest scruples, his studious chivalry, his quiet reticence. She knew when he suffered because the marks of it were on her own heart; she knew when he was contented, puzzled, worried, or pleased; and he knew nothing whatever about her, except that she was always sweet to him, and only occasionally (as we are told all women are) unreasonable. That he was sitting opposite a woman now whose heart was very nearly broken, who had fed in secret on sharp misery and long, ineffectual pain, had never even dimly touched his imagination.

Lady Walton had supposed that Edith might have a difficult time, but that the quiet routine of married life would soon stifle the unnatural hunger of her heart. Nothing had been stifled except expression. Edith had thrust her own pain out of sight with strong hands; she had shut love and anguish out of her eyes—she had schooled her lips not to quiver and held her voice steady against the invasions of emotion; she had taken stones for bread, and received them with pleased acquiescence, as if, after all, her preference had always been for stones.

But when it came to Horace's pain, to the unstilled longing of his heart, which she could have stilled; to the silent, patient endurance, which she could

have stirred into something resembling passionate joy; then her life rose up against her, and the bitter waters of intense and heavy anguish passed over her soul. Ah, the sickening pressure of those hours! While he lay beside her sleeping quietly, she clenched her hands, and quivered with the sobs she dared not free. And then with haggard eyes she watched the slow day dawn over London, the day which would be—as all other days to her—the resetting of her life to sober pain. He thought her a sensible, level-headed, unemotional woman, and she was a creature born of flame and tears!

The hand that held the fire-screen shook a little.

"You mustn't let yourself worry about it," said Horace kindly, "or I shall be sorry I've told you. Honestly, I don't think it will become a serious matter. There's the evening post. I rather imagine that extremely fancy envelope may be from the lady herself. My correspondents are usually less stimulating in their notepaper."

He read it, frowned in a puzzled way, and tossed it over to Edith. It ran:

> MY DEAR SIR,—Thank you for your simple, explicit statement of the case. You gave me a great deal of amusement, and no pain. I wish your son had copied your style. I daresay he has told you that he meant to marry me; but though an imaginative child, I don't suppose he can ever have said to you that I meant to marry him. I don't make promises, and unless any unforeseen circumstance should arise, I am not likely to undertake the experiment. As to my moral influence (which I notice you have done me the honor not to mention), I have always made it my invariable rule to leave boys alone. I laugh at them, but I do not hurt them.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> ANASTASIA FALAISE.

"Well, what do you make of that, my dear?" said Horace Lestrange, feeling after his matches. "Seems to let us out, doesn't it?"

Edith let the paper fall into her lap and looked into the fire.

"Poor woman!" she said very gently. "Do you know, Horace, she reminds me just a little of Helen of Troy. Helen used to talk like that, as if the soul had been eaten out of her words. I think a woman must be very unhappy to write like that."

"It is time you went to bed, Edith; you look tired," said her husband. "Just throw that letter on the fire, will you?"

She threw the letter on to the fire and watched it burn.

"Poor woman!" she whispered to herself again. "Poor woman!"

Horace got up and opened the door for her. He was very much relieved, but he felt a pang of compunction at the same time. He had been a fool to tell Edith; it seemed to upset her; the facts of life—love's tragedies—ought to be kept from good women. Then he went back to his paper.

VII

Like many people who believe in an over-ruling Providence, Miss Lestrange never left anything to it. On the contrary, when her plans succeeded, she remarked triumphantly that it was the will of heaven; and when they failed, she said nothing about it, and tried again. It is usually supposed that plans which play the part of Providence fail very easily, but this is not really so; it is only the result of the plan that fails—carefully combined arrangements made with due knowledge of the forces of life seldom fail. What fails is what we expected to win from such combinations. You plant, water, and gain your increase, and what you thought were the golden apples of the Hesperides taste like dust.

This is what happened to Miss Lestrange. She gave a whole-hearted devotion to Leslie; she kept him away from what she honestly believed to be adverse influences; she cared for the delicate little boy until he became as strong as the average youth; she made her home his home; people always referred to him as "your dear boy."

This was the palace of her dreams, but the monarch had abdicated, and the palace without its King is a Court in mourning.

Leslie was vaguely dissatisfied; he had worshiped his Aunt Etta with an ignorant devotion all his life; he had given her the love of a child and the warm-hearted loyalty of a boy. Now he was grown up. He was nineteen, and he would probably never be quite as old again—in any case, he would never feel such unbroken confidence in his own judgment—and what did his aunt appear? A small, faded, old-fashioned woman, who said "No" to his wishes.

There is a time in every boy's life when he looks very narrowly at his own parents; very often they are the barriers at the gates of his imaginary Paradise, and he regards them as barriers; but if there is solid stuff in the youth, the tie is strong enough to hold. His parents are, of course, wrong, their opinions are worthless, their ideas are effete and purely mirth-inspiring. But they are his parents. They are people who love him with a strange love; they are ignorant people, but he forgives them, and one day discovers that he himself belongs to this inferior branch of humanity, and is giving his life up for his sons, who

regard him in his turn with affectionate depreciation.

Leslie loved his father with a deep natural love, which time turned into an irritated need. He had come to the conclusion that women were all very well, but that feminine relations were a jealous bore, and that—you must see life.

So he saw life. Saw it immaturely and unwisely—or rather he may have been said not to see it, but with the rush of youth's music in his ears he ran blindfold, and Life mocked him to her heart's content, and gave him pebbles for diamonds and dross for gold, till she blunted alike his discrimination and his growth.

Miss Lestrange stood by watching him with incompetent agony. She had seen these things happen before to other people's boys, and she had always known why. The mothers were silly, the boys were unlicked cubs—they had been spoilt from the first. Now she was not quite so sure. Perhaps such things happened just out of misfortune, unhappiness, blunders that must come, accidents of the type which are said to haunt families who live according to the best regulations.

Lines came into Miss Lestrange's placid face, she lost sleep, appetite, and repose. She woke with vague terrors, she was haunted by impotent fears. There was nothing to be done, and she hadn't the strength to do nothing. Finally, the whole story focused on one notorious lady of musical comedy. The youth of London gave her desperate homage and adoration; she was old enough to be their mother; but they did not keep these gifts for their mothers, they gave them to Anastasia Falaise, and she accepted them with easy laughter.

Miss Lestrange wrote to her brother, and her brother replied heartlessly that it was "all right."

Leslie went on worshipping at this popular shrine; he was continually absent from Mallows; if he was present he was silent when he wasn't irritable. He never mentioned the lady's name, but he wrote to her every day; she wrote to him sometimes, and vague ideas, resisted by common sense, prompted Miss Lestrange to tamper with their correspondence. This correspondence flourished even more conspicuously after the ineffective efforts of Leslie's father. It was evident to Miss Lestrange that there was no help to be met in that quarter, so she attacked the citadel itself. With nervous incoherence she implored Leslie to come abroad, to give up this absurd infatuation. Leslie raised youth's deadly standard of silence. He blocked her utterance with a gloomy stare.

Finally, he observed that he did not know what she meant, and left the room. Young men and even old ones are to be congratulated on this gift of absence; it is a very effective weapon. Leslie did not return for some time; when he did, Miss Lestrange said nothing further on the subject, for she had

stayed in the room.

Finally, goaded to desperation, she committed an unprecedented error. She may, indeed, have been described as completely losing her head. She went to call one day by appointment on Anastasia Falaise.

Anastasia was staying in a famous London hotel. She had a charming sitting-room; it was littered with presentations, and she sat shaded by pink blinds with easy indolence in a large armchair.

Miss Lestrange's first impression may be given as it flashed into her mind, "No woman of that type has any right to be so beautiful." Anastasia showed neither youth nor years in her face; she might as easily have been thirty as fifty; she had no lines about her eyes and mouth or marring her low Greek forehead. Her wide-set dark eyes looked like some perennial mysterious spring of life. Her face and neck and hands were the color of warm ivory; her black hair was natural, but as nobody believed it, she would sometimes—to confirm it—let coil after coil fall to her knees. She had beauty as some men have genius, and she used it with more shrewdness and common sense than this other gift is often used. She had no particular wish to please Miss Lestrange, so she simply stared at her.

Miss Lestrange was vaguely uncomfortable; she felt that she was with an extraordinary person, and that she had lowered herself to the same level by doing an extraordinary thing. This was the kind of woman she knew how to snub; she did not know how to appeal to her.

"I think you know my nephew, Leslie Lestrange," she began, blushing a little at her companion's insolent, inanimate beauty.

"There are half-a-dozen photographs of him, and the contents of several jewelers' shops, I should fancy, just behind you," observed Anastasia. "Have you come to retrieve them? I told him that unless his people were whole-sale jewelers he had better try a less expensive amusement."

"His family is one of the oldest in England," said Miss Lestrange impressively.

"Well, he's young enough," observed the imperturbable beauty. She had a slight American intonation which Miss Lestrange found strangely aggravating; it annoyed her almost beyond the power of speech.

"I have always taken the greatest interest in my nephew's concerns," she continued. "I have brought him up from his babyhood. I stand to him in the place of his parents."

"And yet I had a very sensible letter from his father the other day," interrupted Anastasia, and she laughed a low velvety laugh of pure pleasure (which Miss Lestrange promptly mistook for vulgar impertinence). "I think it

is the most sensible letter I ever had, and I answered it. I guess he hasn't sent you here, has he?"

"My brother married regrettably a second time," said Miss Lestrange coldly, "a woman of no family connections, singularly unsuited to bring up a delicate and sensitive child; even her husband has never pressed the point."

"You don't say," observed Anastasia, narrowly regarding her exquisite fingers. "Poor disconnected lady, I feel quite sorry for her!"

"On the contrary," replied Miss Lestrange, "she has, I think, been very fortunate; a marriage of that kind for a girl in Edith Walton's position, and at her age—she was thirty at the time—does not happen every day over here."

Anastasia suddenly woke up for the first time; she opened her great eyes wide and looked at Miss Lestrange. It was a look so vital, so amazingly keen, staring out of the soft, mysterious, velvety dullness, that Miss Lestrange jumped.

Then Anastasia sank back into her usual attitude of inspired indolence.

"What did you say her name was?" she asked languidly. "Haddlestone? I knew some people called that once—way out West."

"No, Walton," repeated Miss Lestrange distinctly; "but it really hardly matters what her name is, I think, to the subject under discussion."

"Were you discussing anything?" Anastasia asked calmly. "I wasn't. I am merely wasting my time. However, I won't waste any more of it. What do you want?" and her voice suddenly turned brisk and business-like.

"I want you," said Miss Lestrange with a sudden quiver of pathetic middle-aged passion, "to let my boy go. You are a beautiful woman; what does one boy more or less matter to you—a practically penniless boy, too? Send him about his business, like a—like a kind-hearted woman."

"How do you know I am a kind-hearted woman?" Anastasia asked curiously.

"Because," said Miss Lestrange, rising to her feet, "you have all the advantages on your side; you can easily afford to be."

"Well, I do call that cute!" drawled Anastasia. "That's the best thing you've said yet, only it's not true. However, we needn't go into that. Now, Miss Lestrange, you've made a great mistake; if you had left the matter in your brother's hands you'd never have heard of it again—that is to say, you wouldn't seriously have heard of it. But, somehow or other, you've put an idea into my head; well, that was a mistake. I have very few ideas, and I always act upon them. I'm going to act right now; but I don't want an audience—so, good-by!"

Anastasia rose too. She was head and shoulders above her companion, and Miss Lestrange drew a long breath at the sight of her majestic swaying figure. This was a woman to wreck kingdoms, and why should she bother her head about a boy—a boy like Leslie, whose connections she didn't even know, whose disabilities she must, of course, see? It was all very odd. The two women looked at each other for a moment.

"I can't understand you," said Miss Lestrange at last, a little helplessly, "and I don't see that I can offer you anything you want in exchange for what I ask."

"You can't," said Anastasia; "nobody can offer me what I want except chocolates. Fortunately, I'm still very fond of chocolates. Well, good-by, Miss Lestrange; I'm sorry I can't oblige you, but I've got to be amused, and I am going to amuse myself with your nephew."

"Oh, amuse yourself as much as you like," murmured Miss Lestrange, holding out her hand in farewell, "but don't marry him!"

"I guess you're going to be disappointed," observed Anastasia, as her companion, reaching the door, turned to look back at her. "I guess you're going to feel disconnected, too!"

Miss Lestrange didn't know what her hostess meant, but she had said all she had to say and done all she could do. There was nothing more to act upon, and she knew that she had failed.

Suddenly Miss Lestrange felt old and helpless; something that had always accompanied her—a sense of the inherent dignity and interest of her position—which made her observe the world blandly, as one who has a right to a front seat on a grand-stand—left her. She felt as if she was, after all, only one of the crowd, liable to be pushed and jogged by elbows, even liable to be thrust permanently aside. She stood quite still in the finely upholstered lounge of the big hotel, and a waiter came up and asked her if he could bring her anything.

"Yes," said Miss Lestrange, sitting down at one of the many little tables scattered about. "You may bring me a cup of tea. Perhaps," she said to herself, "that was what I wanted. I have missed my tea."

VIII

Edith hardly turned her head to say "Come in!" to the timid knock at her door. She was sitting at her desk, doing accounts, and puzzled as usual by her immaculate predecessor's example—an example which, "as the most sensible of women," she tried hard to follow, but she was frequently overcome by the invincible malice of pounds, shillings, and pence.

The pause, however, that followed arrested her attention, and she turned to meet the eyes of her step-son with a thrill of astonishment. He had never before voluntarily entered her private boudoir, and there was an air about his whole person which betokened the unusual, though he suppressed what he could only consider a weakness as well as he could.

Edith saw in a moment that she must suppress it too. “I’m so glad you have come,” she said; “now you can do this horrid sum for me. I am trying to balance my accounts, and though I can see quite plainly what I’ve spent and what I had to spend, they obstinately refuse to have anything to do with each other.”

Leslie looked over her shoulder; he was pleased to point out her mistake—it was a very obvious one—and it at once put him at his ease. He felt there could be nothing very formidable in a woman who could make such a silly mistake in quite a simple sum.

He sat down beside her, smiling and looking so utterly unlike the glum, discontented youth she was accustomed to see that Edith could barely conceal her astonishment.

“I’ve got an awful lot to say to you,” he volunteered at last. “What a jolly little room you have here—just the kind of things I like!”

“Well, you must come and like them a little oftener,” said his step-mother with a friendly smile.

He glanced at her uneasily.

“I expect I must seem an awful ass to you,” he remarked with sudden candor.

Edith shook her head.

“Dear no,” she said, “nor am I a very terrible person either, when you come to know me!”

“Oh, you,” said the boy, flushing scarlet—“you’re ripping! I can’t think why I’ve never noticed it before.”

Edith concealed a smile at this belated tribute; she wondered what he was going to notice next.

“Would you mind,” he began anxiously—“are you quite sure you wouldn’t mind, if I came here regularly—in between terms at Oxford, I mean—instead of going to Mallows?”

Edith gasped. Then she said very gently and gravely:

“My dear Leslie, this is your home.”

He got up and walked about; she hadn’t used her advantage over him; she

hadn't even made him look a fool. He was almost willing to acknowledge that he was one.

"I think I'd like to tell you all about it," he began, "if you're sure I sha'n't bore you?"

"No, you won't bore me," said his companion.

"I daresay you know—I daresay you may have heard some talk about—about Anastasia Falaise? Of course, you don't know what she's like; people talk such confounded rot about her, especially women. You should hear Aunt Etta. They say she's old; of course, it's all jealousy. She may be twenty-five—that's older than me, of course—I'm not quite twenty," (his nineteenth birthday had taken place a week previously), "but then what's five years?"

His step-mother was not prepared to say off-hand what five years were; they might be such different things; so she looked at the boy sympathetically and shook her head.

"People talk such beastly stuff about age," the youth continued fiercely, "and not knowing your own mind; why, of course, I know she's perfect. Why, Edith—Cleopatra, and Mary Queen of Scots, and Helen of Troy—they couldn't have been anything to Anastasia—she's—she's—well, the poets are all really idiots; none of them describe her decently!"

Edith looked as if she quite believed this; in her heart of hearts she thought that the poets had under-estimated Horace, but that was very probably because they were, generally speaking, men.

"Do you know, I can't believe in my luck, Edith—I can't really; she might have married princes, and she's fond of me," cried the boy.

Edith's eyes filled with sudden tears. The boy was very beautiful, young, exquisitely shaped, with light curls and bright brown eyes, and for the first time she was seeing his face alive and eager with the joy of life!

"I can quite believe it, Leslie," she said gently.

"And she's promised to marry me," he exclaimed exultantly, "in three years' time."

His step-mother jumped. This was not what she had been prepared to hear. It came with a sudden shock. Horace had said the woman was old enough to be the boy's mother, and Horace was certain to be right.

"Oh, Leslie!" she murmured, holding out her hands, vaguely troubled and distressed. "Oh, Leslie!"

"Oh, it's all right," said the boy, rising, "you'll like her, I know; and, fancy, Aunt Etta—well—I can hardly believe it; she tried to come between us, and actually went and asked Anastasia to give me up. All my life she's tried to

keep me away from dad and you—and now—now Anastasia! I can't forgive her," said Leslie, "and I shouldn't think you would."

He took one of Edith's hands and kissed it.

"Oh, my dear boy," she whispered, "you don't know, you don't understand how she loved you! You see you did make a mistake, didn't you? Just a little one that didn't matter really about me; don't make another which may matter terribly about your Aunt Etta. Ah, Leslie, she's given up her life for you—she meant it all for the best. You see she—she loves you. Try to forgive her!"

"I'd have forgiven her if she'd told me," said the boy, "but she did it on the sly. Father did it, too—he wrote some stupid letter; but then he told me he was going to—he didn't deceive me."

The boy choked suddenly.

"Do you know," he said, "I sometimes think you and dad have been most awfully kind to me."

Edith's quivering lips smiled, and her eyes shone as they had done ten years ago through happy tears as she stood to welcome Horace's little son.

"Oh, Leslie, Leslie!" she murmured.

He was not a demonstrative young man, so he kicked at a footstool, and gave rather a foolish laugh.

"Well, it'll all be different now," he said. "Anastasia is most awfully keen on my being nice to you and dad. She slanged me fearfully for not living at home—pitched into me right and left."

"Did she?" said Edith thoughtfully. "I wonder why?"

"Oh, she's so awfully clever and generous, you know." The boy went on: "She said she was sure I'd been misunderstanding you all along, and that the least I could do was to make it up to you now."

Edith suddenly rose to her feet, then she sat down again, but her hands trembled, and there was a look of surprise in her eyes.

"Have you," she asked, "a picture of her to show me, Leslie?"

The boy laughed shamefacedly.

"I have her miniature," he said; he drew out a little velvet case and tossed it with a pretence of indifference into Edith's lap. She held it for a moment as if she dreaded what might meet her eye, and then, opening it quickly, she gazed at the exquisite familiar face.

"Oh, Leslie," she cried, "it *is* Helen of Troy!"

The boy was delighted.

"Well, she's the most beautiful woman in the world to me," he said. "I'm

glad you like it!”

His step-mother sat staring as if spellbound at the little velvet case; the boy took it from her unresisting hands.

“If you feel like this about her, Edith,” he said, “will you say something to my father for me—something, I mean, about her being everything she ought to be, you know, and it not mattering her being a little older than me—and really twenty-five is not very old, is it?”

“I am forty,” said Edith irrelevantly.

Leslie looked up compassionately.

“Well,” he said reassuringly, “you aren’t really old yet, you know, Edith.”

“No, I’m not really old yet,” agreed his step-mother.

Helen of Troy was forty-two.

A long silence followed. The boy began to fidget: he thought he would go and choose some flowers for Anastasia. He looked hesitatingly at Edith.

“Promise you’ll do your best for me?” he asked, leaning over her.

Edith raised her eves to his; they were strangely sad and tender.

“Yes, Leslie,” she said. “I promise you that I will do my best for you.”

He kissed her and went out of the room.

IX

Anastasia was dressed to go out in the Park. It was an exquisite day of early spring. Winter had lingered longer than usual and the green world had been for some time pining and cheerless, an unfilled canvas waiting for its artist—the sun. The park was a shimmering sea of verdant new-born foliage and young spring flowers. Crocuses and daffodils and hyacinths made summer in the midst of London.

Everybody who was anybody wandered or drove or motored in its precincts, or sat on the green chairs under the trees and looked at each other's clothes, and speculated why So-and-so was—or was not—with somebody else; and somehow or other spring struck a note of freshness into even the stalest speculations, and did its best to prick the heart towards beauty and delight.

Anastasia was dressed to join the distinguished throng. It was her world, and she knew that she would be followed by whispers, criticisms, and speculation, even as she would be joined by groups of privileged young men, very good-looking, well-dressed, ardent, and most terribly silly—and she knew that none of this would amuse her very much, and yet that if it failed her, and when it failed her, there would be nothing else. She was dressed in white and orange, and as she looked at the superb curves of her figure, at the classical white face and wide dark eyes, at the huge coils of her magnificent black hair, she smiled a little. "Keats to-day," she said to herself, "ye ardent marigolds!"

Then she turned round and faced Edith Lestrange.

"I came up unannounced," said Edith. "I said you expected me. I don't know whether you did. Oh, Helen—Helen; it's you!"

Helen of Troy stood quite still, her arms dropped to her sides, and as she stood there a change came over her face; it was the same face, and yet the years came out in it—the suppressed, ignored, and baffled years; she could no more have passed—even with gullible youth—for twenty-five.

Edith came forward, her hands outstretched.

"Oh, Helen," she said with a quiver in her voice, "am I so old you don't remember me—twenty years ago?"

"Don't!" said Helen of Troy.

She moistened her lips and put her hands up to her throat, then suddenly she began to laugh at first, just her old velvety laugh of music, and then suddenly distorted, bitter laughter—terrible to listen to—like harmony run mad.

“Oh, I remember you!” she cried between the gusts of her laughter. “I remember you all right, Edith.”

Edith came forward quietly; her face was very white and her eyes looked drawn and tired, but she drew the orange and white figure shaking with its bitter laughter to the sofa and sat down beside her.

“I know—I know,” she whispered gently; “don’t laugh so, Helen.”

“It’s all so funny,” laughed Helen of Troy, “so ghastly, ridiculously, agonizingly funny, and he might be your own son or mine, my dear—only we haven’t any!”

“We haven’t any,” repeated Edith. “Now, Helen, give me your hand. See, it’s very cold—and now your other hand! The years have made no difference—nothing has made any difference. You should have come to see me. When did you first know I was his step-mother?”

Helen had found her self-control again; she leaned back on the sofa-cushion with yielded hands and half-shut eyes, gazing at her companion.

“Oh, not till Miss Lestrange came. I wasn’t going to marry him, or give him another thought, you know; I was going to laugh him off gently, and then she let out suddenly about you—and I saw!”

“What did you see?” asked Edith almost sternly.

“I saw your life,” said Helen of Troy, opening her eyes and fixing them on her companion’s face. “I saw your life, Edith, and I see it now.”

“I don’t think you do,” said Edith calmly, “because you have not acted as if you did. Do you suppose I want to wreck the boy’s career?”

“He’ll wreck his own career,” said Helen scornfully. “One rock or another, or else some one must wrap him in cotton-wool. He’s a spoilt peach—just that soft, little rotten spot a woman sees at once. *I* don’t feel guilty. Of course, I saw what the she-cat had done—cut him adrift from you, and made your marriage a divided thing. I remembered everything you thought about love and marriage, and I guessed quickly enough you’d had your heart caught between two stones, and were having it crushed out of you. I thought if I used the boy he’d heal it all in three years. You only wanted your little chance, my dear, to make him love you from the bottom of his shallow little soul, and if your husband saw that, why, I suppose, even he would be convinced that things weren’t your fault.”

“How do you know he thinks things are my fault now?” asked Edith quickly.

“Have you ever known a man who didn’t hold the woman who loves him personally responsible for all the rubs of life?” asked Helen dryly.

Edith did not answer—she smiled a little. After a moment's pause she said:

"You're my friend, Helen?"

"Don't speak as if I had dozens," said Helen. "I've only had one, and I don't forget."

"Then you'll laugh him away very gently—so gently that it won't reach very far down?" cried Edith.

"There isn't very far to reach," replied Helen irritably. "I don't see why you always want to be saving people pain; pain does good."

"Does it?" asked Edith. Her eyes met Helen of Troy's; they looked a long time into each other's eyes.

"No," said Helen at last, "it starves, it ages, it embitters, it doesn't do good."

"Well, I'd rather have it done to me than do it to other people," said Edith. "It's rather more responsibility than I care to undertake."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Helen of Troy with a reckless gesture; "it's a game like any other game. I wanted to pay back your score for you. I knew *you'd* never do it. I kept out of your way, I never let on, and I didn't suppose you'd find out for a day or two. I'm going to-morrow. I thought the little fool couldn't tell you enough for you to work on, the first time he had spoken to you for years."

"He showed me your miniature," said Edith gravely.

Helen laughed.

"My face is my fortune," she said grimly. "Edith, I've made a lot of money!"

"Yes, dear—yes," said Edith; and she spoke soothingly as you speak to a hurt child.

"I've made a lot of money," repeated Helen of Troy. Then she looked away towards the window and the swaying pots of flowers alive in the sunshine. "And I've made nothing else," she said with a little bitter laugh.

Edith did not speak, and the room seemed filled with an unanswerable silence. Helen of Troy got up at last and moved restlessly to and fro.

"I ought to be in the Park," she said. "I've made heaps of engagements. It doesn't matter. Why doesn't your husband love you, Edith?"

"Oh, my dear—my dear!" murmured Edith, "don't ask me that."

"But that's just what I'm going to ask you," said Helen, coming to a stop in front of her friend. "Don't pretend—with your eyes! Why, they were so sad when you came in, I thought—I thought—the pain in them would break

everything in the room."

"My husband," said Edith quietly, "is the best man in the world."

"As bad as that?" asked Helen, lifting her eyebrows. "Why, my dear, you might as well have married an institution or a reformatory outright."

"No, not like that," Edith said quickly; "he's a dear!"

"Something can generally be done with a dear," said Helen reflectively, "even a good dear. Edith, an idea has just occurred to me. The chief difference between a bad man and a good is that you know what a bad man wants and you don't know what a good man wants."

Edith smiled.

"I think you always know what the man you love wants, but you can't always give it to him," she said.

"Tell me about it," Helen demanded briefly. And she sat down on the sofa again.

"There's nothing to tell," said Edith. "His first wife died a year after their marriage, and he is satisfied with that. He wants a sober, matrimonial kind of tie, with no romance. I have supplied more than he needed, but he does not know it."

"And you thought when you married him —"

"Oh, don't ask me what I thought," cried Edith passionately. "I dreamed—and the people who dream get cast into pits. But all this is beside the point, Helen. You've got to give this boy up, you know—and do it so that he will not blow his brains out, or make some unprofitable spectacle of himself to Etta and Horace. You haven't said you would yet, you know."

"I never knew any one so fond of promises; you ought to belong to a law court or a registry or something," said Helen impatiently. "Why should I give the boy up? He is pretty and pleases my fancy. I can assure you my fancy is very particular; it's a great thing to get it pleased."

"You are going to do it because you want to please me more," said Edith imperturbably.

"Don't you see, you stupid woman, that it'll settle your hash?" Helen broke in; "the boy'll find out somehow that you're in it —"

"I shall tell him," Edith interposed quietly.

"Oh, my Aunt Maria!" groaned Helen of Troy, "my sainted Aunt Maria! You'll tell him? And what good do you suppose that'll do?"

"I'm not responsible for results," said Edith. "But I've got to tell him."

"I'm glad I know nothing of the obligations of virtue," said Helen. "I

understand paying for my fun, but I don't see why you should pay for other people's."

"I couldn't deceive Horace or the boy," said Edith, "to save myself. I don't mind deceiving people at all for any other reason. Half of life is mutually tolerated deceit, but not for purposes of self-protection; that I don't like, nor, my dear Helen, do you!"

Helen did not reply to this; she merely nibbled her pen, which she had taken up from an inlaid desk beside her.

"I suppose you are going to bully me into this thing?" she observed after a pause.

"Dear me, yes," said Edith, "that's what I'm here for!"

Helen laughed.

"Very well, then, my dear," she said; "without waiting to reflect on the wits of the Lestrange family (and always excepting its head, who had, I imagine, more than a suspicion of the fact), allow me to remark that they should have a goose for their coat-of-arms. I've been married twice, and so far as I know the second ceremony still holds good. For professional purposes I do not lay much stress upon my husband's existence; privately, we prefer our own lives to each other's. I don't need any pity. I never cared for either of my husbands, but I managed both beautifully. What do you want me to say to your step-son now? I may as well observe that in three years' time he would take it much better."

Edith hesitated.

"I think you ought to tell him that you're forty-two," she said at length.

Helen threw back her head and laughed.

"It isn't twenty years ago," she murmured. "It's ten minutes. Now, Edith, if you'll take my advice you'll not decide this yourself. You seem to have overlooked for the moment the fact of your husband's existence. Does he know what happened twenty minutes—years ago—I mean?"

"Oh, yes," said Edith; "I told him."

"Very well, then," said Helen of Troy. "I happen to know that Leslie is dining out to-night. I will, therefore, invite myself to dinner with you. Do you trust me, Edith?"

"You're a most unscrupulous woman," said Edith. "Still, you can't do much harm with a mere meal, so if you like we'll risk it."

Helen stooped towards her and kissed her.

"After all," she said, "I've had something out of my life. I've had this."

X

Horace was slightly surprised on coming down dressed for dinner to meet in his wife's sitting-room a lady of such widely-spread picture-postcard fame. He had already seen Anastasia twice in the musical comedy which she had made famous, but his wife's introduction arrested him.

"Horace," she said, "this is Helen of Troy."

For a moment he was baffled by memory, and then suddenly the old sacrifice of the impetuous girl who was now his strangely sensible wife came back to him. He held out his hand at once.

"I am most happy to meet Helen of Troy," he said, smiling.

There was no one at dinner, and the house-hold dignity, the little vivid picture of delicate repose lived long in Anastasia's memory. Horace was an excellent host, and Edith was a loadstone for other people's minds. She drew out their best with a silent magnetic skill, hardly participating so much as forming an atmosphere in which it was very pleasant and easy to speak.

"I always could say anything to Edith," observed Anastasia to her host, "but I had quite supposed that I should have to talk to you."

Horace laughed.

"We're so simple and dull," he said. "We are like an old tune to a practised singer; we give her an easy swing."

"Oh, you're not dull," said Anastasia; "it's rather an art to be as simple as all this, and I've never met it in my own people. We're smart, we're clever, we're attractive, we're the most charming people in the world, but we're not simple."

"You can't expect a young nation to have the quality of an old shoe," said Horace. "English people have done the same things for a very long time. They stand on the basis of habit. Now all the Americans I ever met wanted to be individual, personal, impressive—and they very often were. When they were not, it was rather a strain to listen to them; but we don't want, as a rule, to be like that; it amuses us to have people do it for us; but I expect that in our heart of hearts we don't think it very solid. There's something in finding such an easy old track, and knowing that among your own class you'll find the same talk, the same purpose, the same *genre*. I'm not sure it isn't good for conversation as well, because it makes you less self-conscious. You start with so much that can be taken for granted."

Helen gave him a good deal of attention; she was thinking the man out; he

wasn't in the least like his son, nor had she expected him to be. She had imagined him to be good, solid, dull, and probably a shrewd man of business; now she saw that only her first two adjectives held. He might not see everything, but he saw what he looked at. The trouble really began in his never having looked at his wife. He had accepted her, proposed to her, married her, and she had done all the rest. The chances were that she would go on doing it till she died, unless some one interfered.

"What he wants," said Helen of Troy to herself, as she continued the conversation, "is a shaking, and that is what he is going to get."

After dinner Horace accompanied them to his smoking-room, and Anastasia cleared the field.

"Edith," she said, "do you remember my giving you an old silk shawl when we stayed on the lakes; it was pretty, and warm, and soft, and fresh, like one of the little clouds we used to see hover over the lovely garden? I have an idea I want that shawl back to keep always; do you know where it is?"

Edith shook her head.

"At the bottom of one of my old trunks I expect, where I keep my treasures," she said. "I could send it to you, perhaps."

"I want it right away," said Anastasia calmly, in the tone which took for granted that what she wanted right away would be immediately forthcoming.

Edith laughed.

"And I'm to get it?" she asked.

"You're to get it," said Anastasia, "and you needn't hurry back, for I want to talk to your husband about his boy."

Horace looked at Edith affectionately.

"She can share all that," he said.

"You're very kind," said Anastasia, with hidden irony, "but anyway I want that shawl."

Edith left them.

"Now, Mr. Lestrange," said Anastasia, suddenly sitting up and fixing him with her eyes, "I'm not going to talk to you about your son much. I'll say this, and then I'll leave the subject alone. He's not like you. I guess he's like that picture you've got on the mantelpiece—the face is selfish, tyrannical, weak and mean. Hush! I see you're going to tell me she's dead. I know she's dead, and Edith's alive. She's alive! How long are you going to keep the living woman buried and the dead woman taking all her share of life? How long is Edith to play second fiddle to a memory which isn't even true? If your first wife had lived you'd have been worn tired of her by now. Do you suppose

she'd have said, 'I'll give my heart and every quivering nerve to serve this man's comfort? I'll starve every sense I have got to give him friendship, since he's so blind he won't take more? I'll not let pain, or time, or just resentment for a wrong he has allowed to take place against me make me bitter, or old, or blunted'? Would your dead wife have acted this way, Horace Lestrange?"

Horace looked at his patent leather shoes fixedly. Once he tried to interrupt her, but the tense sharpness of her voice struck his down into silence. Something stirred in his heart that was not all anger and indignation—it was pain—it was recognition! So he breathed hard and said nothing. And for a moment the pitiless voice was still. Anastasia was watching him.

"When a man looks down at his shoes, you're moving him," she observed to herself. "You can't tell which way he's going, but he's being moved."

Then she went on:

"I came here expecting to find you selfish and stupid," she said; "and you're neither. You're a live man, and yet you've lived with this woman ten years and not loved her; you've looked at her and not seen her; you've taken all she had to give, and you've never counted what it cost her to give it to you. Oh, you're slow, you English—you're slow!"

"We're quick to act," interrupted the man opposite her gently. He was still looking at his shoes, and he spoke very quietly, but Anastasia suddenly thrilled; she was not accustomed to be thrilled by anything a man said.

"I suppose that's the meaning of English history," she thought to herself; aloud she merely deepened her note of scorn:

"Quick?" she said. "Mr. Lestrange—ten years? I'm afraid it's not quick enough. Do you know what happens when a woman is unhappy too long? She gets used to it. The habit of unhappiness sets in, the heart gets eaten up, she gets haggard, and old, and sad; and not all the king's horses and all the king's men can make the queen take to her throne again! (That's my own alteration, and rather a good one.) The truth of the whole matter, Mr. Lestrange, is that you've made a domestic hack of a woman who had the spirit of Joan of Arc —"

"What on earth are you saying about Joan of Arc?" asked Edith's voice suddenly.

Anastasia started. Horace never turned his head.

"I was saying," said Anastasia, "that she was burned alive at a stake by the English intellect and the French nerves!"

"I've found the shawl," said Edith, "but the pink's turned almost gray in twenty years."

Anastasia laughed shortly. Edith looked quickly at her husband; in a moment she knew that something had taken place—the very room seemed tense with recent passion. A look of anxiety came into her eyes. What had Helen said or done? She tried to stem the silence with the thin stream of talk which is against the current of thought.

Anastasia rose and held out her hand.

"I've got to get home in time to oversee my packing. I leave to-morrow," she said, "and I'm going to write your boy a line, Mr. Lestrange; don't you or Edith worry. I'll make things as easy as I can, and youth's elastic. It doesn't break quickly. He won't do anything violent, you can depend on that; he talks conversational suicide, and that's pretty safe. Just whistle me a taxi, will you?"

They went out into the hall with her.

Horace said nothing. Once his eyes met hers. Horace's eyes were blazing with fairly steady anger, but it was not all anger. Edith looked white and tired.

"Am I never going to see you again, Helen?" she murmured.

"In twenty years' time," said her friend. "Shan't I make a nice old woman?"

Horace shook hands with her, and suddenly Helen of Troy smiled at him—it was a golden, appealing, melting smile. Her eyes took it up and held his in a kind of friendly laughter. Horace smiled back grimly.

"I am sure," he said, "I needn't wish you success."

"You think I've got it?" she asked.

"Yes. I think you've got it," said Horace Lestrange.

Then Edith kissed her, and standing together in the soft May weather the husband and wife watched her drive off into the night. Helen of Troy did not look back at them. She knew that they stood there together and loneliness was at her heart like a knife. What were all the shadows that surrounded her—the easy captives, the shallow victims of her radiant beauty—to that quiet union of strength? Countless, countless, they thronged the courts of memory, and unreal as the false dawn heralding the long gray hours they passed away.

"Oh, my God!" said Helen of Troy. "My men fight for me, but they leave me, and they never give me rest!"

"I'm very tired," said Edith gently to her husband. "I think, if you don't want me, I'll go upstairs."

"Come into my study just one moment," he urged. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

Once more the anxiety flashed back into his wife's eyes. What had happened? What had Helen said? She followed him quickly into his room and closed the door.

"Oh, no, I don't want to talk to you," said her husband suddenly, and at the sound of his voice it seemed to Edith as if the whole earth changed.

In a moment she was held—she was immersed—she was lifted into uncontrollable joy. His arms were round her and his kisses were on her hair, her cheek, her forehead, quick as his tears.

"Oh, Edith," he murmured, "my darling, all these years!"

"No, no Horace," she cried, struggling desperately against his pity, against the terrible tenderness which seemed to drown the weak resistance of her heart. "I was never unhappy. Did she tell you I was unhappy? Why, I've been—you've been—oh, Horace, Horace! You've been pitying me—I can't bear that, you know—not that—let me go."

"Pitying you!" he laughed; he turned her face back with his hand and gazed into her eyes.

"I love you," he said quickly. "I love you *best*—do you understand?"

And suddenly all the sad habit of the years fell from her, the weariness, the dull fret, the days of sober agony—they were as though they had never been.

The miracle of love swept her tears down into an ocean of bliss and carried them into laughing waters. Horace pressed his lips to hers; and they were all lost—the long intolerable hours—in the simplification of a kiss.

ROSE

“Because,” she whispered, “I would take the risk—if you loved me.”

ROSE

CHAPTER I

The Pinsents never saw any reason why they shouldn't be modern without—as they expressed it—going too far.

They didn't believe in the sheltered-life system, but that was perhaps because they rather under-estimated their own idea of what constituted a shelter.

There were certain risks, of course, in allowing your daughters to play mixed hockey, smoke cigarettes and belong to a suffrage movement (they could attend meetings, but weren't to throw stones). Still, it was strange how little harm these concessions to modernity had done the Pinsent girls.

Bernard Shaw rolled off them like water from a duck's back.

Somewhere between the ages of fourteen and seventeen Mrs. Pinsent presented her daughters with an approximate definition of life. Agatha yawned and Edith said, "Oh, dear! We knew all that ages ago." For a moment Mrs. Pinsent became agitated. Had they, in spite of the healthiness of their surroundings, come in contact with evil influences? But she was reassured when Agatha explained that they had picked it up from rabbits.

Rose, who was more sensitive and less observant, gave her mother more trouble than the others, but she acquiesced at last, that God must know best, though it all seemed rather funny. They were not to earn their own livings because later on—(later on being the term in which the Pinsent parents envisaged their retreat from this world) they would have plenty of money; but they were expected to develop hobbies.

The eldest girls developed splendid hobbies. Agatha, who was the plainest of the three, became a lawn tennis champion with a really smashing serve. Edith distinguished herself by writing a history of one of our western counties. She rode all over it on a bicycle and stayed at vicarages by herself. She earned a hundred pounds by this adventure and had a particularly pleasant notice in the "Spectator."

Rose was rather slower at taking anything up. She had had pneumonia when she was at school, and it had left her nominally but not at all

obstructively delicate.

She played an excellent game of hockey and was her father's favorite.

It was really for Rose's sake that they all decided to go to Rome.

They thought Rose would almost certainly settle down to something after that, and it would be good for Edith, who, now she had finished Somersetshire, might like to begin on Rome.

She could at any rate compare the different types of architecture. A friend of hers, a Mr. Bunning, said there wasn't any architecture in Rome, but you could never be quite sure what Mr. Bunning meant. Edith hadn't been quite sure for several years—nor apparently had Mr. Bunning, but perhaps their going to Rome might help him to find out. Agatha was very good-natured about it; she said she thought Rome would do as well as anywhere else.

The Pinsents were a most accommodating family and though, of course, they sometimes quarreled, it was all in a loud, direct, natural way, which generally ended in chaff.

They never quarreled with Rose as much as with each other because of her having been rather delicate, still they chaffed her a good deal. She wouldn't have liked it if they hadn't.

They knew they weren't like other families of their class and standing; they prided themselves on talking to people in railway carriages and even crossing the Channel. Of course, they were particularly good sailors but even if they hadn't been they would have been nice and friendly and not at all stuck up about being sick.

Agatha was thinking of marrying a Canadian who took most magnificent back-handers, Edith was still wondering what Mr. Bunning meant, but Rose was perfectly free.

She'd had two proposals, but both of them had been from men she had known all her life and liked most awfully—but not in that way. So that she'd had, as Mrs. Pinsent put it to her husband, "quite a lot of experience for twenty-one and none of the bother of it."

Mr. Pinsent growled and said that if Rose married the right kind of man she never would have any bother.

Mrs. Pinsent looked thoughtful; she didn't want to think that Mr. Pinsent was the wrong kind of man, it would have been dreadful after being married to him for thirty years. Still, she couldn't honestly have said that she hadn't had any bother with him.

Probably Mr. Pinsent had forgotten it; men do not remember that kind of thing in the same way.

They chose a French hotel in Rome because they thought it would be more Italian, and when they arrived there everything was just as foreign as possible, which was what the Pinsents wanted—provided that they could get enough hot water.

The Hotel le Roy was even for Rome extraordinarily "black." Its *clientèle* was composed of French priests, their sisters, ladies of pronounced age and severity, one or two French families of prehistoric claims, small means and a son at a seminary, and a few Dutch Catholics who were, if anything, blacker than the French, but distinctly pleasanter to the English. Black French Catholics do not like English Protestants. The war may have softened this feeling, but this episode took place a year before the war, when the *Entente Cordiale* was looked upon as a Socialist blunder to be sharply counteracted in private by a studied coldness of manner.

Mrs. Pinsent, whose French the whole family relied upon, did nothing to improve the situation. She said to Madame la Comtesse de Brenteuil, who couldn't very well help going up in the lift with her, "Isn't it a pity the Vatican shuts so often for church things? They say we sha'n't be able to get into the Sistine chapel in Holy Week, and one of my daughters is writing an article on the Sibyls—it's really most annoying!"

Madame de Brenteuil looked at Mrs. Pinsent as if she were a smut that had fallen on her sleeve; then, with a weary irony, she observed, "Perhaps, Madame, the English do not realize that the Holy Father is a Catholic?" Mrs. Pinsent was eager to reassure her as to Anglo-Saxon intuitions. She said, "Oh, yes—we quite understand his own personal views—but it isn't as if Rome really belonged to him, is it?"

Fortunately the lift stopped. It was not Madame de Brenteuil's *étage*, but she got out.

After this incident no French person in the Le Roy spoke to Mrs. Pinsent or her daughters, so that it was rather difficult for Léon Legier to begin—especially as he was a third cousin to the Comtesse, and *lié* to almost everybody there. He had made up his mind to begin from the moment that Rose Pinsent dropped a breakfast roll and blushed as she stooped to pick it up.

He had never seen such a blush before on any woman's face, and any color he had failed to surprise upon a woman's face he had naturally supposed could not exist.

Apparently it did, for Rose had it. Her blush was as fine in hue as that of a pink tulip and as delicate as a winter cloud at dawn.

It swept up in a wave from her white throat into her pale, silky, fair hair, and the fact that she suddenly discovered Léon was observing her did not tend

to decrease her color. Léon Legier made his opportunity that evening in the hall. The porter was explaining to Mrs. Pinsent what time to start for Tivoli the following morning. His English was limited and he altered the train hour to suit the convenience of the foreign tongue. The greater inconvenience of missing the train had not occurred to him until Léon intervened.

Subsequently Léon discovered that almost all the porter's other information suffered from similar readjustments of language, and he and Mrs. Pinsent sat down in the lounge to revise the day's excursion. Mrs. Pinsent should, perhaps, have thought of her daughters, but Léon gave her no time to think of her daughters. He focused her attention upon herself. She felt herself young again, almost dangerous; the young man before her apologetic, diffident, with exquisite manners, was so obviously attracted by her and intent on all that she had to tell him, she had not the heart to cut the conversation short. Later on Mr. Pinsent joined them. He was delighted to find another man to talk to in his own tongue, and who was obviously acquainted with the name of Lloyd George.

It fortunately never transpired that Léon had confused the name of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer with that of a horse who had won the Derby.

Mr. Pinsent told Léon what the English Government really meant and attacked the Italian railway system. Léon listened politely, and it was only at the end of the conversation that Mr. Pinsent discovered his young foreign friend was after all merely French. Not that Mr. Pinsent minded Frenchmen—but they could hardly be held responsible for the state of Italian railways.

In spite of his nationality, however, Léon was able to give Mr. Pinsent the name of a remarkably good wine to be procured at Tivoli; he regretted that the best place to lunch required a slight knowledge of how to order Italian dishes. Mr. Pinsent said it was a pity Léon wasn't going with them. Léon only hesitated enough not to appear over-eager; his deprecatory, half-delighted eyes sought Mrs. Pinsent's, and she said quickly, "But perhaps you could come with us?" Léon produced his card. The Pinsents gave him theirs on which was written "Rocketts, Thornton-in-the Hedges," and on Léon's was written, No. 9, Faubourg St. Germain, Paris, and there was no one there to point out the deadly disparity between the two addresses.

CHAPTER II

The next day was glorious, a spacious, sunny, golden Roman day. The air across the Campagna was delicate and keen. The Cascades at Tivoli fell in tumultuous rushes out of their purple caverns.

The tiny temple of the Sibyls caught itself up against the sharpness of the sky. It hung, perilous and delicate, above the cliff like a little weather-beaten storm-tossed shell.

Léon made no attempt to talk to Rose. He hardly looked at her, but he persistently observed her. He saw that she had in some sense which had been denied her family, imagination and warmth.

He surprised in her a sympathy of attention different from the playful kindness of her sisters.

Agatha and Edith were from the first jolly with Léon. They cultivated, with masculine acquaintances, a slightly jocular tone, and the humor of this was deepened, of course, by Léon's being a Frenchman.

They gambolled cheerfully about him, much like heavy sheep dogs good-humoredly greeting a greyhound.

Léon accommodated his pace to theirs, he met them half-way, but he privately thought they weren't like women at all.

He took Agatha round the little temple and Edith to the foot of the highest waterfall. He let their niceness (for he recognized with a rare leap of the imagination that they were being nice to him) expand into unconscious revelations.

He allowed their frank communications to slip over the polished surface of his manner like leaves borne on the waters that dashed past them. Once or twice he arrested the floating leaves with the point of his stick, and once or twice in the flood of Edith's careless chatter he held, very slightly, the point of his mind against a special revelation.

He gathered that the Pinsents were very well off. It wasn't that they ever spoke of money, but the tremendous amount of things you had to have, the bother of *salonslits* and the burden of expensive hotels filtered through their wider statements of having to think twice as to whether they'd go on to Sicily or not. They deplored prices, but they invariably chose the best of what there was. Léon listened carefully, but he hadn't at first any real intentions.

Rose pleased him. She was an unknown English type. A strange creature, as independent as if she were married, and as innocent as if she had never seen a man.

He decided to devote himself a little to studying her, and in order to do this he had, of course, to accept the Pinsent family.

To Mr. Pinsent he could only be attentive. He found him an English club and was delighted to observe the increasing use which Mr. Pinsent made of it. Mrs. Pinsent, however, was comparatively easy to handle. She was a woman

with the maternal instinct, and with her Léon found it easy to be candid.

He told her that he had just finished his military service and was now taking a little "voyage" before settling down. He talked a good deal about his mother, who occupied herself with good works in Paris; his father he mentioned less, and the works that occupied him not at all. Nevertheless, it could be seen that he had a great affection for both his parents and no brothers and sisters.

"I expect that's why he likes," Mrs. Pinsent explained to her husband, "to be so much with the girls."

It was three days before Léon found himself alone with Rose.

She had begun to feel a little out of this gay stranger's intimacy. It seemed to Rose as if Léon purposely avoided her, and yet, in a way, which was very strange to her, their eyes sometimes met, and then he seemed to be telling her something as direct as a penny and as articulate as the cobblestones of Rome.

Then all of a sudden, breathlessly, without preparation, she found herself alone with him in the Campagna.

Mr. Pinsent had said that the girls were on no account to go outside the walls of Rome by themselves.

He hadn't made it perfectly clear why he put this obstacle to their general freedom, but he'd mentioned when pressed by Agatha, malarial fever and savage Abruzzi sheep dogs.

"So I expect I shall just have to go to a gallery instead," Rose explained to Léon in the hall. "Edith has gone off with some one to see a fountain, and won't be back for hours." Léon hesitated, then he said, "How far does the wonderful English freedom extend? Is it an impertinence that I should offer to take you—wherever you wish to go?"

"Oh, thank you very much. Yes, of course I could go with you. . . ." Rose answered a little slowly. It seemed to her in some strange way that her freedom had ceased to be menaced by her father and mother, but not to have become any the more secure.

She couldn't have said that she disliked the sense of danger, but she knew quite well what increased it. It was Léon's saying as they stood for a moment outside the street door, "Do you know it is since three days—I have been waiting for this?"

They took the tram to San Giovanni Laterano, and as it shuffled and shrieked its clamorous way through narrow streets and wide piazzas, under old yellow walls and through long white modern tunnels, a new sensation came to Rose Pinsent.

She had always supposed that what she liked best in a man was his being tremendously manly, and by manly the Pinsents meant impervious to the wills of others, abrupt in speech, and taking up everywhere a good deal of space.

But Léon was masculine in quite a different way and yet no one could doubt his possessing that particular quality.

The form it took with him was that Rose became suddenly conscious of his physical presence. She noticed as she had never noticed in any man before, his smallest personal habits, the flutter of his fine hard eyes, the scrupulous neatness and grace of his person, and, above all, the alert and faultless precision with which in any direction he met her half-way.

He gave her from moment to moment the whole of his indulgent intensity. No man had ever looked at her like this before, so read her mind and forced her in return to read his own!

The tram was crowded and Léon stood above her, holding on to a strap and looking down at her with laughing eyes. “You are thinking something of me, Mademoiselle,” he said at last. “Confess it is a comparison, not, of course, to my advantage. Tell me, then, to whom are you comparing me, in what do I fall short?”

Rose tried to frown. “Why should you suppose I am thinking of you at all?” she ventured. Léon laughed softly. “Why indeed?” he murmured. “And yet why should you not? Here you are, you and I; we have not yet exchanged half-a-dozen words, and now we are to be together for, I hope, three hours, and all these last days I have been waiting for these hours—planning for them, arranging, as it were, my life to meet them. Surely you, who have not prevented my obtaining them, must now be giving a thought to what I am like? It would be droll to go for a ride on a strange horse and not to look at it, not question a little its character, how shall we put it—its pace? Would you think less of the companionship of a man?”

Rose drew in her breath sharply. Léon had a way of putting things which was very exciting, but not, perhaps, quite nice.

“But,” she said, “of course we have thought of you—Mother and Father, they thought you were—” she paused, breathless. Léon came to her assistance. “Respectable? Oh, yes,” he said easily. “But that doesn’t go very far, does it? Simply to go for an expedition with some one who is respectable! Your excellent Mr. Thomas Cook could provide you with that. You might even procure for a few francs more a gentleman to give you a lecture! Really, Mademoiselle, I had flattered myself that your imagination had dealt with me a trifle more directly!”

Rose tacitly admitted this claim. “Agatha and Edith thought you awfully

jolly," she said hurriedly. "So I didn't see, I mean I didn't mind when you suggested coming out with me."

Léon laughed again. "But I am afraid," he said, "that I sha'n't be in the least with you what I was like with Mademoiselles Agatha and Edith —'awfully jolly.' I do not think of you in those terms. You will have to decide for yourself and not take anybody's word for it what I am like to you."

Rose said nothing. She was glad that they had to get out at the foot of the Lateran steps.

They took a little carriage which went very fast through the swollen, sallow suburb; it soon left behind it the trams, the cobblestones and the shuffling wine carts. Almost at once the Campagna was upon them, vaguely breaking away from the farms and the eucalyptus trees into soft-breathing, deep, unbroken emptiness.

They wandered out over the grass to the ruin of a villa, an old pink tower and a group of umbrella pines.

"It asks to be sketched, doesn't it?" Léon observed. "And now you will have to be very definite, Mademoiselle. It won't do for you to suppose that you can judge of the Campagna without a glance, as if it were merely a new masculine acquaintance!"

He opened her camp-stool and gravely placed himself on an old wall behind her. "Vous y êtes," he asserted, "begin!"

But Rose didn't begin. She had been thinking of what he had asked her. Perhaps she hadn't been quite frank. The Pinsents as a family thought it a sin not to be quite frank.

"I *was* thinking about you," she admitted. "I mean myself; I thought—I thought you weren't at all like an Englishman!"

Léon laughed gently. "What a discovery," he said. "I am not like an Englishman—I! And did you want me to be? You are disappointed, perhaps?"

The wonderful pink color deepened in her face. "No," she said, "I am not a bit disappointed—I like people to be different."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," he said with sudden gravity. "You relieve me very much, for that is one thing I could not change for you—I could not be less a Frenchman."

Still she did not begin her sketch. "You are tired?" he asked her. "Rest then, and don't trouble to make a picture on that little strip of canvas. Nothing you can do there will, I assure you, be half as successful as what you are doing, by just sitting where you are."

She was sure he was flirting now, but what she wasn't sure was how to

stop it. She wondered if Edith or Agatha knew, but it flashed across her in a terrible moment of disloyalty that perhaps neither of them had ever been put to the proof. “I don’t think you ought to say that kind of thing—” she said a little uncomfortably.

“But why not?” Léon urged. “Why do you not wish me to take pleasure in your beauty? And if I take it, would it not be rude and ungracious not to express it? For my part I believe only in the truth. If it is agreeable—good! Let us enjoy it. If it is disagreeable, let us bear it. But why should we try to avoid it? Besides we can never avoid it. If we choose to shut our eyes to the truth it will take us by surprise. Is that the way you like to be taken, Mademoiselle?”

Rose was not a stupid girl; she gave Léon a fleeting glance; there was just the delicate hint of laughter in it, her lips trembled at the upturned corners. “I don’t like being taken at all,” said Rose sedately, returning to her sketch.

It occurred to her afterwards this was not, perhaps, the best way to stop flirting.

They came back rather late for tea, but Mr. and Mrs. Pinsent were not at all uneasy about them. They didn’t look feverish and they hadn’t seen any savage Abruzzi dogs.

CHAPTER III

For a Frenchman of the type of Léon Legier there are a great many ways of being in love; there are also several goals. You needn’t, as he himself expressed it, finish the game in order to have received your entertainment.

In the case of Rose Pinsent, Léon wasn’t at first very serious, he was out for the fine shades. He had never had an intimacy with an Englishwoman before. It was simply a nationality he didn’t know, and he found it touching.

For her sake he led the Pinsents in compact and cheerful batches into unknown churches and gave them on unfrequented hillsides splendid Roman views.

He never made a visible point of the few moments alone he managed to snatch with Rose.

She took these moments with a certain unexacting grace which pleased him.

It was as if she had a special pleasure which never amounted to expectation in his presence. Her grave blue eyes never claimed him, but when he signaled his own joy into hers—he met with no rebuff. He had passed certain barriers with her and she made no attempt to set them up again.

She was secretly afraid, not of him, but of being so different when they were alone together. She tried very hard to be just the same as she was when those queens of chaff, Agatha and Edith, presided over their small festivities.

She had never supposed before you could have two relations with the same person, without doing anything wrong, and yet the most rigid of her scruples failed to warn her that when she and Léon were together they did anybody any harm.

Rose would have stopped all "nonsense" at once; what she couldn't stop was the gradual dangerous tenderness, growing touch by touch under the hand of a master.

She tried not to think too much about Léon, and as long as he was with them she found that she succeeded.

Everything became so interesting and so vivid—but when Léon was out of their sight, buried in obscure private affairs, hidden, perhaps, by his French relations whom he persistently excused to the Pinsents as being poor dear people, so terribly provincial and shy! Rose found Rome wonderfully little of an absorption—she was forced to consider that what she really needed was, like her sisters, some definite active goal. Her mind became set upon a hobby. She felt if she had that, it wouldn't really matter whether Rome was interesting or not. She could not have told quite how the idea came to her; perhaps it was because little Italian children in the streets looked so sweet—but she suddenly thought she would like, when she got back to England, to have a nice little home in the country for children to get well in, quite poor people's children—only they would be washed there, of course, and probably have curly hair. She told Léon about it one day when they were in St. Maria in Trastevere and had snatched a moment to go off by themselves into the sacristy, to admire what Baedeker so aptly describes as "the admirable ducks."

"Papa," Rose explained to Léon, "had been so kind, he thought it could be managed." For a moment Léon looked in silence at the admirable ducks—and then he laughed a gentle, caressing laugh and flushed a little, fixing his hard bright eyes on her upturned face.

"But Mademoiselle," he said, "hasn't it occurred to you that to have your own children—nice little healthy ones—wouldn't that be just as amusing and not quite as expensive for Papa?"

It seemed as if Rose's very heart had blushed under his eyes. She wanted for a moment to go away from him—to hide from out of his sight.

She said quickly and vaguely, "Oh, I don't know—one doesn't think about such things." Léon said, "Doesn't one? I assure you I do."

He hadn't said any more, but it was the moment of his own intention. He

saw as clearly as the lines of the mosaic on the wall—the prospect of a definite new life.

This mere study of a delightful English temperament should develop into the most serious of all his affairs.

A girl as beautiful and as innocent with such a command of so compliant a parent (for little homes in the country for sick children must involve an elastic pocket on the part of Mr. Pinsent) struck Léon as a rare and favorable opportunity.

After all, he meant to settle down some day. His mother wanted it, and his father's extravagance had done much to make a good match difficult in France, and Léon liked Rose, he appreciated her. She was innocent, but she wasn't eager—she made no advances towards him—she was modest without being in any danger of striking him as a fool. She knew, for instance, when to hold her tongue.

She was the only one of the Pinsent family who had the good taste to ignore an awkward little episode which took place at about this time.

Léon had been very fortunate hitherto, he had also been skilful. Rome is not a large town, nor one in which it is easy to keep one's acquaintances definitely apart.

Léon was at this time carrying on two perfectly different affairs. There was the Pinsent affair—which hadn't arrived and which took up a good deal of time, and for which he chose a certain type of occupation, but there was another affair—which had arrived some time ago, very much less serious, of course, but also requiring time and a background from which he had so far succeeded in eliminating any appearance on the part of the Pinsent family.

Mr. Pinsent upset this arrangement by altering at the last moment, and without notifying Léon—the program prepared in advance by Léon and Mrs. Pinsent. Mr. Pinsent decided that he would go to Frascati and walk up a hill to a place called Tusculum. There wasn't much to be seen when you got there—but what he suddenly felt was that he needed more exercise and they could get lunch at the Grand Hotel coming back.

It was at the Grand Hotel that the incident happened. Léon saw them coming inexorably across the garden in close formation, waving parasols and shouting their unfettered greetings.

He notified the brilliant lady who was his companion that they must instantly retire in the opposite direction. His companion stared, not at him—a glance had explained him to her quick intelligence—but at the Pinsent family. She said under her breath, "The English have no families—they have tribes—this appears to be a savage one."

Léon never moved a muscle of his face—he turned his back resolutely upon the approaching Pinsents, and took his companion into the hotel—where he asked for a private room. If the Pinsents chose to follow him there—it would be a pity—but everything would be at an end. There are forms that must be preserved even in the face of self-interest. Léon knew that he would never forgive Rose if the Pinsents went any further. But they didn't go any further—Rose diverted their attention—she loudly declared that it wasn't Léon—and insisted on remaining in the garden. She owned when pressed that the walk had been too much for her. She felt not exactly faint, but that she would rather not go indoors. The Pinsents had their lunch under a magnolia tree in the garden. It was very like a picnic, and Agatha and Edith prepared a splendid method of "roasting Léon" when they got hold of him once more. They effected this seizure in the hall of the hotel that evening. They upbraided him roundly with the exception of Rose. Léon denied steadily that he was ever at Frascati, but of course not—how could he have been there and not rushed to greet them? It wasn't conceivable—they had seen his double! Agatha and Edith described with much wealth of detail the lady he was with (only the English could walk so merrily into dangerous places).

Léon looked graver still. He turned to Rose. "And you, Mademoiselle," he asked, "were you under the impression that you saw me?"

"It certainly did look exactly like you," Mrs. Pinsent murmured, looking rather troubled. "I particularly noticed the hat."

"Lots of people wear hats like Monsieur Legier," Rose said, looking away from Léon.

She was the only one of the party he finally failed to convince.

He did more than admire her then, he respected her. There is no taste so perfect as that which permanently conceals a fact which is awkward for others.

Rose concealed it, but she paid for her good taste by her tears.

CHAPTER IV

Léon planned in advance the setting for his proposal. He would make it in the English way, to the girl herself. Léon had never proposed marriage before, and he gave the affair his best attention.

The Baths of Caracalla are never very crowded and at certain times of the day they are extraordinarily solitary.

Léon knew one of the chief excavators and it was part of his idea to take the entire family of Pinsent with the exception of Rose into the underground regions. The excavator, who was an enthusiast, could be calculated to hold

them there for a full hour. Rose, who never liked underground temples, agreed easily enough to remain in the open air, and Léon disappeared with the others. She was a little puzzled over Baedeker's description of the Baths of Caracalla, once she got the tepidarium in her head she felt she could get on quite easily, but the tepidarium eluded her. The great roofless, sunny space, wouldn't contract itself reasonably, into a guide book, and then she heard Léon's returning footsteps.

"Has anything happened?" she asked in some alarm.

"That is for you to say," answered Léon with unusual gravity. "For my part I have found you—and that for the moment is enough."

"Didn't you mean to stay down there, then?" asked Rose in some bewilderment.

"Never in the world," said Léon more lightly. "Am I the kind of man to engage myself with the temple of *Mithras, je m'en fiche de Mithras*! I beg your pardon—I should say, in the phrase of your American cousins, I have no use for him!"

There was no one but themselves in the Baths of Caracalla, the great pink walls stretched spaciously around them, the blue sky benignantly overhead, under foot the fresh spring grasses spread like an emerald fire.

"I suppose we ought to go all over it properly," Rose asked a little wistfully. Léon shook his head. "Why should we do that?" he objected. "Let us leave propriety to Mithras. If ancient history is true, he stood much in need of it. For ourselves, let us sit down in this corner—under the shelter of the ivy—and look at the pink blossoms in front of us. If you had not informed me how serious it is to pay compliments, I should have told that tree—that it was very nearly as pretty as the English complexion; but as I am a very truthful man and have no wish to curry favor with any one, I should have added, not quite."

Rose smiled a little tremulously. She said nothing, but she hoped Léon would go on talking. She turned her eyes on the almond tree; its pale pink flowers hung above them like a little cloud.

A silence fell between them, a significant, tremendous silence. Rose became aware that she was alone with Léon in a way in which she had never been alone with any one before. Their privacy was as breathless as danger. In a moment more it seemed to Rose something tremendous would have happened like an earthquake or a volcano, but probably much nicer than these manifestations of nature.

Then she knew that it had happened already. Léon had caught both her hands in his. "Mademoiselle," he asked her in a queer, strained voice, "Has any man ever kissed you before?"

She lifted frightened, fluttering eyes to his—they were wonderful in their candor.

"No!" she whispered. "No!"

"*Alors!* You will not be able to say that again!" he said firmly, bending towards her. But though his eyes held hers with the intentness of a hawk, he waited for her answering surrender. She startled him by the urgency of her protest. "Oh, don't! Don't!" she pleaded. "Please let me go!" Instantly he released her.

"You don't like me enough?" he asked her in surprise. "Do you think I am such a brute that I would kiss you against your will? Why, never in the world! That is no kiss, that is not a mutual pleasure. But why do you say 'No' to me, Rose?—for your eyes—your eyes say 'Yes'!"

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly. "I know you wouldn't do anything I shouldn't like, but don't you see I can't let you—it's just because I—I do like you so much." She turned her face away from him, her eyes filled suddenly with tears. "Please don't say any more," she urged. "I know with you it's different—please go away."

But Léon sat down near her. "I will do anything in the world you want," he said firmly, "except go away. After what you have said you cannot expect me to do that. You must listen to me a little now—are you listening, Rose?"

She nodded her head.

"I am going to say something that will give you pain," Léon began slowly. "I had not meant to say it, I had meant, if I were fortunate enough, to give you pleasure, but when you say you like me you make me feel that I must not be a coward. Rose—I am a bad man."

She turned startled, unbelieving eyes upon him. What he said was painful to her, but she had been expecting a different kind of pain.

"Yes," he said gravely. "It is true. I am not in the least worth your regard. I do not think I shall make a good husband even for you. I say this to you because I am going to add the little thing I had hoped might give you pleasure. *Je vous aime*, Mademoiselle." The words had a sharper significance in his own tongue. After he had said them he looked for the first time away from her, towards the almond blossom tree. "You are as fine, as beautiful as that tree," he murmured, "and oh, my dear, you know as little—as these frail pink flowers—about a man like me. How can I ask you to trust me?"

Fear crept into her eyes. "Léon," she whispered, "what you said just now was true, wasn't it?"

"That I am bad?" he asked bitterly. "Yes—it is true—it would be a poor

joke, such an assertion, just now, though perhaps it is a poorer truth. It is also true that I would have kept it from you—if you had not greatly moved me."

"No—I didn't mean that," she said gently. "I meant the other thing you said."

He turned quickly. "That I love you?" he asked.

Rose nodded. "Because," she whispered, "I—I would take the risk—if you loved me."

He took her hand and kissed it, and then with a fierce gentleness that seemed impatient of its own restraint, he drew her into his arms and pressed his lips to hers. "You child! You child!" he murmured. "God punish me—if I ever fail you—" But even with his lips against her lips—he envisaged his own failure.

She drew away from him. "Léon," she said, "I want you to let me go home alone —"

He looked at her in surprise—a moment before she had seemed so helpless, so incapable of asserting her surrendered will, and now, facing him with her steady eyes, she seemed an independent, self-reliant woman. For an instant he wondered if he thoroughly understood her, but he put this misgiving away from him.

"You must do whatever you wish, of course," he said gently. "But it is—not that you are unhappy or that you are afraid?"

She turned towards him fiercely. "Yes," she said, "I am afraid. How can any one be as happy as I am and not be afraid?"

He drew a long breath, he had forgotten that this was her first love.

They walked together to the gates in silence.

Across the road the mortuary chapel opened its big iron doors to let a common Roman funeral pass out. Rose shuddered, and turned wide eyes of terror on Léon. "Oh!" she said, "How can God let anybody die!"

He put her into a carriage, soothing her as best he could, but his own hands trembled. He had not realized how serious this affair was going to be.

It was as serious as death.

CHAPTER V

The Hotel le Roy became a place for consultations. Everybody interviewed everybody else. The hall, the stuffy red salon, the tiny, damp garden, even the lift became indispensable for hurried conversations, but of course none

of them had the least result. Léon, from the moment of his engagement, had taken rooms at another hotel—this was at once more *convenable* and also much more convenient. His French relatives were furious. He let them consume their fury among themselves, and told them when he had to see them, that their interest in his affairs was charming.

The Pinsents were all trying to be large-minded, uninsular and modern, but they didn't like it.

Mr. Pinsent made a false start. He told Mrs. Pinsent that the engagement was out of the question. Mrs. Pinsent suggested his seeing Rose for himself and talking it all out. Mr. Pinsent refused hastily, clinging to the one plank of masculine security. "Aren't you the child's mother?" he demanded. Mrs. Pinsent made no attempt to deny this salient fact. She merely said, "I'm afraid Rose will say she wants to see you about it." Mr. Pinsent knew what that meant. If he saw Rose he was lost. But as a matter of fact, he was lost already, without seeing Rose. Mrs. Pinsent had lost him.

After Mr. Pinsent had finished saying that the engagement was all nonsense and that he wouldn't hear of it for a moment, she said he was perfectly right, but it wasn't as if Léon was an Italian, was it? Paris was really not at all far from London when you came to think of it, and Léon was most obliging, and dressed quite like an Englishman, "and after all," she finished, "we haven't anything against him, have we? He told me himself he wasn't a good Roman Catholic."

In the end Mr. Pinsent had to see Rose, and after this he agreed to a further interview with Léon.

The interview was not, from Léon's point of view, at all what it should have been.

Mr. Pinsent had no sense of form. He hardly listened to Léon's statement of his affairs, and he made no statement at all of his own intentions. He walked up and down the rather cold, deserted salon talking about Rose having had pneumonia when she was twelve, and how sensitive she was, and how much he would miss her. She was quite the best bridge player of the three girls, and her golf was coming on splendidly.

He said he thought Paris hardly the kind of place for a real home life. He hadn't seen any there, some years ago, when he and Mrs. Pinsent stayed in the Rue de Rivoli. He added that he couldn't really feel as if Rose would like continually hearing French spoken all round her. It was quite different from being abroad for a time and coming home again afterwards. Mr. Pinsent laid his hand on Léon's shoulder and sentimentalized the situation in a way that shocked Léon's whole nature.

Emotion should take place (enough of it, for a mere betrothal) between Léon and Rose; it shouldn't take place between Rose's father and Léon, and as for talking about the feeling of a man for a good woman, nothing could have been more out of place. You simply, of course, didn't talk of it. Mr. Pinsent, however, did.

"Of course we must go into everything very carefully later on," Mr. Pinsent finished, rubbing the back of his head. "Rose seems to have set her heart on you—we must all hope you can make her happy."

Then Mr. Pinsent shook hands with Léon and seemed to think there was nothing more to be said.

They never did go into anything later on. In the first place, Madame de Brenteuil refused point blank to meet Mrs. Pinsent. "If," she said to Léon, "your mother sanctions your engagement, we have decided to permit ourselves to speak to the girl. Her family we will never accept. More you must not demand of us."

Madame Legier wrote two letters—one to Léon in which she said if he was sure of getting £500 a year, and the girl was healthy—and agreed to bring up the children as Catholics—she supposed it was better to close with it, though Heaven knew how they would fit things in, the English temperament being as stubborn as wood, and his father most unaccommodating when he was there; and another letter to Rose in which she welcomed her into the family and said what confidence she had in Léon's choice, and how she and her husband looked forward to the brightening of their future lives by the sight of their children's happiness.

Monsieur Legier wrote a third letter which Mrs. Pinsent translated to her husband. He said something about a lawyer in it, but Mr. Pinsent said nothing would induce him to see a French lawyer, English ones were bad enough.

Rose didn't give anybody time to do much more. She announced that she wanted to be married at once and spend her honeymoon at Capri.

She could buy what she needed in Rome and finish getting her trousseau together in Paris.

She had set her heart on going to Capri for her honeymoon and there wasn't any use anybody saying anything.

She didn't even pay much attention to Léon, who ventured on one occasion to wonder if Capri was very gay?

"We sha'n't want to be gay," Rose said a little soberly. "We shall just be perfectly happy."

Léon said no more. Of course he expected to be happy, but he had never in

his life been happy when he wasn't a little gay.

Rose saw very little of Léon during their brief engagement. They were both immersed in preparations for the wedding, but the little she saw was like the vision of a Fairy Prince.

He was gallant, delicate and intent. Nothing about Rose escaped him. He knew with a marvelous tact from moment to moment what would please her best.

It was (but of course Rose didn't know this) the correct attitude for a Frenchman engaged to be married.

As the marriage approached, Mrs. Pinsent had moments of secret doubt. She knew it was very silly of her, but Rose was her youngest child, and marriage by two consuls and a Cardinal wasn't at all like being married properly in your own church at home.

She went so far one evening as to go into Rose's bedroom under the pretext of borrowing her hairbrush, just to see if her child was quite happy. Mrs. Pinsent's hair was long and thick like Rose's, it had been the same color when she was Rose's age. She sat in an armchair by the bed and thought that Rose, whose hair was done in two long plaits, looked terribly like she used to look when she was ten years old.

"My dear," she said, "I like Léon so much." Rose smiled and blushed and snuggled further into the rather hard second pillow reluctantly conceded to her by the Hotel le Roy.

"Yes, Mamma, I know," she said, "and he loves you—isn't it nice?"

Mrs. Pinsent reflected. "All the same," she said, "men are very strange. I mean even our own men. You'd think you could tell what they're like before you are married to them, but you can't—you don't even know for quite a long time afterwards."

Rose looked unconcerned. "It's so funny," she said, "but I feel as if I knew Léon better than if he was an Englishman. You see, he tells me more. I can't quite put it to you, so that you can understand, but I think it's his being so much more expressive."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pinsent. "Only that isn't what I mean, you know. I wasn't thinking of what they said, any of them. I don't think you can go by that; when they're in love, they'll say anything."

Rose hesitated. "But, Mamma," she said, "don't men—don't they *ever* stay in love?"

Mrs. Pinsent resorted hastily to the hairbrush. Almost all married women dislike this question.

"Of course, in a sense," she admitted. "But when they get used to you they aren't always very easy to hold."

Rose sat up very straight and slim. "How do you mean—*hold*?" she asked quickly. Mrs. Pinsent brushed her hair well over her face. She hoped Rose wasn't thinking about her father. It was an unnecessary fear, Rose wasn't thinking about any one but Léon.

"Well," Mrs. Pinsent explained, "I think there comes a time in almost all happy marriages when a man has almost too much of what he wants. He gets, if one isn't very careful, and perhaps even if one is—a little—a little restive and bored. You see, men never have as much to amuse themselves with as women have—and that makes them take more interest in what they *do* like even if it isn't good for them—and other women (whom they wouldn't really care for a bit—if they saw enough of them) may make an appeal to them just because they're *not* their wives. Of course, it mayn't be at all like this with Léon, dear, only you're going so far away from us—and he's a Frenchman, and perhaps they don't think of marriage quite as we do. I have never read Zola, of course, but I believe there is rather a difference in the point of view." Mrs. Pinsent faltered—she felt through the cascade of her hair—Rose's inflexible eyes.

"What would you do, Mamma," Rose asked quietly, "if anything—happened like that?"

Mrs. Pinsent drew a long breath. For a moment she was almost sorry that Bernard Shaw hadn't had a sharper effect upon her daughter's imagination. Mrs. Pinsent wasn't anxious to explain what she would do. She only wanted to be vague, and at the same time helpful; her own case had been quite different, there had been the children, and, besides, Mr. Pinsent wasn't French.

"We rather thought," she said, "of staying on for some time in Rome, and then going to Paris for the first part of the summer. We should be quite near you then—and Agatha could go back to England for her tennis."

"I couldn't ever leave Léon," Rose said strangely, "whatever happened."

"No, dear, of course not," said Mrs. Pinsent soothingly, then she started quite afresh and began plaiting her hair.

"Your father wanted me to tell you," she said, "that he's going to have your allowance settled upon you—and upon your children—that's £500 a year, and later on you'll have even more, of course, like your sisters, but the money is in an English bank, and it is quite your own, but you're to have trustees as well, your father has seen to all that. Léon was so nice about it. I knew he would be. He's been so generous and charming and most thoughtful." Mrs. Pinsent got up and bent over her daughter. "You are happy, Rose?" she

whispered. “You do feel safe?”

Rose lifted her undeterred, terribly triumphant eyes to her mother’s. “I feel as safe,” she said, “as if an angel loved me.”

CHAPTER VI

Everything had been done, the last trunk was packed, the last joke, not a very good one, accomplished by Agatha. The two elder sisters, tired out and unequal to their natural play of spirits, had gone to bed.

Rose flew downstairs to the telephone. The Swiss manageress, a sharp-tongued, good-hearted woman, rose wearily and shouted through the receiver. After a violent exchange of reproaches with an irate porter at the other end, she accomplished the feat of getting hold of Léon, and put the receiver into the girl's hand. "He is there, Mademoiselle," she said with a curious glance at the girl's flushed face.

"Oh, thank you," Rose murmured. "Léon, Léon, are you there?"

"But it is Rose?" His voice answered a little as if he was surprised that it was Rose.

"Yes," she said quickly, "I want to see you. Can you come at once?"

"Something has happened?" he asked anxiously. "Something has gone wrong?"

Rose reassured him. "Oh, no—nothing, but I felt suddenly as if I *must* see you."

There was a moment's pause, a buzzing sound came across the wires, and then Rose heard a strange voice—it sounded like a woman's saying very slowly, "*Mais—c'est la dernière nuit?*" And then Léon's again, "I am very busy to-night, Rose—this that you want to see me about, is it important?"

She was surprised at his hesitation, and surprised at her own insistence. It seemed to her suddenly very important that she should insist. "Please, please come," she said urgently. There was another pause, then Léon said again, "Is it a command?"

A moment earlier she would not have said that it was a command, but her wish to see him had been mysteriously sharpened into a strange imperative instinct.

"Isn't my wish a command?" she asked, trying to laugh. But Léon did not echo her laughter. "Very well, then," he said, "in ten minutes."

The big red salon was empty. For the first time Rose noticed the yellow lamp, the blue velvet tablecloth, the enormous imperishable roses in bulging angular vases under the great gilt mirror.

She had been so happy all these weeks she hadn't really seen what anything was like, and she had hardly ever been alone for ten minutes. Now

she was alone. She remembered with a little smile that Léon had once said of the salon that as an interior it was not seductive.

The Pinsents did not use irony, but Rose thought she rather liked it. In ten minutes precisely Léon was with her. Fortunately Madame de Brenteuil had gone to bed.

Léon entered quickly, looking about him as if he had expected one or more of the Pinsent family to be in attendance. Only Rose, feeling suddenly rather small and very far away, stood under an imitation palm close by the mantelpiece.

Léon took her hands, kissed them, pressing them, and letting them go in one quick movement.

"I am here," he said, drawing a seat up close to her. "Well—what is this thing that has suddenly become necessary for us to talk about?"

Rose looked at him questioningly. Really she hardly knew what it was that she wanted to see him for, perhaps it was after all only to see him! To count over her riches, to feel the wonderful golden coins slip through her eager fingers. Only now as she met his eyes it seemed to her that he shut her out. He had a strange hard look, and though he smiled, his smile itself had a new quality, a quality which seemed to put her a little to one side. "I don't quite know, Léon," she murmured. "I did want to see you—but I think I must have had some reason."

Léon glanced through the glass door of the salon at the back of the Manageress' head. "Let us hope so," he said cheerfully, "for it is ten o'clock and I see no one here but Madame at the Bureau."

"Father was here—but I sent him away," Rose explained conscientiously.

Léon gave an odd little laugh. "To-night," he said, "you are very imperative. But you see we are all your slaves. He went—I came—well—what do you wish of us?"

"Léon," she whispered, frightened by the coldness of his voice, "weren't you glad to come?"

He gave himself a tiny shake as if he were trying to pull himself into a fresh frame of mind.

"But of course," he said, "you are adorable." To a critical ear his tone lacked conviction, but Rose's ear was not critical; that is to say, not yet. She gave a little sigh of relief.

"I think I know what it was I meant to say," she stated, "Mamma has been talking to me about marriage."

"Ah—!" said Léon quickly.

“Something she said,” Rose continued, “made me wonder. You see, I had always supposed when you were in love—that was enough. But what she said made me wonder if perhaps it didn’t matter a good deal *how*?”

Léon looked a trifle puzzled, but he was also amused, his hardness was beginning to melt under the spell of her wistful loveliness; something—some other spell, perhaps, receded from him.

“*Bien sur*,” he murmured, looking into her eyes. “It matters how one loves.”

“And I couldn’t help thinking,” Rose went on with gathering confidence, “that you knew rather more about it than I do.”

Léon’s eyes flickered under the yellow lamps. It was almost as if they were laughing at her.

“Yes,” he said caressingly, “yes—that is always possible.”

“You see,” Rose explained, “all along I have felt as if you knew me, and what I wanted, and how you could please me, so astonishingly well.”

Léon smiled. He did not tell her that compared to other women—many other women—she was easy to please.

“Of course,” Rose went on, “in a way I understand you. I told Mamma that! Better than if you were English, because we’ve talked so much, you see—but I’m not sure—not quite sure—that I know all the things you don’t like.

“What I wanted to ask you to-night was—will you always tell me what you want and not mind if I’m stupid and don’t know things until you tell me? You need never tell me more than once—I shall always remember.”

She had touched him now, touched him so much that he sprang to his feet and walked hastily to the window. She could not see his face. She waited patiently and a little anxiously for him to come back to her. He said, when he came back, and stood behind her chair:

“You are adorable,” but he said it quite differently, he said it as if he really found her adorable. “It is true,” he said at last, very gently and tenderly. “There are things that we must teach each other, and to-night I will teach you one of them. You should not have sent for me here.”

“Ah, but why, Léon?” she cried. “It was just the last night”—her voice faltered—some queer little trick of the brain forced into her memory the voice she had heard on the telephone. That woman, too, had said to somebody that it was the last night.

“In the first place,” he said, still gently, but a little gravely, “you should not have seen me at all—on the evening before our marriage, it is the reason itself! You should have spent it with your mother and sisters. It surprised me—it

surprised me very much—your sending for me."

She flushed crimson. "Do not think I blame you," he said quickly. "But I am a Frenchman, and you must learn a little how we think." Rose bowed her head. "And in the second place," he said, "my very dear child—you must not constrain me to come to you—it is my delight—my joy to be with you—be very careful that you never make it my duty! I am your lover—to-morrow I shall be your husband. So—so you will remember, never try to constrain me to be with you—let me come, let me go, do not try to hold me, and do not seek to know where I have been."

"But," she cried eagerly, "Léon—I didn't mean to do anything like that! I—I was frightened. I wanted you! Just to see you! I never will again—I mean—I don't think—do you?—I shall ever be frightened again. It wasn't that I meant to—oh, what a horrible word—constrain you—only I thought you would be alone and wanting me, too!"

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, with sudden exasperation. "Of course I want you!"

She drew back a little from the savage light in his eyes—he had caught her arm suddenly and roughly—but in an instant he had himself in hand. "Now I am going," he said. "You are not to be frightened any more. You are mine, my sweetheart, my wife, my darling! How I love the pretty English words!—and you will love a little your funny French husband, will you not?—and forgive him, if you do not always understand him."

He took her very gently in his arms, and kissed her troubled eyes and put his lips lingeringly and tenderly to hers. There were tears on her eyelashes, but she smiled bravely up at him. "I will never forget what you have said," she murmured, "and I will love you always."

Then he went away. After he had gone, it occurred to Rose that she was to belong to him, but if they were to be happy he must not belong to her. She did not put it quite as sharply as this, but she reminded herself that the great thing was for Léon never to feel bound.

Madame came in from the bureau to put out the lights. "You will not need them any more, Mademoiselle," she asked, "now that Monsieur has gone?"

"No," said Rose. "Thank you very much. Madame, are you French?"

"No, Mademoiselle," the Manageress replied. "I am a Swiss from Basle."

"But you know French people?" Rose insisted.

Madame shrugged her shoulders. "I know most people," she observed. "Even Arabs, I once kept a hotel in Egypt; but why do you ask, Mademoiselle?"

"I wondered," Rose said, "if you thought them—the French, I mean—very

difficult to please?”

“No people are easy to please,” Madame replied, putting out the lights with a sharp twist, as if she disliked them. “And all are unpleasant when they are not pleased. I do not say the French are more unpleasant than the others. They know what they are about and they don’t ask for the moon and expect to get it for two sous, but what they ask for—that they do expect to get no matter what it costs others that they should have it. In general, I find the French have very little heart. I have no complaint to make against them. They are orderly, they do not waste time, they have the sense of how to behave. But I find it is better to expect nothing from them, and to remain independent. Is there anything further you require, Mademoiselle?”

Rose thanked her again and turned thoughtfully away. Madame, with the last switch in her hand, looked curiously after her. “The English,” she said to herself, “are not practical. Nevertheless, Madame de Brenteuil is quite wrong about them. They mean no harm. The whole family Pinsent walks about with its eyes shut, as innocent as the newly baptized. They are a race of mystics without manners. It is what comes of a meat breakfast so early in the morning. The senses become clogged. I must not forget to remind Alfonso that the father Pinsent wants bacon with his eggs.”

CHAPTER VII

They had been married a week—a tremulous, ecstatic, amazing week.

It seemed to Rose made up of all the laughing colors of the sea.

They were surrounded by the sea, clear and limpid as a shallow pool, the great deep bay gleamed and shone about them.

Out of it the Islands rose like flowers. Capri uneven, wild and blue, Ischia tulip-shaped and tall—Posilippo and its attendant isles like a fallen spray of blossoms; and in Capri itself the whole spring lay bare to the sun.

The South was like Léon—it was beautiful, but it was strange.

On their first evening they had driven swiftly up the hillside; the air was cold and keen; the small mountain ponies galloped through the quick-falling darkness and just for a moment a breath of fear touched the triumphant bride.

She longed for something familiar, something that wasn’t even beautiful, but to which she had grown accustomed. She didn’t put it to herself quite like that—she only wished she hadn’t had to leave her fox terrier at home.

The moment passed and other richer moments took its place.

Love was just—what without expecting it Rose had most desired. No one

could have expected any one to be as wonderful as Léon. He spilt his soul into his passion, his ardor filled their hours, there was no way in which he did not color her life. She felt herself like some poor common pebble transformed into purple and rose color by the touch of the sea.

It never occurred to her that when the tide recedes the color goes. She did not know that Léon's passion was a tide, and she did not believe that it would ever recede.

They explored everything in Capri, the ruins of Tiberius' villas, the many colored grottos, the little stray paths that led between high walls to the heights of Capri—and everything they saw Rose loved. But best of all she loved their own familiar garden of the Hotel Paradiso, surrounded by violets, where Léon taught her to smoke cigarettes and where the stars swooped down on them in the velvet dark evenings, leaning just over the tops of the little stunted trees.

She had everything she wanted then, but most of all she had Léon, rarer and sweeter than the voilets, more astonishing and limitless than the southern stars.

Of course he had his faults. Rose accepted these limits of natural frailty with eager tenderness.

He was jealous, fierce and a little hard on anything that interfered with his crowning absorption. Rose had heard him speak with cold, incisive sharpness to a waiter who interrupted one of their soft, interminable garden intimacies; and Léon was indifferent, intensely indifferent—to anything or any one but her.

She couldn't be said to mind it, but she noticed it; it made her hope that nothing would ever happen to her—it would be so awful if it did—for Léon.

Then one day he ran up the outside staircase which led to their rooms with a peculiar, excited expression in his eyes. Rose came out to meet him, and together they leaned over the balcony.

"Such a funny thing has happened," he explained. "I've met an old friend, isn't it strange?—he is here also on his honeymoon. The wife—I had not met before—you must know them. I have asked them to-morrow to tea."

Rose hid a moment's dissatisfaction. "Are they French, Léon?" she asked a little nervously.

"But of course, yes, Parisians of the most Parisian. Do you object to that?" he demanded impatiently.

"Oh no!" she explained. "Only you know, Léon dear, my French is so bad!"

He didn't say it was adorable, which was what he usually said, though he

never allowed her to attempt it when they were together. “It is time you learned French,” he said. “You can’t go on like this.” Then he looked at her with strange critical eyes. “You mustn’t wear that to-morrow,” he said coldly. “What have you got that you can wear? Madame Gérard—dresses.”

Rose flushed. “Dearest,” she answered, “you know everything I’ve got—I thought you liked my clothes—they were all I could get in Rome.”

“They are, nevertheless, extremely poor,” Léon pronounced with an air of finality. “I can’t think why you have no manner of putting on your clothes. There is no character in them, no charm, no unexpectedness. You dress as if you wanted shelter from the cold. Also none of your things have any seduction—they are as dull as boiled eggs. You cannot live in Paris and dress like an English country miss.”

Rose felt as if she would die if Léon would not get that cold look out of his eyes. She lost her head under his impassive scrutiny. “Must I meet them?” she pleaded. “The Gérards, I mean. They don’t sound a bit my kind of people.”

“But of course you must meet them!” said Léon angrily. “Naturally, since you are my wife—you are not my mistress, to be hidden away at such a time!”

“Léon!” Rose exclaimed—his words struck at her like a whip lash. She turned quickly away and went into their room. She felt as if she could not stay any longer with Léon. In five minutes he rejoined her—not the strange, disagreeable man who had spoken to her like that, but her husband Léon. He was full of tender apologies. He couldn’t, he explained, think what had made him so nervous. Perhaps it was because Capri was so quiet, one resented anything that broke into it. But, after all after to-morrow they need see very little of the Gérards—Raoul wasn’t a great friend of his—he was, however, an interesting man—a well-known and very fine singer. He was a good deal thought of in Paris. Perhaps one day he would sing to them. Madame also was musical. She adored her husband’s voice.

Rose said that would be lovely, and she asked Léon how long the Gérards’ honeymoon had lasted. Léon said longer than theirs—a fortnight or three weeks, perhaps.

It was Madame’s idea, Capri. They had taken a villa so that Raoul could practise comfortably. Raoul would naturally have preferred Naples. “She is romantic, however, like you,” Léon murmured, kissing Rose’s soft white throat.

Then he sighed a little and moved restlessly about the room. “For Raoul,” he murmured, “I am not so sure. Capri isn’t very gay.” This was the second time Léon had mentioned the lack of this quality in Capri, and neither time had Rose paid any attention to it. She was not a Frenchwoman, and she had no idea

that Léon attached any particular weight to the idea of gaiety.

Léon kissed her again. This time he did it a little remorsefully.

They were to have tea in the garden under the almond blossom trees. Léon was to go into Capri and return early with cakes and roses, but before he went he inspected Rose's dressing table. He frowned helplessly at her dreadful lack of accessories.

"Before she goes," he explained to Rose, "Madame will no doubt wish to tidy her hair and readjust her veil. Why is it you have nothing here?"

Rose gazed at him. "But, Léon," she said gently, "I have pins and brushes."

Léon exploded suddenly into one of his picturesque whiffs of anger. "Mon Dieu! Are you a woman at all?" he exclaimed. "You have no powder, no rouge, no scent. You have nothing here on your dressing table that a woman should have! Oh, you everlasting creature of soap and fresh air! How can I explain you? How can I explain anything? I shall go mad!"

Afterwards he calmed down. He would, he explained, buy what he could get at Capri. Fortunately Rose did have silver-topped boxes and bottles; these could be filled to look as natural as possible.

Rose agreed; she would have agreed to anything to please him, but she was surprised at the amount of things Léon apparently considered a Frenchwoman would find necessary in order to reassume her veil and tidy her hair after a tea-party. Besides, Rose didn't like scent.

At half-past four Madame Gérard appeared, her husband strolling a little behind her.

Two impressions flashed simultaneously upon Rose; one was that Madame Gérard, though distinctly smart, wasn't particularly pretty, and the other, that in spite of her lovely clothes, her new husband, and the romance of Capri, she hadn't got happy eyes.

Her other impressions of Madame Gérard she formed more slowly.

Monsieur Gérard she instantly and wholly disliked.

He was much older than his wife, and had a bored, conceited air, and rather thick red lips.

He stared a great deal at Rose, and said several times over, when Léon introduced him to her, that he was very much impressed.

Madame was charming; she was charming about the garden, about the tea, about the wonderful English nation, and about Capri; but she was charming in Parisian French. Neither of the Gérards knew a word of English, and Madame spoke in a cascade of little soft, vanishing sounds, the significance of which poor nervous, attentive Rose couldn't possibly catch.

Monsieur Gérard, on the other hand, made three separate emphatic attempts to talk to Rose. Rose blushed and frowned and didn't suppose for a single instant that she had understood what he said. She wouldn't have liked it at all if she had, but of course men couldn't say such things to ladies to whom they had just been introduced.

What was strange was that she could, she always bewilderingly had been able to understand Léon's French, however fast or complicated the rush of his talk might be, and what was so odd, so uncomfortable and bewildering was that Léon was saying really dreadful things to Madame Gérard. Not that Madame Gérard minded, on the contrary she seemed particularly stimulated by Léon's vivid attentions. Nor that Monsieur Gérard minded, either; he gave up his endeavors with Rose, and seemed to resign himself to a silent but perfectly good-tempered peace. He seemed, though the idea was as preposterous as everything else, to feel like a sentry who has just been relieved after a too protracted exposure at a difficult post. He ate heartily, and when he had finished he asked permission to smoke, once or twice he hummed something under his breath.

It was perfectly natural that Léon should not notice Rose, you can't in public single out your wife for attention, and Madame Gérard made the most valiant efforts to include her.

Expressive, gesticulating, infinitely gay, Madame drew, or strove to draw, the poor dull little English wife into the swift current of their talk, but she did not succeed, partly, no doubt, because Rose was shy, but partly also because Léon markedly wished to keep her out.

Rose kept out. She made herself as busy as she could pouring out tea and handing cake, then she leaned back in her chair and tried to look as if she enjoyed hearing Léon and Madame—what?—you couldn't call it exactly talk.

That was the difficulty. It was more of a game than a conversation, and a game whose rules Rose had never learnt.

Monsieur Gérard got up after a time, and asked if Madame would excuse him—might he examine the planting of the lemons? He was madly interested in lemons.

Rose gladly excused him. She heard Léon ask Madame Gérard if this statement of her husband's was true.

"Never in the world!" Madame gaily replied. "He does not know the difference between a lemon and an orange!"

"Then let us," said Léon, "also go and examine something we do not understand."

Rose stayed where she was. Something had happened to her little secret

lovely garden, it was suddenly vulgarized and spoilt.

The scent of the lemons, delicate and pungent, made her head ache. The pigeons came to her, when the others had gone, and she fed them from the crumbs of her first party. She had always thought it would be so delightful to give a party with Léon, but she had not supposed that the party, as far as she was concerned, would be composed exclusively of pigeons.

CHAPTER VIII

An affair of importance had brought Monsieur Gérard to the Hotel Paradiso. He excused himself to Rose for wishing to consult her husband privately. Rose accepted his excuses sedately and retired to her balcony.

She liked Léon to be consulted. It showed how wise he was, that an older man, even if he wasn't very nice, should stand in need of his judgment.

It was very interesting to watch the two men walking up and down the garden. Léon slim and smart, with his little unconscious air of having arrived without premeditation at the perfection of appearance. Monsieur Gérard heavy, with a kind of sleepy uncertainty in his movements, and the effect of forcible compression about the waist. There was something to Rose very repulsive in the muffled greediness of Monsieur Gérard's expression. He looked at once selfish and burdened; it made her nervous to see the two men together—for she had an idea that the burdens of the selfish are apt to be readily transferred.

She could not hear what they said, but she could see they were saying a tremendous amount. First Monsieur Gérard would begin emphatically with a puffy white forefinger attacking the air. His shoulders, his eyebrows, his hat were volcanically active, speech broke from him in a cascade as overwhelming and magnificent as the Tivoli Falls. Then he would pull himself up abruptly, broken in upon by another torrent from Léon. Even when they listened to each other their attention was as vivid as speech, and they were capable at moments of catching each other's speech without discontinuing the rapid flow of their own.

Rose thought their conversation must be about an opera; and she was sure that if the opera was like their conversation it would be very exciting.

There were moments when she thought the two men were angry, there were others when the emotion between them seemed to rise up like a sudden wind and possess the garden.

On the whole it was Léon who was the most excited—he repeatedly said "*Non!*"—but even from the balcony Rose gathered in his passionate negative a reluctance for it to be taken as final.

They parted with great affection; there was gratitude in Monsieur Gérard's attitude, and there was protection and soothing in that of Léon's. "But above all," she heard her husband say, "with women one must be practical." They shook hands three times, then Monsieur Gérard waved his hat to Rose and hurried out of the garden.

Léon rejoined her, lighting a cigarette; his hands trembled a little, his eyes were intensely bright. It struck Rose that he was restless, more restless than usual.

He hummed a little tune to himself and then, breaking off suddenly, told her to bring him out her best hat.

"It has an air," he explained, "quite too much of the Sunday. I want to eradicate it! A tranquil hat afflicts me! It has no power to move the heart. In a hat, one should have peril. It should not be an accident, I admit many are! But it should have an intention with a hint of danger. Pass me the scissors."

Rose passed him the scissors. "I hope," she ventured, "that Monsieur Gérard hadn't anything dreadful to say."

She thought it couldn't have been very dreadful, for Léon was looking distinctly pleased.

However, he put a decent amount of gravity into the headshake with which he answered her.

"Everything is of the most complicated," he assured her. "The affair Gérard has literally come to pieces. The marriage has as little integrity as the inside of a volcano. They walk on broken glass. It is no longer a honeymoon—it is an inferno!"

Rose cried out in horror. "But what has happened to them?" she asked anxiously.

"It is a long story," said Léon, who had by now completely unpicked her hat and was trying the trimming upside down, and rather liking the effect. "But I shall tell you as much as I can. One must make the troubles of others one's own—must we not? Both our religions agree upon that. *Non?*

"It appears, in the first instance, the marriage was of Madame's making.

"She had the idea—common to many women—that she was born to be the wife of a great artist. As a matter of fact, no women are born for that, because no great artist should have a wife. They should have from time to time a tragic union with a mistress—that develops them; wives do not. Raoul was the only artist Madame knew. She was twenty-three, an heiress, and as you see for yourself a charming little woman of the world. She made a good impression upon Raoul. He discovered that marriage with her would have a solid

foundation. Now he has got it and naturally he does not know what to do with it. Above all he finds that Madame considers herself ill-used. She is, as I told you before, romantic. She expected a grand passion, she knew him capable of one, but she did not grasp that it could never be in her direction.

"I find it myself a little bourgeois of her to expect Raoul to develop such a thing for a wife. Do not look so like the Sunday hat, dear Rose! Remember their marriage was a French one. Ours is English—therefore we were in love. Still, of course, both were marriages!" Léon manipulated the hat afresh, it was beginning to look less and less like Sunday. Rose said nothing. She had a silly feeling that if she spoke she might cry. She was very sorry for Madame Gérard.

"That, then, is the grievance of Madame," Léon went on. "She is young, excitable and disappointed. You have that on one side. I must say that I think she lacks management, but for all that one sympathizes with her.

"His grievance is, however, more serious still. Because he has no grand passion for her, Madame turns round and asserts that there is no real marriage between them!—that, in short, if she cannot have the silver moon, she won't be put off with very good cheese of the day. You follow me? She does not wish to be a wife to Raoul."

"Oh," cried Rose incredulously, "oh, Léon, surely Monsieur Gérard did not tell you this about his *wife*?"

"But yes—" said Léon calmly, "why not? I, however, consider that if Madame lacks management, Raoul lacks *souplesse*. Things should never have been allowed to reach such a sharpness. I don't say he could have given her a grand passion, one can't invent such things, but he might, all the same, have lent himself to the situation during the honeymoon. If a good woman cannot have a honeymoon, what can she have? The type will die out if they are to be starved all round."

"Do you mean to say you want him to pretend?" Rose asked. She spoke quietly, but the feeling behind her words made Léon throw down the hat and catch her hands in his.

"Ah!" he said, "you Queen of the Puritans! No! not pretend—but he might—mightn't he?—have for the moment have gone a trifle in advance of the facts?"

Rose withdrew her hand from his. "It seems to me," she said, "all of it, simply horrible! I don't understand. How could he come here and tell you such things—to talk about his wife and her feelings? Why, it's all so incredibly *private*! It's as dreadful as if he'd killed her. I don't think I should have minded it half so much if he had. And what is the *use* of it, Léon—why did he

come to you?"

"Ah, that is why I told you at all," Léon explained, a little crestfallen. "Of course, I knew you would shrink from this affair. It is natural that you should, though I cannot, for my part, see why, in a strange land, surrounded by Italians, the poor Raoul shouldn't be allowed to consult a compatriot and a friend. However, it is really for my assistance that he came, and I cannot give him that, Rose, without your consent. It is simply a question of whether or no you are sufficiently magnanimous."

"How do you mean?" asked Rose, more frightened still. "You know I can't talk French properly, and if I could I shouldn't know what to say to people like that!"

"Oh, I didn't ask you to mix yourself up in it," Léon answered reassuringly. "It is, however, perhaps even harder for most women—what I have to ask of you! It is to stand aside and let me mix myself up in it."

She shivered a little. "Oh, but why," she asked, "should you be mixed up in it? We only saw them yesterday!"

Léon picked up the hat again. "It appears," he said, "that I managed to entertain Madame yesterday. Poor thing! she has been living the life of a tortured Romantic. For the first time Raoul heard her laugh, saw her smile, and he became attracted by the idea. He thought if I managed to amuse her a little, she would be less tragic, and then, after a time, she might submit her case to me, and I could, little by little, you know, much as I have done with this hat—a feather here, a ribbon there, readjust the situation. Such things have been done, you know, by people of tact, and to save a marriage when one has oneself made such a success of one's own—isn't that a duty one perhaps owes, in return for one's happiness?"

Rose thought the situation over, that is to say, she felt it over. Here and there her heart winced under the probes she gave it. She knew that Léon was magnificent, and she felt humiliatingly conscious that she was not as magnificent as Léon. She saw plainly enough what was required of her. She was to stand aside for the sake of these strangers, she was to give up her honeymoon, she was to be alone, and to let Léon spend his time with this French lady, who was charming, and whom she could not understand. She remembered what Léon had said, that he must not be constrained, she remembered it perhaps too well. Her whole being centered in the desire to leave him free.

She shut her eyes and prayed. Léon did not know that she was praying, but he felt a little uncomfortable. He was deeply sorry for the Gérards, but there was no doubt that their complications had made the Island of Capri more

amusing.

Rose opened her eyes wide. “Léon,” she said, “I want you to do whatever you think right, and I will help you all I can.”

He kissed her joyously. “There,” he said, “the perfect wife! What a pity Madame cannot hear you! She would see the path of happiness without a lesson! Of course you will help me. You will help me profoundly. Day by day I shall bring you the history of my little attempt. It is on your advice I will lean, the drama of it will be for both of us an immense resource, and I have a feeling that for all of us it will have a happy ending!”

Rose did not share the feeling. She picked up the hat which he had finished and tried it on. “It is very French,” she said doubtfully, “but does it really suit me, Léon?”

“Ah, you must make it suit you,” said Léon a little ironically. “I cannot help you to that! It’s all a question of how you wear it!”

CHAPTER IX

Léon had, from the first, the best intentions. He was to be the good comrade to Raoul, the sympathetic counselor to Madame, and for the situation in general a happy blend of an olive branch, a dove, and a rainbow in the heavens!

His shrewdness of judgment was only to be matched by the lightness of his heart. For a month many of his most salient gifts had been lying idle. Rose had not asked for management, and there had been in their easy-going lovemaking no very great place for tact.

Léon was on the look-out for difficulty, for gulfs of temperament and training, efforts and sacrifices and gently taught lessons, but after a time his look-out ceased. Rose looked out. She made the efforts, she learned his lessons, before the need arose to teach her. In fact, she saved him trouble, and there had been moments when Léon found this a trifle dull. It was different now; his skill was called upon at every turn. Madame Gérard was a very unhappy woman. She had had a spoilt childhood and a sentimental and enthusiastic youth guarded at every point from experience.

All her adventures had been in her unfettered dreams. She had dreamed that she should marry Raoul, and then she had married him. Life had brought her up very short. She had believed in an exquisite and ideal relationship and she had been given with terrible promptitude Monsieur Gérard’s impression of what constituted the marriage tie.

He had spoilt her dreams, he had shaken about her ears the fullness of her

life; but he was still the man she loved. All other men were but as trees walking, even Léon was only a tree that walked. It was true that he walked more and more frequently in her direction. She took a certain notice of him, her heart lay in the dust but it began to mean something to her that Léon resented this. She felt through the bitterness of her shame a tiny spark of returning pride.

It was a very tiny spark, it hardly amounted to self-respect—but Léon guarded it and kept it alight, as a man shields a flickering match from the rough air. He flattered her grossly at first because she was too sad to understand subtlety. Afterwards, as her mind turned towards him, he refined his flatteries. He kept her a little hungry so that she should more and more look to him for this nourishment of the spirit.

But Madame Gérard, in spite of her grief, was a kind-hearted little woman. She remembered Rose.

"We must not neglect her," she would say gently, "the little English wife. One does not cure one unhappiness by making another." And Léon would explain that the English were a strange race. They loved solitude, speechlessness and wonderful long newspaper articles about politics. Also Rose was learning French from a nun and she didn't care to make a third in their little amusements until she could talk more freely with them.

"She has a pride about it," Léon explained. "These cold, silent women are very proud."

"I should not have thought her cold," said Madame Gérard, thoughtfully. "She has kind eyes. When one is very unhappy one notices kind eyes."

Léon led the conversation back to Madame's unhappiness and away from Rose's eyes. He had not meant to be disloyal to Rose, he rather liked to think of her as cold and proud. After a time Madame no longer tried to send him back to Rose; she was a Frenchwoman, even if she was broken-hearted, and she was not slow to understand Léon. "This type," she said to herself, "will always be with some woman or other—with me he is safe! I shall send him back to her as he came even perhaps a little wiser, a little more appreciative of her. I will do her no bad turn, the little English wife."

Madame Gérard had the best intentions, too. She had even better ones than Léon, but neither of them perceived that they had them in the wrong direction. Nevertheless, for a time all went well. Monsieur Gérard studied for the coming opera season with a freer mind and in a better temper.

Rose took long lessons from the nun, and as she slowly and painstakingly began to master the intricate and exquisite language of her husband she felt as if she were approaching his spirit, and preparing for herself and for him a fresh

world of understanding and companionship. Day by day Léon brought her, with fresh enthusiasm, endless stories of his progress with the affair Gérard. Some instinct in Rose told her that by the length of these stories, and by Léon's absorbed, invigorated returns to her, their love was still safe.

She needed all the assurances that she could get, for she was very much alone. She was always just the same to Léon; she spread about him the warm, wide sea of her magnanimity; he was never to know she felt sad or strange, or that she had a silly habit of almost crying when she walked alone on the cliffs above the bright, transparent sea.

He wasn't to dream that she minded his boating and driving and walking with Madame Gérard, or that she kept explaining to herself how natural it was for him to talk more and with more gaiety in French, and not to care so much as he used to for moonlight in the garden.

She succeeded so entirely in the effect of appearing not to mind that she thoroughly annoyed Léon.

He had been looking forward to a fresh drama with Rose, a little visible but not fettering jealousy, a scene or two, even a few tears, wise and tender explanation on his part, and passionate pleading upon her own.

But Rose's passion was very quiet and it never occurred to it to plead.

She had no such intention, but she made Léon's vanity smart, under her daily serenity. "Is she made of wood—or of iron," he asked himself bitterly, "that she lets me live in the pocket of another woman even during the honeymoon? What have I to look forward to—centuries of ice?"

He knew very well that there was no ice in Rose, but his bad conscience enjoyed resentment very much. It was not only his vanity that was injured, he began to be conscious of a secret fear.

Rose was to be his guardian angel in this affair—he mustn't, whatever happened, be allowed to lose his head.

He didn't expect his wife to stop his doing what he wanted, but she ought to be so effective, so in the center of things as to prevent his wanting it, and Rose wouldn't come into the center of things. She remained in the background, trusting him. He felt the burden of her confidence checking him at every turn.

There was danger, and she didn't see danger. Was she going to walk straight through it, with her wonderful blue eyes forever unaware?

She ought to have realized that however noble a man is, and however unhappy a woman, a situation in which, from the best motives, they are constantly thrown together, needs watching. A most unfortunate thing had already happened. Madame had discovered, from an unguarded remark of

Léon's, that he had talked with her husband about her. Madame Gérard had a constructive mind—if two and two were anywhere about, it did not take her long to arrive at four. Instantly she understood: this new companionship, the devout attention of her husband's friend was nothing at all but a plot between the two men to play with her broken heart!

She knew their aim; it was to make her compliant to the lowest needs of one who had not so much affection for her as a stray dog for the hand that strokes it. To say that Madame Gérard was angry at this discovery is to underestimate the uses of language. She was attacked by a bitter fury of outraged pride. Léon had brought back her pride, then, simply in order to outrage it! But this time she kept her head. Any woman can keep her head with a man with whom she is not in love.

Madame Gérard knew herself to be standing with her back to the wall, fighting for her life against two men, one of them at least she could injure.

She gave herself a moment of despair, her small hand clutched fiercely at a little stone beside the path near which they sat—her hidden eyes burned with unshed tears. For a long moment she held herself in silence, while she let Léon cover up his mistake as if she had not heard him; then, being a practical woman, she put despair away till afterwards: besides, despair could only hurt herself.

It was a pity that in destroying Léon's marriage she should have to destroy Rose's. Enraged as she was, she thought of this; still, she couldn't stop to consider a woman who, if she had had the least sense, would have interfered in the whole affair long ago.

"You are not angry," Léon urged, "that I should have touched on your sufferings with the good Raoul?"

Madame laughed softly and looked at Léon with provocative, caressing eyes.

"You who know women—must know how safe you are from me," she replied. "Do I look angry?" She did not look angry, but she looked provocative, and this was the first time that she had looked provocative.

It was the difference between a battery turned on and a battery turned off. Madame Gérard, like all Frenchwomen, could use her sex or sink it as the occasion required. Up till now she had never used it, she had kept it steadily in abeyance out of respect to Rose. Now Rose had to go, respect had to go, everything had to go—but her fierce rage against the two men who were in league against her pride.

It was no wonder that Léon began to be afraid, even though it must be admitted that his fear was chiefly of a pleasurable nature, nor that Monsieur

Gérard should suddenly feel that he had evoked rather more help than he needed; nor that Rose should find herself not only more alone but suddenly deprived of the support of the long histories Léon used to make to her, on his returns.

He could no longer tell her what took place between him and Madame; speech had become a medium for something better not explained.

Madame Gérard was the only one of the group who appeared wholly at her ease; all her energies were being freely used, and in the direction she had chosen for them. She was making her husband jealous, Léon infatuated and giving the stupid English wife plenty of time to learn French.

The good intentions of everybody began to look a little like the fashion of the year before last.

CHAPTER X

It was part of their general attention to the surface of things that Rose was never to appear deserted.

Léon and Madame tore themselves away from her with public reluctance at the garden gate; they rejoined her eagerly like creatures reprieved, after a prolonged but obviously penal absence.

They even arranged between them times and occasions when Monsieur Gérard should also be represented, when the united four, like a procession on parade, strolled before the watching eyes of Capri.

The watching eyes of Capri are indulgently accustomed to youth and change, they are incapable of the element of shock, but they are equally incapable of the delusion of a good appearance. When Capri beheld Rose and Léon issuing from the Hotel Paradiso on their way to a “Thé Intime” at the Villa degli Angeli, Capri was not hoodwinked by this overflow of a dual domesticity, rather it laid a finger to the nose and cried, from one doorway to the other, “Behold!—a festa of knives!”

It was a many-colored day in the late spring, the bright air shimmered and danced like the bubbles in champagne. The Villa degli Angeli shone pillow-shaped and glittering in a rose-hung garden. Wistaria streamed from its porch, and cloaked like a shield its romantic lovers’ balcony.

Inside the high-ceilinged, gilded little salon, Madame Gérard moved gracefully to and fro—she wore a white dress with touches of scarlet and gold; her lips were very red, her cheeks were lightly powdered, her eyes had a certain sparkle in them, and the heels of her small white shoes were thrillingly high. It struck Rose, not for the first time, that there was really no use being

much prettier than that. Madame Gérard greeted Rose with ecstatic pleasure and Léon with a charming ironic gravity; behind her from the gloom Monsieur Gérard moved heavily forward. It was plain that he found the occasion exhausting. Monsieur Gérard easily exhausted most occasions, his was not a revivifying nature; still, there was a certain dignity in the way he murmured over Rose's hand that he was impressed, greatly impressed, by her visit. She remembered that he had been impressed before. Rose would have liked to have said something pleasant in return, but it is difficult to appear full of *savoir faire* when expression is limited to requests for hot water, the superficial qualities of dogs and cats, the time of day, and the habits of railway trains.

Rose could talk quite easily about these things by now, and she was also an expert in weather and could have made herself into a well of sympathy to an invalid, but for ordinary tea-party purposes her French hung fire.

The burden of entertainment fell naturally enough upon Madame. She was equal to it, in all probability she had arranged her rôle in advance.

The week had gone well with her. Monsieur Gérard had been roused from practising operas and from nervous hostility over his matrimonial liabilities. He perceived that at one stroke his liabilities and his security had been snatched from him. He was jealous and had begun to be a little eager; but Madame did not meet him half-way.

She no longer bored him to make love to her, indeed she ignored any opening for his attention; she lived exquisitely and extremely unapproachably a life of her own. Monsieur Gérard resented this; he hadn't meant anything so extreme, but he did not see his way to put an end to it. Madame knew perfectly that he was ready to put an end to it, and she had arranged this occasion, both that he might be given his opportunity and that Léon might receive the punishment that he deserved.

Léon had wanted, it appeared, to reunite her to her husband. This was the height of kindness on his part; she would repay him by showing him that his efforts were a little in arrear of the facts. But alas! once more she showed that lack of intelligence to be found in the cleverest of women when they are dealing with the man they love. She understood the man—she had proved it—but she muddled the love. She should have hooked her fish before she dangled it before the exasperated eyes of Léon, and she should have remembered that it was only half a fish—and half an artist. But at first she was satisfied with the rôle of the perfect wife—instantly she succeeded in exasperating Léon. She drew her husband skilfully and prominently into the front of the situation; she did not praise him, but little by little she tapped the fount of his successes.

She laid him out before her guests with delicate touches that were far finer

than praise. It was intoxicating for Monsieur Gérard. After a week's complete indifference he found himself a hero in his wife's eyes!

He found himself also in the most comfortable chair in the room (for with men over forty a certain attention must be paid to an appropriate background) and enjoying a wonderful "gouter" in which his taste ruled supreme. Lately Madame had not studied his taste, but for the occasion everything his fancy desired had been obtained for him. His future spread before him in a rosy glow—after all this marriage of his had not been a great mistake—he rather wished he had not taken Léon into his confidence about it; still, it was amusing to watch the fellow's nose slipping out of joint! He would now have to return to his dull little wife—that would be punishment enough for any man!

Léon was a bad loser; he became first restive, then actively hostile, finally sulky. Madame turned his active hostility into gentle ridicule; his restlessness served somehow to bring out the grand nature of Monsieur Gérard. The grand nature of Monsieur Gérard was not as a rule, active; and Léon, confronted with a specimen of it, sank into silent resentment.

Even this tent of Achilles was not, however, left to him; it blew this way and that under the delicate raillery of Madame. She noticed that Monsieur was out of spirits?

She attacked Rose about it. "A woman is responsible for all that happens to a man during his honeymoon, is she not?" she asked her. Rose, thinking that Madame was doubtful as to the state of Léon's health, told her painstakingly that Léon was an "esprit fort." Madame, with a happy little shriek, proclaimed that she was sure of it, but was not his wit like Madame's own—this afternoon, at any rate—of the wonderful silent English type? Even Monsieur Gérard laughed at this, but on the whole Madame spared Rose; she kept as far as possible her hand off her. She would gladly have spared her altogether, and, in a sense, of course, she was doing so. She was giving her her husband back—not wiser, nor more appreciative, and certainly in a far worse state of mind—but for all that he would be returned to Rose this afternoon not so very much the worse for wear, as husbands go.

For half-an-hour Madame Gérard took upon her little supple shoulders the entertainment of her guests. She was for that half hour like the whole cast of the Comédie Française put together—brilliant, exquisitely decorative and incredibly, ironically knowing; then she turned to her husband with her eyes like an innocent caress, and said, "Now, *mon ami*, will you not make music for us?" Monsieur Gérard was not unwilling to use his magnificent gift. Léon, who felt that the end had come, politely echoed the request; and then Madame made her fatal mistake. The game was hers—she had only to stand aside and let it finish itself; but she could not stand aside—nervously, with happy

flutterings, she must show them how she followed her husband's work, and how she helped him: and she didn't help him at all.

She drew out his music—it wasn't what he wanted to sing and he said so crisply; he always knew what he wanted to sing. Then she said she must play his accompaniment, so that he could stand up and let his voice out.

Now Monsieur Gérard's voice was not of a quantity to be lightly let out in a small bird-cage of a room; it would have been sufficient to roll over Capri like a rock-stream. Also, Monsieur Gérard was like a tiger to any accompanist but his own, who was taking at the moment a much-needed holiday.

It counted for nothing at all with Monsieur Gérard that his wife was dressed in white and scarlet and gold and that she had roused in him the temporary sentiments of attraction. From the moment that she mounted the music-stool nothing counted but her power of playing a correct accompaniment without too much expression. She had evoked the artist, and the artist upsets everything.

Monsieur Gérard began to sing; he modulated his great dramatic voice, but the sound of it shook the Villa degli Angeli; it poured out on the dancing air with the majestic roll of great billows breaking on the beach.

Madame tinkled mildly and prettily on the piano after him—too prettily of course, and not very accurately. The little ineffective notes were like a pee-wit chirping in a storm. In an instant Monsieur Gérard had swept her from the music-stool almost on to the floor. "You have no more music in you than a fly!" he broke off abruptly to inform her, then he sat down in her place and roared in velvet with magnificent effect.

Madame, shaken and reduced from triumph to the verge of tears, quivered for a little in the window-seat; but even then her prize was still within her grasp—Monsieur had simply for the moment forgotten her. She was capable, if she had waited, of reminding him successfully. Alas! she had that fatal longing to help which reduces the greatest women to the level of a nuisance. She could not let herself be forgotten even for a moment—even for his art. She would go back and turn over the leaves for Raoul. He frowned, he swore under his breath, he shook his heavy head at her; but she went on turning over the leaves—he was not playing to the score, he did not want his leaves turned over—her eager, fluttering figure drove him frantic. In ten minutes he banged the piano lid down, and threw the score on the carpet. He told her before Léon, before Rose, in the drawing-room of the Villa degli Angeli that she was an intrusive insect!

There was a horrible pause. Léon approached Madame in a state of mingled chivalry and satisfaction. She was a pitiable figure as she stood there

biting at her dainty lace handkerchief to keep the tears back; her face was very white under its layer of powder. Probably it would have been better if she had sat down. She simply stood with imploring, helpless eyes fixed upon the angry tyrant before her.

No angry man likes to be looked at helplessly. Monsieur Gérard glared at her—then he made the gulf that had come between them impassable.

"Understand!" he shouted, turning the music still on the piano to and fro, as if he were making hay, "To-night I go to Naples! I cannot stand more of this! I will go to Naples for one night, for two—for three! You must remain here! I go to Naples!" Madame's eyes went from her husband to Léon. Léon's eyes were fixed on hers in pity, in forgiveness—and were they also fixed a little in expectation? He knew, and Madame knew, precisely the purpose of Monsieur Gérard in going to Naples.

Rose did not understand as much as this, but she thought it was very wicked of Monsieur Gérard to go away from his wife on their honeymoon because she tried to turn over the leaves of his music.

She got up and crossed the room towards Madame. It was Rose who put an end to the unendurable silence.

Léon was waiting for a cue from Madame, and Madame was too stunned to give him any cue. She was like a little helpless leaf that has brought on its own storm, but Rose waited for nothing. She looked first at Monsieur Gérard. She compelled that enraged artist to meet her steady, disapproving eyes; then she held out her hand to Madame Gérard and with a gracious diffidence that was the perfection of dignity, she said in her stumbling French, "I hope very much, Madame, that if your husband is to leave you for a few days, you will give us as much of your company as possible."

Madame excused herself. She murmured under her breath that Rose was too kind. Once more her eyes flickered from her husband to Léon. "It is a great happiness to me to second my wife's invitation," said Léon gravely. He murmured something more as he bowed over her hand and kissed it. Rose had already turned and without even glancing in the direction of Monsieur Gérard she went out into the gay little garden.

Capri saw them return to the Hotel Paradiso.

Léon was remorsefully attentive to his wife; he treated her as if she were something very valuable that might break.

Perhaps in some subconscious way he knew that he was going to break her, but he was very much impressed by her behavior.

She was, he thought to himself, the soul of generosity, and when we are sure that we have the soul of generosity to deal with we sometimes find it

difficult not to take advantage of it.

CHAPTER XI

The next day Monsieur Gérard carried out his intention of going to Naples.

Madame Gérard remained invisible. She accepted the flowers Léon called upon her to present, but she sent down a message that she was indisposed and could see nobody. She was indisposed until five o'clock the following day. By this time she had made up her mind.

It was not an easy task. She said to herself again and again that she would have accepted heartbreak—but she could not accept outrage. Her husband had not only cruelly wronged her—he had done so publicly before the eyes of a man who loved her—and before his wife. Her marriage was a false step—it had been her first adventure—but in her imagination she had only counted upon adventures as successes—now she was face to face with an adventure which had proved a failure. She could not go back—she could only go on—and yet she hesitated, for after marriage, adventures that go on are no longer innocent. Her husband had left her with a weapon lying within her reach—from the first it had occurred to her that she could strike back with Léon, but with this idea had come another one, that in striking back she must cruelly wound an innocent and happy woman. In all the horrible scene which had taken place the day before there had only been one moment less intolerable than the others, and Rose had given her that moment. She had distinctly stood by her with an offer of friendship.

Madame Gérard spent twenty-four bitter, sleepless hours considering Rose. At the end of that time—having come to the decision that she did not want to hurt her, but that she wished to do the thing that would hurt her—she made the further decision that, after all, it need not hurt Rose so very much. When she thought of her own unhappiness, a little distress on the part of other wives did not seem out of place.

She would do her best to shield Rose from the truth, but she wouldn't do anything to prevent the truth taking place. These two decisions placed her in a better position than Léon. Léon had decided nothing.

He only knew that he must see this complex woman, that he must, out of chivalry, discover what she felt about the incredible behavior of her husband. He must find out also—in honor or common kindness—if there wasn't in the situation some successful part for a good friend to play. He drew upon all his virtues for his reasons. Yesterday Madame had sharply wounded his *amour propre*; he saw that she had been playing a game with him. Well, the game had

failed, and yet he was still there; there was therefore still the possibility of a new game under new conditions, with the advantage, perhaps, to him.

He went no further than that. He wanted, he assured himself, to go no further. He was full of consideration for Rose, but he distinctly wished to see how far he could go.

At five o'clock he found himself admitted. Madame was already out in the sheltered wistaria-covered balcony. She lay in a long chair draped in a soft white robe; there were pearls round her neck and a little black velvet band. She looked extraordinarily pathetic and young and very tired of grief.

There were no traces of tears on her little white face—but she was not the woman to allow traces of any kind to appear, unless they were becoming.

"It was kind of you to come," she said gently after a long pause. "Forgive me, I had misjudged you. I thought that you were playing with me."

Léon protested eagerly, how could she have had such an idea? One did not go about playing with young and innocent women who were unhappy. She must not do him so much injustice.

He talked for five minutes nobly and eloquently about unhappy young married women. Madame Gérard listened, looking between the wistaria branches towards the sea. When he had quite finished she said gently, "And yet it was a plot between you and my husband—your friendship, your attention to me—they were not very real, Monsieur. You had agreed with him to win me over to his wishes. Is that not so?"

Léon was upset. You can never be sure what a husband will not tell a wife, even an estranged and angry husband. There is a terrible habit of indiscriminate confidence in marriage. Léon had come across it before.

He would have eagerly denied conjecture, but it would not do to deny a confidence; besides he was secretly much relieved at this new version of things. He had been afraid that Madame had been playing with him; it appeared now that he had been playing with her. What had happened yesterday was merely a charming little feminine *revanche*. He began to find the part he was playing more attractive.

"It is true," he said at last, "your husband told me that your marriage was not happy—and to begin with perhaps I had the idea that it lay with you to make it so. Forgive me, this idea soon passed. It passed before the affair of the other day showed me the incredible *lacheté* of Raoul. Permit me to say that his behavior shocked me to the heart; but before this shock took place I had learned in what light to consider you. Believe me, I have not been playing with you. I am in earnest, in terrible earnest."

She turned her eyes to his. They were not beautiful eyes like Rose's—but

he did not know them so well, besides she used them better. “You are really in earnest, really, Léon?” she asked him searchingly. He sprang to his feet, but with a wave of her hand she motioned to him to remain where he was.

“I wonder,” she said very softly. “I do not want to be twice deceived, to be deceived once is to go broken-winged through life, but to be deceived twice, could one live at all?”

“I swear that I have not deceived you—that I will never deceive you!” cried Léon passionately. “The feeling that I have for you is real—it is intense.”

Still he meant to stay at Capri; he hadn’t any idea of doing anything else.

“You are prepared,” she asked him, “to prove your words to me? You realize if I believe them what is at stake for me—and if you realize that, do you not think that I have the right to ask you for a proof?”

“You shall not ask me for one!” he cried. “Rather I will give you *all* the proofs in my power—one or a dozen—what you will—you have only to ask!”

“You are very generous,” she said with her pretty irony. “One will be enough. I want you to-night to take me to Naples. I cannot stay in Capri until my husband returns. I will not return alone to France. It appears that we made a mistake in not going to Naples for our honeymoon. Let us then—you and I—rectify this mistake.”

Léon said nothing. He gripped at the little wooden balcony railing with both hands, and stared with blank eyes at the laughing sea. Leave Capri! Leave Rose! His heart shuddered within him—with every honest fiber of his nature, and he had many honest fibers in his nature, he loved Rose. He did not love the woman before him—but he had sought what she offered—how could he refuse it? It was true he had expected to make his own terms, but this would not be very easy to explain to her. Still, he tried hard to keep the situation in hand.

“I have said,” he began at last, “that I considered your husband, in leaving you, to have committed the worst of infamies. You are asking me to commit the same.”

Madame raised her eyebrows.

“You mean in leaving your wife?” she asked. “After what you have allowed me to suppose, I had not thought you would have that feeling. Nor would it be necessary for you to act as my husband has acted. But I am supposing, of course, that what you feel for me is—real.”

“Pardon me, Madame,” said Léon firmly, “all that I have said to you is true—and yet—is it incredible to you?—I love my wife!”

Madame smiled at him.

“You know how children play with daisies?” she said. “As they pull off the

little white petals one by one—'He loves me—a little, very much, passionately, not at all.' It is funny what comes after passionately—so soon after, Léon."

He stirred uneasily. Madame began to pull to pieces a spray of wistaria, throwing the blossoms one by one smilingly into her lap. "I do not ask you, my friend," she said slowly, "for the devotion of a lifetime—there are hardly enough to go round of these blossoms—we must not stop at passionately, must we—we must stop at not at all! I was thinking of spending three days in Naples."

"And you would expect me to leave you in three days?" asked Léon reproachfully. He watched her feverishly. A man must know what he is in for. "In three days," said Madame, throwing all the silvery mauve blossoms with a quick little gesture over the balcony, "I should insist upon your leaving me." As she did this her small, firm hand touched his. He caught it to his lips and kissed it fervently. The smile in her eyes deepened.

She supposed he must have stopped thinking of Rose, but he said again, after a moment's pause, "To leave her—to leave her—that seems somehow very base!"

"Then do not leave her," said Madame wearily, withdrawing her hand. "Break your word to me, it is very simple. I have no claim on you—I am not your wife."

"You are everything in the world to me," he said desperately. For the moment he believed she was.

She leaned forward a little.

"After all," she said, "your wife will not know why you go to Naples. You have only to say you go on business. She is so innocent she will believe you—you might even tell her that you are to act as my escort back to my husband. She need not suffer."

Léon flung back his head. "But," he stammered, his eyes filling with sudden tears, "I cannot lie to Rose! She is not like that! I cannot lie to her—it is as you say, she would believe me!"

"Ah," said Madame, "let us hope then that you can lie about women better than you can lie to them! But you are making a mistake. It is very easy to lie to us. All men have found it so."

He pushed her words away from him.

"Elise," he asked her suddenly, "do you care for me? This thing that you are about to do, is it from your heart?"

She rose and stood beside him.

“I will give you the proof,” she said in a low voice.

But still he was not satisfied; his eyes continued to question her.

“It is from my heart,” she repeated firmly. He caught her to him and kissed her, but it seemed to him even then as if he held something dead in his arms, something which by no beat of the heart, by no single spiritual response, met his. She gave him her lips.

For a long moment he held her, then she withdrew herself and moved away from him. “No more,” she said gently. “To-night I shall expect you. I will meet you at the turn of the road by the Madonna of the Rocks.”

She moved with him slowly towards the door. “*Voyons!*” she said before they parted. “Don’t hurt her—don’t ever tell her—your young wife. She is too good. A lie will cost you nothing. And, after all, if it was not me—it would be some other woman soon—would it not? After all—” Her voice faltered. Something in her wavered for a moment, something very hard and deep, tried suddenly to melt. “After all,” said Léon gravely, “this is the greatest proof I have to give. Take it as generously as I give it!”

She looked at him with strange eyes. “We are both about to be very generous, are we not?” she said with a dry little smile. “*Eh bien!* Love is short and marriage is long—all the better for love—which sees its end.”

Léon did not like this point of view. There was some truth in it, no doubt, but it would have sounded better from the lips of a man. He kissed her hands reproachfully. He could not think for the moment of anything very beautiful to say about love, and Madame herself said no more. She simply looked suggestively at the door.

After he had gone she stood where he had left her, clenching and unclenching her small, firm hands.

“From my heart,” she whispered, “*Mon Dieu*—it appears so—from my heart.”

CHAPTER XII

Rose was finishing a letter to Agatha on the balcony. She found it difficult to write to her sisters, they seemed so very far away.

She was afraid, too, that they might find her letters dull. You couldn’t go on describing the blue grotto; besides, neither Agatha nor Edith cared for descriptions of scenery, they always skipped them in books; and as far as Rose could tell nobody played any particular game in Capri. Young men shot birds on Sunday afternoons when they could, but they weren’t even the proper birds

to shoot, so perhaps it was better not to mention them.

When Rose wrote to her people she always said “we” even when she was referring to things that she did by herself.

It wasn’t very like a Pinsent to give way to this illicit expansion of fact, but Rose comforted herself by thinking that after all, editors said “we” when there was only one of them writing, and most of the married people she knew expressed themselves in the plural, though that perhaps was because they really did the things together. Still, she went on writing “we” because she didn’t want her people to think anything funny about Léon. She had just got as far as “We have such jolly little dinners in the garden,” when she heard Léon’s whistle coming up the stairs. He stood looking at her a little curiously.

“You are writing,” he asked her, “to your people?”

“To Agatha,” she said. “Have you any message?”

Léon sometimes sent very amusing messages to Agatha. For a moment Léon did not reply, then he said, “And what do you say to them—of me—your people?”

Rose blushed, just the same wonderful pink tulip blush Léon had from the first particularly admired, but it was ill-timed, it looked guilty. It shot through his uneasy mind that she had been complaining of him to the Pinsents. In his irritable, resentful state it gave him a sudden sense of justification. Hadn’t he done already wonders for Rose? He had not made open love to Elise (until just now, of course), he had borne for over a month the ennui of Capri. He hadn’t so much as been to a café without his wife, and now he had almost decided not to leave her!

“Tell them,” he said bitterly, “that you are perfect, and that I am a monster of depravity. Almost all wives say that to their relatives sooner or later. You, it appears, have taken up the tone in good time!”

“Léon!” she cried, aghast. And then, because she loved him so, because she had shielded him in the defiance of truth, because she had never had a suspicion of his faithlessness, she chose this moment to say the only harsh thing she had ever said to him. “I think,” she said, turning away her eyes, “that you are guilty of very bad taste.”

It was, of course, the one fatal reproach to make to a Frenchman. If she had said he was guilty of anything else he would have forgiven her.

Léon rushed into their room, his cheeks on fire as if she had struck him. It was clear she no longer loved him! Coldly, cruelly, with her horrible English justice, so out of place in a woman, she had thrown this stone at his heart! There could be but one issue now. He must go to Naples. She complained of him to her parents and she had accused him of bad taste! He packed a small

bag feverishly. The door between them was shut.

Rose hesitated. Should she open it and tell him she was sorry?

What would Agatha or Edith do, if they were there? Probably they would have burst open the door with shouts of glee, and inserted a cake of soap down Léon's back, but this happy method of conciliation seemed closed to Rose. She had never had their robuster gift of horseplay. She got up hesitatingly and walked slowly away, out into the garden and beyond the gates to post her letter. Perhaps when she came back for dinner she might have thought of something nice to say, something that would show Léon she was sorry and not aggravate him.

It was a lovely evening. She wandered on, seeing at every fresh turn of the road a yet more glorious view.

The great bay spread before her like an endless liquid flame. The color seemed to throb upon its burnished shield.

Naples lay beyond it, a long pearly circle in the evening light, pale cream and coral pink and soft, dull gold. Above Vesuvius the white plume of smoke drove straight as a lifted feather up into the sky.

She went on till she reached the Madonna of the Rocks, then she sat under the tall raised figure with its lamp.

At the turn of the road below her a little carriage was standing; in it was the figure of a woman in white. The figure reminded her of Madame Gérard, only it could not be Madame Gérard, of course, because Madame had written to Rose that she was not well and could not leave her room.

As Rose sat there her eyes filled with tears. They were not for herself, though her own heart was sore; they were for the poor woman whose husband had so cruelly left her all alone on her honeymoon. And when Rose thought how happy she was herself, and how soon she would tell Léon, with her cheek against his cheek, that she was sorry she had been horrid, her heart ached for that other bride who had no lover to appease; and who must be looking at all this great sparkling sea and wonderful bright earth with such sad, different eyes! And so Rose sat there and cried for Madame Gérard—and Madame Gérard, two hundred yards away, waited for Rose's husband.

He came at last, hurriedly, quietly, with hanging head, like a thief. He was ashamed, ashamed of his anger against Rose, of his incredible folly, of his silly, intemperate desires. He passed close by the rock on which Rose sat. Her heart moved suddenly against her side; it betrayed her; stubbornly it beat as if it knew itself in danger, and yet, Rose said to herself, there was no danger. It was only Léon hurrying by, looking as if he were ashamed.

She saw him get into the little carriage, and then turn and look back. She

could not see his face, but it seemed to her as if he were reluctant to be driven away. Of course he would be back for dinner.

Perhaps, after all, that was Madame Gérard, and Léon was driving her down to the eight o'clock boat? Probably she was going to Naples to join her husband, and Léon had offered to see her off. He would be very late for dinner. If she hadn't been cross he would have told her what he meant to do. The little Capri ponies plunged forward and the carriage disappeared in a cloud of dust. A long while after she saw the little steamer pushing its way across the crystal sea and leaving behind it a long purple trail. She watched it till it lost itself beyond Castellamare. Léon would soon be back now. She walked slowly towards the hotel and when she got there she was conscious of something strange about it. The Padrone met her with a bunch of flowers, and the stout Padrona bustled out from the office to ask Rose if there wasn't anything extra she would like—would she not dine now in the garden?

"Oh, no, not now," Rose said quickly. "I will wait for my husband." A shadow passed over the Padrona's face. She hesitated and then said with urgent kindness, "The Signora has only to ask for anything she wants." The waiter, too, looked at Rose with strange, sympathetic eyes. He suggested her feeding the pigeons, and hurried to offer her new bread off the table of some traveling Germans.

"These people," he said, "Tedeschi will not know the difference. Take it, Signora mia, for your birds."

The pigeons had already gone to roost.

Peppina, the chambermaid, watched Rose from the balcony. She should have been at her supper, but she stood for some time gazing down into the garden at the figure of the young wife. Suddenly she also bethought herself of something and hurried down into the garden carrying a black kitten in her apron which she deposited on Rose's lap. "Behold," she said, "the little one of fortune. A black cat brings luck. Talk to it, Signora, perhaps it will stay with you." But the black kitten jumped off Rose's lap. It wanted to play with its own shadow in the grass, and to stalk birds. It was not too young for that.

The sky changed slowly from rose color to a clear, pale blue. One by one the stars came out, but they made no place in the sky, till the evening waned and night came, velvety and black, to Capri, embracing it like a dropped mantle, and then, through the curtain of the mysterious dark, the stars grew enormous and shone down upon the scented lemon gardens and over the vague wide sea.

Outside the gate a mandolin struck up a hungry, empty little tune.

Rose shivered and moved back into the house. She could not bear the

beauty of the garden any more alone.

The Padrona met her with a letter in her hand. She had had it for two hours, but she could not make up her mind to give it to Rose. “How,” she asked her husband, “am I to slay happiness?—I am not a butcher.”

“Signora,” she said nervously, “here is a little letter—it is doubtless from the Signore. He is perhaps detained—hospitable friends have kept him—” Rose held out her hand for the letter. The Pinsents never made fusses. They didn’t believe in bad things happening, and when they happened they tried to look as if they weren’t bad.

This was the way Rose looked now. She smiled pleasantly at the Padrona, and moved slowly away towards her room with the letter. She would not hurry.

The Padrona gazed compassionately after her. “She is walking over a precipice,” said the Padrona to herself, “as if it were a path in our garden, Poverina!”

It was a very short letter.

“My dear,” Léon wrote in French, “I find I must go to Naples. It will not be for long I leave you, and I have told them all to look after you until my return. Forgive me. Léon.”

After all he could not lie to Rose.

She read his letter three times. The first two times she translated his letter into English, and wondered why Léon had gone to Naples. The third time she read it without translating it, and then she knew everything. She knew everything in all the world.

But she could not quite believe it. The arrogance in her rose up and fought against the truth.

Rose had very little arrogance, but all women who have been loved must have some. Surely he who was so much her lover could not have left her so soon?

She remembered that when she had said to her mother, “But I could never leave Léon,” Mrs. Pinsent had made no direct response. Her mother had realized that that wasn’t the only question. How had she realized this? Had her father ever—? Rose buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly. “Oh, poor mother!” she murmured, “poor mother!” She could not see herself as wholly poor yet.

And then she remembered Léon’s face as he passed her, his sad, ashamed face, and she knew now why he had left her; but that he did not want to leave her.

She sat up very straight and stopped crying when she realized this.

She thought it very strange, for she knew quite well that Madame Gérard didn't love Léon, either. She loved her own husband, Rose had seen this; she knew it as if it were in the multiplication table; but she couldn't think of Madame Gérard now, she wasn't her business. Léon was her business. She must understand, why he had done this thing. It wasn't any use being silly and just crying, then it might happen again, and it should never happen again; she wasn't going to have Léon looking ashamed twice.

From the first what wrung her heart was that Léon would feel it so! He had meant to be such a help, he nearly had been, and if he hadn't been wasn't it because Rose had failed him? She hadn't meant to fail him of course, she had meant just the opposite; but that was before she knew all about everything, and before you know how to mean, meaning isn't going to be much of a help.

She had thought Léon was strong. He wasn't strong, but in the rush of her passionate reasoning she carried this feather-weight of disadvantage into the fathomless sea of her love and left it safely there. No, he wasn't strong—but he was Léon—he was hers.

It was she who should have realized his weakness. She remembered now that once or twice lately he had turned back from his excursions with Madame to suggest that Rose should join them, but she had refused in her foolish pride because she had wanted to prove to him how magnanimous she was. She shouldn't have done that at all, she shouldn't have had any pride—and it didn't matter in the least whether she was magnanimous or not! She should have held him to her by whatever could have kept him there. Tears, if tears were necessary; pity, duty, pleading—anything and everything that would have helped him.

She had been thinking of what he would think of her—not of what he needed in her! She saw now it only mattered what he thought of her in so far as it helped her to save him. Her magnanimity hadn't saved him. Something less beautiful but more practical might have saved him, her just being, for instance, a little more there.

But he hadn't lied to her, she came back to that as if it was something on which her heart might rest. Ah! if he had done that she would have known that he no longer loved her!

But he had given her no reason—no excuse; he had flung his sin before her because he was ashamed, because he wanted his soul to be naked in her sight—because he knew that she would never fail him.

In the dark she caught sight of the hovering Peppina. "Signora," Peppina pleaded, "will you not dine?"

Rose stood up. "Yes," she said in a voice that sounded strange. "Yes,

please, I will dine."

The Pinsents always dined.

"Tell the Padrona," Rose said steadily, "that the Signore has had to go to Naples on business. He will not return to-night."

Peppina still hovered. "Si Signora," she said, "and the black cat, the one I brought to the Signora earlier in the evening, he has found for himself the room of the Signora. Behold, he lies there curled-up on her bed. He is there now—a miracle! The Signora remembers that I told her 'a black cat means good fortune'?"

Rose hurried into the room, and found him. He was not quite so good as her fox terrier at home, but he was a comfort. She buried her cheek against the round black ball of the fortunate kitten, and wept with easier tears.

Then she went down and had her dinner in the garden.

CHAPTER XIII

They sat on a terrace overlooking the most beautiful view in the world. They did not look at it, nor did they look at each other. They were beautifully dressed, they lived in the same world and spoke the same tongue; they would have laughed at, if they would not have made, the same jokes. The materials for happiness were heaped before them; but neither of them stretched out a hand to take them. They were both like creatures under an invisible ban.

It could not be said that Léon had any cause for a grievance. Madame Gérard had given him what she had offered him, but he had fatally underestimated how far this gift would fall short of what he wanted.

From the moment of their departure from Capri it had come over him that Elise was not beautiful, that she had no particular charm of person nor of mind; she neither touched nor soothed him. There was a fatal alteration in her. She was accessible.

Léon could not tell what had caused this change in his feelings—he had been covered so lightly by a rare and perfect tenderness that he had not realized how it warmed and nourished him, until he found himself sharply deprived of it.

He felt like some one suddenly pushed into the dark. He fumbled and knocked himself against obstacles, possessed by an intolerable fear, a fear that he shouldn't get out, shouldn't ever get back into his light again. He knew now what the light was, he had been in relation to perfect purity, and it was not

until the relation ceased that he realized it had not left him as it found him.

He no longer wanted anything less. He wanted only his flawless jewel, the deep and incorruptible heart of Rose. And as for the first time he knew the hunger of a real desire, he knew also that he shrank from returning to her after so light and base a sin.

He had thought this three days could be nothing, an episode, a chance wayside plucking of a flower, something that he could quite easily put away from him and forget on his return to Rose.

He now discovered that it would burn into his heart like a corrosive fluid, and make him fear to seek her presence. It was not that he doubted Rose would forgive him; but he came up against something in himself which would not yield forgiveness. He had too easily gone wrong.

He kept his eyes carefully away from Madame Gérard. He hated her with a cold antagonism; he could not make love to her. He fell back on a sharpened irony of attention. She should have all that she wanted and he waited upon her with an exaggerated courtesy; but she was as oblivious of his coldness as she had been of his warmth.

Léon had never known so strange a woman.

As for Madame Gérard, she had effected her purpose. Last night at the Opera, seated in the front of a box with Léon beside her, she had caught and held the eyes of her enraged husband. That was what she had come to Naples for.

Léon had not seen him. Monsieur Gérard sufficiently accompanied to feel that a scene would have been out of place, had swiftly withdrawn.

But before he had withdrawn, his eyes had crossed swords with his wife’s.

After that there seemed very little to do. She was conscious that the rest of her life lay before her, and that her husband would never forgive her. The prospect once accepted, ceased to stimulate.

From time to time she was conscious of Léon, but never as a consideration requiring much effort. She had fulfilled her bargain and nothing more seemed to be asked of her. She felt with relief that rather less was required of her than might have been expected, and she was vaguely grateful to Léon for leaving her so much alone.

He was a man of tact and could be trusted to look out her trains for her and see her eventually back to France. She supposed she would have sooner or later to rejoin her parents; but she wished she could forget what she had done to Rose.

Now that her purpose was accomplished this fact became more and more

troublesome to her. Léon she had no qualms about, for she realized neither his unhappiness nor what she had cost him, but she did realize Rose.

It made her a little sharp with Léon when she thought of him at all; but it was quite easy not to think of him.

Madame Gérard wanted to ask him if he had succeeded in keeping Rose unaware, but she shrank from speaking of Rose. Neither of them spoke of her, and neither of them thought of anything else. It made the silence heavy between them.

"You would like something to eat or drink, perhaps?" Léon at length roused himself to ask her. "No," she said, "thank you."

He lit a cigarette and smoked it through, then he said, "It is, I believe, considered very beautiful to drive to Posilippo in the sunset—to dine out there and return. Shall I order a carriage?"

She turned her head for a brief moment and glanced at him. She wished he would go away now—drive to Posilippo by himself, for instance. "Do as you like," she said without stirring, "I stay here—" "Then, of course," he said gravely, "I shall not leave you." It was like being in prison—and not being quite sure whether you were the prisoner or the jailer.

It was a relief to know that some one else was advancing along the terrace. Léon sprang to his feet; he was not a clumsy man, but he very nearly upset the table by which they sat.

Rose was walking slowly towards them. She held a Baedeker in one hand and a parasol in the other. She was very tall, and she looked taller than usual. Her wide blue eyes rested on the wonderful sea beyond—but she had seen Léon and Madame Gérard. She walked towards them without speaking or smiling.

When she came up to them she smiled a little nervously, but in a very friendly way, as if she was glad to see them both, but didn't want, of course, to make a fuss about it.

"They told me," she said, "that I should find you out here."

Madame Gérard could not rise. Her lips moved as if she tried to speak, but she dared not speak. This was her judgment. She was the cleverest of women, but she no longer knew what to say.

Léon stood there with his eyes on the ground, white as a sheet and trembling. He could not look at Rose at all. He felt as if her eyes were fire from Heaven.

Rose spoke again. "Léon," she said, "do you think I might have some tea?"

"*Mon Dieu*—Rose—" he whispered under his breath. "*Mon Dieu*—what

must you think —”

“If I could have some roll and butter, too,” she went on, ignoring his murmur, “it would be very nice. I am rather hungry.” Léon turned and without speaking passed quickly into the house. Rose sat down opposite Madame and put the Baedeker on the table. Madame Gérard lifted her heavy eyelids and looked at Rose.

She did not know what was coming, but she meant whatever came—scorn, anger or contempt—to take it.

She was not sure what Rose wanted—she waited to be sure.

Rose met her eyes with a grave and infinitely kindly look. “I am so sorry,” she said slowly in her hesitating French. “We meant to help you, but I’m afraid we didn’t.”

Madame drew a quick breath, she had not expected this. It had not occurred to her that Rose would be sorry; that hard, stubborn substance that was in her breast melted once and for all towards Rose. The tears filled her eyes and fell slowly into her lap.

“My dear,” she said, “no one could help me, and I have not even—helped myself.”

“I was stupid,” Rose went on gently, “and I didn’t understand; but I do understand now. What I wanted to say before Léon comes back was, that I *know* he meant not to make things worse. You *will* forgive him, won’t you, because it was my fault really. If I had understood, you see, I should have known he couldn’t help you—not in that way—and I think I could have stopped him.”

Madame Gérard nodded. “I have nothing to forgive your husband,” she said, choosing her words carefully. “He has done me no great wrong; always I knew where his heart was—it is still there, Madame—it is in your hands. I—” said Madame Gérard, looking away from Rose’s pitying, tender eyes—“have what I deserve. I have nothing.”

The waiter came with the tea. Léon returned at the same time. He could not keep away, and yet it seemed to him as if there had never been less of him anywhere—his self-respect, his manhood had left him.

Rose turned to him, and with a little gesture of perfect tenderness and trust she slipped her hand over his. It was as if she gave him back his soul. He drew himself up—strength passed into him. She had come back, she was his—somehow or other she was there to save him, and at least he could be generous—he could let himself be saved. He no longer cared that he must be a poor figure in her sight, and he forgot that there was any other sight but hers.

She withdrew her hand again and went on very slowly, still in French, including him in the conversation with a little wave of the hand.

"I have just," she said to Madame Gérard, "been talking to Monsieur Gérard. He thinks I have improved very much in my French."

"My husband!" Madame cried, starting forward, then she sank back, white-lipped and trembling.

"Yes," said Rose, "I went to see him. I found him in the Baedeker. He was in the sixth hotel I called at."

"But why," began Madame Gérard, "why did you seek him—Madame, what did you say to him? Forgive me, I do not understand?"

"I thought perhaps I had better see him first," Rose explained. "I saw him in the hall. I think he was in a kind of rage—he said he had seen you last night at a theater with Léon, and I said, yes—that I never went to theaters in Italy because I didn't understand the language, and then he asked me if I had been with you all the time."

Madame Gérard held her breath. Her eyes seemed like a prayer.

Rose turned to Léon. "I'm afraid I didn't tell him the truth," she said hesitatingly. "I hope it wasn't very dreadful—I said, yes, of course I had."

"You lied to him!" gasped Léon. "Then—then—" for the first time he looked at Madame Gérard. She covered her face with her hands. Rose looked a little perturbed. "I didn't know," she said, "what else there was to be done. Of course I know it was very wrong. I never have been untruthful before. I—I don't like telling lies, but I thought—I'd better. So I said we were all together. I was a little afraid he mightn't believe me or that he might ask me where we were, but he didn't. He quite believed me. He only asked me what I wanted to see him for."

"*Par exemple*," muttered Léon; "he asked you that?"

Rose poured herself out a second cup of tea. "I said," she went on, "I came because I thought you might be sorry for leaving your wife all alone—just because she tried to turn over your music for you—and that I thought perhaps you might be wanting to tell her so—and not know where she was."

Madame's eyes fell from her face. "But yes—" she whispered, "and what did he say, Raoul, when you asked him that?"

There was a new look in her eyes now, and a little color in her pale cheeks.

"He said he *was* sorry," said Rose, gently. "He said he never would have behaved like that, and never meant to—it was only the music, he said, he often lost his head over music, and that that afternoon he had felt how great a success his marriage was—so that it was doubly unfortunate. He said he

wanted to come back to you very much."

There was a moment's pause. Madame Gérard's voice was quite different when she spoke now, there was hope in it. "And what answer did you give him, Madame?" she said. "I think I can see by your eyes that you gave him an answer."

Rose nodded. "I told him—I had a feeling that you would forgive him—and that I would ask you, if you did, to send him a line to-night—saying if you would see him, and where, of course! You see I didn't know where you were at the time—but I found you quite easily, because I had remembered something that Léon had said to me about this special view."

Léon buried his head in his hands and laughed wildly. He laughed to save himself from tears. Madame Gérard said nothing at all; but she stretched out her hand for the tea Rose had poured out for her and began to drink it.

Rose ate two rolls and a half. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm dreadfully greedy," she explained, "but I haven't had any lunch, or any breakfast either, properly."

"But I," said Léon, coming from behind his hands, "I cannot meet Monsieur Gérard to-morrow?"

"No," said Rose, "but I left my luggage on the Quay. There is a boat that goes to Venice to-night, and I thought," she murmured with a diffident, disarming smile, "that perhaps you wouldn't mind if we just went to Venice, Léon. It would be more gay."

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

A few obvious punctuation and typesetting errors have been corrected without note. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

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[The end of *Helen of Troy and Rose* by Phyllis Bottome]