

*MAIDS AND*  
*MISTRESSES*

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*Also by*  
*BEATRICE KEAN SEYMOUR*

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FAMILY GROUP  
TUMBLER HOUSE  
JOY AS IT FLIES  
BUDS OF MAY  
RETURN JOURNEY  
HAPPY EVER AFTER  
FOOL OF TIME  
THE UNQUIET FIELD  
THE HAPPIER EDEN  
SUMMER OF LIFE  
FROST AT MORNING  
INTERLUDE FOR SALLY  
DAUGHTER TO PHILIP

BEATRICE KEAN SEYMOUR



MAIDS  
AND  
MISTRESSES



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*For my husband*

WILLIAM KEAN SEYMOUR

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# BOOK ONE

## THE YORKES

### CHAPTER ONE

(1)

Louisa Dunn chose the wrong moment to have her affair with Sally's father and to bring an illegitimate child into the world, for she accomplished this commonplace and undistinguished act three whole years before the war broke out. By this piece of untimeliness she brought upon her respectable working-class family disgrace and obloquy instead of that aura of patriotic impulse which similar efforts upon the part of other young women a little later conferred upon theirs. Sally's imminent appearance upon the earthly scene being obvious by the Christmas of nineteen-ten, the inconveniences of her subsequent arrival in the following June were glossed over by no fine phrases: no patriotic commendations as an "unmarried mother" were handed out to Louisa. She was merely another girl "gone wrong" or a girl who had been "unlucky"—according to your views on the subject—and folk were sorry for Louisa's parents without being in the least sorry for Louisa, who had always been a "stuck-up piece," anyway—no wonder she'd got herself into trouble!

Louisa's parents, very sensible of this attitude of their neighbours, felt implicated in Louisa's disaster, for so indeed they regarded it. Neither were they rendered more cheerful and optimistic or more indifferent to the "talk" of the neighbourhood by the optimism and indifference of Louisa herself or by her obstinate refusal to say who was responsible for Sally's advent. Her parents thought it only right that, whoever he was, he should be made to pay for "his bit of fun," but if Louisa thought so, too, she did not say so. Perhaps she thought it had been *her* "bit of fun, too," or perhaps she knew her man and what she was doing—and preferred to lie alone upon the bed she had made. It was generally believed that Sally's father belonged to a higher station in life than Louisa's, that Louisa had thought he meant marriage and had been badly "had"—and serve her right! Louisa seemed amused at this, whilst her parents reflected that she had never been drawn to marriage and had turned down so many suitors of her own class as to have earned for herself a reputation for pride and bigness of ideas that now seemed justified.



But Louisa's amusement was not informative. Nobody ever did learn the name of Sally's father or his station in life—but Louisa certainly encouraged the idea of his exalted class. Certainly, too, at the time of Sally's birth and in the months that followed it, Louisa was in no need of money, and this despite the fact that she had had to leave her situation and had never been a girl to save, being, as her mother expressed it, "too fond by 'alf of 'er fine feathers."

Louisa Dunn was a big comely girl and Sally's arrival gave her no more than the normal amount of trouble. Nevertheless, when she was up again she took herself off with her child to the country for a holiday and no parental threats or tears could move her to say where or with whom. Mrs. Dunn was always convinced that Louisa went off with "him" and lived for the weeks that followed her return in a state of misery in the expectation of nature playing another low-down trick upon Louisa. However, when her daughter found herself another job—a daily one and in the neighbourhood because she wouldn't part with her child—Eliza Dunn breathed again and ceased to look as if the world had fallen about her ears. But seeing that Louisa's funds had come to an end she renewed her talk of the "law," of "justice" and of "fun," but Louisa tossed her head.

"That's enough of that, I tell you. You leave me alone, and stop putting dad on to me. I don't want the measly five bob I could get. I reckon I can manage things better myself—I'm not likely to starve, nor the kid neither."

"But Lou, yer father could see 'im and make 'im do the proper thing by yer."

Louisa laughed.

"Father? I like that! He's only fit to order women about"—which was unfair and typical of Louisa's methods in argument, her mother said, for Tom Dunn ordered no woman about but his wife. And if the British working-man couldn't be master in his own home . . .!

Louisa went on laughing.

"Oh, come off it, mother. The beans are spilt, anyway. What's the good of going in off the deep end every day about it? Forget it! . . . Oh, damn the neighbours—let 'em talk! They'll soon get tired of me and my affairs. I'm not the first and I shan't be the last—so why worry?"

"For shame, Lou—anybody'd think you'd done something to be proud of!"

“Well, that’s a matter of opinion, anyway. I can’t see what difference it makes whether you’re married or not. Don’t know as I want a husband—come to that! Look at you and father! Most men, if you ask me, want too much when they get married—a cook, bottle-washer and galley-slave as well as somebody to go to bed with!”

“Hold your tongue!” said Liza Dunn sharply, but Louisa was not minded to do anything of the sort. Her mother had forced the conversation and now she should hear once and for all what Louisa really thought.

“Well, it’s true, I reckon, whether you like it or not. P’raps *you* fancy running around fetching and carrying for some man. Can’t say it ever did appeal to me. If you and father’d leave me alone I’m right enough as I am. And father’d leave me alone if you’d leave off nagging him.”

Eliza Dunn was very near tears.

“Anybody’d think you didn’t care wot people said about you,” she declared.

“I don’t,” said Louisa.

“Well—*I’m* ashamed to put me ’ead outside me own front door, so I tell yer.”

“’Pon my word, mother, you make me fair sick. All this nonsense about me and my morals—and all the time the only thing you really mind is what the neighbours say! Tell them to go home and keep an eye upon their own daughters—and their sons, too, if you ask me.”

The Dunns gave it up—or at least Tom Dunn did. He agreed that Louisa had disgraced them, but saw that she was an obstinate young woman you’d never drive the way you wanted, and he was tired of attempting it. He only wanted to be left alone—and not to hear the baby cry when he came home. They’d got over all that, he’d hoped, at their age. He’d never wanted Louisa nor Louisa’s two predecessors, considering three children as much as one man in his position could afford to bring up. But, as if they agreed with him, the two younger had both succumbed to some illness of infancy and Louisa had been the last of the Dunn family. She had a sister, now married and living in Canada. Of her two brothers, Reg, the elder, had recently taken a wife who refused to have anything to do with Louisa or her child. “Pity she don’t hurry up and have one herself,” was Louisa’s answer to that. She disliked her sister-in-law and thought her brother a fool to take his orders from her. The younger was only eighteen and more embarrassed than shocked by Sally’s appearance. Louisa liked Ted and so did Sally, who

proved a good child and seemed to know the hours when crying was *verboden*. Eliza Dunn went on feeling that her daughter had disgraced them, but Louisa's contribution to the family exchequer did something at least to smooth a situation she could not assist. This, when the war began, became a much more liberal one, for Louisa deserted the domestic scene for the factory, and buying neither the grand piano nor the furs by which (so tradition says) the earnings of munition-workers were swallowed up, she opened a post-office account, and paid regular sums into it. The Dunns were well pleased. Louisa the wild, the extravagant, was sobering down; they agreed with her that Sally was a "nice kid" and the sight of other people's daughters being hastily married or looking as though they ought to be did a good deal towards restoring their *amour-propre*. Louisa grinned.

(2)

In the summer of nineteen-seventeen, Ted, that nice boy, was killed in the taking of some few yards of German trenches. Louisa raged with grief and anger, for she hated the war. Ill-taught, knowing nothing, like most people better educated than herself, of the hidden causes of war, she fulminated against the slaughter, at the cheapness of human life, at the stupendous folly of war—obeying the instincts of one who deeply loved life. It seemed, her parents thought, to take Louisa a long time to get over her brother's death—so long, indeed, that they sometimes wondered if it was only her brother's death for which she sorrowed. They could not understand why suddenly she had left her munition-factory and gone back to daily service and Louisa never explained except to say that she was "sick of the dirty business . . . but was glad she'd got something for Sally out of it, anyway."

Then came the autumn of nineteen-eighteen, and the influenza epidemic which, accounting for the lives of so many and so much more important people, accounted also for that of Louisa Dunn. She was very angry at dying—death tore her protesting out of life which she had loved and laughed at. She wept bitterly at the last for Sally and turned away her head alike from comfort and assurance. It was unbearable to die—and outrageous to die at twenty-five leaving a daughter like Sally. The tears were still wet on her cheeks when she lay dead.

So the Dunns were left with the seven-year-old Sally—and Louisa's post-office account. So little had its owner intended to die that she had never even thought of making a will or begging that the money should be put into Sally's name and kept in trust for her. The Dunns were poor, there was the

funeral to pay for, the doctor's bill to defray, decent mourning to order—and poor Louisa's fifty pounds soon disappeared. Sally, for whom she had slaved and saved, would eventually start out in the world without the nest-egg she had intended. Even as she died she must have seen to what death—and life—was delivering Sally, Sally, dark of hair, pale of face, large of eye, quiet and good and gentle of voice, as unlike her handsome bouncing mother as any child could be. Sally, the Dunns thought, would give them no trouble and sighed with relief. Sally would do as she was told. Eliza Dunn made up her mind that Sally should not fall into the pit into which her mother had fallen and from which she had emerged so blithely. Gradually she came to think that Providence in removing Louisa from the scene had known its business—by which she meant that things without Louisa would be considerably easier. Come to that, Sally herself would be easier than Louisa had ever been. Nothing of her mother in her, that Liza Dunn could see. Hadn't her looks or her "go." Took after her father, if you asked Liza Dunn—she never had any opinion of *him*, whoever he was, and whether he had been killed in the war or not.

Sally was thirteen when her grandmother showed her hand. The child had won a scholarship which would have taken her, after the holidays, to a secondary school, but Eliza vetoed this. No use putting ideas in the girl's head and making her too big for her boots. She'd be leaving school, anyway, in a year's time—three years at a secondary school learning chemistry and Lord knows what was out of the question. Besides, what use was chemistry and the like going to be to Sally—and who was going to keep her while she was learning it? Her grandparents were growing old, too. Sally would have to go into service—the best thing for a girl, in Liza's opinion—and Sally needn't believe all the nonsense she heard about service, anyway. Besides, since the war, mistresses didn't have everything their own way, not by a long chalk, they didn't.

Sally was disappointed about the scholarship, for in her quiet plodding way she had enjoyed working for it. She was neither very clever nor endowed with any special gifts: she had a good serviceable brain, her teacher said, and sound intelligence and should make a good teacher or secure a Civil Service appointment. But Liza said no. Where did they think she could get the money from to keep the girl while she was passing exams, even if she won scholarships all along the line? Besides, Liza knew, none better, what came of putting ideas into poor girls' heads. Eliza was polite but firm and Sally's headmistress fell back before so unremitting and unexpected an onslaught.

“It’s really rather a shame,” she said later to Sally’s form-mistress. “I’m sure Sally would do well. It’s a shame to make a servant of her.”

But Sally’s form-teacher, though she was disappointed also, had different ideas about servants from those held by the socialistically-inclined headmistress.

“But why should only the fools be servants?” she asked.

“Nobody but a fool would want to be,” laughed the other.

“Well, Sally isn’t a fool.”

“But Sally doesn’t *want* to be a servant.”

“She doesn’t *mind*. She didn’t show any fight. In a way she seems to agree with her grandmother—and she’ll certainly make a good servant. Heaven knows we want a few intelligent ones.”

Tom Dunn was sorry about the scholarship, too, but he did not see, any more than his wife, what else could be done. They were both getting old; they had nothing behind them—and Sally had no father! This, said Liza, was what Louisa’s fine ideas came to. If Sally’d had a father, like any other girl. . . .

“Well, she ain’t,” said Tom Dunn, “so wot’s the use of chewing the cud about that, all over again! She’s managed all right without a father, so far, ain’t you, Sally?”

A little embarrassed, as ever, by this question which adumbrated whole circles of knowledge so far closed to her, but grateful somehow to her grandfather, Sally said: “Yes, gran’pa.”

“Service is the best thing for ’er,” said Grace Dunn, Reg’s wife, her hard gimlet eyes raking Sally from head to foot.

“Course it is,” said Liza.

“Wot you got to say about it, Sally?”

“I shouldn’t mind, gran’pa. I expect it’d be all right.”

“Course it ’ud be all right,” said her grandmother, and there the subject rested until Sally left school in the July following her fourteenth birthday the previous month.

Grace Dunn came to tea one day soon afterwards and began again on the subject, speaking of Sally and her affairs for all the world as if she were not there or were entirely deaf and dumb.

“Sally’s got no ‘push,’ no ‘go’ in her, dad. She looks kind of timid—she’ll never make much of a way for ’erself if you ask me. She don’t make enough of ’erself—don’t push ’erself forward enough.”

“There’s them as do,” said Tom Dunn, who liked his daughter-in-law about as much as Louisa had done.

“There’s them as ’as a better right, p’raps,” said Grace. “Well, wot do *you* fancy ’er as? A film star, I shouldn’t wonder?”

Grace Dunn, who, like her mother-in-law, could see no beauty in the pale chiselled face, the straight hair swept back from a white brow, raked Sally again with her hard gimlet eyes. A film star? *She* should say so! Colourless, Grace called her—all that straight hair, too, and no figure at all—not even the beginnings of one. Louisa would have made a dozen of her. She had admired Louisa’s looks (which were of the kind she could understand) and had hated her all the more because of them, so that it was with a sense of satisfaction that she wondered how Louisa had come to have such a plain daughter. Thinking of her own daughters—twins, born after the one boy she made a fool of, and Sally’s juniors by some six years, she put up her hand to her frizz of mouse-coloured bob and laughed.

Tom Dunn looked at her.

“I don’t see wot it’s got to do with you, anyway,” he said. “She ain’t your girl.”

“I give you *my* word she ain’t,” Grace tossed her head. “But if a girl wants to get on, these days, she’s got to ’ave a little ‘go’ about her. Snap. Now you can’t say your Sally’s got ‘snap,’ can you?”

“Sally’s all right,” said Tom Dunn, who liked girls without what Grace called “go” or “snap,” and was aware that he did not want Sally to go into service. He would have liked to have kept her at home, but as he knew this would be considered the suggestion of a complete idiot, he kept it to himself. He had grown fond of Sally and in a way he did not understand was sorry for her, feeling that she had somehow been defrauded of something which other girls had. Neither did he agree with his wife or his detestable daughter-in-law that Sally was plain, being caught (again in a way he did not understand) by her pale, gentle looks—the white skin that flushed so delicately at these times, by the wide-open dark-grey eyes and by all the tender immaturity of her. He felt badly at times about the swallowing up of that nest-egg—but, fifty pounds? How far would that have gone? Perhaps Liza was right, but he felt they ought to have done something more with it than allow it to be swallowed up so sordidly. Yet bills had to be paid; times

were hard and he was getting old. He kept remembering that, these days, for his work was telling on him. There was nothing he could do for Sally save see that she was not pushed into something she detested. But he, too, wished Louisa had not been so obstinate about the name of the girl's father. He might, who knows, have done something for her, whoever he was—unless he had really, as they always assumed, been killed in the war. He could not believe that there was any man alive who would not be proud of having Sally for a daughter.

However, with these two women he knew he stood no chance. And Sally said she didn't mind service. He knew she was used to helping in the house and with the meals. "No one's going to leave you a fortune as I know of, Sally," Eliza said, "and I don't suppose as you'll ever win anything in a sweepstake, no more than your grandfather there."

Tom Dunn ignored this, having by now got used to his wife's reminders of the day when he had plunged on a third-share in a Calcutta ticket, "with two blokes from Covent Garden."

"I hear," said Grace, "that Mrs. Spears, the butcher's wife, wants a girl—straight from school she prefers, too. A nice 'ome they've got be'ind the shop and as she's in the desk she wouldn't be always poking around. There'd be plenty of good food, too. Sally might do worse. Next time I'm in the shop I could inquire if she's suited, if you like."

Sally made no demur when the position with Mrs. Spears was fixed up and herself helped to make the good and serviceable garments with which her grandmother thought she should start out on her independent life. Eliza thought Sally a good and sensible girl and hoped she would settle down and be happy. She had had some difficulty in making Mrs. Spears understand that Sally was not delicate. Pale, yes—that she would allow—but not sickly. None of the Dunns had ever been that, thank God. Privately, Eliza was glad of the paleness and the fragile look—she had had enough of the bouncing vitality of a Louisa, thank you very much, and she considered that Sally was not the sort to worry about "boys"—she had never even had a "sweetheart." Of course a nice early marriage to some decent hard-working young man would be the very thing, but Eliza was not very hopeful. If Mrs. Spears thought Sally delicate, most men would think so too, and men were not anxious to burden themselves with a wife who looked as if she might turn out to be sickly. Besides, Grace was right, Sally *was* quiet; she never had much to say for herself—kept herself to herself, like her mother, when it pleased her. But what Liza considered mere obstinacy in Louisa she was ready to believe natural in Sally—a kind of stand-offishness attributable to

her unknown father, for Liza had by now entirely accepted the idea of his superior station in life. Well, men didn't like stand-offishness, neither, if you asked Eliza.

As they sewed the thick, good-quality cambric Sally's grandmother gave her advice as stout as the material through which their needles moved to and fro. Assuming that Sally knew "how things were"—for did she not know that her mother had had a baby without being married?—she repeated the warnings Sally had heard with vague comprehension for the past two years or more. "Don't speak to men. Don't let them speak to you. Never make friends with strangers!" Well, what harm could come to a girl if she behaved herself in these ways? When, much younger, Sally had asked awkward questions, Eliza had snubbed her. "You don't want to know nothing about those things yet . . . you'll find out about them soon enough!" But Sally hadn't found out, learning nothing from the whispers and innuendoes of the girls at school and quite uninstructed as to the meaning of the physical happenings which her grandmother had recently and airily dismissed as something tiresome but to be put up with.

So, equipped with some stout and serviceable under-clothing, two print frocks and a black one for afternoons, and with her sleek dark hair twisted into a knob on her neck, Sally betook herself to the Speares, who lived in the Brixton Road, not very far from Sally's home. Mr. Speares was already known to Sally as a very large and fat man in a blue apron who stood outside and shouted: "Coming over, four-and-eight," or came inside and said: "Yes, my dear?" when she was sent to buy meat by her grandmother who, however, was not a regular customer. He was hearty, kind and given to a sort of apoplectic laughter which at first terrified Sally considerably, but to which she soon got used. He wanted a good deal of waiting on when he was not in the shop and sometimes he gave her sixpence for running an errand; but he saw that she had a succulent chop or a juicy piece of steak for her lunch and teased her because they brought no colour into her face; a form of mild amusement, however, which Mrs. Speares did not encourage. She was a stiffly-dressed, rather precise-minded woman, with a set expression which hardened curiously when Mr. Speares made himself pleasant to Sally.

Sally did not find Mrs. Speares unkind, though she certainly overworked the girl, being in the desk and leaving the work of the six rooms behind and above the shop and all the cooking to be attended to by Sally. And she, growing fast and at a critical age, began after six months to look rather thin and "peaked," despite the succulent chops and steaks and overboiled vegetables. And sometimes she had headaches and always she was tired by



ten o'clock and glad enough to slip into bed. Moreover, fate chose this particular time to complete Sally's education on sex by arranging for her a particularly unpleasant but terribly enlightening encounter with a wretched decadent who followed her one night on her return from a visit to her grandparents. Sally was not very frightened—she was too near the shop for that: but the sudden revelation of what all her grandmother's warnings and hints had meant gave her a physical and mental shock which deepened for several days her pallor and made her more silent and withdrawn than ever, so that the next time Sally went home her grandfather insisted that she must find an easier place and producing the newspaper gave her two advertisements to answer before she left the house. One of them was for a "general, with experience" from which she had no reply; the other was for part housework and part care of two children, and turned out to be the advertisement of a Mrs. Mildred Yorke, of Denmark Hill, who wrote asking Sally to go to see her. Sally went and was enraptured with Mrs. Yorke, her flat and her two children, and gave notice the next day to Mrs. Spears, who was annoyed and said so. Just as Sally'd got into her ways and all. . . . Well, she'd soon get tired of looking after other people's kids—see if she wouldn't. But if Sally went she went altogether. She didn't believe in taking people back. Sally must understand that.

Sally said she did, but she went, all the same, quietly, as she did most things, leaving everything in the Spears's household as it should be and carrying her bag across the busy road to the tram stopping-place. The tram would take her to within a few minutes' walk of Fern Lodge, the old house converted into flats in one of which the Yorkes lived. It never occurred to her that somebody might have carried the bag for her nor did the fact that two hefty men—Mr. Spears and his assistant—stood in the doorway and watched her struggles with it have any significance for her. Chivalry was not a quality Sally had as yet encountered.

"Gratitood!" said Mr. Spears, "gratitood, my boy—that's wot thet is! Want it all their own way, the servants of to-day. S'welp me bob, they do!"

And Mr. Spears spat on the pavement with disgust.

## CHAPTER TWO

(1)

The Yorkes at the moment were four. Mildred, plump, handsome, still on the sunny side of thirty, her husband (called "daddy" so persistently by his wife that Sally had been with them for several weeks before she learned that

his name was Gilbert), and their two children, Paul aged six and Barbara aged three. Sally rather fancied that Mr. Yorke did not really like to be called “daddy” and wished that his wife would not do it so often. Certainly there were times when he did not look like anybody’s daddy but only Mildred’s lover. But Sally did not know this. She saw that he was very fond of his wife, but that seemed only natural, for Sally had already lost her heart to Mildred Yorke and was completely enchanted by her brand of good looks. Her fair, beautifully-waved hair, her pink cheeks, the thick white column of her neck, all seemed alike adorable to Sally. Mrs. Yorke, moreover, was a good mistress, being unalterably kind and considerate, and a good mother, so obviously adoring her two children that Sally at first saw very little of them. Unlike the butcher’s wife she did not mind Mr. Yorke’s playful teasings of Sally, neither did anything happen to her face when he called her Sally Lunn. “Names always amuse him, somehow,” she said to Sally, “you’ll get used to what he does with them in time.”

Sally liked Gilbert Yorke and considered that with his slim height and dapper good looks he was a worthy husband to his beautiful wife. A handsome pair, she called them to herself.

The children were well-mannered and gave Sally no trouble during the few hours she had the care of them. Mrs. Yorke had engaged Sally, it seemed, just to look after them when she was from home visiting, shopping or playing tennis, and also because she wanted somebody about the house beside the daily general. This girl’s name was Annie and she could talk of nothing at the moment of Sally’s arrival but her imminent holiday at Margate, for the Yorkes were soon going off to the sea, and though they were taking Sally, the flat was to be shut up and Annie left free to take a holiday of her own.

“Take their holidays early they do,” she confided to Sally. “Pity, ’cording to *my* idea—nothing to look forward to when you come back.”

Annie had a loud voice and a drooping eyelid which gave her a slightly sinister appearance and, as Sally came later to know, had equipped her with a reputation for unpleasantness she did not really deserve. Sally wondered if she were going to like her.

“Have you been here long?” she inquired, since she was obviously expected to say something.

“I come just before Miss Bar was born, and she’s three and a bit. . . . It ain’t a bad place, on the ’ole, but they’re a funny pair. Reely they are! Couple o’ love-birds one minute and sleepin’ in sep’rate rooms, bless you,

the next, and not a word to say to one another. Wot I say is married's married — and no nonsense about it.”

Having no opinion upon this subject Sally offered none. She said instead: “The children seem nice.”

“Oh, they're not bad kids, as kids go. Paul's got a bit of a nasty temper, though, when the fit takes 'im. Not that I've 'ad much to do with them. She's like that—must do everything 'erself for them. Wouldn't never 'ear of 'aving a proper nursemaid. Just soppo, I call that, with 'im willing to dub up for one. She's kind o' mean, some ways. Why, when 'e backed Manna and won a tenner on the Derby the other day she was quite put-out like because 'e wanted to take 'er out and blue it in! Said there were better ways of spending money! 'E got a bit wild at that and said: ‘Wot *you* want money spent on couldn't be done for ten pounds.’ Any'ow, 'e persuaded 'er at last and orf they went all dolled up fit to kill! Funny, she is—don't seem to like to see money spent on 'erself!” Annie pushed her hair back with an eloquent gesture and laughed her loud, harsh laugh. “Lawd!—wish *I* 'ad the chance!”

(2)

That first fortnight Sally spent for the most part helping Mrs. Yorke to make the little girl some “seaside” frocks. Sally, who had a neat small stitch which evoked Mrs. Yorke's approval, was enchanted by the small and dainty things, by the clever fancy stitchings with which her mistress adorned them and by the small sweet limbs of the tiny child who tried them on!

“Look, Gil, at these nice stitches!” Mrs. Yorke said to her husband as Sally and she sat together at work one evening after dinner was cleared away. “It's quite a treat to have somebody besides myself about who can sew. It's never happened in this house before!”

Gilbert Yorke looked up from his newspaper, threw a quick glance at the diminutive frock his wife held out to him and said: “Oh, good! Clever Sally Lunn!” and went on with his reading. Sally had the feeling that he didn't really think it clever of her to sew well (neither did she, for that matter!) and that he was profoundly bored with the domestic evening and by her presence there and irritated by the soft sound their needles made as they slipped in and out of the material.

But in the end all the frocks were made and the day of departure had arrived.

“Well, I wish you luck!” Annie said to Sally as she stood in the hall watching the taxi-man hoist up the trunks. “Don't fall into the sea. And let's

'ope it keeps fine."

"Yes, indeed!" said Sally, who had heard already several times how last year, when Annie had gone away, as Sally was going now, with the Yorkes, it had rained almost every day. That month at Sutton-by-the-Sea had remained in Annie's mind as a personal affront. This morning, however, was fine and very warm—a happy augury.

"Fine weather for 'olidays for them as is lucky enough to get 'em!" the taxi-man said as he opened the door for them. "Loopool Street? Very good, sir!" but he banged-to the door rather with the air of one who had been requested to drive to the North Pole.

"Is it *far*?" asked Barbara, who was too young to remember the journey of the previous year.

"Miles and miles!" said Paul, who was not, and who settled down with determination to the enjoyment of that long ride across the City of London.

"Really, Gil! I think we ought to have gone by Tube!" Mrs. Yorke said presently. But Gilbert Yorke said: "With all this luggage? Don't be silly, my dear!"

"I've sometimes thought we ought to try the South coast instead, Gil!"

"But I thought you'd decided that the east suited us all so much better."

"Well—so it does!"

"Very well, then, that's that! Have a cigarette and stop looking at the clock. We aren't paupers—yet."

(3)

That month at the sea was to Sally a succession of days filled with bliss without alloy. A dozen times in any one of them she told herself what a lucky girl she was to have found so easily such a lovely place instead of "keeping on with the Spearses." This was the first glimpse fifteen-year-old Sally had had of a comfortable existence, of a life in which the need to get just enough money to pay the rent, buy the food and have your boots repaired was forgotten. Yet, as the days went on, she fancied sometimes that Gilbert Yorke was enjoying the holiday a good deal less than the rest of them.

The weather had turned very hot and the long lazy days on the sands were to Sally the loveliest thing that had ever happened to her. She did not mind the heat and she was the lucky possessor of a skin that did not mind it

either. But Gilbert Yorke, it was obvious, suffered a good deal in the heat and did not care for sitting about on the shadeless sands with books and papers and the children—and the children of all the other people, too, as he said. Save when he was taking his morning dip the sands were the least of his delights and even that seemed not wholly to please him because Mildred didn't swim and wouldn't be taught. He was for ever trying to coax her to go off driving or sight-seeing with him and though she sometimes went, she went unwillingly, as if, thought Sally, she thinks I can't be trusted or as if she likes to be with the children so much better than she likes being with him.

"Oh, come along, old girl," he'd say. "Sally Lunn'll keep her eye on them. What's the good of bringing her if you're never going to be free? You can trust Sally. She isn't like the fair Annie!"

Sometimes Mildred would say: "Haven't you anything to read, darling?" and more likely than not he would reply that he'd read everything in the *Daily Mail*, including the advertisements, and that he had finished the latest Edgar Wallace he'd brought from the library the day before. Not even Mr. Wallace could write "thrillers" quickly enough for Gilbert Yorke and if his wife recommended another provider of such fare he would say he'd much rather go for a walk and Mildred would say: "Do, daddy! It'll do you good."

"I meant with you!"

"Oh, Gil. In this heat! I couldn't!"

"I don't call *this* heat, though I can't say sun-bathing appeals to me. . . . Idiotic the way the English lie about in the sun when they get any!"

"But it's too hot for anything else!"

"Then why not lie in the shade?"

"I like to lie by the sea!"

"You'll spoil your complexion."

Mildred laughed, well knowing that she had that thick parchment skin which takes no heed of sun or wind.

"Oh, come on, my dear—do come for a stroll. You'll get fat lying about like this all day, heat or no heat!"

Mildred smiled as if she thought it better to be fat, even in nineteen-twenty-five, than scraggy. It was more comfortable, anyway. Besides, she was fond of her food and would rather get fat by eating what she liked than

thin on the things she didn't, or on an insufficiency of those she did. So when her husband tried to compel her to his wishes by the bugbear modern women seemed most to dread, she only laughed.

“Go on with you, Gil! Don't tell me you admire these bony moderns!”

This was one of the occasions when Sally felt she ought not to be there. Gilbert's smile and the long intimate look he bent upon his wife and her own laughter that was gay and infectious and something else to which Sally was too ignorant to give a name, all brought the bright colour to her pale face.

Sometimes Mrs. Yorke did eventually give way and consent to be taken walking, but more often Gilbert went alone.

Sally, for whom the sunny lazy days could not be long enough and who sometimes wished that this holiday by the sea could go on for ever, saw with something like dismay that his spirits rose as the last week of it approached, though the weather had got hotter than ever.

“How queer you are, Gil!” his wife said one day. “Holidays are wasted upon you. I believe you'd much rather be in that stuffy office of yours than down here with nothing to do but enjoy yourself.”

“But down here we don't do anything I really enjoy,” Gilbert Yorke defended himself. “I don't like the seaside—much, and I particularly don't like sitting about on the sands. I wish you'd learn to swim. It must bore you just keeping around the edge the way you do!”

“Oh, no—why should it?”

“Oh, well, it would bore me. Then there are these beastly rooms. I don't like 'em—and I don't like the other people in the house. I don't very much like what they give us to eat, either.”

Mildred laughed.

“Oh, *daddy!*”

“Well, thank heaven the kids'll be old enough for a decent hotel next year. Nothing about this apartments idea appeals to me.”

“They're much less expensive, darling!”

“A silly sort of economy!”

“My dear, you always want to spend money on the wrong things.”

“For instance—?”

“Well, going abroad—staying in hotels. Dinners, theatres, dances . . .”

“Instead of— —?”

Mildred looked at him, smiled, shrugged her shoulders, but did not reply. Gilbert Yorke looked at her—a look that was first a challenge, then changed suddenly to that of a sulky child. He looked away from her and sat for a long while staring out to sea.

Ignoring him, Mildred’s eyes came thoughtfully to rest upon Barbara and Paul building a sand-castle together a few feet away.

“Look how brown they’ve got, Gil,” she said presently. “Bar’s like a gipsy. *They* like the sea, anyway. They won’t care about Denmark Hill, after this. They’ll be an awful trouble to you, Sally, I expect.”

“Denmark Hill’s healthy enough,” said Mr. Yorke. “High up and all that, but I’ve been wondering if we couldn’t move out a bit in the autumn. We want more room now that we’ve got Sally—and Bar.”

“Bar? Oh, darling, *she* isn’t a new-comer, why we’ve had her three years! But it would be nice to have a garden, I admit.”

There was space but no garden at Denmark Hill, for the tall elms in it had long ago wrested their victory from a succession of disheartened gardeners.

“I suppose we shall have to buy.”

“Shall we? Houses are still very expensive.”

“Oh, that’ll be all right, so long as you don’t want a car yet a while. And so long as . . . you know what.”

Once again Sally felt that strange uncomfortable sensation of listening to things not intended for her, but the Yorkes, she had by now decided, were evidently “like that.” Their conversations did no more than faintly acknowledge her presence by stopping a sentence midway or by a succession of “you know whats” and the like. But this time Sally saw again upon her master’s face that darkly sullen look and upon her mistress’s a strange crooked little smile which as Sally watched it broke into a gay laugh.

“Oh, Gil, you really *are* a funny old thing!” she said, and then to Sally: “What about you, Sally? Would you like to live in the half-country and have a garden?”

“Oh, yes, ma’am, indeed I would!” said Sally enthusiastically.

“Well, I’m glad you’re on my side, Sally, anyway,” said Mr. Yorke a little unexpectedly.

“Darling! We’re all on your side,” Mildred assured him.

But the next morning something had happened. The pair of them did not come down to breakfast until Sally and the children had nearly finished and Sally thought that her mistress looked as if she had been crying. Tears and Mildred Yorke being on the face of it a highly incongruous juxtaposition, Sally (not herself given to easy tears) wondered what on earth could have occurred. Had they quarrelled?—about the children, or the difficulty with which their mother could be separated from them, or about hotels and apartment houses or going abroad or going to live in the “half-country”? Sally could not see how Mildred Yorke could ever have anything to quarrel with her husband about, since, whatever he might say, he invariably ended by doing what she wanted, just as he sat with her on the sands when he wanted to go for a walk and stayed in apartment houses when he would have preferred an hotel. Sally thought it must be lovely to have Gilbert Yorke for a husband; but then she also thought it must be lovely, if you were a man, to have Mildred for a wife. So where were you? Clearly, on the steps of an infatuation on Sally’s part from which she was not, as it turned out, to be easily parted.

However, things improved as the day wore on. For once Mrs. Yorke allowed Sally to take the children off alone and when she came back to lunch there they were in their sitting-room drinking something they called a cocktail—a new drink to Sally—and looking as if the world were a pleasant place indeed. Lunch was a light-hearted meal at which a bottle of wine with an unpronounceable name appeared, and at the end of it Mildred announced that they were going for a walk. But strangely enough, Sally thought, Mr. Yorke this time did not seem as anxious to walk as upon previous occasions and when his wife laughed and said: “How like a man!” he put it on to the drinks and said they must have coffee first—black and very strong. They seemed to Sally very unlikely to get very far, for Gilbert Yorke settled down to his coffee and cigarette with the air of one who was more inclined for slumber than exercise.

“It’s that wine!” he complained. “I always say it’s a mistake to drink wine at midday. Why did we?”

“Because you thought we’d quarrelled and ought to drown our differences.”

“*Had* we quarrelled?”

“No—but you thought so.”

“But there *were* differences?”



“Were there? Do try to wake up, Gil. It’s such a lovely afternoon—it’s a pity to waste it indoors!”

“Daddy looks sleepy,” said Paul, suddenly laughing.

“Walking will wake him up.”

“Daddy . . . wouldn’t you wather wide?” Paul had difficulties just then with his initial “r’s” and his father, less tactful than his mother, failed to ignore it.

“Yes, Paul, I wouldn’t at all mind ‘widing.’”

“Oh, *daddy!*” said Paul’s mother, “how weak of you! And after all the fuss you’ve made because I *haven’t* taken walks.”

“I know, Mil. It’s that confounded lunch. What *about* hiring a car and taking the kids for a ride instead?”

Mildred did not reply at once. She knocked the ash off her cigarette, regarded it for a moment with her fair waved head on one side and said, without looking up: “Really, darling, you are a *little* exasperating, aren’t you? Just as you like, of course—but you won’t grumble, next time, when I don’t like leaving the kiddies, will you? You’re evidently quite as bad as I am.”

She laughed and her face was amiable enough, but Sally felt that nevertheless she did not this time *want* to take the children riding, that she was, even, quite anxious to get rid of them—as anxious as “Daddy” was, apparently, to keep them about. How queer people were! So contrary—even amiable people like the Yorkes who didn’t squabble and disagree. However, as usual, Daddy Yorke did what his wife wanted. He got up, took Paul by the shoulders and said: “Sorry, old man, not to-day. Run off with Sally and look after your sister like a good boy!”

“Can I go Wednesday?” asked Paul, standing his ground. “It’s my birfday that day.”

“We hadn’t forgotten that, darling,” said Paul’s mother.

“Then can I go?”

“I expect so, darling.”

“Me too?” asked Bar.

“It’s not *your* birfday!” Paul objected.

Bar smiled happily, not able to detach herself from the happiness of to-day and concerned at the moment with nothing but the necessity to be doing something definite with the pail and spade she held in her tiny hands.

Mildred walked with Sally to the door, where she stooped to fasten a button of her little daughter's frock. From this task she looked up to say to Sally: "Don't wait tea for us, Sally, and if we're not back by six get the children to bed, will you?"

They went together down the staircase, into the hall and out into the sunshine, where they stood for a few seconds in a little group, with Daddy Yorke screwing up his eyes at the glare from the sea and Mildred regarding the summer scene from the shady comfort of a soft large-brimmed hat.

"Good-bye, darlings—be good children. Look after them, Sally."

She stood at the door, watching them as they walked away, and when Sally turned round once to dissuade Bar from the passion of farewell-waving which necessitated too much walking backwards, it struck her that Mrs. Yorke did not really want to go walking any more than did her husband, though she couldn't have told you why she thought so.

"They won't get very far in this heat, anyway," she said to herself and was surprised to discover, when, after an uneventful afternoon, she took her charges in to tea, that they were not already sitting at tea. There being no sign of them at six o'clock, Sally bathed and put the children to bed and presently went in to turn down her mistress's bed. The untidy scene that met her eyes as she opened the door was so unexpected that, with the door-knob in her hand, she stood still for a moment surveying it. The bed was dishevelled, the curtains dragged anyhow across the shut windows, and the pretty organdie frock with which Mildred Yorke had honoured the morning thrown carelessly over the back of a chair. Sally drew back the curtains, opened wide the windows and hung up the organdie frock to revive in the fresh evening breeze. Sally looked at the crushed frock with regret for so pretty a thing so casually spoiled. Mrs. Yorke must, she decided, have changed in a hurry, with Daddy Yorke fuming with his customary impatience at the delay.

(4)

When they came in Gilbert Yorke presented Sally with a large box of chocolates with the air of one who was grateful to her for something. For taking the children off their hands, she supposed—only that, surely, was her

job? Mildred too, seemed pleased and happy, but she was quieter about it and, for once, did not ask immediately about the children.

“We didn’t mean to be so late,” she said, “but we changed our minds and didn’t go out very early after all . . .”

Sally thought she looked very pretty, with her deepened colour and bright eyes, as if the afternoon, whatever she had done with it, had agreed with her. Gilbert’s good spirits persisted throughout the evening and were still with him at breakfast the next morning, and when Paul began again about his birthday ride on the morrow he laughed and from his vest pocket drew out a small book.

“All right, old man. I’ll make a note of it in my diary. Then we shan’t forget.” Turning the pages of the little book, he wrote something with the diminutive pencil belonging to it.

“There we are, my lad. Special treat for Paul made a note of.” He turned the pages again and did something else with the pencil. “And it isn’t only you, my lad, who have special treats,” he said, and returned the diary to his pocket with a smile for Paul and one of those intimate exchanges of glances with his wife which Sally had seen before but which now, as ever, brought the bright colour racing to her face.

“Gil!” said Mildred, “*must* you?” but she smiled and added: “Is it really the first of July to-morrow?”

“You should know, since it’s Paul’s birthday.”

“I’m seven!” said Paul.

“I know, darling,” said his mother. “How the time flies! You’ll be grown up soon, Paul.”

Sally wondered why her voice sounded so sad, but there was nothing but satisfaction in Paul’s voice as he said: “Yes,” and proceeded, the subject of his maturity being one after his own heart, to enlarge upon it.

(5)

“Well, Sally Lunn,” said Gilbert Yorke at breakfast on their last morning. “I hope you’ve enjoyed your holiday as much as I have. Best holiday I’ve had for nearly four years!”

“Oh yes, sir, thank you. I’ve had a lovely time,” said Sally.

Mildred Yorke smiled.

“I must say she looks better for the change, Gil, anyway. And she’s a little fatter, isn’t she?”

“Fatter?” Gilbert Yorke considered the blushing Sally. “Oh, she’s got a long way to go yet. Don’t you be led away by these silly fashions, my girl. Men don’t admire these modern scraggs. Can’t think how women ever deluded themselves into thinking they do!”

“Well—who designs most of the fashions?” asked his wife. “*Men!*—and they’re all for the ‘scraggs,’ as you call them.”

“*Men!*” said Gilbert Yorke, as if he thought that men who decreed what clothes women should wear on what sort of figures weren’t much, anyway.

“Don’t you be led away!” he said again to Sally. “You eat what you like and fill out some of the salt-cellars, my child, and you’ll do nicely.”

Sally coloured up. She was used to being discussed, to hearing her grandmother and her detestable Aunt Grace agree that “there wasn’t much of her” and she would not have disputed the general verdict that she was a “scraggy little bit.” Sally had no vanities, never having been allowed to think herself even passably good-looking, and with no mind towards her own type. In the class of society to which she belonged a woman was preferred for a “bit of figger” and Sally had unconsciously adopted the standard if not the phraseology which, somehow, always passed her by as an alien idiom. But the ripe curves, the deep and swelling bosom of a Mildred Yorke caught her wistful admiration—the nearest that Sally ever came at that time in her life to envy. Mildred Yorke fulfilled all that her eye demanded of female beauty, so that she loved to look at her—the pink and white of her cheeks, the flaxen hair and the way it waved across one side of her head to flow down over her ears and be caught in a loose soft knot on her white neck. Sally’s hair was naturally straight and it had never occurred to her even to try to wave it, much less to spend any part of her wages in getting somebody else to perform the operation. Already, subconsciously, she realised that the cult of beauty went hand in hand with leisure, which was the monopoly of those women who had money—money of their own or that bestowed by men.

Mildred Yorke laughed—either at her husband’s pronouncements about beauty in women or at the blushing results upon Sally.

“We ought not to waste all our morning indoors,” she said. “Can you manage the children this morning, Sally? Mr. Yorke and I have a few purchases to make at the shops. Keep them as quiet as you can or they’ll be tired out before we get them home.”

From the open window Sally saw her, a quarter of an hour later, as she walked down the road at her husband's side: saw how people turned to stare at her, saw Gilbert suddenly take her arm and turn his head to glance at her. She wondered what it was he said to make her look up at him like that from beneath her shady hat; what she said to him.

Those ardent glances of his which even the street could not entirely check would almost certainly have made Sally blush, and the tone of his voice as he said: "God! You make all the other women in this place look like tuppence-ha'penny."

Mildred laughed.

"All things are comparative," she said. "And among the blind the one-eyed are kings."

Gilbert Yorke laughed, too.

"Yes, one-eyed—I reckon that's just about the value you put on yourself, isn't it?" he asked, taking her arm.

"Darling!—must we be so literal-minded?" From beneath her shady hat she looked up at him as if there were no other man in the world—but also as if she had very neatly scored some point or other in the game they had been playing together.

## CHAPTER THREE

(1)

Back in London Sally slipped easily into her position in the Yorke household. She found that save when the daily general was off duty she was not expected to do more than give an occasional hand with the actual work of the house or the cooking. Mrs. Yorke taught her to wait at table and looked to her to take charge of the children when she was out or otherwise engaged, and made good use of her capacity to wield needle and thread. Before a month had elapsed Mildred was congratulating herself upon Sally, whom she approved because she knew how to make herself useful in the exact ways in which she wanted her to be useful; because she "kept herself to herself," and had a voice that fell gently, like dew (as somebody told her much later), and because, after three years of the strident Annie, Mildred found this immensely soothing. Mrs. Yorke, who had listened to her mother's accounts of servants of a bygone day without ever believing in the paragons, was already minded to thank the gods who had given her Sally,

who did not seem to care whether she went to the cinema or not, and did not offend her sense of the fitness of things by bobbed hair, carmined lips or an over-display of cheap silk stockings. For this reason, she had endured three years of Annie, who also had no mind to the more frivolous side of life and regarded most of what she saw at the cinema as “soppy.” Mrs. Yorke, in short, was lucky in her maids and, an essentially amiable person, was wise enough to appreciate them.

“My dear, wherever did you find her?” her friends cooed at her when they came to call and saw Sally. “I didn’t think they existed!” and when Mildred smiled they would add: “I always say you’re the one person of my acquaintance who *knows* how a house should be run and who gets it done! What a treasure Gil must find you!”

Still smiling Mildred would make a soft deprecating movement of her whole lovely body, but she knew well enough that what her friends said was true. Running a house, making a man comfortable—it was her job. But Gil? No denying Gil was difficult at times and very wrong-headed on certain subjects: but he *did* think her the only woman in the world! So, because she was so sure of that and because she had not yet discovered that Gil did not particularly appreciate comfort—or not, perhaps, the particular kind of comfort she gave him, her complacent happiness went undisturbed.

Sally, too, was busy congratulating herself, thinking herself already a lucky girl. Mrs. Spears’s prediction about “other people’s children” had not so far come true. Paul had now started school and it was Barbara with whom Sally had most to do: but when Paul was at home he and his sister played together with more toys than Sally had ever seen gathered together in one place and with an amity that only gradually she came to recognise as due less to Paul’s disposition than to his sister’s. Those quiet afternoons when she sat sewing in Mildred Yorke’s pretty drawing-room, with Bar playing on the floor or amusing herself, if the day were fine, in the square strip of shady garden outside the long French window, made green and restful oases in Sally’s town-bred mind.

Little by little, however, Sally carried away from them one or two impressions: “facts” they certainly could not be called. The first was that Mildred Yorke cared more for children than for anything else in the world, and that the younger they were the more she liked them; the second, that she could not understand women who wanted husbands but no children. Mildred did not “talk” of these things: they were implicit in the other things she said and in her attitude to so much else. Sally did not criticise: did not agree or disagree. She said indeed very little, being content to sit lapped about by

Mildred Yorke's personality, by her kindness, her air of treating Sally as a member of her family; by her sweet smile, her gracious movements. Sally was young and green and ignorant and too sweet-tempered to envy Mildred Yorke either her happy circumstances or her natural advantages over lesser mortals. In those afternoon sittings Mildred, knowingly or not, forged chains which were not easily to be broken. Her acknowledged pride in her motherhood, her acceptance of it as her chief business in life, struck Sally as something marvellously right—for her own upbringing had taught her only that maternity was something shameful, or, alternatively, the merely automatic result of marriage. "Luck" was the word most generally in use on the subject and as far as Sally could make out most of the women of her acquaintance would have agreed that they had singularly little of it.

(2)

Eliza Dunn was pleased with her young grand-daughter when, a week after her return from the sea, Sally went to spend an afternoon and evening with her. Liza liked the neat appearance she presented in the dark-blue costume in which she had invested her first month's wages, and she noted with approval that her hair, though neatly braided over her ears in the fashion Mrs. Yorke had suggested, was still virgin to the waving-iron. Neither had she fallen a victim to the paint and powder with which her degenerate age saw fit to bedeck itself. Liza sighed with relief. Her views of modern youth were definite and disapproving and she did not understand that in part at least this was due to a subconscious fear that Sally would go "like her mother."

However, since the afternoon held no signs of this dread possibility, it began auspiciously and Liza settled herself down comfortably at her kitchen table, with the kettle singing on the hob and a pot of strong tea with which to regale herself and her visitor. She had not seen Sally since she had left Mrs. Spears and she looked forward, as she poured out the tea, to an interesting afternoon. Having recently gone to a new "place" and fresh from all the delights of a month of fine weather at the sea, even Sally (no gossip, as she knew) must, she felt, have something for once to say for herself. But Sally, stirring her tea, did not seem by her experiences to have been rendered any more loquacious. She was happy, she said, and comfortable, and the holiday at the sea had been lovely. But that was by no means all that Eliza Dunn had made up her mind to hear.

"Wot sort of a lady is Mrs. Yorke?" she inquired.

"Very kind," said Sally.

“Good-looking?”

“Yes,” said Sally, “with a lovely figure.”

“Fair or dark?”

“Fair.”

“You like ’er, do you?”

“Oh *yes*.”

“Wot’s ’e like?”

“Oh, he’s nice, too. As nice as her!”

“Oh, *is* ’e? Well, I ’ope ’e don’t make ’isself too nice to you, anyway.”

“Oh, *grandma!*” Sally’s face creased with distaste.

“You needn’t look like that about it, my girl. . . . Men ain’t all they ought to be—not by a long chalk.”

“Well, Mr. Yorke isn’t like that . . .”

“Don’t make too sure. Just see as ’e don’t try any nonsense with you.”

“For goodness’ sake, gran’ma! Why, he worships the ground she treads on. You ought to see the presents he gives her! Clothes . . . chocolates, flowers . . .”

“Plenty of money, seemingly.”

Eliza Dunn sighed.

“I don’t know,” said Sally, “seems like it.”

“Wot are the kids like? Spoilt, I’ll be bound.”

“No . . . I don’t think so. She’s fond of children.”

“Wait until she’s got a dozen.”

“I don’t think she’d mind.”

“Wot’s ’e do?”

“He’s something to do with houses and furniture. I don’t quite know.”

“’Ow did you get on at the seaside? Did you like it?”

“Yes, lovely . . .”

“Well, I ain’t very fond of the ocean m’self—the sound of it kind of gets on me nerves. It sounds so mournful-like, and I never *could* swim and I



don't see no fun in bobbing up and down on the edge. Besides, it ain't decent."

This was a new idea to Sally, who had certainly not thought when she had seen Mildred Yorke disporting herself upon the edge of the water that she was an indecent spectacle. Not knowing what to say she said nothing, which Sally could usually be relied upon to do.

"Did you go in?"

"Me?" Sally was clearly startled. "No, I had to look after the children. Besides, *I* can't swim either."

"Well, I don't know as you're any the worse for that. Swimming ain't much use—unless you want to swim the Channel or something, or you're going to travel. The boats are safe enough these days, though there *was* the *Titanic* of course. But you wouldn't remember that. You was only a few months old."

Sally not knowing when the *Titanic* had sunk and her grandmother, even at this time of day, finding the subject of Sally's babyhood a painful one for reflection, there was a slight lull in the conversational flow until Eliza was inspired to ask: "Wot sort of flat 'ave they got?"

"Lovely!" said Sally.

"You're fond of that word, ain't you?" asked her grandmother. "Wot's 'lovely' mean eggsackly?"

Sally laughed.

"Six big rooms and a bathroom," she explained. "It's an old house—made into three flats. They have the ground floor and use of the garden."

"Wot kind of garden 'ave they got?"

"Oh, just grass and trees—the trees won't let the flowers grow."

"Oh, *that* kind," said Eliza, losing interest. "Pity, you'd 'ave liked a garden. Awful fond you used to be as a child of the flower-box your mother would always 'ave outside 'er winder. Pretty it used to look."

Sally did not remember and the flower-boxes had ceased long ago with all the bouncing vitality that was Louisa Dunn. But the mention of her mother made Sally wistful.

"When we were away something was said about going to live in the country," she said. "I'd like that."

“Oh? Wot part of the country, pray?”

“Surbiton or Wimbledon, I think.”

“Wimbledon ain’t the country—nor yet ain’t Surbiton as ever I’ve ’eard. Houter sububs—that’s wot *they* are!”

“Well, whatever they are—it doesn’t matter. They want to live somewhere where they can have a garden, but nothing’s been settled.”

“Well, you seem to ’ave struck lucky, anyway. Yer grandfather *will* be pleased. Fair worried about you at the other place ’e was. . . . She’s got a new girl now, Grace tells me, but she’s very distant-like. She was very funny about your going, so Grace says. But as I said to ’er, nobody couldn’t blame you for betterin’ yerself, mutton chops or no mutton chops.”

“I get all the mutton chops I want where I am,” said Sally, who wasn’t particularly fond of them. “How’s Grace?”

“Expectin’ again!” Eliza made a clicking noise with her tongue. “Reg ain’t too pleased, I can tell you. ’E reckons three children is enough for any man these days. But there, can’t be ’elped!”

The door opened and in walked Sally’s grandfather. She jumped up and put her arms around his neck. She thought he looked worn out and much older than when she had seen him last, when he had thought much the same about her and had insisted upon her getting an easier place.

“You’re tired, aren’t you?” she asked, watching him sink into his old armchair.

He laughed.

“A bit like. I’m not as young as I was. Reckon I ought to retire.”

His wife laughed too.

“Retire’s right,” she said. “But wot on? Reckon we’ll work till we drop—unless Sal ’ere marries a toff!”

Sally smiled, but as she looked at her grandfather a little spasm of uneasiness ran like a lizard on a sunny wall across her mind. She didn’t know about marriage, but she wished she could somehow make it possible for her grandfather not to work so hard or go out so early and in all weathers.

“How old are you, grandfather?” she asked.

“Sixty-five come next month, my gal.”

It seemed a great age to Sally, just fifteen. She wondered mildly if she would still be working when she was as old as that, or whether long before then she would have found a husband, with or without her grandmother's qualifications; and if at sixty-five she, too, would sit drinking tea with some grandchild of her own. But she didn't expect so. Somehow, perhaps without meaning it, her grandmother had managed long ago to leave the impression that girls who could not put their hands, so to speak, upon a father would find considerable difficulty in securing a husband of any kind whatever. Sally could not understand this, but she accepted it as she accepted most of the harder facts of her particular fate. She thought wistfully that it would have been very pleasant to have been born like Mildred Yorke, with the proper complement of parents and so lovely that she had had (as Sally had learned) numerous admirers and had been engaged almost before she left school and twice before she was actually married to Gilbert Yorke. Mildred, however, was clearly of the grand order of human beings who could take their time and choice; who, if the law permitted, could find half-a-dozen husbands. Sally sat still, revolving that other little piece of knowledge she had acquired—that though husbands waited, as it were, on her door-step, it had not, primarily, been a husband that Mildred Yorke had wanted . . .

“Well, my gal, how're you getting on?” asked her grandfather. “Treat you all right, eh?” And as he gulped down his tea Sally obligingly began all over again.

After the meal was over Sally took them both to the cinema, where they saw a “crook” film and a drama of high life in America which, as her grandmother said, “just showed you.” When they came out into the street the placards announced the result of some by-election, and her grandfather bought a paper and found that the Conservatives had retained the seat by a large majority. “It just shows you,” he said, as her grandmother had said of the American film, but Sally was equally in the dark, for she had no idea what it was she was supposed to have been shown. For Sally the Pankhursts had laboured, so far, in vain. She knew nothing of politics and could not conceive what she would do when old enough to have a vote. She had grasped nothing of political affairs save the fact that whichever party was “in” everybody grumbled and blamed “the Government,” and that things, so far as she was concerned and for most other people with whom she came into contact, went on just the same. Politics, in fact, as Sally saw it, had, like religion, singularly little to do with the ordinary business of life.

As she rode home upon the top of the bus she had a sense of duty fulfilled, but a sense, too, of going home. For already the flat in Denmark

Hill was more to her than the poky little house she had just left, in which she had been born and in which she had spent the first fourteen years of her life.

(3)

At the flat agitation reigned. The Yorkes were going that evening to a theatre, and suddenly Mrs. Yorke had decided she could not go because Paul had developed a cough and was peevish. Gilbert Yorke spent himself in an attempt to do something which he called "making her see reason." There was plenty of time, he said, to send for the doctor and find out what was wrong with Paul. Probably nothing—or very little. Mildred fussed and "panicked" every time the kids sneezed. After all, they could not be allowed *entirely* to rule their lives: it was ridiculous. Where was her commonsense, and so on and so on. Mildred listened and said nothing. Sally had never seen her get into a temper nor heard an angry retort on her lips, and though she had yet to learn that Mildred's demeanour had nothing to do with meekness or consciousness of guilt, she had already discovered that the method had an almost infallible efficacy, for people somehow invariably did what Mrs. Yorke wanted. However, upon this occasion, victory lay with Gilbert Yorke, for although the doctor confirmed Mrs. Yorke's suspicions of whooping-cough and her reading of Paul's temperature, he saw no cause for alarm. Paul must go to bed and stay there, but if Sally (he called her "this girl") was competent to look after him, there was no reason why his mother shouldn't go to the theatre or anywhere else. The boy was in no danger—the malady would run its usual course.

The doctor gone, Gilbert Yorke looked at his wife.

"*Now* perhaps you'll go and change," he said, and his voice was more inclined to crossness than Sally had ever heard it, but Mildred went off to her room with completely unruffled demeanour.

Downstairs Gilbert Yorke strode up and down, kicking at the carpet, looking at his watch and frowningly from it to the door. Then, when it seemed impossible his patience could hold out a moment longer, Mildred appeared. She wore a frock Sally had not seen before, of the same delicate shade of pink as her cheeks, and of which there was so surprisingly little that Sally almost gasped. It was the first time she had seen anybody dressed for the evening at such close quarters, and Mildred so dressed was certainly worth looking at. The pink silk frock outlined the lovely if ample lines of her figure and revealed shoulders, arms and bosom like milk in their creamy whiteness. Sally could not take her eyes off the vision of loveliness she presented while her husband took the cloak of blue velvet from her arm and

held it over her shoulders, and she blushed when she saw him bend his head and imprint a kiss upon the expanse of bare back presented to him. A funny little smile came upon his wife's face, though she said nothing and gave no sign.

"No time to eat first," he said; "we'll have supper afterwards. Go to bed, Sally, when you like. We shall be late."

They were off at last and Sally went upstairs and tried to think of stories to tell Paul, who was fractious, inclined to resent his mother's departure, and in no mood to be grateful to Sally for her efforts. She was so tired when at last he was asleep that she speedily sought her own bed, and for a while lay thinking of all that pink and white loveliness at the theatre and of the look on Mrs. Yorke's face when her husband stooped and kissed her back. "A pair of love-birds," Annie had called them once, and later, "Fair gone on 'er, as you might say . . . Well, she's a looker, all right, ain't she? Can't blame 'im!"

Very far into the night it seemed when sounds upon the staircase roused Sally from slumber. Voices and subdued laughter. She sat up in bed to listen. So they were home again! She hoped they would not wake Paul up or go into his room, for Paul awakened out of his sleep was a handful, and Sally did not want to turn out of her comfortable bed or bestir herself completely from the delicious pit of sleep into which hours ago, it seemed, she had fallen headlong. Yet the voices were so near she knew they must be just outside her and Paul's rooms and not their own, which was just above, up a short flight of four or five stairs. She wished they would go on up before it was too late and Paul woke up. She could hear Mr. Yorke's voice distinctly; rather thick and unfamiliar, perhaps because he was trying to whisper, Sally thought. She heard him say: "It's all right, Mil, don't be so idiotic . . . You're sure to wake him up if you do . . ."

More whispering and Mildred's little laugh, to which something suddenly happened as if somebody had put a hand over her mouth but not quite firmly enough.

"Oh, Gil, *really*, darling, do wait a moment!"

"I can't wait—not half a one!"

Mildred's laughter again and the sound of footsteps going upstairs and the opening and shutting of a door and silence.

Sally heaved a sigh of relief, held her breath for a second to see if Paul had awakened, decided that he had not, turned her head upon her pillow and slept.

The next morning Mrs. Yorke did not come down to breakfast, and Mr. Yorke showed a disinclination for his. Annie, coming into the kitchen with the plate of congealed egg and bacon upon her tray, grinned at Sally as she regarded it.

“The morning after the night before, if you ask me,” she said.

Sally had not asked her and usually found Annie’s comments upon people and things a little beyond her, for Annie, more frankly brought up than Sally and more representative of her day and generation, knew a thing or two about life and more than a thing or two about the institution of marriage. Sally was aware that she thought her strangely ignorant and ill-informed upon this fascinating subject, and was aware also of Annie’s contempt for her state. So she made no reply to her cynical remark and went on finishing her own breakfast.

“Pretty late, weren’t they?”

“Yes. They went out to supper after the theatre. I expect they’re tired this morning.”

“*I* bet they are!” said Annie, and laughed her loud vulgar laugh as if she cherished some secret joke which tickled her to death.

“I was afraid they would go in and wake Paul up.”

“I reckon ’e didn’t worry ’em much when they come ’ome, ’owever it was afore they went.”

“*She* wanted to . . . They stood outside Paul’s door for ages. *He* said not to because it was late and Paul asleep, anyway.”

“More than *they* were, I’ll be bound, for a long time afterwards!” Annie said.

The hot colour came into Sally’s cheeks. She disliked Annie profoundly. She couldn’t have said why exactly, but only that somehow she spoiled for Sally this tale of married bliss and put upon that queer little smile of Mildred Yorke’s and upon that soft kiss of her husband’s a defiling touch, a new but dimly-comprehended interpretation.

“I don’t see what’s so funny about it!” she said indignantly.

“No, I don’t suppose you do, Miss Innocence,” said Annie, and went on laughing.

Paul’s whooping-cough, which took its usual uneventful course, was destined to give Sally one more uncomfortable moment. She had arranged to

go to see her grandmother that afternoon, her usual “off” hours having been irregular and rather haphazard since the beginning of Paul’s illness, and Mrs. Yorke had insisted upon her taking this particular afternoon to make up for one of which she had been recently mulcted. Annie would be there: neither she nor Mr. Yorke was going out, and Sally was to go off and forget about them. However, Sally did not entirely manage that, and feeling her responsibilities lying a little heavy upon her, got home a good hour earlier than she was due. She let herself into the house unexpectedly quiet. No Annie put her head out from the kitchen door, and the open door of the drawing-room proclaimed it unoccupied. Presumably the Yorkes had gone out for a walk. But where was Annie? Mrs. Yorke would have a fit if she thought those two children were in the house alone. Sally went along to the kitchen and found that in similar case. Outside in the garden Barbara lay asleep in her pram. Sally tiptoed over and looked at her, very pink and white and golden-haired, very like her mother, and very sweet, thought Sally, and her heart gave a little jump in her body, as it was apt to do when she looked at these children of Mildred Yorke’s. No wonder, she thought, as she looked at Bar, that their mother thought so much of them! She turned away and went upstairs to Paul’s bedroom. As she did so she heard a little cough from the room at the top of the three steps above, which was the Yorkes’ bedroom. Mrs. Yorke was not out, then, but lying down! Sally felt a sense of relief as she opened Paul’s door and went in. Paul, too, was asleep, but frowning and belligerent as if even in sleep something had annoyed him. Almost as she entered he awoke and Sally moved softly, hoping he would go to sleep again and so save them all from the grumpy, petulant young man that was Paul Yorke waked too soon. It speedily became apparent, however, that Paul had no intention of going to sleep again, and Sally was forced to notice that he was awake.

“’Lo, Paul,” she said. “Woke up too soon? All right, sit up, then, and Sally’ll tell you a story, shall she?”

Paul stopped grizzling, smiled his peculiarly stormy and attractive smile, and prepared to listen—and criticize, as poor Sally well knew. But scarcely had she begun her story (not a very good one) when Paul caught his breath and began to cough so violently that he went red in the face and nearly frightened Sally out of her wits by the length and strength of the paroxysm. So long indeed did it last that she suddenly lost her nerve, and getting up, ran up the stairs to Mrs. Yorke’s room and tapped upon the door, wondering a little why she had not already come rushing to the rescue. The voice that answered her knock was not Mildred Yorke’s but her husband’s, and it sounded angry.

“Yes? What is it?”

“It’s Paul. He’s coughing very badly.”

An indistinct murmur of sounds on the other side of the door; then the turning of the key in the lock and Mildred Yorke came out clutching her dressing-gown, her ruffled hair loose upon her shoulders and the colour very deep and rich in her cheeks. Without a word she went past Sally and ran down the stairs into Paul’s room. And then, as if he’d done it on purpose, Paul’s cough stopped as suddenly as it had begun. As Mildred lifted Paul out of his cot and sat down with him upon her lap, Sally sighed deeply and gasped out her apologies.

“I’d only just got back, ma’am . . . I couldn’t see anyone about . . . I thought you had gone out . . .”

“I was lying down. Where is Annie?”

“I don’t know, ma’am . . .”

She saw that Mildred’s feet were bare—she had not waited even to find her slippers, and Sally was as fascinated by the shapely whiteness of them and their pink and well-tended nails as she was by the flushed loveliness of the face bent over Paul.

Just then a door opened somewhere downstairs and a minute later Annie ran whistling up the stairs. She flung open the door and stood petrified by the Madonna group which met her eye. Mrs. Yorke lifted her head.

“I thought I told you I was going to lie down and asked you to keep an eye on Paul,” she said quietly.

“There was no spice in the ’ouse for that spiced cake you asked me to make for Paul. I haven’t been gawn five minutes, ma’am.”

“Long enough for Paul to have choked to death if Sally hadn’t come in.”

Even Sally realised that this was an exaggeration, for Paul’s coughing was audible enough, and up there in her room Mrs. Yorke could not have failed to hear him. Sally reflected that she had been surprised that when he began she had not come running in without waiting to be called. Annie stood there taking the reproof with a bad grace, tossing her head, and with her sulky eyes fixed upon her mistress, who, while talking, rose, put Paul down upon his bed and pulled her silk dressing-gown tightly together.

“All right. You can go now,” she said. “I’m sorry you were not to be trusted.”



Annie took herself off with a flounce, and Mrs. Yorke, smiling at Sally and Paul inclusively, took herself off too. Five minutes later Sally heard the bedroom door open, shut, and the sound of a masculine tread upon the stairs above. They did not stop at Paul's door. Though the boy called, "Daddy! Come in here . . . I want you!" they went unhesitatingly downstairs and into the hall, and the sound of the sharp shutting of the front door sprang upwards. Presently Mildred Yorke came down, dressed, coiffured, and mistress of the situation.

"Where's daddy gone?" Paul demanded, looking sulky and unwelcoming.

"Out for a walk, lovey."

"I called him, but he wouldn't come. P'raps he didn't hear."

"P'raps not, darling. Mummy'll stay with you, shall she, and tell you a nice story?"

"Yes, please," said Paul, not too graciously.

"Not going to cough any more, are you, Paul?"

"I don't think so," said Paul.

Mrs. Yorke looked at him, went over and moved his pillows.

"Sally's just done them," he said, still ungracious and unwelcoming. "Why didn't daddy come? I don't believe he didn't hear!"

"Well, you can ask him when he comes back, lovey . . . Just run down and have a peep at Barbara, Sally, will you? And if she's awake bring her up here. And then run down to the High Road and see if you can match that silk for her frock. I'll manage the children. Unless you're too tired, are you?"

"Oh no, ma'am . . . not a bit. Wouldn't you like some tea, though, first?"

"No, thank you, Sally; it's too late now. Paul—I've thought of a lovely new story for you."

"What's it called?" asked Paul.

"The Princess Who Couldn't Laugh."

Paul thawed.

"Oh yes, mummy . . .!"

Mrs. Yorke sat by the open window where she could look down into the garden and upon the pram in which her little daughter lay and began:

“Once upon a time there was a princess who couldn’t laugh . . .”

(4)

Downstairs in the kitchen an indignant Annie said to Sally:

“Bullyragging me like that! I’ve a good mind to give ’er notice! Pretendin’ she couldn’t ’ear the boy cough! Any other time she’d been down those stairs like a shot!”

“But she thought you were there! Why didn’t you knock and *say* you were going out for a few minutes?”

“Yes—a lot of thanks I’d ’ave got for that, you bet yer life!”

“Why?”

“When she’d gone to bed with ’im in the middle of the afternoon?”

This seemed to Sally an unnecessarily vulgar way of saying that her master and mistress had gone to lie down after lunch, and she said so. Annie’s scornful laugh rang out and filled the kitchen.

“Pretty little innocent, aren’t you?” she said. “I s’pose you didn’t notice she’d got nothing on under that wrap? Or p’raps you’ve got no eyes in yer ’ead?”

“I didn’t think about it!” said Sally, but remembering how Mrs. Yorke had clutched at the wrap and how Annie’s sulky gaze had followed her.

“*Think* about it! Fat lot of thinking was necessary. Why, you could see all she’s got! Good job she *is* married, if you ask me! A hot lot!—that’s what she is, and no mistake!”

“I think you’re perfectly beastly,” said Sally, suddenly very angry.

“Well, I ain’t no fool, anyway. And I ain’t been ’ere for three years without seeing a thing or two. I wasn’t born yesterday like you—and I got eyes in me face.”

“And a nasty mind!” said Sally. “Anybody’d think they weren’t married, to hear you!”

“I don’t know so much about my nasty mind. There’s a proper time for that kind of thing if you’re married! They got all night, ain’t they? I’d be ashamed going off to bed like that—regardless!”

“It’s you who ought to be ashamed!”

“Did I, then? Well, I can’t see what you’ve got to be so set up with yourself about, anyway. If I know anything about it, ’e ain’t too pleased with *you*, neither.”

“Why, what have I done?”

“Well, ’e told me before ’e went upstairs that she wasn’t to be disturbed. On *no* account, ’e said—not for nobody. Bit done up, ’e said she was . . . Done up!” Annie’s laugh rushed up to the ceiling again, knocked violently against the walls and split into a myriad pieces that spread all over the house. “Then you went and fetched ’er out . . . and now ’e’s gone orf in a fine temper, I can tell you!”

Sally went out into the garden with a queer tight feeling across her chest, a whole medley of emotions besieging her. Did Mrs. Yorke sitting up there so placidly telling a new story to Paul care nothing that her husband had marched off out of the house in a temper—or wasn’t it a fact, nothing but a part of Annie’s general nastiness? She thought as she looked down upon the still sweetly-sleeping Bar that she hated Annie, that she was the one unsatisfactory item in this pleasant life in which she found herself.

As she went through the hall the telephone rang. She took down the receiver and said, “Yes?”

“That you, Sally?”

It was Gilbert Yorke’s voice, and it certainly sounded as if its owner were not in the best of tempers.

“Tell your mistress,” it said, “that I shall not be in to dinner.”

Click. Buzz. Buzz. Mr. Yorke had rung off. Sally’s “Very well, sir,” was uttered into the void. For some reason she felt crushed and unusually near tears, and she stayed for a second by the telephone driving them back until the sound of Barbara’s return to the everyday scene sent her hurrying through into the garden.

The baby, who, unlike her brother, woke up good-tempered, was pleased with her, at any rate, and laughed and prattled as Sally stood with her for a moment in the sun, her soft face pressed against her own, before she marched her upstairs and delivered her to her mother.

“Mr. Yorke rang up, ma’am. He won’t be in to dinner.”

“All right; thank you, Sally.”

Not a tremor, not the very faintest shadow of dismay or surprise or anger upon that lovely face.

“Tell Annie, as you go down, Sally, will you? And say she needn’t trouble about the mushroom omelette . . .”

## CHAPTER FOUR

(1)

During those weeks of late summer the question of the “house in the semi-country” was very much in the air, and now that Paul was better Mr. and Mrs. Yorke frequently went off on Saturday afternoons to some outlying district on a tour of inspection, coming back in time for dinner with sheaves of literature and photographs. From the talk at dinner-time, and from what Annie made it her business to find out, Sally gathered that no house they had looked at so far exactly suited their requirements.

“There’s no particular hurry,” said Gilbert Yorke. “Plenty of time yet till quarter-day. We can find subtenants for this any time we like. Brown’s have got a waiting-list.”

But suddenly it seemed there wasn’t plenty of time, and Mildred was urging the need to get moved and settled in before the weather got bad. Little arguments went on for several days about a house concerning which Mildred Yorke was very enthusiastic, until it was definitely decided in mid-September that they were actually going to have it. Mr. Yorke, who had to go away for the week-end, promised to begin preliminaries upon his return on the Tuesday, but this didn’t suit his wife. Couldn’t they go and clinch it at once? No, said Gilbert, with some firmness; he couldn’t put off his week-end. Business was business. . . .

Accordingly, on the Saturday morning he went off, calling Sally into the dining-room to brush his coat. Mrs. Yorke was not down, having asked Sally, when she went in with the early tea, to bring her up some toast only. She was tired and had a headache, and wouldn’t get up for an hour.

“Look here, Sally,” said Mildred’s husband, “I leave Mrs. Yorke to you. I’ll be back to dinner on Tuesday; that’s nearly four days. Look after her and keep the children off. She has them with her too much. Encourage her to go down to the hard court to-night if it keeps fine, and a game each day wouldn’t do her any harm. But do relieve her of the worry of the youngsters. . . .”

“I’ll do my best, sir!” said Sally.

“Good Sally! Good Sally Lunn!” said her master, and Sally’s face beamed with pleasure. He hadn’t called her that since that afternoon when he had sounded so cross across the ’phone. All the same, she was at a loss, for she had never seen any evidence that having the children worried Mrs. Yorke, though not having them certainly did. But she thought now, as she had so often done before, that it must be lovely to have a husband like Gilbert Yorke, who thought of these things.

After he had gone she went up to her mistress, collected her breakfast-tray and inquired after the headache. “Oh, it was only a little one, Sally! *You* aren’t going to fuss, too, are you?”

“Mr. Yorke said, ma’am . . .”

“I know—that you were to keep off the children, see that I stayed in bed in the morning and went to bed early at night. I’m not ill, so why?”

“He said, ma’am, that you were to go and play tennis this evening, and that a game each day wouldn’t hurt you.”

“Oh, *wouldn’t* it? Well, I’m not going to play tennis, Sally, any more this summer, and if any of the club people come up this week-end to dig me out you can work my headache for all it’s worth.” And Mildred threw back the bedclothes, put her legs over the side of the bed, and pushed her feet into the soft heelless slippers standing close by. “Now I’m going to get up.”

Sally told the appointed lies to the young man who came up in the afternoon to escort Mrs. Yorke to the tennis court, and then at dinner-time wondered if they really had been lies. For her mistress ate very little dinner and looked as though she ought to be in bed. She was very pale and her eyes looked heavy and dark-ringed, and the next morning when Sally took early tea she said she was feeling bilious and didn’t want any breakfast; but Sally thought, with relief, that when she came downstairs she seemed completely to have recovered, and made light of the whole affair.

“Sally,” she said, “not a word to Mr. Yorke, mind, when he comes back. He’ll only be worried and fuss and all the rest of it—and there’s nothing really the matter with me.” She went off shopping, and by dinner-time had quite recovered her appetite. So Sally ceased to worry.

And then on the very evening of her husband’s return, in the middle of dinner, Mildred scared her nearly to death by slipping sideways in her chair, the arm-rests alone preventing her from falling to the floor. Sally turned round from the sideboard to see Mr. Yorke lifting his wife from the chair to

the settee; but before Sally could bring the brandy or the water for which he shouted, Mrs. Yorke opened her eyes and laughed at them. But her husband didn't laugh; neither did he seem in the least inclined to accept Mrs. Yorke's assurances that there was nothing to be alarmed about. He began firing off questions to Sally in a way that betrayed her into complete forgetfulness of her mistress's admonitions that he was not to be told of the morning indisposition. And then, as suddenly as he had begun firing questions at Sally, he left off. He turned his back on Sally, and his voice when he spoke to his wife seemed to be now not anxious at all but quick and sharp with anger.

"So *that's* why you were in such a hurry about the house," he said. "Well, you remember what I said—you can't have both!"

"All right."

"You've got what you want most, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

Dinner proceeded in silence and Sally was dismissed.

"Coffee in half an hour, Sally, in the drawing-room," said Mrs. Yorke, with her sweetest smile. When Sally took it in she was sitting in an armchair looking her usual self, and close by, smoking a cigarette, stood Gilbert Yorke, looking down upon her. The conversation had ceased abruptly upon her entrance, and not a word was spoken as she handed the coffee. Mr. Yorke took his mechanically, forgetting the sugar, then reaching for it as she took it away. Sally went quietly out and down into the kitchen, filled in a way she did not understand with all kinds of misgivings, and Annie laughed at her long face and said: "Cheer up! She's not going to die—she's only going to 'ave another kid! I guessed that days ago."

"Oh!" said Sally, a little blankly. The simple explanation of recent events had never entered her head. Really, she was appallingly ignorant, and she saw that Annie's contempt was not without reason. "Are you sure that's it?"

"'Course I'm sure. My mother had five after me. Reckon I ought to know what they're like before'and."

No answer from Sally.

"'E don't seem too pleased about it—face like a fiddle when I went in to clear away. *She* seemed cheerful enough. Queer! Most ways it's the women makes the fuss. One woman I was with cried and carried on something

awful—it was *her* third, too—and her husband laughed and laughed as if 'aving a baby you didn't want was the funniest joke on earth. Some men are fair pigs . . . Well, anyone can 'ave marriage for me. It ain't a fair distribootion of labour, leastways not accordin' to *my* ideas!"

Still no answer from Sally.

"Matter of taste, I daresay," continued Annie. "Now this one seems to *like* 'aving 'em. If you asks me, it's 'er doings . . . I mean, it's 'er as wants the fam'ly—not 'im!"

Sally said quickly: "It'll be nice to have a baby in the house."

"Glad you think so!" said Annie. "Well, I'm off. So long!"

What she said, however, proved to be indeed the fact. Mrs. Yorke was expecting a new baby at the end of March, and they were not to leave Denmark Hill after all.

"Daddy says we can't have the new house *and* the new baby!" she said laughingly to Sally. "I tell him he's very mean—especially as but for his old business week-end it would all have been settled up before he went. Then he *couldn't* have got out of it."

Gilbert Yorke looked at his wife.

"It's your choice, my dear," he said. "What's the young man to be called, anyway, when he arrives?"

"Peter, if it's a boy."

"Why?"

"Oh, reasons . . .!"

"And if it's a girl?"

"June."

He didn't ask why this time. He stared at his wife for a moment, then he said: "Good God! You don't play fair, Mil. I'm damned if you do!"

"*Really*, Gil! You're shocking Sally."

"I don't suppose she has the faintest idea what we're talking about; have you, Sally?"

Sally laughed and shook her head.

"How old are you, Sally?" asked Mildred.

“Fifteen, ma’am. Sixteen next June.”

“Oh, that’s a long way off. You’re a mere baby!”

“She’s an anachronism!” Gilbert Yorke said. “That’s what she is; aren’t you, Sally?”

Again Sally laughed and shook her head. The word was beyond her; she must look it up in the dictionary. Again she thought how lucky she was to be with these people, and what dears they were—kind, amusing, generous. If their conversation was at times a little embarrassing, that was true of all the adults she had ever encountered. Sally had no complaints to make, but it was her grandmother’s fault she was so ignorant. In time, she supposed, she would stop being that, would cease to feel her face and neck grow hot at certain jokes, at the way people looked at each other, at the things they said.

Later in the day she took down the dictionary from its place on the dining-room shelves and hunted for the word Gilbert Yorke had used. *Anachronism*, she read, “chronological error . . . belonging to a later period . . . out-of-date thing . . .” Sally wrinkled her brows; she felt puzzled and a little humbled, but scarcely enlightened. Another of Daddy Yorke’s jokes, she supposed, as she put the volume back in its place.

He made, as the weeks went by, far fewer of them, and as the year slipped down into the trough of winter it seemed to Sally that he changed quite alarmingly—almost it seemed that Annie was right and he was annoyed about the baby. She remembered that her grandmother had said her Uncle Reg was annoyed about his . . . Queer! Didn’t men *like* children, then? He seldom if ever called her these days by her “fancy” name, and she knew that with Paul’s bed made up in the nursery so that his father might occupy his room, he sat up reading long hours after his wife had gone to bed. He grew irritable, too, when she and Sally sat sewing long white seams after dinner by the fire. Frequently he ’phoned that he wouldn’t be home to dinner, that he was working late or going out with friends, and once or twice he took a girl called Erica Poole to the theatre because tickets “had come to the office,” and Mildred did not want to go. Erica Poole was one of the young women from the tennis club, and had often been to the house after play. It had been Mildred’s idea that he should take Erica, and Sally was aware that Mildred’s friends thought she had been rather a fool.

“Oh, why?” she said. “Just now I can’t stand late evenings, but I don’t see why he should never go out. After all, men have none of the fun of having a baby.”



As for Mildred herself, after that unusually bad beginning, she thrived and suffered from none of those minor ills which, according to the knowledgeable Annie, were always the lot of the prospective mother, and none of the worst disfigurements. Her figure was not noticeably ungainly, for she carried her child well and was built nobly for maternity, besides being considerably helped by the clever and expensive gowns she had bought for this time of waiting. Though she was never to be lured out at night to dinners or theatres, she spent busy enough days—shopping, having her friends to tea, going to tea with them, giving occasional bridge parties, and going to them—without exhibiting any sign of fatigue.

“That kid’ll be born in a bus if she don’t look out,” said Annie; but she was wrong. Miss June Yorke made her appearance in the middle of the night on the second of April without fuss or undue bother—and Sally was deeply humiliated to discover in the morning that she had slept through the whole exciting business.

In the morning Mr. Yorke came down to breakfast in a mood which had been foreign to him for many months past. “Glad to ’ave it all safely over, I’ll be bound,” Annie said, but Sally was disappointed that he showed little enthusiasm for or even interest in the new baby. He gave Sally telegrams to send out to various people, and with an admonition to see that certain things were attended to he went off to the office.

(2)

Sally knocked at her mistress’s door before she went out to take Paul to school and to send the telegrams, and was told to come in. Mrs. Yorke, rather pale and with her hair braided in two long plaits falling over her shoulders, smiled at her and said: “Hallo, Sally—come and look at my new baby. Isn’t she sweet?”

“Yes,” said Sally loyally, though in truth the new-comer seemed to her rather too red for beauty and strangely old for her age. She saw that the baby wore one of the new beautifully embroidered night-gowns, the seams of which she had sat sewing of late so frequently beneath Mr. Yorke’s moody gaze. (“Fancy making new ones—and ’er with two babies already! Fair extravagant *I* call it!” said Annie.)

Mrs. Yorke said: “Bring the children in, Sally. I want them to see their new sister.”

Sally stole out and returned holding an eager, delighted Bar and encouraging with gentle pushes a sullen and reluctant Paul.

“Well, darlings, come and see how you like your new sister.”

Bar liked her, it was evident, very well, crowing with delight at that diminutive red and puckered countenance, but Paul hung back, threw one glance towards it and announced angrily: “I wanted a brother.”

“Oh, but a little sister will be so nice for you to have when she gets a little bigger,” said the baby’s mother.

“I’ve *got* a sister,” urged Paul with emphasis. “Can’t I have a brother?”

“You must ask daddy about that, I’m afraid, darling. He’ll be late for school, Sally, won’t he? Run along with Sally, Paul, there’s a good boy.”

“When can I have a brother?” demanded Paul.

“Oh, darling, I don’t know. Some day, perhaps, if you’re a good boy.”

“Will it be long?”

“It depends—upon how good you are, for one thing . . . But it won’t be *next week*, I’m afraid.”

Bar said: “Why is she called June?”

June’s mother said: “Oh, don’t ask questions, darling.” She laughed and added: “It’s a very pretty name, don’t you think?”

Nurse, included in the smile, said: “They usually call children born in June by that name; that’s what the child means, I expect, madam.”

Mildred Yorke laughed again.

“Oh, is she old enough to mean all that?” she asked, but she looked reflectively at the nurse’s back as if wondering how good she was at arithmetic. “Take them away, Sally, there’s a good girl.”

Paul lost no time in tackling his father upon the subject of the desired baby-brother. That evening as Sally brought them down to say good-night, Gilbert asked him what he thought of the new baby.

“I didn’t want a sister,” he replied. “I wanted a brother,” he said patiently, as if quite ready to believe there had been a mistake. “Mother said I was to ask you about it.”

“Little brothers are too expensive. Little sisters are bad enough,” said his father. “I’m afraid you’ll have to be content to be the only boy in the family, son.”

“It isn’t fair,” said Paul, stamping his foot. “If she has a sister, why can’t I have a brother?”

“She’s your sister as well,” his father pointed out.

“I don’t want her!” stormed Paul, bursting into tears of rage, his reasonableness all gone. His father looked at him in cold dislike. And then Miss June chose that moment to voice her disapproval of the world in which she found herself.

“Take him away, Sally, for heaven’s sake!” Gilbert Yorke said, “and shut the door tight. God, what a house!”

Sally stared at him for a second in dismay, then, taking Barbara’s hand, she pushed the howling Paul in front of her and so to the door and out of the room.

“You naughty boy!” she said to him when she got him there. “Fancy making all that noise and upsetting your daddy. Sally’s ashamed of you.”

She took him upstairs, pulled off his dressing-gown and hoisted him into bed.

“Paul hasn’t said his prayers,” said Barbara, gravely watching.

“Never mind,” said Sally; “you come along now, like a good girl, and say yours.”

“I’d rather stay wiv Paulie.”

“Paul doesn’t want you. Paul only wants to be left alone for a bit. Come along now, duckie . . .”

Bar moved with Sally to the door.

From the room at the top of the stairs the nurse appeared.

“Mrs. Yorke wants to know what’s the matter with the little boy,” she said in the tone of one who said: “Really, if you can’t do better than this at such a time . . .!”

“He’ll be all right in a minute,” said Sally, but the nurse pushed past her into the nursery. *That*, her manner said, doesn’t answer my question.

“Now, now,” she said to Paul, who lay where Sally had laid him, the tears running down his face and his rage shaking him to pieces. “Come, you mustn’t go on like this. You’re upsetting your mother, and that’ll never do!”

But Paul, as if in some fashion he associated her with the arrival of the sister he so resented, sat suddenly up in his bed and screamed at her: “Go

away . . . go away. I hate you! I want Sally . . .!”

“Such goings on!” said the nurse. “I never did! If you were my little boy I should smack your bottom!”

Paul stopped in the middle of his grief and rage to put out his tongue at her. This struck Barbara as funny, and she laughed with glee. The nurse said: “Upon my word! What dreadfully-brought-up children! Really, I’d be ashamed!” and with a scornful glance at Sally swept from the room. Even the happy Barbara was a little impressed by all this adult dignity and stopped laughing. Paul put his head on Sally’s shoulder and ceased to mind everything so dreadfully.

“Never mind, Paulie,” Sally said, “it hasn’t been a nice day, has it? Tomorrow’ll be better, and don’t you worry. You’ll have a baby-brother one of these fine days—you’ll see.”

“How do you know?”

“I can’t tell you—but I do.”

“You sure, Sally?”

“Certain sure. Now you lie down and go to sleep. Would you like to say your prayers now?”

Against her shoulder Paul’s head shook a definite negative.

“All right,” said Sally. “I’ll cover you up, shall I? There, that’s better. Now you forget all about it and go to sleep like a good Paul. I’ve got to put Bar to bed yet, you know.”

Bar, who wouldn’t have agreed that it hadn’t been a nice day, for all days were nice to Bar, who seldom saw anything to cry about and had the temper of an angel at this stage of her career, put no difficulties in the way of the process of being put to bed. She chatted all the while she was being undressed and to the very moment when the door was closing behind Sally; but Sally knew she would be asleep in a few minutes and trouble nobody until the clock struck seven the next morning. If she woke before she’d stay quietly where she was until Sally came to bath and dress her, not clamouring for untimely attentions, unless Paul condescended to come in and give her a few. Bar was truly her mother’s child—quiet, placid, even-tempered and given to the same sudden ripples of amusement at other people’s tantrums—whereas Paul bore no more than the same strong physical resemblance. Beneath that fair cool exterior he had a dark and sullen temperament that

glowered out at a world which failed to give him exactly what he wanted at the moment he wanted it.

Again from the doorway came the voice of the nurse:

“Mrs. Yorke wants to see her husband. Will you ask him to come up, please?”

Sally went down to the drawing-room, and in answer to her knock an irritable voice said, “Come in.” Gilbert Yorke was sunk in an armchair by the fire, a glass of amber-coloured liquid at his side, the decanter and soda-syphon on the table.

“Well, Sally?”

Sally thought how like Paul’s was that dark look upon his face.

“Mrs. Yorke would like to see you, if you please, sir.”

“Oh, all right . . . You seem to have reduced the house to some kind of order, Sally. I’m obliged to you.”

“Yes, sir,” said Sally.

“Make the fire up while you’re here, there’s a good girl.”

Sally stooped to do it. Gilbert Yorke lifted his glass, drained it at a gulp and refilled it from the decanter and syphon at his side.

“God!” he said fervently, addressing nobody in particular (as Sally seemed to know, for she made no answer). “This children business gets me down! If a man comes home from his work he wants a little recreation and peace—he doesn’t want to hear a lot of squalling kids! Can’t think how women stand ’em all day long!”

Pause.

Then: “How do *you* stand it, Sally?”

“Oh, they’re good children, sir, usually. Paul gets a bit worked up sometimes, but Bar hasn’t any temper at all.”

“What was wrong to-night with Paul, do you imagine?”

“Oh, I think he was a bit jealous, sir . . .”

Gilbert Yorke laughed.

“Jealous? Well, he’ll have a lot more cause for jealousy now, if *that’s* what’s the matter with him!”

“Oh, children are all the same, that way, sir!” said Sally.

Gilbert Yorke rose from his low armchair, Sally from the hearth-rug.

“From out of what depths of experience do you speak. Sally?” he inquired. Some unfamiliar note in his voice made Sally wonder how many whiskies-and-sodas he had imbibed. She had never seen him drunk, but perhaps, at times like these. . . . No, he certainly wasn’t drunk now. Pulling quietly at his pipe, he stood there regarding her.

“You’re a good girl, Sally. I s’pose you’ll be getting married some day.”

“Oh, I don’t know, sir.”

“Don’t you? *I* do.”

His look was not only quiet but roving. Beneath it the colour came into Sally’s face. Somehow or other he had ceased suddenly to be “daddy” Yorke, the kindly employer she had known for the past year. She said nothing.

“You’re growing, Sally—filling out. Some fellow or other’ll be falling in love with you some day. Especially if you blush like that when he speaks to you. You’d like to get married, wouldn’t you, Sally?”

“I don’t know, sir . . . I don’t know that I’ve ever thought much about it!”

“Don’t tell me that! *All* women think about it from the day they’re born!”

Sally laughed—his voice was so indignant, so angry, for some reason, that she forgot that roving glance, the feeling she had of being in the room with a stranger. And suddenly the anger went out of his voice and Gilbert Yorke was laughing, too.

“Well, p’raps it isn’t true of you, Sally. I’ve told you before you’re an anachronism, which means that some day you’ll make some man very happy. Only don’t be in a hurry, Sally—marriage isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Go and get me a box of matches, will you?”

When she came back with them he said: “Here’s a word of advice for you, Sally. If you get married don’t have half-a-dozen children. Too many people in the world as it is, anyway.”

“That’s what my grandfather says, sir.”

“Sensible man! Don’t you think so?”

“I don’t know, sir . . . I’m afraid I haven’t thought about it . . .”

Sally’s blushes were mounting again.

“What *do* you think about all day long, Sally?”

“Oh, I don’t know. . . . About Paul and Bar quite a lot, of course . . .”

“Babies! That all?”

“Well, it’s what I’m *here* to think about, chiefly, sir.”

“I suppose it is, Sally. But don’t you ever think about questions of the day—Free Trade, Protection, the Labour Party—things like the dole and the Abolition of Capital Punishment?”

“No, sir, I don’t think so. Not much, anyway.”

Gilbert Yorke poured himself out another drink.

“Well, some day some man’ll kiss you and you’ll think about ’em even less. Pity, in my opinion. That’s what’s wrong with women—there’s such a *do* about all this sex business. Why can’t they take it in their stride—more like men? I’d like to have a wife who was an M.P., Sally. What do you think of that?”

“I don’t think you mean it, sir.”

“Oh? Why not?”

“Because I think you’d rather be married to Mrs. Yorke than anybody else in the world, sir.”

“You do, do you? Well, that doesn’t prevent me from wishing she was a member of Parliament, does it?” Suddenly he laughed and became again the familiar person she knew. “Well, she’ll begin to talk to me like one if I don’t go upstairs, I suppose . . .”

Sally smiled. She said: “Shall I take your glass, sir, if you’ve finished?”

“I haven’t finished,” said Gilbert Yorke.

## CHAPTER FIVE

(1)

Mrs. Yorke’s mother (whom Sally had met once before) came one day to see the new baby. She was a tall upright woman, as dark as her daughter was fair, but it was obvious from whom Mildred Yorke got her build and

straight-cut features. Sally thought she was a good deal older than she had expected Mrs. Yorke's mother to be, but this, she had been told by Annie—who knew everything—was because there was a difference of twelve years between Mrs. Yorke and her brother in America from visiting whom Mrs. Pomeroy had only recently returned.

On the occasion of Mrs. Pomeroy's visit Sally was told to bring tea in at four and to bring Paul in with Barbara when the nursery meal was over, and this she accordingly did. The two women stopped their conversation to greet the newcomers, but presently, with the new baby on the old lady's knee, Bar on her mother's and Sally at the other end of the room being condescendingly admitted to the secrets of some new brick erection with which Paul was engaged, the talk broke out again. Mrs. Pomeroy had a soft but distinct voice which she evidently tried to muffle, but Mrs. Yorke never made any attempt to lower her peculiarly clear and distinct accents, and though in the main the conversation, which at first was of Canada and America, flowed past an unregarding Sally, her attention was later caught and held by scraps of it.

"But, mother—it's such a bore without. So meaningless."

"I don't see why. Do you tell Gil that?"

"Of course I don't. He's too fond of me. I wouldn't unnecessarily, hurt his feelings for the world."

Sally, looking up, saw a smile dart across the old lady's features.

"Aren't you in love with your husband?" she asked.

"Of course, mother."

"Well, I don't understand. Where d'you get these puritanic ideas from? Not from me!"

"Puritanic? *Me?* Oh, mother—you *are* funny!"

"But, my dear child, you do sound, on this subject, rather like the Bishop of London."

"Well, perhaps the Bishop's right."

"But, my dear child—you've got to stop some day. Incomes really won't run to it. What then?"

"Why, darling, you're as bad as Gil! He's always got money for everything else—evenings at the theatre, dinner at the Savoy, presents I



could very well do without. We can afford everything, it seems, but a family.”

“My dear child, don’t you call three children a family? I only had the three of you over thirty possible years. Work that out—on *your* theory and the Bishop of London’s—and see what you make of marriage!”

At this point Sally began to talk hard to Paul, and when she stopped, the conversation, happily, had moved on.

“But, my dear child, in these days there’s no getting away from it. The large family’s impossible, what with the income-tax. . . . They will have their wars, and they have to be paid for. Gil does well to be careful!”

“But he *isn’t*—except on this one subject. He’d spend five pounds any night I liked upon taking me out!”

The old lady sighed.

“Well, perhaps he doesn’t *care* for children. Lots of men don’t. I remember your father found you all rather tiresome until you began to grow up. I don’t believe he ever wanted *any*, but he thought it was his duty. People did in those days. And he was proud enough of you when you began to grow up.”

“Yes . . . I can’t understand that. The smaller they are the better I like them. I’m quite prepared to be very bored when they grow up. Why, Paul begins to bore me even now. That’s the trouble—they grow up so soon. Paul’s been at school for months and Bar will go to kindergarten next year. I’d be lost without June.”

“Bless her!” said June’s grandmother. “Well, my child, you know your own business best. But I seem to remember that when you and Gil were engaged he said he’d have two children—one of each—and he’d stop when he got them!”

“But I never agreed. I’m not quite thirty. Gil is thirty-three and he’s still in love with me. I’m not going to be his mistress.”

“Well, so long as he remains in love with you, my dear, I imagine you’ll get your own way.”

“Do you think he won’t be—some day?”

The old lady looked at her daughter.

“Not for a long while, my dear, while you manage to look as you do. I think you look prettier every time you have a baby. Maternity’s certainly

your job.”

“Then why do you think I ought to give it up?”

“Oh, because maternity ought, I think, to be a limited liability. Or because I think you ought to have half-a-dozen husbands!”

“Really, mother! You’re as bad as Gil! But there’s some excuse for him! It’s that awful business of his and the people he has to kow-tow to. It’s a horrid set. No morals at all. Gil thinks they’re a rotten lot, too, and yet he wants me to be like them—or to make my marriage like theirs. He had to go down to see the famous Lady Ethelreda last week-end—you know, the one they call the most beautiful woman in England! He said she was there with her latest lover. . . . Gil had to go and discuss her new bedroom scheme, with him in the room. And the jokes! They’d disgrace a charwoman! All that fuss about her marriage three years ago! *Marriage!*”

Mrs. Pomeroy laughed.

“Oh, that’s merely our modern bad manners. She’ll settle down in time and produce the requisite heir.”

“It’s queer that Gil should want his wife to be like that!”

“My dear child, he does nothing of the sort. Don’t be so absurd. Only Gil’s a natural creature. He doesn’t want to find excuses for being natural. He’s in love with you. That’s enough. It’s enough for most men.”

“I *can’t* understand it. All this rubbish everywhere, in the Press, in our novels, about the modern woman shirking maternity, and the husband being defrauded and all the rest of it. It’s the *men* who don’t want the responsibility!”

“They don’t want too much—and they don’t want to be beasts of burden, either. After all, there’s something in his contention that three children should be enough for any woman!”

“Well, they’re enough for me—at the moment . . .” She turned up her wrist-watch and looked at the time. “Half-past five. Gil said he would be here by five. . . . Sally?”

Sally, getting up from the floor, went quickly to her mistress’s side.

“Well, Sally,” said Mrs. Pomeroy, “how are you these days? You still look very pale.”

“Except when Gil makes her blush!”

Sally blushed on the instant and Mrs. Pomeroy smiled—and changed the subject.

“What do you think of the new baby, Sally?”

“I think she’s perfectly sweet, ma’am,” Sally replied.

“So do I,” said the baby’s mother, whereupon the mite screwed up its face and began to cry. Mrs. Yorke deposited Bar on the floor and held out her arms.

“She’s hungry, bless her,” she said. “Give her to me, mother,” and baring her breast with an instinctive gesture she gave herself up to her child.

“Kiss your grandmother good-bye, darling,” she said to Bar, “and run along with Sally. Paul, darling, leave your game now, my pet . . .”

Paul left it, not too willingly, deliberately kicking it all over with his foot as he came.

“’Bye, Grandma,” he said, offering his hand.

“What does Paul think of the new baby?” asked Paul’s grandmother as she drew him a little towards her.

Said Paul: “I wanted a brother. Mother promised me one if I was good.”

“There you are!” said Paul’s mother, laughing. The old lady laughed, too.

“Pity you didn’t have twins!” she said, and lifting up Barbara kissed her little soft mouth before putting her down again. “Is Paul too big a man now to kiss his grandmother?” she asked.

Paul presented his cheek, screwing up his face as one who suffered, nobly, the idiocies of the sex to which he didn’t belong.

“Run along, darlings,” said Mildred, “Sally’s waiting for you.”

But she did not look up from her contemplation of the top of her small daughter’s head cradled there upon her white bosom.

“Something nice about that girl,” said Mrs. Pomeroy as Sally ushered out her charges.

Mildred smiled dreamily.

“Gil calls her an anachronism.”

“Is she?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps. Gil says she’s not like the girl of to-day—I don’t know how much he knows about it. She’s very trustworthy and steady—excellent with the children, especially with Paul, who’s got a temper and is difficult when he likes.”

“She’s very nice-looking, too.”

“Is she? Yes, I suppose she is. She’s growing fast now. She is very young still—sixteen last month.”

“You’re very lucky to have her. But she’s devoted to you.”

“I know,” said Mildred.

The door opened and Gil came in. He shook hands with his mother-in-law, then stooped and kissed his wife, who turned up her face to his.

“Hallo, Gil!” she said.

She was kissed but did not kiss, Mrs. Pomeroy observed.

“That child’ll burst, Mildred!”

“Time she stopped feeding her!” said Gil gloomily.

“At three months? What nonsense, Gil!” said Mildred, but she saw that her child slept at her breast and pulled her frock together. “Have you had tea?”

“Yes, thanks. . . . Well, mother—I hear they’ve been taking you to America. Anything like the novels written about it Mil’s so fond of?”

“It depends which novels. Not very much like the novels of young Englishmen, certainly. But then I never thought it was. I didn’t see how the America of Dorothy Canfield, Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow could just *not* exist, somehow. America was mostly like that—the America I saw, which wasn’t a lot, I admit—New York, Boston and a bit of New England. I daresay the main streets of the Middle West are everything Mr. Sinclair Lewis says they are—but I didn’t see them and we’ve Babbitts enough of our own, I daresay.”

“If you’re going to talk about America, I’ll go and bath June,” Mildred said. “We did America very thoroughly over our tea, didn’t we, mother?” and Mildred rose and took her child out of the room.

Five minutes later when Sally came into the room for something Paul had left behind and found life not worth living without, Gilbert said: “Sally, bring me a drink, will you?”

The drink was brought—whisky and soda. Gil poured out for himself, settled back in his chair, glass in hand, and said as the door closed behind Sally: “I’m glad you’ve come. I want to talk to you.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I want you to talk to Mildred.”

“I’ve *been* talking to her.”

“Any good?”

“Not much, I’m afraid. What’s wrong, exactly?”

“Most things. It’s getting dark. Do you mind if we don’t have the light?”

“Not a bit. Tell me—didn’t you want this baby?”

“Not much. . . . But I wouldn’t mind, now, if Mildred would come to her senses. What does she think I’m made of? After all, June’s three months old. . . . Oh, I *know* she has theories about it—bad for the child and all that. . . . But where do I come in? If you ask me, Mildred’s got only one use for me—or rather two—getting her with child and earning the wherewithal.”

“My dear Gil!”

“Well, it’s true. And something has to be done about it. I don’t just want a mother for my children, and I’ve all the children I want. I want a wife. Who told Mildred that it’s sinful for a woman to have anything to do with her husband save for the purposes of procreation?”

“The prayer book, I expect.”

“But who takes that seriously?”

“Mildred, apparently. And you, since you were married in church . . .”

“Because Mildred wouldn’t have thought she was married if we hadn’t been! But she never goes to church and neither do I.”

“That’s true. The responsibility there lies with the church, I imagine.”

“That doesn’t help me. The plain fact is I married Mildred because I was head over heels in love with her; but if she wouldn’t have had me I’d have married somebody else. I believe in marriage, which doesn’t mean just babies. And for whole chunks at a time my marriage is no marriage. We’ve been married for eight years by time—and about a year by fact.”

“Are you still in love with Mildred?”

“Head over heels. She’s as lovely now as when I married her and she excites me as much—more, I believe. It hasn’t gone at all. I want Mil still—but I’ll be damned if I want any more children. Honestly, I’ve got as much as I can pull off. Times aren’t good and Interiors Limited have been badly hit by the effects of this damn General Strike. We’ve got to call a halt, but Mildred thinks contraceptives the devil, so, in the end. . . . Well, you can guess, I daresay. That explains June. Probably I ought to be keeping this to myself.”

“No, I don’t see why, but I don’t see either what I can do. I’ll have another try with Mildred—but she’s extraordinarily set on this subject. Not quite balanced, somehow.”

“Is that it? Heaven knows—I can’t make her out. She’s beyond me. It isn’t as if she’s a cold woman. I give you my word she isn’t—until she’s got what she wants! And then, where am I? Left to stew. I’m sorry if I’m vulgar, but, honestly, I sometimes think it’s a pity she has her children so easily. I believe she *likes* the whole business.”

“I know. However you look at it maternity’s her job. I told her to-day that she ought to have half-a-dozen husbands, that economically it wasn’t fair on one man.”

“What did she say?”

“Nothing much. She’s used to me and my depraved ideas. She makes allowances for me.”

“She doesn’t know anything about men. Why, these last nine months she’s positively pushed me into the arms of other women.”

“Have you escaped unscathed?”

“So far. They all look silly beside her. And I don’t *want* that sort of thing, either. I want the woman I chose—and who, presumably, chose me.”

“Is it true that the modern girl is as accommodating as rumour says?”

“Lots of ’em are. Can’t blame ’em. Why should women depend upon the caprice of men to ask them in marriage in order to experience one side of life?”

“That’s a dangerous doctrine.”

“Possibly—but it never did seem fair to me, even when there wasn’t this scarcity of eligible husbands. But a man who’s in love as I am with his wife doesn’t have anything to do with other women if he can have her. At least,

I'm not the sort that does. And Mildred knows it—that's why she does all this modern stuff about my having other friendships. She thinks I'm too 'decent' to 'betray' her (that's the word, isn't it?) and she doesn't know that there comes a point when not all the decency in the world's going to be of any help to a man—or keep him out of the mess."

"Do you want me to tell Mildred she's imperilling your immortal soul?"

"If you think that would impress her. It sounds the sort of phrase she'd understand. . . . Hallo, Sally, what is it?"

"Mrs. Yorke sent me to ask Mrs. Pomeroy if she would like to come upstairs for a moment, sir."

Mrs. Pomeroy rose.

"I'll see what I can do," she said to her son-in-law as she went out.

Gil nodded.

Gilbert rose and poured himself out another whisky and soda. He felt suddenly very empty and flat and a little nervous. He supposed he oughtn't to have said all that. Hardly decent, perhaps—but she was a game old woman. Never turned a hair. Nothing old-fashioned about her and no nonsense. Modern as could be—knew a lot, too. Perhaps she would make Mildred see reason.

(2)

That evening after Mrs. Pomeroy had gone, Mildred said: "Mother thinks it very wrong of me to send you out with other women. She thinks I put temptation in your way."

"So you do!"

"Oh, Gil, how silly and conventional of you! As if I didn't know you could be trusted!"

"Yes—like a dog on a chain!"

"Gil!"

"How much longer do you intend we shall go on like this?"

"Like what?"

"You know what I mean. Isn't it time you stopped being just June's mother and remembered you're my wife?"

"Gil! What on earth's the matter with you?"

“Human nature, I guess. . . . Come over here a minute.”

Mildred rose and sat on the arm of his chair. He put his arm round her waist and pulled her gently down beside him. She did not resist. After a while he put up a hand, twisted her face round to his and found her mouth with his. Again she did not resist: she allowed him to kiss her all he wanted: but she did not kiss back, except once, very gently, when he had finished. He roused no spark in her. The lover had slipped far back in her. He could not get at her. Would she ever love him again in the old fashion? He could not believe it. But he'd felt like this before, hadn't he? Before Paul and Bar were born—and immediately afterwards. He couldn't believe that, either. This was different. Perhaps because this time they had talked about it, because he'd let it get on his nerves; because the physical side of it was taking its toll. It seemed to him wrong—the whole thing. He believed in the sex-relationship—believed in it not merely as an appetite, as any other natural instinct, like eating or drinking or self-preservation, but as the perfect instrument of expression between man and woman. He wasn't polygamous—at least he was considerably less so than the average civilised man. As he saw it, the sexual act was not important unless performed with the woman he loved. If he went to other women it was not because he wanted to go or because he took anything of his soul to it or carried anything away, but only because all that was human in him cried for appeasement, because only that way lay peace—the immunity to escape and have power and concentration for other things. Women had told him—some of these modern young creatures with whom Mildred thought him so safe, too!—that it was very much the same with them, that lacking lovers or husbands sex pressed in upon them, crushing other things out. They despised sex, some of them, for this very reason, because it got in the way. It prevented them from being quite sane, quite normal, balanced. Probably women no less than men had always been like that—but tradition and taboos and fear of consequences had held them back, alike in speech and action.

“It isn't likely I'll get married,” said one young woman he'd met at some business friend's house, a girl of good family and education. “I'm not the sort men marry, somehow—and I haven't the domestic virtues. But there are plenty of young men who don't want to marry you who'll give you a good enough time for a week-end. And it sets you free, somehow. . . . After a week-end I feel fine. . . . I forget about it.”

“Aren't there ever any complications?” he had asked. “I don't mean babies, I mean falling in love?”



“I’ve never fallen in love. I don’t believe it’s as common as is supposed. Of course if you mean just physical attraction, well, that’s common enough. I’m often attracted to men I meet in the street—in the train. But if one had affairs with all the men one was attracted to . . .!”

“Are you by any chance attracted to me?” he had asked her.

“I shouldn’t be saying all this to you if I weren’t, I suppose. . . . It isn’t *all* mental sympathy. But I’m not in love with you. . . . You’re married, too. And I bar married men.”

“For falling in love with or the other thing?”

“Both.”

“Principle?”

“More or less. Besides, there are always so many of the unmarrieds.”

“You can’t help falling in love.”

“Can’t you? I’ve never done it—I’m no authority. Aren’t you happily married?”

“I’m in love with my wife, if that’s what you mean.”

“I don’t think it is—quite.”

Then she had laughed and said she must go. “I’ve a lot to do to-morrow. I’m a writer of sorts . . . not very good, not very bad. I write to a formula.”

“You don’t seem to have much formula about life.”

“You’re right; I haven’t.”

Sitting there in the dark, his arms round his wife, he found himself recalling these things, these scraps of conversation. He’d got her address. He’d look her up. . . .

God! If only Mildred would let up on this—if she’d let him take her to-night. She moved restlessly in his embrace and twisted away from his kiss.

“I’m tired, Gil. I think I’ll go up.”

He let her go.

“Don’t sit up very late.”

“I’m all right,” he said.

He felt better when he’d had a drink—several drinks. He was a little drunk when at last he went up to bed. This was no good. He’d go to pieces if

he didn't look out. The other thing was better. . . . You could have it and forget it—forget the whole damn business! Damn it all—to-morrow he'd look up that girl. . . . Easy enough to manage a week-end if he went carefully.

(3)

The year moved down into autumn, but though there was no talk of a holiday this year, it was not to be altogether devoid of excitement, for the Yorke were going at last to move out of Denmark Hill to a place called Mayes, some eight or ten miles, so Mrs. Yorke informed Sally, beyond Bromley—a town familiar by name to Sally, for Mrs. Yorke had occasionally gone down there to visit her husband's mother and sisters.

"I reckon she'd not mind if it were twenty," Annie commented with a grin. "No love lost there, I give you my word."

Sally had never met Mr. Yorke's mother and sisters, their one visit, since June's advent, having been made on her "off" day.

A week before moving-day Mr. Yorke went off to Amsterdam on business and when he came back Mildred planned to have the new house in order and themselves installed and looking as if they'd been there for ever—a plan which was, in fact, carried out to perfection. Mildred was very clever at getting things done.

Sally was enchanted with the new house and with the village and its ridiculous post office and thought Annie an idiot to have grumbled so much at going to live in the wilds. Not that Sally would have parted from Annie with regret, but only that she was in the mood to be sorry for anybody who could not appreciate living in so pretty a place, where there were trees, where everybody had a garden and where the birds sang.

By the middle of October they were, as Mildred had intended, well and truly settled-in at Green Acre, and Gilbert Yorke came home to a house that, newly-decorated, shone from top to bottom like a new pin, with Sally's smiling face at the door and a wife moving up the little square hall like a queen to welcome him, and a mother-in-law who made herself scarce for a while and then emerged to say quietly: "Well, Gil—here you are again. You look very fit."

"I am," said Gilbert.

"Have you had a good time?"

“First rate,” said her son-in-law, who certainly seemed, Sally thought, in the best of spirits. “I say—the garden’s looking fine!”

“Yes—it’s well stocked and it’s been well looked after. Mildred’s had a man on it, though, ever since we’ve been here.”

“Has she, by jove!” said Gil. “Trust Mil for finding new ways of spending my money!” But he smiled at his wife as if he didn’t mind how much money she had spent so long as she’d enjoyed it. As they stood together at the window he slipped an arm round her waist and looked out upon the stretch of lawn and the wide beds full of red-hot-poker plants and multi-coloured chrysanthemums as if his world pleased and satisfied him utterly.

Then Sally came in with the children, and the shouts of Paul and Barbara were another delicious welcome. He had bought them both toys from Amsterdam and suggested they should go upstairs at once and unpack them.

“You haven’t spoken to Miss June, sir,” said Sally.

“Good heavens, neither have I. Where is she?”

“In her pram outside in the hall, sir.”

They trooped out and found a plump and smiling baby dimpling with something her father construed as pleasure at his return. She was a pretty, attractive baby, he thought, as all Mildred’s youngsters were. He was surprised to find how definitely of late he thought of them in that fashion.

“Come *on*, daddy!” cried Paul, no more resigned apparently than before to this baby sister and already half-way up the stairs. Gilbert turned, caught Bar up on his shoulder and went after him. Mildred lifted the baby from the pram and followed them.

Quite a picsher, as Annie, standing in the hall at Sally’s side, observed. Mrs. Pomeroy, standing just inside the drawing-room door, smiled, as if she agreed. But Sally, turning and catching sight of her face, saw the smile slip away quite suddenly, leaving it very grave and a little sad.

When she went upstairs a quarter of an hour later she found her master quite willing to let her take over the charge of Paul and Barbara.

“The very person I wanted!” he said to her. “Show Sally how that performing animal works, Paul—there’s a good boy. Where’s your mistress, Sally?”

“In her room, sir.”

He smiled at her.

“And where is that? The topography of this house is beyond me at the moment.”

“The door on the right, at the end of the passage.”

Sally pointed to a door which stood slightly ajar showing a few feet of “sunshine” wall-paper and green-painted wainscoting. Gilbert Yorke went along, put his head inside and then pushing the door wide open went in, shutting it sharply behind him.

Inside Mildred sat by the open window that looked down on to the autumn garden, her child at her breast. She smiled as he came in, but said nothing. He sat down opposite to her and for a moment allowed his gaze to rest upon the white bosom against which leaned the golden head of the child. He sat there as if he wondered whether she knew he was there or not, and he said nothing until she moved the child from her breast and pulled her frock across the whiteness which had held his gaze like a magnet.

“I thought,” he said then, “you’d have finished by now with that.”

“Only partly. I still feed her twice a day. She doesn’t take very kindly to artificial foods.”

She answered very softly, for she saw that her child was asleep, and, rising, put her down in her cot.

“How old is she?”

“Seven months and a day.”

“Isn’t she a big baby?”

“Only half a pound above the usual weight.”

“She looks fine.”

“Doesn’t she?”

He came towards her and took her in his arms.

“God! It’s good to see you again,” he said. “Are you glad to see me?”

“Very,” she said.

“Show me . . .”

She shook her head.

“Come on, show me.”

He crushed her in his arms, felt her unyielding resistance, her passive acquiescence in his kisses.

“Damn it all, Mil! Don’t you want me at all—not even after all these weeks?”

“Oh, Gil! Why must we argue like this every time!”

“We’re not arguing. I asked you a plain question.”

“It wasn’t a fair question. It’s not a question of what I want—it’s a matter of principle.”

“Oh, hell!” said Gilbert Yorke, but he let her go. “All right,” he said. His voice was carefully negative, his manner as he roamed about the room, touching this, moving that, admirably deceptive.

“You’ve made a pretty room of it! You’ve a good eye for colour. You ought to be in the firm!”

Tidying her lovely hair before the glass, she blushed like a schoolgirl with pleasure.

“Has Sally shown you your room?”

“No. Where is it?”

“Next door.”

He laughed.

“Very trusting, aren’t you?”

“Of course I am. Why not? Come and have a look at it.”

She tiptoed out of the room and opened a door a little farther along the softly-carpeted landing.

“Here you are! Say you like it as much as mine!”

“Come, you can’t expect that, my dear!”

“Don’t tease! Isn’t it nice? Your favourite blue and gold.”

“It isn’t my favourite. My favourite’s that peculiar blend of mauve, blue and green you’ve fixed up farther along the passage. And I’d like a double bed and . . .”

“Idiot!”

She laughed as she crossed to the door again. “Come and see the rest.”

He followed her, a smile upon his face that brought up speedily a smile upon hers. He wondered what either of them were finding to smile about, though perhaps there was something slightly humorous in the spectacle of a gentleman who had firmly resisted very strong and very recent temptation because he'd found he loved his wife even more than he thought, and who'd returned home to find she cared much more for some idiot principle she'd imbibed from God knew where. He wondered if she'd smile if she knew how very near the temptation had been and how much she'd mind if he'd succumbed, and wished he knew and went on smiling and admiring her taste in colour-schemes.

(4)

A few days later Gilbert Yorke's mother and his two sisters, Hester and Cecilia, came to tea. Sally was much impressed with the starch and smart clothes she showed into the drawing-room, where by the side of a fire dulled by the bright October sunshine, Mildred sat embroidering a frock for June.

"Oh, here you are!" she said, getting up, but keeping hold of the little frock; "I hope you found the way easily from the station."

"Oh, yes, thank you!" the three ladies chorused, rather as if they thought that anybody who could not would have been a born idiot.

"Oh, well—come and take your things off," said Mildred, and still carrying the little frock she moved out into the hall and preceded her visitors up the staircase. When Sally took in tea at the prescribed hour, Mildred was still working on the little frock and she was laughing a little as if something amused her mightily but somehow or other did not amuse the others in the least.

"Well, but he *is*!" she said. "Why shouldn't I call him so?"

"But you did it when there was only Paul!" said the dark Miss Yorke they called Hester.

"Well, why not?" Again Mildred laughed. "No, Sally—stay and pour out, will you . . .?" She laid aside the little frock, as with regret, and proffered a dish from which she lifted a cover to disclose hot buttered scones. "Do have some, Hester," she said. "They're awfully good."

Hester, however, preferred brown bread and butter. "They're so fattening," she said, and once more Mildred laughed.

"My dear child, *you* don't have to bother about things like that. Nor you, Cecilia. . . . Why, you're both lead-pencils."

Cecilia took a buttered scone and her sister said: “You know you oughtn’t.”

Mildred went on being amused and helped herself to buttered scone, which she began to eat with relish and Hester said frigidly: “I don’t think *you* ought to eat it, either, Mildred.”

“Oh, why not? The fashionable figure is not for me, anyway. Besides, I *like* buttered scone!”

Mrs. Yorke senior looked at her daughter-in-law as she took tea from Sally’s tray and helped herself to milk and cream. “You’re putting on weight, surely?”

“Oh no—am I?” Mildred’s voice was amiability itself. “You see, I’m still nursing June.”

The younger Miss Yorke looked slightly offended as who should say: “We know such things are done, but are they mentioned quite so publicly?” The elder merely looked bored.

Their mother said: “Indeed? Isn’t it time she was weaned?”

“She’s only seven months.”

“All mine were on the bottle long before then,” said Mrs. Yorke, “including Gil. After all, one has . . . other duties.”

“You are making Sally blush!” said Mildred and was quite unperturbed by Hester’s: “*Really*, Mildred! How can you be so vulgar!”

Sally, blushing very hotly and feeling Mrs. Yorke’s eyes riveted upon her, saw that everybody had everything they were wanting at the moment and hurriedly escaped. Queer, she reflected, how such a nice man as Mr. Yorke came to have such a mother and sisters!

However, the visit came to an end, like all others, with nobody seeming any the worse; but Sally, though no word was spoken, knew that Mildred Yorke was not liked by her husband’s family and that she did not like them. The first fact was obvious enough, but Sally could scarcely have said how she arrived at the second. Perhaps she knew by now that whenever Mildred smiled that particularly over-sweet smile and introduced that carefully level note into her voice she was hiding rather than revealing something.

The year plunged suddenly into winter. Gone were the red-hot-poker plants, limp and flaccid the gay chrysanthemums. The rains came, the first frosts, and presently the fogs which, white mists though they were at Mayes, were black nuisances up the line, so that once or twice Gilbert Yorke 'phoned that he was spending the night in town because the train-service was disorganised. All the same, nobody seemed to regret the exodus from London. Mildred had made a new circle of friends in the neighbourhood who came to tea, sometimes to play bridge and nearly always to grumble at the weather. And suddenly it was Christmas and the Yorkes were giving a dinner-party. Mildred wore a new frock which matched the creamy white of her skin and Sally waited at table without mishap though with much misgiving; and was secretly amazed at the variety and number of drinks that were handed round as the evening wore on and the gramophone succeeded the wireless for the dancing in the somewhat circumscribed space of the little parquet-floored hall. She was persuaded, with Annie, to drink a glass of port, which gave her a slight headache without any of the hilarious excitement that seemed to ensue from the drinking of all the other things by all the other people. Sally was vaguely disappointed.

But nothing that she drank seemed to have any effect upon a dark and very pretty woman Sally knew as Mrs. Hanson. She came sometimes to tea and sometimes to bridge or dinner with her husband and always she seemed profoundly bored and detached, spoke very little and then in a voice so low that Sally never caught the whole of any single sentence she uttered and was always in terror at dinner that she would ask for one thing and Sally would give her another. Sally had heard some of the women who came to tea at Green Acre say that her husband had brought her to live at Mayes in order to get her away from the set she was in; that he hoped she would make friends there and live the kind of life lived by most Mayes women. Mrs. Hanson, however, had money of her own and could snap her fingers at her husband. (A favourite occupation, this, Sally learned, among wives.) She did as she liked, went to town whenever she chose and studiously refused to make a single woman-friend in Mayes. And look at her clothes. . . .

Sally looked at them to-night—what there was of them, which was certainly not a great deal. She wore red, a frock completely without back and not over-burdened with front. Her skin was like old ivory, her eyes long and so dark they looked black; and she was so slim she gave the effect of having been poured into her frock! She seemed and looked as usual supremely bored. She did not talk, but she smiled when anybody spoke to her, a sweet



enigmatic smile, no sweeter for the men than the women, but which somehow made the whole party seem unutterably beneath her notice. She danced with a languorous grace that attracted attention and Sally noticed that so much bare back seemed a little to embarrass her partners, but only at first. After a few steps they made no bones about it and Sally saw that the men who danced with her once tried to get her to do it again. Quite plainly she was different from any other woman in the room. Her manners were less good, for one thing, thought Sally, who knew nothing of highly-polished bad ones. She was strange and difficult, like her name.

At half-past eleven June woke up and began to cry so loudly that even the wireless orchestra playing a strident number could not efface her efforts to make herself heard. Sally's hands were occupied with a tray of drinks and before she could put them down and run upstairs Mildred had torn herself out of her husband's arms in the middle of a fox-trot and gone running like a girl up the stairs. For a second Gilbert Yorke stood where she had left him, then he turned and walked over to Mrs. Hanson, who sat on a corner of the bottom stair, her head leaning back against the woodwork, her throat and face beautifully revealed by Mildred's discreet orange lighting. As Gilbert Yorke sat down beside her, she turned her gaze upon him with scarcely any movement of her head—a trick Sally had not seen before and found so attractive that she stood staring for a few seconds before she recovered her senses and went on handing drinks to those who were not dancing. Gilbert Yorke and Sanchia Hanson did not dance and they were still sitting on the stairs when Mildred came down them. They did not notice her and at her "Sorry, Gil!" uttered in her clear distinct voice, turned round, saw who it was and got to their feet. Mildred swept on to where Sally was busy with her tray, took a glass and stood drinking its contents.

"Miss June all right now, ma'am?" Sally inquired.

"Gone to sleep again, Sally," said Mildred, and putting down her empty glass she walked over to the pair who had re-seated themselves on the bottom stair.

"Come and dance, Gil, there's a dear!" she said.

Gil got up with alacrity, murmured an apology to the girl on the stairs and taking his wife in his arms danced off with her as if he were in heaven. Sally had never before seen a wife take her husband from an attractive woman and did not realise how very easily and with what consummate sureness it had been done. But even Sally knew that Mildred as she danced was pleased with herself. Moving lightly as a feather, she held back her head

and smiled into her husband's eyes, and Sally, seeing how he held her closer and leaned his dark head to her fair one, felt her face grow warm and hastily looked away.

## CHAPTER SIX

(1)

The old year died. The new came with universal influenza, cold weather and "the worst gale within living memory." An old elm in the Green Acre garden fell with a loud crash upon the winter lawn and all round the adjacent country trees had fallen beneath the lash of the wind. But though outside the elements raged, life within the walls of Green Acre moved placidly forward. Since Christmas night a peace had descended upon the household which resembled the early days at Denmark Hill and which Sally had learnt (with Annie's assistance) to associate with those times when the Yorkes shared a bedroom. Sally, herself, who had never before lived in a ten-roomed villa or had the freedom of a garden which offered shade for rest, for tea or for work, was half-way to heaven.

No money was spared upon the Green Acre garden; a man worked in it five week-days out of the six and already the kitchen garden had been converted into grass, dotted with fruit trees and bedded down with bulbs, for Mildred did not like the look of cabbages and other vegetables growing, thought them uneconomical to grow, anyway, and was not beset by that kind of urban pride which takes immense pleasure in growing its own vegetables. "The greengrocer calls each morning," said Mildred, "so why should we eat cauliflowers every day just because we've a row in the garden which will go bad unless we eat them at once? Besides, it's cheaper."

Sally delighted in the social atmosphere which, as the year advanced, surrounded Green Acre. Tea-parties, dinner-parties, and something new to Sally they called a cocktail-party, were frequent; after the tennis on Saturdays and Sundays at the new Hard Court Club they had joined, people dropped in for drinks; Sanchia Hanson and her husband frequently among them. The house rang with voices, with laughter and good spirits, and Sally bloomed in it all as if she were a flower outside in the spring garden. Sally, sixteen and a half, had added inches to her height; approaching womanhood had rounded her angles and softened her long lines, and the fresher air had driven a delicate pink into the white of her cheeks. Old Eliza Dunn still thought her "a little bit of a thing," but she saw, not without trepidation, that she was growing up. She wondered, sometimes, how much the girl knew of

life—as much as was good for her, doubtless, in that house with a young married couple and the birth of that baby recently, though Sally never had much to say about that. On the whole, Liza found little to worry about; she still thought Sally “kind of timid,” and after the dashing good looks of Sally’s mother still considered Sally’s appearance nothing to write home about. That pale face, ever so slightly freckled since she’d lived in the country, and that straight dark hair—how different from Louisa’s pink and curled and buxom beauty! Every time Louisa was out of her sight she had been consumed with anxiety; but Sally, she had already come to believe, was an entirely different proposition, and would remain for ever decent and respectable and single in some decent and respectable family until she got married, which Liza still thought unlikely. Not the marrying sort, if you asked Liza.

Sally’s grandfather, however, was a little staggered without being worried by Sally’s looks, was quite certain she did not get them from the Dunns, and dreamed faint vague dreams of some fine husband they would attract for her. For she looked, he thought, less like a servant every time he saw her. Those long white hands with their pointed fingers and well-kept nails—they belonged to no servant. “You’d never believe they did a lot of dirty work,” he said to Sally, who laughed and said they didn’t. “Waiting at table, bathing the children, taking them to school, and sewing and mending isn’t very dirty work. All I do of that is cleaning my silver once a week and cooking the dinner on Annie’s night out.”

Tom Dunn saw that she was happy and left her alone.

(2)

Sally’s devotion to Mildred had survived the eighteen months she had spent in her service. Work, done as she wanted it, she indeed exacted from her maids; but so long as this was achieved she left them alone. She did not interfere with their private lives; neither, for that matter, did they interest her, and certainly she did not live, as do so many middle-class women, as though she expected her servants to be listening at the door. Mildred, indeed, conducted her family life exactly as she chose, and her servants fitted unobtrusively into her scheme of things, rather than made an annoying pattern of their own across it. When Annie complained that she often talked “as though they weren’t in the room,” she spoke the truth. The amiable trait of ignoring her servants when other women would have been embarrassed by or careful of their presence was one she shared with the notorious Lady Ethelreda and her like, whose lives in all other respects she contemned.

But Sally, for all her devotion and acute sensibility, was no psychologist. She had no idea of the two forces pulling that household asunder. In Mildred she saw only a charming and (to Sally's thinking, at least) very beautiful woman, with a devoted husband and three lovely children, and caught no glimpse of the type she was—maternal, domestic, self-centred, rather lazy, self-complacent; and because she was content to shine at the things she did well and to exclude those she did indifferently or not at all, Sally gave her cleverness as well as charm and beauty. She had this definiteness of aim and object to a degree that frequently in women amounts almost to genius, but in the choice of a husband it had failed her utterly. Herself a natural mother, needing a father for her children far more than she ever needed a husband, she had chosen out of many suitors to marry a man for whom she had a powerful physical attraction, and who from the first was deceived by the passion that he believed to be wholly for himself, but was in fact impersonal, racial and purposeful. His vanity suffered as this knowledge grew within him. But the attraction held. He could not escape. Neither did he wish to escape. Yet he thought sometimes of that young Hanson woman who'd set the neighbourhood rather by the ears, and of the stories they told of her, whether true or not, heaven only knew. A sulky, sullen type . . . a bitch probably, in no great hurry to give a man a child and with nothing maternal or impersonal about her. He wondered sometimes how much of what they said was true: what kind of a dance she really did lead her husband and was inclined to be sorry for him because he was obviously as enthralled by her as he himself by Mildred. Gilbert wasn't particularly attracted to Sanchia; she wasn't his "type," but Mildred's vagaries as a wife inclined him sometimes to wonder what other women were like—how many more of them held these astounding theories. He'd held back from discussing the subject with men—fear of being laughed at, for one thing (his three children in six years had elicited more than one jocular remark at the office), and his real affection and loyalty to Mildred for another. This fetish of maternity and all these puritanic objections to an ordinary normal married life—who would have thought that Mildred would have been the victim of either? There were times when he felt that the men who married the Sanchias of the world came off the best.

His particular Sanchia had never had much to say to him since that evening on the stairs, that evening when he had known suddenly that he and Mildred were to be lovers again. She had resented, he supposed, the way he had allowed himself to be swept from her by his wife and he often chuckled to himself at the neatness with which Mildred had done it. And yet, though he didn't care a fig for Sanchia Hanson or her rather pointed indifference, he

felt a little sorry for her. She was so obviously bored at being set down in this semi-rural spot to play tennis and bridge with men and women of whose language she knew and chose to learn nothing whatever. Supposing George Hanson to be what, in fact, rumour declared him to be, a man who, disapproving of his wife's chosen friends, deliberately removed her from their influence in the hope of making of her the domestic maternal creature he desired, Gilbert Yorke began to feel a definite kinship with her. He was vaguely upset (and sympathetically drawn) by the sullen look upon her face and the dreary boredom that dwelt in her black eyes. She was too young, he thought, for unhappiness, to know such bleak and utter emptiness of purpose or design. Perhaps she couldn't stick her husband—or perhaps he was a brute, or perhaps she was in love with someone else. He didn't know, but vaguely, in the haphazard way in which just then he thought of other women, he wondered about her and went on being sorry for her. He could imagine the look of contempt she'd fling at him if she ever caught him at it. All the same, whenever they met he found himself adopting towards her a friendly attentive manner under which, ever so faintly, she began to thaw.

Perhaps Mildred noticed these things. Perhaps she was merely repeating current gossip, but one morning as they were waiting for the household to stir and tea to appear at their bedside, she asked her husband how old he thought Sanchia Hanson was.

“Haven't thought about it,” said Gilbert; “why?”

“Well, she's been married nine years, so I heard yesterday.”

“Good God!” said Gilbert, he didn't know why exactly.

Mildred laughed and sat up in bed, pushing her hair back from her face with the lovely familiar gesture he knew so well.

“You don't have to get profane about it,” she said. “Nine years—and nothing to show for it. She'd suit you, darling!”

“Would she!” said Gilbert. “I'm quite satisfied, thank you.” But though his eyes were upon his wife's white bosom, he was thinking of Sanchia Hanson and wondering how she managed, after nine years of marriage, to look as if no man had touched her. He wondered what it would be like to live with a woman for nine years without having a child. But because these were disturbing thoughts and because he was both startled and annoyed at Sanchia's intrusion after this fashion into his mind, he put out an arm and pulled his wife down to him.

“Suit me, would she?” he said. “Say that again if you dare.”

But Mildred only laughed.

“You immoral woman—always trying to get me interested in some other woman. Aren’t you afraid?”

“No,” she said; “why should I be?”

There was, Gilbert found, no answer to that.

(3)

He wondered what Mrs. Hanson did in town so many days a week. Whenever he went by the later train he met her, but though she said good morning she made no attempt to get into his carriage—nor, indeed, into that chosen by anybody else. The train was never crowded and everyone on the platform seemed to go out of his or her way to see that she had her selected carriage to herself. Yet Gilbert Yorke found himself looking eagerly each morning for a sight of that black fur-coated figure with the neat black hat that covered, without hiding, her softly waving hair, and somehow or other when she was not there he was sensible of disappointment as though the day had begun badly. Yet he wondered why she took so much trouble to remove herself from the fresh countryside when it was almost certain to be foggy and murky in town. Like so many men whom necessity drives to catch a certain train to town each morning, he sometimes envied women who need not. And spring was coming, too, when it would be most desolating to be in town—he really couldn’t see why she did it. Then one sunny cold morning in early March, she surprised him by appearing on the platform with her husband, who usually caught, he knew, a train much earlier and one that went to the City and not to Victoria. As he approached them on the platform, ready to bid them good morning, he hoped George Hanson would engage him in conversation so that there might be some chance of travelling up with them. Damn it all, the man came to his house, drank his whisky, why shouldn’t he be friendly—even if his wife must adopt that aloof air of contempt for Mayes and everyone in it? George Hanson, however, seemed to have forgotten these social occasions. He looked bad-tempered and rather, the pair of them, as if, but for the public place, they would be quarrelling. Hanson made little effort to take the expression off his face as he raised his hat and said “Hallo, Yorke . . . beastly cold this morning,” and turned back to his wife, who staggered Gilbert by smiling very sweetly at him and moving a step towards him.

“Oh, Mr. Yorke,” she said, “don’t run away. . . . You go to Victoria, don’t you? George is changing at Herne Hill for the City—won’t you keep me company? I’ve forgotten to bring a book.”

So they travelled up to Victoria together and whilst Gilbert talked with sprightly determination of contemporary events—the recent gale, the Japanese earthquake, the Portuguese rebellion, the Calcutta Cup, President Coolidge’s recent proposal for the limitation of navies, and Scotland v. England—a scowling, nervy, ill-tempered George threw occasional remarks upon the air and finally let himself out at Herne Hill, to climb into the waiting City train on the other side of the platform. His wife made no comment, but went on with her conversation, which was oddly impersonal and concerned chiefly with a holiday she had spent last summer in the Austrian Tyrol. She loved mountains, it seemed, and thought Kent a neat and tidy place. “If we had to live in the country,” she said, “why couldn’t it be somewhere wild and untractable, like Yorkshire or Westmorland?”

Gilbert smiled and said: “Too far for daily jaunts to town . . .!”

Sanchia shrugged her shoulders. “There’s Hindhead, with miles of Surrey common, anyway. . . . Have you ever been to a place called Blanchland in Northumberland?” she asked him.

He hadn’t.

“Nobody has. It’s twelve miles out of Hexham, within ten miles of blast furnaces and chimneys, and it belongs to a dead century. There used to be a monastery there, but nobody knows much about it. I ate my lunch in what used to be part of the conventual buildings now known as the ‘Crewe Arms’ just inside a lovely old arch and facing the village square. All around there’s just miles and miles of moor. The moor doesn’t change. I guess it was like that when the monks were there and it’ll be there when I’m as dead as they.”

Gilbert, whose eyes were on her face, was startled by the look of mingled rapt happiness and unhappiness upon it. He was too surprised to speak for a moment and when he did he was conscious of the flatness of what he said: “I don’t know much about England, I’m afraid. . . . My wife likes to go to the sea each year because of the children.”

She smiled. “The same bit of sea?”

“More or less. She thinks the East Coast good for them. I’d like to go farther afield, I must say. I suppose we ought to keep a car. You haven’t one?”

“I did have in town—I found it very nearly useless.”

She looked, Gilbert thought, as though for some reason or other she found most things “very nearly useless,” but suddenly, she switched the conversation to the theatre, which Gilbert liked, and to novels, which he

didn't like and about which he confessed he was lamentably ignorant. He was no reader. And then the train was running into Victoria and soon they were saying good-bye at the barrier.

After that they got into the habit of travelling up together whenever she was on the platform, but when they met at the tennis club or elsewhere he could hardly believe it. She was two different people—the girl who went out of Mayes and the girl who came back. And although it was now the end of March and they had travelled to town on and off since that first Monday, he still did not know why she went or where. She never talked of herself and never mentioned her husband unless forced to do so by something Gilbert said. He wondered if she kept a hat-shop. . . . Lots of girls did, and she looked as if she knew a lot about hats. . . . But when he said this to Mildred she merely said lots of other people were wondering that, too. Enigma! That was the word for Sanchia Hanson.

“Well, it's her own business,” Gil said, strangely aware that he did not want to discuss Sanchia Hanson with Mildred.

(4)

If Sally had been of the order of beings who keep diaries she would have put a cross against a certain date in April when for the first time in her life she heard the cuckoo calling. The loveliest thing, it seemed to her, in a lovely world. The Green Acre garden was bright now with daffodils and early tulips: the trees were greening over. On Mildred's rockery aubretias and primulas were in flower, and many other things of which nobody knew the name and which everybody but Sally and the children took for granted.

Beyond the garden the country shone with delicate colours and over it, swaying the green tassels of the larches, the fresh young green of the silver birch, ran the sweet spring breezes. The far-away hills were blue and enticing, and in the woods, though the primroses were late, the blue of the periwinkle was showing and the bright purple of the dog-violet. Sally had never been so happy in her life.

At Green Acre tennis and outings were the order of the day. All the bright weather had suddenly made everybody very good-tempered and eager to be out of doors; and Mildred, who had observed that April, not May, is the dry and sunny month, gave what she called a semi-garden party and crowded house and garden with friends and acquaintances. Sally, dashing about with trays of tea and what Gilbert called less harmful drinks, and keeping an eye on the children, found time to notice Sanchia Hanson, who trailed her languid loveliness about Mildred's lawn and seemed, like



everybody else, to have put on a newer, fresher mood with the spring. She was more gracious to everybody than Sally had ever seen her, and when asked if she would play in the tournament being arranged for the following week she answered quite cordially that she was awfully sorry, but that she wouldn't be there. "I'm going away on Friday and I'm afraid I shan't be back in time."

A few minutes later Sally saw her standing at Gilbert Yorke's side and approached them with a tray of tea. Sanchia smiled and putting out a white hand took a cup of China tea with a thin slice of lemon in it. As she helped herself to sugar Gilbert said: "I shall miss you. . . . Will you be away long?"

"About a month, I expect."

"Somewhere nice?"

"I think so. Paris. My mother lives there. I go over pretty frequently. But this time she expects me to take her to Mentone."

"Won't you like that?"

"Not a bit. The Riviera's overrated. Plenty of sun, but all the duller English and mostly middle-aged or elderly. Besides, I hate the French of the South of France."

"But Paris will be all right."

"Oh, *Paris*, yes! I can get some clothes, too. Do you know Paris?"

"A little. I go over on business sometimes."

"Do you know Madame Genot?"

"No," said Gilbert and Sanchia laughed. The first time Sally had ever heard her laugh. A pretty sound, she thought it, like herself.

"Madame keeps a restaurant," she said. "My mother, who knows what cooking should be, takes her friends there and occasionally, when she thinks she's worth it, her daughter."

George Hanson, strolling up at this point, and overhearing the recommendation said: "Don't let her mislead you, Yorke. Don't go anywhere she tells you. She knows all the disreputable eating-places in the city. She took me to a disgusting place where they served chicken in a cloth and ripped it off before your eyes with scissors. Filthy business!"

Again Sanchia laughed.

“Oh, you mean *La Poule en Chemise*,” she said. “Not a nice way of cooking chicken, I admit. But the name’s amusing, surely?”

“*La Poule en Chemise*,” said Gilbert, whose French was not his strong point. “*Poule*” meant “hen,” surely! *En chemise*? Well that, of course, was just the French touch! Accordingly he translated: “A hen cooked in a cloth.”

Again Sanchia laughed.

“It’s also slang for ‘girl,’” she said, tranquilly stirring her lemon-tea.

Sally moved away. How lovely she was—and how nice her voice was when she troubled to use it. Sally felt faintly wistful. Paris, the South of France. . . . She sighed as she moved to the next group of people.

“Will you take tea?”

Lovely, she thought, to be Sanchia Hanson. Why didn’t Sanchia like it more? She had never seen her look really happy before and that seemed to be chiefly because she was going away. Lucky Sanchia Hanson who was going to Paris to buy new clothes and who could be “sniffy” about the Riviera. Sally sighed again as she handed her tea, so that Mildred, whom she had not observed standing near, said: “Why, Sally, tired already?” at which Sally smiled and became again her usual bright self.

“Oh no, ma’am, thank you . . . not at all.”

“Have you had any tea yourself?”

“I’m going to in five minutes,” said Sally. “No, madam . . . the other is China. . . . Yes, certainly, madam . . .”

“What a charming maid you have, Mrs. Yorke . . .”

“Yes, isn’t she? I’ve never seen her out of temper.”

“And so nice-looking!”

“Yes—*quite* nice-looking.”

Sanchia, talking to Gilbert Yorke, turned her head and looked at Sally as if she had never seen her before. Perhaps she hadn’t. And for no reason at all she suddenly smiled at her. Pink to her ears with pleasure Sally smiled back. The whole party was hers. It was a lovely, lovely world, and as if to show that he agreed with her the cuckoo hailed the throng from the bottom of the garden and then flew, a dark, strong shape, above their heads.

“How nice Mrs. Hanson looked to-day!” said Mildred later, when the party was a thing of the past and she was brushing her hair before her

dressing-table. "Didn't you think so, Gil?"

"Why, yes . . ."

"I don't suppose you noticed, did you?"

"Oh yes, of course . . ."

Mildred laughed.

"What's amusing you?"

"You, my love."

"But I'm not being funny."

"Aren't you?"

Mildred went on laughing. For some reason or other Gilbert felt himself getting annoyed. He couldn't think why. Why should he mind her laughing at what she regarded as his blindness over other women? Generally it was true; he scarcely saw them. But a man couldn't look at Sanchia Hanson without seeing her. What instinct was he obeying in pretending that he could—that the usual rule applied? He found himself suddenly remembering the mischievous look upon her face when she said: "*Poule* . . . it's also slang for 'girl.'" Lucky that Mildred hadn't heard that little piece of conversation! Hanson, he was sure, hadn't half liked it! He had an idea she had said it for that reason—just because she knew he wouldn't, as if some devil drove her. Again his curiosity asserted itself. What *was* it between those two? What dark under-currents ran out to what dark sea? He was ready to swear it wasn't enmity or dislike. . . . He'd caught her once that afternoon looking at Hanson across the room and the expression on her face had baffled him. Pain had been in it; he was sure of that, and a kind of longing hopelessness that was almost despair.

"I wonder why she married him?" he said presently, a little surprised to find this twisted version of his thoughts thrusting itself upon speech.

"Don't ask *me* why the Sanchias of the world get married! It's beyond me!" said Mildred. She got up, went to the window and stood looking out. It was a perfect night—a clear blue heaven, a moon almost full and a faint powdering of stars. Down below in the garden the rockery was a blur of light and dark; the cypresses at the end of the lawn stood black and still. All the odours of sweetness were abroad and magic treading a silent measure. The night seemed somehow a rebuke, as if they were quarrelling—but he and Mildred had never been quarrelsome. What was it, this something between them which the large calm and peace of the spring night seemed to

reproach? Gilbert, never any good at the more intimate forms of expression, totally unequipped to make anything but the most banal of pseudo-poetical statements concerning nights, scenery or any of the subjects people strive upon occasion to be poetic about, felt that out there beneath and beyond the open window was something that prevented speech. It was as though if he kept very still he would know just what it was that hovered intangibly outside his understanding, that resisted his attempts to pull it across the threshold of his mind.

Suddenly Mildred shut the window with a little decisive snap. “Oh, damn!” said Gilbert to himself, for the action seemed to underline the note of disharmony which had worried him, and he wished she hadn’t done it.

“It’s colder than you think, all the same, especially in this stage of undress,” she said, as if she read his thoughts. “Of course I don’t believe all the tales I hear,” she went on after a while, “but it is difficult to find excuses for her.”

“Excuses for what—whom?”

“Well, they say she refuses to have a child—and that’s what’s the trouble between them.”

“She probably has her reasons. I think she’s unhappy.”

“My dear, she’s probably merely very selfish.”

“Oh, we’re all selfish!” said Gilbert, “if it comes to that! We all want what *we* want and do our damndest to get it.”

Mildred laughed. “Counsel for the defence!” she said.

“What the devil do you mean by that?”

“Darling, surely you’ve noticed that anybody has only to criticise a person even ever so little for you to leap to defend them.”

“Nonsense! Anyway, what of it?”

“Nothing. I only meant that it showed your generous nature, my dear!”

Touched, he said: “Well, you’re not exactly spiteful yourself. The least catty person I’ve ever met.”

“Any more compliments?”

“Not to-night.” He smiled at her, surprised to notice how the little fundamental feeling of antagonism of which the night had whispered was no longer there. His feeling for her, deeply a part of him, flowed over, engulfing

him. It was her fault if he ever thought about or looked at another woman; at heart he was not polygamous. He wanted nobody but his wife when she would have him. If she chose she could always make hay of all the other women in the world where he was concerned. Even Sanchia Hanson. . . . He wondered about that. And about that “even.” Why did he think so much of Sanchia this evening? But Mildred had been thinking of her, too—was still doing it. . . .

“Do you think she would bring me some face-powder from Paris if I asked her? Mother used to bring me some of a shade I can’t get here—peach—from a Monsieur Chady.”

“I daresay, if you know his address. She’s kind.”

“You think a lot of kindness, Gil!”

“Kindness is worth thinking a lot of. In the end it goes beyond ethics and principles.”

She frowned a little.

“Do you think it ought?”

“I don’t know—I only know it *does!*”

“You sound like Ella Wheeler Wilcox.”

“Do I? I don’t mind.” He came over and gathered her suddenly into his arms. “Stop arguing. It’s getting late. Besides, you’re wasting time.”

“There’s a good deal of time.”

“Is there? Sometimes I feel that there’s none left at all. . . . None for us, I mean. . . . Do you ever feel like that?”

“Never. Why should I?”

She laughed contentedly as she yielded herself to his embrace.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

(1)

It was early June before Sanchia Hanson got back. She came in one afternoon to bring the powder Mildred had wanted and found her lying down in the drawing-room.

“Aren’t you well?” she asked.

“Oh yes, perfectly; just a little tired. You’ll stay to tea?”

“I really think I won’t,” said Sanchia. “I feel I’ve disturbed you and that you ought to be resting.”

“I’m quite rested now, thank you. Do stay and tell me about Paris. Were you there when Lindbergh arrived?”

“Yes,” said Sanchia, “I suppose I was.”

Mildred laughed. “Please smoke,” she said. “Did you have a good time?”

She got up and rang the bell. Sanchia looked at her, her eyes narrowing. Lighting her cigarette, she said: “I always have a good time in Paris. I don’t like the Côte d’Azur—its name is the nicest part of it. But luckily my mother felt that way about it, too, this year—so we came back to Paris.”

“Dances, dinners, theatres, I suppose?”

“Oh yes . . . and seeing all my friends—and my mother’s.”

“Has she lived in Paris long?”

“The greater part of her life. Even during the war, during the operations of Big Bertha. Paris is the only city she can bear to live in, she says. And what have you been doing? Have you been playing tennis?”

“Not the last few weeks. I’ve been very lazy, I’m afraid. And my husband has been working very hard and rather late. We’ve been a little dull, I think, but Paul has been having the gayest time. He got some mild throat trouble and had to stay away from school; so to make up (he adores school) he has been taken to the Tower, to the Zoo, and to Madame Tussaud’s.”

“With his father?”

“No, with Sally.”

“Oh, that’s your nice-looking little maid, isn’t it?”

Sanchia, Mildred thought, was a little *distracte*. Doubtless it was all very boring after Paris.

“Did you get a lot of new clothes?”

“Not a lot, alas! Rather nice, though.”

“Are you back for good?”

“I’m going into the country to-morrow for a few weeks with my husband. We’ve a car again and shall do a little tour.”

“That will be very pleasant. We’ve seen very little of your husband, you know, since you’ve been away.”

“He’s very busy—been over-working and badly wants a change. . . . Oh, good afternoon, Sally.”

“Good afternoon, ma’am,” said Sally.

Sanchia smoked in silence, her eyes resting apparently casually upon the girl at the tea-table and the woman at whose side she had set it.

“I see you’ve a new study of your baby girl,” she said. “May I see it?”

Sally handed the photograph over.

“It’s very charming. Let me see, how old is June now? Was she born in June?”

“No, in March—she will be fifteen months next week.”

“Oh, *quite* a baby still. Charming children you have! Are you anxious for them to grow up?”

“No. They do that too quickly for me. I like them small. Look at Paul—he’s a great boy now, nearly nine, and Barbara’s well turned five.”

“Are you fond of children?”

“Oh yes. All women are fond of children, surely?”

Sanchia’s eyes narrowed again, but she said nothing more on that subject.

“How is your husband?” she asked presently.

“Very well, I think—save for the over-work. Once or twice he has stayed the night in town.”

Sanchia said nothing.

“I sometimes think we ought not to have moved out here . . . on Gil’s account, I mean. These late evenings are so tiring for him and so bad, I always think, don’t you, for one’s nerves? But of course it does suit the children.”

“Living out here, you mean? . . . Oh yes, of course.”

Sanchia stubbed her cigarette, pulled on her gloves and rose.

“I’m afraid I must fly. . . . Remember me to your husband.”

“He’ll be sorry to miss you! I expect him any minute now.”

“I’m afraid I can’t wait a moment longer . . . I’ve stayed too long as it is. I’ve a lot to do before I get off to-morrow morning.”

She made her adieux, hastened down the Yorkes’ neat front garden, and was gone.

“An overrated young woman,” thought Mildred as she went in and cut herself another slice of cake. “And in such a hurry!” Five minutes later she heard Gil’s key in the lock.

“Visitors?” he said as he came in, and surveyed the usual evidences.

“Yes, Mrs. Hanson,” Mildred said, placidly accepting his kiss on her upturned face.

There was the tiniest pause before Gil said: “She’s back?”

“Yesterday.”

“Was she in a hurry?”

“Yes, rather—she’s off again to-morrow.”

After another little pause Gil said: “Back to Paris?”

“Oh no—into the country somewhere, with her husband, who needs a holiday. He’s been over-working, she says.”

Gil put down his papers and made no reply. His wife looked at him, her smooth face showing a streak of worry.

“Wouldn’t you like some tea?”

“No, thanks. I had the usual cup in the office.”

“Very strong and horrid, I’m sure. You look a little tired, still, I think, Gil. You’d better go to bed early to-night. The weather’s a little trying, too. A cup of tea would do you good. I wish you’d have one, Gil.”

“No . . . I’ve *said* ‘no.’ I don’t want tea. I’d like a drink, though.”

He rang the bell.

“Bring me a drink, Sally,” he said when that young woman appeared. Something ran quickly over her face as she said in her soft voice, “Yes, sir.”

When the whisky came, Gilbert poured himself out a stiff peg and opened his paper. Mildred picked up her sewing and made attempts to support a languishing conversation.

“You don’t seem very talkative this evening,” she said.



“Eh? Talkative? No . . . we never did have very much to talk about, did we?”

“I can’t think what you mean, Gil.”

“Can’t you?” he said, not looking up from his paper. He drained his whisky and poured himself out another. Presently he became aware that Mildred was crying. He picked up his glass and went, rather noisily, out of the room.

At dinner the traces of Mildred’s tears had vanished. She attempted to behave as though there had been nothing to cry about, and being a naturally amiable person and ready to make allowances for the bread-winner and especially so in the case of one whose work brought him continually among the spoiled and petted darlings of the world, she had already persuaded herself that Gil’s manner was to be explained entirely by pressure of work. She was that type of person who will not admit the possibility of something she does not want to believe possible. Gil was having one of his “difficult” times. No use to get upset about it. If you disregarded it he would recover.

After the meal he said he thought he would play tennis, but he did not ask her to come. He knew she wouldn’t play just now, but she thought he might have asked her to come and watch. However, he didn’t. He went up to change, came down with his racket, and again stooped to kiss his wife’s face.

“Good night,” he said, as if he knew she would have gone to bed when he came back. She did not seem surprised. Tennis was apt to be late in June, with Summer Time in operation—even if nobody suggested drinks at somebody’s house.

“Good night, Gil!” she said, striving to be very reasonable and understanding. He did not reply. She heard the door shut after him, his footsteps going down the gravel path and, sighing, she went upstairs to see if the children were asleep, for this was Annie’s evening out and Sally would be busy in the kitchen.

Barbara was asleep, her sweet face half smiling as if some lovely dream held her between sleeping and waking. But Paul was wide awake and called to her in that irritable voice at which to-night she frowned a little—for it was so very much like Gil’s had been that evening.

“What is it, Paul?” she asked. “It’s nearly nine o’clock. You ought to be asleep.”

“I’m hot. Can I have an orange?”

“Wouldn’t water do as well? Sally’s too busy to-night to stop to squeeze oranges.”

“I can eat it without.”

“Oranges are no good at this time of the year unless squeezed. They’re all pith and that is no use to you.”

“I don’t see why I can’t have one, for once. I don’t mind the pif. Where’s daddy?”

“Gone to play tennis.”

“He didn’t come up to see us.”

“Didn’t he? He was tired—he’s had to see a lot of very tiresome people who make him feel cross.”

“With us?”

“No, with them—but perhaps it’s all the same. Now, don’t fuss, Paul, you’ll only make yourself hotter. Sally shall bring you a squeezed orange presently.”

“All right. Can’t you stop and tell me a story?”

“I haven’t any new ones, Paul.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you’re rather insatiable, aren’t you, for stories?”

“What’s ‘satiabable?’”

“It means . . . oh . . . greedy, I think.”

“Don’t you *know*?”

“Oh yes.”

“Then why do you say you only *think*?”

“Paul, don’t be rude.” What she wanted to say was, “Don’t be like your father,” but she managed to stop herself in time. One parent must never mention the other in that kind of way to a child. Being tired and labouring under a sense of injustice was no excuse.

“Well, tell me a story. Teacher told me a lovely one yesterday about a nasty ole Jew who lent some money to a Christian . . .”

“Paul! You mustn’t say ‘nasty ole Jew.’ He couldn’t *help* being old *or* a Jew.”

“No, but he could help being nasty. And he *was awfully* nasty, because when the Christian man’s ships all went to the bottom of the sea and he couldn’t pay him he said he’d have to be paid wif a pound of flesh . . .”

“Oh, *Shylock* . . .” said Mildred, with relief.

“Yes, *Shylock*! Do you know that one?”

“Yes, I think we all know that one, Paul. Won’t you be a good boy and try to go to sleep now?”

“I think I might if you’d let me have an orange. Couldn’t *you* squeeze it, p’raps?”

Mildred sighed as, for the fourth time, she covered her small son’s limbs. He was really growing very naughty, but his small white body filled her with delight.

“I do think you might,” he urged.

“Hobson’s choice!” she said, laughing a little ruefully.

“What’s that mean?”

“That there’s nothing else to do.”

“What a *funny* thing! *Who* was Hobson, mummy?”

“I don’t know, darling.”

“But it *is* funny. There must be *something* about Hobson.”

“Oh, it’s just a phrase, darling. Just something people say.”

“Oh . . . can I have the orange?”

“Well, stay covered up, darling, while I go downstairs and get it.”

It was Sally, however, who squeezed the orange. She had finished her washing-up and was busy making fruit-jellies for the morrow.

“Aren’t you tired, Sally?”

“Only a little, ma’am. It’s the warm weather.”

“I know. It’s been making us all very touchy. Mr. Yorke has gone to play tennis and may be late. I think I’ll go to bed. Annie’s going to be late, isn’t she?”

“Yes, ma’am. You gave her permission to go to the theatre. She won’t be in until after twelve.”

“Well, *she*’ll be cross, too, to-morrow, then.” Again Mildred sighed. “You get to bed early, anyway, Sally. Will those jellies take long?”

“They’re not quite cool enough yet to put the fruit in, ma’am.”

“We ought to have an electrolux.” Mildred seemed to decide, however, that this was scarcely the moment to ask for one, and sighed again as she took the orange-juice and went upstairs with it to Paul, who lay prone on the top of a bundle of bedclothes, his night-shirt screwed into a muddle somewhere in the region of his neck. Mildred lifted him out, remade his bed and, turning back the top sheets so that the under one might cool while he drank his orange-juice, sat down with him on her lap. He wriggled at first, but sat still after a second or so until the drink was finished. Then, taking away the glass, she stroked his fair wavy hair, so like her own, away from his hot face, sponged his face and hands and talked to him softly.

“Paul, you must be a good boy this summer and go to bed early.”

“Aren’t we going to the sea?”

“Not this year. Daddy’s bought us this lovely garden.”

“It’s not the same as the sea. Why can’t we go to the sea? I heard Annie say she’s going to Margate.”

“Annie has only herself to think about. Now, Paul, into bed with you—and try to lie still. You’ll be asleep in no time at all if you do. And, look, I’ll push the window farther open so that you can see the moon over the hill. It’s nearly full and very bright.”

“What makes it a full moon?”

“Now, now, no more questions.”

“I like it teeny-weeny best.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, when will it be teeny-weeny again?”

“Oh, soon.”

“*How* soon?”

“Next month.”

“What time?”

“Oh, quite early, I should say.”

Astronomy was not Mildred's subject. Somebody should write a primer on the subject, Astronomy for Mothers . . .

Paul wriggled and struggled to be free. She'd soon not be able to coax him into her arms at all. As she let him go her heart cried a little for the helpless small thing he had once been. She felt dispirited to-night—restless. She would dispose of Paul and go straight off to bed. She was tired but as restless and unsatisfied as Paul. "I'll come back in two minutes, darling, and see if you're asleep." She covered him up and went off to the bathroom. When she came back all was quiet and, closing the door, she hastily retreated. As she went down to her own room she encountered Sally on the landing.

"I came to see if you wanted anything, ma'am."

"No, nothing, Sally. I'm just going to bed. Have you finished downstairs?"

"Not quite."

"Don't be longer than you can help. Good night, Sally."

"Good night, ma'am. I hope you sleep well."

"Thank you, Sally."

As the girl turned away she heard the sound of the key being softly turned in the lock of Mildred's door, and over her face there ran again that same fleeting expression which had been there earlier in the evening when Gilbert Yorke had asked for a drink. She began to devote herself to the coaxing of the obstinate jellies.

(2)

A short time afterwards Sally heard Mr. Yorke let himself very quietly into the house and go as quietly up the stairs. She heard his voice quite distinctly as she stood there at the kitchen table. It sounded loud and angry, and she pushed to the door with her foot. Then the voice ceased, the footsteps came down again and went along into the dining-room. Where the whisky is, thought Sally, and the little shadow deepened upon her face.

Half an hour later, the jellies finished, she had switched out the lights and was going up to bed when the dining-room bell rang. She gave a little jump, switched on the light again in the kitchen, and went along to the dining-room.

Gilbert Yorke stood in front of the empty fireplace, glass in hand, as she entered.

“Come here, Sally!” he said. “I want to talk to you.”

Sally advanced a few steps. Gilbert Yorke laughed, put down his glass and crossed rather unsteadily to her side.

“What time my wife go to bed?” he asked thickly.

“About a quarter of an hour before you came in, sir.”

“Then she couldn’ ’ave been asleep.”

“She was very tired, sir.”

“She’d got her door locked.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Disgustin’ thing happen to a man . . .”

Sally said nothing. The instinct to escape was suddenly oppressive. She saw that her employer was drunk, which seemed to her very terrible, for it changed him so completely. The instinct to escape grew: she looked wildly round, but before she could move Gilbert Yorke came nearer, caught her up to him and kissed her violently. She released her mouth, flung back her head and felt his lips at her neck. Quick as lightning she reached out a hand and smacked his face.

Sally was outraged. Into her mind came flooding all the things she had learned about kisses from her grandmother. A girl who would let a married man kiss her—a girl who would let her employer take liberties—was an abandoned, wicked creature. Men didn’t do these things unless encouraged. It was the girl’s fault, always—don’t let her forget that. And Sally’s sense of outrage was partly due to her knowledge that this business was *not* her fault—that nothing she had ever said or done could possibly have brought him to this stage and nothing he had ever said or done could possibly have led her to expect it. Were *all* the things adults told you such stupid lies? All these things had contributed to the smartness of the slap upon Gilbert Yorke’s flushed face. In effect she slapped not only him but her grandmother and her Aunt Grace and all the others who had said, “A girl can tell fast enough . . . she’s only got herself to thank”; the whole race of stupid women who misled the young.

The next minute she was gone.

Shutting the kitchen door behind her, she stood quite still for a second, one hand pressed over her eyes, the other holding, a little convulsively, to the edge of the table. Presently she was aware that the door had opened, shut again, and that Gilbert Yorke stood at her side.

“I’m sorry, Sally,” said the thick unfamiliar voice, “but you’re very pretty and tempting—’pon my word you are. A man oughtn’t be shut up in a house alone with you . . . not with a wife like mine.”

“Please go out of my kitchen,” said Sally, looking very fierce, but inwardly trembling—not because of the kiss or because she thought he might do it again, but because of something she read in his face which called up within her that same sense of embarrassment that came to her when Annie developed certain topics of conversation or when she had surprised some intimacy of word or look between this man and his wife. She shared now the same sense of being admitted to something not really hers, something it was not her time to know, and for that reason profoundly shocking. She wanted not only that Gilbert Yorke should get out of her kitchen, but that he should be stopped somehow from saying what she knew he meant to say, and of which she knew nothing save that she did not want to hear it, that it would make her terribly unhappy to have to listen to. What it was that took and shook the lives of these people of whom she was so fond, she did not know, but that it was something deep-lying and fundamental she did know and something which one day she would understand. But not now—she did not want to know now. She wanted her ignorance and her belief in their happiness left to her. As she stood there staring at Gilbert Yorke’s flushed face, she felt as if he was wresting from her something infinitely precious, and which, once taken, would never come back to her. Something that was more than just her youth and innocence, that it needed no act of violence to despoil her of; something that could be battered and crushed and spoiled by words. A kind of frozen horror gripped her limbs. She might have made an attempt to dash by him and run upstairs to her room, but she could not move. Her horror deepened and suffocated her. She was incapable alike of movement and speech. But Gilbert Yorke had the loquacity that quite as often as taciturnity belongs to the very drunk.

“Look here, Sally Lunn, I’m sorry . . . I’m sorry and I ’pol’gise. Can’t say fairer ’an that, can I? I don’t wanner make love to you, Sally, though you deuced attractive girl. I don’t wanner make love to any woman ’cept my wife, and she won’t have me . . . Locked her door, she has . . . means to keep it locked, dessay—as if I were dangerous character. It’s not nice, Sally . . . it’s not kind. ’Specially with girl like you in the house.”

“Oh, be quiet!” said Sally. “You’re drunk, sir . . . Do go to bed. You’ll be sorry for this in the morning.”

“Other people’ll be sorry, too . . . treating me like dirt . . . Her own fault . . . ’Sides, she doesn’t care . . . Wouldn’t matter to her if I slept all th’ night with you . . . s’long as I did my duty . . . gave her home, money . . . babies . . . She don’t care for me . . . not scrap . . .”

Sally opened her mouth to speak, but no words came. Her face and neck were bathed in heat. She felt vaguely that she was being insulted, but so heavy a wave of something so like pity was assailing her that she wasn’t sure even of that.

“Sally . . . you’re a nice girl, and I’m very fond of you. . . . Be kind to me, Sally—there’s a good girl. I promise I won’t get you into trouble . . . you betcher life I won’t. . . All these babies, not *my* fault. I give you my word, Sally Lunn. ’Course I know all ’bout age o’ consent and all that . . .”

Sally was quite aware now that she was being insulted—terribly, unspeakably insulted. He was suggesting—“daddy Yorke,” the kindly employer, the devoted husband and affectionate father of Paul and Bar and little Miss June—that whilst his wife was indifferent to him she should take her place . . . in his own house . . . under his wife’s roof. . . From all that was definite in her knowledge of the sexual act her young body, unfired, untouched, shrank back in dismay. But much worse was the shrinking of her spirit, which sank down before the knowledge that he cared nothing about her, knew nothing about her—save that she was a girl he found not unattractive. It was unbelievable that he should be suggesting this thing—but more unbelievable still was the fact that no anger would rise to her support. She was hurt—hurt and humiliated; but she could not be angry. She was aware only of things too deep for her knowledge and for her remedying. She wanted to cry because she knew that in the morning, when he’d ceased to be drunk, he would be unhappy and as terribly humiliated as she was now.

As his stream of words, shocking in their intimacy and implication, broke over her, like a faint echo came tumbling into her mind the dark hints and phrases of an earlier day. Her grandmother would have told her what to do. A virtuous girl would pack her box and leave the house immediately “improper overtures” of any kind were made. The girl who did otherwise had clearly no respect for herself or her sex. But Sally, so well acquainted in the class to which she belonged with the word “insult,” had already rejected it. She could only feel sorry—for herself, for “daddy” Yorke, for everybody:



and very, very young. Why, she knew nothing, nothing at all . . . She could have wept for her ignorance and futility.

Suddenly she smiled sadly and put a hand on Gilbert Yorke's arm.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't—I can't possibly."

"Why not?" asked Gilbert with the bland innocence of the very drunk. He might have been asking no more than why he couldn't be allowed bacon for his breakfast.

"Because I can't."

"You're too good . . . Baptist—that's what you are . . . You think it's wrong . . . Bad as my wife . . . Procreation of children and all that. Just bosh. Nashural act . . . perfec'y nashural act . . . like eating and drinking—nothing wrong with it . . ."

"Oh, please *don't*," said Sally. "Do try to remember how sorry you'll be in the morning."

"Don't care about the morning. It's the night that matters to me . . . Give me 'nother kiss, Sally . . . there's good girl."

He lurched towards her, clutched at the table and stood leaning towards her, looking surprised and foolish.

"Damn good whisky," he said, "only good thing 'bout th' evening. Rotten tennis . . . and *she* wasn't there either . . . Mrs. Hanson, I mean . . . nice girl, Sanchia. . . . Wouldn't 'ave got in this disgusting state if she'd been there. . . ."

"Come, now, go to bed, sir, *please*," said Sally, taking his arm.

"You come, too, then."

"Stop being silly. You don't know a word you're saying. You'll be so ashamed in the morning."

His humour changed suddenly.

"You're a bitch," he said, "like all the others. All bitches—no use to a man. Damn the lot of you . . . For the last time . . . will you come and be kind to me?"

Sally, to her own surprise, burst into sudden tears. She felt she couldn't bear another minute of it. She didn't want to kiss him or be kissed by him. She didn't want to sleep with him or anybody else. She wanted to lie straight down in her bed and cry and cry—and if she didn't get there soon

she wouldn't be able to do it, for Annie, with whom she shared a room, would come back from her theatre, and she'd rather die than let Annie see her crying. Annie's comments on this situation were more than she could bear even in anticipation.

"Look here," she said, beating back her tears with a sudden gust of anger. "Don't keep asking me that silly question. You know I won't. . . . It isn't me you want—anybody would do (how, she wondered, did she know that?). There are heaps of girls who wouldn't mind. You find one of those!"

Gilbert leaned towards her with a foolish leer. One eye closed and a finger came up and waggled itself about at the corner of his mouth.

"I know all 'bout them," he said, "I've tried 'em!"

"Then you go and find another!" said Sally, and, turning, she flung out of the kitchen, shutting off the light at the switch by the door as she went. His curses and stumblings as he floundered about in the dark hunting for the switch followed her up the stairs. She hurried up, fighting down an inclination to giggle more terrible and more strong than had been the desire to cry. But whatever they were, tears or giggles, she'd got to get them over before Annie arrived. She tore up the stairs as if pursued by all the Furies.

(3)

Not until the morning, however, did Sally realise the full extent of her unhappiness. Drunk the master had certainly been, but for the last month he had drunk a good deal (as he had done, she remembered, at the time June was born, when he had talked so queerly to her in the dining-room upon one occasion), and there was no reason, so far as Sally could see, why he should not get drunk again. And then where was she? Clearly, upstairs packing her box, crying her eyes out over it, too, for Sally did not want to leave. But she couldn't stand, she simply couldn't bear a repetition of last night. She was a little ashamed of herself in the finish—she ought not to have said that about the girls who didn't mind. An Annie-ism that . . . But what did he mean when he said, "I know . . . I've tried 'em." Bosh! He meant nothing, of course. He was drunk. Didn't know what he was saying . . . When the drink was in. . . ! Steadfastly, something sturdily common-sensical in Sally kept her from believing that here she had the hungry male, the ravaging wolf of her grandmother's fables.

However, here was the new day with the new day's tasks. Not having time to bother unduly with mental states, Sally usually forgot she had any—and though this morning that was less true than usual, she felt, all the same,

considerably better when she had got up, washed and dressed the children and given them their breakfast. It is true she had managed very neatly to dodge the necessity of taking up morning tea to Mr. Yorke, but as it turned out that wouldn't have mattered either, for Annie reported that "'e was dead asleep—didn't wake, only grunted-like, even when I shook 'is shoulder. Too much whisky again, I s'pose. Queer how 'e gets these drinking boots every now and then, ain't it?"

"Very," said Sally, and managed to smile at Annie's ill-treatment of a word she set great store by. People, with Annie, were always having "boots" of something—bad temper, awkwardness, cussedness.

Then the postman came and brought Sally a letter addressed in her Aunt Grace's writing which said that her grandfather had been "taken bad," and that her grandmother thought she ought to come home at once.

Sally took the letter into the dining-room, where her master and mistress sat at breakfast. Mildred agreed at once that she should go home and appealed to her husband on the matter of trains. Could she not go by his?

Gilbert Yorke looked up from his paper. "There are at least two she can catch before that, if she goes at once," he said.

"Of course she can go at once," said Mildred. "I'll take Paul to school. Run along, Sally, and pack up what you want. If you can find time, ring me up later on and tell me how things are; if not, let me have a card in the morning."

When Sally came down with her handbag Gilbert Yorke had changed his mind, for he stood in the hall complete with neatly-folded morning paper, hat and gloves.

"Daddy thinks he'll catch your train, Sally, so that he can give you a hand with your bag."

Then, to Sally's everlasting astonishment, her employer reached out and possessed himself of this article.

"Got everything?" he asked. "Have I my purse, season-ticket, key, powder-puff and lipstick?" They looked all three at each other and laughed, sharing an old joke when Gilbert had written out the question as a notice and stuck it inside the door of the Denmark Hill flat because Mildred was always going out without her key or money.

He kissed his wife's proffered cheek, opened the door for Sally, and waited for her to pass out. Mildred smiled from the open doorway, and then

they were walking down the road together, talking about the fine weather, the changed note of Sally's friend the cuckoo, who said "cuck-cuck-oo" now and sometimes on a falling note—"cuck-cuck-oooo . . ." ("Very early, this year, I heard it before May was out"), and the age and condition of her grandfather. Only as they walked up Victoria Station together did he say: "Sally, have you forgiven me?"

"Oh, yes, sir, indeed," she said, but in truth she did not know whether she had forgiven him or not, not having thought of it in that way or that there was anything to forgive.

"And you *will* come back?"

"Yes, sir—as soon as I possibly can."

She had not known until that moment that she intended to come back.

"Good girl!" he said. "Good girl! We shall miss you."

Outside he put her into a taxi and gave her money for the fare. Then he raised his hat and left her.

(4)

Tom Dunn died on the following morning, and Sally cried because when she arrived he called her Louisa and found some difficulty in remembering that Louisa ever had a daughter, and was inclined to argue about it. "But Lou was never married!" he kept repeating. But he knew her before he died, and was pleased to see her, and rallied a little and asked her three times if she was "all right." But after he was dead she cried again because she had loved him and had never been able to do anything for him, and because all his life he had worked so hard, gone out at five o'clock in all weathers, scarcely missed a day's work well or ill, and had known so little of comfort or pleasure. His favourite son had been killed in the war; his only daughter had brought disgrace upon him at eighteen and died at twenty-five. Sally wept, without quite knowing it, as much for the futility and unkindness of life as because she had been fond of her grandfather and would not hear his voice again.

The business of death, however, left her little time for weeping, for everything devolved upon her, her grandmother having suddenly become an old woman quite incapable of facing life with her usual formidable courage. But at last everything was done—even to the finding and moving-in of the young man lodger (to whom Liza Dunn would have to look in future for the greater part of her rent) and to the agreeing as to what part of Sally's wages

should be sent to her each month. Neither of them was going to be very well-off in the near future, Sally decided, but she did not mind that. At Green Acre she had all she wanted, and it seemed to her but fitting that she should share her earnings with her grandmother, who had given her a home for the first fourteen years of her life. Sally knew nothing of the savings her mother had intended as a nest-egg for her, and it would have made no difference if she had, for Sally would have been the first to agree that money must have been wanted at the time, and would not have blamed her grandmother for putting it to what she considered the best use.

“She’s a good girl, our Sally,” the old woman said to Grace, “whether she come in the right way or not.”

“Quiet as ever, too,” said Grace, “no sign of any fella as far as I could make out.”

“Sally ain’t that sort,” said the old woman. “She’s got a good place and won’t be in no ’urry to change it for a ’usband.”

“Don’t blame ’er, neither,” said Grace, who was still annoyed over the birth of her last child, for which she blamed her husband.

The old woman laughed.

“You didn’t think so when Reg came courting you.”

“No—but I learnt a good deal since then, I reckon. Marriage ain’t all it’s cracked up to be.”

Said Grandmother Dunn: “I reckon it’s like most other things in this world. Those who’re in it wish they wasn’t and those who ain’t wish they was . . . I ’ad one of the best—and I often wished I’d never set eyes on ’im. Gawd forgive me!”

(5)

The affairs of the Yorke household had slipped somewhat into the background of Sally’s thoughts, but on the Sunday evening, as she rode on the bus down to Victoria, she remembered the kindness in Mildred Yorke’s voice when she had rung her up to say her grandfather was dead, and the lovely wreath of lilies which had presently arrived bearing a message of “deep sympathy from Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Yorke.” Impossible to believe that Gilbert Yorke had stood in her kitchen saying those dreadful things to her! Still, when she thought about it, she found her chief feeling about it all was regret and a kind of pity that anybody so kind and good could be “like that”—but she did not blame him. You couldn’t help being “like that,”

whatever it was. Sally was simple and uninstructed and informed with good nature. She did not blame anybody for anything, not even Fate, the butt of most people's petty annoyances and angers.

The Yorkes were out when she arrived. "Gawn to a party," said Annie, from which, however, they had said they would be back by eleven.

"Didn't want to go, she didn't," said Annie. "It's my belief she's going to 'ave another."

"Has she said so?"

"Not she—but I know the signs. All this lying about in the afternoons and not wanting to go nowhere in the evening . . . the separate room business and these whisky-boots of his."

"He hasn't been . . . while I've been gone?"

"Well, I don't know what *your* not being 'ere's got to do with it—not egzactly, I don't."

"It hasn't anything to do with it. How are the children?"

"All right. Paul's been getting into some fine tantrums, though. Pity 'is father don't lamm into 'im a bit. I'd give 'im wot for if 'e was my kid! Bloomin' nuisance if there's mother coming . . ."

"Well, perhaps you're wrong."

"And p'raps I ain't. See?"

Annie's laughter reached up to the ceiling, split into a thousand pieces, each of which violently and separately assaulted Sally's ear-drums.

"Oh, shut up," she said.

"Going to funerals don't seem to be good for your little temper," Annie remarked. But the kitchen door had already closed behind Sally's back.

(6)

Life settled down again.

Sally sometimes thought in the next few weeks that that evening in her kitchen had been merely part of some horrible nightmare, so far removed was it from the dead-level of the two weeks which followed her return to Green Acre. Evening after evening Gilbert Yorke came home, dined, walked in the garden with his wife, or sat and smoked for half an hour over his coffee, then changed and went out to tennis, and was seen no more until the

next morning. But sometimes, waking momentarily from her healthy slumber, she fancied she heard feet stumbling up the stairs, and once, surely, a thud, and once certainly Mrs. Yorke said quietly at breakfast: “Gil, I *wish* you’d remember not to turn the light off in the hall until you get on to the first landing.”

“Light? Landing?” said Gilbert, looking blank.

“Yes . . . you know you’re no good in the dark. You always blunder round the turn. What’s the good of having double switches fixed if you won’t use them?”

“Oh, I see. I’ll try to remember. Did I wake you up?”

“I’m afraid you did,” said Mildred, but very sweetly, and as if, after all, that mattered less than the disregard of a mechanical convenience.

Sally alone knew that it couldn’t have been the dark which had caused Gilbert Yorke to stumble up the stairs to bed, because, the first down in the morning, she’d found the lights fully on, both on the first landing and in the hall.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### (1)

“Good evening!” said a quiet voice that made Gilbert Yorke jump round as if someone had fired a revolver at his back.

“For goodness’ sake, don’t do that!” said Sanchia Hanson. She held out her hand and looked at him with narrowed, closely-observing eyes. “Sorry, did I make you jump?”

Gilbert put down the remainder of his fourth double.

“I didn’t know you were back . . . much less expect to see you here.”

“We only got back last night. We were both too tired to play this evening, but I’d promised to come in after the games finished. Did you have a good game?”

“Rotten. That’s how I play these days. No damn good at anything. Have you had a good time?”

She smiled as if she was thinking of something quite different, and said: “Yes, thank you,” and then: “Will you be on the nine-fifty to-morrow morning?”

“Yes.”

“So shall I.”

She smiled and slipped away.

Damn! He wished he hadn't had so many drinks! He'd have a filthy head in the morning, and there was that blasted woman to see at four about her thrice-damned drawing-room. Heaven alone knew what time he'd get home . . . headache or no headache. Why couldn't he leave the stuff alone? After that rotten exhibition with Sally he'd meant to—but he'd got to the point when he had to have it. When you were drunk nothing mattered. At least it didn't matter very much and he had the sense to keep off it in the daytime.

He stayed where he was, drinking solidly until midnight, but if Sanchia were still there she didn't come near him again. For a short while his eyes followed her slim, white-clad figure about, and something dark and uneasy stirred within him. Then gradually he forgot all about her. He forgot everything: he sat there in a silly stupor, not even aware that there was a small but gradually widening space between him and the rest of the party, that nobody spoke to him save his host, upon whose whisky he was making such depredations. When he began to realise this his edgy temper rose and boiled over.

“What's the matter with me?” he said. “Have I got the plague or something?”

There was an awkward silence, then somebody said hastily:

“You're all right, Yorke, old man. Have another drink.”

“Don' mind if I do.”

“*I* mind.”

Sanchia's white figure moved into the circle. “Aren't you going home, Mr. Yorke? We go the same way. It's getting very late for hard-working people with trains to catch in the morning.”

“Go to the devil!” said Gilbert, snatching at his drink.

“Do come,” said Sanchia softly.

“Gotter finish my drink. Another little drink can't do me any harm.”

Somebody laughed. Several people moved away.

“It can't make any difference, certainly,” said Sanchia.



Somebody laughed again. Still Sanchia didn't move. She waited until the drink was finished, then putting a hand on his arm said quietly: "Now. *Please!*"

He got to his feet, swayed a little, and then developed a tendency to cling to the table. "I'm all right." he observed. "Pins and needles in my legs, that's all . . . You lead . . . I'll follow."

"Please come," said Sanchia. "It isn't far to the door. Make an effort . . . lean on me . . . I've my car at the door."

Somehow or other she got him there, closed it behind them and stood him up against a tree for a moment. After a while he could walk unaided to the car. The whisky which went to his head first had only just got into his legs. If she could have prevented his having that last drink, she reflected, he'd have made a more dignified exit. He climbed clumsily into her two-seater, and at once she drove out of the gate and down the hill at a pace sufficiently reckless. He did not seem to observe that they were going in the wrong direction, and he made no comment upon the speed. It was nearly one o'clock when she pulled up outside the neat gates of Green Acre.

"Here we are!" she said. He got out of the car and she saw that the air had at least partially cleared the fumes of whisky from his head.

"Night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head," he said.

"Something like that!" she said, also getting out of the car. "Can you find your key?"

It took some doing, but when at last it was done she took it from him and went up the stone path before him and softly opened the door. Suddenly she felt his arm round her waist and herself swung round so that her face was very near his. The smell of whisky was an insufferable assault to her senses. He jerked up her chin with his and closed his lips hard and tight upon hers. He felt fine—god-like.

She did not stir or protest, but very slowly she turned to stone in his embrace. The god-like sense slipped from him: he was suddenly very sober. He let her go.

"I'm a swine," he muttered.

She stood quite still for a moment, looking at him across the soft darkness.

"God! I ought to be kicked!" he said. Suddenly she held out her hand.

“Good night. The nine-fifty to-morrow morning. Try to remember,” and was gone.

Neither of them saw the dark figure that came to the top of the stairs, stood still for a moment and then scurried back out of sight and hearing.

(2)

On the nine-fifty the next morning they had a first-class carriage to themselves as far as Herne Hill, and Sanchia lost no time in coming to the point.

“Can you come to see me this evening? I want to talk to you.”

“About last night?”

“The piece where I belong, you mean? Forget it.”

“I thought you’d probably never speak to me again.”

“Because you kissed me when you were drunk? Well, I don’t like being kissed by drunken men . . . but I sometimes expect to be . . .”

“Did you expect it last night?”

“Yes—but I hoped you wouldn’t. I thought my reckless driving would have done that much for you. It doesn’t matter, anyway. What about this evening? I’ve a flat near Regent Street. I’m on the ’phone, but you won’t find the number in the telephone book, and I’d rather you remembered the address than wrote it down . . . Can you, do you think?”

“Yes. I’m not drunk this morning, you know.”

“Well, will you come?”

“Yes.”

“To dinner?”

“If I can. I have to go out to Pinner—a business appointment, at four.”

“Are you expected home to dinner?”

“No. I’m not popular if I ask for dinner after eight.”

“Good. Then I shall expect you.”

She gave him the address and he repeated it.

The door opened: several people got in and Sanchia began to talk of other things. At Victoria they parted with the merest good-bye and at half-

past seven, feeling rather a fool, Gilbert presented himself at the flat, the door of which was opened by Sanchia herself. Cool, self-possessed as ever, she smiled a greeting that had nothing furtive or beguiling about it, and led the way into a room furnished as a sitting-room, but with a very workmanlike desk beneath the open window, with a pile of manuscript paper and an open volume spread out upon it, and in the centre a table set for dinner for two. She pushed a chair forward and offered him cigarettes. Beneath her air of tranquillity the embarrassment with which he had arrived slipped from him like a cloak. He ceased to wonder why she had a flat like this of her own, and why she had asked him to it. He smoked his cigarette, listened to her quiet everyday remarks and wondered why he had ever thought she looked sullen or unhappy. This woman, quietly smoking her cigarette, talking easily and pleasantly, not chattering, was certainly neither. She looked as though from some deep secret source she drew upon endless supplies of content and satisfaction.

A quick, sharp peal of the bell interrupted the conversation.

“That,” she said, “is the dinner,” and went out, to return five minutes later bearing the first instalment of the meal, which she set upon the table, and with a little gesture—very pretty, he thought it—invited him to come and eat.

“This,” he said, as he sat down, “looks suspiciously like a miracle.”

“Easily explained. I have no maid here—I come here to work, and no maid I’ve ever met respects work done by a woman at a desk—so all the food comes from a little restaurant near at hand. It’s very good, and all I’ve done towards it is to ring up for it. I hope I’ve managed to order what you like.”

The soup was *tortue verte* and excellent. It was followed by *sole à la bonne femme* and cutlets deliciously cooked, and a half-bottle of Château Haut-Brion, at which Gilbert raised his eyebrows. Well, she’d lived in France, went there a good deal . . . she *knew* about wines. But did not, apparently, drink them. Of the good Haut-Brion she drank, he noticed, less than half a glass.

During the meal she told him the kind of work she did—translations, chiefly from the French, sometimes from the German. She was amusing herself, too, by learning Russian. She had tried working at home, but had found it impossible. She had tried the British Museum, and had found it conducive less to work than slumber. The flat had been a last resort. Nobody

knew about it. Officially, she worked at the British Museum still. It was her mother's idea, she said. Left to herself, she would never have thought of it.

"If a woman wants to work," she said, "she ought to live on the top of a mountain. But most women don't, of course."

Gilbert thought of the women of Mayes—with a couple of servants, most of them, and a nurse for their children, all looking for something to do. Tea-parties, bridge, tennis, at-homes . . . And he thought of Mildred, avoiding the worst excesses of her friends by the expedient of arranging to have a young baby perpetually upon her hands. For a moment he wondered why this girl chose to come and work at translations rather than have a baby . . . babies . . . of her own. But he didn't ask her. Already he felt that he had not been invited here to ask questions. That was all he did know, but he knew that with certainty. . . . He found it extremely pleasant and stimulating to sit there eating her nicely-cooked food, drinking her good wine, and watching her as she talked. She wore a frock of some deep golden-brown, sleeveless and simple, that seemed to him the perfect setting for that ivory skin. She had an attractive voice, too, very low but clear and cool, like a bell, and the languid air of boredom she carried about with her in Mayes she seemed now to have sloughed completely. He couldn't make her out: she was an enigma. More here than at Mayes. What, he wondered, vaguely ashamed of the vulgarity of the thought, was her game? A secret flat—this talk of work, his own invited presence there. . . . But he did not feel uncomfortable: on the contrary, he was glad to be there. The meal over, he stretched his legs across Sanchia's deep blue carpet and sat watching her as she made coffee in one of those patent affairs he always thought rather absurd. But the coffee which it produced under Sanchia's ministrations was certainly good.

As they sat drinking it, she said suddenly: "Have you decided yet why I asked you to come here this evening?"

Taken aback, he started several answers, gave them all up, laughed a little and said: "No . . . frankly, I haven't."

She smiled, then her face grew suddenly serious.

"I want to talk to you about last night—and all the other nights like it. There've been rather a lot of them, haven't there?"

He wasn't surprised. He wasn't even resentful and not very self-conscious. Somehow or other it seemed perfectly natural that she should be taking this sort of interest in him. He said, very quietly: "Yes, I'm not going to deny it."

Suddenly he found himself talking, saying to this quiet woman he hardly knew the things he'd revolved so often in his mind, seeking explanation, elucidation as much as excuse. Somehow or other it did not seem important that he should excuse himself to this girl who listened without interruption, without movement. He was surprisingly aware of something kindred between them, of something innately understanding and sympathetic, using that word in its truest sense . . . of suffering with. He even recorded that deplorable incident with Sally. When he came to the end there was a little pause before she said: "These other girls . . . were they any good to you?"

"No . . ."

"Because you were in love, all the time, with your wife?"

"I suppose so."

"Men are supposed to be unaffected by that . . . Men say they can have any number of affairs even if they *are* in love with their wives. Is it true?"

"Not of me."

"You didn't get any help that way?"

"No."

"Didn't they interest you?"

"The women? Yes . . . quite a lot, if we could have kept off the physical side of it . . . They were decent girls—ought to have been married. I got to dislike them because we couldn't—because they were as hungry and unsatisfied as I was, and in the end I got bored because they gave themselves airs . . . got 'knowing' about wives. And because I felt mean, too, I suppose . . . I don't know. It's a muddle. I guess I wasn't meant for an adulterer."

She said quietly: "No, neither was I."

Stricken to shocked silence, Gilbert could only stare at her. Reaching for another cigarette she said: "We ought to be friends—Fate has played us the same scurvy trick. Tell me which, of all the tales you've heard of me, have you believed?"

"None of them."

"Are they as varied as I've reason to suppose? Which is the commonest?—that I'm merely a selfish modern who denies her husband a child?"

"I've heard that one, certainly."

"Did you believe it?"

“I don’t think so. It didn’t seem to matter. It was your own affair. But I used to be sorry for you—when I first saw you you looked so unhappy.”

“I was, terribly.”

“Not now?”

“A good deal less, anyway.”

“You’re different since your holiday . . . not the Paris one. The one in the country with George.”

“Yes . . .?” She looked at her watch. “What time ought you to be home?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“I want to catch the nine-fifty. George expects me by ten-thirty and is bringing the car. Do you mind coming down by the one before or after?”

“The one after, I think, perhaps.”

“Good. That gives us half-an-hour. It’s your turn to ask questions.”

“I’ve none to ask.”

“No curiosity?”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“You don’t care to know why I asked you here?”

“I care to hear, certainly . . . if you’d like to tell me.”

“Of course I’d like to tell you. I asked you here because I like you and because I’ve seen for a long time that emotionally your affairs were in a tangle . . . because I thought I knew why you were drinking . . . and because I wanted to make sure. Nothing to do with me, I know—but I felt that if I was right the fates had played us both the same trick and that we ought to be able to do something for each other. Well, I *was* right.”

“None of all that . . . surprised you?”

“I wouldn’t say that. But it isn’t a situation which is new to me. I’d met it once before—the other way round. But in this case the man had religious grounds for his beliefs. He was a clergyman and married a close friend of mine. He, too, not only believed that physical love was wrong save for a procreative purpose but conducted his marriage along such lines. His wife adored him, but after five years of marriage she was a physical wreck. She ran away with another man and he divorced her. From first to last he was

sustained by the unwavering belief that his conduct was Christian and pleasing to his God. But your wife, you say, is not a churchwoman.”

“No, but she believes that upon this subject the bishops are right.”

“I see. The result is the same. In either case it is a thing I don’t understand. The Puritan in me is a long way down, I fancy. I believe in the right to love, children or no children. To deny that seems to me to deny one of the deepest instincts of life itself.”

“Why is it that two people with such opposite views upon marriage ever come together?”

“I don’t know. I suppose there are some things you don’t know until you *are* married.”

“Was it like that with you?”

“No, not in the least. I fell in love with my husband during the war. That expresses it badly. I loved George at sight. I love him still. He’s the only man I ever shall love. . . . But it doesn’t save me, somehow. . . . We wanted to get married, but my mother refused her consent and I was under age. Nineteen. George was four years older, so we took the law into our own hands. We lived together whenever he could get leave—there was very little risk for me, for we did not intend at that stage to introduce another life upon the scene. We kept our secret well. Nobody knew. Even my mother did not suspect, which was lucky, for my mother had, and still has, rigid ideas upon this subject. Those two years, despite the anxiety of it all, were the happiest of my life. We meant to get married directly I was twenty-one. A month or so before that happened the war was over and George, wounded in the last hours of it, was in hospital. When I went to see him he told me the truth. I was full of the plans for our marriage which I intended should take place as soon after my birthday as his health would permit. It’s nearly nine years ago—I remember as if it were yesterday what he said: ‘For God’s sake shut up . . . I’m no use as a husband any longer.’

“It’s queer to-day to remember, too, how I felt. Even with the memory of those two years to warn me I thought it didn’t matter . . . that our love was superior to all that had given us so much joy and content. George says now that he never did think it—but that he was too selfish to give me up when I was so anxious not to *be* given up. It’s quite true, I forced myself upon him. I insisted upon marrying him. I wanted to make up to him, I suppose I thought I could do it. . . . Perhaps I’d have thought so longer if George hadn’t developed scruples. I was twenty-one in the New Year and we were married in the February. Nobody knew the truth and at first we were happy.

There'd been so much beside the physical—mental companionship, community of ideas . . . and being together was heaven from the first. It did seem we had a chance.

“I'm quite sure now that we hadn't—not along the lines I'd laid down for myself, anyway. After six months I got ill—and George developed his scruples, was convinced he ought not to have allowed me to sacrifice myself. He couldn't leave the past alone—he tortured me with it and himself. He knew me. . . . I needed love—and children. I ought to take a lover. There were times when he urged me to it. The scruples multiplied. We were being punished for not having a child when we might, for not having the courage. And he gave me a confidence very hard to bear. There'd been a girl in France—long before we met. I'd known of her—she hadn't mattered. But now I learnt suddenly that there'd been a child. I wasn't half so obsessed by the business of thwarted motherhood as George imagined, but he got it into his head that that was chiefly what was the matter. If it had been merely a question of children it would, I'm sure, have been all right. . . . Even the idea of this child of George's by another woman wouldn't have upset me if it hadn't upset him so much. Everything at this time went wrong with us. At the crucial moment my mother came over from France, guessed the truth of the matter, said a lot of things which made matters worse and insisted upon taking me off for a holiday. While in France I tried to find this girl who'd been George's mistress. She'd married and couldn't be traced. I don't know why I thought getting hold of that child would have made any difference. I know now it wouldn't—that nothing would have made any difference. I wanted the thing I couldn't have—legitimately. And I believed my feeling for George would for ever make it possible that I could want it through any other channel.

“George's general health got better but nothing else. Under an outside calm I was a bundle of nerves. My mother urged me repeatedly to get free—and George sensed that she did and made a fuss when I wanted to go to France to see her. He accused her of putting young men in my way. But I am sure she never did. She told him that she wouldn't dream of doing anything so superfluous. . . . The net result of that, of course, was that George became insanely jealous of every man I spoke to. The high mood of renunciation when he had urged me to take a lover had gone. There seemed to be nothing I could do for him.

“In desperation I began to work. My mother had had some success as a younger woman with books of travel—she knew a good many writing people and publishers and was able to get me some good commissions. Save



for the difficulties incidental to a domestic staff's inherent ideas as to what constitutes a woman's work, life began to be happier than I could have thought possible. George, seeing me busy and occupied, came to believe the bird was netted. He forgot the worst of his scruples and to a certain extent, since I was so obviously blind to them, that there were other men in the world. We began to be happy again, to believe that we could do what we had set out to do. We talked sometimes, I remember, of the sublimation of sex.

"Then suddenly it happened. I met a man—a visitor—at my mother's house in France. . . . He was a writer . . . still is . . . you'd know his name if I mentioned it. We fell instantly in love. Also, we fell into each other's arms. We were lovers within a couple of days of meeting. You can't argue about an attraction like that. I like to think I'd have withstood it if I'd been normally married, but God only knows. . . . Anyway, we *didn't* argue about it. When we went back to England we met at regular intervals.

"I suppose George must have read it in my face, but nothing happened for nearly a year. Then one day he accused me of having a lover. I suppose I didn't deny it quickly enough. . . . It was after I came back from friends I'd been staying with at Hexham—Northumberland was his home, too—and we'd contrived a lot of meetings beside a day upon Blanchland moor. . . . That was, as it happened, our last day together, for George's fury frightened me. I daren't risk it. I wrote him good-bye. . . . I've never seen him since. . . . I don't know what would happen if we ever met again. Perhaps I do. Perhaps that's why I avoid the likely places.

"That was two years ago. . . . It seems like a century. I had an awful time with George, who simply couldn't be told the truth. Denials were the only thing. But I don't think he believed me until I consented to leave town and go to live at Mayes, though I'm sure that was a mistake. I don't seem to belong there. The women disapprove of me and I suspect the men of thinking I'm a bad influence on their wives—I don't know why. Because I don't stay in my home enough, I suppose, and because of this legend about my childless condition. . . . But I don't suppose we shall live for ever in Mayes—I think George wants already to go back to town. Even he sees his idea hasn't worked."

"You're going to *leave* Mayes?" Gilbert Yorke said, healing the dismay in his voice with profound surprise.

"It hasn't been discussed yet, but I *hope* so. It's a long journey to and fro for him after a heavy day and it complicates my visits to my mother in France even more than they were before. They were never popular. For

George is one of the people who persist in believing that the French have no morals and every time I go he has one of his bad moods over it—shuts himself up, won't see people, won't go down to tennis. I found him a wreck when I got back this time and had to take him away directly. If he could live alone with me somewhere he'd be all right. That's why he likes Mayes—because we're surrounded by a group of eminently respectable men all behaving like perfect gentlemen. The uncertain quantity of our London existence or mine in Paris, where I might meet anybody, at any moment, is missing. That's Mayes's claim to George's regard. . . . Have I bored you a good deal?"

"You haven't bored me at all. I wish I could do something. . . . You need things done for you far more than I do."

"Do I? I wonder. Sometimes I get depressed—I see this going on for years and years until I'm too old to care, too old to want anything and then perhaps it'll all be nice and quiet and peaceful and rather like the grave. . . . At others I feel something will happen . . . a miracle, I suppose." She laughed. "Do you ever feel resentful? Ever, I mean, wonder why *this* should happen to *you*?"

"Often. You see, I feel I'd be quite a good sort of husband if that was what Mildred wanted. I *believe* in marriage and single standards and monogamy and all the respectable things. I *like* 'em—and for no fault of my own I'm pushed away from them—made to break my marriage vows, to commit adultery, to lie and deceive. It doesn't seem right, somehow."

"I know. . . . I don't suppose I'll ever care for anybody as I care for George, and I tell myself I'd never have looked at another man if the fates had been kind. But perhaps I flatter myself—I'm a normal creature and I long for a normal life. As it is I find the ground cut from under my feet, as you do. I'm not a free agent. It's so easy to fall in love now . . . and so difficult to withstand the logical conclusion. Besides, I find myself saying: 'Why should you?'" She laughed. "There are so many attractive men who're ready to say that, too."

"I can believe," said Gilbert Yorke, "that there must be many who are more than ready to say it to you."

"You mustn't pay me compliments—and I think it's time I began to get ready to go home."

"Can I come again?"

"Would you care to?"

“Indeed I should.”

“Can you keep my secret?”

“Of the flat, you mean? Oh yes.”

“Not, perhaps, if you get interested in the flowing bowl.”

“I shan’t.”

Sanchia smiled.

“Good-bye . . . I must hurry.”

“You will let me know when I can come again?”

“Yes. Will you be at tennis on Monday?”

“Yes.”

“All right. So will I. Can you be discreet?”

“Very.”

“Then do be. I hate this part of it—but it has to be done . . .”

“Because of your husband? Mildred wouldn’t mind. She’s constantly pushing me on to other women.”

“Not, I think, on to me, though.” Sanchia smiled. “Have you forgotten Christmas—on the stairs? I was dreadfully miserable that evening . . . George and I had quarrelled. The banished had sent me a Christmas card (very wrong of him) and George would have it we were still meeting—or corresponding. You looked so miserable when your wife ran away like that in the middle of the dance . . . and so ridiculously happy when she came back and gathered you up again . . . I think I felt sure about you from that evening. Sure, I mean, that we had things in common and ought to be friends . . .”

He felt they were so already. He felt they had known each other for years, for ever.

That night he went to bed without recourse to the whisky bottle, not because of anything Sanchia had said on the subject, or because he was consciously endeavouring to reform or being reformed, but quite simply because he forgot all about it. His mind was full of other things and he only drank when it was empty, when he was defeated, bored. And to-night he was neither. He slept on that knowledge without attempting to analyse it.

The heavy rains which swept over the country in July of 'twenty-seven interfered with Gilbert's plans for improving his game, as with other people's, and on the Monday following his visit to the flat a series of violent storms throughout the day made play that evening impossible. Smitten, however, with the desire to see Sanchia, Gilbert hit upon the idea of arranging over the 'phone a post-prandial gathering at Green Acre, such as were common among club-members after play. Such hospitality on the part of the Yorkes was a little over-due, but not particularly expected, since it was generally known now that Mildred was not playing this summer because of the "interesting event" due at the end of it. Mildred was a favourite at the club. She was considered amiable and pretty (in a kind of Hebe way, not very fashionable to-day, though) by the women and by the men a "damn fine woman" who had the loveliest kids, but both thought it such a pity her husband had these periodic fancies for the whisky bottle. However, on this particular evening he had kept off it. Perhaps that Hanson woman had made him feel ashamed of himself, after all, the other evening, though what business it was of hers nobody knew.

Sanchia's manner, when she arrived, Gilbert thought, striving hard not to look at her too much or too often, was perfect and he hated himself for the thought that the situation was not new to her. She gave him no more of her time and attention than the gossips of Mayes would approve, and though something of her old languid air had come back to her, doubtless her clothes had something to do with it. In her pale-green frock, with her dark eyes and ivory face, she looked rare, exotic, among that gathering of flushed, short-skirted sportswomen—exotic, too, beside Mildred, who, tall and stately in her clever maternity gown, moved about greeting her guests. About Sanchia's attitude to her host there was nothing whatever to remind him of that evening so short a while ago when together, with one stride, they had moved across the intimacies and reticences of ordinary life. In fact, as the evening wore on he could almost have believed it had never happened, save that his pulse beat the faster when he looked at her, which was unexpected and disturbing and entirely outside the bond of their friendship. Not until the very end of the evening did she mention the subject of another visit. And then, coming up to Gilbert as he stood for a moment alone, she said softly: "Thursday?"

Gilbert nodded, his pulses jumping again as she stood before him, then together they walked away towards the departing guests, all busy making their adieux to Mildred. To any casual observer she had merely gone up to

him to say good-bye—it was all natural and simple and excellently “discreet.” Neither of them observed Sally busy with her tray behind them nor saw how the colour ran fine and quick up the paleness of cheek and whiteness of neck. *Mrs. Hanson!* Then it *must* be true . . . what she had thought about ever since that night she’d seen them together at the front door. Mrs. Hanson, young, lovely and with a husband of her own, too! was being “kind” to Gilbert Yorke! Sally’s heart gave a little jump and she was nearly in tears as she stood there collecting glasses and plates. She remembered again that dreadful evening when Gilbert Yorke had been so drunk in her kitchen, recollected something she had not realised before she had remembered. “*She* wasn’t there. Wouldn’t have got in this disgusting state if she’d been there . . .” He’d meant Mrs. Hanson, of course.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear!” said Sally to herself and despised Sanchia a little without, however, condemning her. People were like that . . . and after all, it *was* true about the whisky. He went sober to his bed at night. It was weeks since she had found any of the lights on in the morning. . . .

## CHAPTER NINE

### (1)

All the same, Sally was wrong. It was not until some weeks later that Sanchia and Gilbert became lovers and nobody was more surprised certainly than Gilbert, who never knew quite how it happened, but was surprisingly free from scruples afterwards and from regret. Not analytical, he was inclined to accept the situation when it arose and was slightly offended by Sanchia’s quiet: “I don’t love you . . . and you don’t love me.”

“No, but we like each other . . . and I find you deuced attractive,” he said.

“Thank you,” said Sanchia calmly, without coquetry or sense of compliment.

“Don’t you find *me* attractive?”

She laughed.

“Oh yes—but if one had an affair with every man one found attractive!”

“You’re going to have an affair with me!”

“I think I am.”

“Try to be sure.”

She smiled.

“I would prefer to be sure I’m not.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t intend an affair.”

“Neither of us intended it. But we might have foreseen it. Do you mind so much?”

“I have no moral scruples, if that’s what you mean.”

“What then?”

“I’m feeling resentful—of my fate—not of you. I wasn’t made for this.”

“For what?”

“To be the mistress of many men.”

“Many?”

“You will be my third lover. . . . I only wanted one. I was made for single-mindedness and wifhood. I feel twisted out of shape.”

“You were made for love,” he said, his hot eyes upon her, and said it again when her ivory body lay within his embrace. It was all he did say. She amazed him. There was about her way with love none of the hot greed that had so easily wearied him in the other women with whom he had consoled himself, that girl who said she wrote to a formula but had found none for life and who treated sex as something she had to get out of her system, so that she might forget about it. He had resented being used, forgetting, maybe, that he was using her. The whole affair, and others like it, had sickened him.

Sanchia was a different matter. It was true she was made for love. She knew not only its language but its nuances; excitement did not belong to it, but neither did constraint nor yet violence. There was nothing primitive about her way with love—nothing, that is to say, which in any way suggested (as, alas! had been the case with those others) a mere throwing-off of accumulated repressions. She might, for all there was of that, have taken a lover every night. (This, for some reason, annoyed him a little.) Made for love, for the permanency of wifhood, she might be, but the quiet lovely quality of her giving had something almost virgin about it so that he forgot he was nearly middle-aged, a husband and father, and all the things that had brought him to this—to Sanchia’s arms and the strange, unexpected peace he knew there. He looked for nothing beyond—satisfied, happy, time cheated, and life, maybe. Was that, he wondered, what *she* was after, too?

But he didn't wonder very much. His time for wonderment, as for scruples or regrets, was past. He had found something he had not been looking for, but he would not look at it too closely, finding it a little disturbing, grateful to Sanchia for her cool detached acceptance of the situation; again a little annoyed by it, too. What was it told him that she had found nothing that was unexpected, or more than she had been looking for? He didn't understand Sanchia's part in it and was not sufficiently vain to believe that she had lost her head about him, even if it were not so plainly obvious that she had not lost her head in the least. Neither, when he remembered Sanchia's body in his arms, was he able to believe her driven by physical necessity. She was driven by nothing. What she did she did deliberately. She was not the least little bit in love with him. He had said—he had believed—that he was not in love with her. And did she know better? Was she being kind? Not entirely that; her surrender had more than kindness (that friendly virtue) about it. If she gave she also took. He was under no illusion as to that. Her proportion of giving and taking was exquisite: she did not just passively let herself be loved. She got something out of it—what, just exactly? Satisfaction, pleasure, well-being perhaps? Not transport, not ecstasy, not that brief spell of enchantment and rapture which came to him. Not for one moment was she transported to any elysium of physical or spiritual bliss. But she shared with him the sweet tranquillity that followed their love-making. No woman he had known—not even Mildred, by whom, in mere febrile passion, she was outshone—had ever given him what she gave him here. She did not switch her mind away at once to other things. Luxurious and unhurried she was in love's giving and taking and in love's recovery. He found her alluring and entrancing at the end as at the beginning. An artist in love, he called her one day, watching her as she lay with one arm thrown across her eyes, her slim ivory body gleaming in the light of the small summer-evening fire.

She moved the arm and looked at him. After a minute she said surprisingly: "I should have made an excellent courtesan. Is that what you mean?"

"I didn't—but I think you would."

She said sadly and her voice was sad too and her face grave in the firelight: "The days of the courtesan are over—the Fates didn't even allot me that. . . . Born out of time and place."

He said: "Aren't you a little ungrateful?"

"Ungrateful?"

“You have so much . . .”

“I? So much?”

“Brains, beauty—generosity, kindness.”

“Kindness? You find me kind?”

“Unutterably, beautifully kind.”

She sat up, cupping her breasts with her hands, her face serious and a little questioning.

“To myself, too, surely?”

“Why not?”

“There is no reason. Do I make you happy?”

“Need you ask?”

“But don’t you regret, sometimes, getting happiness . . . satisfaction . . . through the wrong channel—the wrong person?”

“Not if the ‘wrong person’ is you.”

“I’ve said you mustn’t pay me compliments—especially as I’m really being rather rude to you.”

“Are you?”

“Implicating you as the wrong person, wasn’t I? I don’t really mean it. You’re very nice to love—I’m glad of you. I only meant that sometimes I’m frightened—seeing myself betrayed entirely, passing from one man’s hand to another.”

“You torture yourself unnecessarily.”

“Do I? With thinking of things I can’t be? Perhaps my dream of myself as a faithful single-minded wife is all a delusion. Perhaps I’d have been faithless in any circumstances. Perhaps it wasn’t in me to be faithful to any man. Oh, God, I wish I *knew* that, for certain!”

“Were you in love with the other man—the man you sent away?”

“In love? I suppose so. I suppose that’s the right term. But I even hated him at times because he had what belonged to George—and because I enjoyed so much giving it to him.”

“If he came back?”



Her hands sprang to her face. She looked, he thought, like a badly-scared child.

“Oh, he won’t do that,” she said, and she sounded like a scared child, too, a scared child reassuring itself.

“If he did?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “Oh, heavens, I hope he won’t.”

Then suddenly she laughed, swung her feet to the ground and stood up.

“I’m going to get dressed,” she said, “it’s getting late.”

He watched her pick up her clothes and walk across the room, pale and slender in the firelight, light of step and beautiful of movement. As the bathroom door shut-to behind her, under his breath he cursed this unknown previous lover, knowing himself jealous of this man who’d probably also lain in the firelight and watched her pick up her clothes and walk away like a queen. That was idiotic; he was a fool. Jealousy had no place in this affair. She belonged to no man. The Fates, as she called them, had seen to that. Best not forget it. Best take what she gave, house it warmly against the famine. He would not have her for ever. He knew that suddenly—and with finality. Nobody would have her for ever. Unless, indeed, it were George, whom plainly she still loved and who in consequence had the power to make her miserable.

He, too, got up and began to get dressed.

(2)

Later he said: “I’ve often wondered about this business of monogamy. Do you think, perhaps, we’re all wrong about it?”

“I don’t know,” said Sanchia. “We’ve grown up with it, that makes a difference. I’ve got all sorts of ideals about it, even now, when I’m not apologising for this—or what went before it. Tradition, our modern civilised tradition, is still operative somehow, though I know chastity hasn’t always been considered a virtue, and isn’t now in some parts of the world. Quite the opposite, in fact.”

“Don’t you believe that women are, speaking generally, monogamous?”

“No. Do you?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think they’re probably no less and no more so, at heart, anyway, than men. Some are, some aren’t. That’s all you can say. It’s tradition again, I expect, which makes us think those who are superior in some way to those who aren’t. I don’t know. You see, some little bit of me still *wants* to apologise—for this, for you. I can’t help wishing sometimes that I’d fallen in love with you, and then sometimes I feel it would be all right if I didn’t love George. And sometimes I think it’s all right anyhow . . .”

“Has love got very much to do with sex?”

“The idealists think so. But I don’t think it has, much. How *can* it have? I love George—and I give myself to you, to others. You love your wife, but you’ve consoled yourself for her harsh views about sex by going to other women, by coming here to me. Perhaps our special circumstances excuse us. I don’t know. Anyway, neither of us is in love with the other and yet it’s worth while. . . . Or isn’t it?”

He looked at her.

“You know it is. At least for me. I can’t speak for you.”

She laughed outright at that.

“I’m sure you know quite well that I think it worth while. In a way, I suppose, it’s all part of our education. Perhaps we’re the advance guard of the new ethics.” She laughed again.

He looked at her and fell silent. He knew so little about her save that he found her intoxicating, and when he talked of polygamy he was thinking of himself and his own marriage and adventures outside it, not of hers. He would not let himself think of hers. Already that phrase she had used twisted in his mind: “Neither of us is in love with the other.” Already he knew it wasn’t true.

(3)

All the rest of that very wet summer their secret relationship persisted and nobody guessed, except Sally, who’d guessed too early and then saw-sawed everlastingly between belief and disbelief.

Sally was perplexed. An affair with another woman seemed to her incredible if you were married to Mildred Yorke, even after those drunken revelations which she had tried diligently to expunge from her mind, and even granting the undeniable attractions of Sanchia Hanson. She saw in the strange events of recent days only an example of Annie’s theory that men were troublesome when their wives were having children. Simple-minded

and good-natured, Sally supposed only that her master couldn't help it, without being able to make up her mind in the least about Mrs. Hanson. Sally had seen other men, beside her master, look at Sanchia, and even Annie agreed that, for all the tales you heard, her husband obviously worshipped the ground she trod upon. In the end Sally's good nature extended itself even to Sanchia, for she was not the kind that could blame anybody very much or very long for anything—not even Fate, the butt of so many people's angers and annoyances! All the same, during the whole of that wet August she felt frequently depressed and sad—she hardly knew why. Perhaps at what she vaguely recognised as the essential unkindness of life. She longed that this unspeakable August should be ended and that the baby, who was causing all the trouble, should get itself born. And thinking of the new baby she cheered up, for she liked babies, and Paul, these days, was quite grown-up, whilst Bar was to go to kindergarten after the holidays. When the new baby arrived Miss June, who would then be eighteen months old, would be more especially Sally's care. Pleasure moved within her at the thought. She fell to wondering whether the new baby would be a boy or a girl. A boy, she hoped, because that would please Paul, who still scowled, when he remembered it, at his sister June and occasionally inquired even now when he was to have the brother his mother had promised him.

(4)

In the Green Acre garden the last roses were blooming and the first chrysanthemums, when Master John Yorke appeared upon the scene, causing his mother, seemingly, no more inconvenience than had his brother and sisters. He was small, chubby and very noisy, occupying Mildred a good deal both by day and night, so that she grew rather pale and wan and would be glad in the afternoons to sit down in the yellow autumn sunshine whilst Bar and her sister played together, not in the garden, for fear of disturbing their new brother, who slept (or probably did not sleep) there when the weather was fine, but in the little ornamental park five minutes' walk from the house.

Paul seemed a little disappointed with his long-looked-for brother. His father, it seemed to Sally, took very little notice of the new-comer except to grumble when he chose a particularly awkward time in which to exercise his lungs: neither did he attempt to persuade his wife to fall in with the doctor's suggestion that she should not feed him. John, it was true, was not thriving as Mildred's other children had done: he had lost at two months much of the chubbiness he had brought with him into the world, but Mildred would not be persuaded that the reason was the one the doctor insisted it was. Of

course mothers should feed their children. She was first amazed then distressed, but when she began to search John's pre-natal life for some sign of error of omission or commission on her part, Gilbert Yorke lost his temper unexpectedly and said: What the hell did she mean and that she'd lived like the Virgin Mary—at hearing which, Sally was frankly shocked and Mildred cried. For a while longer she persisted in feeding the child, who continued so emphatically to protest that she was ultimately moved to stop and to admit, reluctantly, that the new food the doctor prescribed suited him better. And so it came about that Mildred, relieved from this maternal function, had suddenly a good deal more time for her husband than she had ever had at such periods before, but he did not seem, Sally thought, to notice it overmuch. He did not bother her in the old way to come out. He still betook himself to tennis every evening in the week that was not impossibly wet, except on his one inevitable “late” evening (usually a Thursday), to which the household had become accustomed and about which Annie had expressed herself with her usual frank cynicism and about which Sally maintained a rigid silence.

“Funny thing *she's* always late on Thursdays, too,” said Annie.

“Who?” said Sally.

“That Mrs. Hanson. I know the cook there. Never 'as to keep dinner, if you please, on Thursdays. No more, I said, did we, for ours . . .”

“What's it got to do with us, anyway?” said Sally wearily.

“Nothing, daresay. . . . But I dunno. . . . I've seen 'im lookin' at 'er sometimes . . . and it ain't no secret they don't get on none too well, meanin' 'im and 'er. . . . Not that I'd blame any woman for not gettin' on with 'im—a fair bundle of nerves, if you asks me! 'Course they do say it's the war, but that don't 'elp nobody, so fur as I can see. And she's a good-looker. Can't blame 'er for amusin' 'erself elsewhere.”

Annie went so fast Sally found it difficult to keep up, but she was convinced that Annie knew nothing; that she was once more giving rein to her imagination, to what she heard Mildred's friends refer to scornfully as the “servant mind.”

“I don't think you ought to say those things,” she said. “It's no concern of ours.”

“Oh, I dunno . . . cats may look at kings. 'Sides, this business of 'oly matrimony interests me like. . . . A girl 'ud be blind not to see things going on under 'er nose. You can't 'elp putting two and two together.”

“Well, don’t make them four-and-a-half,” said Sally, suddenly feeling cross, conscious of a headache and of the fact that Paul would be coming in from school, bringing (she hoped he would remember) Bar with him. If he’d forgotten, which was not unlikely, she’d have to put her things on and go out herself to fetch her.

However, Paul had remembered, so that was all right.

The next morning Sally, serving bacon at the sideboard, heard Mrs. Yorke say: “Oh, daddy, now nice! Here are some tickets for *Ambrose Applejohn’s Adventure* from the Davidsons, who can’t use them.”

“When for?” said Gilbert.

“To-night.”

“No use to me.”

“Why not, darling?”

“Thursday. My late evening.”

“Can’t you get out of it for once? You know how you like Hawtrey.”

“You can’t alter business arrangements, my dear girl.”

“You might try.”

“All right. I’ll ’phone you during the morning, but don’t build on it. Can’t you arrange provisionally to take somebody else?”

“Oh yes . . . I daresay. Perhaps Mrs. Hanson would care to come.”

Sally, putting bacon in front of Mildred, glanced up at Gilbert and read something in his face which confirmed afresh all her suspicions of the last few months.

“Bacon, sir?” she said, suddenly anxious to say something, do something which would alter the expression on his face. “Or fish? Finnon haddock, sir.”

“Fish,” said Gilbert, and then to his wife: “Mrs. Hanson? Oh, you can ask her, why not, if you think you’d like to have her.”

“She’d be all right. She’s quite an interesting woman, I think, in her way.”

Gilbert Yorke took up the paper and was lost behind it. Sally retreated.

Later in the morning she heard Mrs. Yorke on the ’phone:

“Is that you, Gil? Mrs. Hanson? No . . . she couldn’t. Can’t you possibly? All right, then, I’ll ring mother . . .”

(5)

“You ought to have taken your wife to the theatre,” Sanchia said to him that evening.

“I couldn’t. It was our evening. You were expecting me.”

Sanchia looked a little stunned.

“Please don’t do anything like that again,” she said.

“But I didn’t want to take my wife to the theatre . . . I wanted to be here with you.”

“Yes, I’d gathered that,” said Sanchia, still looking a little stunned.

He pulled her to him with a little laugh. “What did you expect?” he asked. Sanchia said nothing.

## CHAPTER TEN

(1)

At the end of October it was announced that the Hansons had sold their house and were going back to live in town before the winter set in. The announcement came as a shock to Gilbert, who reproached Sanchia for not telling him when last they met.

“It was settled since, in a great hurry,” she said. “We suddenly had an urgent buyer. It doesn’t matter very much where we live. Not at all to you.”

“It matters a good deal to me. I shall see you a good deal less often.”

“You won’t see me at all,” she said.

He stared at her.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly what the words say.”

“You can’t possibly . . .”

“Yes, I think I can.”

“Do you mean you’re tired of this?”

“Far from it. But you’re falling in love with me—and that’s not allowed.”

“Are you falling in love with me? Is that what you mean?”

“No. Why should I? I mean what I said.”

“I didn’t try to fall in love with you.”

“But do you still love your wife?”

“No . . . But that hasn’t anything to do with us.”

“Hasn’t it? I expected you to drop me when she wanted you again. I hoped you would.”

“Good God!”

“Didn’t you expect that, too?”

“At first—not for long. You’re the sort of woman I ought to have married. You’ve spoilt me for anybody else.”

“You see! Just now you said your not loving your wife had nothing to do with us—with me.”

“Well, I don’t believe it has. I’d stopped caring for her in the old fashion when I was first unfaithful to her. Must have. It would have come, this difference. It was only a question of time. It was inevitable.”

“Oh, dear,” she said, and her face was troubled. “I’ve done you more harm than good.”

“Well, anyway, it’s happened. I shouldn’t call it harm myself. I daresay I’d have got tired, sooner or later, of waiting about on my wife’s bedroom mat. You only made it sooner.”

“Well, I wish I hadn’t. If I go away you’ll feel differently. Don’t add the breaking-up of homes to my account.”

“You’re talking nonsense.”

“I’m talking sound sense.”

“Then you’re tired of it all.”

“No—I’ve said not.”

“Then you think my wife suspects?”

“I’m quite sure she doesn’t. Only . . . I don’t think about that side of it, much.”

“Your husband, then?”

“Oh no . . .”

“Then it’s the other chap. . . . You’ve been meeting him again.”

Her face paled a little.

“No—oh no.”

“Then I don’t understand. Honest, I don’t.”

“But I’ve told you. I can’t go on because you’re taking me too seriously. Establishing rights. . . . In short, falling in love with me—and doing the usual silly things that men and women do in such case. I didn’t mean that at all . . .”

“You *want* me to make love to my wife?”

“Of course.”

“And to you?”

“I? Oh, I don’t compete. . . . I’ve no rights. I’d hate to interfere with another woman’s life or home—it’s the unpardonable sin! I expected to be forgotten, having served my purpose. I *wanted* to be forgotten. I didn’t want any emotion mixed up with it.”

“God! What rot you talk! No man could forget you who’d once had you!”

“It’s you now, isn’t it, who are talking rot?”

He came over to her, took her by the shoulders and shook her a little.

“Good heavens, don’t you know *anything* about yourself at all!”

“Too much—far too much, I assure you.”

“You know nothing if you think I can forget you.”

“You can try.”

“I won’t—you bet I won’t.”

She shut her eyes, looked, he thought, a little weary, as if she’d been through this before, but she said nothing. Suddenly he buried his face in her neck. She stood quite still, as she’d done, he remembered, that first time he’d kissed her, drunkenly, disgustingly, by his own open door. Well, he was a little drunk now, he supposed.



He said sullenly, not raising his head: "Don't you want to be loved to-day?"

"If I say 'no'?"

"I'll go away."

He laughed a little.

"But I'm afraid you'd come back."

"Well?"

"No—don't go away . . . not yet—not to-day . . ."

(2)

"You didn't mean all that, did you?" he asked her later, "about putting an end to things?"

She nodded.

"Yes, I meant it. It is the only reasonable thing. But I don't feel argumentative now, do you?"

"Lord, no!" He laughed softly. "Sanchia, you're divine!"

She said nothing. He saw that her eyes were closed. She lay very still, her head to one side, one lovely arm hanging straightly over the edge of the couch to the floor. As he looked at her he was conscious of a sudden withering despair, a deep emptiness within him. He felt that never again would he see her lying there in the firelight. It was as if he'd lost her already, for ever.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

(1)

The Hansons left Mayes at the beginning of November, and a week later the household at Green Acre was disrupted by the announcement that Gilbert Yorke was going abroad—a business trip upon which he expected to be away three or four weeks and the house stood on its head to get him off. It seemed to Sally amazing that anybody could remain so calm, so indifferent, to so important an event—but Gilbert Yorke was no more excited, Sally thought, than if he contemplated a week-end at Southend instead of a Continental trip which began at Paris and extended itself to Amsterdam and Berlin. Even his good-byes were casual, she thought, except

to her, and there she thought he overdid it, as if he expected her to have found another place before he came back, as if he never expected to see her again and were rather sorry about it. He came into the nursery where she was giving Master John his feed and insisted upon shaking hands with her and holding her hands in his in a way she found embarrassing.

“Good-bye, Sally, think of me sometimes—not too unkindly, won’t you?” he said.

Sally thought him rather absurd.

“Goodness gracious, sir, you aren’t going for ever!” she said. “You’ll find us here all right when you come back.”

“Shall I?”

“Well, unless Mrs. Yorke gives me notice.”

“She won’t do that, I’m sure.”

“I hope not, sir. And I hope you have a good time, sir.”

“It isn’t a good time I’m supposed to be concerned with, you know, Sally.”

“Well, I daresay it won’t be altogether business, sir. There’s lots to see, I’m sure, in those foreign parts.”

Gilbert Yorke said nothing to that. He stood there watching her manipulation of John and his bottle.

“You’ll get tired of doing jobs like that for other people’s children one of these fine days—be wanting some of your own, too, I suppose.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Sally, beginning to wish he would go.

“Well, you’ll make some lucky man a good wife some day, I’ll be bound, give a man a square deal all round, shouldn’t wonder.” He paused for a moment and then said: “Sally, if you ever fall in love with a man, be kind to him . . .” Another pause, then: “Good-bye, Sally . . . don’t forget. Think of me sometimes, and don’t let them all overwhelm you,” and before she could protest, he had given her a kiss on the side of her cheek and was wafting her another from the doorway.

Sally laughed. How absurd he was! Such a fuss about a month’s absence—as if he’d never been away before. Such nonsense! said Sally to herself, smiling at John and listening to the sounds of the taxi that bore his father swiftly away.

Though she had said—just for something easy to say—that this trip might not be “all business,” it was Annie who first put the idea seriously into her head. Annie who came in from one of her “evenings out” with the information that “she” had gone to Paris, too. “She,” as Sally knew, with Annie, was always Sanchia Hanson, but she always pretended she didn’t, so she said now: “Who’s ‘she’?”

“That Mrs. Hanson.”

“Oh. . . . She’s always going to Paris. To see her mother. How do *you* know, anyway? Has she sent you a postcard?”

“No, she hasn’t, funny—but Ethel Cox and me’s still friends even if they ’ave moved to town and me and ’er went to the picshers to-night. She ’appened just to mention it . . .”

“Oh, did she? And I suppose *you* just happened to mention that the master had gone there, too?”

“Well, so ’e ’as, ’asn’t he? Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin . . . that’s wot *I* understood.”

“Yes—but how do you know he’s gone to Paris first?”

“’Cause I saw ’is boxes labelled ‘Paris.’ ’Otel Carlton, Paris, it said, and you can’t get away from that.”

“I don’t want to get away from it. Why shouldn’t the master go to Paris same time as Mrs. Hanson goes to see her mother? What’s it got to do with anybody?”

“Oh, nothin’ . . . I ain’t suggesting there’s anything wrong. Nothing to do with me.”

“Then what do you want to talk about it for? Why can’t you leave people alone?”

This conversation ended like many which preceded and followed it, in “words” between them. As ever, Annie regarded Sally as a prig and Sally Annie as a pig. To the end of their association each was a thorn in the side of each.

(2)

Postcards came for them all from Paris. Annie and Paul had a picture of the Eiffel Tower, Bar one of the Arc de Triomphe and Sally a photograph of the Champs-Élysées, with a mark against a building therein which, said

Mildred, was the hotel where the master was staying. These cards were posted, apparently, immediately upon arrival, as if the sender had rushed out at once and bought and dispatched them and having got it over proceeded entirely to forget he had a family at all. For no other cards came for Sally or Annie, and Sally soon learnt, from the complaints of Paul and Bar, that they also had received no pictorial illustrations of either Amsterdam or Berlin, supposing the traveller to have arrived by now at either of these places.

Mrs. Pomeroy had come to stay with her daughter during her husband's absence and from the odds and ends of conversation they made no effort to prevent Sally from hearing, she gathered that they, too, were without news of the traveller and that Mrs. Pomeroy thought Gilbert was too casual upon the matter to be excused and Mrs. Yorke thought her mother was making a fuss about nothing.

"Gil hates writing. It's a physical pain to him. And he's so keen on foreign countries. He always wanted to drag me off somewhere abroad instead of going to the seaside."

"Did he suggest your going this time?"

"No. He knew I wouldn't go with John so small. No use suggesting it."

Sally thought Mrs. Pomeroy looked a little worried.

Three weeks went by. "She," Annie reported, was home again and "he" had been annoyed because she had stayed so long. But then he always was, more or less, however long she stopped. Couldn't bear her out of his sight and hated her to go to Paris. Excitable kind, 'e was—p'raps they'd noticed—and mad about 'er. 'E'd got real tiresome again since they got back to town, so Ethel said. 'E'd been better while they were at Mayes. Seemed to 'ave spells of it, Ethel said. Didn't like her seeing people . . . 'specially men. Not that they had rows—not to say 'rows'—she never seemed to lose 'er temper. Got quiet like, sort of sullen, never said much . . . and then 'e got better again. Pity they 'adn't some kids . . . do 'im good that would. Wouldn't think so much about hisself then . . . and she'd not be able to run about so much, neither.

Four weeks went by. Five. In a fortnight it would be Christmas. Gilbert, said Mrs. Pomeroy severely, was preposterous. Mrs. Yorke, still seeming mistress of the situation, refused to make inquiries of Interiors, Limited, and seemed a good deal less perturbed than did her mother. Neither she nor Mrs. Pomeroy made any attempt to keep Sally in ignorance of this situation. Mrs. Yorke never had taken any great pains to keep Sally, or Annie for that

matter, in ignorance of her affairs. That amiable trick she shared with the fabled Lady Ethelreda tended, with the years, to grow upon her.

Life went on uneventfully—too uneventfully for Annie, who was of the type that hates a feminine household. Six men coming in for a meal at whatever unearthly hour in no way affected Annie's temper, but three women to tea every afternoon and one woman to dinner roused in her a vehement fury Sally found it difficult to understand. A feminine household it certainly was, these days. No man, unattended by his wife, ever dined at Green Acre during Gilbert Yorke's absence. This, Sally felt, was accident rather than design. It never occurred to Mildred Yorke to invite unattached males; she had, in the modern fashion, no male friends.

"A home's not a home without a man," said the disgruntled hater of marriage to Sally, who replied: "What difference does it make? It's all work."

Annie tossed her head.

"I know that, but I ain't so gone on my own sex as you seem to be. Not that Mr. Yorke was much good when 'e was 'ome—'e never seemed to 'ave any say in 'is own 'ome; but 'e did bring 'is friends to dinner occasionally. A girl got a few tips, too—if that's anything to you. But probably it ain't."

Sally thought of that old rather pathetic woman, her grandmother, and of the postal order that was sent to her each month, but otherwise she saw no particular reason to desire more money.

"Oh, well," she said, ignoring the point, "a man in the house does make a change, I'll admit. It'll be nice to have the master home again."

"Don't seem in no 'urry, 's fur as I can see," said Annie. "Glad to get away, I reckon. If you asks me this heverlastin' baby-business got on 'is nerves. She likes 'em when they want cuddlin' and fussing—'e only seems to care about 'em when they're going to school, same as Paul, who got on with 'im better than with 'er, I always say. She's always *on* at 'im, some'ow—quite nice and all that, but still *on*—and you know 'ow sulky 'e gets with 'er, too. Funny, I call it. Can't make it out."

"I don't see any use in trying," said Sally. "You can't make people out. They're like that. You can't alter them. Why should you, come to that?"

"Like what?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . . Some one thing, some another."

“S’pose you’re right. Takes all sorts to make a world.” But Annie looked as if she thought it a pity—as if she’d have liked it better if people acted according to some well-formulated and easily-recognised plan.

One morning she informed Sally that her newly-acquired young man was pestering her to marry him.

“’E’s gettin’ sort of all worked up abart it,” she confided to Sally. “I ’ad to give ’im a piece of my mind last time we was out. I’m a respectable girl, I said, even if this is a modern age—and don’t you ferget it.”

Sally laughed.

“Oh, poor young man!” she said.

“Well, a girl’s got to look after ’erself, ’asn’t she? ’E’ll ’ave to wait for all that kind of thing until we’re married, so ’e may as well know it now as later on.”

“Why *don’t* you marry him, Annie? He seems a nice young man and very good-looking.”

“Oh yes,” said Annie, mollified but off-hand, “Bill’s a decent enough sort, but if ’e wants me that bad, why don’t ’e buck up and improve ’isself? He’s unskilled, you see—went inter the Army w’en ’e ought ’ave been learning a trade. An’ the Army don’t do a young fellow no good, neither, if you asks me. All the same, ’e can’t treat me as if ’e was a soldier now and it’s no use ’e’s thinking ’e can. I know there’s obligin’ girls and plenty, but I ain’t one of them.”

Sally said: “Are you fond of him?”

“Oh, I s’pose so. . . . I’m sort of soppay abart ’im, I own. But wot’s that got to do with it? A girl’s gotter look after ’erself. ’E gets all that’s good for ’im—and all that’s good for me. I’ll watch it! Trust me!”

As Annie continued to emphasize her strict regard for virtue, Sally pondered deeply her brisk and decided utterances. This saga of the hungry male! How it pursued her! She found, surprisingly, that she rather despised the carefully virtuous Annie as she had despised the beautiful Sanchia Hanson, but apparently for diametrically opposite reasons. She could not understand this—she had despised Sanchia because she judged her “kind” without being in love: she despised Annie because she was in love without being “kind.” She was a little puzzled by this and was aware that either way it was a mental state which would not be approved by Grandmother Dunn, who would plainly consider her a thoroughly wicked and immoral girl. But

Sally did not know what was moral and what not. Certain things she had been taught were wicked, like “going with a man” and having a baby if you weren’t married—a point of view with which she felt both Mrs. Yorke and Annie would agree.

She wondered vaguely if she would ever fall in love and get married, or fall in love perhaps and not get married. But neither seemed very probable. She was seventeen and knew no young men. It was true the butcher’s boy had asked her what she did on her free evenings; but it was also true that her reply had been neither very definite nor very satisfactory from the butcher boy’s point of view, and Sally had not been unaware of his attempts to seduce Annie from her allegiance to her Bill.

Sally thought she did not very much like boys. Not tradesmen’s boys who were, after all, the only kind she knew.

(3)

One morning about a week before Christmas Sally took in with the morning mail a letter addressed to her mistress with the words “New York” stamped in red across the face of it and Sally, serving the bacon at the sideboard, heard Mildred say to her mother: “You’d better read this. Gil seems to have gone mad!”

By midday a letter lay upon the hall table addressed in his wife’s firm handwriting to Gilbert Yorke, Esq., c/o some bank in New York, marked “Urgent, per S.S. *Berengaria*,” and that same evening Mr. Yorke’s mother and his elder sister arrived and demanded to be shown into Mrs. Yorke at once. Half-an-hour later the bell pealed out loudly and there inside the door Sally saw her mistress standing, her face very red and a little frightening.

“Show this lady out,” she said to Sally, indicating her mother-in-law, “and remember I’m not at home to her or her daughters ever again.”

“Don’t make yourself so ridiculous, Mildred. Of course we shall continue to come until this outrageous business is put right. You don’t imagine it can rest here, do you?”

“Please go,” said Mildred.

“I will not go. I’ve no intention of being turned out of my son’s house—my son’s house, I would remind you. I shall stay here until you’ve quietened down and can talk like a reasonable woman.”

Sally, who had never seen her mistress even mildly angry, now saw a wave of such passionate hate run across her face that she was suddenly very

frightened. She saw that Mildred was momentarily incapable of words. From her retreat by the window Mrs. Pomeroy came to her assistance.

“I think you had better go, Mrs. Yorke,” she said; “my daughter is sufficiently upset as it is!”

“Upset! Of course she’s upset. Any woman would be upset when her husband writes and says he’s left her. But only a fool would believe him when he says he hasn’t gone off with another woman. Of course he has. Else why go? Mildred must be made to see she can’t just make *no* effort to get him away from her. *No other woman!* Men don’t just walk away and leave their wives and families for nothing!”

“Oh, mother, be quiet!” said Hester Yorke, moving forward. “I should think Gil’s had enough of women after ten years of Mildred. Anybody could see he was fed up years ago. An endless procession of babies just because Mildred’s the kind of woman who thinks it wrong to have anything to do with her own husband without.”

“Hold your tongue, Hester. I’m ashamed of you!” her mother said.

“I don’t care whether you are or not,” said Hester calmly; “it’s the truth—and Mildred knows it. She won’t ask Gil to come back because she knows he won’t—and because he’s given her enough evidence for divorce so that she can marry some other poor idiot.”

“Hold your tongue, Hester!”

“Why should I? I think it’s time Mildred heard the truth about herself. She’s never cared for Gil—she’s only used him and skinned him of every farthing to keep a house and servants for her and a never-ending family. Gil *had* to get away. I’ve seen it coming. I wonder he didn’t do it before!”

Mrs. Pomeroy said: “Oh, please—not before Sally!”

“Why not before Sally, pray? She’ll have to know that her master’s not coming back and she’ll know why. Servants always know everything,” said Hester coldly.

“So do young unmarried women, seemingly!” said Mrs. Pomeroy icily.

“What’s marriage got to do with it? This is the twentieth century,” said Hester Yorke calmly. “We don’t wait for marriage nowadays before we know things. You may as well accept the facts in his letter to you, mother, and come home. Gil’s gone off because he was fed up, and I don’t see why it shouldn’t be true what he says—that he’s gone alone.”



“But the evidence he supplies for divorce?”

“Well, why not? What he says is clear enough. He admits he’s been consistently unfaithful to Mildred for the last twelve months . . . and then gives the hotel bills for a night spent with some girl in Berlin. It’s the obvious thing to do. And all Mildred needs to get free.”

“Have you finished?” asked Mildred quietly.

“Nearly. I’ve this to say to you, Mildred. You always thought you could do what you liked with Gil, didn’t you? From the day you married him he’d neither mother nor sisters. You swallowed him up. It wasn’t even as if you wanted a husband—you only wanted a father for your children and a fine house and servants. You imposed your own terms and got away with it for years, and everybody thought you a model wife and mother. Well, now the worm’s turned! It serves you right, Mildred. I’m not even sorry for you. You brought it on yourself.”

“I don’t need your pity,” said Mildred in a dreadful voice. “Will you please go?”

“I will!” said Miss Yorke. “Stop crying, mother, and come on.”

“I shall never see my darling boy again,” said Gilbert’s mother, suddenly collapsing.

“We shall never any of us see Gil again, if you ask me. Not if he’s got any sense. To have been brought up with three women and then to marry a woman like Mildred! God! I should think he’d keep clear of women for the rest of his life!”

And Hester Yorke, holding her mother firmly by the arm, strode past the amazed and horror-stricken Sally with her head in the air. Neither as she hurried after them and opened and closed the front door for them did either of the women vouchsafe her a look or a word. She felt terribly sorry for both of them and was glad it was evening and dark and that nobody would mark their departure.

“My word—she didn’t ’arf tell ’er orf! Fair flabbergasted me, it did!”

Sally realised that Annie had been standing in the hall listening to the whole edifying scene.

“I *thought* as much!” said Annie, “didn’t you?”

“Didn’t I what?”

“Guess ’e wasn’t coming back.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Sally wearily, but she realised suddenly that he must have *meant* not to come back. All along he must have made up his mind when he came and said good-bye to her and kissed her cheek in the nursery. Only she hadn’t understood. And now that she did she wanted to cry because she would never see him again.

“I think the noise has wakened baby,” she said, and ran quickly out of the kitchen.

(4)

The next morning, as Sally brought John down fresh and sweet-smelling from his bath, a rather worried-looking Mildred Yorke said to her: “Come into the drawing-room this afternoon, Sally, after Annie’s gone and after you’ve got Miss June off to sleep. Mrs. Pomeroy is going to town and I shall be alone. I want to talk to you.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Sally.

At half-past two Sally knocked quietly at the drawing-room door and was told to come in.

“Sit down, Sally,” Mildred Yorke said, and Sally did so, sitting on the edge of the chair uncomfortably—a strained unnatural expression on her face and both it and her attitude contrasting strangely with the quiet way in which her folded hands lay unmoving upon her lap. It was at her hands Mildred Yorke looked at first. She had often admired them, thinking them strangely beautiful hands for a girl in Sally’s position, or did she mean strangely well cared for? At the moment, however, she was chiefly grateful to Sally for keeping them still.

“I want to talk to you, Sally,” she said after a little, “about what you heard last night. You gathered from all that, I expect, that my husband has written to me that he is not coming back?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Sally, letting her eyes rest bashfully upon Mildred Yorke’s rather harassed but still pinkly beautiful countenance.

“And you probably gathered also that he had said, in his letter, that he was not running off with another woman?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Well, Mrs. Yorke senior doesn’t believe it. She declares that there *must* be another woman.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Sally again.

Mildred Yorke said a little sharply: “Don’t keep saying ‘Yes, ma’am,’ Sally. Don’t you see I want to *talk* to you? Do *you* think Mr. Yorke has gone off with another woman or is he just letting me down lightly?”

Sally, with thoughts of things past, hesitated before she said: “If he *says* he hasn’t, ma’am, then I don’t think he has.”

Mildred Yorke looked as if a load had been lifted from her mind.

“Yes, that’s what I think. Gil was always queer—but I don’t think he ever cared for any other woman but me.”

“No, ma’am,” said Sally, ruthlessly effacing the image of Sanchia Hanson.

Mildred Yorke continued: “But all the same, he ought not to have married me. He ought to have married somebody like that woman we used to know—Mrs. Hanson. Somebody who wanted just a good time out of marriage and no children. I sometimes think Gil didn’t want children, either, you know, Sally . . .”

“I think they got on his nerves sometimes, ma’am . . . and he was bored when you . . . when you weren’t free, ma’am . . . if you know what I mean, ma’am.”

Mildred Yorke nodded.

“I know, Sally . . .” For a moment the kindly familiar expression on her face hardened a little. “But if one marries, Sally, one doesn’t expect to be just a man’s mistress. . . . To me marriage is a sacrament . . . what the Prayer Book says it is . . . and not just licensed pleasure. It’s very difficult when you marry somebody you’re very fond of, Sally, who thinks otherwise and who can’t see your point of view at all. Some day you’ll understand all this for yourself . . .”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Sally, who had already begun to suspect that she would never understand anything, never know why people acted as they did, married or fell in love or begat children. Left to herself she would probably never have tried. She was not among those who were born with an itch to put the world right. She was content to accept it as it was and the people in it. The mere business of being alive was enough for Sally, a spring morning sufficient justification for existence.

“I used to think,” said Mildred Yorke sadly, “that Gil was getting very fond of Paul, that he would probably have been very fond of his children as they grew up. He told me once he couldn’t bear living with so many

immature minds. But the smaller they are, the more I seem to like them. . . . I can't bear to think he'll never see them again."

Mildred Yorke began to cry a little.

"Oh, ma'am," said Sally, fidgeting on her chair edge but not getting off it, and still keeping her hands miraculously still, "don't cry. It isn't your fault. Nobody will blame you—except Mrs. Yorke and her daughters."

"They have always been disagreeable. Hester was always jealous of me . . . and Mr. Yorke, you know, used to give them absurd allowances until we were married. And afterwards, too, for a while until the children began to arrive. Then, naturally, he found he couldn't afford it . . ."

"Yes, ma'am," said Sally again.

"Now look, Sally. I have written to my husband—he gives the address of a bank in New York—asking him to come back to me. Hester says he won't—and I think he probably won't." (Nobody knew better than Mildred that he wouldn't. Had he not said, "I want to be free . . . taking a woman if I feel like it and forgetting all about it"?) "He says he's been unfaithful to me. I find that hard to believe, but there's been *something* with some woman in Berlin, evidently—he sends me a hotel bill, so that I can get free. I shall probably start divorce proceedings if, as I expect, he refuses to come back. I don't know quite how we shall manage. Mr. Yorke tells me he's selling out his share in the business here and investing it for me; but I don't know *how* much that is or how much a year we shall have. This house, too, he is making over to me, but I shall sell it, of course. We couldn't go on living here after . . . the divorce. It is so humiliating, Sally, to have to announce that your husband has left you . . . even if there *isn't* another woman."

"Oh, please, ma'am, don't go distressing yourself again . . . I'm quite sure Mr. Yorke would be awfully sorry if he knew he'd upset you like this, ma'am."

This point of view arrested Mrs. Yorke's attention, and her tears.

"I believe he would," she said. "He was awfully fond of me. He never looked at another woman . . . I used to find it very difficult to get him to go out with any of our women friends when I wasn't available. He used to get quite cross about it. That's why I'm quite sure there weren't all these other women. Mr. Yorke wasn't a bit like that. This hotel bill is just a formality. . . . He wants to give me a way out."

"Yes, ma'am," said Sally. "I'm sure he'd not like to think you were unhappy."

“That’s silly, Sally. . . . Of *course* I’m unhappy—dreadfully unhappy. But I’ve the children to think of—I’ve got to do the best for them, poor mites. Now I’ll tell you what I want you to do, Sally.”

“If you please, ma’am.”

“I want you to let everybody believe that Mr. Yorke is still away on his business tour—that’s he gone on to America. Tell Annie that, will you?—and let the gardener hear it. They’re both gossips, but we shan’t be taking either of them with us when we leave here. I hope you’ll stay with me, Sally? I shouldn’t like to lose you. In his letter my husband says, ‘I think—and hope—Sally will stay with you. She’s a good girl.’”

Sally remembered that farewell of his and felt a little tremor run down her spine. “Look after them, Sally, and think of me sometimes. . . .” She felt that a mission had been laid upon her.

“You can depend upon me, ma’am,” she said firmly. “I will stay with you as long as you want me.”

“Thank you, Sally. You’ve made me feel better already. And you’ll remember about Annie and Stevens and anybody else who ought to know?”

“Yes, ma’am, I’ll be sure to remember,” said Sally, getting up with a little sigh, perhaps of relief, from her chair.

“Thank you, Sally. I won’t keep you any longer. Bring Master John in to me when he wakes, will you? I had so little time with him this morning.”

“Very well, madam,” said Sally, and went out.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

(1)

If Mildred Yorke’s new friends thought it queer that she should be selling her house and moving away during her husband’s absence, they did not say so to her, and indeed Mildred disposed of her house and made her new arrangements with so reasonable an air that even Sally found it difficult to think of her as the deserted wife she was. She had taken a smaller house farther in the country, partly, she said, for John’s health, which was still a good deal less robust than she cared about, and partly to be near her mother during these extended business trips of her husband’s. And that sounded reasonable, too. There was nothing left to dispute. But Sally, watching her, wondered how she could do it, and if she really felt anything save the jar to her pride which she was so busily safeguarding.

By the arrival of spring they were comfortably settled in the little house, and the divorce, the bare announcement of which appeared in the papers a few weeks after the departure from Mayes, and kept that community busy with its tongues and teas for weeks to come, was a thing of the past. “Daddy” Yorke was washed out, forgotten—or so it seemed to Sally, except by her. Marie, the cook-general who was Annie’s successor, tried to talk to her about him.

“Was he a bad lot?” she wanted to know.

Sally said no with emphasis, even with a show of temper.

“Well,” said Marie, a plump round-faced girl of twenty-three, “well, it seems queer. . . . After all, she did divorce ’im!”

“I know. All the same, he wasn’t a bad lot, as you call it,” she said. “I don’t think they were very suited. . . . You see, she’s very fond of children and I don’t think he was—very. . . . Marriage is a funny thing.”

Marie, it seemed, thought so too. She was engaged, she told Sally, to be married, but was in no hurry, it appeared, to follow that state to its logical conclusion. Marriage, she said, was “such a lot’ry.”

“I’ve got a sister been married three years. A steady young chap ’e was, too, when she took ’im. But lor’ now, bless you, ’e drinks and comes ’ome that bad-tempered Liz daren’t open ’er mouth. Why, ’e’ll throw ’is dinner about if it don’t ’appen to be to ’is likin’. ’Course ’e don’t get much money, and they’ve a couple kids already and only three rooms. I s’pose it gets on ’is nerves, like, ’avin’, as you might say, no peace an’ quiet in ’is own ’ome. ’E’s not a bad chap at ’eart. I always tell Liz it’s the kids, but that’s as much ’is fault as ’ers, come to that. As Liz says, ’e won’t leave ’er alone, so what can you expect? I tell you, it does put a girl orf—and no mistake. An’ you can’t say otherwise. . . . You got a fellow?”

“No,” said Sally.

“’Ow old are you?”

“Seventeen—eighteen in June.”

“Well, that’s a bit young, I’ll own. Don’t you be in a ’urry—’specially as you like it ’ere. You do, don’t you?”

“Oh yes—a girl couldn’t ask for a nicer place.”

“I’m glad to ’ear it—I’ve ’ad some places, I give you my word. Enough to drive a girl to matrimony!”

Sally did not regret the move from Mayes to this little village on a spur of the Chilterns. The house was smaller, too, and Sally had done all the work of it until Mildred had settled upon Marie in Annie's place. She had been difficult to suit, and Sally had been rather worked to death in the interval. But the pretty house repaid her efforts, and the quiet secluded garden with no neighbours on either side had been well tended, and as the bulbs planted by other hands began to burst into bloom and the cuckoo came calling Sally began to feel happy again.

She sometimes wondered, as she looked at her mistress, if she had ever been even slightly unhappy—and was staggered to find herself remembering how Gilbert Yorke had said that night in his cups: “She wouldn't care . . . she doesn't care for me a scrap. . . .” Life, certainly, went on very much as before, save that economy was a word, never heard before, to which the kitchen had become either accustomed or resigned, and Paul had more tantrums than ever, to which his mother certainly was neither the one nor the other. There were times when he made it quite evident that he considered it his mother's fault that his father was still away, and that he considered her a miserable substitute, so that even Sally began to look forward to the time when he should go to the preparatory school for which he was destined, even though her sympathy went out to him. He seemed, so easily, to have passed out of his mother's existence. He was just any rather sullen-tempered and tiresome little boy with frightfully noisy and ubiquitous school-friends. Sally never saw Mildred lose her temper with Paul: she retained, with him as with everybody else, her invariable amiability; but Sally felt that she, too, fortified herself with thoughts of the preparatory school. Bar, as ever, was a good-tempered, amiable child, who accepted the legend of her father as she accepted most things else, as a matter of course. Bar, in fact, already growing tall and leggy, was so little trouble that she tended to be overlooked by her mother—a fate Paul escaped by his temper. Sally saw that June and John, with but eighteen months between them, were Mildred's darlings, whom as yet she shared with nobody, and Sally wondered sometimes what her mistress would do when they, too, were claimed by school and by the years. Mildred with all her children grown up was somehow an anomaly.

(2)

At the beginning of the summer of nineteen-twenty-eight, Eliza Dunn became ill and Sally, after endeavouring to arrange matters with her Aunt Grace, was compelled to ask Mrs. Yorke to release her. Mildred was not too pleased about it—but she consented to get a substitute for a month, and hoped that if Sally could get back before then she would do so.

Sally was back within the stipulated time, but felt, rather, that she had been away for years, for during her absence Mildred Yorke had dug herself well into the new district, and her new friends—all strange faces to Sally—crowded the house. She perceived with amazement that if Annie had been there she would no longer have grounds for complaining that the visitors tended to belong to one gender. Men and women came to tea, to dinner and for tennis on the not very good grass court at the end of the garden; and then, suddenly, about a fortnight after Sally's return, Mildred fell ill—not very ill, Sally thought, though surprisingly she stayed in bed, and on the third day told Sally to 'phone and ask the doctor to call.

“Dr. Gordon, Sally—there are two doctors here. . . . You'll find his telephone number in the index in the centre of the directory,” Mildred told her. “He came to look at John's throat while you were away, and I like him better than Sanders, whom we had for Paul's cut forehead. Tell him it's nothing urgent—but I'd be glad if he'd look in any time he finds most convenient.”

When Sally answered the bell and saw a good-looking youngish man upon the step, it did not immediately occur to her that this was Dr. Gordon, though why she should have expected him to be tall and elderly, as was Dr. Sanders, she could not have told you.

“I am Dr. Gordon,” he said. “You sent for me.”

“Oh, the doctor! Come in, sir, if you please.”

Leaving him in the hall, Sally ran upstairs to her mistress, who lay in bed looking a little pale, but very pretty in a nightgown of pale lemon over which her fair hair streamed loose and beautiful.

“The doctor, ma'am,” she said, and, “Well, show him up, Sally,” said Mildred.

So Sally showed the young doctor up and, shutting the door behind him, had the sense of having done something irrevocable.

Mildred's illness did not keep her very long in bed. She took a pink-coloured tonic and told callers she was a little “run down,” but when she was about again it seemed that Dr. Gordon was definitely included among Mildred's personal friends. He came to dinner sometimes on a Tuesday—the evening when he did not see patients—and he often came on Sunday for a game of tennis or, with growing frequency, to take Mildred off for a drive in his smart, dark-blue coupé. This annoyed Paul, for whom there was no room in front, who was not allowed to sit in the “dickey,” and was obviously not



wanted, anyhow. Paul, in fact, behaved as badly as possible upon the occasions of Dr. Gordon's visits, being more obstinately concerned with the date of his father's return from America than was either seemly or acceptable.

Sally thought she knew what was happening long before she came upon her mistress embracing and being embraced by Dr. Gordon at the bottom of the garden that Tuesday in July after dinner. She had gone to fetch her mistress to the telephone, and her little warning cough had either been not soon or not distinct enough. At any rate, when Mildred announced that she was marrying again as soon as her decree had been made absolute, which would be in the September, Sally was not surprised.

"It's Dr. Gordon, isn't it, ma'am?" she asked.

Mildred smiled very sweetly.

"Why, yes, Sally—but how did you guess?"

"Oh, it wasn't very difficult, ma'am," said Sally, wondering if Mildred had really forgotten that evening a week or so ago when the telephone had so inopportunately rung, though kisses, she was aware, did not always mean marriage, though she fancied they did with Mildred Yorke. "It was easy to see how much he admires you, ma'am."

"I hope you like him, Sally."

"Oh yes, ma'am, he seems a very nice gentleman, I'm sure. I hope you will be very happy, ma'am."

"Thank you, Sally, I'm sure I shall." To Sally her tone seemed to add: "This time!"

The marriage took place in the middle of September—one short week after the decree which pushed Gilbert Yorke definitely into the past was made absolute. It was Sally who helped to get Mildred Yorke into her wedding-dress and out of it, who packed her trunk and dried John's tears—poor John, who did not realise that already one stage of his earthly career was ended and that his mother had, at the moment, somebody more interesting even than John to attend to. But Sally, too, wept a little that night when she got into bed, thinking of Mildred Yorke—Mildred Gordon now—in her new lover's arms, and of that evening (how long ago it seemed!) when she had seen Gilbert Yorke kiss his wife's back as he helped her on with her wrap. Sally wept, without knowing it, for the transitoriness of love and all sweet things.

Mildred was back early in October full of enthusiasm for those parts of England through which the coupé had taken them for their honeymoon and looking radiant, the soft pink and white of her cheeks ever so slightly touched with tan. She had had, she told Sally, a wonderful time—with weather to match. She was pleased with June and John's uproarious welcome and in no way abashed by Paul's dispassionate civilities or Bar's matter-of-factness.

"I wonder 'ow it feels to marry a woman with four kids already," Marie said. "Some men would be kind of put orf, I reckon. Still, 'e's a doctor. I guess you can't tell 'im nothing."

Sally had no complaints to make concerning her new master, who, for all he was a busy man with uncertain and frequently long hours, was obviously wrapped up in his new wife. Sally did not understand why it hurt her to observe this, for she admired and liked her mistress still: still thought her beautiful. But also she continued to think of the other man who had loved and yet in the finish fled from her, and on those mornings when the doctor was there when she took in the morning tea Sally always averted her eyes from the bed, so that Alec Gordon laughed one morning and said, as she closed the door: "That girl of yours is a prude, my dear. She thinks I oughtn't to be here," and did not know that Sally heard him. Sally wondered exactly what a prude was and if she really was one. Certainly she preferred those mornings when Mildred had the big bed to herself, which meant that the doctor had been called out very late at night or in the early morning, and would need his tea taken into the adjoining dressing-room.

One result of Mildred's marriage was that the word economy was less heard in the realm of the kitchen: another that Paul went to his preparatory school at the beginning of the winter term instead of waiting until Christmas, and a third the transference of Bar from her kindergarten to a school five miles away, from which she returned only every Friday afternoon. Mildred was left with June and John, whom she shared so much more thoroughly with Sally now that her secondary task of parlourmaid was automatically relinquished and another girl engaged. A doctor's house needed, Mildred said, perhaps in explanation, to be run very efficiently.

Towards the middle of December Sally found her grandmother again upon her hands. One visit, which included another interview with her Aunt Grace, sufficed to show Sally that, for the moment, at least, she must abandon her part in the efficient running of the Gordon establishment and

get a daily job near her grandmother's house so that the old and rapidly-failing woman might be cared for. But when, upon her return, she broached the matter to Mrs. Gordon, Mildred came nearer to losing her equanimity than Sally had ever seen her before.

"How long for, Sally?"

"I don't know, ma'am. The doctor doesn't hold out any hopes of her getting any better; leastways, not well enough ever to do for herself again, ma'am."

"Oh, but Sally, why should *you* . . . Surely there's somebody else!"

"Only my Aunt Grace, ma'am, and she has a husband and four children. We talked it over, ma'am, and it did seem best that I should go."

"But, Sally, you can't leave me, Sally—you positively can't."

"I'm very sorry, ma'am. If there was any other way, I'd not be asking you, ma'am—but there isn't. I'm sorry indeed to leave you, ma'am, I am indeed!"

"But Sally . . . I'm going to have a baby. You *mustn't* leave me!"

Sally was suddenly grateful to her grandmother for so opportunely choosing her moment to achieve infirmity, for even as Mildred Gordon spoke she became aware that she did not want to see the rise of this second young family of hers. The young Gordons would be as nothing to her. She stuck to her decision, and Mildred in desperation appealed to her husband.

"Alec, do tell her that she can't, darling. I can't possibly manage without her."

But Alec Gordon belonged to the race of men who do not say they cannot manage without anything or anyone.

"We shall be very sorry to lose Sally's services, of course," he said, "but if she really feels she ought to go we mustn't stand in her way."

"But, Alec—with the baby coming!"

"Oh, that's a long way off. You don't have to worry about that yet awhile. When do you want to go, Sally?"

"As soon as convenient, sir, if you please."

"Very well—I'll see what can be arranged."

"Oh, Sally!—and you promised not to leave me as long as I wanted you!"

“I know, ma’am. But I didn’t foresee a thing like this, somehow.”

She was aware that she did not believe Mrs. Gordon wanted her very much any longer—that in a way, and if she might suffer no inconvenience, she would be glad to break this strongest link with the past.

“You’re quite right, Sally,” went on the doctor. “Mrs. Gordon is naturally a little upset at the idea of losing so good a servant, but of course she approves your decision. We think it shows a proper spirit.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Sally, and looked at Dr. Gordon with interest. How capable and level-headed he was, despite the obvious fact of his being in love with Mrs. Gordon. But perhaps all doctors were these things. Sally wondered a little about the future, but decided that she was glad she was, after all, to have no part in it. She would, she knew, never come back. And she was strangely relieved. She wanted to see neither the overwhelming of Dr. Gordon nor the defeat of Mildred, and it had, in some sort, to be one or the other, she felt.

In the end she was sorry, she found, about two things only—that she would never see the children again and that she was not able to say good-bye to Paul, who was at school and would come home for the Christmas holidays and find her gone. June, she fancied, would miss her a little and perhaps Master John, whose sun in the maternal sky was so soon to decline from its high noon. Mildred Gordon, once she had stopped being inconvenienced, would, Sally was convinced, forget her as completely as she felt she had already forgotten the man in whose arms she had so often lain and whose children she had borne.

In the months that followed it seemed queer to her also that of all the three years she had spent with this family she remembered most clearly and most often the morning when Gilbert Yorke had come into the nursery and wished her good-bye and she had not known that she would never see him again. The memory of her casual, indifferent farewell for months afterwards rose up at quiet moments and disturbed her.

## BOOK TWO

### THE HANSONS

#### CHAPTER ONE

(1)

Sally's grandmother, like Charles the Second, was an unconscionable time a-dying, but she did not apologise for it. Like so many other people to whom life has been neither kind nor just, she had found it sweet and did not want to be parted from it. When it was all over Sally found that a scheme concerning herself had grown up in the mind of the young man who had lodged with her grandmother for the last year of her life. He thought it would be a good idea if he took over the house in which Sally had been born and in which she had lived for so long, and that she should come to live there again with him. It took Sally a little time to grasp that this was a proposal, the first she had had, and she was surprised, just a little, to discover that she was not in the very least thrilled or tempted by it, that the idea of marrying this earnest-minded young man, or, indeed, marrying anybody, moved her to a faint disgust that was a new sensation to her.

"Why don't you take him?" asked her Aunt Grace, who had come over to act as chaperone during the rest of Sally's stay. "He's a decent chap, getting decent money—and he don't drink neither. You'll go farther and fare worse."

Sally shook her head and said: "I couldn't . . . I don't care about him that way."

"Go on with you—*wot* way? You're the same as the rest of us, I reckon, rather 'ave a man than not."

"I don't know," said Sally, "that I would."

"You got your head all full of *romance*, my girl—that's *wot's* wrong with you. Cut it out. There ain't enough to go round. . . . *Romance* ain't got much to say, I reckon, to forty shillings a week and three or four kids. All the same, I'd rather be married than not—and you'll be sorry some day you didn't take your chance when you had it."

Sally laughed.

“Don’t you think anybody else’ll ever ask me?” she said.

“Maybe, maybe not. Young men ain’t so anxious these days . . . say they can get wot they want a lot cheaper to-day. So they could yesterday . . . in some quarters.”

The blood came into Sally’s face at this thrust aimed Sally well knew where. Queer, she thought, that even death hadn’t managed to put an end to that hatred of Grace’s—that it must pursue its object even down into the grave. Kindness Daddy Yorke had wanted of people, but Grace wasn’t kind. Sally took her leave of her in that quiet detached fashion that always aroused her aunt’s antagonism.

“Don’t you fill your ’ead up with ideas too big for it,” she said, accepting Sally’s cold kiss. “We know where *they* lead you.”

“I’m all right, Aunt Grace, don’t you bother,” she said. “They’ll lead me, I reckon, to another job pretty soon.”

“Can’t see why you won’t go back to Mrs. Yorke or whatever ’er name is,” said her aunt. “Thought you was so gone on ’er.”

“I’d like a change, perhaps,” said Sally, “now that she’s married again.” Impossible to tell Grace of that feeling she had of wanting no lot or part in Mildred Gordon’s new family. She knew only too well the kind of cheap comment Grace would make.

“Stick to wot you’ve got is *my* motto,” said Grace, “if it suits you. ’Ave you told ’er you aren’t coming back?”

“Not yet,” said Sally. “But it won’t make any difference to her. She’ll keep on her temporary, I expect.”

Mildred, informed of Sally’s decision, wrote at once asking her to change her mind, but Sally refused and took a situation in which, after the first few days, she knew she would not stay, and began again the business of interviewing prospective mistresses. She was given one morning an address in Regent’s Park, where she was told to ask for Mrs. Baines, the housekeeper. The house was a pleasing one, Sally thought, but the countenance of Mrs. Baines a good deal less so. It glared at Sally while she demanded to be told why she had so stupidly divided her time between being a nursemaid, a parlourmaid and a maid-of-all-work. “A Jack-of-all-trades and master of none,” was not what *she* was looking for.

“There are no children here,” she said, as one scorning the delights of lesser mortals, “and from what you say of your duties as a parlourmaid, you

have a good deal to learn. Madam is very particular. . . . However . . .” She looked at Sally, with her calm, pale face and quietly-folded hands, as these things at least disposed her in her favour. “I daresay you will fall into her ways, and you seem to know how to behave. I hope I shall not be disappointed in you.”

Sally felt rather that she hoped she would, that she would, on the whole, prefer to be disappointed in people than not, but all she said was, “No, ma’am . . . I’ll do my best.”

“When can you come?”

“At once, ma’am.”

“Oh . . . well, I don’t know. . . . Elizabeth doesn’t leave until the end of the month. It might be a good idea if you came and worked under her for the rest of her stay.”

The door opened and in came a young woman dressed for the street. Sally started, for she would have known that tall slim frame anywhere with its bored and languid air. How extraordinary that it should be Sanchia Hanson’s house to which she had come. She got to her feet and stood quite still, her hands motionless at her side.

“I was just interviewing the young person from Mrs. Brown’s, ma’am,” said Mrs. Baines.

“Oh . . .” said Sanchia, and then her face brightened.

“Why, it’s Sally,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Sally, with a smile.

“Oh, but really, this is very nice. . . . I hope you’ve engaged her, Mrs. Baines?”

“Well, yes, ma’am . . . I think she might do. She seems rather inexperienced to me, ma’am, she hasn’t done *all* time at parlour-maiding . . . but as I tell her, I daresay she’ll learn.”

Sanchia Hanson said: “I’m sure she will. . . . Let me have a word with her myself, will you, Mrs. Baines?”

Mrs. Baines swept out of the room and Sanchia sat down in her chair.

“Sit down, Sally,” she said. “Tell me . . . why did you leave Mrs. Yorke?”

Sally explained about her grandmother’s illness and death.

“But afterwards? Didn’t you want to go back?”

“Not very much, ma’am—you see, Mrs. Yorke had married again.”

The face Sally looked at lost for a moment the calm indifference that had settled down upon it again. “Why, what happened, then, to Mr. Yorke?”

“He went away, ma’am.”

“Went away?”

“Yes, ma’am. He never came back after he went away that time, ma’am, just after you left Mayes.”

“You mean he just *deserted* his wife and children?”

“I suppose you’d call it that, ma’am . . .”

“Did he make provision for them?”

“Oh yes, ma’am. Mrs. Yorke was left quite comfortable, I believe.”

Sanchia’s eyes rested for a second upon Sally’s hands folded so quietly in her lap. She did not look up as she said:

“Was there another woman?”

“He said not, ma’am. He just didn’t want to come back, he said.”

Sanchia laughed. “But you say his wife has married again?”

“Yes, ma’am. There was a divorce. Mr. Yorke provided the evidence, though I don’t think Mrs. Yorke believed it, ma’am. . . . She thought he made it up because he wanted to make it easy for her. Even the hotel bill he sent her from Berlin.”

“*Berlin!*” said Sanchia, as if surprised. Then she laughed again. “Berlin!” and sat silent a moment. “Whom did Mrs. Yorke marry?” she asked after a while.

“A Dr. Gordon, ma’am.”

“Is that why you didn’t want to go back?”

“Partly, ma’am.”

“You liked Mr. Yorke, didn’t you, Sally?”

“Oh yes, ma’am, everybody liked him. He was always kind to me.”

Sanchia looked at her for a moment as if remembering something, or wondering if Sally had remembered.



“Don’t you like the new husband?”

“Oh yes, ma’am, but it wasn’t the same, somehow . . . especially with the new baby coming and all.”

Sanchia said nothing to that and Sally found the expression on her face a little baffling—it seemed to be angry and yet a little sorrowful and regretful. Did she, too, care that already Gilbert Yorke should have been so thoroughly superseded, forgotten? Had she been what they called “in love” with him? Or he with her? Sally had never believed the tales Annie used to collect from her friendship with the Hansons’ cook—at least not unless she remembered that night under the porch. To-day she wondered why Sanchia looked so sad, but even while she wondered, Sanchia ceased looking it. Her face wore once again its old familiar look of boredom and indifference.

“Well, Sally, I’m afraid I can’t offer you any excitement of the kind you’ve been used to. You’ll find us a little dull, I expect. When have you arranged with Mrs. Baines to come? Oh, to-morrow? With Elizabeth—yes, quite a good idea. Mrs. Baines will tell you just what your duties are. The only thing I want you to do specially for me is to understand that when I hang out upon my study door the sign ‘Do not disturb,’ it means what it says. It means that I am not free even to speak to people on the ‘phone—unless I’ve given you a note of exceptions on any particular morning. These I shall want you to put through to me—Mrs. Baines will show you how to do this. Is that quite clear?”

“Quite clear, ma’am.”

Sanchia got up.

“Then I think that’s all,” she said.

Sally got up, too.

“Thank you, ma’am, I hope I shall give you satisfaction.”

“What?”

It was so long since Sanchia had had a servant who had uttered so pious a wish that for a moment she stared. Then: “Oh yes . . . so do I, Sally,” she said, and with the long graceful stride Sally remembered so well, was gone.

Mrs. Baines came back and said coldly: “Mrs. Hanson agrees about your coming to-morrow, and in the circumstances won’t trouble to take up your references. I hope you’ll not be a source of disappointment to her. And be here by ten o’clock to-morrow morning, if you please. I hope you’ve suitable clothes? Very well . . . ten o’clock.”

Something of the admiration that the youthful Sally had given to Mildred Yorke went out in those first few weeks to Sanchia Hanson. Not because her new employer had for her Mildred's friendly air of treating her as one of the family: on the contrary, she seemed not to notice her, but if she gave an order she did it in that soft clear voice which in the old days had often covered Sally with confusion, and she easily made it known, without effort and without words, that she knew Sally was trustworthy.

"She's cottoned on to you," said Ethel Cox, who still reigned as cook. "I reckon it ain't often she gives herself the trouble of liking anybody. A stuck-up piece, I call her. And I can't say her looks appeal to me neither."

To Sally, always sensitive to physical beauty, the dark and sullen looks of Sanchia Hanson appealed as earlier had those of the fair Brünhilde type that was Mildred Yorke at twenty-eight. The way she held her head or moved across the room captured and held Sally's admiration, as the curves and gold and white beauty of Mildred had done years ago. She forgot there was a time when she had felt contempt for Sanchia because she judged her guilty of a mean intrigue with another woman's husband, and had been lavish with those favours men called "kindness" in women. The things Sally thought now of Sanchia were not harsh or contemptuous: she did not understand why this should be, nor stay to analyse it, vaguely aware that it had something to do with that broken idyll which the Yorke marriage had been to her; in which there had been things too deep for her present understanding, but which Sanchia had known and understood from the first. But indeed, all the things which belonged to that brief period at Mayes in which Sanchia had figured seemed a little unreal—and many of the tales told of Sanchia and her marriage Sally knew, in that first month of service in her house, to be untrue. Here was a household smoothly run for two people who were obviously very fond of each other and as obviously unhappy. George Hanson, as an employer, was kindly, courteous, untroublesome and as glad to have Sally among them as was his wife. His manners were a source of delight to the susceptible Sally, who knew good manners when she saw them, was eternally drawn to them, and had not a few of her own. And yet there was something which told her that George Hanson was an unhappy man and that the cause of his unhappiness was not unconnected with his wife. She remembered Annie's tales of this *ménage*—Annie, who was a friend of Ethel's—and the constant assertion that "he" disliked her "goings-on" and was jealous. And here, in a kitchen which boasted still of Ethel, she soon heard these tales repeated—heard them with quick anger and the

knowledge that Sanchia was no favourite with her staff. They thought her proud and mistrusted what they did not understand, and it satisfied, Sally saw, something ineradicably cruel and mean in their natures to say the spiteful and scandalous thing. The “servant mind” Mildred Yorke and her friends had called this manifestation, and it was so Sally thought of it, not stopping, then, to inquire whether it was not, rather, merely a manifestation of the meanest of our human attributes.

“One of the clever ones,” Ethel called the woman for whom she worked, and was quite sure *she* knew whose fault all the trouble was. (“*What* trouble?” asked Sally. “Ah, you wait, my girl, and see . . .”) Ethel never hesitated to say the most uncharitable things about her mistress. *He* was a lamb—or would be if it weren’t for her, with her gaddings about and her French mamma always taking her off to Paris and winking at all her goings-on. Sorry for him, Ethel was. Why, look at all this stuff about work at the British Museum or wherever it was. . . . Easy enough to see he didn’t believe she went to any British Museum, no, nor nothing like it, if you asked Ethel. . . . A stuck-up piece and no better than she should be. Why, look at that man all the trouble had been about just before they moved out to Mayes. . . . It was because of him they went there—to get her away from him. All worked up he’d been . . . something terrible. Awful goings-on in a respectable house. And if you asked cook, the affair wasn’t finished yet. . . . It wasn’t any business of hers, of course. . . .

“Of course it isn’t,” said Sally sharply, and called down upon her head Ethel’s scornful displeasure. “Oh yes, all took up with ’er, aren’t you? You’re that sort . . . anybody can see that. Must have a crush on somebody. I know your kind. . . . Well, don’t get all worked up about ’er, she ain’t worth it. Thinks she can do what she likes ’cos she’s supposed to be good-looking and has money of ’er own.”

To Sally it mattered not at all that Sanchia was aloof and withdrawn: it did not antagonise her or lead her to spiteful conclusions, neither did that frequent mask of indifference matter very much, for Sally had caught another look upon her face when her eyes rested upon her husband—a look which had nothing to do with indifference and which Sally remembered to have seen upon Gilbert Yorke’s, and which in the early days had made her blush. If she wished sometimes that she might have secured service with a simple, happy family, she kept the wish to herself and came, perhaps, to believe that no such family existed. People, thought Sally, had a way of looking all right on top. Without knowing it, she meant married people.

Daisy, the girl who came in twice a week to clean the brass and silver, Sally much preferred to Ethel.

“This place suits me all right,” she said. “I don’t take much count o’ wot *she* says about ’em—got their troubles like the rest of us, I daresay. Bit nervy ’e is—the war, so they say. Don’t know nothin’ about the affair she was on about—nothin’ in it, if you ask me. Don’t take much to make husbands jealous, seemingly. She makes a song about everything—just because they don’t sleep together and ain’t got no kids. Good for them, if you ask me.”

But at this point the door opened and Mrs. Baines came in and the conversation faded away. Mrs. Baines did not gossip about her employers—at least not with the kitchen.

Sally was astounded to discover how it enraged cook—and Elizabeth during her short knowledge of her—to see that sign “Do not disturb” hung outside Sanchia’s door. It seemed that Elizabeth was leaving because she had never learnt to respect it, and had interrupted her mistress once too often. She was tired after spring-cleaning and wanted to go into the country with her young man over the week-end, and Mrs. Baines had refused her permission, whereupon Elizabeth had knocked at the study door, proffered her excuse, and been promptly sacked.

“Harsh treatment!” cook called it, if you asked her. The girl was entitled to a few hours off.

“But not to disturb the mistress by asking for them when she was working,” said Sally, whose private opinion was that Elizabeth had been sacked—and quite properly—for impertinence.

“*Working!*” said cook and Elizabeth together in tones of profound disgust. “Scribbling at a desk! Call that work!”

Sally was relieved when Elizabeth’s time was up and she had seen the last of her.

(3)

Sanchia said to her husband: “This girl really is very nice. I remember I used to think so when that woman at Mayes had her. Don’t you remember her?”

“Whom? Sally or her mistress?”

“Both . . . though I *meant* Mrs. Yorke.”

“Yes, I remember Sally—but which was Mrs. Yorke?”

“Tall, fair, rather large—a Brünhilde.”

George shook his head.

“It doesn’t matter. You didn’t see much of her, anyway. Her ideas of marriage got in the way of her social appearance.”

“What sort of ideas?”

“Oriental, I believe. She thought she enhanced her value as a wife by presenting her husband with a baby every year.”

“But surely she didn’t?”

“Oh no . . . I’m joking, darling.”

“I remember Yorke—nice chap in his way. Bit of a vulgarian—never read a book in his life, I should say. Belonged to some firm that did interior decoration. Queer thing to do, I always thought. Good sort though, wasn’t he?”

“Very. Pity he married that kind of woman.”

“Why? Weren’t they happy?”

“Oh yes, I think she was. She got what she wanted, so why shouldn’t she be?”

A shadow ran over George Hanson’s face.

“Didn’t he?”

“I don’t think so.”

“How do you know that?”

The shadow now ran fleeting across Sanchia’s face. “Well, he ran away, you know.”

“Good Lord! Another woman?”

“I understand not. Just got sick of the oriental attitude, I imagine. She’s married again, Sally says—a doctor.”

“I wish I could remember her.”

“Oh, of course you remember her, darling. Tall, very fair—what most men would call a damn fine woman.”

“I thought that suburb singularly lacking in ‘damn fine women’.”

Sanchia laughed.

“Well, Mrs. Yorke made up for the deficiency. She had three lovely children—a boy and two girls—all singularly like her—as if he’d had nothing to do with the getting of them. I always wondered how she managed it. You used to admire them.”

The shadow again on his face, he said: “I never said so.”

She looked at him quickly. No, he had never said so. He never mentioned the subject of children, which was one of the reasons why she had to, so unbearable did she find it that there should be a subject he was afraid of. But long ago she had learnt how many such there were.

“I don’t believe you did, but of course you admired them. Everybody did. I liked the boy best, I think. For all the fair good looks of his mother, he was exactly like his father, darkly sullen, when he couldn’t get what he wanted.”

“I don’t think I noticed that.”

“But then you are a singularly unobservant person, darling.”

“Surely not?”

She glanced quickly at him. “Sometimes, just a little, aren’t you?”

They smiled at each other. Something deep and quiet passed between them. After a little Sanchia said: “I’m glad Sally didn’t want to go back. She’s the nicest servant we’ve ever had.”

“Hate servants,” said George, which was true.

“But nobody could hate Sally. There’s something different about her. I remember Gilbert Yorke used to say she was an anachronism.”

“Really, my dear; you do seem to have been very deeply in the family councils.”

“Oh no,” she quickly denied it, laughing a little. “Anybody might have heard him say it—probably did. It was his most famous remark—and it was true. Nothing like Sally has been seen in our kitchen since the war.”

“Is she really as good as all that?”

“Yes. Have you noticed her hands?”

“No, not specially, ’cept that she keeps ’em clean. But I’ve long ago given up judging people by their physical characteristics. Nothing in it. What’s special about Sally’s hands?”

“Their shape, but chiefly, as you say, the way she keeps them. She does everything but polish her nails. And she knows how to keep them still. And not only that part of her. I never came across anybody so restful. She carries the poise of the ages about with her.”

“Well, I’m glad we’ve got her, if you like her as well as all that. I’m glad Elizabeth has gone, anyway.”

At this moment Sally came to the door and announced that dinner was ready.

“She’s the first girl we’ve ever had who announced dinner as though she thought we were entitled to it!” said George, laughing and putting his arm through Sanchia’s.

“I know—almost as though she hopes, even, that we shall enjoy it.”

“Elizabeth used to do it as if she hoped it would poison us!”

“And as if it would serve us right. I’m afraid Elizabeth disapproved of us entirely.”

George said he had disapproved of Elizabeth.

“She was too fat. We fed her too well.”

Sanchia laughed and presently made Sally happy by the pleased and satisfied look she bent on her, serving soup.

George said: “I see they’re giving that fellow Tomlinson the Femina prize for *Gallions Reach*. What did you think of it, Sanchia?”

“Oh,” said Sanchia. “Well, I thought it . . .”

But Sally never knew, for her duties at that moment took her out of the room, which she regretted, for she had never before been in a house where writers were talked about as if they were intimate members of the family. Besides, when these two people talked about books, it meant they were happy, and already Sally knew that there were many times when they were not, without in the least understanding why. Tomlinson, Galsworthy, Wells, Brett-Young, Maurice Baring, the Sitwells, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, E. M. Delafield, Margaret Kennedy—and many others were all names to Sally indicating nothing whatever but the state of the Hanson’s matrimonial chart!

Sally had come to the Hansons in the bitter weather that was February, nineteen-twenty-nine, and had at once written to Mrs. Gordon acquainting her with the strange coincidence that had led her to service with their old neighbour at Mayes. But the weeks had gone by without any reply, and Sally, a little sadly, had reflected that Mildred did not intend to reply, that already she was forgotten. At the beginning of June, however, when Sally had put the matter out of her mind, a letter arrived, telling Sally she had another son, now three weeks old, and asking her to come down one afternoon and see him. So, on her next free afternoon Sally betook herself to Baker Street and caught an early train. Arrived at the pretty house at the foot of the green hills of the Chilterns, she found to her delight that Mrs. Pomeroy had walked down from her own house to take tea with her daughter and renew her pleasant acquaintance, as she put it, with Sally.

At first glance Mildred seemed very much the same and not uninterested in the coincidence of Sally's new situation. She held up her hands, however, at the idea of housekeeper, two maids and a morning-girl to run a house for two people.

"What does she *do* with her time?" she asked. "I suppose there are no children still?"

Sally shook her head.

"Oh, but she works . . . I don't know what it is she does—something to do with books, I think. She's out a lot at the British Museum—in the Reading Room."

"Good gracious!" said Mildred. "And we used to think it was *hats*! She doesn't *look* like the British Museum, does she?"

Sally laughed, not knowing what the British Museum was like, and remembering something she had heard Sanchia Hanson say to her husband. He had referred one morning to this appalling desire for work which drew her and so many others to the Reading Room, and she had replied: "Not for work, my lamb, *slumber*. The only thing that keeps me awake is the snoring of my neighbours."

Mrs. Pomeroy said that she did not suppose Mrs. Hanson found time hang upon her hands. She had thought her an exceptionally attractive young woman.

"Yes, but so parasitic, mother. You must do something in marriage—bear your husband children or otherwise justify your existence—mending his



socks or running his house.”

“I fancy,” said the old lady with a smile, “that her husband thought she did that all right—merely by existing.”

“They used to say at Mayes that he’d brought her down there to get her away from some love affair or other. I used to think it might be true. She always seemed so very bored and indifferent. I remember once she tried to flirt with Gilbert! Really, *quite* the wrong person! It was Christmas time; they sat on the stairs, I remember, in everybody’s way.”

Mildred laughed, and Sally had a sudden mental vision of her sailing down the stairs, drinking a cocktail and then marching up to her husband and taking him away. Just like that. The easiest thing in the world.

Mrs. Pomeroy did not join in her daughter’s laughter. She looked, Sally thought, a little sad. Mildred said: “I can’t imagine why people like Mrs. Hanson get married.”

“Oh, because men fall in love with them, my dear.”

“Men are rather stupid, it seems to me,” said Mildred. “They always fall in love with the wrong woman.”

“Oh, come, my dear—at least some of them never find it out.”

Mildred coloured faintly, and Sally had an idea that the conversation was neither as simple nor as inoffensive as it appeared. It flashed between the old woman and her daughter like a bright sword. There was distinctly an edge upon it. The old lady, Sally knew, had been fond of her first son-in-law, and at the time of his going, as Sally remembered but did not understand, had not given Mildred her undivided sympathy. As the afternoon wore on, Sally thought, a little wistfully, that she had not improved. She neither looked nor was as even-tempered as in earlier days. Perhaps, Sally reflected, you grew like that when your husband walked away from you, leaving you for no other reason than that he could stand no more of you. Sally thought that on the whole, she would rather be left for another woman, that it was a good deal less hurtful to one’s pride.

“I used to stick up for Mrs. Hanson,” Mildred said, “when people used to say things about her. I don’t like being uncharitable—but privately I always thought her rather contemptible. . . . To all intents and purposes she’s a kept woman.”

Mrs. Pomeroy said: “Because they don’t have children, you mean?”

“Well, yes, for one thing. After all, what else was marriage instituted for?”

“Companionship, perhaps. I always think Robert Louis’s definition of marriage as good as any—a friendship recognized by the police.”

“Mother!—your views on this subject are deplorable.”

“I’m willing to believe, my dear, that you think they are! But seriously, aren’t you all in somewhat of a hurry to assume that it’s Mrs. Hanson’s fault they don’t have children?”

“Oh, if she *can’t*, of course I’m sorry for her, poor thing.”

“Pity is an insolent virtue, my dear, and I can’t help thinking in young Mrs. Hanson’s case, scarcely even a virtue. But we’re forgetting Sally, my dear. I’m sure she’s dying to see the new baby, if she’s finished her tea.”

The new baby was duly brought in by the new nurse, and presently there came also Miss June and Master John, and Sally was hurt because June was shy of her and John had forgotten her, and even the new baby did no more than solemnly stare at her, denying her the tiny smile for which she longed. To them all, she was merely a stranger, and even Mildred, she felt, had wanted to see her only to hear what there was to know about Sanchia Hanson. With a strange contraction at her heart, she watched her take the baby from its nurse and put him to her white breast. The conversation flagged and Sally was left to reflect that John was growing very like his father; she could see no sign of his mother in him at all.

Presently Dr. Gordon came in and the conversation revived, but not markedly, for the doctor was obviously tired and not very interested in recollections which belonged to the days when Mildred was another man’s wife or in talk about a woman he had never met. Sally thought he looked a little harassed and bothered, and that he was glad when Mildred took the babe from her breast, gave him into the arms of his nurse, and sent June and John upstairs with them. She noticed, too, that his eyes came frequently to rest upon his wife, and that he answered questions directly addressed to him in an absent-minded fashion. He did not take much notice of Sally, and did not ask her how she liked her new place, and was glad, she felt sure, when she rose and said she must go. His car was at the door, but he did not offer to drive her to the station, which was a good half-hour’s walk, and Sally would have been surprised if he had. It was a fine evening, and she set out to walk through the sweet June air with a feeling of being released from something which had oppressed her. The birds sang and once, faintly, across the hills floated the already broken cry of the cuckoo. The outspread countryside,

with its rounded curves of the summer trees, its mingled scents of hay, syringa and a hundred things Sally could not distinguish; the way the woods ran up the hillside, the fields of sorrel and ox-eye daisies, the festooned hedges and all the galaxy of scattered June beauty, made its old appeal to Sally. She was sorry to think that she was going back to London, except when she thought of the household she had just left. She was not sorry to be leaving that. All the way back to town, when her thoughts slipped back to it, there came again that queer tight feeling in her chest. She wondered a little where Gilbert Yorke was and what he was doing, and thought how strange it should be that the son he hardly knew should be the only one of his children who in the least resembled him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### (1)

One evening in early July an unlucky chance took Sanchia and George to the Playhouse, where Somerset Maugham's *The Sacred Flame* was running. The tickets had been sent by friends who found themselves unable to use them, and George, who liked Maugham, had been eager to go. Sanchia, who liked Maugham too, and who prided herself upon knowing something about all the more important plays running at any given time in London, found to her surprise that she could recall nothing of the theme of *The Sacred Flame*, but that for some reason or other she was urgently looking for some excuse why George and she could not use the tickets. Vaguely she recalled some angry critic accusing Mr. Maugham of drawing a character "out of nature," and, with the title of the play to help her, she had connected it with some unpopular representation of motherhood. She imagined that it must have been the same kind of fuss which had been made about Sidney Howard's earlier play of maternal selfishness, *The Silver Cord*, which she and George had enjoyed. Anyway, George wanted to see *The Sacred Flame*, and Sanchia, shutting down her vague disquiet, wrote a short note of thanks for the tickets, and said no more.

On the evening of the performance, five minutes after the curtain went up, the things she ought to have remembered about the play came back to her, and she was besieged with frantic, desperate ideas of pretending to be ill so that she might get George out of the theatre. But looking at his face, she saw that she was already too late. For George, as for her, *The Sacred Flame* had become merely a play about a cruelly disabled man with an attractive wife who took a lover. The questions as to who murdered the husband, and why, were of no importance, and after his death at the end of the first act, the

play for both of them came to an end. Maurice, Stella, Colin—you had but to alter the names: George, Sanchia, Adrian. . . . With a knife turning in her heart Sanchia sat there in the dark envying from the bottom of her heart that theatreful of people to whom Maugham's clever play was no more than an evening's entertainment.

They maintained, on the way home, a conspiracy of silence about the play, spending their breath upon the actors, the beauty of Gladys Cooper; and when they arrived home they found a little pile of letters awaiting them, all, as it turned out, for George, except one that was addressed in a bold familiar hand and bore a Continental post-mark. This, thought Sanchia, as she opened it, is certainly not my evening.

"Well?" said George, as the note drooped in her hands. "What's she want?"

Sanchia gave a little twisted smile.

"Hospitality, I'm afraid, darling."

"Damn! Why does she come here? She hates it, anyway. How long for?"

"She doesn't say."

"What are we going to do about it?"

"Nothing—except let her come."

"Can't you suggest she'd be more comfortable at Brown's?"

"Oh, darling, how *does* one suggest that one's mother would be more comfortable at an hotel than at one's house?"

"Damned if I know," said George. He looked harassed and unhappy: that play had undone all the good she had thought she had wrought in the last few months. Sanchia passed him the letter, not that she wanted him to read it, though its purport was simple enough, but only because if she didn't let him read it he would think there was something in it she did not want him to see. He read it through and threw it down impatiently upon the table at his side.

"Thursday or Friday of next week, she says. At least she won't be here for my birthday."

No, thought Sanchia, even mother knows better than that.

"As the weather's fairly presentable I thought we'd take the car down and have dinner at the 'Holly Bush.'"

Her heart gave a little jump. They hadn't been to the "Holly Bush" in the valley of the Medway for years. It belonged to those days of George's leave, to those early days of headlong passion into which they had fallen almost as soon as they'd set eyes upon each other. She had hoped he had forgotten all about the "Holly Bush" and the nights of love that belonged to it. Nobody like George, she reflected, for sharpening barbs for his own breast. If she refused this suggestion of his she but handed him another.

"Oh," she said, "it's probably changed hands long ago. We'd get a better dinner in town."

"Why should it have changed hands?"

"It must be twelve years since we went there first."

"It's a hell of a time," said George. "God, I wish we could put the clock back!"

Sanchia stood there wishing she could put it forward. His tortured face tore at her. He'd be thirty-five in three days' time, she was barely thirty-one, and there'd be no peace for either of them until they were sixty! None probably even then—none until the grave closed over their heads.

"Let us go by all means, if you'd really like to," she said. It could not, after all, be any worse than a good many other things they could not avoid; worse, for instance, than that evening's play. But George had swung off already full tilt down the hill of reaction. He was afraid of the "Holly Bush" and all the ghosts it harboured, as she was.

"But it's your birthday, darling, after all."

"And no longer a matter for congratulation."

Sanchia laughed.

"Oh, why not?" she said. The look in her eyes belied her casual tone.

"That chap in the play was lucky! Why don't you do what that woman did, Sanchia? Nobody would blame you, even if they found out."

"George, don't!"

"Why not? What use am I?"

Sanchia was silent, the echoes of Maurice Tabret's despair running in her head. Even now, after ten years of it, it still seemed fantastic that this thing could have happened to her—to her and George: their life together have become merely stuff for a play!

“Why don’t you answer?”

“Why should I, darling? Questions that need not be answered . . .”

“Oh, I know, you’re decent about it—won’t go back on your bargain. You ought to have found some nice desert island where we could have brought it off perhaps, where I wouldn’t see other men looking at you—or you at them. Damn it all—why *shouldn’t* you look at them! What right have I to complain? You’re worth better things than this! God, Sanchie, I wish I’d never had you! If I hadn’t anything to remember!”

“Oh, why *not*? Why shouldn’t we remember? The things we’ve *had*! At least nobody can take them from us!”

“I can’t live on the past. I can’t bear to think of you loving somebody else. It drives me insane to think that you ever have and that some day you will again . . . Oh, of course you will! I’m not fool enough to believe you won’t give yourself to somebody again some day. A woman like you!”

Again Sanchia could find no words. She had long ago exhausted all her more convincing lies about the man who’d been her lover for nearly a year, between whom and herself there’d been that instantaneous attraction, with whom she’d parted, three years ago, in panic, and gone off with George to live in the outer suburbs.

“How do I know that you don’t see him now? You’ve plenty of opportunity.”

“I *don’t* see him. I never have seen him since . . .”

“Since I found out.”

“Since *I* found out that you felt like—like that about our friendship.”

“Friendship! You call it that?”

His voice was rising; he came over and took her roughly by the hands, pulling her to her feet.

“Will you swear to me that he wasn’t your lover . . . that you never gave him what you once gave me?”

“I couldn’t ever give anybody what I once gave you. What you had of me, what I had of you is our own for ever. Nobody can touch it!”

“Quibbles! You’re clever. I know that. Tell me what I want to know. Was Adrian Lorimer your lover?”

“I have sworn he wasn’t so often. Why go back to all this now?”

“Swear it again!”

She was aware of the thin rising note of hysteria in his voice, and it struck her, as it had done so often before, that it was the only sound in the world. The house seemed to have suspended its every activity, as if it lay listening. She knew the look she’d see on cook’s face in the morning and the particular kind of inflection there’d be in Mrs. Baines’s voice when she said good morning and came in to get her orders. She was so tired of exaggerating her pose of complete indifference to what these people who worked for her thought or imagined or said among themselves.

“Darling, *don’t!*” she said. “You’ll rouse the house. You’re upsetting yourself about nothing.”

“Swear it, then! . . . Swear it.”

“Of course I’ll swear it. I’ll swear it every day, my darling, if it’ll be any good. There aren’t any men for me but you. . . . There never will be!”

He dropped her wrists, saw the red marks he’d made upon them, and picking them up again put them to his lips. Something snapped suddenly within her and she began to cry. In a second his arms were round her, her face pressed down against his shoulder.

“Oh, darling, forgive me. I’m a swine to say these things. I make you so dreadfully unhappy.”

“No, no, you never do that!” she sobbed. “I cry because you make yourself unhappy . . . because you torture yourself with things that don’t matter.”

“They do matter.”

“Not so much as other things, the things we have and that nothing can touch.”

“I can’t help it. I’m a dog in the manger . . . I can’t bear to think of anybody else having you. If I could forget what you were like to love. . . . But I’ll never do that as long as I live.”

She held her breath against his shoulder, hearing Gilbert Yorke’s “No man could forget you who’d once had you!” and, before Gilbert, another, out there that day of heat and stillness on Blanchland Moor, that they hadn’t known was their last day together. And suddenly she hated both of them because they’d had these things of her, because they had them to remember, and because neither of them mattered to her any more. George was the only person in her life who really mattered, and she’d failed him as she’d never

have believed, in those first renunciatory days, she could possibly fail. Was there anything, she wondered, that she could ever now do for George, whom she adored, save lie and lie? . . . She went on crying out of the sheer misery of knowing that for the next few weeks, for just as long as her mother stayed with them, she'd need to lie more steadfastly than usual. Her mother was clever and ruthless. She hated this marriage, would like to see it broken. And George knew it. And she knew that she regarded him as the spoiler of her daughter's life, that she disapproved of the part he had played in it, and had never forgiven him for making her his mistress. That was how she saw it: the phrase with which she clothed it in her mind, if not in words. Sanchia, she thought (and she let George see she thought) had thrown herself away, and she lived for the day when Sanchia would think so, too. So, every time they met or were threatened with a meeting, this kind of mood was induced in George. But it would pass, as it had passed before. The winter would soon be here, and London would not see very much of Alicia Blackwood. They'd be free of her.

Sanchia stopped crying and raised her head. She had only to have patience, to keep her head, and lie and lie and lie.

(2)

George came in to find Sanchia in the tiny, well-kept garden with a book. July had turned suddenly very hot, and, year of extremes that 'twenty-nine was showing itself, Sanchia found it a little trying.

"Too hot for a walk before dinner?" he asked her.

"I believe it is."

"Then it's certainly too hot for a film *after* dinner."

Sanchia laughed.

"It's always too hot, with me, for films."

Sanchia did not like the films, which she called the bastard art, but George read C.A.L. in the *Observer* every Sunday, and went to the cinema for reasons of his own. Sanchia knew that his reasons for going there this evening were his own in a special sense, and she had never seen so many films in her life as she'd seen in the last few weeks, so she said quickly: "Mother's dining out to-night, with old friends."

George didn't say "hurrah," but his face said it for him. Sanchia laughed again.



“She’s been out all day—shopping.”

“Weren’t the Paris shops good enough for her? I thought everything Parisian was as it should be.”

“Mother can never resist shopping. . . . One way and another she’s been really nice and effacing this time, you must admit.”

George did admit it. Things had been a lot better than he thought. All the same. . . .

“I always feel she’s spying out the land, you know—seeing how much nearer you are to walking away from me.”

“But I have no intention of walking away from you.”

“Haven’t you? Well, I wish *she* had.”

“Secretly, so do I, darling.”

“Why does one have to have relations?”

“You seem to have avoided the necessity very successfully. And I have only mother.”

“Well, she’s worse than a whole army—with banners.”

“Most people think she’s a very charming old lady.”

“To me she’s only an old lady who can’t forget I seduced her daughter.”

“You may take it from me that she blames me equally for that. Most parents, even at this time of day, would take her point of view. You were an idiot ever to tell her.”

“I had to—else she’d have gone on with her talk of a nullity suit.”

“It needn’t have mattered. Why do you let her trouble you at all?”

“Because I hate, I suppose, to be disapproved of so thoroughly. First of all, it was wrong of me *not* to marry you, then it was a good deal more wrong that I *did*. Well, she’s right—in both particulars.”

“Why will you talk such nonsense? You just let her get on your nerves.”

“Doesn’t she get on yours?”

“Oh yes—but I never care what she says or allow her to persuade me that she’s right. She’s been trying all my life to impose upon me her own sense of right and wrong.”

“She thinks I’ve ruined your life.”

“Well, if *I* don’t think so?”

“Oh, but she’s right. . . I oughtn’t to have let you tie yourself up to me.”

“I don’t *feel* tied up.”

“You’re sweet to me. But it’s no life for you. Your mother’s right.”

“Has she been saying this to you?”

“No. She doesn’t have to say it.”

“I wish you wouldn’t worry about what you think she thinks . . . if *I* don’t.”

“I suppose it’s because her thoughts on the subject are the reflex of mine. My *mind*’s reasonable on the subject—if that were all. I *know* you ought to have lovers—that I ought not to mind.”

Sanchia laughed.

“Do you really believe my mother thinks I ought to have lovers?”

“Only because she’d think of them as so many nails in my coffin.”

“You’re quite wrong. She’d be disgusted. Years of Paris haven’t killed the essential Puritan in mother. She doesn’t like sex. She apologises for it—it’s better to marry than burn. I remember her when I was a girl of sixteen telling me that no really *nice* woman liked one side of marriage. . . . I suppose that was why my father was so notoriously unfaithful to her. He was very attractive. My mother used to be angry at the things he said to me. I suppose, now, he *wasn’t* very decent. All the same, I think he was right and she wrong. *He* would have understood about us—and given us his blessing.”

“But what would he think about us now? That you’d a right to console yourself. A right to love . . .”

Sanchia shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, he’s dead. We haven’t to reckon with him. And you’ve got mother all wrong, anyway; she’s the last person to hound me on to consolation—even to annoy you. And with *her* views upon sex she ought to be glad I’m delivered from the side of marriage for which she finds it necessary to apologise.”

“Then why isn’t she?”

“I don’t know,” said Sanchia, aware that she did. Even as she sat there, struggling to keep that look of gloom from her husband’s face, a leaden despair seized upon her. “Would you like a drink?”

“How soon’s dinner?”

“Ten minutes.”

“Too near, thanks. What about you?”

“No, thanks. We’re drinking Haut-Brion—I won’t spoil it. It’s the last bottle. I thought we’d have it to ourselves.”

“Good idea! But haven’t we got through that lot pretty quickly?”

“Have we? I don’t know.”

She felt guilty, thinking of the bottles she had transported to the flat, of the meals there when she had drunk it with Gilbert, who knew nothing of it save that he liked it. And thinking of the flat, too, and all the secret life that belonged to it, that had belonged three years earlier to those rooms another man had in the Temple . . .

“Do you like it so much? I’ll see if we can find some more.”

“Excellent,” said George, and reached out his hand for the book which lay upon her lap. It was Allan Monkhouse’s *True Love*.

“I looked it out for you,” Sanchia said, “but couldn’t resist reading bits of it again. I still think it the best of the novels the war produced. But too early for proper recognition, like his play, *The Conquering Hero*. You liked that, too.”

“The play, *yes* . . .”

Sanchia smiled. What he hadn’t liked, she knew, was the way she had crumpled up somewhere in the middle of the first act and sat in a sodden heap in her stall for the rest of the evening. George had regretted her sudden surprising lack of control and had encouraged her decision to see no more war plays. Poor George, who hated her to look unhappy in his company!

“Queer,” she said, “what the psychological moment has to do with literary or dramatic success. If the recognising of that moment is pretty nearly the whole of genius, as it seems to me it is, then Monkhouse hasn’t it. His play came just when the first wave of interest in war plays was receding and too soon for the other and larger wave which bore *Journey’s End* to its popular success. Yet Monkhouse’s is immeasurably the better play.”

“Do you mean a better play—or that what it says is of more importance?”

“Both, I think. The one is a transcript of something which happened. It makes its own appeal, and I imagine gained by clever production and finished acting. Monkhouse’s play is something more than a transcript of reality. It has imagination, it attacks some of the most patent and easy lies about war and what it does to men. It isn’t only war it shows up, but peace. It has the spirit that is in *Mary Arden* in *True Love*, and it’s extraordinarily good to read.”

As she talked she saw that gradually she was drawing him away from his mood of dangerous introspection. They sat there talking of books and plays and of ideas as if they were not the material out of which books and plays were made, as if they were two ordinary married people for whom the situations and problems in literature were merely academic, for whom sex and love were merely a part of many interesting worth-while things, not something which circumstances had pushed into the front of life, making it for ever impossible that they should fall into proper perspective.

The fatigue presently with which Sanchia sat down to dinner, and hoped the meal would be worthy of the wine, was not, she knew, entirely attributable to the heat. That elaborate pretence, that careful conversational game took more out of her than a dozen minor heat-waves. But she was glad Ethel had iced the soup. It was very good. After all, whatever her morning face, Ethel could cook, and she had common sense about the relation of weather to food. Perhaps, she reflected, generously, she couldn’t help her face. She smiled when George praised the soup, when she looked up to see his smiling face. She didn’t really care about anything but the fact that George should go on looking happy and normal. She was ready to put up with anything if it contributed to that end. That was her business in life, keeping George happy. Oh, why did she forget it and think sometimes that there were things of equal importance in the world—desires and impulses of her own? Her face saddened as she knew that she would go on forgetting it; that she would forget it quite as often as she remembered it; that that, too, was an item in the sum-total of her miserable failure, an unending part of that putting a hand to the plough and looking back. Contempt for herself washed over her in wave after cold wave. Fine, she had thought herself once, fine and fastidious. She was neither. She was that miserable creature, a woman who wanted the best of both worlds.

(3)

After dinner as they sat by the open window, beyond which the summer night passed like a pageant, whilst George played Schubert to her on the

gramophone, she picked up Monkhouse's novel again and read in it here and there. It's sound: it's true! she thought, her eyes lighting upon those phrases of the German woman's to the sister of her English husband. *A flair of passion is not enough. We want to be wise and safe and permanent . . . Geoffrey and I are going to snatch something beautiful out of all this. We have a compact. We are not going to be small and mean.*

She closed the book softly and put it aside. She, too, had meant to snatch something beautiful out of the situation into which the war had flung her. But she hadn't done it. The bitterness and frustration of life encompassed her, even while she smiled and talked and listened to George's Schubert.

## CHAPTER THREE

### (1)

Sally quickly realised that Mrs. Blackwood was no favourite with her daughter's staff. Sally herself considered her the most marvellous old lady she had ever seen—not really old at all, certainly much younger than Mrs. Pomeroy—elegantly dressed, with marvellously shingled hair untouched with grey, a delicate complexion, and most beautiful clothes and jewellery. These things, however, counted for nothing in the kitchen, where she was held to be haughty and proud beyond bearing. It was true she required her breakfast in bed, and that her bell would ring three times to everybody else's once, and that nearly all the telephone calls were for her, and that she was annoyed if, when Mrs. Hanson's study was disengaged, you forgot to put her calls through to her there. It was also true that she gave her orders in a peremptory tone and never thanked you for anything whatsoever, however much trouble you took, but what seemed most to upset everybody, even the starched Mrs. Baines, was her trick of talking before them all in French. If she was speaking English when any of them appeared upon the scene, she immediately changed. This apparently even Mrs. Baines regarded as a deadly insult—Sally couldn't understand why. Neither did she understand why they should regard her as a disturbing family influence and a typical mother-in-law.

“Trouble!—that's what *she* brings!” said Ethel. “You mark my words: anyone can see 'e hates her. They're always out with each other after 'er visits and after the mistress comes back from visitin' 'er in France. Pity she don't stay in the bloomin' country. She's Frenchified enough, 'eaven knows, what with the lingo and 'er clothes that are a fair disgrace. Look at the dress

she 'ad on the other night they went to the theatre. Well . . . I *ask* you. And all that makeup, on an old woman like that! Disgustin', I call it!"

Oh, well, thought Sally, and was silent but of the same opinion still.

(2)

Mrs. Blackwood certainly approved of Sally.

"Where did you get that girl, Sanchia?" she asked her daughter.

"From the registry office, as it happens. But I'd met her before, in the service of a woman we got to know at Mayes."

"She has very nice manners."

"Yes—they're natural."

Mrs. Blackwood laughed.

"The woman at Mayes couldn't have imparted them, you mean?"

"Do I? I don't know. I think I just meant that Sally is one of Nature's ladies. Anyway, I didn't know her former mistress very well. I don't think I got to know any of the women of Mayes very well. I don't think they approved of me."

"Why not? What did they know about you?"

"Nothing. Not that that troubled them, though!" Sanchia laughed. "Not one of our successful experiments, I think, going to live in the very outer suburbs."

"George's experiment, wasn't it? You shouldn't have allowed him to make it."

"Oh, why not? Something really drastic had to be done. Digging me out was the only way to the *status quo*."

"You behaved very stupidly. You had the situation in your own hands if you'd cared to have been straightforward. You should have made George see reason."

"Over Adrian, you mean?"

"Of course, over Adrian."

"I'm afraid the task was beyond me."

"Only because you're so sentimental and because you let George play upon your feelings with his hysteria and threats of suicide. Those who

threaten don't perform."

"I wish I could be sure of that."

"George knows how to get his own way with you, but he can't blame you for what happened. He'd no right to have married—you of all people."

"Why me of all people?"

"Well, he knew something about you already."

"Because we'd lived together before this happened?"

"Yes, of course I mean that. He *knew*. There's no excuse for him. Why should he imagine that a girl who'd had so little self-control that she couldn't wait until she was twenty-one is going to control herself married to an impotent husband when other men make love to her?"

"You think very badly of me, mother."

"Oh no, but I recognise you are your father's daughter. He thought sex important—and found a lot of women to agree with him. George was unlucky, I suppose. There are girls who would not have minded."

"But I'm not one of them? I expect you're right. But it isn't George's fault. I *wanted* to marry him. I insisted, even after I knew. I think I'd have dragged him to the altar if he hadn't gone willingly."

"I don't doubt it. You were the usual kind of romantic fool. But life isn't romantic—as you're probably beginning to find out. You'll not be happy until you're properly married and with two or three children to occupy your mind."

"Oh, mother, *must* you talk like this?"

"I came over to talk like it."

Sanchia sighed.

"I was afraid you had. But it's quite useless, you know. I shall never leave George and shall never be 'properly married,' as you call it, and presumably, therefore, shall never have two or three children to occupy my mind."

"Why won't you leave George?"

"Partly because there's nobody I want to leave him for."

"Then what about Adrian Lorimer?"

"I didn't want to leave George for Adrian."

“Your father’s daughter, indeed! Is that what you want me to think?”

Sanchia shrugged her shoulders. “As you will!”

“My dear child, do be honest with yourself! You made this mad marriage because your conscience prompted you to it—because you’d lived with George before his injury, and wouldn’t like to have it known that you’d thrown him over after it.”

“No, no,” cried Sanchia, all her indifference gone. “Indeed, it was nothing of the sort. My conscience had nothing to do with it. I hadn’t one over George, ever. I married him because I loved him—and because I thought I could do it.”

“Very well. But then you found you couldn’t. Consequently—other men.”

Sanchia shrugged her shoulders again: indifference once more clothed her from head to foot. She reached for a cigarette and lighted it.

“I welcomed the appearance of Mr. Lorimer, whom I take to be the first of them. I thought you were serious.”

“I was, if you mean I was very strongly attracted to him—that I was ‘in love’ with him, to use the usual phrase.”

“Then why not have allowed George to take his legal remedy?”

“We never, either of us, got as far as suggesting any such thing. As you know, I strenuously denied that Adrian was my lover.”

“I thought you were quite mad.”

“No, I simply saw that George would never understand. He took the idea of my having a lover so badly I couldn’t assert it was a fact. I lied and lied all the time. I made Adrian lie, too.”

“If you’d just gone away, things would have adjusted themselves. George would have had to face up to it.”

“But I didn’t want to go away from George. Even Adrian knew I’d never do that.”

“You wanted your lover and to keep your position. To stand well with George and the world.”

“I didn’t want to leave George and I didn’t want him to know the truth about Adrian. I meant, at first, that he should. Years before, when I’d laughed at the idea, he’d tried to pretend he’d not mind if I had lovers—at



least, that he'd understand. When the trouble with Adrian began I realised what those protestations were worth. George frightened me. I saw that the only thing to do was to lie—and to get rid of Adrian.” She laughed. “It wasn't so difficult, as it turned out, as he wanted to go to America.”

“You've never seen him since?”

“Not once.”

“You meant it to be a complete break?”

“I believe so, but honestly I don't know. Nothing mattered just then but getting George back to normal. I've never been sure about Adrian. . . . Sometimes I think it would have always been the same, however we'd met. Even if my marriage had been normal, I mean. I don't know anything about myself any more.”

“And how do you explain the man you brought to Paris last autumn? Were you violently in love with him, too?”

“I wasn't in love with him in the least. And I didn't bring him to Paris. He was passing through Paris *en route* for Berlin and other places.”

“He stayed nearly three weeks, I remember. . . . Are you going to deny that you went off with him for a week?”

“Let us be accurate. For ten days.”

“And he, too, is now a thing of the past?”

“I'm afraid so.”

“Is that all you have to say about it?”

“I think so. There doesn't seem to be much to say of it you'd understand. I was sorry for him. He was going around rather wildly with women, getting nothing out of it and making overtures even to a servant in his house. Drinking heavily, too. I was sorry for him, and I liked him. He liked me, too. I became friends with him because I thought I could help him until he could go back to his wife.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“Well, his wife was going to have another baby. She made rather a habit of it.”

“Good God! Do you think it part of your mission in life to comfort men temporarily deprived of their wives?”

“Not in the least.”

Again that look of indifference swallowed up every other expression upon Sanchia's face.

"Then what on earth *do* you mean?"

"I felt, somehow, that we were kindred spirits. I saw he was unhappy, deteriorating, going to pieces . . . I asked him to come to see me—the rest just happened. He wasn't my type of man, but he was an attractive creature."

"Sexually, I suppose you mean."

"No, I meant—just generally attractive."

"And he found you attractive too?"

Sanchia shrugged her shoulders.

"Mutual accommodation, I suppose?"

"You suppose rightly."

"Easily begun, easily finished."

"Not so easily finished, certainly. Unfortunately, he fell a little bit in love with me. I wouldn't have minded that, if he had not also fallen out of love with his wife."

"I see. He, too, wanted you to run off with him. Instead you gave him ten days in Paris?"

"You sound very vulgar."

"You have *been* very vulgar."

"It didn't *seem* vulgar, somehow."

Suddenly Sanchia began to laugh.

"To think!" she said, "that George thinks you the evil influence of my life!—that you encourage me to 'console' myself for his marital shortcomings! Why, you are as Victorian as George's conscience."

"I see nothing amusing in the situation. I only see that it has to come to an end."

"What do you mean?"

Sanchia had stopped laughing. She looked suddenly a little frightened.

"You don't imagine I *like* to see my daughter playing the harlot?"

Sanchia blanched, but said nothing.

“You don’t like the word?”

“Did you expect I should?”

“People never do like things called by their right names.”

Sanchia looked bored.

“It so seldom does any good, anyway.”

“Perhaps this time it will recall you to your senses. Either lie on the bed you have made or make another one and lie on that.”

Sanchia laughed.

“With somebody else?”

“You put it vulgarly but yes, that is what I do mean. Put up with your bargain with George or throw it up. You can’t expect to be allowed to run around for the rest of your life with any man you take a fancy to. You’re only thirty-one. You’ve had three men at least already. There may be others for all I know. How many more are there going to be before you’re forty?”

“God only knows!” said Sanchia, and reached for another cigarette.

(3)

After a long while Mrs. Blackwood said: “But, Sanchia, you can’t possibly mean to go on like this!”

“I never mean to go on like it!” said Sanchia. “It seems to happen.”

“You see! It’s this unnatural marriage. It’s demoralising you! Oh, my dear child, you must have a little courage and put an end to it!”

“But *is* it my marriage?” said Sanchia. “I wish I knew.”

Her mother made a little gesture of despair.

“My dear child, of course it is! For Heaven’s sake, don’t get introspective and analytical like these wretched modern novels you’re so fond of.”

“But you yourself said just now that I was” (she smiled) “the daughter of my father.”

Another gesture of despair from her mother.

“But I put it on to the wretched circumstances of your marriage . . .”

“Which can’t possibly affect the fact. No, I’m inclined to think you’re right. I like to excuse myself by circumstances, but I don’t believe they either excuse or explain me. I’d have been like this, anyway. It’s a pretty picture I draw of myself as a faithful, single-minded wife, and that’s all. I’m what you said I am, I fear—my father’s daughter. Wanton. A harlot.”

“For goodness’ sake, don’t use those words!”

“You used one of them yourself.”

“Not in that cold-blooded fashion. How can you talk so . . . say those things of yourself? Just as if they don’t matter.”

“I don’t know that they do. Perhaps, after all, chastity is merely part of the morality made in the past for the subordination of women. It had a commercial value then. The apotheosis of virginity, so far as I can see, goes hand in hand with the low position of women. Virginity and chastity have come to be the *sine qua non* of feminine virtue. I don’t believe I ever accepted this dogma myself, but I must have thought I did.”

“Sanchia! Have you no decency? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“No, merely a little disappointed, I think. You see, some part of me admires tradition and somehow I’ve got hold of a lot of idealistic ideas. I’d got quite used to thinking of myself as somebody rather fine and fastidious—one life one love sort of thing.”

“You’re talking arrant nonsense. I won’t listen to you. What would come to the world if all women got these ideas into their heads?”

“Lots of them have. Some of them even act upon them. But tradition dies hard and—besides, most of them can’t afford to. The economic factor accounts, quite as much as tradition, for chastity in women.”

“And fear of results. Surely you forget that!”

“Oh no . . . But is there much fear to-day?”

“I am ashamed of you, Sanchia. I don’t know what to say to you . . .”

Ever so faintly Sanchia shrugged her shoulders.

“Don’t say anything. I’m not really talking to you—I’m talking to myself, trying to explain myself to myself—to get things straight.”

“They’re very far from straight. Every word you say seems, to me, to make them more crooked. Why, if you think like this, are you so insistent about not dissolving your marriage?”

“Because I like George to live with, even like this. I’ve never met the man I’d rather share a home with. That, I suppose, is why I keep kidding myself that if things had been different I’d have been faithful, the usual kind of single-minded bourgeois wife.”

“So you would have been, of course. Come now, there has been enough of this silly theorising. Apart from anything else, it’ll end some day in scandal—and you’ll not like that. Supposing this woman whose husband you went off with in Paris finds out and brings an action?”

“She has—but not against me. He went on to Berlin. There was a girl there, or so he alleges.”

“How do you know all this? Are you still seeing him?”

“Oh no, I don’t suppose we shall ever meet again. I feel a little sorry about him. No use explaining. You wouldn’t understand.”

“No more explanations, for heaven’s sake! You’ve had a lucky escape. I hope it will be a warning to you.”

Sanchia looked suddenly very bored.

“I must go, anyway,” she said. “I’ve some books to get out at the Reading Room. That’ll take all the afternoon. There’ll be no time left to look at them if I don’t get there soon. Will you be in to dinner?”

“Yes . . . no. I don’t know. I feel very upset and rather as if I shall never want any dinner again.”

“Oh, you will,” Sanchia laughed. “I hope you will. I’ve ordered something you’re specially fond of. . . . Good-bye.”

She went off, still laughing. . . .

(4)

When Mrs. Blackwood went back to Paris she took her daughter with her. George did not demur, but Sanchia knew he hated it, that he had hoped she would refuse the invitation. But Sanchia, who loved Paris, and was exhilarated at the very thought of it, though she knew her mother took her only to keep an eye upon her, spent some time trying to urge George to come too. She couldn’t think why. Was it to please George—or to placate her mother? Did she really want to do the latter? Did she really believe she would give her away to George? She didn’t think so. Not yet, anyway—she didn’t take all that talk seriously, was still inclined to believe her more sinned against than sinning.

Sally thought the house very quiet and strange without Sanchia, and was sorry for George. She always felt happy when she could take him a letter bearing a French stamp, which for the first fortnight was almost every day. Then, suddenly, they began to thin out, and Sally got to look away from his face as she presented the post. He came in almost every evening to dinner: sometimes he brought a friend, but more often he was alone. Sally often heard the gramophone playing all the evening, when she went to bed, and far into the night. Meeting it for the first time, Sally found she loved good music, and would sit up in bed most eagerly to listen. But though sometimes it struck her as pathetic that the master should be down there playing to himself like that, she would have liked to smack Ethel's face when she passed judgment upon the situation.

"I don't 'old with all this running about for married women. It ain't natural. Serve 'er right if 'e found somebody else while she's away—that it would. And I bet *she's* 'aving a good time all right."

"Don't blame 'er," said Daisy. "I would, if I got the chance, I know that!"

Sally said nothing. She was still wrapt in admiration of married bliss, of monogamous love. She thought: You've only got to look at him to see he'd never even *look* at another woman, and she forgot she had once thought the same of Mildred and Gilbert Yorke. Neither, if she had remembered, would it have meant anything to her. For her ideals were still simple and romantic, her standards not in the very least comparative. She believed, without knowing it, in husbands and wives—not in lovers. She was, in short, Eliza Dunn's grandchild at this stage a good deal more than she was Louisa's daughter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

(1)

Sanchia came back just as the fine weather came to an end. Through streets wet for the first time for more than a month George had taken the car to Victoria to meet her, and Sally, standing at the open door, saw her jump out of the car and run up the steps as if she had been so anxious to get home that she had run all the way, and had somehow annihilated the Channel, choppy to-day and ill-tempered, as foretold on the wireless over-night. She certainly did not look, Sally reflected, as though the antics of what Mrs. Blackwood had referred to as "La Manche" had affected her at all. She had a bright colour in her cheeks and a dancing light in her eyes, and she said:

“Hallo, Sally, it *is* good to see you again!” as if she really meant it. She’d had a lovely time, she said, in reply to Sally’s softly-spoken inquiries and pushing about with her foot the luggage George was bumping down in the hall, but it was also lovely to be back. Sally nearly dissolved in admiration as she stood there picking up this and that and waiting for the last package to be dumped inside and she could shut the door.

“What time’s dinner, Sally?”

“Mrs. Baines put it back, madam, until eight. She thought you wouldn’t want to be rushed.”

“Oh, George, be an angel, then, and take the car—or she’ll just stand there running her battery down.”

“Righto!” said George, and ran down the steps again. Sally shut the door.

“Take these up to my room, Sally, will you . . . and turn on my bath. I’ll be up in a minute.”

She moved away to the telephone, which hung in the hall. The number came through almost at once. Going on up the stairs Sally heard her say:

“Yes . . . just now. This minute . . . I don’t know . . . I’m full of good intentions . . . I can’t be sure. Friday, I think . . . No, I’ll ring *you* . . .”

The click of the instrument followed Sally up the stairs, and as she turned at the top she saw Sanchia standing just by the telephone, quite still as if lost in thought.

The stately approach of Mrs. Baines recalled her with a start. It was Monday, and by all the rules Mrs. Baines should have been off duty. So outside Sanchia’s experience was it for any of her servants to vary their arrangements to suit hers (save, as she was coming to know, Sally) that she had taken it for granted Mrs. Baines was off seeing her married niece at Kew or wherever it was. How much, she wondered, had she heard of what she had been saying on the ’phone? Nothing, said Mrs. Baines’s admirable manner. Naturally, after so long an absence, ladies had pressing matters to attend to . . . She hoped Sanchia had had a good crossing . . . such a pity the weather should have broken just at this time . . . Was there anything she would like before her bath? A glass of sherry and a biscuit, or a little brandy, perhaps? They’d said on the wireless last night that the Channel was going to be a little unpleasant.

“It wasn’t, very,” Sanchia said, and there wasn’t anything she wanted except her bath, and with the mechanical smile she kept for all her servants

save Sally, went off to have it.

In her room she found Sally busy disposing her belongings. She flung off her hat, ran her hands through her dark hair and stretched her arms above her head.

“There’s something there for you, Sally . . . no, the other and . . . Yes, there you are. I hope it will fit.”

Out of its layers of tissue paper Sally shook a little black afternoon frock, and Sanchia laughed at her face of frank delight.

“Oh, *madam!*—a frock from *Paris!*”

“No other,” said Sanchia. “Take these down for the others, will you?” She pressed three neat packages into Sally’s hands and watched her go out of the room. Then she sat down in front of her glass and looked at herself.

“Help—it *does* show!” she thought, and shut her eyes for a second. “God! what a fool I am.” A look of bitterest self-contempt ran over her face, eclipsing its bright tell-tale look. She shrugged her shoulders, got up and dragged her frock over her head, slipped out of her underclothes, got into a yellow dressing-gown, and went to her bath.

George was in her room when she came back. She shut the door, stood with her back against it and said faintly: “Hallo—you ought to be dressing!” She saw him look up from his contemplation of the various Tauchnitzes with which she had defied the Customs and which Sally had turned out upon the table, and came forward.

“Clever of me, wasn’t it? They opened the other case . . . your *Cointreau* was in it, so I had to pay. Here, let me get it.”

She pulled out the bottle and handed it to him.

“That was kind of you . . . we’ll open it to-night—or have you had all the *Cointreau* that’s good for you the last month?”

“I? Practically none. I’ve been well looked after. Mother’s been a dragon.”

“Good for her. But you look as though it’s agreed with you . . . Continental food and all.”

“Oh, I’m awfully fit. I tell you I’ve been well looked after. Has Mrs. Baines looked after *you?*”

“Most adequately . . . Come here, darling.”



“I am here.”

“Closer.”

He sat down on her bed, drawing her upon his knee. She yielded herself to his embraces, quietly and with no show of passion. Her head against his, her hand gently stroked his hair. To be still and inexpressibly tender—these things at least she had taught herself long ago. But to-night they were less easy than usual, and to-night of all nights he had to think her satisfied and tranquil, and very pleased to be home again, as indeed she was. But the excitement which had come upstairs with her had gone. She felt empty, depleted. Yet these occasions were better now. She remembered how, at first, she had dreaded them.

George got up, still holding her.

“You’ve been away all the fine weather,” he said.

“Oh, but it was fine in Paris, too.”

He turned up her face and kissed her. “Get dressed!” he said. “You must be starving.”

He picked up his bottle of *Cointreau* as he went out, smiling at her from the doorway.

When she was alone she took out of her handbag a folded envelope from which she drew a note. She opened it and read: *Don’t talk rot! Of course we must meet. Ring me up when you get back and say where and when. Adrian.*

She had not meant to ring him up—but she had before she had been five minutes in the house, had got rid of George for the purpose, too . . . It was true that she had done it because she was afraid he would ring her if she didn’t. He was capable of it, she knew. But she hadn’t said what she meant to say. She’d meant to refuse to see him, and she’d almost committed herself to a meeting on Friday. At the memory of his voice across the wires her excitement revived—the old excitement she knew so well. She hadn’t been able to keep it out of her own voice. Useless to pretend Mrs. Baines hadn’t noticed . . . Oh, damn!

As she burnt the note to powder, she thought: It’s fate . . . to meet like that, right at the end!—and shivered as if she were frightened. And yet it was obvious she couldn’t avoid meeting him for ever, now that he was coming to live in London again. Yet to meet him, like that, walking down the Champs-Élysées, neither of them alone . . . that very last afternoon—she hadn’t expected that. But the telephone call he’d put through that same evening to

her hotel, that hadn't surprised her, nor the next morning's note, making hay of all the protestations she had poured down the 'phone. Nothing surprised her. She had always known that some day they would meet again. And she knew what would occur if they did. Unless a miracle happened. And miracles didn't . . . She felt curiously left—forsaken, and as she went downstairs that little sensation of fear went with her. The curtain was still down: but the scene was set. Already every detail of it was familiar to her. She was an actress for whom her part was already written.

(2)

For the next two evenings there were people to dinner, and on the third a theatre party to His Majesty's, to see *Bitter Sweet*. The house had suddenly become very lively. Everybody was in a good temper, even cook, appeased perhaps by the presents which had travelled back with Sanchia from Paris, though she snorted a little because it hadn't happened before. She would have snorted still more if she had known she owed the event to Sally, for whom Sanchia had bought the black frock only to realise the impossibility of singling Sally out for her attentions. Sanchia, bored by the thought of spending time choosing presents for the others, wished before she had done that she had not been so impulsive about the frock for Sally.

On the Friday following Sanchia's return on the Monday, Sally heard her say to her husband at breakfast:

“Don't hurry home on my account. I'll go and see *Metropolis* if I feel like it,” and George had replied: “Oh, I'll be in about elevenish. Mathers isn't a late bird.”

Later, Sanchia went to the door to see him off. It was a fine morning, with a crisp note in the air and early October's yellow sunshine. As she came indoors the telephone bell rang. She picked up the receiver.

“Hallo!” she said.

Then suddenly the colour came into her face, the remote look so usual to her went out of it.

“Oh . . . This very minute . . . But you promised you wouldn't . . . You never gave me time to—you're so impatient! I can't possibly now . . . What? Oh, about seven. All right. Good-bye.”

She hung up the receiver just as Sally came out of the breakfast-room with her piled-up tray. She said:

“Oh, Sally, ask Mrs. Baines to come up a moment, will you?” And that lady arriving, she was told nobody would be in to dinner that evening, that Mr. Hanson had a business dinner engagement, and she herself would dine out, as she would not be leaving the British Museum until closing time. Anybody who wished to go out might do so.

“Then if it’s all the same to you, madam, I’ll take the opportunity of going to see my grand-niece. Born on Wednesday, madam. Going on quite well, they say Lucy is, but I’d be glad to go and see her.”

“Certainly,” said Sanchia. “But it seems only yesterday that she was married!”

“Fourteen months to-morrow, madam,” said Mrs. Baines, as who should say better late than never. Sanchia left it at that.

At eleven o’clock Sanchia went out. It is true that she went to the British Museum, and that she read for an hour in the Reading Room; but it is certainly not true that she stayed there until closing time. Why, she wondered, as she went out into the sun at exactly half-past twelve, did her lies have to be so very circumstantial? And why, in Heaven’s name, hadn’t she stayed at home long enough to have some lunch there? The idea of going and eating somewhere by herself was always loathsome to her, and there’d be nothing at the flat. However, the day was fine and a walk would do her good. She turned in the direction of Tottenham Court Road, and found herself walking up Oxford Street—the most hateful street in London, she thought, down which nobody would walk for pleasure. But de Quincey, she remembered, hadn’t agreed with her. He’d walked there, a hundred years ago, with his devoted Ann. Well, there were less people in the world in those days, and women had other things to do than walk up and down and stare in shop-windows.

Sanchia stared in none. She walked straight on until she came to Maison Lyons, when she went inside, bought some flowers, something cold, with salad, for lunch, some fruit, and a large box of Turkish delight. She then asked the commissionaire to call her a taxi, and packing herself and her purchases inside it, left the driver to deal with Oxford Street.

As they approached the flat Sanchia stopped the taxi to get out and buy butter, milk and bread at a dairy, and sighed with relief when a few minutes later she put her key in the door and let herself in.

It was two months since she had set foot there, and though the place was in order, dust lay thick on furniture and floor. Sanchia covered up her hair, equipped herself with overall and gloves, and removed as much of this as

was absolutely necessary; then she opened all the windows, washed her hands, creamed and powdered her face, combed her hair, arranged her flowers and sat down to eat the cold lunch with which she had equipped herself. This over, she unlocked drawers, took out a pile of papers, turned them over rather wearily, pushed half of them back again and sat frowning at the remainder. Abruptly she remembered something, took off the receiver and asked for a number. When it came, she said: "I want dinner this evening—for two, please, about seven-fifteen. Miss Blackwood. Yes, please. No, I don't mind what you give me—but clear soup, not thick, and I want *cœur à la crème* to finish. No, I'm tired of *pêche Melba*. . . . *Coupe Nesselrode*—what's that? . . . *What?* Chestnuts? Are they to be had? Very well . . ."

She hung up the receiver with a smile which speedily converted itself into a sigh. The noises of the little street were insistent and numerous: She reached out a hand and shut down the window over her desk, after which she worked until the little clock on the mantelshelf struck four. She put down her pen, stretched her arms above her head and became aware that she had a headache. She got up, hunted for aspirin, stretched herself out on the divan and closed her eyes.

She'd been a fool to do this. To start all over again like this. Too late now to go back . . . though she rather thought she might have done but for the ordered dinner. But what then? Adrian would only ring her up at the house, as he had done this morning to say: "*When* am I going to see you?"—and then it would begin all over again—all that old trouble with George, those terrifying scenes she could scarcely bear even now to remember. No, better to see him and have done with it.

She wondered idly how long he'd been back from America. The silence of these years wrapped him about—even professionally he had not spoken: no book had come from him since they parted. Was he dropping out? He didn't, that afternoon in Paris, look "dropped out." Presumably one doesn't write whilst trotting about America with a lecture engagement list. She wondered what he was like as a lecturer and why the Americans allowed themselves to be lectured to so much. Sheer good nature, she supposed. Well, even if Adrian talked rot he was pleasant to look at while he was doing it. It never had been his conversation which had attracted her. She could remember no single occasion when she had found Adrian intellectually satisfying: he wrote books that were by no means negligible, but it was George not Adrian with whom she could exchange literary, as other opinions. The truth of that was, she knew, that though Adrian was interested in books he was not very much interested in other people's views about

them, certainly not in hers. And, as with her, it was not her conversation by which he was attracted.

The clock struck five. She opened her eyes, saw that it spoke the truth, and shut them again. She was aware that she was beginning to feel better, not only as to her aching head, but as to mood and *moral*. She had stopped feeling excited long ago; now she felt critical, carping, detached and unimpressed, which was much better. It was vastly improbable she'd feel about him in that old devastating fashion, for three years was a long time. No merely physical passion lasted across so great a space of time, across so long a silence. The world was full of a number of things and she didn't doubt that Adrian had managed to find quite a fair proportion of the pleasantest of them. For a certainty there would have been other girls. He was possibly engaged, married even. . . . No, she didn't believe that. He wouldn't, in either case, have taken so much pains about following up that casual meeting—and he wouldn't have looked as he did, either. No hope there. . . .

She realised with a little start that she was annoyed with him for ringing up that morning after she'd expressly said across the Paris 'phone that that was a thing he must not do, ever, at any time. Why had he to have his own way? Five minutes sooner and George would have been there in the hall, in all likelihood would himself have answered the 'phone. When she thought of that it was not mere annoyance which seized upon her but a deep dark fury of anger that made her clench her hands. Adrian had professed pity for George (and that had made her angry too), but she suspected him of nourishing contempt at the back of his mind not only for George but for her, because she had so little courage, because she had never been able to bring herself to leave him. She knew that never for a single moment had he even pretended to believe that she didn't *want* to leave George; that what she wanted, rather, was not to feel like this when Adrian looked at her, put his hands upon her. Adrian, she was aware, was not among those of his sex who can understand that, though a man can dominate a woman physically, he does not control her mind. George was the only man she had ever known who'd understood that, who left her mind alone. Perhaps that was why she clung to him still; why, despite his moods and despairs, she still found George good to live with.

The whirligig of her thoughts persisted, maddening and stupid, setting her down just where she had begun. Nothing emerged, nothing mattered, save that George must never know, whatever happened, that she and Adrian had met again.

By a quarter to seven Sanchia was ready. The table was laid, the cigarettes and sherry put out, and she herself, with a book and an excited pulse, awaited the ringing of the front-door bell. Outwardly she was calm and remote in a long-sleeved frock of blue which had been her second choice. She had flung off her first because it was too short and too . . . festive. She wouldn't have him think she had dressed up for the occasion.

At seven promptly the door-bell rang. She put down her book at once but took her time about reaching the door. She felt suddenly very cold. She lifted her hand, opened the door and found herself smiling at the man who stood, hat in hand, on the mat outside.

"Very punctual," she said. "Come in."

He came in, hung up his coat, hat and stick on a peg inside the little hall and turned to look at her. Her heart moved painfully in her breast. She thought: "Heavens! Am I to feel like this about you for ever?"

"You haven't changed," he said. "Time deals with you lightly."

She laughed.

"And with you, surely?"

He looked, she thought, as if he considered that a rather unnecessary remark. He was a man. Everybody knew that Time's dealings with a man were infinitesimal. All the same, there was *something*. You didn't get off scot-free, she thought, and was glad, remembering how, after she'd said good-bye to him, she had wanted to die. Briefly, as is always the way on these occasions. There were a few grey streaks in his abundant hair which had not been there three years ago, and something restless and dissatisfied about the lean face otherwise so little changed. That, however, was quite as likely to be due to the exigencies of the literary life as to anything she had done to him. Somehow that made her smile.

"Come in," she said, "and sit down."

He followed her into the sitting-room, where he sank into the chair she pulled forward to the fire and cast his eyes about the room. The busy-looking desk with its bowl of flowers, the neatly-set dinner table, the one picture hung over the fireplace upon which his gaze lingered.

"Tyrol!" he said. "When did you go there?"

"The spring before last I saw that in Innsbruck. I think it's very clever."

“Clever use of colour.”

As she handed cigarettes and sherry they talked of Tyrol, more or less intelligently, considering that both of them were thinking of something else, and just as the subject was beginning to give out, the front-door bell gave its sharp ting-ting.

Unconcernedly, Adrian continued to drink his sherry. Sanchia put hers down and went to the door. As, when she returned, Adrian showed no curiosity about her absence and the murmur of conversation, she said: “That was the dinner.”

“Dinner?”

“Yes. Didn’t you expect any? It ‘comes in.’ I’ve no maid. This is merely a work-place.”

“Your idea?”

“My mother’s.”

“Oh. . . . Do you do so much work?”

“I have done a fair amount lately. Translations.”

She told him about them. He said: “But why a flat? Are the translations so very remunerative?”

She told him about that too.

“Why must you work?” he asked at the end of it.

“I suppose because I don’t fancy myself as an idle woman.”

“You can’t expect any servant to respect that kind of thing.”

“I don’t. Have some more sherry?”

“No, thanks.”

She thought, as they finished their cigarettes: This is excellent. If we can keep it up. . . . She said: “Then what about dinner?”

“As you like.”

“It ought to be eaten soon.”

She got up and came in bearing soup-tureen and plates. She set them down at the sideboard and applied herself to the business of serving. She saw Adrian rise, sensed him behind her, felt his lips for an instant upon the back of her neck and kept very still until he took them away. She turned

then, cool and collected in manner and without a word carried the plate to the table and set it down before him. But as she ladled soup for herself, her hand shook and the soup was spilt on the edge of her plate. She knew that this fact had not escaped Adrian's notice, for all he sipped his soup with the air of one absorbed in savouring the flavour. She said casually: "I hope it's as good as usual."

"Excellent."

"Will you open the wine whilst I do parlourmaid again?"

His eyes fell on the bottle of Haut-Brion.

"You haven't forgotten!" he said, eyeing her keenly.

"Oh . . . it's what I happened to have here."

He laughed, obviously unbelieving. Too often had they drunk Haut-Brion together for that.

"You ought to be drinking burgundy, not claret, with what follows," she said, by way of emphasising the truth of her remark. He only said: "What *does* follow?"

"Wait and see," she told him.

He always cared, she remembered, for good food and could eat it, apparently, for ever with impunity. They'd sent *caneton a l'orange* as a main dish, and she reflected now that he'd think she'd specially ordered that, too, for she remembered how often they'd eaten it together at his rooms in the Temple. She wondered if he still had them. She got up, removed the soup-plates and brought in the duck with oranges. As his eyes fell upon it, he said: "Quite like old times, I declare . . ."

She ignored that, served the duck and said: "Tell me about America."

"What do you want to know?"

"Not about Chicago's underworld, thank you. About your lectures, the places you saw, the people you met. Did you meet Dorothy Canfield or Ellen Glasgow?"

He shook his head, but his talk of those he did kept them pleasantly occupied until the duck was finished and the *coupe Nesselrode* took its place. It revived again during the appearance and disappearance of the *cœur à la crème*. A safe meal, Sanchia reflected, refusing her second glass of Haut-Brion and hoping that Adrian would finish (at least temporarily) with



his third. She encouraged him to take it to the armchair by the fire whilst she cleared away the dirty plates and made coffee.

Over that the evening slipped on to another plane. They had talked enough “of all this”; he thought it time they talked about things that mattered.

“And what,” asked Sanchia, hiding her trouble under that air of weary indifference, “are the things that matter?”

“You,” said Adrian. “Me. Us.”

(4)

After a while Sanchia said: “In that sense ‘we’ don’t exist any longer.”

Adrian smiled.

“In what sense?”

“The sense you mean—the old sense.”

Adrian laughed.

“Don’t you believe it,” he said.

“Oh, but of course . . .” she said.

“What makes you think that?”

“But it came to a natural end three years ago.”

“An end. But not a natural one. Anything but natural, in fact. You insisted that I could only avert a tragedy by clearing out. You refused to see me or to speak to me on the ’phone. As a matter of fact, you treated me very badly.”

“Well—there’s your natural ending. I was bound to do that, sooner or later.”

“We had to meet again, anyway.”

“I don’t see why it was so inevitable. I’m often in Paris.”

“I’m *not*. Hadn’t been there for three years. The night we met I’d been there six hours . . . and that only to avoid night travel from Italy. What do you say to that?”

Aloud she said nothing. To herself she said as she’d said before: “Fate.”

He leant forward, put a hand on her knee.

“Sanchia. . . . Have you forgotten?”

She shook her head.

“Aren’t you the least bit glad to see me?”

“I didn’t want—ever—to see you again.”

His laugh told her how completely wrong her answer was. Abruptly he changed the subject as if there was nothing more to be said.

“Tell me what you’ve been doing. . . . What happened after you banished me?”

“We moved. To an outer suburb, very outer. I started doing these translations—and came here to do them.”

“Very extravagant. Very foresighted of you, too . . .”

He laughed.

She made an effort and said: “Nobody knows, save mother.”

Adrian lighted another cigarette. As he did it he said: “Tell me, Sanchia, for whose benefit, really?”

“Nobody’s but mine.”

Adrian’s gesture was incredulity personified. “Do you mean to say there’s been *nobody* all this time? You haven’t brought anyone here?”

Sanchia said: “Hasn’t there been anybody with you?”

“Good lord, of course there has! But that’s your fault.”

“Why don’t you get married?”

“Because the only person I want to marry is you.”

“And I’m married.”

“You still stick to that?”

“Of course I stick to it. It’s true.”

“Little fool!”

He put aside his cigarette and moved his seat, getting up with quick easy grace and placing himself beside her on the settee.

“Darling little fool! Listen to me. I’m as mad about you as ever, and so are you about me. Confess it.”

“I won’t.”

He caught her up to him and began to kiss her. She did not resist, but she made herself passive beneath his kisses. He laughed and shook her a little. “Kiss me, you little devil!” She remained passive. He released her. She stood up.

“I’m going to the cinema. To see . . .”

He laughed and pulled her down again.

“You’re not going to do anything of the sort. You’re going to stay here and be kind to me.”

She moved her head so that his kisses fell upon her ear. She said: “No, no . . . it’s finished—done with! It isn’t going to begin again.”

“Of course it’s going to begin again. Why shouldn’t it? We were made for each other.”

“What nonsense!”

“Good lord! Do I have still to tell you that if George were all right you’d leave him like a shot and come off with me?—that you’d have done it three years ago? (He paid no attention to her ‘I would not, I would not!’) But he isn’t and you have to do all this duty-and-behaving-decently stunt. How long are you going to stick to this? How much longer are you going on with it?”

“As long as I live, I expect—and George. I happen to love George!”

“I know you tell yourself so. In spite of . . . us. Like all your sex, aren’t you?” He laughed, and kissed her hair. “Why won’t you? What’s the matter with you, darling? You didn’t argue about it when we first met.”

“No,” she said with bitterness. “We wasted no time.”

“Don’t pretend you regret, or have scruples about it. It was all perfectly natural. We made each other happy.”

“It’s over.”

“It’s not over.” But he let go of her. “You’ll see,” he said.

She got up.

“If I go now I shall see something of my film.”

“You’re afraid.”

She looked at him.

“Yes,” she confessed.

“Of me?”

“Partly. Of myself more—of something else I can’t explain.”

“There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

“I have the feeling there is.”

“You’d forget if you yielded.”

She knew that. She’d forget most things.

She shook her head.

“Be generous. Leave me alone.”

“To-night. I can’t promise next time.”

“Is there to be a next time?”

“Many next times.”

That faint look of weariness came again upon her face. She shrugged her shoulders.

“I don’t come here every day. . . . Not always even once a week.”

“I don’t mind trouble where you’re concerned.”

He smiled at her in his familiar ingratiating fashion. Her heart moved in her body and for a second she was at his mercy. But he did not press his advantage. He could wait.

“You won’t see much of that picture,” he reminded her.

She went to get ready.

## CHAPTER FIVE

(1)

They met several times during the next few weeks while the weather steadily worsened and slipped down into the trough of winter, but it was not until the beginning of November that Adrian Lorimer had his way. He had turned up one afternoon just as it began to get dark and Sanchia, her hair ruffled, ink on her fingers, her face unpowdered, opened the door to him and let him, almost before it was shut again, take her in his arms. She was not surprised. She knew it had to happen. She only marvelled that it hadn’t

happened before. She felt as if she had been starving for weeks, as if she'd just come down from the top of some tall and very icy mountain.

“Come and have some tea!” she said when he had released her and was getting out of his coat. “You must be frozen.”

Perhaps she thought that tea might bring them to common sanity. It didn't. Tea finished, they fell headlong, as they had done years before, into each other's arms.

Their love-making was brief, fierce and surprising. It relieved without satisfying. They both felt when it was over a little too highly-strung, a little hysterical. It remained like that for several occasions. They were like people deprived for a long period of food—they gulped it and felt a little queer afterwards. They were both strangely disappointed and Sanchia, at least, a little disgusted. She felt she was like one of those young women of whom Gilbert Yorke had complained—greedy of love, extortionate, that for her as for them it was all a mere throwing-off of accumulated repressions. It struck her, as it had struck him, as a slightly disgusting as well as a highly unsatisfactory business. It offended the artist in her. If it was going to be like this, she couldn't go on.

But things righted themselves. The artist in her triumphed. The quiet loveliness, the exquisite balance of giving and taking that characterised Sanchia as a lover and which Adrian, as others, had found so unforgettable, came back to enchant him once more. He said, as others had before him, that she was made for love, that it was preposterous that she should ever live without it. They accepted their relationship naturally, saw it slip into the scheme of their lives. They seldom went out together: never met socially. Their relationship was warm, secret and ecstatic. There came a time when Adrian began to chafe under the limitations fate set them, but Sanchia never chafed at anything. She had of him all that she wanted and it not only satisfied her completely but left her free. She knew, and accepted the knowledge calmly, that this thing between them was physical, that if that went everything went. She did not want to go away with Adrian or to live with him. She was surer of it now than ever: she hoped he, too, had come to accept that. Certainly in those early days he was content—and uncontentious, as he had not been three years ago. He ceased to ask her to throw in her lot with his. She hoped he never would again. As things were, her life had a natural balance that left her not only free but tranquil and that bewildering sensation of fear had fallen from her like a cloak. This was her life. Shaken no longer by tremors, scruples or self-analysis, at last she accepted it. She ceased to think about or discuss what she had been used to

regard as her declension from her own ethical standards. She thought sometimes that in the circumstances it was probably natural that it should take two men to complete her life, which now took on a stability and a graciousness it had lacked for years. Physically satisfied, her life with George sent down fresh roots; her feeling for him acquired new value just because perhaps it was so free from the trammels, ecstasies and fevers of sex. Sometimes, indeed, she trembled lest as once before George should guess, should know from what source her unvarying equanimity sprang. But as the months passed and there was no sign she began to believe that things with George had changed, that with his return to ruder health his nervous system had also strengthened, that he had, in fact, recovered that central sanity which once had been so markedly his. And it seemed to her that her feeling for Adrian was almost wholly one of gratitude, as much for having helped her achieve this for George as for saving her from other men—from that ultimate betrayal she had sometimes glimpsed, of which she had spoken to Gilbert Yorke and to which her fine talk of vanguards of new ethics did nothing to reconcile her.

Of Gilbert Yorke she talked sometimes to Adrian, and knew that her frankness over that relationship was sponsored by nothing save the desire to belittle in Adrian's eyes the feeling she had for himself. And as if he understood this:

“What was he like?” he asked one day as they lay in the firelight at peace with themselves and the world.

Sanchia, lying very still, her head twisted to the firelight, one arm drooping to the floor, considered the question.

“What you would call a ‘decent sort,’ I expect,” she said. “A man's man, probably.”

Adrian grunted.

“What did you see in him?”

“I? Oh, I wasn't in love with him.”

“No?”

She tried to explain. It was a good deal less difficult, she found, than when she had tried it with her mother.

“He wasn't in love with me, either. . . . Not at first, anyway. I don't believe he'd looked at me, though we'd met socially. You see, he was in love with his wife . . .”

“But she was cold to him! Is that what he told you?” Adrian sounded scornful. “The usual story!”

Adrian had at times a terrible scorn of unfaithful husbands. She felt that as a husband he would perhaps be hardly human.

“*Not* the usual story at all,” she said and went on with her explanation. It seemed to amuse Adrian. He hadn’t thought of her, he said, as a reformer of rakes.

“I hadn’t thought of it either. I just thought it a shame he should go to pieces like that whilst his wife got all the credit of being a model wife and mother.”

“Well?”

“That’s all . . .”

Adrian laughed.

“Were you the first?”

“I believe not. There had been several obliging young women whose hopes of a normal life had gone west in the war. . . . They hadn’t done much for him.”

Adrian laughed again. “I’m ready to believe he found you a distinct improvement—when you let him. Why did you? Were you in love with him?”

“Never. He was attractive—so are men one meets in trains and buses, for that matter. We didn’t fall into each other’s arms. We even argued about it first. I think I felt we had things in common. Neither of us *wanted* to be adulterers.”

“My dear child! What a word!”

“It’s accurate, I think.”

“What did you get out of it?”

“Escape, I think. . . . I was, I suppose, rather in the position of those other young women he’d found so unsatisfactory.”

“Except that you weren’t—unsatisfactory.”

“I was as much driven by physical necessity as they, but I suppose I showed it less plainly. I used to think his wife a fool rather, and that it was no wonder they had such lovely children. He knew something about love—he wasn’t a bungler.”

“A foeman worthy of your steel!”

She gave a low chuckle of laughter and twisted her ivory body in the firelight. Adrian said: “I begin to dislike this man.”

“You needn’t.”

“Weren’t you ever—not even the very least little bit in love with him?”

“No.”

“I hate to think of him—and you.”

“Don’t think of it then. It’s over.”

“What ended it? Another panic like the one which sent me packing?”

“No. . . . I found he was falling in love with me a little.”

“Didn’t you expect that?”

“No, because he’d been so much in love with his wife. I expected to fill a gap. I’m no breaker-up of homes.”

“What happened?”

“We said good-bye.”

“And he went back to his wife?”

“I’m afraid he didn’t.”

“What happened?”

She explained.

“I often felt a little unhappy about it . . . but apparently I needn’t have done. She married again very promptly and is busy producing family number two.”

“What about him?”

“I don’t know. . . . He went to America.” She laughed. “You probably passed him in the subway.”

“I wish I’d known. I should have liked to have wrung his neck!”

“Nonsense!”

He got up and came and stood over her.

“Damn you, Sanchia!” he said.



She smiled up at him, lifted her arm from the floor and putting it round his neck drew him down to her. "Idiot! Go and get dressed."

His mouth very near hers he said:

"Presently. . . . What the hell do I mind how many men you've had?"

His kiss stifled alike her soft laughter and her reply.

(2)

In this interval of quiet and happy existence, Sanchia found time to finish her translation into English of the French novel which had been engaging her attention for the last three months, and to start upon an earlier novel of Adrian's, which the Tauchnitz had never smiled upon. About this she thought it would be a good thing perhaps to go to see the French house that was to bring out the novel she had just finished, and with this intention in mind worked steadily during the early days of nineteen-thirty—so that it might be finished by the time the weather broke. April in Paris was an attractive thought to her.

Adrian came in one day and said that it was attractive to him also, and what was she going to do about it? They had not seen each other for a week and it needed a certain amount of fortitude to reply that she couldn't say anything about anything until she had finished the page she was working on, which was proving difficult. Once or twice she asked his opinion upon a word, a phrase, but she could see that his mind was not on the subject. When had he ever cared to talk "shop" with her? In a way she knew he'd rather anybody but herself was translating his novel: that it irritated him to see it occupying her time, especially time that might have been devoted to him.

"Won't it do later?" he asked.

She said it wouldn't and he went back to his paper. When the clock struck five he said: "Nearly done?"

"No. Go and make some tea. You'll find some biscuits in the tin marked 'cake.'"

He went away and came back in due course with the tea-tray. He put it down on her desk, seated himself beside it and began pouring out, glancing up every now and then to look at the quiet figure so busy with pen and ink and to admire the light on her dark sleek hair.

"Stop for goodness' sake and drink this!" he adjured her.

She put down her pen, drank her tea, nibbled a biscuit and said: “You’re very hard to do!”

“Am I? Why?”

“Your kind of novel is. . . . The write-it-all-down school is longer but easier. The compact novel with each word, each sentence polished to the last ounce of meaning’s a different matter. If it’s taken, the French should like it. It has precision of language—if I don’t murder it!”

He stooped and kissed the top of her head. She frowned and looked up: “Aren’t you interested in your book?”

“Not at the moment, darling. What time have you to be home?”

“Seven-thirty dinner.”

“Oh, damn! Can’t you make an excuse for once?”

“Of course I can’t.”

She never put off George and her normal life with him for extra time with Adrian. She did not really believe he wished her to begin, but looked at his frowning countenance this February afternoon with concern.

“Besides, this evening George and I are going to see *Canaries Sometimes Sing*, so I must be punctual.”

“I’m going to a theatre, too. A different one, and unfortunately not with you. We don’t have enough time together, Sanchia.”

“We have quite a lot—and make excellent use of it, too.”

“Not this afternoon. You keep wasting time over this wretched book. Can’t you stop now?”

“When you’ve taken the tray away and coaxed the fire into a blaze.”

“Right!”

He departed with the tray, came back and worked valiantly at the fire.

“The blaze!” he said at last at her elbow. “Behold!” She turned and looked, smiled, and put down her pen. A long sigh escaped her.

(3)

For hours, it seemed, no word had passed between them. The tide of love had flowed over them, washing them clean out of time. But at last Sanchia sighed, laughed and slipped off the couch to sit curled up in front of the fire.

Adrian, his arms above his head, his eyes on the white mound that was Sanchia's body, said:

"Must you go?"

"You know I must. Soon, too. We've another half-hour."

"I hate to let you go. Can't we have a holiday together?"

Sanchia turned and gazed at him.

"How? Where?"

"Can't I come to Paris with you?"

"Darling . . . I don't see *how*. You forget my mother lives in Paris."

"Must she know you're to be there?"

"She'd find out . . . take it into her head to come over here during my absence, or something of the sort. Can't risk it."

"She wouldn't tell?"

"Can't risk that either."

"But she used to *like* me."

"I know. She thought I meant to marry you, then. She won't encourage this renewal of our friendship. The last time she was here she called me a harlot and asked me what I meant by it."

Adrian laughed. "What did she mean?"

"I'm afraid she'd heard about Gilbert Yorke."

"Did she know him?"

"Yes. He came to Paris when I was there."

Adrian sat up as if shot.

"That finishes it! If you took *him* to Paris, my girl, you'll take me."

"I didn't take him. I was going, anyhow. He was due to spend several days in Paris before going on to Germany or somewhere."

"But you saw him . . ."

"Oh yes . . . it was for the last time. But my mother found out . . . and called names. I told her all about women and sex. Women down the ages in Other Lands. She wasn't impressed. I didn't like her hard names, I'm afraid. If she finds out about you she'll call some more."

“Let her!”

“I wouldn’t mind, but I’m so afraid she’ll tell George.”

“Why should she?”

“Because she thinks I ought to leave George and get properly married. She’s grasped by this time that I won’t leave George, so she’s got the idea, I think, that if she can rouse George sufficiently he’ll insist on releasing me.”

“Would he?”

“I don’t think so. Anyway, I don’t want to be released.”

“I want you released.”

“Please don’t, darling.”

She came and knelt by his side.

“I want all of you, Sanchia.”

“You have all of me,” she said, and thought: “Do I lie? No . . . it’s true. Adrian has of me all he wants and *I* all I want of him,” and knew that she wanted no arrangement of greater permanency and laughed a little, quite happily, because she had been loved and had loved and was full of that sense of well-being nothing else produces quite so abundantly.

“I *haven’t* all of you!” said Adrian, putting out a hand and touching her breasts. “I want you, in my house, in my bed. . . . Oh, God, Sanchia, I want whole nights with you!”

She laughed.

“How would that be better? The nights were made for slumber, like the British Museum Reading Room.”

“I hate letting you go like this. It’s such an anticlimax.”

“No more so than getting up and sitting together at the breakfast-table if we were really married.”

“You’ve an answer for everything, haven’t you?”

“Not quite.”

She smiled.

“Sanchia, would you marry me if you were free?”

“You could probably make me . . .”

He laughed.

“I’d make you, all right. Oh, Sanchia, how good it would be—our home together . . . holidays . . . and children.”

She said a little faintly: “Please, Adrian . . . you know it’s forbidden!”

“Don’t you want children?”

She said nothing: just knelt there moving a slow finger up and down the muscle of his arm.

“Don’t you, Sanchia?”

“Yes . . . I suppose so. . . . I mean the egotist in us all wants children, doesn’t it? But not having them doesn’t give me an inferiority complex as it seems to many women and most men, and I don’t know that I really think the world would be any the better for several versions of me.”

“Of *us*! You *are* an egotist!”

She smiled, wondered what he’d say if she said that the only children she’d ever wanted were hers and George’s and that children of a union as mainly physical as hers and Adrian’s she did not want at all. Anyway, she didn’t say it. She said instead: “The marriage that falls to pieces if it isn’t bolstered up by children’s not much good, is it?”

“Of course it isn’t. But oh, Sanchia . . .”

He stopped and fell to kissing her breasts, which she yielded to him, stroking his hair and wanting, strangely, to comfort him, to push him back into the niche he occupied so safely, so indisputably as her lover.

“I haven’t much idea of myself as a mother, somehow,” she said. “Do you think you’d be any good as a father? You’d be terribly impatient and angry with me if I didn’t keep the house quiet enough when you wanted to work.”

“I daresay I would.”

“I’m afraid you must stop making love to me now. I’ve got to go home.”

He didn’t entirely stop making love to her.

“But we haven’t settled about Paris,” he said.

“What is there to settle?”

“This. If you go to Paris, will you *try* to arrange for me to follow you? I’ll be as discreet as the Prime Minister.”

“You mean, if I go at a time when my mother isn’t there and if George doesn’t want to come?”

“Yes. Are you going to *ask* George to come?”

“Yes. I always do. But he probably won’t.”

“All right. When will you know?”

“Not for ages. It’ll be in April, I expect . . . though I hate being out of England then. . . . *Oh, to be in England now that April’s here!*”

“Oh, but it’s *always* here!” said Adrian.

Laughing, Sanchia got up.

“Why *will* everybody malign the English weather so? *I* like it, so there!”

He caught her by the hand, pulled her close and kissed every inch of the ivory body his lips could reach. Still laughing, Sanchia escaped and walked away to dress, dragging the yellow dressing-gown after her. Adrian sat and watched her, dissolved in every kind of primitive emotion. He wanted to take her away with him, away from the world and from George and all the people he knew. He wanted to possess her utterly, to give her children, to have her bound hand and foot. But he did not believe any more than Gilbert Yorke had believed, that anybody ever would so have Sanchia Hanson. She gave you her body with delight and rapture, but she kept her own soul and her own thoughts.

I’d give *my* soul, thought Adrian as he watched her, I’d give *my* soul, my beauty, to know that I’d the power to break your heart . . . !

## CHAPTER SIX

(1)

Sanchia fixed her visit to Paris for the end of March. Her mother wrote from Mentone that she would be there until the second week in April and suggested that if Sanchia finished her business with her publishing houses in time she should come on to her there. She was at the Hôtel des Anglais. Sanchia shuddered. A French hotel for the English—all the duller kinds of English. No, she thought, she would not be in any hurry to finish her affairs in Paris.

George, as she had expected, did not want to go to Paris and, anyway, the end of March was not a very good time. He’d try to get a week off upon her return. They could take the car and tour southern England for a while,

weather permitting. She said once or twice: “Are you quite sure you can’t possibly come? I hate leaving you, my dear.”

“Oh, I’ll be all right. You’ve been sticking at those translations, though I must say work seems to agree with you. You’ll look much tireder when you get back. You always do.”

She thought, not without reason, that it was he who would be most in need of the week’s holiday, knowing how he braced himself to her departures, how he suffered in her absence and reacted to her returns. She said: “I won’t arrange anything yet, in case you find you can manage, after all, to come.”

Adrian fumed and kicked his heels in impatience, but Sanchia was not to be hurried.

“Anybody’d think you *wanted* him to come!” he expostulated.

“So I do!” she said. “At least I’d hate him to think I didn’t want him.”

“What about me? I don’t matter, I suppose?”

“Oh yes. . . . Of course.”

But she saw that he didn’t understand and knew that she could never make him understand, for the simple reason that she didn’t understand it any too well herself. She smiled at him and let him make love to her partly because that was what he had come for and what she wanted most of him, because it satisfied and delighted her and because when he did that he forgot to argue and demand explanations of the unexplainable.

At the end of March she went to Paris, staying at the Henri Quatre, where she knew nobody, and a week later Adrian joined her there. The cold had receded. The sun shone and Paris in the spring sunshine, with Sanchia, was obviously Adrian’s idea of heaven.

She had meant to send him home a week before she herself was leaving, and to go on for that remaining week to Mentone, but Adrian refused entirely to be dismissed, and Sanchia, very much caught up in his mood and not quite sure how to manage him, agreed to stay where she was and to allow her mother to think that her business with the various publishing houses of Paris was still uncompleted.

Perhaps this fiction was a little too much for the astute old lady. Perhaps she merely got tired of Mentone; at any rate, suddenly she arrived in Paris and presented herself at the Henri Quatre one evening soon after dinner.

“Why this out-of-the-way place, my child?” she demanded of Sanchia, whom she had surprised in the lounge, but then she looked at the young man sitting at Sanchia’s side and it was obvious she did not expect an answer to so entirely superfluous a question.

“How do you do, Mr. Lorimer?” she said, and sat down opposite to them.

“Have something to drink, mother,” said Sanchia, who for all her nonchalance had gone a little pale.

“A Benedictine,” said Mrs. Blackwood, as one in definite need of a revive, “and a very strong black coffee.” The lounge was empty and looking around it the old woman said: “Well, it’s quiet here—I may as well say what I’ve got to say here and now.”

“*Don’t* say it, mother!”

“Let her alone,” said Adrian, who saw in her a friend and whose three weeks with Sanchia had in no wise spoiled in him the desire so to live with her for ever.

Sanchia was very still.

Mrs. Blackwood said: “You’re staying here together? I needn’t ask, though.”

Adrian bowed.

“Is this the beginning of it?”

“Of me, you mean?” Adrian smiled. “No . . . I came back last autumn. We started again almost at once, I’m afraid.”

“Are you going this time to make my daughter see reason?”

“Is she going to marry me, do you mean? I’m afraid I can’t tell you.”

“Do you want her to?”

“Like hell.”

“Well, Sanchia?”

Sanchia shook her head.

“Adrian knows my mind on the subject. I thought he’d accepted it. Please don’t disturb him, mother. He doesn’t really want to be married.”

“I want to be married to you,” said Adrian.



“I’d rather things remained as they are.”

“But, my dear child! George can’t, in the face of this, refuse to give you your freedom.”

“He won’t know about ‘this.’”

“Supposing I tell him?”

“You wouldn’t do that?” Sanchia masked the fright in her voice by her cold: “We’ve signed the register separately and filled up their damned forms correctly. ‘This’ proves nothing.”

“Our adjoining rooms might prove a little,” said Adrian.

“They won’t remember which rooms we had!” said Sanchia coldly, aware that Adrian was behaving rather like a cad and wondering, to her surprise, why she had ever allowed him to come.

“I really *don’t* understand you, Sanchia,” said Mrs. Blackwood helplessly.

“I can’t see why. I’m transparently clear on the subject. I’m married to George and want to stay married to him!”

“*Married!*” said Mrs. Blackwood and Adrian together. Sanchia got up and walked upstairs.

She slipped out of her clothes and got into bed and lay there crying with mingled anger and fear. She hated her mother and she hated Adrian because they would not leave her alone, because they conspired together to make an honest woman of her. The feeling she had for Adrian had clarified itself, so that she remembered with a little stir of wonderment the misery of those early days in Mayes after she had said good-bye to him. Already, she wanted to be back home with George. She did not want to see Adrian again or to take him as her lover for months and months. She was sated with love that is of the body and with Adrian there was little else; she found herself longing for all the little intimacies and trivial kindnesses that had nothing to do with sex and passion, but were the daily intercourse that is marriage. She wanted to be sitting at George’s feet, her head on his knee, talking of impersonal things, of ideas, plays, books, of D. H. Lawrence, who was recently dead and for whom they both mourned. She thought: “I’ll go home to-morrow . . . and I won’t go near the flat for weeks . . .”

And then, what?

What were they planning down there between them? She couldn't believe they meant to make mischief, to force the issue. . . . *Of course* they wouldn't tell him. It was incredible that either her mother or Adrian would interfere. No man, surely, without a woman's permission. . . .

The door of the adjoining room opened and shut. She stopped crying and lay listening to Adrian moving about. Very noisy, she thought him—as if his anger and annoyance came running out at his finger-tips pushing things about and dropping them. She hoped he wouldn't come in. . . .

He did, opening the door softly as though he rather expected to find she'd slipped the bolt. Sanchia did not move though he came and sat on the edge of her bed.

“Asleep?” he said softly.

“Yes,” said Sanchia, relieved because his voice was less angry than his fingers had sounded in there . . . and suddenly, as he put out a hand and turned her gently round by her shoulder, not angry at all. She sat up and slipped back into his arms.

“Mother gone?”

“Yes.”

“Is she . . . all right?”

“You mean have I persuaded her to keep our dark secret?”

“Yes. She will, won't she?”

“Yes. I made her see she must. After all it's for you to say, my sweet. God knows why you won't cut adrift—but if you won't, you won't.”

“I can't . . . I can't ever.”

“All right . . . don't cry.”

“Don't you like things as they are? Aren't they enough? Why won't you be more cynical about marriage? If you'd remember what happens to most marriages you'd be glad I'm not married to you, perhaps.”

“Would I?”

He slipped a hand over her heart and lowered his mouth to hers.

“Not angry with me now?”

That beating heart said “no” as emphatically as her shaken head. He moved back the bedclothes and slipped in beside her.

“Do you want to go to sleep?”

“Yes, please,” she said, and meant it.

He laughed and took her in his arms and possessed her in the easy, familiar, utterly careless fashion of the unimaginative husband. That easy, almost casual husbandly air and the measure of restraint with which she allowed herself to surrender to it, told her afresh that it was a good deal less than marriage she wanted of Adrian. Why, if I were free, she thought, I wouldn't marry him if I could help it, and again there stirred within her that little wonderment that ever she could have been so unhappy because of him. Lying there in the dark long after Adrian had fallen asleep she thought suddenly, with a piercing clarity, of those early days with George at the “Holly Bush” when she had not only given herself with rapture but had known that never as long as she lived would the sweetness of that giving pass from her. It was with her now as she lay there at Adrian's side and her tears flowed silently down her cheeks. Oh, George, my darling, darling, she murmured brokenly, and pain for another flooded her being.

Was it true?—she had never believed it!—that a woman belonged to the man to whom she first gave herself in love? Or was it only that with that initial giving there was mixed up something that never came again . . . some upspringing of the spirit of youth, of idealism? Perhaps. But it went beyond that, thrusting down again to that bedrock of things built up in daily intercourse, shared, suffered, and become an integral part of life itself.

(2)

“Suppose,” said Adrian on the last morning of their stay, “we were going to have a child? Would you marry me then?”

Sanchia, powdering her face at the glass, looked up with a startled expression. Then she laughed.

“We shan't,” she said, but the startled expression was still there.

“Accidents, you know . . .” said Adrian.

Sanchia said nothing. Adrian persisted.

“You haven't answered my question.”

“I can't . . .”

“Why can't you?”

“Because I don't know the answer.”

The face getting itself so nicely powdered in the glass continued, however, to look a little startled.

(3)

Back in London, they saw nothing of each other before she went off with George in lovely weather for his promised holiday. At intervals that startled look came up in quiet moments upon Sanchia's face and a strange unusual emotion kept her tense. The days passed, bringing relief and assurance. The startled look, the rending emotions troubled her no more.

Spring trod her merry, lovely measure in the fields and on the hills. The beech-woods were garbed in young green; a sea of bluebells had flowed over their floors; on the hillside tall and straight, the ash and silver birch climbed up into the blue. The hawthorn was out and on a cottage-wall in Devon they saw the first red rose. A moon, like some great torch at the festival of spring, looked in upon them as they slept, and the thrush and blackbird waked them at dawn.

Sanchia was happy and at rest. The vague fears which she had brought back with her from France had vanished and her happiness, no mere blend of anguish and delight, had about it a positive, solid quality. She felt sometimes as if she must die of it. She saw, too, that the quiet of her own spirit had slipped into George's, that he rested himself in her tranquillity as a tired bather in a warm pool. He no longer saw when he looked at her that something frustrated and imprisoned which had been used to send him mad. But whilst she wondered sometimes if he knew the truth and accepted it, George saw only that he had her again, his Sanchia, gay and gentle, that whatever there'd ever been in that miserable affair which had ended in his dragging her to that God-forsaken hole in Kent, it was over and forgotten.

Misted and golden the days went by. The ordinary world in which Amy Johnson set out upon her flight to Australia, in which by-elections were being fought and Masfield was made Poet Laureate, in which she gave herself to Adrian and lied and deceived and grew stupid with the hated complications of existence, seemed so very far away. This life she lived with George, ambling about the countryside, lying out on hillsides together, eating picnic meals, reading Mr. Baring's *Daphne Adeane* and talking, talking, talking, was the only real one, and though she knew they must go back to that other, it continued to seem unreal and fantastic.

She wondered a little about *Daphne Adeane*. Was it a dangerous kind of book for her and George to be reading together? Was he, perhaps, tormented by the ideas it suggested, by the mental picture of Fanny in Francis's arms,

of Hyacinth in Michael's? But he never said what he thought of these defaulting women, these faithless wives. All his comments were generalised and common-sensical, concerned with Baring's beautifully-suggested atmosphere of the usual life of cultured ease, his world of books and plays and operas, of dinner-time conversations and political talk, and with his own gifts as a narrator. George appreciated his quiet voice, that was never raised, that contrasted for him so pleasantly with much that he considered strident and over-emphatic in the literature of to-day.

It was the end of May when they got back to town. The laburnum in the front garden drooped with bloom, and Sally opened the door with a smile of such warm welcome upon her face that Sanchia wanted to kiss her, but supposed she must be feeling a little sentimental and refrained. Sally, she thought, had grown very pretty. Her skin was lovely. She would be losing her soon to some admirer. She was the kind of girl men would notice—only Sally didn't seem to realise it. This evening she hustled about carrying up bags and clothes and running water into baths as if these things were all her existence, not as did most other girls she'd employed, as if they just paused in some very important life of their own, to do these uninteresting services for somebody else.

Sanchia thought: I wonder *what* she's like—away from here. If she's what she seems. . . . If she has a boy—or goes out with some man much older than herself or lets herself be kissed or imagines herself in love? Sanchia thought not. There was an untouched virginal look about Sally. She was deeply and truly innocent. And very sweet, Sanchia thought. She had grown very fond of Sally.

As she stood there in the hall thinking these things and watching her come running down the stairs, the telephone rang. Sanchia turned and took off the receiver.

“Hallo!” she said, and then: “I don't know . . . not this week . . . I can't. Next, perhaps. . . . All right.”

She hung up the receiver, and the deep colour in her face had scarcely faded when George put his key in the door and let himself in after putting the car to bed.

“Did I hear the telephone?”

“Yes . . . wrong number.”

She saw the colour run up in Sally's cheeks. Of course . . . she must have heard that conversation; she'd know it wasn't a wrong number. It had begun

again already, this life of lies and deceit. She felt a little sick as she bent over the telephone pad to see who had been ringing up in their absence. The usual names, but Adrian's, thank heaven, was not amongst them. Had she really expected it? Wasn't it bad and mad enough that he should ring her up directly she got inside the door?

Upstairs unpacking she said to Sally: "Were there any other calls, Sally? People, I mean, who didn't leave their names."

"Only one, ma'am, for you. A gentleman, asking when you were expected back. He rang three times, ma'am, before I was able to tell him."

"Silly of people not to leave their names."

"He said he would ring to-day, ma'am, about this time."

"Oh," said Sanchia, glancing at Sally's face, pleased with what she saw there, and remembering what Elizabeth's expression would have been and the meaning inflections there'd have been in her voice as she gave her this piece of information and remembered the call her mistress had just disowned in the hall. "All right. Thank you. Hang this up at once, Sally, will you?"

Sally took the frock and selected a hanger for it.

"This, too, Sally."

As she shook out her clothes and passed them over to Sally a pulse began to beat somewhere deeply inside her. Had she believed he would forget her, grow indifferent, leave the first move to her? Had she hoped that it would be like this? She didn't know. It was nearly five weeks since they had met; it would be six by the time they did. She had not known it was so long nor thought about it. She remembered that she had been glad to take leave of him in Paris, that she had believed her feeling for him was waning, that those casual husbandly embraces had given it a mortal wound. But now as she sorted her frocks and handed them over to Sally she knew it was the merest flesh wound. She wouldn't escape yet. . . .

## CHAPTER SEVEN

(1)

As it happened, however, it was another month before they met, for circumstances called Adrian home to Northumberland, from where he wrote begging her to find some excuse to come up to him there.

“Blanchland is looking lovely,” he told her, and though the name filled her with thoughts of a day that had made her dizzy, even in remembrance, with joy and pain, she made no attempt to go. She revised her translation of Adrian’s book and dealt with some of the minor problems of existence involved in the business of getting herself and some part of her household down each Friday evening to the cottage they had taken by the sea and in transporting them home safely on the Monday.

It was the end of June when one afternoon she heard Adrian’s voice on the ’phone and fled on wings to the flat.

They loved each other, as Sanchia knew they would that first time, greedily and unsatisfyingly.

“You see what happens,” he told her, “when we are parted. We can’t live without each other.”

“We did it for three years,” she replied with a laugh, and would not be serious; but somewhere she was conscious that somehow she was a little afraid again—she did not know of what or why and as their love continued to be feverish and unsatisfying the fear persisted, so that she was almost tempted not to go to the flat any more. Fear of reprisals on Adrian’s part, however, kept her from pursuing this course, and gradually, as their relationship settled down again into the delightful easy and assured intimacy with which they were so familiar, the fear subsided. She grew, as the summer advanced, to laugh at herself, and Adrian reached once again the plane whereon he accepted the situation and did not attempt to do anything with it.

Early in July, George and Sanchia translated the whole of their household to the sea, the house in Regent’s Park was shut up and Adrian and Sanchia were parted once again. Sanchia had a party of friends for some part of each week and the days went in bathing, rowing, walking and kindred delights. The cottage, left high and dry at low tide, was lapped at high, and the joy of dropping out of your sitting-room into the sea was one, they found, that never palled. George was an excellent swimmer and taught Sanchia a stroke new to her, taking her out to practise it alone at nights when there was a moon. Sanchia was happy, with that unmistakable happiness that always seemed a solid thing to her. She wanted the long summer days to go on for ever. She did not miss Adrian; all that side of her to which he belonged was quiet and troubled her not at all. When she thought of him it was peacefully, almost indifferently; it did not even seem very important that they should meet again. But she attached no importance to this state of

mind: she had known it so often. And that troubled her neither. She remained happy.

Sally was happy, too, on this second seaside holiday, so different from that first she had spent with the Yorkes. Sanchia's devoted slave, she could not do sufficient for her or admire her enough. She, too, wished the summer days would go on for ever. But presently it was time to go home, and as if in annoyance at their desertion of the pretty scene the weather suddenly changed and they departed in a fine drizzle of rain beneath a dark and gloomy sky.

Arrived home Sanchia ran upstairs, let herself in with the key and picked up a pile of letters from the mat inside the door. Dropping everything upon the oak settle inside the door, she turned over the pile swiftly but thoroughly and Sally, coming into the hall immediately after her, saw her slip two of them into her coat pocket well down out of sight, then push the rest into a heap upon the table. When George came in he turned over the pile and picking out those which belonged to him, he, too, stuffed them unconcernedly into his pocket.

"Dozens for you, darling," he said.

Sally saw Sanchia's indifferent gaze sweep the pile.

"Bills and receipts, I expect," she said, "but bills chiefly. There are never any interesting letters when one comes back from a holiday."

She picked them up and went upstairs.

(2)

The letters were from Adrian—brief but ardent. Quite impossible to say why every time she saw his handwriting she snatched it up out of sight. She did not expect anyone to open her letters. She obeyed she knew not what instinct of self-preservation. And she was always a little angry that it should be necessary—that Adrian should so persistently break the rules that prohibited both letters and telephoning. Impossible entirely to abolish the suggestion that he did not very much mind if the thing the rule was designed to prevent actually took place. Though he said no word to persuade her to alter her decision she began to feel that he was not averse to bringing about some incident which might precipitate such a decision. So firmly did this idea of Sanchia's take hold upon her that she answered his letters in a very different key from that in which they were couched. He had no *right* to write to her: she would not be at the flat all that week and she wished he would be sensible. No more. But for some reason or other (or perhaps for none and



with the instinct for self-preservation temporarily out of action) she did not destroy his letters but carried them about in her bag until she turned them out one day in the flat and bundled them forgetfully into the drawer in which she kept her manuscripts.

She kept to her decision not to go near the flat that week, fighting a desire that tore her asunder to go there immediately, determined to take this unruly lover of hers in hand—and their unruly passion. And then at the very end of it, walking one fine evening across Kensington Gardens with George, she came face to face with Adrian.

He raised his hat and came towards them. Sanchia, glancing quickly at George's face, saw it flush, then pale. He seemed to stop as by an effort and Sanchia felt his eyes were upon her face.

“Ages since we met!” Adrian said to her with a cool, friendly smile and left her without a rejoinder.

George said: “I didn't know you were in London, Lorimer. Have you been back long?”

“Oh yes, quite a while.”

“You've overcome your dislike of living in London?”

“Not entirely, but it has its attractions. How are you, these days?”

George said he was very well, but volunteered no extension of this pleasing fact.

“Been away, I expect,” Adrian tried. “Sanchia looks well.”

She did just then because the hot colour came flooding her cheeks, but she said nothing.

And then George made the most astonishing proposal. He said: “Perhaps you'll look us up one evening? We hope to get away for another week in September, but until then we shall be in town. Ring Sanchia up some time.”

Sanchia's eyes said faintly: “No . . . no . . . don't take this seriously.” Her tongue: “Yes, do. . . . We should be so glad.”

Afterwards, when she reached home, she said: “What made you ask Adrian Lorimer to come and see us?”

“Oh, you always liked the chap,” George said, “and now you've got this translation of his book placed I'm sure you'd like to meet him again.”

Sanchia said faintly: “Who told you I'd translated his book?”

“Your mother. She’s sending me a copy, she says.”

Sanchia managed to laugh.

“Oh, I see. . . . I didn’t think the book would interest you . . . and I didn’t know it was to come out so soon.”

George laughed.

“Your mother knows everything,” he said.

Too much, at least, thought Sanchia; but she managed to smile as she said: “I’m sorry. I ought to have told you. I never dreamt you’d cared about an old novel like that.”

“Isn’t it good?”

“Of its kind, very.”

“But you don’t think it’s my kind?”

“Not altogether.”

“Sanchie, tell me. *Was* that the reason—or did you just not want to remind me of Lorimer’s existence? You were afraid, weren’t you, that I’d go off the rails again about him?”

“Perhaps,” she admitted. “Don’t you mind, then, any more?”

He put an arm round her shoulder and kissed the side of her head.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I’m sure it’s all right. You’ve been so sweet to me . . .”

She understood then that he was making a gesture, offering her amends. How awful! How truly awful! She felt a little sick as she leant back against his arm. But she murmured: “It is so easy being sweet to you.”

That evening, from a public call office, she rang up Adrian and told him on no account to take advantage of George’s offer. But Adrian only laughed and said why not, and when did she intend to see him? Couldn’t she come to him—or would she be at the flat on the morrow? They could talk about it then, if she really must. And was she aware how long it was since he had seen her? Still feeling sick, she hung up the receiver. Somewhere in the dark watches of the night terror seized upon her. She arose with a headache and in the afternoon took herself off, in panic, to the flat.

If he took, she said then to Adrian, the slightest notice of George's suggestion, she would not come to the flat again; she would put an end to their relationship. Adrian was amused, and refused to listen to any of her arguments, which he thought hysterical and which, anyway, he'd succumbed to before, so unnecessarily as it had turned out. Sanchia broke away from her hysteria, following after that air of calm indifference with which she so often masked her feelings, but this time she could not come up with it. Suddenly she was in tears and in Adrian's arms, and he was saying: "Don't be such a little idiot. You haven't been near me for weeks, and now you waste time in argument . . . Sanchie, be nice to me . . ."

She shook her head and went on crying.

"Sanchie, it's so long. Weeks and weeks."

His hands moved treacherously upon her body. She sat up and pushed him away.

"No, no . . ."

"You'll feel better if you do."

"It's your answer to everything."

He laughed.

"Of course it is."

"It's no answer to anything."

"It is between us, anyway."

"You're hateful."

"Don't you want to?"

"Not unless you promise."

"Promise nothing . . ."

He laughed again, sure of himself and of her.

"Little idiot!" he said. "What is there to worry about? Nobody would blame us, anyway . . . You've a right to love. You're taking nothing from nobody. Besides, you'll be ill if you don't. Look at you to-day, a bundle of nerves over nothing. Be sensible, my child."

She shook her head, pulled herself out of his grasp. He had never seen her like this before. Sudden anger swept over him and the desire to master

her, to beat down her will.

“Sanchia! Stop it! Stop crying!”

Her tears fell faster. Her breath was coming in short hard gasps. He could not see what she was crying about—and he felt aggrieved and helpless. The sight of her distress, so pointless to him and so unnecessary, roused no pity in him. She was no longer his Sanchia, who looked so cold and was not, who lay in his arms and loved and was loved, but merely a silly woman making a scene. He did not see that she was in the grip of something beyond reason, that she was really terrified and beside herself. Like all women, he thought easily and contemptuously, she was using her tears as a weapon to bring him to her will. The situation was absurd, anyhow, and had to be put an end to. A damn fuss about nothing. All women were the same . . . His face had gone quite white, a savage anger that was cruel and impercipient stared from his eyes.

He said thickly: “Sanchia, are you going to love me?”

She shook her head.

“Are you going to let me love you?”

“No.”

He pulled her up against him.

“I mean to.”

“Leave me alone.”

“I won’t.”

She looked at him, drawn for a brief second from the circle of her woe. Her eyes widened as he got up and laid his hands upon her. He thought for a moment that she was going to scream; that if she did he’d choke her. But she did not. Neither did she struggle nor try to balk him of his will. Violently, brutally, with the tears running still down her face, he took her.

Ashamed but angry still, he said when it was over: “It was your own fault. You drove me mad.”

She did not reply.

He sat down beside her, took her hands in his and began to kiss them. She did not seem to heed.

“Darling, forgive me,” he said at last, the dregs of his anger running out.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said. She did not seem to know he was there, and presently he got up, found her some brandy and brought it to her.

“Drink this,” he said.

She sipped at it and put it down.

“Better now?”

“I’m all right,” she said.

He looked at her, wanted to take her in his arms, but dare not.

“Do you hate me?”

She shook her head.

“Sure?”

“I hate nobody but myself,” she said with an immensity of bitterness in her voice that tore at him, and presently she got up and went away. He did not follow her, but from the window he watched her call a taxi from the rank and be driven away. He gave her time to get home, then picked up the telephone and called the number of her house.

Sally answered.

Mrs. Hanson had come in with a bad headache and gone straight to bed. Was there a message?

“Ask her to come to the ’phone for a moment,” he said.

Sally was afraid she couldn’t do that. Who should she say had rung up?

“Mr. Lorimer,” said Adrian firmly, and hung up the receiver.

Two days later when he rang he was told Mrs. Hanson had gone into the country and would not be back for several weeks.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

(1)

Sally saw her mistress leaning against her bedroom wall, her arms hanging slack at her side, her eyes shut, the tears running down and down her face, her soft heart for one moment stopped beating. She had not thought to find her there, and certainly had not believed she could cry, so that looking upon the incredible spectacle her eyes grew wide with dismay. She might have discreetly retired, but being Sally she did not. Being Sally she

went forward and standing very near to her mistress said in her softly-falling voice: "Oh, ma'am . . . oh, ma'am."

Sanchia raised an arm and covered her eyes as a child will do. She did not seem to know that Sally was there, and she, who had never looked upon misery as hopeless and utterly despairing, felt a chill at her warm young heart. Timidly she approached her hand to the arm which still hung slackly at her mistress's side. She had no words; she felt with some deeply right instinct that words were not wanted, that the situation was somehow beyond them—beyond, certainly, any that she could find. The situation was beyond her, too; she had not the faintest idea what to do with it, but something kept her there, standing quite still, her long, strangely white hand, so unlike a servant's, upon her mistress's arm.

Presently Sanchia uncovered her eyes and looked down upon the white hand. As she put her own upon it a wan smile trembled across the misery in her face.

"I'll go to bed, Sally," she said. "Don't let anybody come up. . . . Say I've a bad sick headache. And don't let them bring me any dinner."

She sat down upon her bed, slipped her frock over her head, let her underclothes fall away from her in an unregarded heap, and in another minute had slipped into her bed rather as though it were her grave. She lay there slackly, her head sideways on the pillow, her eyes shut, and Sally went away, delivered the message about dinner, and dealt with Adrian on the telephone. She could not, however, deal with George, who turned away abruptly from her explanations of sick headache and Sanchia's desire to be left alone, to go straight up to her room. But when he sat down at her side and spoke her name and saw how when she opened her eyes they filled with tears, and all the misery upon the face so dear and lovely to him, his heart, like Sally's, seemed for a second to stop. He leaned over and took her in his arms, but like Sally again he said nothing, just sat there holding her and feeling the long sobs which shook her and the pain of the cruel knife that turned in his own heart.

In the morning he was stricken afresh by the sight of Sanchia at the breakfast table. Her face was dead white; her eyes swollen and red with crying; her voice muted as are the voices of those who have wept overmuch. He parted from her with a dreadful pang, commending her to Sally's care and returned at six to be stricken afresh by the sight of her whiteness and limpness. He saw that she was unhappy, guessed that she was at least a little ill, and saw in these things a return to that condition which had so scared his

soul in those few first frustrated months of their marriage. He had thought, poor fool, that things had righted themselves, but as he looked at her now he suffered afresh and saw himself as the culprit, an opinion to which Sanchia's ready agreement to his plan that she should go off at once to the sea with Sally only lent additional colour. He was far from guessing at the sick shame and self-disgust which tore her, so that for the moment effort and caution were beyond her. She was in that weak mood when confession is a physical relief as well as a mental necessity, and the fear, nameless, perhaps groundless, which had sent her rushing upon her fate, had slipped into the background.

Yet she had no real desire to ease her present anguish by an admission of the passion to which she had submitted herself and by which now she felt herself so dreadfully degraded. At the best George would but believe himself responsible for that too—at the worst, he would slip back into that super-emotional state from which she had once hurried him in the terror whose return had been responsible for this last degradation of her infatuation for Adrian. She knew that she must get away, away from George's stricken gaze, until she had securely taken hold of herself, but as he kissed her pale face and wished her good-bye she ceased for a moment to feel the pressure of her own misery and felt only (and so acutely) his. Dreadful to go like that—leaving him with those self-accusations and old-time troubles crowding in upon him. Presently she would be able to help him—catch him up again in her love and friendship, for surely this appalling contempt she felt for herself and the passion to which she had given herself for so long with so much abandonment and delight would pass? At the moment it closed about her like the dark night. There was no way through it. She smiled wanly at George from the train-window (for he would not hear of her driving the car), strove wildly to think of something suitable to say, fell headlong over the precipice of her own miserable thoughts and said only: "Good-bye," which, after all, perhaps, was as suitable as anything else.

She was already a little better on the Saturday when George came down for the week-end, and the weather was good, so that they rose early to swim and were able to stay out all day, which so exhilarated Sanchia that almost she believed she had exaggerated her feelings a week ago and been merely a little hysterical; but when George said: "That chap Lorimer rang me up this week to ask after you and to say he'd been unable so far to look us up," she knew that she'd done and been nothing of the sort. She said with a fine assumption of indifference: "Did you say I was away?"

"Oh yes . . ."

She wanted to ask: Did you say where? but dare not. She said instead: “You won’t bring him down, will you? I don’t think I could bear it.”

That was safe enough; when Sanchia specially did not want to do anything or see anybody she always used that expression—“I couldn’t bear it!”

George said: “No, of course I won’t, if you’d rather I didn’t. . . . Not an easy chap to put off, though . . .”

“What made you *ask* him to look us up in the first place?”

“I thought you’d like it. You used to care about being friends with him.”

“I know,” said Sanchia. “It seems a long time ago.”

If only she need never see him again—never hear his name, she thought, with passion, her anger and disgust surging up in her again.

“What about another swim?” said George.

She said it would be lovely and went upstairs to get into her bathing-dress, damp still from the morning dip. Together they jumped down from their sitting-room window and ran towards the sea “half-way to France,” as Sanchia said, and shining like a strip of silver beneath the golden summer sun.

When George went back to town on Monday morning she was looking almost herself again. “I ought to come back with you,” she said.

“Why?” he smiled at her, happy because his dread and forebodings had been, it seemed, unjustified or at worst justified only of some passing mood of emotional unhappiness that perhaps he must learn, in their peculiar circumstances, to expect.

“Well, oughtn’t I? I’m quite well again. Are they looking after you all right?”

“Excellently—I haven’t been in a lot.”

She made a little face. He never was, she knew, when she was not there.

“Sure you’re all right?”

“Quite sure. Besides, the week-end will soon be here again. You can come back with me on the Monday.”

She assented readily, aware that she did not want to go back and with the thought in her mind that if she stayed there she’d be safe. Safe! She had the sensation of one in hiding. If she stayed long enough she’d have strength



enough to go back and face the meeting that seemed inevitable. "Not an easy man to put off!" She knew that, none better; but now, she told herself, she did not want ever to see him again. She was a little disturbed, all the same, because she hadn't the courage to go back and risk it. But she smiled at George and said: "All right . . ."

She wished he hadn't to go, and when she told him so he looked so happy she wanted to cry. That look he wore sometimes as if something wild and chained lived within him had quite gone. Oh, my darling, my only love, she cried in her heart as she watched him on Monday morning climb into the car and drive away, and remembered those nights and days when their youth and love had had their way with them, in that inn by the Kentish river. Oh, lovely, lovely unforgettable nights, how long ago you seem and how tragic that there should be nothing left of you now but these piercing memories, this aching passion of regret! She shivered and went in from the sunlight, remembering that even as all those years ago they had yielded themselves in passion deep as the grave, across the quiet night there had come, faint but unmistakable, the sound of the guns in France. The jealous gods had seen and had no mercy. Doomed, even then, as they lay in each other's arms quite given up to the ecstasy of their love and headlong passion. She wanted to cry for the cruel and futile thing that life could be, for the folly of men who ravaged the years with their wars!

We never had a chance, she thought wildly as she went up the narrow staircase to the room she loved most to sit in. We were doomed from the beginning. She stood motionless in the middle of the room, feeling quite lost and a prey to a hopelessness utterly barren. She did not see what she could ever do to get even with the fates. The handicap was too severe. Her spirit felt bleak and bitter, even after her lovely peaceful week-end with George. What was it in her which had made her fall so hopeless a victim to the cruel circumstance of life? She had aspired after unselfishness, single-mindedness and the love that serves without desire to take or to snatch, and had fallen into that abyss which had yawned all the time at her feet. Had she ever really believed that this passion of feeling which had seized upon her for Adrian Lorimer was a beautiful and natural thing to which by the very irony of things she was justified in yielding? Had she not always known it for a betrayal of the things she held lovely and of good report—even when she thought it was over and that she must die of its mere cessation? Excuses for herself there were in plenty, natural physiological reasons: she knew that, but nothing explained the obsession the thing so easily had become. Ecstasy there was to it in plenty—of the body, but none at all of the spirit. (How should there be when it was George, not Adrian, she loved?) Yet there was

something else in it, too, something evil and weak and obsessionist that, to her own dismay, had taken and held her in a vice. Even that brief alliance with Gilbert Yorke (indulged in surely as much for her own consolation as for his and for all its unfortunate conclusion) had had in it something which offended her less. Never, in any circumstances but those which were the precise ones in which she did it, would she have given herself to Gilbert Yorke. But Adrian, however it was, had only to look at her. She knew that—just as she knew now what that relationship was worth. However, and in whatever circumstances they had met, Adrian would have made hay of all her fine aspirations and ideals. *Not in our stars, dear Brutus.* . . . The explanation after which she had reached so desperately, the excuses which existed in the very nature of her marriage, were all beside the point. She had always known it, even though until this moment she had contrived to keep the knowledge hanging about on the edge of her mind. Adrian and the feeling he inspired in her were stranger than she. Together they represented something base and febrile in her life, something which slowly, hour by hour, was pulling its delicate fabric to pieces. She knew that just as surely as she knew she was standing in the middle of this pretty room with her hands pressed down over her face. She hated and loved and feared this thing, but it possessed her yet. Not all her disgust and recent revolt had washed her clean of it.

(2)

When, on the Tuesday, Sally showed Adrian into her room she was not even surprised. She had known it must happen. She did not even ask how he had found her. Why ask unnecessary questions? Of course he had rung up and had been given her address. At the London house there was no discreet Sally any longer to deal more tactfully with such inquiries.

Adrian waited for the door to shut upon Sally, then he came forward and with a laugh caught up Sanchia in his arms and impudently kissed her face all over. She permitted this, but drew away from his embrace as soon as he made it possible. He sat down then and looked up at her, negligently lighting a cigarette.

“Well?” he said, “what about it?”

She looked at him, made her face as impassive as alabaster, and said: “I’ll have a cigarette, too, if you please—” as if she knew this kind of situation was easier to manage with a cigarette.

“Why did you come here?” she asked.

“Isn’t it obvious? To see you.”

“But I don’t want to see you.”

“I can’t believe that.”

“It’s true, all the same.”

“Look here, Sanchia, haven’t you got over it yet? I’m awfully sorry. . . . I know I was a beast . . .”

She said icily: “We were both beasts.” After a pause she added: “And now I ought to apologise to the animals.”

He laughed.

“Oh, come . . . what does it matter between us? We don’t think any the worse of each other for it.”

“I think very much the worse of myself.”

“You needn’t. I lost my head. . . . You must admit you were a little maddening. And all about nothing. Why you get in these sudden panics I can’t understand. You can’t expect me to respect them at this time of day, can you?”

“I don’t expect you to respect anything.”

“Oh, don’t be so cutting. I’ve apologised, but really I don’t see what all the fuss is about.”

“Is there a fuss?”

“What else would you call it—this running away and hiding and having me put off with telephone messages?”

“They don’t seem to have ‘put you off’, as you express it.”

“Of course they don’t. Besides, I know you don’t really want ’em to.”

She stared at him, then walked away to the window.

“I wanted never to see you again.”

“Well, I don’t believe that either. You know you’re as fond of me as I am of you.”

As she made no answer to that, he came over and, standing behind her, put his arm round her waist.

“Aren’t you?” he asked.

“I’m not fond of you at all.”

“Rubbish, my dear. . . . You fell for me the first moment you set eyes on me—as I did for you.”

“That has nothing to do with ‘fondness’.”

“Hasn’t it? What has it to do with, then?”

“Just sex,” she said, the weariness of mortality in her voice.

“Well? Why not? Even if it’s true, which it isn’t, I’d marry you tomorrow if I could—and you know it. It’s not my fault the thing’s an intrigue.”

“I wouldn’t marry you if you were the only man in the world.”

“Thanks, my love. Why not?”

“Because I don’t love you. Because I don’t even like you. There’s nothing between us but this abominable physical attraction.”

He laughed.

“Not in the least abominable,” he said, putting his sleek head against hers. “Don’t you believe it.”

“I do believe it—but I didn’t know how *very* abominable until the other day. Hateful, beastly, mere animalism . . . I loathe myself!”

“Little idiot! It’s your pride I hurt . . . nothing more. Forget it.”

“I’ll never forget it . . .”

“You would if you’d not determined so obstinately to go on thinking about it. Be a sport, Sanchia. Show me you’ve forgiven me.”

“I haven’t forgiven myself. I wish you’d not come here . . . I wish you’d go away.”

“Do you?”

His deep and charming voice murmured hot endearments into her hair: his hands shifted from her waist to her breasts. He felt the quiver that ran through her at his touch and deepened its pressure.

“Do you?” he said again.

“Please let me go,” she said, and began to struggle a little.

“Be quiet!” he said, and his lips were kissing her hair, the pressure of his body against hers unrelenting. She ceased to struggle, the rigidity went out

of her. With a deft movement he turned her round in his arms and began kissing her white face, her tightly-closed eyes.

“You darling, darling idiot!” he murmured, and felt her arms come round his neck and once more the yielding sweetness of her lips was upon his. He half-carried her to the sofa, pushed a cushion behind her head, and walking to the door turned the key in the lock.

It was still locked when Sally came up later to bring in tea and stole softly away wondering if Sanchia had seen or heard her soft turning of the door-handle.

She had, but like so many other things that afternoon, it had ceased to matter.

(3)

The significance of these things was not lost upon Sally, but she accepted the position as she had accepted the earlier similar one, with that same almost divine capacity she had for not judging people, the same tremendous haunting certainty that here were things she did not understand, forces that could not be stayed. What the kitchen said of her beloved mistress was true: she had her “fancy men”, and this Mr. Lorimer was evidently the latest. That visit to the cottage, that locked door at tea-time, clarified in her mind all the things which had preceded it: those telephone messages when Sanchia, very pink, answered briefly or lied about wrong numbers: the letters which she stuffed into her pocket so hastily, that dreadful shocking crying. She and Mr. Lorimer must have quarrelled and he had come down here to make it up. Had that made her mistress happy? Sally did not think so. Looking at her these days she felt unhappy and uneasy, but when they got back to London she was relieved because Adrian only came formally to the house when George was at home, to dinner, or for coffee afterwards, until the kitchen-comments showed her that here, after all, was little cause for relief. For Sanchia’s kitchen knew all about Mr. Lorimer, it seemed. He had at one time been a constant visitor to the house—until the master’d put his foot down and sent him packing and taken his wife off to that one-eyed place in the country.

“Rubbish!” said Sally; “must be—or why should the master have him coming here again?”

“That’s ’er cleverness,” said Ethel, “if you ask me. She’s got ’er own ways of managing things. . . . It’ll end in trouble, you mark my words.”

Sally did mark them, alas! a good deal more than she cared about, for though she was only nineteen and a very youthful nineteen at that, she was well enough aware that husbands deceived their wives and women their husbands and took lovers. But taking a lover ought, surely, to make you happy—else why do it?—and it was impossible for her to believe that Sanchia was happy. She didn't look happy and she didn't look as if she enjoyed Mr. Lorimer's formal visits. Sally noticed how little she spoke to him, how relieved she looked when he'd gone and she sat smoking a final cigarette with her husband before bed. Neither was she disposed to put the interpretation upon this fact so readily put there by the kitchen.

"*More* of her cleverness," Ethel told Sally; "dust in his eyes, poor wretch. Seen her at it before. . . . She's a bad lot, if you ask me."

But Sally went on wondering why, if you went to so much trouble, it shouldn't make you a little happier. None of it, as Sally saw it, made sense. But her affection for her beautiful young mistress never faltered.

(4)

It happened that year that Alicia Blackwood came to spend Christmas with her daughter, and it was for her benefit that a theatre party was formed for Boxing Night. During dinner somebody remarked that Sanchia was very quiet and her husband commented upon her lack of appetite. But Sanchia smiled and said she was all right and must just have eaten too much Christmas dinner the day before. As Sally was handing coffee, however, she suddenly put a hand before her eyes and swayed a little on her feet. The next moment she was declaring that it was nothing, that she wanted neither water nor brandy, but her face was white and she seemed glad to lean her head back against the cushions of the settee before the fire to which George had hurriedly led her. The colour soon came back into her face, but she looked, Sally thought, rather strange, lost, somehow, and as if something had badly frightened her. When the others went upstairs to collect their cloaks she sat where she was, staring into the fire and quite oblivious of Sally's presence as she moved about collecting the coffee-cups and emptying cigarette ash-trays. Sally was struck not by the fact that she looked ill but by something unfamiliar about her face, and again the thought ran through her mind that she looked frightened, as if she had seen a ghost.

Presently Mrs. Blackwood came back, bearing Sanchia's cloak.

"How are you now, my child?" she asked briskly.

"All right," said Sanchia.

Then George came in.

“Do you think you ought to come?” he asked her. “Let me stop at home with you.”

“Oh no, I’m all right,” she said.

“Are you? You still look most dreadfully—fragile.”

Sanchia smiled, and Sally, watching her, was torn by something very sad and wistful in that smile.

“Do I? Oh, I’m all right.”

She got up from the settee just as Lorimer came in.

“Better?” he asked. “You still look pale.”

Sally was utterly vanquished by the look on Sanchia’s face, like sunlight running down a hill as she said: “I’m all right,” and, turning her back upon him, put her arm through her husband’s.

## CHAPTER NINE

### (1)

In the New Year Adrian Lorimer went to America to fulfil another lecture engagement, but Mrs. Blackwood seemed to be in no hurry to betake herself to France, though Sanchia made no secret of the fact that she would be as glad when the boat sailed for Boulogne as she had been when the *Mauritania* sailed out of Southampton.

Since her return to town at the end of September, Sanchia had refused altogether to see Adrian except in the most formal manner at her own house. Save for a few odd moments she had never been alone with him once and Adrian, inwardly furious, had, after a few attempts over the ’phone to break her determination, opposed to it an indifference which, to any other woman, would have been intolerable. But Sanchia seemed not to regard it. Adrian, remembering the past, and supposing her engaged in the amiable occupation of throwing dust in her mother’s eyes, probably thought he could afford to be indifferent. His ally was time. Time and absence. They had never failed him before. So he smiled upon her his slightly-fatigued farewells, with nothing to show how bitterly he resented the fact that he must say them in company. He thought she looked off-colour and less attractive than usual; which had the effect of consoling him in part, if not entirely. Too brainy by half, and too analytical was Sanchia—like one of his own heroines,

confound it. She'd never be normal until she left that fellow and lived an ordinary decent life as his wife and the mother of his children. She had a bee in her bonnet about Hanson—all because she'd had that affair with him as a girl. Women were traditional—couldn't forget things, must drag the past about with them for ever—even women like Sanchia. . . . Well, there it was. Leaning heavily upon his two allies he took his leave of this woman who stirred his pulse and subdued his will as no other woman had ever done and perhaps as none ever would. He did not understand why quite so much assurance went with him nor why, for all her present indifference, he thought of her long afterwards with a quiet certainty of possession entirely new to him.

Adrian gone, Sanchia looked for signs that her mother intended soon to follow his example, but without observing any. Never had Alicia Blackwood been more tiresome, more determined to outstay her welcome, more quickly observant or determined. For once, however, it amused George, secure in the loving companionship Sanchia had bestowed upon him for the past month, and cheered by the sight of that cool reception and dismissal of the man over whom he had once suffered torments.

“What's she doing it for?” he asked her, as they sat one night over their coffee when Mrs. Blackwood had taken herself off to her room to write letters. “I've never known her with such a passion for the English winter. Have you ever known her anywhere but in the South of France in mid-January?”

Sanchia had not. She said suddenly and with unexpected passion: “*I wish she'd go!*”

“So do I.”

“She will, you know, if I go with her.”

“That's no good. Besides, you hate the South of France.”

Sanchia nodded.

“Well, but what *is* she doing it for?” George persisted. “Do *you* know?”

Sanchia shook her head and said consoling things, hiding beneath a mask of smiling ignorance her deep and dreadful knowledge. For she knew very well why her mother was staying in England at a season when its climate roused in her a fury of resentment. She knew it quite as certainly as she knew her own name long before that cold and chilly evening in mid-January when her mother came into her room as she was putting the final touches to the toilet she was making to go with George to dance at the



Savoy, and said in a fashion as commonplace as that in which she might have asked her if she were feeling cold:

“Sanchia, my dear, are you going to have a baby?”

Sanchia looked at her mother through the looking-glass and paused in the business of the final powdering of her face.

“I’m not sure,” she replied after the briefest pause.

A faint shrug of Alicia Blackwood’s shoulders.

“When *will* you be sure?”

“At the end of the month, presumably.”

“I see. Couldn’t you find out a little more quickly by going to a doctor?”

“I don’t think so. At any rate I don’t intend to do that. I’m sorry to keep you here in this weather—it’s very bad for you, I’m sure.”

She put down the powder-puff, shut it into its glass case, and turning stood facing her mother, her hands upon the edge of her dressing-table.

“Go back to France, mother. I’ll send you word when I know. I don’t think there’s any doubt about it. Do you?”

Alicia Blackwood looked at her daughter.

“None,” she said at length. “How long have you suspected?”

There was the slightest pause before Sanchia said: “Nearly two months.”

“It’s Adrian’s, of course?”

“Yes.”

“Well, my dear, I’m glad you’ve decided to be sensible at last. There is now, of course, only one thing to be done.”

“And what is that?”

“To ask George to release you and to marry your child’s father.”

“Adrian? I see. Do you think it quite certain George will divorce me to bear another man’s child?”

“Of course—men don’t father other men’s children. But surely you must have made up your mind about your course before you embarked upon this business at all?”

“No,” said Sanchia. “I never meant to have a child. It was what, I believe, is usually referred to as an accident.”

“*Really*, Sanchia!”

“I’m sorry if the truth shocks you. I’d rather, I think, be dead than bear a child to any man save George. I’m in a mess and I haven’t the faintest idea what to do about it. I’d give ten years of my life not to have to tell George. But he’s got to be told. . . . It keeps me awake at night wondering how—what words will make it hurt least.”

“Let me tell George.”

“I couldn’t bear you to tell him.”

“Does Adrian know?”

“No.”

“Well, my child, you can’t go on like this, can you? And the longer you wait the worse it’ll be—and the more difficult to ensure that your child is born legitimate. You’ve only rather more than seven months even if you lose no time and George starts his proceedings immediately.”

Sanchia went very pale. She said: “Then I don’t see how it could be done, anyway. But I won’t have George told. Not yet—not until there’s no help for it.”

“A fool’s paradise! I thought you had more sense.”

“I’ve no sense at all,” said Sanchia, “not even of the variety known as ‘common,’” and, taking up her cloak, she went out of the room without another word.

(2)

The next morning Sanchia did not appear at breakfast, but as, after a late night, she frequently breakfasted in bed, this would have raised no comment even if life in France had not killed in Sanchia’s mother all desire to make an appearance at the breakfast-table. When, however, that lady sat down to lunch with that air of the day being about to begin so characteristic of those who have lived long in the country which travails all the morning to produce *déjeuner*, she was told by Sally that Mrs. Hanson was indisposed and was not taking luncheon! After she had done ample justice to the excellent one cooked for her benefit, Mrs. Blackwood knocked at her daughter’s door and walked in, prepared to be very maternal and very firm. Neither did Sanchia’s protests that her head ached, that she knew what her mother had come to say

and that nothing she could say would make any difference avail her anything. Maternal and firm Mrs. Blackwood had come to be and maternal and firm she was. Not only Sanchia's white, weary and exhausted looks decided her, but her own resolute determination not to be grandmother to an illegitimate child.

“You've no right to be dancing at all, much less dancing all hours of the night. You'll end by killing yourself and the child too.”

Sanchia looked as though that, on the whole, were an acceptable fate, but she said nothing, just lay there listening to what her mother had to say and thinking of nothing, nothing in the world save that she wished she were dead. And she went on thinking that long after her mother had re-arranged her pillows and gone away, long after Sally had come and gone with her coffee-tray, her sweet smile and anxious inquiries.

(3)

Sally, a prey to her own sick thoughts, torn in two by her affection and her uneasiness, was hard put to it, these days, to maintain the dignity of her mistress in the kitchen, for Ethel, at least, was quite certain she knew what was the matter and not at all uneager to debate the subject from several angles, each of them so exceedingly painful to Sally that feeling in the kitchen ran high. Sally, with her own secret burning knowledge, felt vaguely alarmed and unhappy, but continued strenuously to uphold the commonplaces of the situation and with them Sanchia's honour.

So, with the year moving gradually down into February-fill-dyke, and to the accompaniment of black and dismal fogs and the complaints of the lady who had almost contrived to forget what they were like, they arrived at the day which Sally was destined to remember all her life.

(4)

It began with Mrs. Blackwood's request in her hearing for an opportunity one day that week to have lunch with her son-in-law. Sanchia had been down to breakfast and gone out almost immediately afterwards, saying she would not be in until dinner-time. George Hanson, ready also for departure, and interrogating Sally as to the whereabouts of a pair of gloves by not wearing which the morning, it seemed, would be irretrievably ruined, looked up at his mother-in-law in surprise.

“Oh yes, if you wish. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yes . . . I think there is, George. I’d be very glad if you can make it soon. I want to get out of this murk and gloom—or I’ll be in my grave.”

George smiled as though he thought that particular six feet of earth would remain undisturbed for some time to come.

“Well . . . there’s no fog to-day, as it happens, and I’m quite free. Will to-day suit you?”

“Admirably.”

“Good. Where shall we go?”

“Somewhere quiet—where we can talk.”

“Not at any of your favourite eating-places, I’m afraid, then. If you can stand anything as English as a grill-room at, say, twelve-thirty, I think I can ensure you a little privacy at one I know pretty well.”

Sally, hunting still for the gloves, heard them fix time and place and as she put the lost articles into his hands she was rewarded by the tail-end of the smile he was bestowing upon his mother-in-law.

“Oh, splendid, Sally.”

She held the door open for him and as he ran down the stairs he waved the gloves at Mrs. Blackwood.

“Now, don’t be late,” he called to her, still laughing. Surely, thought Sally, it wasn’t true, as Ethel averred, that he detested his mother-in-law. She didn’t believe he detested anyone—that he was altogether too kind and considerate; but she was well enough aware that if Ethel had overheard the making of that appointment she would have said: “Why, he’d give her a hundred lunches, wherever she liked, if that would take her off to France any the quicker.”

That memory of him running down the steps, turning to call out that laughing message and to wave his gloves in the face of the morning, stayed for ever in Sally’s mind, like something etched on copper.

(5)

Sanchia came in late for dinner and went straight up to dress and did not come down until the gong had gone. Mrs. Blackwood and George sat together in the drawing-room and they did not talk at all while Sally handed the sherry and when Sanchia appeared they went at once into the dining-room. As the soup was being served George Hanson said: “I thought, my

dear, you'd like to go on somewhere and dance to-night. Your mother's going to play bridge somewhere, so what about it?"

Stirring her soup, Sanchia looked up with a smile.

"Why, yes, of course, I'd love it."

"Sure you're not too tired?"

"I feel very fit."

"Don't keep her up too long, George," said Mrs. Blackwood; "one o'clock's quite late enough for any dance."

"I quite agree," said George soberly, beginning to eat his soup. "Where would you like to go, my dear?"

They canvassed possibilities whilst Sally removed the soup-plates and served fish—fish that George said was excellent.

"Did you order it on purpose?" he asked Sanchia, who said, "Because I remembered you're so fond of it?" George did not say that was not what he meant, but he ate the fish, Sally thought, with singularly little relish, seeing that he had remarked upon its favouritism with him. It seemed to Sally afterwards, questioned upon the point, that George Hanson had made, on the whole, a distinctly poor meal.

Whilst Sanchia changed into something worthy of the place, as she said, to which they were going, Alicia Blackwood went off to her bridge-party. When Sanchia came in George put on a dance record and danced a few bars with her up and down the room, but suddenly he stopped, took off the record and shut down the gramophone. Handing coffee, Sally thought she had never seen Sanchia look more beautiful, though she was even paler than usual, perhaps because of the clinging black frock into which she had changed. When they had gone, Sally thought of them for a long, long while and with her mind full of them fell asleep.

She did not hear them come in.

The clock was striking one when Sanchia turned up the light in her bedroom and threw her wrap across the bed. She looked very tired, but smiled at George as he came in, and sitting down at her dressing-table she began to pull off her rings.

"Do go to bed quickly," she said; "you'll be so tired to-morrow."

He stooped over her and kissed her.

“Good night, then,” he said. She turned up her face to his and kissed him. Suddenly she put her arms round his neck and felt him tighten his hold of her.

“George,” she said, “I want to tell you something.”

“I shouldn’t. It’s late and you ought to be in bed. Won’t to-morrow do?”

“I may not be able to tell you to-morrow. I think I could to-night. It’s been so lovely.”

“Could you? Well . . . get into bed. I’ll come back.” He kissed her again, disengaged himself. His tone was light: his manner easy. Her mood rose and sank, rose and sank, as she looked at him—she did not know how she was going to tell him if he went on looking like that nor how she would ever tell him if he didn’t.

She had been in bed for some time before she heard him coming down the stairs which led from his room to hers. She seemed to have been lying there for centuries—and to have said what she had to say over a thousand times in a thousand ways before he was there at her side, stooping over her, his hand smoothing her hair. The reading-lamp by her bedside was alight and for a moment he saw the expression of the dark soft eyes she turned upon him before he pulled down the shade and dimmed the light, as if he wanted not to see it again. He leaned over her as if he would kiss her, but he did not. He saw that her eyes were shut now and that her face, closed like a flower, had about it the utter weariness of mortality.

“Darling,” he whispered, “don’t tell me anything . . . it’s not necessary. I know.”

She opened her eyes and looked straight up into his.

“You know?”

“Yes. You wanted to tell me, didn’t you, that you are going to have a baby? Isn’t that it?”

She shut her eyes again. Her lips murmured: “Yes . . . but how *could* you know? . . . It doesn’t show—yet.”

“No, it doesn’t show.”

“Then, *how*?”

The eyes were open again and beseeching.

“Your mother told me at lunch-time to-day.”

She sat up suddenly, wide-eyed and distraught.

“Mother!” she said. “Oh, God! *what* did she tell you?”

“That you were bearing Adrian Lorimer’s child, had been doing so for a couple of months.”

“What else?”

“Nothing we need talk about.”

“Oh yes, indeed we must talk about it. . . . *Please*, please tell me what she said . . .”

“My dear, don’t worry. I understand . . . perfectly. Let us leave it alone.”

“But, you *don’t* understand! You don’t understand for a moment! You don’t even *begin* to understand, not if you believe I love Adrian.”

“Oh, my dear, why distress yourself? You had a right to take a lover . . . and I know why you denied it so often. And it was inevitable that one day you should want a child. I don’t blame you for a moment.”

Her arms round his neck, the tears streaming down her face, she cried: “I *don’t* want *his* child! I never meant to have a child! It was an accident.”

But she knew that he didn’t believe her—that nothing she could ever say would ever make him believe she was the creature she knew herself to be, devoured by a passion she knew to be base and bearing the child not of love—not of love for a moment—but of lust.

“Be quiet,” he said to her, his mouth against hers, “be quiet. It’s bad for you to excite yourself—and unnecessary. Oh, stop crying, my lovely darling, and listen to me.”

She did not stop crying, but she lay quite still in his arms, her face against his, and listened to what he had to say.

“Darling . . . we haven’t much time. . . . We’ll have to move at once. I can pull a few ropes. We ought to be able to manage it just in time.”

She pulled herself away from him. “You mean you’ll—divorce me?”

“My darling—your child must be born properly.”

“But I don’t *want* to be divorced. I *hate* divorce. . . . And I don’t want to marry Adrian. He’d be dreadful as a husband!”

“You know you don’t really believe that.”

“Because he pleased me as a lover? Oh, what has *that* to do with marriage? Love-making is so small a part of it. . . . What am I to do with Adrian when I’m not letting him make love to me? I know nothing but that about him. There’s nothing else *between* us but that!”

“My darling, he’s keen on books and the things you find specially interesting.”

“But not interested in what *I* think of them. It’s not my mind he’s interested in. . . . Adrian’s like so many clever men—he doesn’t like brains in women. Oh, I tell you I *know* what Adrian would be like as a husband. He’s one of those who think because he can dominate a woman for a moment or two emotionally he can dominate her mind all the rest of the time. He wants a mirror for himself, somebody meek, adoring and mindless. George, you can’t, you *can’t* condemn me for ever because of *this* to *that*! I can’t *live* with anybody but you. I can’t. I can’t . . .”

He said nothing, just held her in his arms and pressed his lips upon her hair.

“George, you *can’t* mean to do that to me? I never want to see Adrian any more. I don’t love him . . . I’m not even *in love* with him. I can’t *live* without you—and all the things we’ve built up between us—the ordinary commonplace things . . . twelve years full of them. . . . It isn’t *possible* to destroy them. Don’t try to do it, George. Don’t get rid of me. . . . Oh, God, I can’t bear it!”

“Sanchie, darling, listen to me. God knows I don’t want to get rid of you. God knows what I’ll do without you. But it’s you I’m thinking of! You *can’t* have an illegitimate baby!”

“Why not? *I* don’t mind . . . lots of advanced people have them quite deliberately—and with their husbands’ consent.”

“I don’t think, somehow, I’m quite as advanced as that, nor, I imagine, are you.”

“We could go away—nobody need know.”

After a long pause George said: “The law gives me your child. Do you think Lorimer would let it go at that?”

“I don’t know.”

The answer was a mere breath, for it was a lie. She knew only too well. She had not forgotten that morning in Paris when Adrian had asked her if they ever had a child if she’d marry him then, and though she’d given him



no answer she knew, well enough, where he stood. She even knew, now, that he'd meant this to happen—she remembered a hundred things she'd forgotten or scarcely ever heeded. No, Adrian would never permit her to keep his child . . . to let her and George palm it off on the world as their own. This child—and others he intended, in marriage, to be born to them—would be used as his most powerful weapon against her. By her motherhood he'd both win and keep her. She knew that. She had a sense, not for the first time, of having been trapped.

George said nothing for a long time.

“Then there's nothing for it,” he said. “Surely you see that, Sanchie. It'll be all right. . . . We'll see a lot of each other. Adrian can't be jealous of a chap like me. . . . But you *can't* have an illegitimate baby. . . . Adrian and you must marry. And we'll have to be quick about it. We've got just seven months, haven't we? If I pull a few ropes we ought just to do it.”

Sanchia said suddenly:

“We haven't got seven months—we haven't got six . . .”

She could hear George's breath come suddenly in thick heavy gasps. For a moment his hold of her tightened, then relaxed. He said nothing.

“So you see,” said Sanchia, “there isn't time . . . however quick you are. It's *got* to be illegitimate.”

“I do see,” said George, and laying her back on her pillows stooped over her. “Why did you do this to yourself, Sanchie, darling? Why did you keep it a secret so long?”

“I don't know,” she said; “because I couldn't face telling you, chiefly, I suppose. But also because I hated to tell Adrian—and because I didn't want to be forced to marry him.”

George stood there looking down upon her like a man in a dream. Presently he began to tidy the bedclothes around her and to make her head more comfortable on the pillows. She caught his hand and held it against her crying mouth.

“Oh, my darling, my darling,” she breathed.

George waited until she released his hand, then he stood up and said quietly: “It's late—too late to talk any more to-night. You must try to sleep.”

“I'll never sleep . . . never again.”

“Oh yes, you will. . . . I’ll find something which will soon send you to sleep.”

“I hate sleeping-draughts. I won’t take them.”

“Oh yes, you’ll take this one,” George said, and went away to get it.

“No,” she said when he came back with it; “I won’t drink it unless you come in with me. I can’t be left here alone.”

“All right. Of course I’ll come. Drink it down, darling, at once.”

She gulped it down, handed him the empty glass and watched him put it away and slip into bed beside her. He leaned across her and put out the light and as he did so she saw the expression on his face, so white and drawn, and her heart was torn asunder as she looked. She took his head on her breast and closed her long white hands around it.

His breathing, still heavy and painful, kept her awake awhile; but the pressure of his head upon her breast was soothing and the drug he had given her potent. Gradually, the white hands relaxed. She did not know when that soothing pressure was lifted, when George slipped away to his own room, nor feel the long look he bent upon her as he stood by the bed nor the last light kiss he imprinted upon her forehead. Nor did the low murmur of her name slip through to her consciousness. She would not wake, he knew, until long after the usual rising hour. He knew she wouldn’t hear the shot when he fired it, and he guessed it would be Sally who’d come running upstairs and knew that he could trust her not to wake her mistress too soon.

## CHAPTER TEN

(1)

Much later Sally found it very difficult to remember the events of the next few hours, to sort them out or to recall with exactitude quite what part she herself played in them. Whilst all the household, shocked even out of their usual scandalous attitude, had wondered and whispered among themselves as to the why and wherefore of George Hanson’s suicide, Sally, her eyes upon her mistress, her tender heart torn by the white exhausted look of her, knew that she was in no doubt about it. Even after the inquest Sally continued to believe that Sanchia knew something about it that none of their questions and probings had been able to tear from her. But whether the knowledge gave her a deeper measure of pain or consolation Sally never knew.

The inquest itself lived in Sally's mind with all the force and horror of a nightmare. She was terrified that the questions they asked her, the answers she gave, would in some way implicate her mistress still further in the tragedy that had so terribly descended upon her. Pale and wan from two sleepless nights and worry-filled days, Sally stood before the coroner and answered his questions with her heart in her mouth. Had she ever seen the service revolver with which deceased had shot himself? She had not. Had the deceased seemed normal upon the evening preceding his death? Sally thought so. At dinner he had suggested to his wife that they should go out to dance. He had praised the fish (she did not say how little he'd eaten of it), and afterwards he'd danced a little with his wife. They had gone out almost immediately. Yes, on the best of terms. Yes, always. . . . Had she formed the impression that they were very fond of each other? She had. Had she ever seen anything which would lead her to suppose that the deceased was jealous—or had cause to be? No, never. (Oh God, let him not ask about the cottage! He did not.) Nothing that she said could surely, she thought, as she sat down, have splashed even the slightest touch of mud upon Sanchia's reputation.

But her spirits fell as she listened to other people—to the detestable Ethel, who had a lot to say about former scenes of jealousy, the temporary move to Mayes and the recent return of a certain Mr. Lorimer now in America. No, she didn't know why he had gone. She admitted there had been no trouble recently, that he had become a regular visitor at the house—but he was the same gentleman all the trouble'd been about before.

Sally would like to have fallen upon her, tooth and claw. The horrible, horrible creature! What had Sanchia ever done to her? Or any others of these people who, from unexpected directions, contrived to sling mud at her? The things people had made it their business to find out!—they'd unearthed some story about a secret flat, they knew that Sanchia was *enceinte*—and not by her husband, for the doctor had told the Court the nature of the disability George Hanson had carried over from the war. They knew everything, Sally thought, except the one thing she had managed to hide from them—the fact of Adrian Lorimer's visits during that week at the cottage.

Sanchia herself, pale as a lily in her black frock but most unlily-like in the unyielding pride and composure she showed the court, admitted the facts. Her husband had been rendered impotent by the war: she had a lover and was *enceinte* by him. She refused his name. There had been no jealous scene with her husband: he had intended to divorce her so that she might

marry her child's father. She could not say why he had altered his mind and shot himself. Yes—he was very much attached to her and she to him. She might have been talking about things which concerned somebody with whom she was only remotely connected. Her answers, given in that clear bell-like voice of hers, were distinctly audible all over the court. Sally wished with passion that she'd soften and mute it as she'd been used to do those times when she came to dinner with the Yorkes and Sally never could tell whether she said “yes” or “no” to wine and food she proffered.

The conclusions of the Court were perfectly simple and inevitable. George Hanson had obviously shot himself in distress because his wife had taken a lover and because, by reason of the proof afforded him by virtue of her condition, he was constrained to file his petition for divorce. There was no doubt that he was very much attached to her and his action must have been the sudden decision of an overwrought brain. Everyone must have the profoundest sympathy for him—and also for Mrs. Hanson in the very terrible situation in which she found herself. This was undoubtedly another tragedy of the war.

The evening papers made an excellent “human” story of it with headlines and placards at which Sally stared with anger and dismay. Mrs. Blackwood read them with her anger entirely unrelieved and said a lot of indignant-sounding things in French to Sanchia, who said nothing; merely shrugged her shoulders as if they concerned her no more than the events of the afternoon. Only at the sacking of Ethel did she raise a protest.

“Why!” she said, “you liked her cooking! What does it matter? Why not let her stop as long as you're here?”

However, Ethel went and Sally did the cooking which Mrs. Blackwood dismissed as “good but unimaginative”. But imagination at the moment was not a thing to which she was particularly drawn, feeling that Ethel had had altogether too much of it.

Sanchia endured the days that followed as she had endured the questions, insinuations and comments at the inquest, as though they had nothing whatever to do with her. Her white exhausted look remained, but her appearance of composure was absolute. Stares, nudges, half-audible comments did nothing to it. She ordered her mourning, attended the funeral, and began the dreary business of gathering together her belongings without, so far as anyone saw, the shedding of a single tear. Hard and unfeeling, even a kitchen bereft of Ethel voted her. But Sally knew better.

The Regent's Park house was to be shut up, and Sanchia was to go back to France with her mother. But they would not go, Sally knew, before Adrian Lorimer came back from America, for it was Sally who had taken Mrs. Blackwood's cablegram and she who had taken in the one that came in reply. So she felt no more surprise than, as a well-trained servant, she evinced when she answered the door-bell one evening and found Adrian Lorimer upon the door-step.

Something fleeting and desolating ran quickly over the white exhaustion of Sanchia's face when Sally showed him into the room where she sat sorting papers and letters. Sally saw the quick fashion in which Lorimer crossed the room and took her with a protective gesture into his arms: but she saw, too, that Sanchia's gesture of acquiescence was that of someone still too weary and empty to offer either resistance or participation. Sally went sadly away, unable, as ever, to comprehend the forces behind these things she saw, which moved people to acts of loyalty, disloyalty, kindness and unkindness. She supposed her mistress to be in love with "this Mr. Lorimer" or she would not have done with him those things which had brought her to the present pass; but that she had been fonder of her dead husband seemed to Sally undeniable, and even after that piece of medical information given so bluntly in the court and around which the kitchen tongues had wagged so waggishly, it was still a mystery to Sally how a woman could have followed Sanchia's course of behaviour. Untouched by sex, unattracted by any male, so utterly virgin that no man as yet had even kissed her despite her nineteen completed years of life, Sally knew nothing of the power and force of sex: nothing of the demands it could make or the betrayals and disloyalties into which it could lead you. Though she loved Sanchia, she could not understand why, loving one man, she had given herself to another, *to others*. She fell back, in her innocence and lack of knowledge, upon the old belief that people were what they were—that you could not alter them, that it was folly to try, that you had to like people and accept them as they were. She found this theory, however, a singularly weak defence when her heart urged her to a warm rebuttal of the easy conclusions of the kitchen against her mistress.

When the door closed behind Sally and her doubts and incomprehensions, Sanchia extricated herself from Adrian's embrace and faced him dry-eyed.

"Have you seen mother?" she asked him. "She was to come to meet you."

“She did—but she wouldn’t come back with me. Said she’d an engagement.”

“What has she told you?”

“She gave me the papers.” He bent over her, put his hand upon her shoulder. “Oh, Sanchia, why didn’t you tell me? Why did you let me go off like that without a word? You must have had an appalling time with George!”

She said: “I didn’t have an appalling time. Not with George! If I live for ever I’ll never forget his greatness and tenderness—his understanding and love.”

“But to do a thing like that!—to leave you to face all the scandal and misery! The kindest thing is to believe that he went out of his mind, as the inquest verdict agrees he did.”

“He wasn’t out of his mind. He was terribly sane. He knew exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it.”

“My dear child! It seems pretty obvious that he just went mad when faced with the fact of something he must always have suspected. That’s the only sensible way to look at it, anyhow.”

Sanchia shook her head.

“No, that wasn’t why he did it. He wanted to divorce me only because he couldn’t bear that I should have an illegitimate child. He thought he could get the divorce through in time to prevent it. Then I made it clear that he couldn’t. . . . If I hadn’t told him the truth he’d never have done it. I sent him to his death.”

Her head drooped. Her voice ached with regret and throbbed with all the hopeless despair in the world, but still she did not cry. Adrian would have liked it better if she had. As it was, he thought she was being unnecessarily tiresome. Damn it all, hadn’t she always maintained that George would go and do something desperate if ever he found out, though he’d never believed her!

“*Why* did you tell him?” he asked her.

“Because I thought that if he couldn’t get his divorce through in time he’d drop it.”

Adrian stared at her. His handsome face looked offended. His voice, when he spoke, was definitely hostile.

“Is it really true—that there wouldn’t have been time?”

“Of course, it’s true. Do you think I lied to George?”

He thought: You’ve lied often enough before, but he said: “No, of course I don’t. But I can’t see why you should have done a thing like that. It seems so idiotic.”

“Does it? You *know* I didn’t want George to divorce me . . . that the last thing I wanted, the last thing I’ve ever wanted, was to leave George and come to you. I never wanted to marry you. I don’t want it now. I don’t want anything—except to have my time with George over again.”

“I don’t *see* how you can be sure! Why *shouldn’t* he have gone suddenly off his head—decided just to put an end to the whole thing?”

“He didn’t go off his head. He did everything but that. I tell you, I sent him to his death. I don’t see, even if I live for ever, how I’m going to forget a thing like that!”

Adrian dropped on his knees beside her and pulled away the hand with which she had covered her face.

“Stop it!” he said. “I won’t have you saying these things! How dare you? You’ve been my wife, in fact, for a long while, and now you’re going to marry me. Do you hear?”

“I won’t marry you. I can’t . . . I don’t love you.”

“We’ve loved each other from the moment we met.”

She shook her head.

“You and I never knew even the first things about Love. We never shall.”

“Look here, my dear, you’re letting this get on your nerves. The shock’s been too much for you. But you’ve got to stop tormenting yourself. It *had* to happen . . . the position was impossible. From the first—long before I came into it. You didn’t know what you were taking on. Some women might have got away with it. But not you. Why, one only has to look at you! You weren’t made, you know, Sanchie, to live like a nun!”

She said only: “I don’t think I can bear you to call me ‘Sanchie,’ if you don’t mind.” She thought: He doesn’t understand at all. He understands nothing. For years he’s been praised for his imagination, his knowledge of feminine emotions, his insight into their reactions. And he hasn’t the faintest idea of what I feel . . . he never has had. And then she thought: He despised

George, thought him a Philistine . . . but George knew more of me than he will know in a thousand years.

She heard him say: “All right, I’ll try to remember. But you must pull yourself together, darling. After all, there’s the child. . . . You’ll feel better when he arrives.”

“I don’t want the baby. I never wanted a child of yours. I never meant to have one.”

“I won’t have you saying things like that!”

“That doesn’t alter the fact. It’s true. I never wanted a child of yours because I’ve never loved you.”

“Have you forgotten that first time you came to my rooms? That day up on Blanchland? You loved me then.”

“No, that wasn’t love. I think I always knew it wasn’t, though I couldn’t resist it. Bodily hunger—lust, that was what I felt for you. Nothing more. Love has to be more . . . an expression of mental and spiritual sympathies—the symbol of those things. A child born of that kind of union I would have loved, but not a child born of the raging wild beast you and I called love. Oh, I hate myself so bitterly . . . I wish all day and all night that I were dead.”

“*Will* you stop saying these things?”

He shook her, with savage restraint, kneeling there still at her feet.

She said: “I shall never stop thinking them. You can’t control my mind, I wish you could.” She thought: He’ll spoil his trousers . . . he’ll hate that . . . and all to no purpose, because I wish he’d get up. I wish he’d get up and go away. But she knew he wouldn’t do that.

“Now, look here, Sanchia . . . there’s no use in going on with this. We’ve got to use our common sense. If you can’t or won’t, I must. There’s my child to consider. And if you don’t care about him, I do.”

She thought: “*His* child. . . . *Him!*—yes, it would be a ‘him.’” She said nothing.

“After all, it seems to have been George’s wish that he should be born properly, with a name. If you’re right, that’s what he died for.”

Sanchia stared at him with wide, frightened eyes, rather like a little animal in a trap. Her mouth quivered, but no words came from it. But Adrian saw that this argument was the right one and went on with it.



“You see, if you *won't* marry me, you'll be denying George his last wish . . . for I suppose that *was* his last wish, that we should marry. If we don't, he'll have died for nothing . . .”

He knew, though Sanchia did not, that George had died for nothing, anyway, since he could have got his divorce through in time enough if he'd gone for it to Scotland, where the decree is made absolute as soon as pronounced. But Adrian knew it would be a long time before he would tell Sanchia that or before he said, “No really sane person ever commits suicide . . .” which he really believed. He'd have to go carefully. The things he knew of Sanchia would always remind him of that. She was going to marry him all right. He knew that now, but he also knew that she was quite capable, some day, of getting up and walking away from him. As long as he lived with Sanchia he'd never be able to forget the disturbing fact that there were other men in the world. . . .

He heard her say: “Yes, I'll have to marry you. I see that. . . . But you'd be wiser to let me go . . .”

“Why?”

“Because I'll never be any good to you. Because all the best of me's in George's grave, and because I can't see how our marriage can be anything but a failure.”

Adrian laughed as he pulled her up against him.

“I don't care if it's hell!” he said.

## BOOK THREE

### COLIN

#### CHAPTER ONE

##### (1)

Whilst Sanchia made her plans (or had them made for her, perhaps) for going away to France and marrying Adrian Lorimer, Mildred Gordon was moved to write to Sally. She was getting rid of her present nursemaid and thought that Sally might care to come back to her as she assumed that she “would now be looking for another situation.” Why? thought Sally, but as the letter proceeded she began to understand. Obviously Mrs. Gordon considered Sanchia an abandoned creature, lost to all self-respect, who must expect her servants to leave in a body.

This made Sally feel very angry and quite disinclined to accept Mrs. Gordon’s invitation to go out one afternoon to see her; moreover, she still hoped against hope that Sanchia would alter her mind and ask her to go to France with her. But perhaps because she knew how very slender that hope was and because it was never easy for Sally to be angry for long, she did eventually betake herself to Baker Street, and rode down through the February afternoon to the Bucks country.

It was a fine afternoon. Sunlight was in the lanes, pouring down like golden water upon tree and field and climbing wood. The birds sang beneath a windless sky threaded with amber, and as Sally walked along the winding uphill road from the station the freshness and sweetness of this outdoor country world plucked at her heart-strings. It would, she thought, be lovely to live in the country again. The remote thought of exile in France made her feel a little sick, but she knew she’d go to it, all the same, if Sanchia gave her the chance. But she won’t, she won’t, she thought; they don’t mean her to take *anybody*. . . . She had already sensed how strong was Mrs. Blackwood’s intention and that of Adrian that Sanchia should carry away with her no reminder of her life with George. They meant it to be a complete break. . . . Well, if it was, perhaps, after all, she might go back to Mrs. Gordon. Wouldn’t the country and the children, perhaps, make it worth while?

Five minutes inside the pretty little house among the Chiltern Hills, however, showed Sally that never again could she work for Mrs. Gordon. The afternoon definitely depressed her, heavy as it was with remembered things, with recollections of the days when Mrs. Gordon, as Mildred Yorke, had seemed such a different person, when her pink and white loveliness had been grounded in sweetness and good-temper and not in this discontented, unquiet spirit that pervaded the pretty house like an unhappy ghost. Plumper Mildred Gordon had grown but not happier, Sally thought, and not kinder. Her tongue that used, in Gilbert Yorke's day, to utter amused and tranquil comments about everything under the sun, seemed to have grown bitter and complaining. It was as if Sally saw this afternoon the harvest of what a year ago she had seen in genesis and the picture she had carried about with her for so long, dulled and misted of late, faded out of her mind altogether. Never again, she knew, would she think of the Mildred Gilbert Yorke had loved and who had seemed to her the embodiment of all young and gracious womanhood: she would be to her only a rather large, and uncharitable woman with a hard, discontented mouth, restless eyes and a tongue that said unkind and rather stupid things about another woman.

Neither did the arrival of Dr. Gordon just as tea appeared upon the scene make Sally feel better about things, for the doctor ate his tea as though that was the sole business of life, and showed singularly little interest in Sally or the project of her possible return to them. Obviously servants were all one to him. Sally noticed, moreover, that he did not look at his wife very much (as he had done last time) or pay much attention to what she said—rather as if she bored him, and he only sat there in her drawing-room for the purposes of eating and drinking, and was waiting for the moment when in common decency he could take himself off again to his work. When presently the children came in from their walk—June, a pink and white little beauty like her mother, John more than ever, Sally thought, like the father he never knew, and the baby, now some fourteen months old—he seemed to think he had an excellent excuse for departure.

“Good-bye, Sally,” he said, heavily casual, and stooping, kissed the top of his wife's head and went away.

After his departure Mrs. Pomeroy came in, having heard, she said, that Sally was to be there.

“Well, my dear,” she said to Mildred, “have you managed to persuade Sally to come back to us?”

Sally smiled at that friendly “us,” but Mildred did not smile. She said petulantly: “Sally wants to go to France with that woman!”

“With Mrs. Hanson? Is that likely, Sally?”

“No, ma’am, not very. But I can’t decide anything until I know for certain.”

“Of course you can’t, Sally.”

“Oh, mother, it’s ridiculous! Of course she oughtn’t to go to France with a woman like that. I was never happy about her being with her at all.”

“Oh, come,” said Mrs. Pomeroy, “why not?”

“Because I always knew, from the first, what Mrs. Hanson was. It was obvious enough from the beginning, though I *did* always defend her. I haven’t forgotten that Christmas when she tried to vamp poor Gilbert. And there were other things, too—things I heard. She made herself quite ridiculous over him one evening when Gil had had a drink or two too much. . . . Everybody was so amused. And in the mornings she used to hang about for him on the platform and manoeuvre for an empty carriage. Too ridiculous! She wasn’t in the least poor Gilbert’s sort!”

Sally’s face was very pink. Mrs. Pomeroy said: “It isn’t like you, my dear, to listen to gossip!”

“It isn’t gossip. . . . Besides, after all we know now, after this disgraceful case . . . Oh, I know the facts, and if she really wanted children, one has every sympathy with her—but why didn’t she have her marriage properly annulled instead of taking lovers? Really, mother, I don’t like to think of Sally in such a household. I still feel a little responsible for her, you know!”

“Yes, I’m sure you do, my dear, but Sally must decide for herself,” said Mrs. Pomeroy. “I daresay she knows her own mind, and I’m quite sure she can look after herself very capably. . . . Of course it would be very nice for you, my dear, to have her again and very nice for the children, too . . . What do you think of the baby, Sally?”

They talked of the new baby, of June and John, and of Paul and Bar away at their schools, until Mildred Gordon rose and took the baby upstairs to his bath.

“How do you think my daughter is looking?” she asked Sally then.

“Very well, ma’am,” said Sally.

“But not very happy, eh?” The old lady smiled. “Isn’t that what you feel?”

“Perhaps . . .” said Sally. “She seems . . . different, somehow.”

“You see that, too, Sally? I’ve sometimes thought I only imagined it. This marriage isn’t altogether a success, Sally. If you’re coming back to us you’d soon find that out, so there’s no harm in confirming your suspicions.”

“Oh, but surely, ma’am . . . the doctor seemed so fond of her . . .”

“It doesn’t always last, Sally. . . . You see, my daughter wants marriage on her own terms—and no woman can expect that twice in one lifetime, Sally.” She laughed. “How about you? Don’t men interest you?”

Sally blushed.

“I don’t know, ma’am . . .”

“Hasn’t anybody ever made love to you, Sally?”

Sally hesitated, blushed even more deeply, and said finally: “Somebody did once ask me to marry him, ma’am.”

The old lady laughed.

“Not the same thing, my child. How old are you, Sally?”

“Nineteen, ma’am; twenty this year.”

“Are you indeed? You look such a child still.” Then she laughed again. “I don’t know, I’m sure, what all the young men are thinking about. Wouldn’t you like to get married, Sally?”

“I don’t know, ma’am. I don’t think about it much.”

“I expect the sight of other people’s marriages is enough for you, isn’t it? And yet, you know, if it comes off, there’s nothing quite so good as marriage. At least, I’ve never seen that the alternatives have much to offer. Sharing a life . . . somebody else’s thoughts and ambitions . . . it’s a satisfying business. There’s a good deal left when the love-making’s over, Sally. But this generation doesn’t seem to think so. It’s got no use for the permanent—at least, not for anything more permanent than the wave women have in their hair. . . . I see you’ve kept clear even of that, my dear.”

“I suppose, ma’am,” said Sally suddenly, “you’re not in need of a maid yourself?”

“Indeed, no, Sally. I’ve had both my maids for fifteen years. The best I can hope for is that you will decide to come back to my daughter. She

doesn't get on so well with her servants these days, and these constant changes I find a little upsetting. You see, I am one of the people who value permanency. I hate changes—changes of husbands, servants, anything. . . . I'm even beginning to hate new clothes, I find—a sure sign of advancing age, Sally.”

Then Mildred came back.

“Well,” she said, “have you persuaded her, mother?”

“To come back? I don't know. Have I, Sally?”

Sally blushed, smiled and shook her head. She hadn't made up her mind—she would write. . . .

Mildred looked offended. “I must know by the end of the week,” she said. “But I expect you know that *some* people won't be too anxious to engage a maid mixed up with that unpleasant affair. . . . It isn't everybody who's broadminded.”

After that she seemed to lose interest in Sally's visit altogether, and made no objection when Mrs. Pomeroy proposed that Sally should walk home with her.

“My house is about half-way to the station,” she said. “Good-bye, Mildred . . .”

As they went along Mrs. Pomeroy said: “Tell me about that poor girl, Sanchia Hanson . . . I feel you grew very fond of her.”

(2)

Even as she had told Mildred Gordon that she needed time in which to think things over, Sally knew that no time would be sufficient to make her decide to go back to her. Right up to the end, to the very departure of Sanchia for France, she hoped that she might be allowed to go, too; but the original plans, she saw, were not to be altered. She cried a little that last morning when she awoke and hoped for the miracle, but it didn't happen. At the last Sanchia pressed her hand and looked for one moment as if she were going to kiss her, but in the end she didn't. She smiled that sweet sad smile that it always hurt Sally to see, reminded her that Mrs. Baines would answer all inquiries from employers, thanked her again “for all her kindness,” and was gone from Sally's life for ever.

Two days later Sally went to see a Mrs. Stawell, living at Streatham, who wanted a parlourmaid. Mrs. Stawell lived in a barn of a house facing

the Common (which Sally loved at sight), and proved to be a tall, starchy, over-plump woman with a hard handsome face and a manner so crude and unpleasing after the sweet graciousness of a Sanchia Hanson that at first Sally thought she could not bear it. Presently, however, she decided that it was, perhaps, the only kind of manner she *could* bear—something so entirely unlike all that belonged to Sanchia that she would never be reminded of her. Mrs. Margaret Stawell—Mrs. Arthur Stawell—knew exactly what she wanted in a maid, and was aware that she did not quite want what she saw in Sally—youth, an unusual, arresting face despite her sensibly-dressed hair and plain attire. Neither did she like her association with that immoral woman who'd got herself into the papers recently, nor her evident regard for her. Evidence of complete wrongheadedness. Like Mildred Gordon, she pointed out her own broad-mindedness in considering her at all, in the circumstances, but admitted that she was pleased with her manner and with Mrs. Baines's excellent reference, and was disposed to give her a month's trial. After that she told her the correct pronunciation of her name, and indicated that the interview was at an end.

Sally's life for that month of trial at Red Lodge was completely uneventful and, if the truth must be told, more like what she had originally expected service to be than it had ever been before. Mrs. Stawell was a widow, and though she had a son he was at Oxford and was not likely, Sally gathered, to form any permanent part of the household for at least another year. Meanwhile, with the need to keep employed a large domestic staff, which included a housekeeper and a butler (to Sally's everlasting astonishment), his mother gave cold and formal dinner-parties to the *élite* of the neighbourhood, and changed her servants with a frequency that even in these days, and to so unquestioning a person as Sally, appeared excessive. That she was not popular as an employer was obvious, and even Sally (spoiled for the Mrs. Stawells of the world by a Mildred Yorke and Sanchia Hanson) found life in her service a little arid. The servants despised Margaret Stawell, she discovered, because she made soap—despised her a little more because she made it under another name, and were entirely unaffected by the fact that they used it in Mrs. Stawell's own kitchen, and knew it was good soap. People who made soap, mere nobodies, were not entitled, in the opinion of the kitchen, to live in the state to which Mrs. Stawell pretended and to send their sons to Oxford. However, in that initial month, Sally found that the collective servant mind was less occupied with the social shortcomings of their employer than the moral ones of the employer Sally had just left, and she was hard put to it to withstand the easy condemnation meted out to her by William Gage, Mrs. Stawell's butler. This

gentleman, Sally had already been informed, belonged to a religious body known as the Particular Baptists, and when he returned to his native haunts at holiday time not infrequently (he let it be understood) occupied the preacher's pulpit and "expounded the Word." Sally, though intimidated by this individual, disliked him extremely—his pompous manner quite as much as his flat white face, the pale eyes that seemed to lie upon it as if stuck there, and the bald head which contrasted so oddly with his hairy hands and arms, and proved so curiously upsetting to Sally's sense of proportion. Mr. Gage, she found, knew exactly what should be done with a wife like Sanchia Hanson, and said so with a frankness that made Mrs. Stow, the housekeeper, suggest that he "moderate his languidge, there being young persons about." But Gage, turning a baleful eye upon Sally as the "young person," was unrepentant. Then as touches pitch, he averred, could not remain undefiled, and his "languidge" remained as unmoderated as he chose upon this entrancing subject of the faithless wife as upon all others.

"Wot about faithless 'usbands?" demanded Mary Green, the housemaid of the moment, a heavy, lumpy girl with a red, round face in which two small dark eyes were set like currants in a bun. "Never 'eard of them, I s'pose?"

"Oh yes, I *have* 'eard of them, Miss Green," Gage replied, "but wives are wives and 'usbands *husbands*," an aspirated point which the housemaid had not disputed.

"Meanin'," she said, "as 'usbands can do wot they bloomin' well like."

"Men," said Mr. Gage, "are different—in His inscrutable wisdom the Almighty gave men passions."

"And not women?" asked Sally, emboldened by the rebellious attitude of the kitchenmaid and wondering where Mr. Gage got his own inscrutable wisdom which made him so dead certain of so many things which had puzzled her for so long. Mr. Gage, still turning the battery of his pale, fixed glance upon Sally, observed profoundly: "Woman is the passive instrument . . ."

"Wot of?" demanded Mrs. Blake. "Men's pleasure, I suppose?" Mrs. Blake was the cook, a thin slip of a woman with a worried look and a face into which the fiercest fire seemed unable to induce any hint of colour. ("Might as well have your food cooked by a corpse," Mary Green had said of her.)

"Women," said Mr. Gage, "aren't tempted the way men are."



“Don’t you believe it, Mr. Gage,” said Susan Blake. “Wait till you’ve had a fine strapping girl go wrong, and then see wot you got to say.”

Mr. Gage lifted a deprecating hand.

“Now, now, Mrs. Blake . . . don’t you distress yourself. We know all about your Emma . . . and no one’s blamin’ *you*. You take it too much to ’eart, Mrs. Blake . . . too much to *heart*.”

“Too much to ’eart be blowed, Mr. Gage. My Emma ain’t no more wicked than the man wot tempted ’er . . . only (’cording to you!) ’e was a man and couldn’t ’elp it, and she was a woman and could. So, as she didn’t, she’s wicked, depraved, all the rest of the rubbish . . . I’ve no patience with people like you, who know everything, and wot the Almighty meant and wot ’E didn’t. You and your ‘women ain’t tempted!’”

“Kind o’ convenient for men, I should say,” averred Mary Green, encouraged to beard the lion by the tremendous scorn of him shown by Mrs. Blake. “I reckon they ought to be much obliged to the Almighty for arranging it all so nice and comfortable for ’em.”

“Now don’t you go blaspheming against the Holy Name, Mary Green, or you’ll find yourself in trouble, and if you’ve finished those potatoes I daresay Mrs. Blake can find you something else to do. Satan finds mischief for idle hands . . . and for idle tongues, too, that talk about things which don’t concern them and probably never will, in my opinion.”

“Don’t you be so sure!” said Mary, taking this as a slight upon her power to attract the more eligible members of Mr. Gage’s detestable sex. “There’s *some* things as even *you* don’t know, Mr. Gage.”

At this point Mrs. Stow intervened to restore order, and further discussion of the Almighty’s design for his creatures was temporarily abandoned.

## CHAPTER TWO

(1)

When Sally had served her trial month at Red Lodge, Mrs. Stawell went away to have treatment for something vaguely referred to as “her rheumatism,” a practice which she invariably followed, it seemed, after what she called the rigours of the English winter, which she endured because she could not bear during that season to live in France and other places reputed warm. Her absence made no difference to the household so far as Sally

could see, save that everybody did a good deal less, ate a good deal more, took a longer time over it, and entertained their friends right royally. Sally, having no friends to entertain, immediately lost caste, and upon these festive occasions preferred to go and help Nathaniel Lewis weed the garden, an occupation for which Lewis had singularly little taste. She found, however, that when she worked in the garden Mr. Lewis did not—that is to say, he preferred to dig his spade or fork into the soil, lean his hands and body upon it, and benevolently regard Sally as she knelt upon the ground dealing out death and destruction to groundsel, “daisy” and other vigorous forms of weed-life with which, according to Mr. Lewis, it was entirely beyond his power to deal single-handed. Mr. Lewis, however (apart from his singular incapacity to deal with weeds), was a good gardener and immensely flattered that Sally should seek knowledge of him, for nobody at Red Lodge ever did anything of the kind beyond asking him why Mrs. So-and-so at the Myrtles had strawberries before Red Lodge, or why the roses had gone off so early, or why the asparagus beds had yielded so poor a return for the money and labour spent upon them. Not that Lewis complained about that—employers were like that, took the successful things for granted, as no more than their due, and the unsuccessful ones as a personal affront. A gardener’s job, Sally gathered, was a thankless one, and if he had his time over again Lewis didn’t know that he’d spend any of it as a son of Adam. He liked Sally, however, and was deeply appreciative of her love of a garden and of her particular interest in the rockery, which here, toward the end of March, was beginning already to look intensely alive and fascinated Sally immensely, so that forking it lightly over, pulling out the grass blades which intruded in the heart of some green tuft or silver-leafed carpeter, was a deeply pleasurable occupation. So much so, indeed, that she failed entirely to grasp how much time Lewis spent upon her horticultural education, how little upon Mrs. Stawell’s garden. She only knew that her life became enriched with lovely new sounds: words like dianthus, alyssum, campanula, daphne, myosotis and aubretia crept into her mind if not into her vocabulary.

One sunny March afternoon (one of the fine spring days that frequently grace the month) Sally was balancing herself upon two smooth surfaces at the summit of the rockery, disentangling a clump of clover from a large and prospering silver carpet of *raoulia*, whilst Mr. Lewis in his favourite attitude regarded her labour of love with approval both of her enthusiasm and digital deftness, when a young man came out through the French windows of the drawing-room and walked across the lawn in the direction of the scene of their labours, or, more correctly speaking, of Sally’s. Both had their backs to him; the grass deadened the sound of his approach and Sally nearly fell off

her perch when behind her back she heard a young amused voice declaim: "And my brother leaned upon his sword, Mr. Boffin, and wiped away a tear!"

Sally regarded the speaker with amazement and was clearly of the opinion that for all his youthful elegance and good looks he was insane; for the words meant nothing at all to her, and yet the smiling, amused countenance of the young man clearly indicated that he imagined they had. Lewis, however, had obviously heard the observation before, and was aware of its implication, if not literally then certainly as used by the smiling and amused young man. He lifted himself from the handle of his fork, straightened his back and lifted his cap.

"Afternoon, sir," he said.

"Good afternoon, Lewis—you're at it again, I see. . . . Who's your . . . assistant?" He indicated the blushing and utterly mystified Sally with a graceful, casual air, his queer detached amusement still hovering about him as if it were a cloak lightly secured to his shoulders, and caught and lifted with the light afternoon breeze.

"This is Sally, Mr. Colin—your mother's new parlourmaid, I understand."

"The new parlourmaid?" The young man laughed outright. "'Pon my word, Lewis, you are a lazy swine, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir!" said Lewis, not in the least put out of countenance and not apparently injured in pride or self-esteem. The young man put his hands in his pockets and continued to regard him with amusement.

"I am glad you agree with me," he observed. "D'you know, Lewis, I've a theory about you."

"Yes, sir?"

"I've an idea that when you were young you read too much Robert Louis."

"Robert Louis who, sir?"

"Stevenson, Lewis. He once wrote an Apology for Idlers in which he said that if a person cannot be happy without remaining idle, then idle he should remain. Stevenson agreed this was a revolutionary principle, but thought that, thanks to hunger and the workhouse, one that would not be lightly abused. I feel it incumbent to remind you, Lewis, that Robert Louis lived in the days when nobody had thought of the dole."

“Yes, sir,” said Lewis, not knowing quite what to make of this long speech; “quite so, sir.”

“I quite agree with Robert Louis—and with you, Lewis,” the young man went on, “that the duty of being happy is one we tend to underrate, but my mother won’t agree with us, and as she’s coming home in about ten days’ time, I suggest that you stop giving a practical demonstration of the Theorem of the Extreme Liveableness of Life and hoe a row or two of potatoes, or whatever you do in gardens in March. And that you start at once.”

“Yes, sir,” said Lewis, and with a grin and a resigned hunching of his shoulders, he took himself off.

Sally thereupon, stepping circumspectly, came down from the rockery and emerged upon the lawn at the young man’s side, which embarrassed her a little, so that her blushes broke out anew, and she would have turned and fled had not the young man taken her by the arm and stayed her progress.

“Don’t run away,” he said. “Tell me, why do you do that lazy lout’s work for him?”

“I like helping in the garden, sir—and there isn’t very much of my own work just now with Mrs. Stawell away. And all the other servants have friends to tea to-day.”

“Yes, I noticed that. Why didn’t you have your friends to tea as well?”

“Because I don’t seem to have any friends, I suppose, sir.”

“Really not?”

The young man regarded her quizzically and was in no hurry to remove his gaze. Sally’s drooped before it. So fine and free and friendly a young man she had never seen. She wished suddenly that her face felt less hot and that gardening did not make such a mess of one’s hands. But the young man had not, as yet, seen her hands. His eyes were sufficiently occupied with her face; his brain with the thought that his mother must suddenly have gone mad. To engage a girl like this—she who never had a presentable woman in the house, who thought that no young man could be left in safety with any woman under thirty who did not squint. A nasty mind, the mater’s—not a doubt of it! However, this time he’d caught her dozing—with the result that the next ten days looked like being a bit less boring than he’d thought less than ten minutes ago.

“You aren’t one of the people who like to be idle, it seems,” he said to the blushing girl before him. “You’d even rather come out here and grub out the weeds that Lewis neglects than sit indoors drinking tea with other people’s friends! Is that it?”

“Yes, sir, I think I would.”

“Do you *like* gardening?”

“I don’t know much about it. Mr. Lewis has been very kind, sir . . . he’s told me a lot.”

“Oh, *very* kind. I can believe it. He’d rather your back ached than his, any day. But Lewis, as my mother would remind him, isn’t paid for the aching backs of other people.”

“Oh, sir . . . he won’t get into trouble, will he?”

“I shan’t tell, if that’s what you mean. Not, that is, if you’ll talk to me sometimes, or show me how to weed, too . . .”

“I’m afraid I couldn’t very well do that, sir. Besides, when—when the family comes back . . .”

“Meaning my mother. Yes?”

“Well, sir, I shan’t *come* into the garden. . . . Parlourmaids don’t. Only there *were* a lot of weeds and Lewis said . . .”

“Yes, I’m sure he did! Well, we’ve got ten days in which to assist that gentleman. That’s quite a lot of time. It would be a pity to waste it, wouldn’t it? Supposing we start now?”

“I can’t stay out any longer, sir, this afternoon.”

“But you would have stayed out if I hadn’t come home unexpectedly, now wouldn’t you?”

“Well, sir, not for much longer.”

“What’s your name?”

“Sally.”

“Sally what?”

“Sally Dunn.”

“Sally Lunn?”

“No, sir, Dunn.”

“Oh . . . I see. Well, thank goodness. How long have you been here, Sally?”

“Seven weeks, sir.”

“Do you like it?”

“Yes, thank you, sir.”

“Do you get on well with my mother?”

“Yes, sir, thank you.”

“And with that psalm-singing canting humbug who let me in—Gage?”

“I think so, sir.”

“Well, you’re luckier than I am. However, he probably won’t be here much longer. My mother’s visit to Munchleigh will probably do for him. It does for most. We have a domestic upheaval every year after she comes home from her annual stay there. Tell me, Sally—have you any moral objections to your employer living on salads and nuts?”

“Why no, sir, why should I have?”

“Lord knows. But most servants have, it seems. They don’t like cranks and only cranks, of course, eat salads and nuts. Unless you’re a duchess—then you can eat what you jolly well like, because nobody will believe you do it because you don’t know any better.”

Sally laughed. The young man stared at her in admiration, saw that she had good teeth, and made a mental note that her laughter was as soft and pretty as her person. Then suddenly, for some reason or other, he glanced down at her hands. He could see nothing for the dirt of his mother’s garden, which clung to them, but the shape of them—their long slimness and the small delicately-boned wrists from which they depended. But he noticed that she kept them still as she talked and listened, fidgeting them, on the whole, no more than her person. He was arrested in that moment not by the thought that here most unexpectedly was a pretty girl, but here was somebody quite unusual, whether considered as a servant or simply as a human being. This girl had individuality, she was a real person, not a copy. There was something much more than prettiness in the face from which he found it so difficult to remove his eyes. Doubtless to his mother the prettiness hadn’t been overwhelmingly apparent. Couldn’t have been. That pale face, framed in the dark smooth hair, so obviously virgin to the permanent wave, the large dark grey eyes with their upturned lashes and thick arched brows, would not, he supposed, strike everybody as beauty—certainly not those who thought

the highly-coloured modern countenance with its mascara'd eyelashes and practically non-existent eyebrows a thing of beauty. But this surprising young man did not, and to his eyes Sally's face presented a picture of something so fresh and unusual that already he was in danger of making a fool of himself over it. For Colin Stawell was a susceptible young man, which is to say he was affected by the young women his mother would not have approved and entirely unaffected by those she would. But she did not really think that at twenty-two he should be affected by women at all. Even in the act of doing it Colin wondered what she would say if she could know that he had "fallen" for her new parlourmaid. The vulgarity of his indiscretion would, he felt, undo all the good of her "cure." Only she'd never know. She never did know things he meant she should not, which was one reason why she declared Colin to be the soul of honour, as open as the day.

Suddenly Sally said she must go in.

"But you'll weed the garden again? To-morrow, perhaps? I'd like to know the difference between soapwort and pearlwort. . . . I would, really. Besides, gardening's a nice healthy occupation. I feel I've neglected it too long."

He stood there bending upon her the brilliant smile in which his dark eyes that curled slightly upwards were as much involved as his intelligent, humorous, but rather weak mouth. Really, she looked a darling—that dark, beautifully-braided hair, *really* over her ears, those lovely eyes with the beautifully-marked iris and the delicate colour she had in her face—due, though he did not know it, less to her struggles with groundsel and pearlwort than to the elixir that was his glance, his youth, his undisguised admiration and her own conviction that she was doing something she had no right to be doing—a thing which seemed never to have happened to her before. He wondered how old she was, saw that she must still be very young, wondered what she would do if he kissed her, wondered if she'd ever been kissed before, decided against it and said: "What do you do when you aren't weeding the garden? While my mother's away, I mean."

"Oh, I've my silver to clean . . . and all sorts of odd things to do to help in the kitchen. And sometimes I read."

"Do you? What, for example?"

Her choice of books made him laugh again.

"What else do you do?" he demanded.

“Needlework, sometimes . . . and I go walking on the Common, too.”

“When?”

“In the afternoon, sometimes . . . It all depends . . .”

“You like the Common?”

“Oh yes, sir, it’s lovely. Don’t you?”

He made a wry face.

“I hate this place,” he said with a sudden passionate disgust that surprised her, “Common and all.”

“Why?”

“Oh, because one should live either in the country or out of it.”

“This seems like the country to me.”

“Good Lord! My mother says it was, once, when my father built this place—but I don’t believe it. Anyway, I hate it—or did. . . . I don’t think I’m going to hate it quite so much now, somehow . . .”

He smiled at her again in his bewildering fashion. “Oh, do stop a bit longer. They’re all busy eating and gossiping away in there. They won’t miss you . . .”

“Can’t I get you some tea, sir?”

“No, thanks. I’ve already told old Praise-God-Bare-Bones that he needn’t bother. I’d hate to spoil the tea-party. They didn’t expect me, anyhow—I’m supposed to be in Norfolk.”

Sally began to walk back across the lawn to the house, and, aware that the young man walked at her side, she fell silent and also to wishing that he’d stop turning his head towards her and continuing to laugh and talk as they walked. She felt self-conscious; the banner of it waved in her cheeks and quickened the beating of her heart. When they arrived at the path which led off to the kitchen door, she murmured good-bye and ventured a look at him again. He stopped, smiled and raised his hat, revealing thick wavy hair.

“Au revoir, Sally! Rotten word, ‘good-bye’,” he said, and stood still watching her until she disappeared round the corner. And he thought: “Well, who’d have thought it? My *mother*! She must have gone blind or something . . .” Then he opened the French doors and stepped into the drawing-room. He stood there looking around for a moment, then, with a wide gesture as of sudden unexpected freedom, threw down his hat, opened the grand piano



that cut the room in half, took off the bowl of flowers that stood upon the top, pulled out the seat, sat down and began to play. The sweet and lovely sounds reached Sally as she sat in the kitchen, her long fingers busy among a pile of white cambric, and the golden air that was the minuet of the third movement of Mozart's Symphony in E flat, and which she had heard Sanchia play upon her gramophone, fell like summer rain upon her spirit.

"We know who's 'ome," said Mary Green, looking up from her "telling" of the leaves in the tea-cup of cook's corpulent friend. "Plays lovely, he do!"

"Kind of mournful stuff, though," said the housekeeper, who was honouring the company with the light of her countenance. "I must say I like something cheerful m'self—I'm partial to a nice bit of jazz, properly played."

"Well, you can always hear that on the wireless, anyway," said Mary. "You can't beat Jack Payne, I always say. You're going a long journey, Mrs. Wait . . . No, it don't look to me as if it's over water—more like the train . . . And you're going to meet a stranger at the end of it. Very fair and quite the gentleman . . ."

In the drawing-room Colin played on and in the kitchen Sally strained her ears to catch the entrancing strains over the babble of conversation. Suddenly the music changed. The rag-time, beloved of Mrs. Stow, assaulted their ears. Mary looked up from the tea-leaves to smile and nod.

"There you are!" she said. "Must be feeling gay!"

"Likes his ma away, if you asks me!" said Mrs. Blake in the tone of one who would add: "And small blame to him!"

"She don't 'old with 'is pianner-playing," said Mr. Gage with satisfaction, "and to *my* way of thinking she's right. . . . All very nice for a hobby, but not to be taken seriously. Not a life's work, if you follow my meaning—not for a young gentleman."

"Wot about Paddyrewski?" asked Mary Green. "They say he used to practise eight hours a day and took his pianner about with 'im."

"Good gracious!" said cook's fat friend, "like my girl's young missis with 'er 'arp. Takes it everywhere, so Nell says . . . Must make life a burden, as you might say! If I was musical, now, I think I'd learn the flute. A nice 'andy kind of instrument, I always think . . ."

The idea of the corpulent lady playing a flute struck Sally as supremely ridiculous, and she bent her head lower over her sewing to hide the

involuntary curving of her red lips. Upstairs, the music hesitated, stopped, and after a pause began again. Colin was playing an elegiac melody of Grieg's, at which the kitchen turned up its collective nose.

"Gawn all mournful-like again," said Mary Green, holding up the tea-cup to the light. "Pore young man! I suppose 'e finds it slow 'ere after Oxford."

"I can't think why he's come home," said Mrs. Stow. "He was supposed to be going away to stay with friends until the middle of April. . . . She'll be upset to think of him home all on his own."

"Do him good," pronounced Mr. Gage. "It don't do a young man any good to be tied to his mother's apron-strings."

"Well, he'll be able to play the pianner all day if he wants to," said Mary Green, "and good luck to 'im! I'm afraid that's all, Mrs. Wait. Mind you tell us, now, if any of it comes true."

"Thank you, dear, I will," said the corpulent lady. "Why don't you try this young lady's cup? Sally's your name, isn't it, dear?"

Sally admitted that it was.

"Which is your cup?" said Mary Green. "This one—or that?"

"That one, I think . . . Oh, I don't know . . . Oh, don't read it, Mary, please. There won't be anything—there never is."

Mary looked at the cup, looked up, looked back again.

"'Eavins, wot a muddle! I *never* saw such a tangle in a tea-cup . . . 'pon my word. I can't make out a thing! A fine old time you're going to 'ave, if you ask me . . . Quite an 'ectic time, as you might say. But wot it's all *about* you can *ask* me!"

"Dear me!" said the corpulent lady, "you don't say! And she looks such a quiet one!"

"Still waters, you know," said Mary, still staring at Sally's cup. "There's a tall man . . . not very young . . . awfully gawn on you, Sally. And a lot of water. That's wot it looks like to me, anyway. Oh, I never did see such a muddle!"

Thrilled, the kitchen hung on Sally's fate as delineated in the tea-leaves and interpreted by Mary. But Sally did not hear. She heard nothing save the lovely elegiac melody which stole out from the drawing-room and the sweet elfin measure which succeeded it. Never had she heard playing like this. It

gave her, for a reason she neither stayed to consider nor would have understood, a deeper, more intimate pleasure than she had received even from the playing of Sanchia Hanson's gramophone records. She sat entranced.

(2)

That evening as she waited upon Colin seated at his solitary evening meal, to prepare which the whole kitchen had travailed and grumbled (all, that is, had grumbled except Sally), he said to her: "Where's Gage?"

"This is his evening out, sir."

"So much the better. Tell me, Sally, did you like my playing?"

"Oh, sir, it was lovely," she assured him.

"It *was* better than usual," he said. "Do you know why that was?"

"No, sir."

"And you can't guess, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Well, supposing I said it was because I felt extraordinarily happy?"

"Well, sir, I suppose that would be a good reason."

"And supposing, still further, that I say I was happy because I'd had a nice talk with you?"

"That would be nonsense, sir."

"But I *did* have a nice talk with you, Sally."

"Yes, sir."

Colin laughed.

"Oh, you *are* a good parlourmaid, aren't you? Can't you stop being it for a moment, Sally?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," said Sally. "I have to go and fetch your omelette."

"I hate omelettes. What's to follow, Sally?"

"Cutlets, I think, sir."

"Get *them* then, there's a good girl."

When Sally came back with them he said: “Are you walking on the Common this evening, Sally?”

“No, sir, all the servants are going out—with the exception of Mary, and she doesn’t like to be left alone.”

“I see. Shall I stay in and play to you? Would you like that?”

“We should both love to hear you play again, sir.”

“Yes—but that wasn’t what I asked you, was it?”

“Oh yes, sir, I think so . . .”

Colin laughed.

“Well, don’t hurry away.”

But Sally opened the door with firmness.

“Will you ring if you want anything else, sir, please?”

“Wait a moment, Sally. You haven’t told me yet what you’d like me to play to you this evening.”

“But I don’t know anything about music, sir—not the names or anything. I just like the sounds. I liked what you played first this afternoon, sir.”

“*Did* you? That’s one up to you, Sally. That was Mozart—the loveliest composer there is for the piano, Sally. Did you like the Grieg?”

“Which was he, sir?”

“His were the sad melodies.”

He looked at her in surprise because she had said “Which was he?” instead of “What was that?” Somehow or other she knew that Grieg was a composer (*How*, he wondered? Was this the influence of wireless?) even if she couldn’t recognize his compositions.

“Oh yes, sir. They were beautiful.”

“Didn’t you like the jazz?”

“Not so well, sir. . . . The others did, though—but you see I don’t dance—I expect that makes a difference, sir.”

“Oh no, not particularly. You either like it or you don’t—like omelettes, you know. Well, I won’t play any rag-time to-night. I’ll play some more Mozart and some Chopin waltzes. And some Chaminade for light relief. And

some old English songs, perhaps—but I can't sing. Do you know any old English songs, Sally?"

"I know some my last lady used to play, sir."

"Oh," said Colin, light dawning upon him, "musical, she?"

"Yes, sir. . . . She had a lovely gramophone."

Colin laughed.

"What did she play on it?"

"I can't tell you their names, sir. But there was the one you played first this afternoon—the . . . the . . . Mozart, I think you said it was, sir, and a good many songs she said were 'old English,' sir. They were lovely."

The young man did not tell her, as even her grandmother had once done, that she tended to over-work that little word. He smiled upon her appreciatively, quite as much because of her naïve enthusiasm for the one thing in the world which could arouse his own as for the reasons for which he had smiled upon her that afternoon in the garden.

"Did they ever teach you to play the piano when you were a child, Sally?"

"No, sir."

"I thought everybody had music lessons, these days."

"My grandmother didn't think it suitable, sir. Waste of time. She meant, I think, sir, for me."

"Your *grandmother*! What had *she* to do with it?"

"She brought me up, sir."

"Hadn't you a mother?"

"No, sir. She died when I was very small."

"No father, either?"

"No, sir."

Colin looked at her and more light dawned upon him. He glanced down at her hands folded before her as she stood there on the other side of the table watching him eat his cutlets. Clean now of the garden soil with which her afternoon labours had covered them, he saw not only that they were long and slim and attached to small, delicately-boned wrists, but white and

extremely well kept. He thought now that he knew where she got them from—and all the long, slender lines of her, the pleasing inflections of her voice.

“Were you born during the war, Sally?”

“No, sir. Before it began. In 1911.”

“Then you’re . . . twenty, are you? Arithmetic’s not my strong point, though, so perhaps you aren’t. You certainly don’t look it.”

“I am, sir, in June.”

“Well, that’s some time yet. For all practical purposes you’re nineteen. A very young nineteen, too, I think. Tell me, Sally—have you got a young man?”

“No, sir.”

“*Really* not?”

Sally shook her head.

“Not even anybody you go about with?”

“No, sir.”

“Don’t you like young men?”

“I don’t know many, sir.”

“You astonish me!”

“Do I, sir? If you will excuse me, sir, I think I ought to go.”

“Why?”

“I ought not to be here, sir. Not so long.”

“Why not? I shan’t often have you to wait upon me, I suppose. That old hypocrite, Gage, ’ll come flapping round me and keep you running about for him. That’s his way. Not that I was ever constrained to talk to your predecessors, Sally. Taking them all round, they were a poor lot. My mother’s servants always are—to look at. I can’t think why she engaged you.”

Sally did not say, as she very well might have done, that Mrs. Stawell had been in several minds about it. She said instead: “Mrs. Stawell gave me a month’s trial, sir.”

“Oh! And is the month up yet?”

“Yes, sir—just before Mrs. Stawell left for her ‘cure.’”

Certainly the mater'd gone a little mad, Colin thought, if after a month she couldn't see how diametrically opposed was this girl to all her standards of what a servant should be.

“Do you like your job?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“Have you always been a parlourmaid?”

“Only in a way, sir. I used to have charge of some young children—years ago that was, though!”

“Good God!” said Colin, “the blind leading the blind wasn't it? Were you any good?”

“Oh yes, sir. They were good children.”

“But you gave it up.”

“Yes, sir.”

“How many places have you had since, Sally?”

“Only one other, sir.”

“With the lady who had the gramophone?”

“Yes, sir . . .”

“Why did you leave her? Because of it?”

“Oh no, sir, she went to live in France.”

“Did she, by Jove? Lucky creature! Wouldn't you have liked to have gone with her?”

“Yes, sir, very much.”

Suddenly panic seized her—of his questions and of the faces which would greet her in the kitchen. “Oh, sir, if you please, I really must go . . . Will you ring, sir, when you're ready for coffee?”

“Will you bring it?”

“Yes, sir, I expect so . . .”

“All right. Mind you do.”

Sally hurried out, hoping that the anxieties attendant upon the concerted exodus of the kitchen staff would prevent any member of it from noticing the colour she could feel flaming in her cheeks or the extraordinary amount

of time it had taken her to serve cutlets, green peas and new potatoes. Luckily they did.

When she went to clear away, the dining-room was empty and when, in answer to his ring, she took in coffee, Colin was engaged with the telephone. With a sigh that had more of relief in it than she quite knew, Sally put the tray on the table at his side and went out.

(3)

Mary Green, who regarded music merely as a background to conversation, spoilt the concert Colin had arranged with and for Sally, by her obduracy in conveying to her during the performance her views, speculations and qualifications concerning the performer.

“A nice young man, ’e is,” she alleged, “’andsome, too, don’t you think? Like ’is ma, I suppose—though that sort don’t appeal to me—not in a woman. ’Course she keeps ’im *under* something orful. When ’e’s at home, anyway—though I daresay ’e makes up for it when ’e’s at Oxford. And small blame to ’im! Been talking to ’im a bit, ain’t you?”

“Oh, he . . . he wanted to know . . . because I’m new here, I suppose . . . how I liked it . . .”

“Did ’e, now? Well, I guess ’e knew ’e’d better get it over afore she comes back. Precious little chance ’e’ll ’ave afterwards, I can tell you. ’E does play grand, though, and no mistake. Don’t you think so? And without a word of music—marvellous, *I* call it!”

Sally, straining to listen to the melodies that were the overture to “Rigoletto,” said “Yes, beautifully,” and hoped by her frown and concentrated attitude to make Mary see that she wanted to hear his playing and not to talk about it. But Mary was oblivious to hints.

“’E wants to go in fer it,” she said, “only ’is mother won’t ’ear of it. Got to go in the business, ’e ’as, poor devil, whether ’e wants it or not. And ’e *don’t* want it, I give you *my* word!”

“Go in for what?” asked Sally, “music, do you mean?”

“Yes. Concerts and all that, same as Paddyrewski. Real artistic ’e is . . . what they call Bo’emian. ’E’d like to go and live in Chelsea . . . and go to all them wild parties that goes on there, by all accounts. I’ve ’eard ’im telling the friends ’e brings ’ere sometimes that this place makes ’im sick.”

“Streatham, you mean?”



“Yes, Streatham, too—but this ’ouse . . . and *us*. Stiff and respectable, ’e calls it. I’ve often ’eard ’im say ’e’d like to chuck it. But she won’t let ’im. She ’olds the money-bags—keeps ’im pretty short, too, so they say!”

“Rigoletto” came to an end. Airs from “Bohême,” from “Butterfly,” floated up to them, some of which, though she could not identify them, were dear familiar sounds to Sally, who struggled after their melodious sweetness through the babble of Mary’s unceasing monologue.

“Oh, *there!*” exclaimed Sally at length, “*don’t* talk for a moment. I do want to hear this. It’s so pretty—do, do listen.”

Mary, looking aggrieved, fell silent for the short space in which it took Colin to play twice over the delicious air to which was set Hartley Coleridge’s lyric:

“She is not fair to outward view  
As many maidens be,  
Her loveliness I never knew  
Until she smiled on me . . .”

“I think that’s lovely,” said Sally when the melody dropped into silence. “It’s a song, you know . . .”

“Do you know the words?”

Sally repeated what she could remember of them. Mary burst into laughter.

“I bet a man wrote that!” she said. “*Conceit! Men ’ave* got a neck!”

From the drawing-room there came, punctuating Mary’s noisy, satisfied laughter, the first stately chords of the Borodin Symphony in B minor, in the middle of which Mary declared she’d had “enough for to-night” and was going to bed.

Ten minutes after her going the bell in the drawing-room rang and with a fast-beating heart Sally went to answer it. Colin, seated at the piano in a dimly-lighted room, asked her, as any young master to any maid, if she thought she could find him a whisky and soda. She went away and, coming back, put the tray upon the table.

“Good night, sir,” she said.

“You’re not going to bed?”

“It’s nearly ten, sir. Mary’s just gone up.”

“Then you stay here for a bit. Sit down in that corner; there’s a good girl.”

“Oh, sir, really . . . Suppose the others were to come in?”

“They won’t for at least half an hour. Do stay. This barn of a house gets on my nerves—even with a piano. I wish you would!”

“I don’t think I ought, sir. Besides, I can hear quite well in the kitchen.”

“Rot! Go and sit down, and when I’ve had my drink I’ll play you some MacDowell. You’ll not hear *him* in the kitchen . . .”

Uncertain, delighted, trembling, afraid, Sally looked at him, blushed, turned away and selecting the chair farthest from the piano, sat down. He looked at her, sitting stiffly on the edge—like a cook waiting for orders, he thought, until you looked at those long lovely hands of hers, so unlike those of any cook he’d ever seen. He loathed cooks, anyway, the sort his mother had, and all the paraphernalia of servants. He wished she wouldn’t sit like that. It was the only servant-like thing she did, that and the eternal “sir” with which she interlarded her sentences. He’d break her of both . . . And in the ten days, too, that were all he had at his disposal. Suddenly he laughed and, swinging himself round on the stool, began to play MacDowell. *To a Water Lily, The Eagle, Will-o’-the-Wisp* and *To a Wild Rose*, slipping presently into a bouquet of old melodies and then into *Yankee Doodle*, played in the manner of MacDowell and Grieg and Liszt and others, upon the conclusion of which he turned round to find an enchanted Sally no longer sitting on her chair like a cook, but leaning eagerly forward with her hands clasped in delight, and to be greeted by the soft, low laughter which had surprised him that afternoon in the garden.

“Did you like that?” he asked her. “Did you, Sally?”

“Oh yes, yes.” she said. “I could listen all night.”

“I wish you could,” he said, and quite omitted to notice that she had forgotten to call him “sir.” He left the piano and came over to her.

“Sally!” he said, and stopped, not knowing what it was he wanted to say to her, and conscious only of something strange and very tender welling up within him. “Sally!” he repeated, and stood there seeing only the rapt, enchanted look of her, the clasped and beautiful hands, the tender appeal of her parted lips. He no longer thought of her as his mother’s servant, or wondered what she would do if he kissed her. She was like nobody he had ever met before—just somebody whom he could delight and who could delight him, who, absurdly, wore a cap and a ridiculous uniform but who,

magically, loved music as instinctively and naturally as he did. In the whole of his young life he had never met anybody who did that, only people who thought of music as something which quite pleasant people made to amuse themselves—and to amuse you when you wanted it. A lordly patronage was what everybody he knew had always given to music—never, never once this humble adoring instinctive love that this girl gave it, who, untaught, with no knowledge of one note from another, yet knew what was good and what indifferent. He had never known till this moment how starved he had been.

“You’re a lovely person to play to, Sally!” he said. “Do you know that? You understand and you feel. . . . I can’t believe you’ve never learnt to play.”

He leant towards her, quite conquered by that still enraptured look of her, his emotions tangled and keenly wrought, commonsense and prudence as far removed from them as the stars.

“Sally!” he said again, and seeing her sway towards him, would have had her in another second in his arms, but suddenly, voices coming up the garden-path smote upon his senses—and upon Sally’s. The look of rapture faded from her face, her hands fell in her lap. His mother’s parlourmaid once more, she got hurriedly to her feet.

“I must go,” she said, and made to do it.

“It’s all right; they won’t come in here. Sit still, sit still . . .”

He attempted to push her back into her seat, but she resisted him and fled to the door, which opened and shut behind her.

“Oh, damn, damn, damn,” said Colin, and going back to the piano began to play with angry precision “The Ride of the Valkyries.”

In the kitchen Mrs. Blake, taking off her coat, greeted Sally with a nod.

“Not gone to bed yet?”

“I was just going when Mr. Colin rang his bell.”

It was the truth, but Sally felt as if it were a lie.

“What did he want?”

“A whisky and soda.”

Mrs. Blake nodded dismally.

“Has he been making that noise all the evening?” she asked. “Doesn’t it get on your nerves?”

“Oh no,” said Sally; “I like music.”

“There’s no accounting for tastes, I’ll own,” said Mrs. Blake, “but it’s eleven o’clock and it’s to be hoped he’ll give the instrument a rest now and let people get a little sleep.”

Colin was in no hurry, however, to do that. He played on and on like one possessed, and Sally lay in bed listening to the sounds that floated out of the drawing-room and up the three flights of stairs to her—sounds as confused at that height as her thoughts, and they kept her awake long after the music had ceased and Mrs. Blake, turning on her pillow, had murmured into it a fervent if not pious: “Thank God!”

## CHAPTER THREE

(1)

The first time—two days later—that Sally encountered Colin Stawell upon the Common, it was, as far as she was concerned, an accident. The second time she tried to think it was, but the third time she didn’t think about it at all. For that was the time Colin kissed her as they sat together beneath a large dipping beech, its boughs already heavy with bud. It was almost dark and Sally, hurrying home after the afternoon out, and already late, had seen Colin advancing towards her along the broad path to which, with a quickly-beating heart, she was hurrying. She would not have admitted, even to herself, that she was late because she had loitered in the hope of this very meeting—she was hardly aware that this was indeed the case, in so strange a world did she walk these days, and with what wild upspringing of God-knew-what tender yearnings and imaginings. She was in love—had fallen precipitately, without knowledge or forethought, into that hopeless state when the whole world and all its brightness and beauty are caught up in the mere existence of another person. There was nobody to warn her or to bring her back to safety, nobody to administer the necessary cold douche of commonsense. She was head-over-heels in love, and that was all there was about it.

Colin, certainly, was in no mood to help her. Highly-strung, imaginative, imprisoned in the narrow bourgeois life he detested, Sally was to him a glimpse of something more to his mind, that lay beyond and hitherto at least completely out of reach. He liked the look of her, he liked being with her; he liked the knowledge—so heady and so essentially cruel—that he held her heart in his hands. For Sally was too simple, too inexperienced and too implicitly sincere to dissemble her feelings—and too much in love to

remember that Colin was her mistress's son and that nothing, nothing of all that so much rapture and joy connoted, but only unhappiness and misery, could ever come of such a situation. Colin had wanted to kiss her from that first evening when in the half-dark he had played to her; but for the return of the servants would probably have done so. He had kissed many girls—had had youthful adventures which, taking him farther than kisses, had also taken him nowhere, but he had never before been driven by the thing which drove him now and which told him, even as he succumbed to it, that he was acting the part of a cad. This girl was his mother's parlourmaid, exceptional, if you like, but still that. He ought to leave her alone, delightful though he found it to be with her, and exciting to watch her fall, with one headlong immensely flattering gesture, into love with him. He knew that. He saw the danger of it, but not the deep ineradicable wrong of it. And he'd never wanted to kiss anyone as he wanted to kiss Sally. That pale composed face with its starlike eyes and the mouth that parted and trembled when he spoke to her—it drew him uncontrollably. So, meeting her in the dusk that fourth day of his acquaintance with her, he found it an easy matter to persuade her to sit down beneath the beech "just for ten minutes" and easier still, before three of them were passed, to turn her face to him and take the kiss he'd wanted.

Sweet as he found it, however, he found it, too, a little alarming. So much surrender, so much of the utter delight of surrender—had he really expected that, or wanted it? He did not know. He knew nothing, saw that Sally's lips were sweet, her arms about his neck all compounded of tenderness. And yet, *oughtn't* he to have known? Didn't everything about her proclaim her untouched? Didn't something warn him, that first evening in the half-dark room, that here were depths it were wiser not to plumb—that here was no simple serving-maid, but a girl of mixed birth who had inherited passions and subtleties, best left undiscovered, from some dark unknown ancestry. What, after all, had he expected that first afternoon in the garden? Nothing save a less boring ten days than he'd anticipated, balked, through Jim Lyndon's appendicitis, of the holiday planned with him at his home in Norfolk. Was that really all?—just a silly, undignified flirtation with one of his mother's maids during her absence? Yet even then he'd known this girl was unusual, no mere parlourmaid. *Surely* he'd known that? Damn, what did it matter? The thing was pleasant—he *couldn't* relinquish it. His vanity was touched, that deadly sex-vanity, so much deeper in a man than in a woman, was keenly roused. Without recognising it, he had seen his power in action and wanted to see it repeated—which meant, in the first place, that having kissed Sally once he wanted to do it again. So he kept her under the beech-

tree much longer than that original “just for ten minutes,” and when at last a dizzy Sally went running away from him across the open strip of common to the roadway, it was already much too late to avoid the anger of Mr. Gage and Mrs. Stow, who, in fact, combined to administer so slashing an attack that upon any ordinary occasion Sally would have been utterly crushed. But this was no ordinary occasion. It was a Red Letter Day in Sally’s life. She had no mind for anything else. She was drowning already in love—in the memory of Colin’s lips and arms, his murmured endearments—and she raised an almost unconscious head to meet the angers and indignation that buzzed about her. What did they matter? What did anything matter, save Colin and the fact that she loved him? And that he loved her? Did she think that, too—whisper it to herself as Mr. Gage waxed wrath, breathed out fire and slaughter and took Sally’s character away with the casual air of one removing his hat. Mrs. Stow was kinder—partly because she disapproved of Mr. Gage’s freedom in speech and opposed to it, on principle, her own more moderate expressions.

“You must learn to be in to time, Sally,” she said. “There can be nothing to keep a decent self-respecting girl out after dark—and it’s not nice for me to think of you on the Common by yourself . . .”

“*By herself!*” snorted Gage, and his eyes raked Sally’s young and budding figure from head to foot with an offensive meaningful stare: “I know her sort.”

Sally cared for none of it. She cared for nothing save the fact that Mr. Gage would keep her out of the dining-room, would make it impossible for her to set eyes on Colin again that evening. She had, suddenly, nothing to live for except the moment when she knocked at his door in the morning and took in his early tea. And ten to one he’d be fast asleep and neither hear nor see her.

(2)

But the next morning Colin was not asleep. He called a blithe “Come in,” in response to her knock and when she entered he sat up promptly in bed and turned upon her the attractive smile that twisted the heart in her body as he said: “’Lo, Sally. Did you get into trouble yesterday evening?”

Sally set the tray down by his side and said as she did it: “I did, rather, sir.”

“I say, though, I’m awfully sorry. I can’t have that old devil Gage being beastly to you.”

Sally looked at him, smiled beatifically and said: "But I didn't mind. It didn't matter!"

"Didn't it? Was it worth it, Sally?"

(Oh, fool, shut up! Leave it alone!)

Sally, starry-eyed, nodded, as if words were things too heavy and cumbrous to pass the threshold of her parted trembling mouth.

"Don't you have a day out or something soon?" he asked.

"Not until next Monday."

"That's ages. Can't you ask for one? Off days are surely possible while my mother's away? The others seem to take them, anyhow. I *know*, Sally. Ask if you can have Friday afternoon and evening—and I'll let 'em know beforehand that I shan't be in all day, and not to dinner. . . . That ought to help. Then we'll skip off together to Hindhead or somewhere. What about that?"

"Oh, sir," said Sally with shining eyes; "do you think we really might?"

"Not if you call me 'sir.' I thought you'd got out of that. Say 'Colin.' Say it now!"

"Colin!"

"That's better. You'll soon get used to it. It's quite a nice name, Sally . . ."

He pulled her towards him. "Give me a kiss, Sally."

"I couldn't. Not here. . . . Oh, please . . ."

He snatched his kiss and let her go.

"You look lovely in the morning, Sally. Look at yourself in the glass, as you go out. But I'll want a better kiss than that on Friday, I warn you."

Sally went out, with a beating swelling heart and without looking in the mirror and without any coquettish looking back from the doorway which Colin had half expected and which left him a little disappointed. He was not yet aware how little—how very little!—of the coquette there was in Sally, how real and lovely to her this thing was which had happened to her.

After lunch that morning she asked about the Friday. She could have, said Mrs. Stow, the afternoon. If she'd go without her lunch and take some sandwiches she could go at twelve, as Mr. Colin had just said he would be out all day; but she must be in at six-thirty, because all the others were going

to a “bit of a do” at a neighbouring house (to which Sally, as an unknown new-comer to the Red Lodge kitchen, had not been asked) and Mrs. Stawell never liked to have the house left, “even with Lewis at the Lodge.” “Not that I care much about leaving you here alone, either,” said Mrs. Stow. “Are you in any way nervous?”

“No, ma’am,” said Sally. “I’ve often been left in charge alone at my other places.”

“But this is such a barn of a place. However, here’s the phone number of the house we’re going to, in case you want it. And Mr. Colin says he’ll be home early.”

Sally found an opportunity that evening to convey her success to Colin, who said: “Take the sandwiches—and look for me at the top of the hill outside the Convent—as soon after twelve as you can. I’ll be there before you.”

He wondered, a little anxiously, what she would wear. Something not too impossible, he hoped. But, after all, he had only seen her in her uniform. He stifled an instinct to say: “Mind you make yourself look nice,” and let her go, with that intriguing smile of his which had first beguiled her and now, already, had the power to twist her heart.

(3)

The red sports coupé Colin had got out of his mother for his twenty-second birthday a few months earlier stood there at the top of the hill the next morning when Sally arrived. She had walked through the High Street clutching her little package of sandwiches and moving as one shod newly with wings, and the sight of the car and Colin leaning briefly from it to say: “Hop in!” reduced her to such a state of bliss that she had no voice in which to wish him good-morning and turned upon him a pair of eyes darkly-bright with the first really personal happiness that had come to her.

“Excellent!” he said, as he helped her to cover her knees with the rug he handed her. “Off to time, and a fine day!” He looked at her with approval. Her clothes were plain but not cheap and he saw as he adjusted the rug that her stockings were not artificial silk but suspiciously like the real thing. He wondered if she had bought them on purpose.

“What’s that?” he asked her, indicating the neat brown-paper package she had placed on her lap.

“The sandwiches. . . . I *hope* there’s enough for two.”



Colin laughed as he let out his clutch and engaged his gear.

“Don’t worry!” he said, “there’s a luncheon-basket behind. You didn’t think I *meant* you to eat sandwiches to-day, did you? You had to bring ’em, of course, as you weren’t staying to lunch. Where are you supposed to be going to-day, by the way?”

“To see a friend in the country.”

Sally did not tell her first lie without a blush, which Colin thought so becoming. He said: “Somebody ought to be engaged to make you tell lies all day. You look so nice over it.” At which Sally’s colour deepened, so that she put up a hand to her cheeks as if to hide it. Whereupon Colin thought again what lovely hands she had.

“Which *part* of the country, my child? Did they ask?”

“No.”

“Good. Then your friend lives at Ripley. So don’t forget.”

“Is it Ripley we’re going to?”

“We’re going through it on the way to Hindhead. Ever been to Hindhead?”

“No,” said Sally; “where is it?”

“In Surrey. Forty miles out of London.”

“Isn’t that a long way? I’ve got to be in at half-past six.” Sally sounded a little anxious.

“No distance at all. And Hindhead’s worth seeing, too. Eight hundred feet up and we shall have it to ourselves more or less. No use at week-ends; too many people about. What do you think of my car?”

“Lovely!” said Sally. “I haven’t been in a car before.”

“Haven’t been . . .?” Colin stared for a moment, then roared with laughter. It was an amusing situation, he thought, and one he didn’t seem to remember having been in before. “Well, I hope you like it,” he said. “We can touch eighty on a clear road and she’ll go up Hindhead like a bird.”

“Is it very *hard* to drive?”

“Good lord, no. Rather not.”

“It seems sort of . . . clever, to me,” said Sally, and added out of her inexperience, not only of cars but of men: “Perhaps that’s because I don’t

know anything about it.”

“You can be sure it is,” said a Colin who remembered how many times young women wishing to flatter the male had made that kind of remark without Sally’s proviso.

Through Cobham they ran, a vivid streak, through Ripley and into Guildford, at which Sally exclaimed with so much delight that Colin said: “That friend of yours had better live here, I think, not at Ripley, after all. . . . It’s a nice old town. Look at the hill climbing up the back and at these old buildings. That’s the Town Hall, with the clock sticking out across the street. There’s a sixteenth-century grammar-school, too, somewhere, and a Norman castle. There’s also an old Elizabethan house now turned into an hotel, but you can’t get a drink there, so I shan’t take you to see it. But if Mrs. Stow asks questions about Guildford you can trot it out. There’s also a rhyme about the town she’d like to know, perhaps:

‘Proud Guildford, poor people,  
Three churches, no steeple!’

I don’t know what it means!”

Colin laughed as he swung the car round to the right at the bottom of the hill, taking the road to Farnham. “We’ll go over the Hog’s Back,” he said; “you’ll like that. It’s a bit longer, but we’ve lots of time, thank heaven!”

Up the hill they went, noisy, fast and beautiful, as though they had no time at all. Sally caught a fleeting glimpse of Onslow village, at which Colin glanced and sniffed, and then they seemed to be on the crest of the world, flying along it as though they fled from some modern devil who would have them stop and take a look at the outstretched kingdoms of the earth. It did not occur to Sally to ask the god in the car to slow down that she might see the view he had brought her to see. It did not, indeed, occur to her to ask the god to do anything. It was enough to be there at his side. He might go where he liked and at what speed he liked, for this girl who had been nowhere and never sat in a car before. Sally, fathoms deep in love, her head completely lost or turned or full of romantic dreams, which is much the same thing, had no very clear impression of anything that was happening. They were going to this place called Hindhead, where they would have lunch and where Colin would kiss her and tell her he loved her. Sally got no further than that—knew nothing more than that. The level-headed sensible girl who had wrestled with the amorous difficulties of other people, who until so recently had asked nothing beyond serving the unhappy woman she called mistress, who had never conceived of herself as loved or loving, kissed or kissing,

had quite disappeared. Her emotions, now so carelessly, so casually aroused by a young man bored and looking for something that might prove amusing to do, carried her along quite helplessly. Neither commonsense nor the instinct of self-preservation seemed any longer to dwell with her. To the watching fates she must already have seemed abandoned, doomed, long before she reached Hindhead, and whether this young man took his pleasure to the full or merely played about on the edge of it.

But suddenly, surprisingly, the young man did stop, and reaching out his hand took the brown-paper parcel from Sally's lap, got out of the car and with a laugh ran across the road. Watching, Sally saw him throw the packet of sandwiches as far as he could across the open country, then he came back, lighting a cigarette and smiling his irresistible smile.

"So much for that," he said. "Have a cigarette?"

"I don't smoke," said Sally, who at any other time would have been worried by the thought of so much good food thrown to the winds in that fashion, but now could think of nothing half so sensible.

"Wouldn't you like to try?" Colin asked as he got in the car again and started her up. But Sally shook her head and they went on—down through Farnham, about which, it seemed, Colin had no information, for he dismissed it with a mere gesture and the mere mention of its name, to race along through Tilford and Churt until they began the climb to Hindhead and came out at the Huts Hotel, where Colin stopped the car and jumped out. "Come in a moment," he said, "and look at the awful pictures. . . . You don't have to have a drink if you'd rather not. Lord, it's a lovely day. Quiet, too. Lucky for us. If there was a wind you'd know it up here, I can tell you. Come along."

The pictures turned out to be mere daubs—all connected with the murder committed in the eighteenth century on Hindhead, about which Colin knew only that the victim was a sailor, the murderers some tramps he had befriended. His body had been thrown into the Devil's Punch Bowl and theirs eventually hoisted on the gibbet at the top of the hill.

"If you really *won't* have a drink," Colin said as he finished his own, "we'll go and have a look at it."

"Which?" asked Sally as they went, "the top of the hill or the gibbet?"

"Both," said Colin as he slipped in and started the car.

They parked it on the ground thoughtfully provided in these days by the local authority, and forgetting temporarily about the luncheon-basket, set out for the summit which stood green and enticing before them. To Sally's relief there was, she found, no gibbet but only a stone cross with Latin inscriptions which, marvellously, Colin was able to translate for her, and a metal disc which told them their height at that point above the sea and the direction and distance of adjacent towns. Having inspected it they set themselves down on the grass and remained there, looking out over the expanse of country stretched out before them, lovelier than anything Sally had ever seen or imagined. Colin agreed that it was "rather jolly," but began to tell her of other "rather jolly" views he'd seen—a great stretch of country running between Taunton and Crediton; the views you got from Harting Down in Sussex, from Sutton Bank five miles above Thirsk in Yorkshire, and the wide sweeps of country that belonged to the moors there, from Ruswarp and Sleights, from the heights above Whitby and all the dark forbidding beauty of the Scottish glens.

"I wish you could see them," he said. "It seems so idiotic that a girl like you should be stuck down in a hole like Streatham, waiting on people like me. Damn silly!"

Sally said: "Oh, well, perhaps I will, some day." "Some day" seemed vague and unimportant beside the lovely reality of that sunny April morning: it had no power whatever over Sally to make her either sad or wistful, and the smile she turned upon Colin, who had rolled over on his stomach so that he had to tilt his head round to look at her, was so gay and unclouded that her mood conveyed itself to him. He dropped his indignant references to Sally's position in the world and began to talk of things both trivial and nonsensical until the fresh air or the appetiser he had imbibed reminded him of the luncheon-basket he had left in the car.

"You stay here," he said, "and I'll go and fetch it up. Don't you dare to move. I don't suppose anybody'll come—but if they do, and try to speak to you, just spit in their eye."

He laughed and so did Sally, who sat for the ten minutes of his absence with her elbows on her knees, her head resting on her hands, staring out across that lovely stretch of hill and valley and plain lying asleep in the sun and shade of that April morning. Overhead, the birds sang in a sky of unbroken blue and the air which played about her was soft and caressing. Sally sat there as in a dream, not thinking, deeply engaged with the lovely

business of being alive and young in the spring which, like the youthful Wordsworth long before with the dawn, she believed to be synonymous with heaven.

Then Colin came back.

“We’ll go down the hill a bit,” he said, “over there. . . . No, by that silver birch. The one with the white trunk. . . . The ‘lady of the forest’, they call her. Can you manage?”

He stretched out a hand, pulled her up from the ground and stood there, holding an impressive-looking basket and pointing out the place which seemed to him a suitable one in which to devour its contents.

Under the silver birch, just breaking into bud of the tenderest and loveliest green, Colin spread his ground-sheet and the fur rug from the car and ordered Sally to sit down upon them.

The hamper had come, he said, from Fortnum and Mason’s and Sally watched what he took out of it as if it were a thing of magic. Cold chicken, prawns in aspic, delicious rolls, pats of butter, peaches, a thermos full of coffee (and no concern of theirs at the moment), and a half-bottle of red wine which Colin stood up for a while in the sun. Burgundy, he explained, was the better for having the chill off.

Sally ate her chicken and prawns with the appetite that belongs to youth sharpened by happiness and the invigorating wind that lives upon steep hillsides. At the red wine, dechilled by the sun, however, she made a wry face.

“Don’t you *like* it?” Colin asked in dismay.

“Not much,” said Sally. “It’s kind of . . . of bitter.”

“*What?*” Colin actually spilt some of the precious fluid, so shocked was he to hear his Clos de Vougeot described as “kind of bitter.”

“D’you know, young woman, this is a king among Burgundies, famous for its soft and delicate flavour. And because it isn’t sweet you call it ‘bitter’!”

“Then . . . then I suppose I can’t *like* Burgundy,” said Sally simply, “or perhaps I’m just not used to it.”

“I ought to have bought you some sparkling Moselle,” he said, “or some sweet Orvieto. . . . Women are *awful* about wines. Don’t know the first thing about them.”

Sally said nothing to this, partly because Colin sounded so disappointed but also because she was thinking of Sanchia Hanson's face as she had seen it thoughtful and considering so often over a glass of wine at dinner-time, and of the comments, assured and informed, that she'd make as she set it down. She took up the Burgundy again and sipped at it, succeeding this time in not making a face, so that Colin regarded her with approval.

"I suppose it's an acquired taste," he said. "Do drink it. It'll do you good. Don't you . . . I mean doesn't Mrs. Stow . . . drink Burgundy in the kitchen? Or the wretched Gage?"

"They have stout—beer—I think," said Sally. "I haven't noticed much. I don't like that either, you know. Oh, Mrs. Blake has Burgundy, I think, though. By the doctor's orders, she says. 'Keystone,' I think they call it!"

"Oh, God!" said Colin with sudden passion, reaching for the Clos de Vougeot and filling his glass again and looking at the bottle with its attractive label in a manner that made Sally laugh. However, she drank down the rest that was in her glass, refused a further amount and accepted a peach. This, like the vintage Burgundy, was something new to her, but she did not say so. She ate it, too, Colin noticed, as to the manner born. Her table manners, he'd already noticed, were all they ought to be. Nothing she did offended him. Her actions, like her speech, were somehow instinctively right. "She's as good as we are," he thought, "if she were dressed the same way . . . and allowed to live the same way," but it seemed queer to him, none the less. He wished he knew something about her—something more than he had arrived at already for himself. Clear, of course, from what she'd said the other evening that she was illegitimate . . . and it was pretty obvious that her father had been . . . well, a gentleman, he supposed. That must have been why the grandmother, he supposed again, had "not held with" so many things, like teaching her the piano, and why she had made a servant of the girl. A damned shame, Colin called it, but lucky for him, this time, as it happened, though what had possessed his mother. . . . He'd always be puzzled by that. He supposed that she'd been caught (as he had, for that matter) by the lack of the more obvious and cheaper aids to attractiveness that distinguished her, for the girls who submitted themselves to his mother's scrutiny as prospective employer were usually either so devoid of feminine attraction that they seemed to have decided that there was just nothing to be done about it, or good-looking enough to be unable to resist the temptation to do too much, and he supposed his mother had got as tired of both as he had. All the same—to leave him alone with a girl like Sally! Well, she hadn't meant to. He kept forgetting that, and when he did

remember it, remembered also that his mother would be home inside a week, very certain of everything in the world as she always was when she returned from Munchleigh. She wouldn't be pleased to know he'd been here for ten days alone; the servants wouldn't count, not even Sally perhaps, unless. . . . Well, there mustn't be any "unless!" He'd have to manage better than that. He didn't want trouble. She'd send Sally away at once if she saw him as much as look at her. He knew that. Not that he'd ever looked at one of her maids before. But then, who would want to?

These things filling his mind reduced Colin to silence whilst he drank his Burgundy and looked, without seeing it, at the view. Damn!—what a bore it all was, her coming back. He wished vaguely that there were some way of preventing it; wished, most unfilially, that his mother could really have some illness (not painful) which would ensure her absence from home for a considerable time, until, in fact, he was due to go up again. Oxford was all right—or would be if he wasn't expected to take a degree. A degree to make soap with! But this life he was expected to live with his mother! The people she knew—who came to dinner, with whom they in turn were expected to dine! The stupid tennis-parties, the "nice" girls with whom he was required to knock a ball about on a green lawn . . . that one, in particular, who always brought her violin with her and asked him to play her accompaniments! She liked *Salut d'Amour*, *In a Monastery Garden*, and things like that, and never made any bones about her belief that the violin was *the* only instrument, though of course Colin played the piano awfully well. When all was said and done, though, a piano was—well, rather a hybrid affair, wasn't it? Very useful, though, for accompaniments, Colin would say sweetly, and hate her in his heart and her smiling besotted parents and his mother's would-be tactful remarks about the dear boy's love of his chosen instrument and all her careful damnable comments about music as a nice hobby. God! he wished he could go on like this for ever! He'd like to go away with Sally—who'd let him practise the piano from morning till night and not bother him with tennis or dinner-parties or changing for dinner or keeping the lazy Lewis up to the mark; or want him to work for degrees or encourage him to pretend he was interested in soap-making. He hated all these things—wanted nothing more than to be left alone, to choose his own friends, and practise his music. And if he had any money, that's what he would do and be damned to it. But he *hadn't* any money—not until he was twenty-five—nothing at all except the allowance his mother gave him—a pretty generous one, but which she could withdraw if she chose—if, for example, she found out about Sally.

“What about coffee?” he said suddenly, reaching for the thermos and hunting for cups in the basket.

(5)

“It’s ridiculous,” Colin said, much later, as he lay with his fair head against Sally’s dark one upon his coat rolled for a pillow, “quite ridiculous.”

“What is?” said Sally.

“That you should be a parlourmaid. Don’t you *mind*?”

“No,” said Sally; “why should I?”

“But, *how? Why?* Wasn’t there anything else you could have done?”

Sally thought of that day of family conclave in the tiny Brixton house that had been her home, when her Aunt Grace had said to her grandfather: “You’d fancy her as a film star, I suppose?”—when it had been made abundantly clear to her that she was not to try for scholarships but to make herself content in that sphere in which it had pleased God to place her.

“I don’t think so,” she said. “You see, I had to earn my living. My grandparents were getting old and my mother died when I was seven.”

“Couldn’t your father’s people do anything for you?”

“I don’t know. I never knew who my father was. My mother would never say. So my grandmother told me. . . . They were very angry with her, I believe.”

“Because she wouldn’t tell?”

“Yes.”

“Did they think he ought to marry her?”

“I suppose so. I don’t know much about it.”

“Wouldn’t you have liked to have known who your father was?”

“I don’t know. . . . I don’t see what difference it would have made.”

“Wouldn’t you have liked a father?”

“Oh, perhaps, I don’t know. Sometimes I used to think I was as well off without one. The girls at school used to think I was *better* off. . . . But I was very fond of my grandfather.”

“What was he?”



“He worked at the docks.”

(Good lord! thought Colin, and was quiet.)

After a long while Sally said: “If I hadn’t been a parlourmaid I shouldn’t have met you, should I?”

That was true. His arm stole round Sally’s waist.

“Would you have hated that, Sally?”

Her mouth, very near his own, breathed softly: “Oh, *yes* . . .”

He pulled her closer. Prudence and caution stood at his side, but he knew how sweet it was to kiss her and he could not deny himself the pleasure it afforded him. Yet he was aware, even as he did it, that she was allowing herself to be kissed far more than she was allowing herself to kiss, that the surrender which had been part of its sweetness under the beech-tree on the common was not there, as if something, at any rate, stood at her side warning her of danger and whispering of caution. With an effort he stopped kissing her and began to talk of himself—of the life he was expected to live—the life he wanted to live. Of something he called Freedom and seemed to spell with a very large capital. Of music—and of Sally. Nobody he knew appreciated music but she, so he said. He wished they could run away together, turn their backs on the silly people who expected her to wait on them, and him to go back to Oxford and then “into the Works”; later to marry some dull young woman in his own set and start having a family. Sally stirred in his arms and said faintly that he could do what he liked—he was a man and doing what they liked was, she indicated, the prerogative of men. Colin laughed.

“I’m not to be allowed to be a man until I’m twenty-five,” he said. “That’s three years yet. My father had some theory about the legal age. He thought twenty-one was much too young, so he tied up all my money until four years later and made me dependent upon an allowance entirely at my mother’s disposal. If she likes to—if she doesn’t approve of what I do—she can stop it or vary it. It’s . . . it’s—bloody! I’m sorry, Sally—I mean it’s perfectly beastly.”

Sally said: “But you’ve been to Oxford. . . . Can’t you *earn* some money?”

“Oh yes—I could play the piano in an orchestra and earn three pounds a week. Four, perhaps, if they recognised my quite unusual talent.”

“But couldn’t you give—concerts, aren’t they called?”

“I could, but nobody would come to them.”

“Why not?”

“Because nobody has ever heard of Colin Stawell—and because there’s no reason why they should have done. And because I’m not good enough and never shall be. I ought to have been allowed to begin years ago if I was ever going to be any good.”

“Oh, Colin,” said Sally, suddenly sitting up, “you play *beautifully!*”

Colin sat up, too.

“I’ll never play well enough, Sally—now. Never in a thousand years! But all my life I’ll like playing better than anything else in the world and never do anything else really well because of it.”

The passion and misery in his young voice stabbed at Sally, who was yet convinced that he was not really serious—merely, for some reason, disheartened. Of course it was dreadful to have nobody who believed in you, only a lot of people who wanted you to do things you didn’t really want to do and prevented you from doing what you knew you could do by seeing that you hadn’t any money. Sally never had had any money and had never minded very much about it—but then, she had never wanted to do something very badly that required money. Being a teacher or a Civil Service clerk had never really appealed to her, so that she hadn’t minded very much when her grandmother had said she could be neither. But if she’d wanted to “go in for music” like Colin she felt she would have minded a good deal, that she would have hated the people who had prevented her.

“What would you do if you had *all* your money now?” she asked; “if your father hadn’t tied it up until you were twenty-five?”

“I’d go off to Leipzig to-morrow!” he said on the instant.

“Then, I think I’m glad your father *did* tie it up!” said Sally, unexpectedly.

“Why?”

Suddenly Colin laughed.

“Well, perhaps you could come too,” he said. “We could learn German together. And you could keep house for me.”

“I see,” said Sally. But she did not laugh. Her sober little face, pale even on this warm day and after that excellent Burgundy, touched him surprisingly to that same mood of tenderness, so like a physical pain, which

had rushed down upon him that first evening when in the half-dark drawing-room he turned from his playing to see her sitting there with clasped hands and parted lips and that look of silent rapture upon her face which had enchanted him.

He said now: "But I *haven't* any money and I can't go to Leipzig and neither can you. We'll have to make this do. Come back, Sally."

He took her hands and drew her down beside him, but though he kissed her and felt this time that caution and prudence were no longer troubling themselves overmuch about either of them, he left it at kissing. His conquests hitherto had been light enough. Girls nowadays, he had found, were as casual about these things as men, and the things which came after meant as little as the kisses which led up to them. But Sally he knew was different—even though he knew, too, that he could take her so easily—not because she was light but because she loved him. Nevertheless, she was no girl to be seduced. He'd no right even to be kissing her . . . putting ideas into her head. For of course he couldn't marry her any more than he could run away with her to Leipzig or anywhere else. The position was hopeless. She belonged, like so much else, to a world with which he could have nothing whatever to do, and soon she would pass from him like his dreams of music and Germany and "freedom."

So at last he sat up and suggested a walk. They'd go down the Punch Bowl—Highcombe Bottom was its proper name, he told her—and on to Thursley Common. They could come back by bus if the time gave out. . . .

"You sit here," he said, "while I run back to the car with the basket. . . . I shan't be long."

Sally looked at him, smiled, but obediently sat still. She was very pale. Her eyes looked enormous.

"Or would you rather come down with me?" he said, suddenly a little uncomfortable.

She shook her head.

"No, I'll stay," she said.

"Sure you'll be all right?"

"Oh yes."

When he had gone, Sally sat quite still for a moment, staring not at his retreating figure, not at the lovely scene, but down at her own folded hands upon which two large tears dropped suddenly. Sally looked at them in

surprise as if she had not known she was crying and two others followed them and then others, fast and furious. Suddenly, she got to her feet, searched for her handkerchief and wiped her eyes. She had no idea why she was crying. She wasn't miserable or unhappy. On the contrary, she had had the loveliest day of her life. Perhaps it was because, although Colin had undoubtedly kissed her, he had failed to tell her that he loved her. She combed her hair and put on her hat. If she cried no more it wouldn't show. She was a little frightened to discover that it was going to be difficult not to cry any more—that she would certainly do it if she stayed where she was. She'd go a little farther down the slope. If she walked she'd be all right. . . .

When she came back Colin awaited her, but he did not seem perturbed by her absence, and though he looked at her keenly he did not apparently notice any signs of her recent tears. And, indeed, there were none. For Sally had cried merely enough to give her eyes an added brightness, and if she had wanted to do something that should heighten her attraction for Colin or deepen his feeling for her she could not have done anything more calculated to do both. Colin, looking at her, was sorely shaken in his resolve "to leave her alone." He could think of a much pleasanter way of spending the lovely afternoon than by the exertion of walking all the way to Thursley and back. But he put the temptation from him. He'd got to be moral—and sensible. Perhaps it was the same thing, anyway.

"Ready?" he said, as she came up. "Good! We ought to do it in nice time. You're not tired?"

Sally smiled.

"Not a bit," she said.

## CHAPTER FOUR

(1)

On the way home, faced with a dull evening as a horrid anticlimax to his day of sunshine and self-control, Colin's good resolutions suddenly and completely failed him:

"Look here!" he said to Sally as they approached Esher. "They're all going out to-night, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Sally.

"Sure?"

"Yes—Mrs. Stow isn't very pleased at leaving me alone."

“Well, you won’t be alone, so she needn’t worry. Like her cheek, all the same. She oughtn’t to.”

“But this party was arranged before I came—and when they knew your mother would be away.”

“Even then it’s a rule the house isn’t left. *One* of them would have stopped if you hadn’t been here. However, good luck to ’em to-night. Because I’ll be there to keep you company.”

“Mrs. Stow said that she hoped you wouldn’t be late.”

“Did she? Old cat! Well, I *shan’t* be. What time are they going?”

“About seven, I should think. I was to be in by half-past six.”

“You needn’t worry. I’ll get you there.” Colin looked at his watch. “I’ll drop you at the top of the hill by the Convent and go on up to town. There are two or three things I want to do—I’ll get back about eight. With sandwiches and picnic-food, which you will come and eat with me in the drawing-room, and afterwards I’ll play to you. How’s that?”

“It would be lovely!”

“*Would* be? *Will* be, you mean, my child.”

“Do I?” Sally’s rejoinder was uncertain, not coquettish, as Colin seemed to understand.

“Of course you do!”

“But oughtn’t you to have some dinner?”

“Will *you* have dinner?”

“Oh no . . .”

“Then, why do you suppose I want so much more to eat than you do?”

“Well, I could have supper if I wanted it, but after all that lunch and tea I don’t.”

“You can have sandwiches with me. Not too early. We all sat too much, anyway—as my mother will inform the lot of us when she gets back from Munchmore. (So called because they munch less!) Find out what time they all expect to be back, there’s a darling, Sally—I’d hate to hurt the sensibilities of the high-souled Mr. Gage, damn him!”

Sally sat trembling and shaken, partly with joy and partly with the faint disgust and dismay induced by the thought of the planning and plotting that

her happy evening involved.

“Wouldn’t it be better,” she suggested, “if perhaps I sat in the kitchen . . . or perhaps in Mrs. Stow’s sitting-room and left the door open, while you played?”

“No, it wouldn’t, Sally. It wouldn’t do at all. Now promise to come up and keep me company or I won’t get you home by six-thirty. If you don’t say, ‘Yes, thank you, Colin, of course I’ll come,’ just like that, before I count ten, I’ll turn the car round and take you back to Wisley and make you eat dinner with me at the Hut.”

“I do think, really . . .” began Sally in some distress.

“One, two, three . . .” said Colin.

“Oh, *please*, Colin, I do think it would be best not . . . You know they *might* come back . . .”

“Four, five, six, seven . . .” said Colin.

“Oh, dear,” said Sally, “I wish it didn’t have to be like this . . .”

“Eight . . . nine . . .”

The car was slowing.

“Now, Sally, I mean it.” The car stopped. “I’ll give you a last chance.” A huge Bentley shot by with a screech of horn and a look of contempt from the driver for the young man who stopped without troubling to give a signal. Showing off, of course, to his girl! “One, two, three . . . eight, nine . . .”

“All right,” said Sally, her head full of terrifying thoughts of not getting safely home by half-past six.

“Good for you,” said Colin, “though you’ve forgotten what I told you to say.”

“But I still think . . .” began Sally.

“Don’t think, my child. . . . Be a good child and stop thinking. It never does any good. Why shouldn’t we have our evening? It’ll give us pleasure. . . . Or won’t it, Sally?”

“Oh yes, yes,” she breathed.

“Very well—and it won’t harm anybody else. Now I’ve got to step on it if I’m to get you home in time.”

It wanted ten minutes to the half-hour when the red car stopped outside the Convent at the top of the hill. Sally got out quickly, shut the door and with the discreetest of good-byes and smiles and no backward glance, walked quickly away, letting the red car pass her in a second or two as though she had never seen it before—for all the world as if she knew the broad black-coated figure of Mr. William Gage was a few yards behind her. But Mr. Gage was in no particular hurry, though he smiled with satisfaction to see that Sally was. He turned into the saloon bar of a nearby pub for a little refreshment. He was not particularly thirsty and there was good drink at home without his spending his good money for it abroad, but he'd prefer not to arrive on the heels of "that girl." It would be a pity to arouse her suspicions—make her wary of her movements. Mr. Gage didn't believe in doing things like that. He liked to give people enough rope. . . . If you paid out plenty, in time they hanged themselves and you had no trouble at all.

"Double and a splash," he said to the young woman behind the bar.

"A nice day it's been, sir," she said as she planked it down in front of him. Mr. Gage eyed her coldly. Rouge, and lipstick quite obviously—peroxidized hair, too, shouldn't wonder. . . .

"A very nice day," said Mr. Gage, "very nice indeed!" and applied himself with satisfaction to his drink. He had no desire for conversation with this young woman who showed a decided inclination towards it. A great pity they had women in these places, if you asked Mr. Gage. Outrageous that a man couldn't get a drink without having to encounter this kind of thing. . . . Women were the root of all evil in Mr. Gage's opinion—women, not money. They had to be put in their place and kept there. . . . Mr. Gage thought of that trim little figure which had stepped out of the car, and wetted his lips. Fine goings on there'd been somewhere that day, if he wasn't mistaken. . . . Of course it *was* just possible Mr. Colin had met her on the way home and given her a lift—but Mr. Gage thought not. What should she be doing up there away from the station when she was supposed to be visiting friends in the country and would come to one or other of the three stations which Streatham boasted? Well, Mr. Gage had always had his own opinion of Mr. Colin—but with these young women of to-day what could you expect? It was a wonder young men were as decent as they were. Fair asked for it, these young women did, invited it, you might say. Doubtless this one had had a bad upbringing and living in that immoral woman's house . . . the one whose husband had shot himself, poor devil, because of her carryings on. And all because. . . . Sensual creatures, women were—fair dragged a man down. No wonder the Holy Scriptures warned men against them. It was his

duty to keep an eye on this latest daughter of Jezebel. What Mrs. Stawell had wanted to engage her for was beyond him—she was just the sort, as he'd have thought she'd have been the one to see for herself, as was dangerous to young men like Mr. Colin, and him left alone with her, so to speak, like this. Mightily annoyed she'd be about that when she got back, if you asked Mr. Gage, who at this point put down his glass and without as much as a good-evening to the particular daughter of Jezebel behind the counter, went forth into the street.

(2)

“We'd begun to think you wasn't coming, Mr. Gage,” said Mrs. Blake, looking up from the buttoning of her new black gloves as that gentleman entered the kitchen, where, as he saw, the staff of Red Lodge was already gathered for collective departure to the festive scene.

“Plenty of time, Mrs. Blake, plenty of time. But don't you ladies wait for me. . . . I know my way.”

“Oh, we'll wait, Mr. Gage. We're full early yet,” said Mrs. Stow. “I've been saying I don't like leaving Sally here alone . . . that Mary ought to stay and keep her company. I don't feel Mrs. Stawell would like it.”

Mr. Gage put down his stick upon the kitchen table and said:

“Well, Sally, what do you say? Do you mind being left?”

“No, sir—not in the least.”

Mr. Gage looked at her. He saw with his cold flat eyes the brightness of Sally's and noted the colour come surging into her face as he looked at her. Her eyes met his calmly enough and did not flinch even when they left her face and ran, like a spoken insult, over the whole of her body, so that she felt as if she stood naked before him.

“I see,” he said. “Well, if you feel nervous . . . or if anybody tries to interfere with you . . .”

He paused, and the pale eyes fixed themselves upon the young bosom that was outlined through the dark-green frock she had worn that day with such pride.

“Lor', Mr. Gage, how you do talk!” said Mrs. Stow. “Who should interfere with her, as you call it? If Sally feels nervous she has only to get on the 'phone to us—she has the number, haven't you, Sally? And there's Lewis at the Lodge.”



“Yes, ma’am, thank you. . . . What time do you think you will be returning?”

“Between eleven and half-past, I expect, but don’t stay up until then. After your day in the country I expect you’ll be feeling sleepy. And, Sally, change your dress . . .”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Whereabouts in the country have you been?” asked Mr. Gage, his fish-like gaze seeking Sally’s again.

“To Guildford, sir.”

“Ah, a tidy distance . . . I suppose you came to Streatham Common Station, didn’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“It’s a good train-service, I believe. Did you ’ave to change at Clapham Junction?”

“No, sir. The . . . the train came right through.”

“I see,” said Mr. Gage, wondering what she’d say if he told her that from Guildford you came to Waterloo Station and as Streatham Common was on the Victoria line no train from Guildford would touch it.

“I see,” he said again, and then: “I hope you had a pleasant day?”

“Very, thank you, sir,” said Sally. She was glad that his eyes no longer raked her person. She did not like Mr. Gage and had never been looked at in quite that fashion before. It didn’t, somehow, seem to go with the stories they told of his preaching and hymn-singing. She wondered why it was that always, just a little, he made her feel afraid. It had something to do, she felt, with that flat face . . . those pale eyes; rather, it seemed to her, like the face of a peculiarly unpleasant kind of fish—a fish she had never seen, something that lurked somewhere at the bottom of the sea.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Gage had taken himself off—luckily with “the ladies,” which much relieved the mind of Sally, who, for some reason she could not define, dreaded being left alone with the gentleman.

Eight o’clock Colin had said and it was now barely a quarter past, seven. She went upstairs to her room, took off her frock and washed her face, neck, arms and hands very thoroughly. Taking down her hair, she brushed it hard, so that when she coiled it up again about her ears it shone with dusky lights. Her toilet made, she hesitated about the frock, but finally slipped into it

again. It was the best she had—Colin’s eyes had approved it—and perhaps it wouldn’t matter about her not wearing her usual parlourmaid frock as everybody was going out, despite Mrs. Stow’s injunction. As she changed her shoes, she examined her silk stockings with care—extravagant wear for the country, but again the best she had and the best was not good enough for Colin. All the same, they were Sanchia Hanson’s last gift to her and she would have been distressed to find she had laddered them. She gave a final look at herself in the glass before she hurried downstairs.

Ten minutes later there came a ring at the front door. Outwardly calm and self-possessed she went to the front door and very much the parlourmaid, save for the green frock, opened it. After all, it might be anybody—Mr. Gage come back, perhaps. It would be like him to use the front door on such an occasion if only to see how long she took to open it. Or it might be a complete stranger. It might not, in fact, be Colin at all.

But it was.

(3)

“Is Miss Dunn at home?” he asked as he stepped inside, and then softly: “All gone?”

Sally nodded.

“Right. Come in here a minute.”

Sally followed him into the big and chilly drawing-room, watched him lay down several packages on various articles of furniture and put a match to the fire.

“Now you watch that while I undo the parcels. If it looks like catching, go and get a tray with some plates and glasses—oh, and some knives and forks. I don’t know what you like in the way of sandwiches, so I’ve got an assortment—tongue, pâté and something called Gentlemen’s Relish—rather like bloater-paste, I believe. . . . Is that fire going to give trouble?”

“It’ll be all right in a minute, I think.”

“Here, let me. . . . Funny thing, we never have a girl who can lay a fire that’ll burn up at once, the kind of fire you can turn your back on after you’ve applied the match. Why?”

“I *think* it’s because they use only three things and not four,” said Sally.

“Four? . . . Paper, wood, coal. . . . What’s the fourth?”

“A draught,” said Sally, continuing her efforts to supply the deficiency. A cheerful crackling presently rewarded her and rising from her knees she surveyed it with satisfaction for a second, then turned her back on it and went and looked at the packages Colin was opening. Sandwiches, some tiny jellies studded with fruits, a large bunch of grapes, a box of marzipan, some chocolates and two enormous William pears.

“How lovely!” she said, “but we can’t possibly eat them all. What shall we do with the rest?”

“Bury them in the garden, perhaps. N.B.L., my child, if you know what that means. I’d as soon offer them to the ineffable Gage!”

“You don’t seem to like Mr. Gage.”

“Do you?”

Sally shook her head.

“Well, then . . .”

Colin unwrapped a long, narrow parcel clad tightly in tissue paper.

“This,” said he, “is the drink.”

Sally looked at it and saw the word Champagne on the bottle followed by some stranger ones which she acknowledged with dismay meant nothing whatever to her.

“Piper-Heidsieck, nineteen-twenty-three. Champagne, Sally—the real thing, vintage year, too. Ever had champagne?”

“No. . . . I don’t even know, rightly, what it is.”

“It’s a wine made and bottled in one bit of France, what they call the Champagne district—round about Rheims and Epernay to the north-east of Paris, to be exact. If it doesn’t come from there it isn’t champagne.”

“Is it very nice?”

“*I* think so.”

“But isn’t it very expensive, too?”

“Yes, I’m afraid it is, but that needn’t concern you. All you’ve got to do is to drink it—and go and fetch the glasses . . .”

Sally went and came back with a tray embellished with all that was necessary, not forgetting the quite unnecessary corkscrew. They moved a small table over by the fire, set the tray and contents upon it, drew up a

settee and sat down to “begin on the food,” as Colin expressed it. “You’d better eat something first,” he said, laughing. “It is over four hours since you had any food. I don’t want to make you tipsy.”

Sally was alarmed.

“Oh, it won’t, will it?” she asked.

“No, of course not. It’ll make you feel bright and happy—and make your eyes shine.”

She watched him wrestle with the cork, saw it jump out with a fine reassuring noise and was commendably ready with the glasses.

“Good!” said Colin, sitting down and holding his glass aloft, looking admiringly first at it and then at Sally.

“To you, Sally—to us!” he said, but he couldn’t have told you what he meant. Happily, Sally didn’t ask. She sipped gingerly at her champagne and smiled and blushed a little at Colin’s ardent looks over the rim of his glass, all of which, however, were a little obscured by the dimness of the room, for although outside it was already dark they had not turned up the light and sat in the still rather uncertain beams of Sally’s recently-persuaded fire.

“Like it?”

Sally did rather, she found. Not because of its taste, though, which to be frank she found rather disappointing, but because of the definitely exhilarating effect of even the half-glass she managed to drink in little sips before she put down her glass. She even found it possible to laugh at Colin’s guying of the “ineffable Gage” and forgot the fear with which his presence always filled her and the particular disgust which his deliberate raking of her person that very evening with his horrid pale eyes had inspired her. She said surprisingly (if you forget the champagne): “I’ve sometimes thought that if Mr. Gage weren’t a very good man he’d be a very bad one!”

Colin roared with laughter.

“Good for you, Sally! But who told you he was ‘good’?”

“Well, I mean religious,” said Sally.

Colin roared again with laughter.

“Have some more champagne,” he counselled her.

“But he *is*, isn’t he?” said Sally. “He’s always quoting the Bible—especially the nasty bits about women—and he preaches sometimes, too.”

“Preaches? Good lord, yes, he never stops doing that. He’s an abomination. Can’t think why my mother has him about. Perhaps, like all the others, he won’t be able to stand the mutton cutlets and the eternal salads she’ll not only want to eat herself but will try to impose upon the kitchen, when she comes back.”

At this point Colin seemed to find it necessary to take a long draught from his glass in order to enable him to support the idea of his mother’s return, whatever its ultimate beneficial effects as to the ridding the house of Mr. Gage’s unwelcome presence. After which they finished the sandwiches, devoured the jellies and stoked up the fire. Then Colin remarked that “this” was jolly and something like an evening, and moving away to the piano played a riotous measure whilst Sally drew the curtains and then sat with her folded hands and folded look to listen. When Colin turned and saw her at it, however, he got up, came over and pulled her up from the settee.

“*That* doesn’t have to be listened to with so much reverence,” he said. “You’re expected to dance to it. Come and do it.”

“I can’t,” said Sally. “Indeed, I can’t—at least, not even half well enough.”

“Not after champagne? Half a moment, well soon alter that.”

He sprang across the room to the gramophone and put on a dance record.

“Now,” he said, “come along.”

Variations of step, it was true, Sally had none; but she had a feeling of rhythm and the sense to yield herself to her partner’s will—no difficult matter in this case, and for reasons entirely unconnected with dancing. In and out of the furniture they went, up and down the long shadow-filled room, stopping only whilst Colin darted across the room and turned the record over. After that another and another and then an excited and breathless Sally sank back upon the settee and wondered if this indeed were she.

“Jolly good,” said Colin, but Sally was not to be further tempted. She wanted Colin to play to her, and Colin, who had had quite enough champagne, shamefully dallied with the idea that if Sally had a little more she might forget about the piano altogether. But something about the look she laid upon his face—that was how he thought of it, as something benedictory—kept him from persuading her to the further imbibing of the exciting liquor which, indeed, as he now reminded himself, he had bought with the honestest of intentions. Yet for all that it was very difficult not to

make love to her as she sat there. She was so sweet and so compelling; she pleased him mightily. But though she roused his passions she excited, too, that tender solicitude he'd felt for nobody before. Almost she seemed part of himself—his complement. He had never felt so completely happy in his life as he'd felt during these brief snatches of time with Sally. He was far from understanding it. Was it because she was so quiet—so strangely mistress of herself—or because she was fresh and unspoiled as the girls of his own class and acquaintance so seldom seemed to be? Already he was aware she was no fool; no sensitive negative he might write what he liked upon, no mirror he could hold up to life—and himself. There were things in her to be developed, a personality, gifts, a shrewd good brain. He felt, as Sally's old form-mistress had felt years ago, that she was "too good to be a servant" and he entertained this evening as he looked at her wild quixotic ideas of taking her away from "all that" for ever. He wished vaguely, yet with passion, that he were older, independent, stronger-willed (or that his mother's will was weaker—which came to the same thing)—that at once, this very night, he might make plans for living his own life as he believed he wanted to live it; and cursed the fate that had given him so wise a father that he knew his own son, who had looked once too often at that handsome weak face and postponed for him accordingly his coming-of-age.

Presently, after chasing these reflections around in his mind for a while in an untidy and futile manner, he found that the process availed him nothing and that he still desired more than anything else to make violent love to Sally, and perceiving that he was beginning to think of himself as a very fine fellow for not indulging his desire, he rose abruptly and walked to the piano.

(4)

Sally sat where she could watch his fingers as they moved, at first uncertainly and spasmodically, across the keyboard. He glanced once at her, saw that she leant back with her head against the cushions of the settee, that in that half-light above her dark frock her face was pale as an image, her pose as motionless, the long slim hands, pale as her face, folded stilly on her lap and her whole self expressive of attention that was not only rapt but almost devout. He had never met anybody who'd paid him the compliment of sitting completely still for more than five minutes whilst he played to them, as though they couldn't be troubled to hide the fact that he wasn't worth more than that amount of the precious thing they called their time. Neither had he ever met anybody who could keep still, anyway, music or no music, as did Sally—and in a restless age in which he was aware of himself as one of its most restless members, this was a quality which appealed to

him at least temporarily more than wit or brilliance of looks or intellect. It rested him, he found (even though he knew her exciting), to be with her. She gave him not only this blessed confidence in himself, this belief that he had really enough strength of character to wrestle with the forces arrayed against him and snatch a victory for the thing he cared about, but peace. At least she would if only he didn't have this aching desire to make love to her and perhaps he wouldn't have it if he wasn't so assured he ought neither to want to do it nor actually to do it. If she were a girl of his own class, someone he could meet in the ordinary social way, he would, he felt, be free of that element. They could be tremendous friends—pals, helpmates. She'd be a kind of bulwark between him and his ambitions and his mother and hers. Love-making, if it were there at all, would not be of the essence of it. But now he couldn't have this girl as his friend except by taking her away—running off with her. He'd come at the friend, the helpmate, the bulwark, only through the lover, the wife—and he didn't want a wife nor the responsibilities of husbandhood. He wanted his music and a career and success and not to be bothered by the paraphernalia of life his mother trailed after him and wreathed about him, in which she suffocated him and tried to smother whatever talent he'd been born with. But he'd no money. He could do nothing—ever. God, but life was rotten!

These thoughts and others like unto them chased themselves round and round in his mind whilst his fingers ran up and down the scale evoking the sweet melodies and subtle rhythms which ravaged Sally's senses. He knew himself more truly when he played—had less illusions about himself, about his life, so that it seemed to him sometimes that there might even come a day when he could no longer bear to open the piano. It wasn't, on the whole, an altogether pleasant thing to see oneself as a lath painted to look like iron.

It seemed to him when at last he stopped that he had been playing for hours. The room seemed very quiet: a coal slipping in the grate, the tick of his mother's ormolu clock were the only sounds to be heard as he turned round from the piano-seat and looked toward the girl before the fire.

"Asleep?" he said softly, but he knew she was not before her voice said softly: "Don't stop. . . . Or are you tired?"

He got up and came toward her.

"Just a little" . . . He did not say of himself, his thoughts and self-knowledge, but sat himself down beside her, pulling her towards him, so that her head rested against his shoulder.

"Sally!" he breathed into her hair.

She stirred a little against him.

“It was kind of you to play so long,” she whispered. “It must be getting very late.”

He looked at his watch.

“No . . . only half-past nine. . . . Don’t go yet, Sally. What time are they all coming back?”

“Between eleven and twelve, they said.”

“Oh, heaps of time. Do you mind if I have another drink? You, too. We can’t leave all that.”

She sat up and made instinctively to get to her feet.

“No, sit down. . . . I won’t have you waiting on me—for to-night, anyway.”

He got up and poured out two glasses of champagne, handing one to Sally.

“Do!” he said. “You’ve had hardly any—and all the marzipans have still to be eaten.”

“I’d rather, I think, have a marzipan, if you don’t mind.”

“I do mind. I mind very much.”

He stood over her while she essayed the drink and smiled up at him over the glass-rim, then moved away and wandered restlessly round the room drinking his own. He felt not exhilarated at all, he found now, but rather deplorable. A sense of anticlimax fell about him. Their day was nearly over. They’d never have another. Neither a day in the sun nor an evening like this in the firelight. It had to last them for ever. It was over—or would be soon, and the five other days that stood between him and his mother’s return would pass like a flash. Afterwards he wouldn’t see Sally at all, except under the gaze of that beast Gage, or weeding the garden for the lazy Lewis, or when she came in with his morning tea, when ten to one he’d be asleep. Always was, somehow, whatever time he said he’d have it. And by the middle of the week, with his mother at home, things would be in full swing—all the familiar life with the social trappings she’d arrange for him, as she always did when he was home—and probably she’d want to be taken to the sea for Easter. Oh, damn, he’d forgotten that. It would be worse there—stuck down in some barn of an hotel with all the dullest people in England, expected to play tennis by day and to dance by night with girls he’d never



seen before and never wanted to see again. Or if by any chance he did, there'd be the mater all the time keeping an eye upon him. Anyway, it would be the old, old round that had nothing to do with Sally and no room for her. A passion of revolt took him suddenly by the throat. He finished his drink, poured out another, took a long gulp at it, and walking over to the gramophone put on a dance record.

“Come on,” he said to Sally. “Just one. Finish your drink first.”

Sally took some time about it, so that the record was finished and had to be restarted before they could begin. About their dancing together this time there was a new element. Colin held her tighter and she did not resist. Their limbs moved more closely; her feet followed his more accurately, and at the end he pressed his lips to her hair before starting another record and rushing back to take her again in his arms. For him, he knew quite well, it had ceased to be a dance. It was a mere excuse to hold her closely, and feel all the comforting warmth of her young and attractive self, so soon to be denied him.

The striking of the ormolu clock synchronized with the last few bars of the record, and as Colin ran to take it off Sally went back to the settee. Faintly, much more faintly, she, too, reflected that their lovely day was drawing to a close, but still closely wrapped about with her romantic dreams she was not hurled into the slough of depression from which Colin now regarded life. Besides, she had drunk two glasses of champagne, and Sally was unused to drink of any kind, so that it had left her with some part of her being caught up from the solid earth. There was a strange, unusually light feeling about her limbs as if they no longer quite belonged to her: she felt distinctly light-headed, but no longer quite as gay as when she danced or quite as happy as when she sat listening to Colin's playing. She was also a little sleepy, but she must certainly not go to sleep because it had struck ten and very soon the others would be back, and before then she had to take away the tray and wash up the glasses and plates and go to bed. It was important that the tray and its evidences of her share in Colin's convivial evening should be carefully disposed of before they came back. She told herself this several times before Colin came back to the settee, and she found that she was a little glad to rest her head on his shoulder. But when again he breathed her name into her hair, and his persuading hands roused in her that desperate fondness which made nothing of common sense and the caution that was mixed up with the vanishing of trays and the washing-up of glasses and plates, sleep slipped a little away from her.

“Sally! Kiss me!”

She turned her mouth to his with an instinctive gesture of surrender, his feelings about which he was in no mood this evening to analyse even ever so little. The champagne had done its work; his depression had taken wings and he was filled with a heady sense of power and a belief in himself that seemed as real as Sally reclining upon his shoulder or her sweetly-surrendered lips upon his own.

“Do you love me, Sally?”

She moved her head against his in assent, but he would not take that.

“Say it!”

“I love you . . .”

He laughed, and putting up a hand withdrew a hairpin from the coil above her left ear. Sally put up hers and tried to remedy the damage, but Colin only laughed and drew out another pin, so that one half of Sally’s soft dusky hair fell suddenly over her face and about her shoulders.

“How long it is!” said Colin, who could not remember having seen a woman with luxuriant uncut hair hanging down her back, and ran his fingers through it with delight. “Haven’t you ever wanted to cut it?” He buried his face in it and pulled Sally tightly against him as she said, “No . . . I don’t think I’ve ever thought of it.”

“You’re not like anybody else I’ve ever met—not like any other girl. Why aren’t you like the rest of your generation, Sally? Why don’t you want to rush about . . . and have ‘fun’ and boys and short hair and cocktails—and hold hands in the cinema?”

“Because I have my living to earn, I expect,” said Sally soberly.

“No reason. It isn’t a question of class. All the maids we’ve had who’ve been young and haven’t squinted have wanted all those things—specially the short hair and the cinema and ‘followers.’ It just is that you’re different. That must be, I suppose, why I like you . . .”

“Do you?”

“Only ‘like’ isn’t the word. . . . Sally, supposing . . . supposing when I leave Oxford I can manage to get away . . . to Leipzig or somewhere . . . would you come with me? We shouldn’t have much money . . .”

“I’ve never had much money,” said Sally. “But do you mean we’d run away?”

“Yes. Would you mind that?”

“No. . . . Would we get married?”

“Would you want to be married?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

“Wouldn’t it be enough if we just loved one another? It wouldn’t matter in Leipzig, you know, whether we were married or not.”

“I think it would anywhere—wouldn’t it?”

“Do you believe so much in marriage?”

Did she? Sally had never thought about it, but she believed in the stability of her own emotion, which was doubtless the same thing. She said: “But if we love each other?”

“All right. We’ll be married, then. I’ll manage it somehow. . . .” His weak face took on an obstinate expression: the champagne was giving him a vicarious courage. “After all, it’s *my* life—and once we’re married I don’t see what anyone can do. And in three years’ time I can do what I like anyway . . .” The champagne spoke with decision.

“But, Colin,” said Sally, “won’t she mind very much? Your mother, I mean.”

“Oh yes . . . at first. But I’m over age and can do what I like. And when I’m twenty-five I shan’t be dependent upon her, either.”

“But that’s three years.”

“I know. But if we went away . . . if I didn’t go back to Oxford. . . . Why *should* I? I’m only wasting my time there. You and I would be happy together—and out of England we could live cheaply enough. Sally, say you’ll come!—say you’ll marry me!”

Again she nodded her assent against his shoulder. She felt very sleepy and content, and Colin’s proposal, wonderful as it was, seemed unable to keep her from wanting only to be still and fall upon slumber. But Colin, sitting up suddenly and watching her as he lay back against the cushion, was torn by his desperate desire for her. He did want to marry her—he meant to do it, to leave his mother to make the best of it, but that belonged to the future and was all hedged about with arguments and inhibitions it tired him to think of. He wanted something much nearer to his obtaining, but was defeated by the quiet passionless look of Sally leaning back amid her cushions.

“Sally!” he said softly.

She opened her eyes and looked at him, smiling up at him very softly and confidently.

“Sally, you *do* love me?”

“Yes . . .”

“Then, Sally . . .”

He put out a hand and touched her neck just where it slipped into the curve of her shoulder.

“Sally . . . let me love you . . .”

“But you do love me, Colin . . .”

“Don’t you know what I mean, Sally?”

Her dark eyes continued to regard him. Did she or did she not understand? Damn it all—she must! It was plain English, and she couldn’t be as ignorant as all that!

“Sally!”

“Yes?”

“Wake up. You look so sleepy. . . . Can you hear what I’m saying, Sally?”

“Yes, I think so . . .”

“But are you taking it in? I want to love you, Sally— —”

“You’ve said that before, darling . . .”

“Are you so very sleepy?”

“It’ll be all right in a moment. It’s the champagne. I’m not used to it. It’s made my head ache a little. Come back here, Colin, for a minute.”

He went back, took her in his arms, pressed her head down upon his shoulder. For a moment or two he was racked by his desire, by his longing to break down her resistance, if resistance it was, to drag her out of this enveloping mesh of sleep. The victory was his for the taking. But he didn’t want to take anything. Not from Sally. He wanted to be given—or denied. He was a little puzzled, too. *Was* she as innocent as she seemed? Hadn’t she really known what that phrase meant? He half hoped she hadn’t. He could teach her. He could teach her many things. Life with Sally looked so rosy and warm and reassuring, so that he yearned for it, wished they might enter upon it at once—just run away, the two of them, through the spring night.

He stirred beneath his restless desire, his keen consciousness of that dusky hair against his face, his sudden wry knowledge that one does not run away through the spring night or any other with a female companion with twenty-seven and sixpence in one's pocket. And that was what Colin had—he had counted it with care and misgiving after he'd bought the Piper-Heidsieck. Also, his account—as usual—was overdrawn. He'd forgotten that until now—forgotten that he'd got to get his mother, when she came back, to do something about it, for even though his account had just been credited with his April allowance it had not put him in funds. He hadn't been looking forward to that interview, but had contrived a whole collection of excuses, tactfully disguised as reasons, why her assistance should have become necessary. Sickening, though, to have to live on twenty-seven and sixpence for the intervening four days which (at the least) must pass before it would take place—and just at a time when he really did want to be able to expand a little. He'd had an expensive day, of course, what with his usual constitutional inability to pass Fortnum and Mason's this morning, or to resist the Vougeot which they suggested. Of course, in the circumstances he oughtn't to have bought the Piper, but he'd found it as impossible to resist as the morning purchases. No good his trying to resist things, anyway. The fact was he'd been too comfortably brought up. The excellent table his mother kept had spoiled his palate for the things he might otherwise have eaten and drunk with the hearty hunger and thirst of healthy youth, and at Oxford, except at these times of crisis, his allowance was sufficient not only to give him plenty of scope to develop what extravagances he possessed but to breed others. He had wanted to drink champagne this evening as never before—and had scruples against taking his mother's, even if that hadn't meant enlisting the services of the detestable Mr. Gage. So he'd spent his good money—and what had it profited him? He had wanted to make Sally's eyes shine—and so they had, briefly, but now here she was, her head on his shoulder, her eyes, shining or not, veiled with sleep or semi-sleep. Had he hoped that the champagne would have helped him with Sally—helped him to make her his mistress? Had he really bought it with that intention? God only knew; he acted always from such a complexity of emotions he'd never know. But if so he'd wasted his money. Well, you never knew with champagne . . . Like dreams, it often went by contraries. It seemed to have tricked him into talking some fine heroic stuff about running away and into forgetting (temporarily) the twenty-seven shillings and sixpence in his pocket. He still wanted to run away and he still wanted Sally, but neither quite so urgently as before. And neither seemed so easy, nor so fine. His passion stirred within him again, but more faintly, and presently, when Sally moved her head from his shoulder, put her arms round him and drew his

head to her breast, he let it stay there. It was warm there by the fire and marvellously comfortable upon Sally's young and swelling bosom that rose and fell gently in sleep. Nothing else mattered very much. Soon nothing else mattered at all. For Colin, too, fell fast asleep.

(5)

Mr. William Gage, coming up the garden path, was surprised (or perhaps not very much surprised) to see a faint flicker of light upon the drawn curtains of the French window of the drawing-room. Either way, he smiled to himself as if he found it a satisfactory state of affairs, and walking warily, approached the French window and perceived that whoever had drawn the curtains had done it badly, for there was a good inch of exposed window at one side which, even without the tiresomeness of kneeling down and with only the precaution of shading his eyes, was sufficient to give him an intimate, and unhindered view of the table by the fire, the litter of food, glasses and champagne bottle upon it, of the sleeping figures on the settee, and of Sally's flowing tresses—all very clearly and unmistakably outlined for him in the bright light of the fire on the hearth, before which the settee was drawn up and which played full upon it. Mr. Gage kept his eye at the window for quite a considerable time, as if he thoroughly enjoyed the sight presented to it; and when at last he tore himself away and let himself in at the side door, the cruel and satisfied smile was still upon his face. He was in no hurry to go to bed, though for reasons of his own he had been the first of the Red Lodge servants to leave the party. He sat down by the fire, which Sally had had the presence of mind to stoke up before she went upstairs, and opened the evening paper, to which the desire for festivities on the part of a pack of tiresome women had prevented him from earlier giving his attention.

(6)

Perhaps it was Mr. Gage's key in the door downstairs, or that sense the sleeping often have of being watched, which presently caused Sally to spring up, disturbing also the light champagne-induced slumbers of Colin as she did so. With sharp anxiety she looked at the clock, which proclaimed the hour as one minute short of eleven, and before Sally had recovered it had struck.

"I must go," she said at once to the blinking and not very amiable Colin, who never could bear to be awakened summarily from his slumbers. "We've been *asleep!*"

She got up, hastily braiding and fastening up her hair, whilst Colin watched her with a faint bewilderment upon his sleepy countenance.

“Why so much hurry? There’s plenty of time . . . I’ve got a headache—it’s being waked up like that . . . Come here and kiss me good night, Sally, there’s a darling.”

She came to him reluctantly, one half her mind, he could see, upon that tell-tale tray. Instantly he pulled her down on his knees, fastened his mouth on hers and ran his hot and urgent hands over her breasts and thighs. She kissed him back, but disengaged herself after a moment, and Colin saw that she had gone very white.

“I must go!” she said. “Do let me, Colin, there’s a dear.”

“Not until we fix something for to-morrow.”

“I can’t—not now . . . I can’t think.”

“What’s the panic for?”

“If they see—that, they’ll know.”

She glanced at the tray on the table.

“Who? Gage—Mrs. Stow? Tell ’em to go to hell . . . If we’re going to run away and get married, Sally, what does it matter?”

Some of the sweetness of that thought filtered through the pall of panic and haste which now encompassed Sally. She smiled, and bent upon him a tender, very loving look. But she said nothing. Colin, intoxicated by the look, felt he would give his soul just then to keep her. He was angry for opportunities missed—for this other come too late.

“Sally . . . to-night. May I? I know which is your room. . . . Please say yes, Sally. Nobody will know.”

“No, no . . .” she said. “You mustn’t . . . Oh no, please, Colin.”

“Are you afraid?”

“Yes.”

“Of me?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t know . . . Of the others. They’d hear.”

“Let ’em! But they wouldn’t.” He held her hands, tried again to pull her down upon his knees.

“Sally—don’t you want me?”

“I don’t know . . . I just love you . . . I think I do. But I *am* afraid, I think . . . Oh, Colin, let me go now.”

“I will if you promise . . . Sally—darling Sally!”

She allowed herself to be pulled down upon his knees and felt beneath his kisses the strength ebb out of her. But Colin was suddenly strong and masterful. If he might keep her now he might have of her all he desired. But he could not keep her. Even as he clung to her he could feel her gone: across the mood of surrender her panic cut with the sharpness of a knife. She got up from his knees, and he clasped her hands tightly and desperately in his.

“Promise!” he implored her. “There’s no danger—I *promise* you it’ll be all right. Sally . . . let me come.”

Suddenly she took his face in her two hands, and looking at it long and lovingly, stooped and kissed him.

“Is that a promise?”

She nodded.

They exchanged a long, intimate look and then he let her go. She went to the table and picked up the tray. Colin rose, opened the door for her, turned on the light in the hall outside, and as she passed him said softly: “You darling!” Sally’s smile was tremulous and uncertain; her face, he saw, was quite white, but her head was up and she returned steadily his ardent look.

Shutting the door, Colin went over to the fire, stood looking down into it for a few seconds, lit for himself a cigarette, and compared his watch with his mother’s clock. It was now nearly a quarter past eleven. How long would it be before the staff came trooping back and got themselves off to bed? He felt very excited—looked at the bottle not yet quite empty which he had rescued from the tray, wondered why he hadn’t retained one of the two glasses that had gone out with it, and reluctantly gave up the thought of finishing the contents of the bottle. After a minute or so he threw his cigarette down into the fire and went to the piano.

(7)

Sally went downstairs to the kitchen, carefully carrying her tray, and nearly dropped it when she opened the door and saw Mr. Gage sitting there before the fire with his outspread paper. Above the top of it he looked at her for a moment, so that she did not see the smile which for a second stretched the hard cruel line of his mouth, for smiles with Mr. Gage had no connection



with his eyes. Then he lowered his paper and said quietly: "I thought you'd gone to bed."

"No, sir. Mr. Colin came in and wanted some sandwiches, sir."

"At this time of night?"

"Oh no, sir—earlier. I . . . I just waited to take his tray. I . . . I didn't hear you come in, sir."

"No?" said Mr. Gage, and his eyes, casually resting upon the tray, as casually took in the sight of the two empty glasses that stood upon it. Trust his nibs, thought Mr. Gage, as he transferred his thoughtful gaze to Sally, for sticking to the bottle if it had anything left in it.

"Well," he said, "I should just put those things down somewhere out of the way and get to bed."

"Hadn't I better wash them up first, sir?"

"No, leave 'em. Get to bed. Can't have you up when the others come in."

From the drawing-room there floated down to them the sound of Colin's playing. Her hands still moving a little uncertainly among the things on the tray, Sally closed her eyes for a moment. Presently those lovely sounds would cease . . . and then? She opened her eyes and for a moment the kitchen, with Mr. Gage and his paper, swam queerly about, then she carried the glasses and plates into the adjacent scullery, wiped the tray, put it back in its place, said good night to Mr. Gage, and went upstairs to her own room.

It was a small room, though it held two single beds, only the one which she occupied, however, being made up. She sat down on the edge of it, and dropping her hands in her lap, sat there quite still revolving in her mind that apparition of Mr. Gage sitting there with his paper before the kitchen fire. She must have been asleep when he came back—so much earlier than the others, too. She wondered why, but reflected that parties were probably not very much in his line. But supposing he'd seen the firelight on the windows as he had come up the garden? Suppose he'd come in, taken it into his head to come and look round—and found her in there, her hair down and Colin's head on her breast? Supposing . . .

Why suppose anything? What did it matter? What could Mr. Gage do to her or to Colin, who loved one another? What could anyone do to either of them? She beat down her panic and her forebodings. What did anything matter . . . now . . . to-night? When she, when Colin . . .

Her heart was beating very fast. Her head had stopped aching. She no longer felt sleepy. She thought of the look on Colin's face as he had stood holding open the door for her. A strange, fierce excitement shook her limbs and ran up its scarlet flag into her face.

This was what it was to fall in love. This was the thing she'd seen stalking into the lives of other people, urging them to strange deeds, cruel and unkind deeds, deeds that were selfish and wrong—and wrong, she felt, because they were selfish, because they hurt other people. Nobody, in Sally's code, had a right to do that. But her love for Colin and his for her could hurt nobody. That it might hurt herself . . . or that it could bring her to disaster she did not stay to consider, or that she was a romantic little fool. Vaguely at the back of her mind was Colin's romantic talk of a runaway match: she had felt, equally vaguely, perhaps, that he was unhappy or at least dissatisfied, and like most women in love for the first time she believed not only that there was something to be done about this, but that she could do it. She did not recognise in him a lath painted to look like iron; that adored face held no hint of weakness or self-indulgence for her. She believed that Colin was in love with her, and made the mistake of taking a young man in that exalted condition quite seriously. And still further, in the belief that love and romance had touched her own life and converted it into magic, Sally—that sane, sensible young woman—was about to make a complete fool of herself, and the fact that she had seen other people do it was not going to help her to avoid it.

She got off the bed, and slowly, like one in a dream, took off her frock, got into her dressing-gown and went into the bathroom reserved on that floor for the staff. Mechanically she washed, brushed her teeth, went back to her room and sat down on her bed, took down her hair, and with long, steady strokes began to brush it. The muffled sounds of Colin's piano-playing, the maddening, indistinguishable beat that is the piano at a distance, floated up to her. Her arm ached with the mechanical movement of the brush over her hair. She sighed deeply, put down the brush, got out of her clothes, and slipped into the solid cambric night-dress, one of the half-dozen made by herself and her grandmother more than five years ago and designed to last a lifetime. But for some reason she did not get into bed. She slipped into her dressing-gown again, put out the light, and sat down by the open window. She sat quite still, her eyes upon the blurred garden beyond. Once she shivered a little, though the night was warm. Her folded hands trembled slightly and the beating of her heart seemed to fill the universe.

The sound of voices, of heavy steps ascending the stairs, of lights being turned off and on, doors opening and shutting and the running of water, proclaimed the return of the revellers. Still Sally did not move. She continued to sit there at the open window, quite still, save for the trembling of her folded hands, which she could not control.

Suddenly something happened, something induced by the sounds of the household preparing for slumber, something rebellious cut like a sword across the romance which was flooding the night and her own mind. For a space she hated that she had to wait here in the dark for the rest of the household to go to bed, to barricade itself behind doors. For just so long as it lasted she saw this feeling of hers and Colin's not as romantic at all but merely as something furtive, stolen—unblest, so that she was filled with distaste and bitter reaction. Then she thought of the touch of Colin's hands, hot and urgent, upon her body, of the look on his face as she had seen it not half an hour ago, and her rebellion faded out. She didn't care. If it had to be like this, then it had to be. She didn't care. It didn't matter. She loved Colin and she wanted him. That truth brought her up against a brick wall she could neither see over nor scale. And she didn't care about that either.

Silence fell suddenly upon the house—unbroken save for the beat-beat of the piano-playing exactly two ceilings beneath her own, and that of her own insurgent heart. She sat there at the window looking out upon the dark mass that was the rockery and the long stretch of green lawn and the black shapes that were the budding trees. The fine early spring day had ended in cloud that obscured the young moon and the stars in a sky which hung now dark and low like an awning above the earth. She thought idly, indifferently, that it would rain before morning. She pushed the window up farther and leaned out into the soft and still and scented air. And thought not of it at all but of the young man who played down there in the room below. The soft melancholy air his fingers called forth detached itself from walls and doors and muffling walls and ceilings and floated out upon the night. He must, she thought, have opened the window. She leant over the sill and saw that he had—and when the melody reached its end Colin came out, leaned against it and stretched his arms above his head as if he were tired—or tired of waiting, perhaps. He did not look up, but presently he took out a cigarette and stood there smoking it.

Colin, cried her heart as she watched him, Colin, my love, my love . . .

But still he did not look up, and after a while he went in, and she heard the sharp shutting-to of the French windows. Once again the beat-beat of something without form or tune ploughed its way up through ceilings and

doors and assaulted her ears. Why didn't he come? The house was quiet now. Sleep would soon fall upon it. She leaned her elbows on the cold window-sill and buried her face in her hands. Her passion possessed her utterly, and again her heart cried to the night: Colin, Colin! My love, my love . . .

(8)

Suddenly the door behind her was flung open, the room flooded with light. Sally jumped up with a little cry, to see Mary Green standing in the doorway, her arms full of blankets and sheets.

“Lor’—aren’t you in bed yet? My word, you’ll catch your *death* standing about there in your night-dress! Sorry, old dear, but my bloomin’ hot-water bottle’s bin and run out. Fair saturated my bed, that it ’as. Don’t mind, do you, if I make this one up for to-night? Mine’s *’opeless*.”

Sally came away from the window and stood, speechless, in the middle of the room, watching Mary in her flannel night-dress slinging the sheets and blankets on the empty bedstead.

“Don’t mind, duckie, do you?” she further addressed the dismayed, thunderstruck and silent Sally, who heard herself say suddenly: “No . . . no, of course not.”

“Well, you might give me a ’and! ’Ang it all, it’s getting on for midnight.”

As Sally moved forward the door was suddenly flung open a second time, and turning she beheld Colin standing in the doorway. For one second he stood as if petrified, then: “I’m sorry—awfully sorry . . . I’ve—I’ve come up too far!” he said and vanished.

“Well, I’m jiggered!” said Mary Green, “Fancy that!”

As the door closed Sally sat down on Mary’s half-made bed and began to laugh. This surprised her so much that she laughed again and found it very difficult to stop.

Mary said: “Come up too far! *I* should shay so! Must ’ave ’ad one over the eight, if you ask me!”

She left her bed-making and went over and turned the key in the lock.

“That’ll settle *’im!*” she said as she came back, and with Sally’s assistance began again on her bed.

Sally, getting presently into her own, had still, she found, that appalling inclination to giggle, but waking in the middle of the night she found she had a headache even more appalling and was taken with a violent attack of sickness. In the morning, feeling as white and weak as she looked, she crawled down to her duties. Mrs. Stow was a little unamiable about it, and said it seemed a pity that a day in the country should make a girl so unfit for her work; but then Mrs. Stow was not feeling very good herself after her unusual late night and “party” food and drinks. She was quite short with Mary Green over her recital of Colin’s appearance at Sally’s bedroom door, but Mr. Gage found it an absorbing incident, and whilst he listened to Mary his flat fish-like gaze rested every now and then upon Sally’s white face and drooping figure. But not a word did he utter.

(9)

Sally did not see Colin during that day nor during the next. He had taken the car and gone away, Sally heard, to see his sick friend in Norfolk, and a nice temper he’d taken with him, too! It was to be hoped he’d lose it before he got there. But on the third day he came back—the day, that is, before his mother’s return was expected, and Sally, busy with the weeds on the rockery, heard the car come up the drive and saw Colin come walking quickly towards her. She had not known until that moment what those two days of his absence had cost her.

Lewis, engaged upon his favourite occupation of “leaning,” languidly removed his hands from the top of his Dutch hoe and wished his young master good afternoon, making at the same time a suitable comment upon the weather, which was quite unusually good.

Colin looked at him sullenly, then jerked his head.

“Get out,” he said.

Lewis got out—that is to say he moved away a few feet and began with a slow and rhythmic motion to ply the hoe over the new polyanthus-rose bed.

“I want to speak to you,” Colin said then to Sally, and moved away up the lawn. Sally got up from her knees and followed after him. When he stopped, she stopped too. He turned and confronted her. His face still looked very sullen, obstinacy curved the weak and handsome mouth, and when he spoke his voice was cruel and angry.

“What do you mean,” he asked, “by playing that trick on me the other night?”

Sally's face whitened.

"What trick?" she faltered.

"You know what I mean well enough . . . Why didn't you tell me you shared a room with that fat Green creature?"

Sally's eyes were like dark pools. Her mouth quivered, then steadied as she said: "I don't—not usually . . . It just happened."

"How do you mean—*just happened*?"

"Mary's hot-water bottle had run out, so she had to use the extra bed in my room."

"Blast her!" said Colin.

"I don't suppose she did it on purpose," said Sally, essaying a faint smile.

"Oh, *don't* you? But you were—relieved, weren't you? On the whole. Thought better of your promise, eh?"

"No," said Sally, uttering the simple truth.

"Then why the hell did you laugh as I shut the door? Or are you going to deny it?"

"No," said Sally, "I did laugh. I don't know why."

"Probably because I'd made a bloody fool of myself. Was that it?"

"No," said Sally again. She felt a little sick.

Suddenly the hard, sullen expression upon Colin's face vanished—went out, leaving it strangely young and appealing. He came and stood a little nearer her.

"Sally!" he said.

Her heart turned over, then seemed to rush up to her throat and beat there with suffocating rapidity.

"Sally, look at me."

She raised her eyes to his.

"Sorry for being a beast, Sally . . ."

"It's all right . . . You weren't really."

"I was . . . I thought you'd played a trick on me . . ."

Her eyes said, “How *could* you think that?”—her lips nothing. They quivered a little as Colin looked at her. Suddenly he found it was at her mouth, not her eyes, he was looking.

“Sally—is it all right, then?”

“Yes.”

“Darling!”

He found the expression on her face irresistible.

“I want to kiss you!” he said. “What a thrice-damned fool I was to go off like that! I’ve wasted all our time.”

“Oh no . . .” She shook her head as if she couldn’t accept that, as if all time stretched out before them.

“But you’ve forgotten my mother comes back to-morrow afternoon. It’s going to be damn difficult, Sally—seeing each other, I mean. You see, I’ll have to go carefully just at first. I’ll have to get all fixed up first.”

Before they could run off together, thought Sally. She smiled.

“It won’t be very long, will it?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Perhaps . . .” Looking at her Colin was once again convinced that he did indeed intend to “cut and run.” “The mater’s not easy to manage—and I’m overdrawn. And if she suspects I’ll get nothing. Not a bean. Sally . . .!”

“Yes?”

“Sally . . . There’s only to-night. Will the Green creature be there?”

“No.”

“Then, Sally . . .”

He saw the red colour run up swiftly into her face and neck. But her eyes did not flinch. What he read in them stirred his pulse and gave him back that self-confidence which the events of the recent evening had so entirely wrested from him. He smiled, twisting her heart, and what he said fell upon her ears like the soft music he played. “Sally . . . you darling!”

He stood quite still for a moment, then turned abruptly on his heel and walked quickly away.

Back at her weeding Sally heard him bring in the car, bang to the garage doors, and go whistling into the house. Ten minutes later the sound of the

piano stole out into the garden, and Lewis coming back rested again from his labours, his eyes upon those of Sally's.

"I like to 'ear 'im play," he said genially; "always shows 'e's feeling happy. Funny-tempered chap, Mr. Colin. But there, I don't suppose you'd see it."

Sally said, "Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, 'e's a bit partial to you, ain't 'e, my dear?"

Sally looked up, laughed a little, blushed a good deal and said nothing.

"There ain't nothin' to blush about neither," said Mr. Lewis. "I'm a bit partial to you myself if it comes to that . . . And no wonder, with the awful-looking lot of women we get 'ere. Never 'ave no luck, some'ow."

Sally had never heard the proverb about the one-eyed being kings in the country of the blind, so she did not spoil Mr. Lewis's compliment for him by making any sprightly allusions to it. She covered her confusion, which had so little after all to do with Mr. Lewis and his compliment, with another little laugh, and bent again over her weeding. She wanted Mr. Lewis to go away and leave her to herself and her lovely exciting thoughts, so she made only the very shortest replies to his remarks. At length, as if disheartened, or as if for once the joy of watching someone else work had really begun to pall, he took himself off again to the rose-bed.

Sally sighed with relief. For a while she weeded with zeal and zest, but presently she stopped altogether, shut her eyes and pressed her hands down hard upon the moist earth. The sweet sound that Colin was making in there in the drawing-room bewitched her, filled her mind with hopes, desires and beliefs in a strange mad medley that nothing could have reduced to reason or sense. Doubtless the people who say that music is a demoralising influence would have found overwhelming proof of their thesis in the result upon Sally. Colin, they would have contended, had an insuperable ally . . .

Not quite, however, for suddenly the sound of a car turning into the drive first cut across the music, then silenced it completely. A moment later and a high clear voice floated out to Sally, shattering her white ecstasy to pieces.

"My dear boy . . . No, not a *moment* later when I heard you were at home . . . Why *didn't* you let me know . . .?"

Mrs. Stawell had come home a day earlier than she was expected.

## CHAPTER FIVE



(1)

A curious heaviness hung about Sally when she rose the next morning. Perhaps, she thought, as she drew up the blind and saw how heavy was the rain which had awakened her several hours earlier, it was just the weather. But as she got into her clothes she knew that the weather had nothing whatever to do with it. She was never susceptible to that. It just was that Mrs. Stawell had come home. Not only that she had come home a day too soon, but just that she had come home. Sally knew that she had now to pick up the threads of her ordinary unromantic existence again—to see Colin and not to see him, to behave as though nothing whatever had happened to her; to remember that by neither word nor sign, by not even the smallest look, must she allow Colin's mother to suspect the truth. Sally had no great ideas of herself as an actress, and she knew this feeling which possessed her to be a wild, unruly thing. It was with a leaden feeling at her heart that she went downstairs.

Mr. Gage, it seemed, had already taken up tea to Colin. As she was not late, she wondered why, but there were so many troublesome thoughts in her head that there was no room for that particular one, which promptly took itself off.

(2)

“Well, Gage, what is it?”

Margaret Stawell looked up from her writing-desk with a frown. She wore the air of one of the world's workers disturbed by something infinitely less than the dust. Really, the more servants one kept, the less peace one had!

Mr. Gage cleared his throat. A disgusting habit, said Mrs. Stawell's face. Mr. Gage began:

“There is something, madam, I think you should be made aware of . . . Something going on in this 'ouse . . . *house*, madam.”

“What on earth do you mean, Gage? Going on in this house!”

“Yes, madam . . . It's the young person you engaged as parlourmaid, madam . . .”

“Oh, that colourless-looking girl! Sally, isn't her name? Well, what about her? Doesn't she give satisfaction?”

“As a parlourmaid, yes, madam, but not, I venture to think, as a fitting companion for your son.”

Mrs. Stawell put down her pen and pushed back her chair.

“For goodness’ sake, Gage, come to the point,” she said.

So Gage came to the point—to all his points, to be precise. And nasty, sharp, deadly-looking affairs they were when Mr. Gage had finished with them. Mrs. Stawell listened to them all with that slightly bored air she opposed to most of the things uttered in her hearing by her servants; but at the end she was sufficiently startled momentarily to forget to maintain this pose.

“You’re not suggesting, are you, Gage, that this girl has *seduced* my son?”

Gage appreciated the delicate way Mrs. Stawell had expressed a delicate matter. He shook his head gravely.

“I cannot say, madam . . . It is true that in the matter of the little incident of the bedroom Providence was, so to speak, on our side, madam, for I understand that the young person didn’t happen that night to have her room to herself. A little matter of a leaking hot-water bottle, madam, I understand, which made it necessary for Mary Green to make up the spare bed in Sally Dunn’s room.”

Mrs. Stawell made a gesture of distaste. “All right, I’ll see her now, Gage. Send her into me at once,” she said.

“I hope you don’t think, madam, that I have exceeded my duty . . .” Mr. Gage earnestly suggested.

“You’ve done quite right,” said Margaret Stawell. “Send her in now, Gage.”

So it happened that about the middle of the morning Mr. Gage came with his dignified stride into the kitchen, fixed Sally with his baleful eye, and said she was to betake herself at once to the morning-room, where Mrs. Stawell awaited her. Sally betook herself there with no more misgiving than was resident in her desire to show herself the well-trained servant, to hide beneath that everything else—to smother beneath it all her romantic hopes and longings, the wild and passionate feeling for Colin which possessed her utterly.

The cold, clear voice that was Mrs. Stawell’s bade her come in. She opened the door, shut it and stood inside it, her face intelligently blank, her

hands clasped loosely in front of her.

“Good morning, madam,” she said.

“Good morning,” said Mrs. Stawell, and her cold, handsome eyes looked at Sally as if she were a queer and on the whole rather repellent kind of insect.

“I have sent for you,” she said, “to see what explanation you have to offer of a most extraordinary account of your conduct which has just come to my knowledge. I have been told, in the first place, that you contrived to get a day off from your duties here last Friday because you wished to visit friends at Guildford. Is that so?”

“Yes, madam.”

“And did you, in fact, visit them?”

The colour came into Sally’s face, but she told her lie bravely.

“Yes, madam.”

“You told Gage, I believe, that you came back by train to Streatham Common.”

“Yes, madam.”

“You would have to change, therefore, at Clapham Junction?”

“No, madam—the train came direct.”

“Would it surprise you very much to learn that the Guildford trains go direct to Waterloo—and do not, therefore, touch any of the Streatham stations?”

Sally looked startled, but still did not quite see what was happening. She did not reply.

Mrs. Stawell went on.

“In any case, if you came to Streatham Common Station, how comes it you were seen getting out of my son’s car at the top of the hill outside the Convent, which would, surely, be a little out of your way?”

The capacity for words left Sally. Her mouth quivered, but would allow not a syllable to escape it. Mrs. Stawell went on.

“I suggest to you that you did not go to see friends at Guildford at all—but that you allowed my son to take you there or elsewhere in his car. Is that the truth or not?”

“Yes, madam.”

“I *thought* so. And can you explain why you thought it any part of your duties here to spend the evening in my drawing-room in my son’s company, drinking champagne and going into a drunken sleep with him afterwards upon the settee?”

The colour flared into Sally’s face.

“We were not drunk,” she said.

“Indeed? That would seem to be the one possible excuse for your conduct. What else happened?”

“Nothing, madam. I came in to hear Mr. Colin play—and the champagne, I suppose, made me sleepy.”

“I see. Then perhaps you can explain why my son presented himself after midnight the same night at your bedroom door?”

“It . . . it was a mistake, madam.”

“On whose part? Don’t tell me any more lies. You’d arranged it, hadn’t you? You’d inveigled him into a nasty, dirty little intrigue. That’s the truth, isn’t it?”

“No, madam . . . Indeed not . . .”

“Are you suggesting, then, that my son made advances to you—a common servant?”

“No, madam.”

“Then what *are* you suggesting?”

“Oh, madam, please . . . We . . . we love each other. . . . We want . . . we want to get married! I know it sounds ridiculous . . . but indeed, madam, we do love each other.”

Sally forced her mouth to the words. Words that sounded silly, impossible, even as they fell softly upon the chilly air of Mrs. Stawell’s drawing-room, and were withered quite away by the cold staring of that lady’s handsome eyes or the incredulous laughter which pounced upon them.

“Ridiculous, indeed! I think you must have taken leave of your senses. If my son promised to marry you it must have been when he had had too much champagne.”

She put out a hand and pressed the bell. To Gage, who answered it, she said coldly: "Mr. Colin, please, Gage."

Colin opened the door, gave one look at Sally, another at his mother, and went very red.

Mrs. Stawell's voice was suddenly warmly maternal.

"Come in and sit down, Colin," it said. "I've had Gage here with a most extraordinary story. He tells me you've been taking this girl about in the car, having her in here until late at night, and drinking champagne with her, with the house empty. He also says he found you asleep together the other night on the couch—a little drunk, Gage thinks, because in the morning Sally had a sick headache and was unfit for her work. Is all this true?"

Colin, very self-conscious, very ill at ease, his eyes on the carpet, said sulkily: "It isn't true we were drunk. We only had one bottle, and didn't drink all of that. And, anyway, it wasn't *your* champagne."

"My dear boy—that's immaterial. The point is, you don't attempt to deny the rest of the charges."

"That I took Sally out—and got her in here to hear me play? No, why should I?"

Sally lifted her head a little. A faint tinge of colour came into her face.

"My dear boy!" said Mrs. Stawell. "How *could* you be so silly! A girl like Sally!"

Colin lifted his eyes from the carpet and fixed them angrily upon his mother's face.

"Well, anyway, she's the first person who's shown the slightest interest in the only thing I care about in the world—and the only person who understands the first thing about it!"

"Really, Colin—you're ridiculous. I'm sorry to put you in this undignified position, but you must be made to realise the implications of your unwise actions. Here we have this absurd girl imagining herself in love with you and you with her—and that you want to *marry* her!"

"Well, it's true. I *do* love her. I meant to go off with her upon the first opportunity. And you may as well know it!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Colin."

"I'm not being ridiculous; I mean it."

“You’re being *extremely* ridiculous. You can’t run away—even with a parlourmaid!—on nothing a year. And nothing, if I choose, *is* precisely what you will have.”

“Oh, damn!” said Colin. “Damn everything and everybody. And damn Gage to hell, the beastly sanctimonious sneak.”

“Abuse is no argument, Colin. Gage was only doing his duty. Seeing a light in what he supposed to be the empty drawing-room, he would naturally inspect the situation. You can’t blame him if you’re so careless as to leave a wide gap when you draw the curtains. If you *must* be silly, you might at least be careful. I should have thought that your own common sense, at least, would have prevented you from going to a servant’s room, however pressing the invitation.”

“Really, mother! There was no invitation . . . It was just . . . just a mistake . . .”

“On whose part?”

“On mine.”

“I see.”

Mrs. Stawell’s hard gaze looked through her son. He might almost not have been there.

“I see,” she said again, and transferred her gaze to Sally, who stood quite still, her hands folded in front of her, her gaze not falling before the boring glance opposed to it. Brazen, thought Margaret Stawell. These appalling young women one took, in all innocence, into one’s home! Outrageous! Perfectly outrageous!

“Go to your room,” she said to Sally, “and stay there until I send for you.”

Sally hesitated, looking at Colin, who rose to his feet as if he were going to open the door for her. His eyes met hers, then looked away again. He stood quite still after that until she had opened the door for herself and had shut it after her.

“*Really*, Colin!” his mother said as the door shut. “I wouldn’t have believed you could be so silly! And so undignified!”

“It didn’t *seem* like that . . . I *do* like her, mother, most awfully!”

“My dear boy! A common servant!”

“But she *isn't* common—and not a bit like any servant we've ever had! Look here, mother, I know it sounds absurd, but I *am* in love with her . . .”

“Colin, you must have taken leave of your senses! I'm quite ready to believe she led you on. But to talk of love and marriage . . . Why, it's ridiculous!”

“She didn't lead me on . . .”

“She didn't invite you to her room?”

“I've told you . . . that was all a mistake.”

“I don't want to hear another thing about it. The girl goes to-day, and I hope you'll lose no time in returning to your senses.”

“If she goes, then I shall go, too!”

“Oh, do spare me these heroics!”

“They're not 'heroics'.”

“Aren't they? Do use your common sense, Colin. What do you imagine a girl like Sally can possibly do for you?”

“She can encourage me, anyway, and make me believe in myself—and in my music. And you don't care a damn about it! None of our set do! I'd have a *chance* with Sally. I hate the kind of life I live here, anyway.”

“My dear Colin! What do you imagine Sally can possibly understand about music or about playing, good or bad? It isn't criticism she can give you—only flattery. Can't you see how little use that is to you? Besides, how *can* you say I'm not interested in your music?”

“But you aren't. You *know* you aren't!”

“How ungrateful you are, Colin! Here have I been spending half the time at Munchleigh, which I ought to have spent in treatment and rest, in trying to interest Sir Thomas Vibart in my clever son! And now you tell me I'm not *interested!*”

Colin got to his feet.

“Vibart? You've been talking to Vibart about me?”

“Poor man—I gave him no rest. I'm afraid I interrupted *his* treatment, too, but the result is that we are to go down to his Sussex place at Easter, and he'll hear you play. And give you any help he possibly can!”

The colour streamed into Colin's face. For a moment words failed him. Then he said: "Good *Lord*, mother! *Vibart!*"

"Well?" said Mrs. Stawell. "Do you still think I'm not interested?"

"No. No, of course not. It . . . it's wonderful! *Vibart!* Awfully decent of him. And of you, too, mother! Of course, if *Vibart* thought anything of me . . ."

Mrs. Stawell laughed.

"And if he doesn't?"

"Well, *then*, of course . . . But he will! You'll see, mother!"

"Now, Colin, just listen to me a moment . . ."

It was a little while before he took in the sense of what his mother was saying. But at last she had his ear and poured her honeyed drops into it. She hadn't meant to say so much about that very lukewarm suggestion of Sir Thomas *Vibart's* that if she was going, as she said, to be in his neighbourhood at Easter she might come over to dinner on the Sunday evening—"and bring the musician with you." But, really, it was most opportune—and everybody said how *well* Colin played. A little encouragement would do him no harm, and if she could get Sir Thomas to say something *really* flattering—well, that would soon make short work of his over-appreciation of flattery in this other and so undesirable direction. At the same time, if (as she secretly hoped) Sir Thomas held out no hopes of a successful musical career, there might be less difficulty than she anticipated in getting him to regard "the Works" as his business in life. In any case, she stood to lose nothing.

"I thought, perhaps, my dear boy," she said, "that we could run down to Eastbourne for the holiday, which would be a very good jumping-off ground for the *Vibart* place. . . . If you made a good impression we might even get Sir Thomas to run over and have dinner with us one evening, provided the cuisine at the Marlborough's as good as usual."

"Oh, mother! Do you really think we might?"

"I don't see why not. If you impress him at *all* with your playing. He's keen, they say—always on the outlook for fresh talent. Of course it'll be up to you now. I can do no more for you. . . . I've made myself a great nuisance to him as it is, I'm afraid."

"I *am* grateful to you, mother. It really *is* marvellous!"



Margaret Stawell laughed, patted his arm and let him go on talking. She did not, however, hear very much of it. She was thinking not of Sir Thomas but of his daughter, the pretty girl who had come down once to Munchleigh to see him, driving her own Lancia, and who, she had learnt, was to be one of the summer's debutantes. Well, one never knew, and Colin was really *very* good-looking. . . . These things did happen.

(3)

When Sally came downstairs again there was no sign of Colin, and when Margaret Stawell opened her mouth no sign of the dulcet tones that had belonged to her voice when she spoke to him. Her voice to Sally was cold and hard.

"I'm sorry to have to take this course," she said, "but you must see I have no other. We mothers have to protect our sons. I don't blame you wholly—to a certain extent it is, I quite see, a case of evil communications. Here is your present month's salary and a month in lieu of notice."

Sally took the envelope and stood there holding it slackly in her hands.

"Can I apply to you for a reference, madam?"

"Oh yes, by all means—but you quite understand that I shall have to tell any prospective employer *exactly* why I had to get rid of you!"

"Oh, ma'am!" said Sally.

"I'm sorry, but there's no other course open to me, Sally."

"But, madam . . . How shall I find another situation?"

"You should have thought of that before, Sally. We mothers, as I've said, have to protect our sons."

Sally stared at her, opened her mouth to speak and shut it again without saying anything.

Margaret Stawell said: "I will tell Sanders to take you to the station. Be ready in half an hour. Good morning." But as Sally continued to stand there she added: "What are you waiting for?"

"Nothing, ma'am."

"Very well, then."

Without another word Sally turned and went out, shutting the door behind her very quietly.

“Well, who’d ’ave thought it!” said Mary Green, as Sanders changed into top and drove out of sight of the eyes that stretched themselves over the basement window curtainrod. “A quiet one like that . . .”

“You could see what *she* was from the first,” said Mr. Gage.

“*That* you couldn’t!” said Mrs. Blake. “She was the nicest girl as ever came into this ’ouse, as well as the prettiest. *I* never saw anything in ’er conduct to complain of.”

Mr. Gage said: “Ah no, Mrs. Blake, but then you’re not, if I may say so, exactly a *judge* of female character.”

“I’m as good as you, likely,” said Mrs. Blake, upon whom this thrust was not lost, “but I don’t presume to set myself up as a judge of everybody else. I *liked* Sally Dunn and I think she’s been treated shameful. If you ask me anything about it, all the running was made by Mr. Colin—she wasn’t the kind to draw attention to ’erself.”

“Oh, still waters, you know,” said Mary Green, coming reluctantly away from the window. “After all, there was that night I slept in ’er room and ’e came in as bold as brass. . . . Well, I ask you, now. . . . And the way she laughed . . .! Not upset a scrap, she wasn’t, I can tell you!”

“Oh, hold your tongue,” said Mrs. Blake; “I’m sick of the canting ’umbug of this ’ouse. You’re all a sight too fond of yourselves.”

“Oh, orl right, Mrs. Blake—there’s no occasion to lose your wool, even if you *do* find the subject a delicate one, as it were. . . . Besides, in this case, likely as not, nothing really *transpired*. My ’ot-water bottle saved the situation, as you might say . . .”

But Mrs. Blake had gone, banging the kitchen door after her. Mr. Gage, however, had not. Mr. Gage said: “I don’t *know* so much about the situation being ‘saved’, as you call it . . .”

“Oh, Mr. Gage, you don’t mean to say he’d been there *before*—to her room, I mean? Oh, *I never!*”

“I don’t know about that neither,” said Mr. Gage. “Bedrooms ain’t always a *siny quo nony*, as you might say . . .”

“Lor, Mr. Gage, you really *think* . . .”

But Mr. Gage suddenly remembered his dignity and the fact that he didn’t like Mary Green. And in that moment Mrs. Stow came in. She had

been severely reprimanded upstairs for allowing Sally the freedom which had landed her in trouble and was not disposed just then to allow any moiety of the privilege to Mary Green, who was promptly sent about her business.

“You seem to have made a lot of trouble, Mr. Gage,” she remarked to that gentleman, eyeing him coldly. “I don’t believe a word of all this rubbish. . . . That girl was neither loose nor fast. Mr. Colin was just amusing himself and turned her head. The rest is just your nasty mind!”

“I did what I conceived to be my duty, Mrs. Stow.”

“Very unfortunate, then, to have a sense of duty like yours, Mr. Gage. That’s all I have to say.”

And it was all Mrs. Stow ever did have to say on the subject, though it absorbed the conversation below stairs for a considerable time to come.

## BOOK FOUR

### SALLY

#### CHAPTER ONE

(1)

When Sally's train landed her at Victoria she gave a porter sixpence to carry her trunk to the luggage-room and wandered out into the London streets.

She was very hungry, for she had had no lunch, and rather tired after a sleepless night: but it never occurred to her to go and get anything to eat nor to get on a bus. She had no plans; her misery so clogged her spirit that it had entirely swamped her brain, which reacted to nothing and was void of any practical suggestion for the immediate future. She had not the remotest idea where she could go. There was, to be sure, her Aunt Grace, but she would rather die, she had decided, than go there in her present circumstances. There was, too, Mrs. Gordon—Mildred Yorke that was—and certainly Mrs. Pomeroy would give her shelter. But Sally was too deeply sunk in misery to be interested in the more practical details of her fate; the emotional side of it just then was all that mattered. She had not yet arrived at the stage when she could see herself as a very silly young woman who'd imagined vain things and was suffering for it; she did not even think very much of the part she played as a young woman who'd been dismissed by an employer who intended to make it extremely difficult for her to find another job. She saw herself only as a young woman desperately and tragically in love with a young man who had dropped her like a red-hot coal when his mother had laughed at his—and her—pretensions. Colin had never really loved her—or he couldn't have let her go like that without a word, without making the slightest attempt to see her. She knew when she left that he was in there in the morning-room still with his mother—she had heard their voices and once, actually, that queer little laugh of Colin's. And he must have heard the car come to the door and drive away, but he had given no sign. He would never see her again and he didn't care. He'd forgotten her already. It was at once her misery and her delight that she was convinced she would never forget him. She shivered as she walked, remembering the touch of his hands upon her and the kisses which even yet burned her lips. And though she

knew him false and worthless she regretted, with a deep aching regret that was physical pain, that she had not belonged to him. With a slow burning jealousy she thought of Mildred and Gilbert Yorke, of Sanchia and her lovers, because they had had what she had not, what she was quite sure she would never have. For she would love Colin for ever and ever and could never, never marry any other man, even if she went on living.

Which, as the day wore on, she began to doubt. She was faint for lack of food and exhausted with emotion. It would be pleasant to lie down somewhere and die—she hoped painlessly—and be finished with it all. Colin would read of her death and be sorry for his brutality . . . and perhaps send a wreath to her funeral.

However, by five o'clock she still seemed very much alive and found herself in a part of London entirely strange to her. Faced with the pleasing sight of a plate of thick freshly-cut sandwiches upon a coffee-stall, the fact of death and its advantages temporarily receded. She bought three of them, got the man to wrap them up and seeing a bus stop close by climbed on to it and rode down the Essex Road until the conductor, very indignant that she didn't know where her penny stage came to an end, turned her off. The Essex Road, like many another, whatever else it lacks, has length and by the time Sally had walked back down the whole of it she was tired enough to have sat in the gutter. Nevertheless, she walked on, down Rosebery Avenue into the long dreariness of Theobalds Road and so into Kingsway, thence down into the Strand and into the Embankment Gardens. She clutched her handbag under her arm, for its fastening was none too safe and the bag contained her two months' pay, the thought of which, even in the midst of her hopeless and tearless misery, was vaguely consoling. Soon, presumably, she would cease to be a heart-broken female crying for the moon and behave like a sensible young woman with enough money to keep her in the interval of finding another job. But as she sat there in the Embankment Gardens, her hands folded in her lap over the green handbag, her face a white mask of despair, that moment seemed to lie some distance off. She was oblivious of the curious glances people turned upon her, of dawdling returning footsteps and of nudges and comments, of murmured experimental "good evenings"! She supposed that when it got dark she would have to get up and go; but no other sensible thought save that filtered through her brain as she sat there. It revolved around the fallen deity, the weak handsome face of Colin Stawell, even then mixing himself a cocktail before dinner and beginning already to think that he was well out of a rather silly affair, although still a little troubled by that last look on Sally's face. He'd been rather an ass: bit of a cad, too, he supposed. But she'd been very sweet. . . . All the same, his

mother was right. It was an impossible idea, that marriage, even if he had really meant it. Had he? At the time, perhaps. But supposing—supposing he'd had her that night? Would he still have wanted to marry her? Usually he'd found that to possess was to desire no longer. He drank his cocktail, wishing he'd possessed her and yet being glad he hadn't, after all, made quite that particular kind of fool of himself. Entirely forgetful of the kind offices of Mary's hot-water bottle, he was already taking some kind of credit to himself that he had not.

And: Colin, Colin! My love, my love, sang Sally's silly heart while she sat there with a face like an image and an all-broken-up feeling inside her.

(2)

The gardens were emptying, but Sally sat where she was until the attendant came up and said: "All out now, if you please, miss," then she rose and took herself and her miseries out upon the Embankment. Turning towards Westminster she walked on again, dragging her feet a little now and vaguely oppressed by the thought that she couldn't go on walking through the night and would have to bestir herself to do something about it. She found herself presently walking past the open gates of the Houses of Parliament, realised after a little that the Embankment now had grown shabby and dilapidated, and in that moment was a little frightened when a man wearing a cap of lurid pattern jostled against her in the half-dark. Her handbag flew out of her grasp, the treacherous clasp gave way, three half-crowns and the little note-case which held all her worldly wealth fell out upon the pavement. So intent was she upon picking this up that she failed to observe that one half-crown had rolled away into the gutter. She gathered up the other two, stuffed them into her bag and was walking hurriedly on when a voice arrested her.

"I think this is yours, too," it said; "I just stopped that old villain from slipping it into his pocket."

Sally turned to find a tall pleasant-looking, well-dressed man holding out the overlooked half-crown.

"Oh, thank you!" she said and opening the bag slipped it inside, so that she entirely missed the quick guarded look the stranger gave at the bag and herself and the crafty cruel expression which jumped into the eyes which looked a moment later into hers with so much concern.

"I say . . . do you feel all right? You look awfully white, you know. I'm afraid that clumsy fool scared you a bit, didn't he?"

The eyes were so kind, the voice so gentle, that Sally's frozen despair yielded ever so slightly. She shook her head and smiled rather tremulously.

"He made me jump," she said. "I'm all right, thank you."

"You sure? You don't look all right, you know. You look as if you want a pick-me-up. . . . Let me get one for you."

"Oh no," said Sally, a little scared at the urgency in the pleasant voice and the gesture with which he made as if to guide her in the direction where pick-me-ups were to be had "Really, I'm quite all right."

"I wish you would. We can get one just across the road. . . . Have you far to go?"

"Yes—a good way. I can get a tram if I go back."

She turned in the direction of the trams. Another ride wouldn't do her any harm—and perhaps at the end of it she'd know what she was going to do. Perhaps she'd see, from the top of the tram, a likely-looking place to spend the night and, if so, she'd ride to Victoria, fetch her box and go there. This encounter with these men had recalled some part at least of her wandering common sense. She felt a little unnerved, especially as one or two passers-by looked at them curiously.

"Please . . ." he said coaxingly.

"No, thank you very much," she said; "I would rather not."

"I'm sorry you don't trust me," said the stranger, plaintively; "I wish you would. I'm very concerned about you. You look so—sort of done up—as if somebody hadn't been very kind to you, as if you were in some sort of trouble. I wish you'd let me help you . . ."

Sally's desire to escape was almost paralysing.

"Oh no, you can't. . . . Really! Nobody can!"

"Oh, come! It can't be as serious as all that."

His pleasant laugh and sympathetic tones drew sudden tears from her eyes.

"Oh, dear!" he said. "Don't cry—or you'll make me feel a brute. I tell you what. If you won't have a drink, which would do you a lot of good, come and sit in a cinema for an hour. It'll be restful in there . . ." Restful *and dark*, was what he thought. "Do . . . there's one quite near at hand and

there's a good picture showing, too. I know because I took my small girl to see it the other day. It's a Nature picture. . . . You needn't stay to the end."

Somehow or other Sally found herself taken by the arm, led back in the direction from which she had come and ushered into a brilliantly-lighted building thronged with people. At the booking-office queue her new friend stopped, holding out to her a ten-shilling note.

"Perhaps you can give me some change," he said. "It'll save time."

Obediently Sally opened her bag, fished out the three half-crowns he had so valiantly helped her rescue from the gutter and sought for smaller change.

"That's all right," said the stranger, "give me the seven-and-six. . . . Here's the note."

Sally took it, stuffed it in casually with the few coppers and a sixpence or two that was all that now remained of her change, and looked up to find the stranger's disapproving gaze upon her.

"Isn't that very careless? You'll pull it out, you know, with your handkerchief or the penny for your tram. . . . Ah, that's better."

He smiled as with relief when she took out her shabby little case and put the note away with the rest. But it was something miles away from relief, something much more heady and satisfying and which told him it was quite worth the expensive seats he was proposing to secure. With *her* money, too . . . unless he bungled it hopelessly.

He didn't bungle it. Sally, lulled into a false security, a little reckless, entirely unlike the Sally of a few short weeks ago, or, indeed, of any Sally of any previous period of her life, and entirely taken up with the beauties of *Tembi*, was an easy enough prey. As, just before eleven, they came out into the crowded foyer he pressed her arm, asked her if she felt better and guided her into a quiet corner.

"You stay here for a moment, I'll try to get a taxi. . . . Don't move—or I'll never find you."

It seemed to her as he vanished through the crowd that from somewhere on the extreme edge of it she caught sight of a face that was vaguely familiar; but the next time she looked it had gone. The stream of people thinned out. The attendants began to look at her as if they wondered what she thought she was doing sitting there as if the show were just starting instead of ending. A little uncomfortable, she moved towards the door and as she stood there a sudden impulse made her open her bag. She gave a little



start, then began to turn over its contents hurriedly, then with panic, then with a slow and horrible hopelessness. What was the good? She knew it wasn't there. The little case that contained every available farthing she had in the world . . . not quite. After the box-office transaction she had two sixpences and a few coppers. By a clever ruse he'd managed to get the three half-crowns, too.

It never occurred to her that she might have dropped the case in the theatre. She knew exactly what had happened and the knowledge of her own folly fell upon her spirit like a lash, as, unheedful of the attendant's "Lost anything, miss?" she walked blindly out into the street.

Suddenly she remembered where before she had seen that face above the crowd. It belonged to the man who had knocked her bag out of her hand. A plant. The whole thing—a clever trick. What a fool she had been! The world seemed too small a place to hold herself and her stupidity.

She walked on, hopelessness and despair clogging her feet, reducing her to a point of misery so absolute, so abject, that life seemed to have ebbed from her. A horrible vision of herself walking the streets all night moved up and down in her brain unceasingly, crossed by another, even more horrible, that was suggested by the leers, hesitations and whispers of the passers-by. Vaguely there went through her mind the notices addressed to girls stranded in London which she had seen in the waiting-rooms at Victoria, but at the moment she was beyond doing anything about it. She was overwhelmed not alone with a sense of her own folly but with a fresh shattering realisation of her personal miseries, and it seemed to her (again vaguely) that she could bear these things better out of doors than in some stuffy lodging-house where she'd have to lie still, unable even to ease her heart by indulging her grief. But tears at the moment were a long way beneath the surface, as if there was something hard and frozen damming them back. This was Sally's first taste of unhappiness and it had crashed into her ordered placid existence with a force out of all proportion to its importance. But she did not yet know that. She only knew that she was penniless, homeless, and the most unhappy person in the world. It seemed enough.

Enough, almost, to account for the wild ungovernable impulse which seized her suddenly as she found herself crossing Westminster Bridge. To clamber up the parapet, however, was not so easy, she found, as she had supposed, so that by the time she was up and looking down into the dark and fast-running river some of the unreal courage which had taken her there had evaporated. She might fall over, but she could not, she knew, ever jump. She had made yet another kind of fool of herself. She wanted, she found

suddenly, to get down, wanted it pathetically, childishly and was afraid to move.

This was why, when a strong arm reached up and pulled her down, she did not resist; why back there again upon the pavement she stood quite still for a moment beneath that firm grip and why, too, she turned suddenly, buried her face in the stranger's tweed coat and began to cry.

Perhaps this was why John Saril hailed a passing taxi, bundled Sally into it and gave the driver his own address. Perhaps not. Decent men who rescue would-be suicides at midnight do not (as he was afterwards assured) take them home with them—though that may very well be why, on this occasion at least, John Saril did. At the same time, no man, decent or otherwise, cares to have a young woman crying upon his shoulder at midnight upon a public highway—certainly not with the burly figure of a London policeman coming into view. Probably, therefore, for all his subsequent protestations, John Saril's action in hailing the cab was, in the first place, simply one of self-defence. And, having called it, where else was there to go save home? Especially when you are on Westminster Bridge and "home" is Camberwell.

He felt, all the same, that he was making a fool of himself and was extremely irritated by Sally's persistent tears, for, like most men, he did not understand this humiliating factor in feminine emotional make-up and supposed that women cried because they liked it or found it easy. He would have been surprised if you had told him that Sally was not given to tears and that this present appalling exhibition was the first of its kind and that nobody, when she recovered, was going to despise it as much as Sally herself. And, anyway, tears at that time of night were probably better than words. Questions, explanations, were much better left until the morning. So when they arrived at the tall London house in a square once fashionable and select, but now mostly given over to "apartments," he gave Sally something hot to drink and a comfortable bed in which to sleep it off and in the morning he explained to his housekeeper—that is to say he notified that lady of Sally's presence, requested that a cup of tea and subsequently breakfast, be taken up to her, but included nothing about Westminster Bridge or what Sally was doing on its parapet.

Blanche Boyes accepted the situation as she accepted most others with which her employer confronted her, in a kind of defensive silence which he endured because at least it prevented him from the necessity of hearing her thoughts regarding them. The only positively satisfactory thing, he considered, about Blanche Boyes's thoughts was her habit, where he was concerned, of keeping them to herself. He did not like Blanche Boyes, he

did not like a good many other people as well. Like Swift's, John Saril's life was fuller of hatreds than of likings. He did not like the human race, he did not like its stupid face, and was glad when Blanche Boyes took hers away.

Across its cold, always slightly-offended expression she managed to twist something that might be called a smile when she carried the commanded "early tea" to Sally's bedside. Awakened suddenly out of sleep, that young woman sat up in bed with an unexpected abruptness, stared at the new-comer out of a pair of very wide-open and startled eyes and took the proffered cup with a murmur of confused and indistinct thanks, for this was the first time anybody had ever brought Sally a cup of tea in bed. The smile, such as it was, faded out of Blanche's face and she went out looking more offended than when she came in.

She felt offended, too. Granted that she was the kind of woman who is more or less always offended, who would, on the whole, prefer to feel offended than not, there seems no doubt that the worsening of her state of mind where Sally was concerned was not unconnected with the fact that Sally was young and pretty. "Or what would be *called* pretty," Blanche Boyes would have phrased it, for she would have you suppose that her standards of beauty in women were not the flimsy, easily-satisfied affairs of other people. A pale face, with a pair of eyes much too big for it, was, in Blanche's opinion, what most men would go "potty" about. Blanche believed she despised man-made standards and opinions and perhaps she did. Or perhaps she merely despised them a little less than those of women. For Blanche was like her master in this—that she was not unduly fond of the race to which she belonged. People make me *sick!* was a phrase repeatedly upon her thin lips, and by its use she seemed to fold herself away in some brighter, lovelier world which, however, did not appear to do much for her, at least so far as the elimination of that general air of offence was concerned.

Sally, however, at this stage, was entirely unaffected by Blanche and her expression. Properly speaking, she hadn't seen Blanche: she had only seen somebody who magically handed her a cup of tea and then left her alone with it. Greatly to her own surprise and a little to her indignation, she had slept and now as she drank her tea her mind filled up slowly with the memory of her miseries, the image of Colin Stawell's weakly handsome face and that of his mother as she said: "We mothers have to protect our sons." From all these things a sense of injustice emerged and another of humiliation at the thought of the cinema and the stranger-thief and the loss of all the money in her possession. She took no consolation from the thought of the few pounds standing in her name in the Post Office which she could

draw upon if she produced her book now lying in her box at Victoria Station, for as yet she had hardly remembered it. She was vaguely surprised that she could have slept with so many troubles crowding in and down upon her. Holding her now empty cup, she leaned back against her pillows and revolved the painful situation in which she found herself and then, suddenly, thought not of the situation at all, unhappy though it was, but only of Colin's face, of his kisses and avowals. Never, as long as she lived, would she ever be able to forget him. She closed her eyes and went on telling herself this and hugging to herself the dramatic and pathetic fact that never, never could she ever be happy again.

She relinquished it for a moment when Blanche Boyes came in with her breakfast-tray, but only to grapple it the more firmly to her soul when the door had closed behind that young woman's disapproving back. She shut her eyes again and sat quite still before the tray, her tears falling down upon it, her hands clutching its sides. Like an image she sat there still when after a faint knock, quite lost upon Sally, the door opened and her rescuer walked in.

John Saril went over to the bedside and stood looking down upon her.

"For God's sake stop crying and eat your breakfast," he said.

Instantly, as if obeying orders from an employer, Sally opened her eyes, reached out a hand and lifted the cover. Slowly at first and still choked by her sobs, she began to apply her knife and fork, and then as though she liked what she was eating, as if her youth and hunger triumphed over the tyrannical miseries which had usurped her attention.

Saril reached for a chair and sat watching her. His face was imperturbable. Certainly, Sally's claims to any degree of good looks at this juncture were not overwhelmingly evident, and if he noticed her youth or the whiteness of neck and bosom of which the sleeveless under-garment she wore as a night-dress revealed perhaps rather more than was usual, that watching face gave no sign.

"I suppose you know I ought to hand you over to the police?" he asked her, and there was nothing in his voice save a slight note of boredom, as of one already regretting an impulsive action.

"Why?" she asked. Either her voice was very soft or her tears had muted it, and the expression in her face, Saril thought, had nothing to do with alarm but merely enlightenment. He had told her something she hadn't known.

He said: "Because it's an offence against the State to take life."

“It was my own life.”

“That would not absolve you.”

“But I was so unhappy.”

“Nor that. We are all unhappy, more or less. You can’t expect the State to care about that.”

“But I didn’t want to live,” said Sally, quite forgetting how frightened she’d been looking Death in the eyes and how glad to find herself back again in life, her feet firmly planted upon the solid London pavement.

Saril looked at her coldly.

“But why advertise the fact? We’ve all wished we were dead often enough, I daresay, but we’re not such damn fools as to hasten the process. Why take a gaping world into your confidence, anyway? It never helps you to make a bigger fool of yourself than Nature intended. When you’ve stopped feeling so exceedingly sorry for yourself you’ll see that you’ve made a fool of yourself, and be a little sorry about that, instead.”

He saw that Sally’s face looked thoughtful and, with relief, that the tears no longer cascaded down it. But she offered no verbal agreement or disagreement. Thank heaven, she was not a talker, anyway. The human voice, like so many other human attributes, John Saril considered overrated. Nevertheless, perversely, he wished Sally would talk—now, and then for ever hold her peace. His curiosity was aroused by her, and this annoyed him; that she should satisfy it seemed the only way to end what otherwise he would begin to find a nuisance.

“Where do you come from?” he asked her suddenly, reflecting that if she became a bore he could easily enough call a halt.

When Sally said: “Streatham!” he said: “Good God!” and nearly said it again when in reply to his question as to what she was doing in Streatham she had replied: “I was a parlourmaid.” She didn’t look like a servant, somehow, he thought. There was an air about her. She looked fine and sensitive and fastidious—not at all the sort of girl you’d expect to pull down from bridges, because you’d never imagine she could get herself on to them.

“Did you get the sack?” he asked her suddenly.

“Yes, sir.”

He wondered if he wanted her to call him “sir.” He said: “And does that explain all that nonsense on the bridge?”

“No, sir.”

“What does then?”

“I’d rather not say, if you please, sir.”

“Very well. Why did the woman at Streatham give you the sack? Weren’t you any good at your job?”

“Oh yes.” He smiled at the sudden ring of pride in her voice. “It wasn’t that.”

“I see. Well, I imagine there are other people in the world wanting parlourmaids.”

“Yes, but Mrs. Stawell won’t give me a reference—at least not a good one, sir.”

“Mrs. Stawell being the lady at Streatham?” asked Saril, mentally reflecting that here, perhaps, was the true inwardness of the prank on the bridge. “Why not?”

“I’d rather not say, sir. . . . I would really.”

He found he was suddenly tired of asking her questions—or of getting such unsatisfactory replies. But all the same, he asked her another: “Do you think you could get on with my housekeeper?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“Don’t be too certain. However, if you care to chance it, I’ll give you a job here. Miss Boyes complains she’s overworked. Can you cook?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

John Saril, looking a little sceptical, said: “Then that’s settled. Get some clothes on and come downstairs to my study when you’re ready. Next floor—the door on the right. And don’t be longer than you can help.” He pushed back his chair, got up, and without another word or look in Sally’s direction, went out of the room.

(3)

A quarter of an hour later, Sally presented herself at the door of the room he had indicated and was told to come in.

Saril glanced up at her. She wore the black frock in which he had seen her the evening before, very neat, with collar and cuffs of white—her parlourmaid’s dress, he supposed. He was disappointed to find she was a

servant, for he loathed servants, considering them, like heat-waves and politicians, as among the minor ills of an existence he despised. But, obstinately, in spite of her dress and her subdued demeanour and the way she shut the door and stood just inside it as one awaiting instructions, she did not look like a servant. He did not even now notice that but for the effect of her recent tears she would have been pretty. He only noticed that she wasn't crying then, that she was very young, that her face was very pale and the hands folded in front of her long and shapely.

“Sit down,” he said.

He got up, pushed forward a chair, re-seated himself, and went on with whatever it was he was writing. He saw, however, that she sat on the very edge of the chair, which irritated him, but she kept perfectly quiet. Thank God, she did not fidget or shuffle her feet. After a while he put down his pen.

“Well,” he said then, “are you ready? If so, we'll go and find Blanche. Unless you've changed your mind?”

The faintest tinge of colour came into her face.

“Oh no,” she said, “but I think there's something I ought to tell you first, sir. . . . I mean about why Mrs. Stawell dismissed me . . .”

“Why? I shan't apply to Mrs. Stawell.”

“All the same, sir, I feel you ought to know. I'd feel happier, sir, if you knew.”

Saril frowned and sat back in his seat. He was bored and afraid that what she insisted upon telling him would but deepen the state. What could she tell him that would be of any real interest? Despite the thin distinguished look of her, the shapeliness of hands and feet, the long fine lines of her and that fastidious air she wore, she would doubtless reveal to him the mind of her class—or that of the class immediately above her for which, presumably, she had worked. The revelation of either would be more than he could endure. However, he had brought it upon himself. He'd let her begin, anyway.

“Very well,” he said, “only sit back properly in your chair, first of all.”

Sally flushed a little as if something in the sharpness of voice and gesture hurt her a little; but she shifted her position on the chair and began to speak.

At least she was not wordy, he decided, ticking off in his mind her briefly-stated facts.

Coming, via the Gordons and Hansons to Colin and Mrs. Stawell, and to that lady's summary dismissal, Sally said: "You see, she thought it was my fault—that I had encouraged him."

"And hadn't you?"

"I don't think so, sir. It just seemed to happen."

"Did he seduce you?"

"No, sir."

There was so little indignation in her voice that he burst into laughter.

"But you wish he had, eh?"

Sally said nothing.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen, sir."

He had thought her younger.

"Did you expect him to marry you?"

"I don't know, sir. I couldn't have, really, I suppose. I don't think I thought much about it. You see I was in love with him."

He laughed again, but she seemed unaware that she had made a subtle remark.

"That's the worst of being in love," he said, "one *doesn't* think. At least, not until it's too late. Then you think too much. How long is it going to take you to forget this young jackanapes?"

"I don't think I'll ever forget him, sir . . ."

Saril laughed.

"Well, we'll see how you feel about it in six months' time. Come along now and find Miss Boyes."

"If you'd like to apply to Mrs. Gordon, sir. . . . I think she'd give me a reference."

"No, thanks," said Saril, "we'll forget about her. I'll take you on trust. Come to that, we take each other on trust."

His smile warmed Sally's heart. It was the first time she had seen it and in the weeks that followed she thought she must have imagined it. But this



morning it called out her own in answer. For a few seconds they stood looking at each other.

“There’s only one thing I want you to remember,” he said after a little. “Because I don’t go out to an office all day, you don’t have to assume I’m one of the idle rich. My study’s my office and nobody comes into it, after I get down in the morning, unless I ring. D’you understand that?”

“Yes, sir,” said Sally.

“That’s all right, then. For the rest, if you don’t get on with Boyes don’t blame me. I can’t do anything about it. But I warn you she’s a bad-tempered woman. So don’t expect life here to be a bed of roses.”

Sally’s smile came again.

“No, sir,” she said.

Suddenly, as though he had never smiled upon her and was now quite sick of the sight of her, he led the way out of the room and into the kitchen.

(4)

“Queer” and “eccentric” were the mildest of the epithets Blanche Boyes applied to her employer, though if put to it, she could have pointed to nothing about his mode of life that was either the one or the other, save his preference for living alone in a ten-roomed house in a shabby locality, that he had made it perfectly clear within a few weeks of her appearance upon the scene that it was a housekeeper he had engaged, not a companion or a prospective wife, and that he had never given her one sentence of his confidence in the whole five years of her presence there. Not that she didn’t, by now, know pretty well everything there was to know about him—Mrs. Alfred Bracey, his married daughter, having made good her father’s silences. All the same, when it came to picking up women in the streets . . .!

She listened to Saril’s plan that Sally should assist her in the house with that slightly offended expression upon her face, but could raise no valid objection, since she had repeatedly asserted that she wanted a substitute for the girl who had married the baker’s assistant six months ago, “as anybody could tell by looking at her.” (Blanche Boyes was of the kind who could never think or refer to a pregnant woman without that faint suggestion of innuendo.)

“Very well,” she said, at the end of Saril’s remarks. It neither sounded gracious nor was meant to be. She regarded Sally’s presence as an affront and her only consolation was that Mrs. Bracey, when she came to hear of it,

would dislike it even more strongly. For Blanche Boyes detested Caroline Bracey, for all she pretended otherwise, and her nose curled in scorn as she thought of her now with her two hateful children, her tubby little husband. . . .

“Very well,” she said to Saril, and to Sally: “Come this way.”

Sally followed her into the scullery, where a pile of dishes waited to be washed.

“That’s a very unsuitable dress,” she said, disapprovingly. “Haven’t you another?”

Sally explained that her box was at Victoria Station, but she could see that the explanation did not make a favourable impression upon Miss Boyes. She was told she could go and fetch it that afternoon and was provided in the interval with a long-sleeved overall much too big for her.

Blanche Boyes could find no fault with the washing-up nor with the subsequent jobs she found for her to do. Sally, she saw, was quick and efficient and that was lucky—and a good deal more than the girl who had married the baker had been. But Blanche Boyes distrusted her looks and could see for herself that she’d been recently crying. What was a girl who arrived from nowhere, with her luggage in the cloakroom at Victoria, likely to have been crying about? Blanche Boyes did not find the question difficult to answer, but it occupied her mind, none the less, for the greater part of the morning.

## CHAPTER TWO

### (1)

Sally had been at Holly Lodge, the incongruous name of Saril’s shabby house, only a couple of weeks when he suggested that she and not Blanche should attend to his wants at table. This, he explained to that lady, was because Sally had been trained as a parlourmaid and ought to get a little practice at her job, but in reality it was because he thought Sally a pleasanter person altogether to have about one when one ate. Yet Sally found waiting upon him a chilly affair, for Saril was taciturn and completely impersonal. He seemed not to notice her presence and never spoke to her except to refuse something she offered or to ask for something she didn’t. For all that Sally vaguely understood that her promotion was not a popular move in the kitchen and this surprised her, for Blanche grumbled a good deal at the stairs from kitchen to dining-room, and Sally had thought she would be glad to

have this amount of relief. She was utterly mystified by the black looks and short answers with which Blanche favoured her in the days that immediately followed her elevation, but gradually, as Blanche learned from Sally that Saril was as taciturn with her as with Blanche herself, her displeasure wore off and she treated Sally once again to her usual brand of frozen amiability.

Holly Lodge was not, taking it all round, an exhilarating household and Sally herself, in these early days, no more an exhilarating companion for Blanche than Blanche for her. For all her comfortable home and good food, for all the luck with which, as she told herself, she had fallen on her feet, she was still, she was convinced, the most unhappy girl alive. Her days were punctuated with memories that seemed to have etched themselves into her mind as if it were a copper plate. That first kiss beneath the dipping budding beech-tree, those that belonged to that day in the sun at Hindhead and all those others which followed that same evening in the firelight; the look on Colin's face at the end of it; the sound of his music, the night when it had floated up to her as she sat up there in her room—these things were with her still, and for all her cruel disillusion she was still fathoms deep in love. Her emotions, if they no longer bore her helplessly along, showed a tendency to close over her head. She drowned still in love—worse, in love unfulfilled. Colin Stawell still held her heart in his hand, and all the brightness and beauty of the world was still caught up in his person. *Ergo*, since she would never see him again, there was no brightness or beauty in the world for her. Here was the essential harm young Stawell had done her, that temporarily at least he had robbed her of her sound common sense, her sense of proportion, leaving her emotions deeply aroused and utterly unsatisfied. Those same fates which had hovered about her as she had driven down through a spring morning into Surrey, if they took any interest in her now, must have felt justified of their gloom. Abandoned, doomed, whether the young man took his pleasure or not. . . . Well, he had not taken it—and here was Sally ready for disaster, for the accidental, living a secret life of emotional tension that dulled her existence by day and edged it with sleeplessness at night.

Not that disaster or accident seemed, on the face of it, to be lying in wait for Sally at Holly Lodge. Her life there was a round of familiar tasks and little or no human contact and nothing more inimical to her welfare seemed likely to come her way than the dull monotony which offered so mournful a contrast to those days sunlit with Colin and her feeling for him. But that in itself was dangerous enough. She saw that this common round, this dull monotony, was to be her life now that Colin had gone—forgetting that it had been her life also before he had arrived.

Nevertheless, though her eyes were sad and often a little shadowed in the mornings from tears and wakefulness, her face paler than its wont, her air of quietude deepened, she did her work with thoroughness and efficiency. This much at least long training at the necessitous business of earning her living was able to do for her.

At this stage of affairs Sally felt no curiosity at all about her employer. Her feelings towards him were entirely confined to gratitude for what he had done for her that night of her escapade upon the bridge, and to a faint glow at her heart when she remembered how he had taken her on trust, asked no questions, was, even, a little bored with what she had told him of the truth, attempting neither to probe nor to reprove. They took, the pair of them, after that one moment that first morning in John Saril's study, singularly little interest in each other, meeting for no more than those few minutes three times a day when John Saril sat down to his meals.

Blanche Boyes, it is true, conveyed much if saying little about her employer. She worked her epithets "queer" and "eccentric" and asked Sally why she thought he lived in a house "this size" in a neighbourhood like Camberwell. Sally said she didn't know and didn't see why he shouldn't and what was wrong with the house, anyway? Sally did not mind its shabbiness nor the still more obvious shabbiness of its neighbours, most of which let "apartments," though the long untidy garden at the back of it filled her with a strange dismay. He had been there, Blanche said, for years—had lived there with his wife after the war. "Sometimes," said Blanche, "you'd think he stayed on here in case she should come back. But as she ran away years ago, with another man, it's not very likely, if you ask me."

Sally did not ask her; she made scarcely any comment upon this revelation of John Saril's private affairs. As ever, a sense of loyalty to those she worked for kept her from a discussion of their lives and the things they did or were alleged to do. She knew nothing of John Saril save that he had been kind to her: being Sally it was all she wanted to know. Asking nothing, she would have served him willingly and faithfully for the rest of her life, and as her concern with her own wounded feelings grew less intense she became a little sorry that he noticed her not at all. She would have liked him to know, somehow, how very sensible of his generosity she was.

(2)

Sally had been at Holly Lodge a week before she went out into the garden, which stretched for a good two hundred feet away from the house, a tangle of grass and weeds, with an occasional tree straggling up towards the

light. There was one with a dark narrow leaf, and vaguely familiar to Sally, on the right of the overgrown path, and several others with sparse red and white blossoms showing here and there. In a spot quite bare of tree or shrub were the remains of what Sally knew to be a rockery, now a mass of moss and weed-covered stone over which waved taller weeds and grasses. Along the wall at the end climbed the neat ampelopsis which Sally knew well enough by sight but not by name, and in the far corner was a tall straggling shrub which later bore surprisingly large mauve racines of flower which Sally had never seen before. Here and there were shrubs, sooty, untidy, tired-looking, yet somehow holding their own against the smoke and grime, and by the kitchen door a may-tree was coming meekly into bloom, which gave Sally the same feeling as the sight of a bird in a cage. In the front garden was a small, sad-looking tree which Sally never saw in bloom and which she did not recognise, therefore, as a wild almond. She could not say why this garden depressed her so much more than the shabby house; perhaps it was because she knew now what a garden could be or because it bore the signs of a thing once prized, now forgotten and left to die.

(3)

One evening after Sally had been at Holly Lodge for close upon a month, she opened the door to a hard-faced, dowdily-dressed young woman who asked for Mr. Saril and favoured Sally with a stare of surprise.

“Are you new here?” she asked as she came inside and wiped her feet with exasperating thoroughness upon the mat.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Sally. “I’ll tell Mr. Saril.”

“Don’t bother. I’m his daughter—Mrs. Bracey. Where is he?”

“In his study, ma’am.”

“I’ll go up.”

“If you will wait a moment, madam, I’ll tell him you are here.”

“Tell him I’m here? Nonsense . . .”

“But Mr. Saril is busy and does not wish to be disturbed, madam.”

Mrs. Bracey, however, was half-way up the stairs and Sally, much concerned, retreated to the kitchen.

“*That’ll* please him,” said Blanche when told what had happened. “No love lost between those two, *I* can tell you. She’s been adding to the population or we’d have had her here a lot more. Wonder we haven’t seen

*him*, though—meaning Alfred. Mr. Alfred Bracey.” Blanche made a derisive noise with her nose which Sally understood (for she knew the signs by now) to indicate that she cared for Alfred Bracey no more than she cared for his wife.

This being so, Sally was staggered when half an hour later Mrs. Bracey knocked at the kitchen door, came in and was made quite effusively welcome by her father’s housekeeper. Sally had encountered this kind of human duplicity before, but this time it seemed so completely unnecessary. What possible reason could there be for pretending, here, an affection one did not feel? The conversation seemed to her, also, to be scrappy and singularly futile, once the embarrassing details of Mrs. Bracey’s recent confinement had come to an end. This, Sally learned, was Mrs. Bracey’s second boy and third child.

“*And* my last, if I know anything about it,” she said. There was, Sally thought, very little about her of the proud mother. As she sat there she mentally compared her with Mildred Yorke in similar case, and thought: How awful it must be to have a child you don’t want, and how awful not to mind people *knowing* you didn’t want it. I’d not do *that*, anyway, she told herself on a quick impulse of personal pride and human dignity, and sat there quietly studying Caroline Bracey. A long rather sallow face, with dark, quick-moving eyes, a mouth too much like a straight line to be very good to look at and a hard, ill-tempered watchful expression—the face of a woman who was afraid somebody would prevent her from getting something she wanted. A greedy, suspicious face as well as a plain one.

She was badly dressed—her clothes, as Sally saw, were not merely tasteless but cheap. Her hideous hat was almost amusing and the tweed costume she wore very badly cut. Even Sally, who had never had much time or money to spend upon her clothes, thought she would be ashamed to look, when she went abroad, like Mrs. Bracey. She felt vaguely ashamed for her.

“You’ve got a helper, I see,” she said presently to Blanche, eyeing Sally. “You managed to persuade him, then, at last?”

Blanche said to this no more than: “Well, time enough, if you ask me—with all those stairs.”

Mrs. Bracey said nothing to this, but continued to look critically at Sally. Her glance Sally found as disconcerting as that of the detested Mr. Gage, and at the thought of that individual, probably at that moment handing coffee to the beloved object, all her unhappiness seemed to rise in her throat and choke her. She turned miserably away from Mrs. Bracey’s critical

regard. What did it matter? What did anything matter? She wished she were dead.

“You don’t look very strong,” Mrs. Bracey said, not as one offering commiseration but as one definitely finding a final objection to something she had already disapproved. “Is this your first place?”

“No, ma’am,” said Sally. Mrs. Bracey looked as though she considered this tantamount to no reply at all, but just then Blanche Boyes caught her eye and she did not pursue her inquiries. Sally, her head bent over some sewing, did not see the look and was accordingly much more grateful for Mrs. Bracey’s silence than she need have been. Before she rose to go, Mrs. Bracey had invited Miss Boyes to tea one afternoon early in the following week and Miss Boyes had accepted.

“Come early—it’s ages since we saw anything of you,” Caroline Bracey said. “We’ve such heaps to talk about. You get the 37 bus, you know.”

Blanche agreed.

Sally gave it up.

(4)

Two days after that visit of Blanche’s to Caroline Bracey’s house at Peckham Rye (“beastly little house!” said Blanche) that young woman arrived with a short pale-faced man just as Sally was taking up coffee to the study.

“If that’s my daughter,” he said to her, “don’t let her come up here. Tie up the knocker. Say I’m sick, I’m dead . . .”

Sally, who did not recognise this as a quotation, smiled faintly as she set the coffee-tray at his side and much to her surprise and delight Saril smiled back.

“Understand?”

“Yes, sir—but *Mr.* Bracey has come as well, sir.”

“Good lord! I might have known it.” He laughed as he poured out his coffee. “You’re a confounded nuisance to me, Sally. It’s you they’ve come to see, confound ’em, not me.”

“Me? Whatever for, sir?”

“Curiosity. Go down and let ’em have a good look at you. But don’t answer their questions. They’ll the sooner get sick of asking them.”

“And you’re too busy to see them, sir?”

“I am.” Again he smiled at her. “Good girl, Sally. I rely upon you.”

A very pleasant and quite unusual sense of light-heartedness descended upon Sally, who felt herself noticed and appreciated—two factors certain to improve the outlook of any human being, even those trailing broken hearts, as did Sally. She went out feeling that, perhaps, after all, life was not so abysmally tragic and hopeless as she had been supposing.

She found Caroline Bracey and her husband in the dining-room in deep conversation with Blanche Boyes, which, however, ceased as Sally entered. She supposed that the husband would be called good-looking, for his features were as regular as a girl’s, but there was an unhealthy look about his dead-white face and pale eyes and his possession of a paunch went so incongruously with his build and age that Sally found him queerly repulsive. His wife addressed him as “Elf,” which somehow nearly made Sally laugh. However, she soberly explained to them both that Mr. Saril was very busy and hoped they would excuse him and did not quite know what she ought to say when Caroline tossed her head and said: “*Excuse* him! The idea! He knows as well as I do why he won’t see me!” Her sallow face had gone very red. Her eyes stared, her mouth became more of a straight line than ever. Sally did not like to look at her. But Elf put out a hand and touched her arm.

“Now, Caro, old girl, don’t go upsetting yourself. It won’t do you any good.” He turned to Sally. “Your master’s busy, you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And he refuses to see us?”

“He hoped you would excuse him, sir.”

“Oh, indeed? Then please go and acquaint him with the fact that we didn’t come here to excuse him. We came on business and must ask him to give us a few minutes of his time. Say we won’t keep him long.”

Caroline Bracey looked impressed by this speech, delivered with a dull pomposity of manner and a staring eye.

“Yes, sir,” said Sally, and turning she ran up the stairs and tapped at her master’s door.

“If you please, sir, Mr. Bracey says they’ve come on business and won’t keep you long.”



John Saril looked up, heard what she said and put down his pen with a weary gesture.

“Good lord—I might have known it. Say I’ll be down in ten minutes, Sally. Meantime, offer them coffee or whatever beastly beverage they drink.”

“Very well, sir.”

Sally was half-way out of the room when he called her back.

“And, Sally, don’t forget—give them a chance to have a good look at you. That’s what they’ve come for. Pity to disappoint ’em altogether.”

Not knowing what to say to this Sally said nothing. She smiled, very faintly, a little apologetically and went out. And once again that sense of light-heartedness went with her down the stairs and a sense of curiosity regarding this man who had befriended her—the first she had experienced in the six weeks she had spent in his house. What, just exactly, did he do up there in his study? What was it he committed with so much thoroughness to paper? For the first time he seemed part of her life, as Gilbert and Mildred Yorke had been and George and Sanchia Hanson. She wanted to do something for him, something that would keep at bay these people he didn’t want and who had obviously come to pester him. But there was nothing she could do but what he asked her—offer them coffee and show herself.

They accepted the coffee and greedily devoured the biscuits which accompanied it, so that Sally wondered if they had, in fact, come along expecting dinner. But since it was outside her province to offer this she was lavish with the biscuits and with the exhibition of her person. Even, in her Sally-ish fashion, she answered their questions and felt a little warm at their obvious disapproval, their blatant implication that she had no right to be there. She had an eager anxious desire to tell them that they were wrong—that, although appearances (as doubtless conveyed by Blanche) were against her, she was a respectable girl. Later she lost this desire, but by then she had also lost her respect for the Braceys and it didn’t matter what they thought or didn’t think of her. That she should care this evening was, perhaps, nothing more or less than a sign that she had regained—or was regaining—her own self-respect.

When Saril came in he regarded the scene with a smile which twisted down the corner of his mouth and entirely neglected his eyes. Neither was his face made the kinder by it. It came to Sally, in that moment, that he hated these people, not only his daughter but her white-faced, paunchy husband. She understood, too, that for some reason they hated him. The air was thick

with animosity. It slipped through the door when Sally went out and went down with her into the kitchen, where another version of it looked out of Blanche Boyes's eyes as she glanced up from the novel she was reading.

"What do you think of *him*?" she asked.

"Mr. Bracey? Oh, I don't know—I expect he's all right."

"*Do* you? He's got 'worm' written all over him!"

"Oh, well . . ." said Sally, "I admit he isn't very attractive."

"*Attractive*? I should say not! And will you believe it, she ran away from home at nineteen to *marry* him!"

"Perhaps he was better looking then."

"Not he. He was born that way. He'll die like it."

"Is that why Mr. Saril doesn't like him—because his daughter ran away with him?"

Blanche, intrigued by the first question Sally had asked, laughed loudly and suddenly: "If you ask me that's the one reason why he might bring himself to *like* him a trifle."

"You mean he wanted to get rid of her?"

"Well, seeing them together, wouldn't you say so?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Sally, in that uneasy way of hers. "She doesn't seem very kind, perhaps. But I expect that's something to do with having the baby. She doesn't look very strong."

"You make a point, I suppose," said Blanche icily, "of seeing the good in everybody, don't you?"

The colour came into Sally's face. She did not reply. Her new-found light-heartedness faded out. She felt, with Blanche Boyes, as she had been used to feel in the early days of the Yorke household with Annie, that her tongue left nothing either clean or good in the world.

She was aware that Blanche disliked her extremely and that she, too, disliked Blanche. A sudden overwhelming sense of loneliness made her almost cry out in despair. Her mind switched back again to that week of romance when life had been painted, marvellously and unexpectedly, in glowing colours. She wanted it back—that one short week, that had turned all the rest of time black. That a streak of brightness had illuminated the gloom only that very evening when John Saril had said: "Good girl, Sally,"

she had already forgotten. Saril was old—fifty-five if he was a day, Blanche Boyes said!—and Colin was young. He had failed her—she knew that he had never really loved her, that he was weak and self-indulgent, spoilt and not for her. But all the same she wanted him. She would have slaved for him, worked her fingers to the bone. If he came in through the door now it would have been the same. She'd always want him—she'd never forget.

She took these hopeless romantic ideas to bed with her, where, of course, they reduced her to tears, kept her awake for hours and sent her down to her work in the morning with heavy shadowed eyes and a headache.

Blanche, looking at her, drew her own conclusions. A man in it somewhere—her late employer, shouldn't wonder, kicked out by the wife, probably. Wouldn't trust her further than I could see her, though what any man can *see* in her . . .!

Sally, feeling sad and broken and extremely unwell, played with her breakfast and didn't care in the least what Blanche was thinking. But later, encountering John Saril in the hall, she tried to slip past him so that he should not see her face—she didn't quite know why—and anyway didn't manage it, for he caught at her elbow and stayed her progress.

He gave one look at her, then let her go.

“Bloody little fool, aren't you?” he said.

Sally's mouth quivered; with difficulty she suppressed a sniff. She turned her head away.

“Do you like dogs?” Saril asked her abruptly.

Sally nodded. She had never kept a dog in her life, but she had had many dog friends, in shops, in the streets.

“Well, my dog's coming home from the vet's to-morrow. Would you like to go and fetch him? He'll walk quietly, on the lead.”

“Oh yes,” said Sally, suddenly, miraculously past her insane desire for tears. “What's he called?”

“Gipsy. He's an Airedale. Beginning to get old now, like his master. You'd better look after him—take him out some afternoons. Blanche doesn't care for dogs.”

“I'd like to,” said Sally.

“Good.”

He nodded and walked on abruptly as if he had suddenly forgotten all about her. But she knew now why she had tried to hurry past him, why she didn't want him to know she had been crying again. She had not wanted him to despise her, to think her, really, the poor thing she had seemed that night on the bridge. Down beneath all the queer unexpected emotionalism which threatened every now and then to engulf her, was a longing for the quieter ways of life, for something that was stable and dignified—equipped with poise and decorum. She did not care for herself in this love-sick dishevelled state. She thought of the Sally she had been with pity for her ignorance but with regret, too, because she had been so happy, so content, and because she had carried a quiet spirit about with her. Vaguely it disgusted her that anything, anything at all, anyone, should have done this to her. She had always despised the love-sick females she had encountered in books, but Sally was no great reader and her choice of books was haphazard, if, indeed, it could be called a choice at all. But it was one thing to have these thoughts, quite another to act upon them, and having made up her mind that “she would never get over it” she refused to comfort herself by the assurance that she would. She was very young and she was in love for the first time, so she did not know that that is how one always feels, nor that the state of mind is not really in the least interesting to the observer. All the same, she had an instinct to keep up a better appearance with John Saril, to fill his mind with a better picture of her than the one which must have sat there ever since their first meeting.

Consoling herself with the thought of the advent of the dog she made up her mind to do better. She would hide her broken heart behind a smiling mask, quite in the best traditions of her explorations in fiction and the cinema, though this she was too simple-minded to realise. Vaguely and uncertainly she reached out after her old personal dignity that, in time of others' stress, had seemed, she saw now, to matter so much to her, and knew, without understanding why, that John Saril's quiet scorn and his request about his dog had somehow helped her exceedingly.

(5)

Gipsy proved an affectionate, but sedate animal who speedily attached himself to Sally in a way which flattered her enormously, so that she knew she would have been extremely hurt and disappointed if he had not. She allowed him to take her for a long walk at least once a day and this did her at least as much good as it did Gipsy, for she liked walking and she had never had a dog to go walking with before. Even the drab London streets in the early summer rain managed somehow to lighten her spirits and Gipsy had no

sort of objection to the rain at all. Sometimes they passed the old house in which the Yorkes had once lived, and sometimes Sally would manage to persuade a bus conductor to let Gipsy ride on top, when they would go out to the country that still lies behind Beckenham and Bromley. But more often than not it was the London streets which claimed them and which sent them back presently to the house lighter of heart and healthier of body than when they left it.

Blanche, who had no feeling for dogs and was glad enough to be relieved of the necessity of walking Gipsy out, shrugged her shoulders at Sally's enthusiasm. "Rather you than me," she said and settled down in peace to her afternoon nap.

It was probably Gipsy who first took Sally's mind off her romantic afflictions. It warmed her heart to see the dog's eyes upon her face, to feel his head on her foot when she sat down, and when once she buried her head on his neck and drenched him with her sudden whirlwind tears he did not seem to mind. This, he appeared to say, as he tried to twist his head and lick her face, is evidently one of her funny ways. In some strange fashion, too, he seemed to recognise her as an ally, with him, of her master's and as definitely against the frequent Bracey onslaught as was he.

Edna and Norrie Bracey, aged five and seven respectively, were, Sally thought, quite the most objectionable children she had ever encountered. Like their father, they were pale-faced and pale-eyed and they shared in the general family appearance of under-nourishment. ("Saves on milk," said Blanche Boyes; "always hard up, always in debt.") The baby Sally had not seen, but Edna and Norrie were somehow sufficient. There was a suggestion of mean streets, mean living and thinking about all these people that was quite irresistible and Sally wondered perpetually how Caroline came to be John Saril's daughter.

"It's a rum family," said Blanche, "and one I can't get to the bottom of. A queer lot all round, what with *her* running off with another man and *she* running off with Bracey when she was nineteen because her father brought home women to the house. So *she* says! . . . Bracey's a worm. As mean as dirt—and she's under his thumb right enough. But they're as like as two peas. They're afraid to death the old man'll marry again or leave his money to charity. Bless you, they used to think *I* wanted him!"

Blanche laughed. Sally said nothing, and after a while Blanche continued:

“Married beneath him, in the first place, so *she* says. Got a pash on some woman he picked up somewhere. They never got on. Led a cat-and-dog life. Then he went to the war. ’Cording to *her* there were other men all the time, and when he got back she went off with the latest. Before *my* time, that was. *She* says he divorced her, but seemingly he’s never told—anyway, they’re mighty afraid he’ll take up with some other woman. It’s his money they’re after! And that’s why they’re keeping an eye on you—same as they did on me when *I* first came.”

“How disgusting!” said Sally, the colour flaming rich and rare into her pale face. “Why, he’s *old!*”

“Not so old, either,” said Blanche. “Not more than fifty-five, I should say. If he were more amiable I don’t suppose he’d look that much. He’s queer, rather than old, if you ask me—eccentric. The right sort of woman might make him pull himself together, daresay.”

Sally realised as she glanced at Blanche that if Saril had asked her to marry him any time during the five years of her occupation of his house she would have done so—that even now she had not given up hopes of getting him and in that moment she saw, too, that this was the explanation of the Braceys’ friendship with her. It covered the watchful eye they were still keeping upon her.

But if they were keeping an eye on Sally for the same reason, they took no pains to dissemble. From the first they were openly and persistently hostile, definitely treating her as a young woman without a character, an offence to their respectability as well as a menace to all their hopes.

Sally began to feel distinctly sorry for John Saril. When the Braceys came to the house she had an instinct like Gipsy’s to growl and obstruct the doorway. But since she could not do this, when Caroline Bracey’s visits were rightly timed she would put on her hat and coat, call to the dog and go out for a walk.

So the first two months of Sally’s life at Holly Lodge went by. June had come, and even in Camberwell the days were made lovely with sun and light, with sweet air and quivering leaves, the drift of chestnut and hawthorn bloom from many an old forgotten tree in some front garden. The shrub at the far end of the Holly Lodge wilderness had astonished and delighted Sally, though she had no idea what it was, and out Beckenham way, where there were gardens in plenty, the roses were in bloom, and sweet-smelling pinks; and here, too, might be heard the late call of the cuckoo, which Sally

remembered so well from the old days at Mayes. Cuck-cuck-oo. Cuck-cuck-ooo . . .

The cry filled her with a soft, sweet melancholy, and she wished vaguely that she could follow it over the hills, that she could live for ever in the country and be happy. Happy and loved . . . for ever and ever.

She thought of Colin less these days, but she thought of the things he had given her still. He had wakened for her a magic she could not still, that came to her afresh in the warm June weather, the velvet night, the call of the cuckoo and the sight and sound of all lovely natural things. The spectacle of the young matrons wheeling their prams, of young women out with their young men, the sight of a woman with child touched some chord in her she had not known was there. And walking in the sweet June weather, with Gipsy running sedately at her side, it sometimes seemed to her that she was not really alive at all, that the stream of her life was secret and buried, turned away from the light. And then the tears would come into her eyes, her soul would fill quite up with the dreadful seas of self-pity, and she would stoop and pat Gipsy's head or adjust his collar that she might hide her suddenly-ravaged face from the passers-by.

## CHAPTER THREE

(1)

One day towards the end of June Blanche Boyes was summoned by telegram to her father's sick-bed, and after her departure Saril called Sally to his room. He wore the slightly bored and irritated air common to men when a cog slips in their domestic machinery.

"Can you carry on in Boyes's absence?" he began, coming to the point at once. "Or do you want me to get somebody to relieve you of responsibility?"

Sally said she thought she could manage.

"Don't 'think.' Can you manage or not?"

"Yes," said Sally.

"Good! That's all, thank you."

Feeling a little foolish, Sally found herself on the other side of the door, and spent a worried morning evolving a plan whereby her assurance to John Saril and her eager anxiety to show that she could be as good as her word could be justified. Here was her opportunity; she must seize it with

determination; must show that she could shoulder responsibility. Lunch was a simple meal, but John Saril was particular about his dinner, and Sally, having with misgiving decided upon a menu, spent an anxious half-hour with the cookery book before Gipsy could coax her out into the afternoon sunshine for their belated run.

If she had expected any praise for the punctuality of that evening meal or for the success of its menu, she must have been disappointed, for Saril ate what was placed in front of him without comment. Since that evening of the Braceys' visit he had retired again into his shell; he never spoke unless speech was necessary, and he looked at Sally as if she were not there, or, at best, something that would soon not be there. He gave her the impression of looking through her as if she were made of glass.

The first three days of Blanche's absence passed so. Relieved that she had come up to the mark, that he was not to be bothered by the inconvenience of Blanche's father's illness, Saril obviously wanted to know nothing more about it. The rest was Sally's business. Sally thought so too, but she wished, once or twice, that he would notice her existence, stop looking at her as if she were transparent. Although she was not aware of it, although she believed that what she wanted was some faint recognition of work done, responsibilities met and discharged, what she wanted just then of John Saril was recognition of herself as a human being, even a desirable human being. She did not, even subconsciously, want him to make love to her; indeed, she would have been very frightened if he had shown the slightest disposition towards love-making; but she wanted him to look at, not through her, to smile at her, even to call her "good girl." She wanted, in short, some of the sweets of appreciation to which the youthful ardent Colin Stawell had introduced her. It was becoming increasingly unbearable not to matter to anybody, not to excite in anybody the faintest human interest. Sally had forgotten the approving glances of the tradesmen's youths. A poor lot, she considered them; impudent young devils who left the side gate wide open and made familiar remarks. If one of them as much as attempted a kiss, she would have smacked his face.

John Saril was a different matter. To have earned his regard, his respect, would be worth while; to know that she had earned it a rare deep pleasure. She knew that. That he was a man had nothing to do with it; she felt over this as she had felt over the commendation and approval of a Mildred Yorke, a Sanchia Hanson. At least she believed she did, not able to connect her feeling for Colin with anything that was happening to her nor aware that



something stirred in her now which, in the days of Mildred and Sanchia, had been asleep.

One inevitable result of the sudden loneliness and disappointment of these first days of Blanche's absence was that she found herself thinking afresh of that idyll of the spring; of Colin's face, his laugh, the lovely sounds he evoked with his hands, the memory of things that had happened to her young and eager body that day in the sun, that last evening she had had with him. These things thronged the corridors of her mind and disturbed her newly burgeoning content.

(2)

On the fourth evening, just as Sally was making the strong black coffee with which John Saril not only rounded off his dinner but regaled the rest of the evening, a ring came at the door, and when she opened it Mrs. Bracey stepped inside very quickly and deftly as though she suspected that Sally would keep her out if she dared.

"Is my father at dinner?" she asked, and Sally showed her into the dining-room, where John Saril sat still over his dessert. Sally saw the unwelcoming scowl which went over his face as he looked up and saw his visitor, and retreating to the kitchen she began upon her neat pile of washing-up, as though there was no hurry at all over the coffee.

Up there in the dining-room Saril concluded this to be her decision, and his scowl deepened. The appearance of Sally with the coffee-tray and a disposition to finish the clearing of the table would surely, he thought, put an end to Caroline and the things she'd evidently come to say—if anything could stop Caroline's tongue, that is, which, on the whole, he rather doubted. But Sally did not put in an appearance, and at last Saril rang the bell, keeping his finger so long upon the push that Sally came hurriedly into the room and just in time to hear him say: "*Will* you please keep the conclusions of your filthy mind to yourself?"

There was a silence as she poured and handed coffee, but Sally could feel Mrs. Bracey's gimlet eyes upon her and, her task finished, made her escape with burning cheeks and a self-conscious air.

"Really, father," Caroline Bracey said as the door closed after Sally, "I do think you might drop this kind of thing at your time of life. Surely we've had enough of it in our family without your starting all over again?"

John Saril laughed.

“You let your imagination run away with you, Caro—and your imagination’s quite as nasty as your mind, you know, my dear.”

“Is it? Can you deny this girl is your mistress?”

“Of course she isn’t my mistress.”

“But you mean her to be?”

John Saril looked a little startled. “Do I?” he said.

“Oh, don’t be such a humbug, father. There’ve been girls before—girls who were your servants, too. You can’t deny that!”

“No—but ’pon my word, my dear, I’d almost forgotten it.”

“Very convenient, I’m sure. But *I* haven’t forgotten!”

“That is a pity, of course.”

“Neither have I forgotten that because of your affairs . . . because you brought your women into the house, *I* had to leave it.”

“But you left it with your precious Elf, so what have you to grumble at?”

“You think I *wanted* to marry Elf?”

“The evidence seemed to lie that way.”

“I didn’t want to marry anybody. I hate that side of life. I’d seen too much of it. I married Elf because he was the only means of escape I had. I wouldn’t have married him for untold gold otherwise.”

“Dear me. Does Alfred know that?”

“Of course he doesn’t know it! I’ve done my duty, I hope. But I’d have married a dozen Elfs rather than have gone on living with you and your paramours!”

“Dear me, Caroline, you surprise me! And all these years I’ve been thinking of your running off at nineteen with Elf as a manifestation of love’s young dream, and reflecting that there’s no accounting for tastes!”

“That’ll do. You can keep your tongue off Elf. He’s a better man than you. He knows what morals are, anyway.”

“Morals,” said John Saril, “are three-parts good manners.”

“Then yours were jolly bad—that’s all I’ve got to say,” said Caroline, “and still are! You pick this girl up in the street, bring her home here, and pretend she’s your servant!”

“She *is* my servant.”

“So you say!”

“My dear Caro, you’re really being a little ridiculous. This girl and I are strangers. I helped her out of a tight corner and gave her a job. That’s all there is to it, I assure you, despite my unsavoury antecedents.”

“But ever since Blanche went off you have been alone in the house with her!”

“My dear Caroline—a purely temporary situation, and not an arranged one. Or do you hold me responsible for the illness of the good Boyes’s father?”

Caroline shrugged her shoulders.

“If you’d never had her here the situation would never have arisen.”

“True, O King, but you see she *was* here. And here I’m afraid she will remain until she expresses a wish to leave me. She’s a good servant and a lot more amiable than the good Boyes.”

“So I’m wasting my time, am I?”

“I’m afraid you are!”

“Very well, then, I’ll go.”

“Thank you, my dear.”

“A nice kind of father I’ve got, haven’t I?”

“I don’t hold myself out as an example. I never wanted to be a father . . . and I certainly never wanted to father you.”

“Come to that, you’re the last sort of father I’d have chosen.”

“I daresay. The business of having children is like all the rest of it—a snare and a delusion.”

“How long is Blanche going to be away?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“The longer the better, so far as you’re concerned, I daresay.”

“I don’t care about Boyes, certainly. I don’t pine for her company, if that’s what you mean.”

“I don’t.”

“Does it strike you that this is a rather footling conversation?”

“Whose fault is that?”

“Mine.”

“You’re going to keep this girl here?”

“Of course I am. Do we have to go all over that again? Since when have I consulted you about the engaging of my servants?”

“*Servants!*”

Saril said nothing. His daughter’s face went suddenly very red. She said, with a vicious little undercurrent in her voice: “You always did have a *rotten* taste in women. Look at the mother you gave me! Vain as a peacock, as immoral as a woman of the streets!”

“Shut up!” said John Saril. His voice was loud and violent, and the hand with which he put down his coffee cup shook so much that its contents splashed over on to the table-cloth.

“So she was,” said Caroline, “and you know it. You ought to have been ashamed of yourself for marrying her.”

“Shut up, I tell you!” said Saril. “Hold your beastly tongue and get out!”

“Well, don’t shout at me. I’m not one of your women. I’ll go when it pleases me.”

“You’ll go now.”

“Oh, very well.”

Caroline Bracey rose.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” she said.

“I daresay, but I’m not.”

“You’ve no shame left in you. . . . You’re abominable! I wonder I have anything to do with you!”

“You need not. Suit me just as well. Better. But if you’re coming here you’ll keep your tongue off your mother’s name.”

“You can’t stop me thinking what I like about her.”

“I’ll stop you putting your beastly thoughts into words, anyway. So understand that. And now clear out.”

Without another word Caroline Bracey went. For some time after the front door shut behind her John Saril sat at the table where she'd left him, then he rose and went upstairs to his study. Sally, hearing him go, came in and cleared away, taking the coffee back into the kitchen, where she rewarmed it and then carried it upstairs and knocked at the study door.

"I've brought your coffee, sir," she said, putting it down beside him. He saw that she had re-heated it, and smiled upon her.

"Thank you," he said, and then: "Shut the windows, Sally, will you? I feel cold."

He looked at her as she did so, suddenly aware that he had never looked at her before. There was a limber grace about her, a sense of youth and human warmth which he seemed also to be noticing for the first time. Was he seeing her through the detestable Caroline's eyes? Had she put ideas into his mind? He'd had an eye for women fast enough—he'd never stood on ceremony. Women were easy—poor stuff: kittens to be stroked. Except women like Caroline—full-grown tiger-cats, all teeth and claws. How had he ever come to have a daughter like that? He and Margot? It never ceased to seem to him ridiculous.

As Sally turned round from the windows he allowed his eyes to rest upon her face. What did Caroline see when she looked at her that disturbed her so much? Just a young and pretty girl ready to be made love to? Caroline suspected all her sex. All women were alike. All they wanted was a man, in whose keeping still resided the sweets of life. Caroline believed this and resented it, he knew; Margot, he remembered, had laughed at it. That was why he had failed to hold her, why any man had failed. Margot was neither cat nor kitten.

Sally stood at the other side of the table, awaiting his further orders. Her small face was pale and composed; her eyes met his with a straight simplicity that should surely, he thought, have reassured the all-suspicious Caroline. He thought, none the less, that they were remarkably beautiful eyes, unusual in colour and in the clear marking of the iris. Had he really not noticed these things before? He said suddenly, on an impulse he did not stay to analyse or reconsider: "Are you busy downstairs, Sally?"

"No, sir. I was going to mend your socks."

"Do you feel lonely down there?"

"Oh no, sir—at least, not particularly."

“Well, I do. Damned lonely. Do you think you could mend my socks up here for once?”

“Why, yes, I expect I could. Can I bring Gipsy, too?”

“If you like.”

Sally went away and presently came back with a pile of socks and a work-basket. Gipsy followed at her heels, walked up to his master, stood for a moment with his head on his knee, and then went and lay down at Sally’s feet. She had seated herself near the window, where the light was better, and already her head was bent over her work. He saw that she wasn’t going to talk, that she had sensed that what he wanted was just another human presence, which he did, but why, Heaven only knew. He sorted out the papers on his desk and made an effort to concentrate upon the article he was writing, to forget the company he had desired. The article was scrappy and not at all suited for the paper for which it was designed. The bad work he did! The good work he had done, once, before he met Margot, before he knew the truth about her—though had he ever done that? No wonder the conventional, frigid-minded Caroline despised him! He must look a first-class failure to her. Come to that, he looked one to himself. Only it no longer mattered.

Even this article only mattered to the extent of ensuring that Collins did not return it; did not see it as useless even for the intelligences and capacities for which it was intended. He began to delete and correct, his mind angry that this should be necessary, that so simple a theme, so ordinary a task, should so far have eluded his capacity as to need re-shaping. He was going to seed. Shut up here for five years with the sour-faced Blanche, his interests narrowed to the world of books and to the dull channel which was all that was left of the work once so dear to him, what else could he suppose would happen? Even Caroline saw that it couldn’t go on, and assumed that the appearance of this girl was the first sign of his return to a way of life which she contemned but was bound to recognise as more natural than the hermitical existence of the last five years.

Was it? Was that really the explanation of his quixotic behaviour? Did he really only need a woman again? If he made this girl his mistress, would he settle down once more to this life of bitter regret and frustrated hope which, like a climbing weed, he had allowed to grow over the shining fabric which was once his life and ambitions? It surprised him to realise that in very truth he had never once thought of Sally like that, that until this evening he had never really looked at her. She hadn’t attracted him because there was

nothing blatant or openly provocative about her, and it was for the blatant and provocative he had for so long been on the look-out. He had scarcely, even, been grateful for the positive things he saw now he owed to her—a quieter existence, a relief from the perennial presence of the sour-faced Blanche, the lack of necessity in her absence to suffer the presence of a stranger. But, suddenly, as he looked up from his work and saw her sitting there so quietly over hers, a sense of gratitude belatedly stole up in him. There was something about her, something he'd felt all the time without troubling to think about or even to acknowledge. He wondered what she thought about as she sat there so peacefully.

Presently he spoke, looking up at her with a little smile. "Are there many holes?" he asked her.

Sally shook her head.

"No, sir—there are very few. I think there ought to be more."

"Why, in heaven's name?"

"Well, more holes would mean more exercise—I *do* think you ought to go out more, sir."

"Do you? Why?"

"It would be good for you. Gipsy thinks so, too, don't you, Gip?"

Gipsy thumped the floor with his tail, cocked an ear and showed that he liked the sound of that soft, kind voice even when it said nothing really exciting, like remarks about walks or the post.

"This is no place for walking. It depresses me to go out."

"Why don't you move then, sir?"

"You would probably laugh if I told you why."

"I don't think I should."

"No? Well, this is the reason. Ten years ago I took this house, which happened to belong to me and was just then empty, whilst a house in the country was building. I lived here with my wife—the first house we took together after the war. Eleven months later, just as the house in the country was nearing completion, my wife went away. She went off with another man. I gave up the idea of living in the country and stopped here. Perhaps because I thought she might come back. I suppose that amuses you?"

Sally shook her head.

“Oh no . . . I can understand that, sir.”

She looked up from her darning and for a moment her eyes rested upon him so gently he felt as if she offered him a caress. She said nothing. Saril put down his pen and sat for a long time staring in front of him.

“Well, that’s what love does for you,” he said at length, taking up his pen again. “Keep out of it, my girl, if you want to keep your sense of proportion and your common sense. It’ll rob you of both. Love’s not the business of life. God knows why so many of us behave as though it were!”

He returned to his article, and for the rest of the evening took no more notice of Sally than if she had not been in the room. At ten o’clock Sally folded up her last pair of socks and got up. She was going out with Gipsy, she said, and asked if she could post anything.

“Yes, you may as well take this,” Saril said, and put his article into an envelope, addressed it and handed it to her. The address she had seen before: The Editor of the *London Gardener*, Clerkenwell Road, E.C. Most of the envelopes she posted for him were similarly addressed, and with the wilderness outside his own windows it seemed queer to her that he should write articles, as apparently he did, concerned with gardening, and that the Journal of the Horticultural Society should lie so often upon his desk. But she asked no questions, took the envelope, wished him good night, and called to Gipsy.

She lay awake that night long after the noises of the outside world were stilled, long after she had heard John Saril lock up and go to his room, her mind full of the things he had said to her.

Keep out of love, he said, or it would rob you of your common sense. Perhaps—but how was it to be done? Love was more, surely, than a matter of mere intelligence? Indeed, even Sally knew that intelligence frequently had no lot or part in it. She thought of herself with Colin, of Sanchia Hanson with Adrian Lorimer, of Gilbert Yorke with Mildred, and felt vaguely that something was wrong with this conception of love without in the very least understanding what. Love was not the business of life. Sally had never supposed it was until she had fallen in love, and knew well enough what it could do to your common sense and sense of proportion. But that made no difference. Love was sweet, she wanted it. Wanted to love and be loved, whatever it did to her. And, as usual, she fell to thinking of sweet things past and over, and as usual they kept her from sleep and sent her downstairs in the morning tired and heavy-eyed.



Perhaps John Saril noticed this, perhaps not. Perhaps he merely wondered what had possessed him to talk to this child of his secret affairs; perhaps he had really looked at her too much through Caroline's appraising eyes. Whichever way it was, he did not ask her to keep him company on either of the two following evenings, and by the third Blanche Boyes was back.

She came into the kitchen, unannounced, as Sally was busy with the coffee.

"Well," she said, "how've you been getting on?"

Sally, intent upon the straining of her coffee, did not look up.

"Quite well, thank you," she said.

"How's he been? Amiable?"

"Oh yes," said Sally, and this time raised her eyes to Blanche's, which, as she had felt, were keenly regarding her. "He's been no trouble at all."

"Did you manage the food?"

"He didn't grumble, anyway."

"Any developments? *She* been here?"

"Mrs. Bracey? Once."

"What did she want?"

"Goodness only knows!"

"Oh, all right . . . Here, I'll take that up. Suppose I'd better report myself. While I'm about it, see if you can find me something to eat. I'm starving."

"Is your father better?" Sally asked, relinquishing the coffee-tray.

"No, he'll never be better. But I couldn't wait for him to die. He took too long about it. I've my living to earn."

The thought went through Sally's mind that for some reason or other Blanche Boyes had hurried back because of her. She wondered why?

"I'll warm you some steak-pie," she said, "if you'd like that."

"Did you make the pastry?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll risk it."

Blanche laughed, took the tray and went off with it. Sally went to the larder, took out the steak-pie, slipped it into the oven and lighted the gas. But as she laid the table she felt a little chilled and depressed. She could not understand why, but was vaguely aware that she liked the house better without the presence of Blanche. Why? Because she did not very much like Blanche, or because she sensed that her presence would put a very full stop to her newly and not very firmly established intercourse with John Saril? She didn't know. She knew only that life was somehow the duller and the poorer because of Blanche's return.

(3)

Blanche had been back a week when she went off to Peckham Rye to have tea with Caroline Bracey, and when she came back Sally felt that Blanche was definitely hostile to her. For a week or so she made their joint life a difficult and miserable thing, so that she was almost tempted to tell Saril that she would not stop. But something held her back from so decisive a step; she did not want to leave. There seemed, too, more in it than that. She felt in some strange and but half-realised fashion that John Saril did not want her to go—that he'd be sorry if she went. Though he had not spoken half-a-dozen unnecessary sentences to her since that night in his room, she felt that something had been born between them—some sympathy and understanding that was of value. She would not allow herself to be pushed out, would not go unless he told her to go. It was as though she believed in her heart that she could do something for him—not now, perhaps, but some day—if she kept still and allowed herself a chance. What did it matter what Blanche said or how she behaved? Blanche could do nothing. By dint of much striving Sally managed to put Blanche and her animosities outside the ring of her life. She continued to make it appear as if she noticed nothing. And presently, as suddenly as they had begun, so the worst of Blanche's attacks came to an end. Sally sighed with relief—a little too soon, as it happened, for one afternoon shortly afterwards Mrs. Bracey came to tea.

John Saril was out. He had gone off immediately lunch was over in what Sally supposed were his best clothes, and had taken her breath away a little by the air of distinction with which they sat upon him. She saw him for the first time as a gentleman, as a member of that class of society (as she put it to herself) to which Colin had belonged. For all his usually shabby clothes, his shabby house and his impossible relations, John Saril was obviously a gentleman, and she wondered why she hadn't known this before. He had gone off without any explanation, without word of any kind, save that he would be in to dinner, and immediately after his departure Blanche had

slipped out of the house for five minutes and she, too, gave no explanation of her movements. Even when an hour later Caroline Bracey knocked at the door, Sally did not in any way connect her appearance with Blanche's brief absence. She had merely excused herself and taken Gipsy for a run, hoping that upon her return Mrs. Bracey would have departed.

But she had not.

Hungry after her walk Sally attacked her tea with vigour, wishing that Mrs. Bracey would not stare at her so and not sit so determinedly in the kitchen. As if she divined the thought, Caroline presently rose and went out of the room and five minutes later Blanche followed. Sally breathed a sigh of relief, propped up the novel of Berta Ruck's she was reading, and settled down to the enjoyment of the rest of her meal. She had barely shared the last crumb with Gipsy than Blanche put her head inside the door and said that Mrs. Bracey was in the dining-room and wanted to speak to her.

"What does she want?" asked Sally ungraciously.

"Better go and see," advised Blanche, retreating.

Sally betook herself to the dining-room, where she found Caroline Bracey standing in the bay of the window looking down the road. As Sally shut the door, she turned round and advanced a few steps in her direction.

"Oh," she said feebly, "here you are!"

Her sallow face was a little mottled, and she looked confused. Sally said quietly:

"You wanted to speak to me, madam?"

"Yes, Sally, I did. I want you to let me give you a little advice."

Sally stood waiting.

"How old are you, Sally?"

"I was twenty a fortnight ago, madam."

"Really? Only five years younger than I am. You look quite a child."

Still Sally said nothing.

Caroline began again:

"Sally, I want you to look for another situation—something that is more . . . more suitable. Now that her father's so ill Blanche will be away from time to time, and it really isn't right that a young girl like you should be left in this house alone."

“I shan’t be alone,” said Sally simply.

Caroline looked more confused than ever.

“I know. That’s what I mean. Alone with my father.”

“Why not?” said Sally, entirely forgetful now of her careful polite “madam.” Her voice was quite sharp and brusque. She was aware that she detested Caroline Bracey and what she was saying, what she intended to say. “Why not?” she said again, and waited, head up.

“My dear child! It really isn’t right for a girl like you to be in the house with a man like my father.”

“What do you mean?” said Sally, vaguely resentful and definitely afraid of those “likes.”

“Well, a pretty, attractive girl like yourself! Oh, of course you must know that about yourself! . . . And a man like my father, who is really rather dreadful about women . . .”

“Dreadful? How ‘dreadful’?”

“Well—he can’t resist a pretty woman, you know.”

The colour came into Sally’s face. Ignoring the compliment, she said: “Mr. Saril has always treated me properly. You’ve no right to say these things about him to me.”

“I’m sorry to *have* to say them, but it does seem to me—and to my husband—to be very necessary. We’ve seen so much of this sort of thing before, though I admit that since Blanche has been here things have been better. But I do think it my duty to warn you. Both of us have had you very much on our conscience since you came here. I shouldn’t like you to get into trouble. To be forewarned, you know, Sally . . .”

Sally said sturdily: “I’m not afraid.”

“My dear child, you talk very unwisely. As a married woman I wish you would allow me to know better, to give you advice. There are plenty much more suitable situations than this. I am sure your people would not like to know the kind of house you are in now.”

“I haven’t any people to bother about me,” said Sally, “and I don’t want another situation. Mr. Saril treats me all right, and I’m quite happy. At least, I would be if other people didn’t come making trouble.”

The red colour more deeply mantled Caroline's countenance. She came nearer and leaning her hands on the shining surface of the dining-table, looked across at Sally.

"No *nice* girl would put herself in such a position," she said; "only a girl who didn't care about her reputation or what people said of her would take this astonishing attitude."

"Well, I *don't* care what people say about me—much," said Sally. "And while they're talking about me they're not talking about anyone else, so that's something."

Caroline said: "Well, you *should* care. If you'd been through what I had to go through before I was your age, you wouldn't talk so stupidly. I was married before I was your age, Sally—and a mother."

"Well, I suppose you pleased yourself about that."

"No, unfortunately I didn't. I married to escape what—what I had to stand here, in this house, with my own father. Twice I had to dismiss a maid—and that wasn't all. He took to bringing his women home. Women he had picked up. I'd stood a good deal, but that was too much. And now he's starting all over again."

"What do you mean?" said Sally sharply.

"Well, you didn't come here the usual way, did you? Came home in a taxi with my father from goodness knows where at midnight. You can't deny that, can you?"

"How *dare* you!" said Sally, her face flushed, her eyes blazing. "You horrid woman, you!"

"Don't shout, please. What I say's the truth, and you can't say it isn't."

"What you *imply* isn't true."

"Oh, *imply*! My father picked you up in the street, didn't he? And brought you back home for the night. Isn't that true?"

"What you're *saying* is true—but not what you're making it mean. Your father's always behaved properly to me . . . always! I was in trouble and he was kind to me."

"*Kind!* Yes, he would be!"

The sneer in Caroline Bracey's voice snapped some thread of control in Sally. She cried out: "How *dare* you? How dare you? You horrible, vulgar

creature . . . !”

The door opened and Blanche came in.

“Sssh, for goodness’ sake,” she said, seizing Sally’s arm. “the neighbours’ll think you’re being murdered instead of being given a little friendly advice.”

“*Advice!*” cried Sally, shaking herself free. “I’m better without *her* advice—and yours. You told her about my coming here first—she couldn’t have known it any other way.”

Blanche eyed her coolly.

“Well, what if I did? It was true.”

“You’ve a filthy mind! You know he never touched me—that night or any other. You beast! You know as well as I do that Mr. Saril was kind to me—took pity on me when I was in trouble and didn’t know which way to turn.”

“Quite,” said Blanche Boyes; “but decent women don’t like having girls who’ve been in your kind of trouble shoved in among them same as you were shoved in here. What do we know about you, anyway? He picked you up, that’s certain, and at midnight in the public street. No getting away from that, as I can see.”

Sally, reduced now almost to incoherency and only by a tremendous effort of the will keeping back the tears of rage inspired less by the gross injustice being done to herself than to the man who had been to her so kind a friend, could say nothing but “You beast! You beast!”

“Now look here,” said Caroline, “that’s enough of that. Abuse won’t help you—and it won’t break *our* bones either. If you won’t go, you won’t—but if you find yourself in trouble again presently don’t blame me. All I wanted to do was to help you. Blanche is different. She has her living to earn and if she feels she can’t stay here with you, then it’s you who ought to leave and not her. That’s only fair. Surely you see that?”

“*Why* can’t she stay here with me? What harm have I ever done her?” cried Sally on a high, shrill note of anger and indignation.

“Well, she doesn’t feel she can—that’s all there is to it. She doesn’t like the way things have been done or the way they’re shaping. A woman with her living to earn can’t be too careful. That applies to you, too, Sally. You’d be much better advised to pack your bag and go. You’re only being advised for your good. It’s *you* we’re thinking about.”

“*Is it?*” cried Sally. “Then you can save yourself the trouble. I can look after myself, thank you.” She eyed Blanche with eyes grown suddenly cold and contemptuous, and made what was probably the first catty remark of her life. “Anyway, *you* seem to have lived in the lion’s den for five years without as much as a scratch, haven’t you?”

Blanche’s face went very red. She stuttered into incoherent speech, then seizing Sally by the arm began to shake her so violently that the pins began to slip out of her plaits and her hair to loosen and fall upon her shoulders.

“You little rat—to dare to say a thing like that to my face—to mock *me* . . .”

“Well, it’s true, it’s true . . .” gasped Sally, and fell silent under a sudden rain of blows upon head and breast and shoulders.

In the midst of the turmoil John Saril put his key in the door and stepped inside. The whole amazing scene was instantly open to his sight—for Blanche had left the door open when she came into the room—and for a second Saril stood upon his doormat thoughtfully regarding it. Then he shut the front door with a sharp, quick sound and saw the combatants fall apart.

Nobody spoke.

“Well?” said John Saril, benignly interrogative.

“Really, father, this is most unfortunate,” began Caroline Bracey. “I called Sally in to give her a little advice, and she lost her temper and insulted Blanche . . . and then, as you see, Blanche lost hers . . .”

Saril looked at all three disputants with an air of cordial dislike. A pack of quarrelsome women—they gave a man no peace. Then his eyes rested upon Sally’s face, very white and wearing, for all her dishevelled appearance, the air of one far from vanquished or ashamed, and evincing none of the confusion of the other two. His gaze shifted from Sally to Caroline.

“I see,” he said, “you were giving her good advice. May I know the nature of it?”

“No. What has it to do with you?”

“Everything, I expect.”

“She said, sir,” said Sally in her usual quiet voice, though she was panting a little, “that this was no sort of situation for a girl like me. That you . . . that I . . .”

Sally stammered, was bathed suddenly in confusion and gave it up.

“I see,” said Saril, “and did the fair Boyes assist in the good work?”

“She said I . . . I wasn’t respectable, sir, and that if I stayed here *she* couldn’t . . .”

“Very good. You *are* staying—unless you want to leave?”

“Oh no, sir, indeed not.”

“Very well. I give you half an hour to get out of the house, Blanche. You’ll find your month’s wages and a month’s in lieu of notice waiting for you on the hall table when you come down.”

“Really, sir, this is most unfair. I assure you there’s been a mistake.”

“No mistake, Blanche—save on my part, in keeping you so long.”

He turned his back on her.

“As for you, Caroline, clear out—and don’t trouble yourself to come here again. I shall give orders that you’re not to be admitted even if you do. I want to see none of you again—neither you nor your precious Elf nor your charming progeny.”

“Father! Don’t be so ridiculous!”

“Please go, Caroline.”

“Of course I shall go. But every word you utter and your most extraordinary attitude over this business entirely justify my suspicions. It is quite clear now, at any rate, what your relations with this girl are!—even if I’d really had any doubts before!”

“Get out!” said John Saril.

Scared, for once in her life, by his whitening face and dilating nostrils, Caroline hurried out. They heard the front door bang after her. Left with Sally, Saril turned and looked at her. She was very pale, and she held one hand over her left breast and was breathing very fast.

“Did she hurt you?” he asked unexpectedly.

Sally shook her head.

“No . . . Not much, sir. Oh, *please*, I *am* sorry . . . I did lose my temper, but she’d said such awful lying things.”

“All right, not now . . . I’ll talk to you later. You’d better go upstairs and make yourself tidy. And stay there until that creature’s gone.”



Sally slipped out.

(4)

After dinner that night, when Sally took up coffee as usual to the study, Saril told her to sit down.

“I suppose you’d better tell me what happened this afternoon,” he said. “Make it short.”

Sally said: “I’d rather not . . . it doesn’t matter. Really it doesn’t. I didn’t believe it.”

“Don’t bother about that. I want to hear.”

Unwillingly Sally gave him the gist of the afternoon’s conversation.

“I see,” he said when she’d finished. “They’ve given me a pretty bad character between them. Very kind of them. Why did you defend me, Sally?”

“I speak as I find, sir. You’ve always treated me well, sir.”

“All the same, Sally, what they said was true. Since my wife left me I’ve had lots of women—and it’s true that two of them were my maids. Does that frighten you?”

Sally looked at him out of steady eyes.

“No, sir, I don’t think so. I—I expect it was their fault.”

“I wouldn’t say that—but they were willing enough. I’m no seducer. All the same, if you’d rather go now you’ve only to say so. Think it over and tell me to-morrow.”

“I can tell you now, sir. I don’t want to leave.”

“I’d rather you slept on it.”

“It won’t make any difference.”

“Well, I won’t take your answer to-night. Think it over. And remember that what Mrs. Bracey said is quite true. Don’t deceive yourself about that. If you want to go I shall understand. I don’t even ask you to stay. It’s for you entirely.”

“Very well, sir.”

“That’s all, then, Sally, thank you. It’s a nice evening—I should go for a walk if I were you. You look as if a breath of fresh air would do you good.”

The early July evening was enticing even in those dull London streets in which Sally took her walk. There was no moon, but a quiet sky across which the last gay banner of the sunset was still flung lay over the world like a benediction. A soft breeze ran by and by her like some soft-footed thing of the woods, and from somebody's garden there stole out the sweet honey-scent of lime.

As she walked a sense of utter peace stole upon Sally. The troublesome, disturbing events of the afternoon belonged to some other world, and there was no decision for her to make. That had been taken before she left the house, and from it there was nothing to add or subtract. She was not only quite certain that she would stay: she knew that there was nothing, nothing in the world, which could make her leave. A sense of destiny accepted, entered upon, was with her. She knew now that whatever happened and however long she lived she would never have any regrets.

## CHAPTER FOUR

(1)

Sally slipped into the routine of her new responsibilities with ease and pleasure, refusing the morning assistance John Saril offered her. Until the winter fires and fogs began it was, she said, quite unnecessary—a decision in which Saril acquiesced readily enough, for the quiet house and all the new-found peace which belonged to it was very much to his liking. For the first few weeks of the new regime that was the only thing about it all with which he was concerned. He had slipped back into his normal indifference to the means by which it was procured, to the person to whom he was indebted for it. Those few occasions when he had talked to Sally, when as a human being he had in any way been aware of her, had slipped once more into the background. He had started a new book, the kind of book he despised, but which was promised for the autumn, and which occupied most of his day and evening, and when Sally suggested one day that he ought to take a walk, he stared at her for a moment with distinct disfavour.

“When I want to walk I’ll walk, and not before,” he told her. “You look after your own affairs and I’ll look after mine.”

He stuck to this until one morning Sally slipped down the kitchen stairs and twisted her ankle so badly that even the shortest walks with Gipsy were out of the question. Angry and affronted, Saril twice a day was obliged to put on his hat, take his stick and give the dog his constitutional. He had done this for several days when it struck him that Sally came up and downstairs

and in and out of his rooms with singularly little inconvenience, and that the need for further effort on his part was a thing of the past. Nevertheless, for some obscure reason, he continued to take Gipsy out each morning and afternoon, leaving no more than his short evening stroll to Sally.

Neither he nor she, however, commented upon this. It became, almost automatically, a part of the new regime.

Sally noticed that somewhere about this time those occasions when he dressed himself in his best and betook himself off to appointments began to increase in number. She never knew where he went or what he did. He gave her no confidence nor did she look for any; but she saw that he was happier and less sullen than in the days of Blanche, that he went to bed at more reasonable hours, drank less black coffee, and grew less taciturn. Too modest to ascribe so much to her lowly ministrations, she felt that a goodly part of it was due to the fact that his life was relieved of the strain of Mrs. Bracey's attendance and disapproval. Not that he ever mentioned that lady. Their tacit satisfaction in her nonappearance was sufficient. Sufficient also was their relationship of master and maid. It existed easily and naturally, and with a respect and consideration that was mutual and undeviating, so that there began for Sally one of the happiest periods of her life. Under her clever fingers the old and dingy house blossomed anew. Curtains were taken down and washed, carpets were taken up, sent away to be cleaned, and returned in a state that gladdened Sally's heart. Flowers appeared with regularity and were never left to wilt or to gasp for fresh water. Forgotten china and glass were dug out of cupboards, washed and taken into general use, and even the rows and rows of books with which not only the study but many of the other parts of the house were lined were taken out, too, dusted, and made to bear their part in a brighter scheme of interior decoration. All this was done with so little fuss, so complete a lack of that general sense of disorder and dirt which attends so often the achievement of order and cleanliness, that the comfortable tenor of Saril's way was not disturbed. He took his extra comforts, his unqualified peace and quiet, his nicer meals and brighter home, as thousands of men have taken them before and since, for granted. Doubtless he would have continued to do so but for the incident of Sally's poisoned finger, which she successfully managed to camouflage until after two nights of sleeplessness and intense pain she slipped down in a heap between sideboard and fireplace as she was pouring out Saril's morning coffee. She got up almost before he realised what had happened, but the sight of her white drawn face, with its little smear of blood from her grazed forehead, as she sat on the edge of her chair, frightened him more than he had been frightened for years.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Nothing,” said Sally. “It’s my finger. It’s been keeping me awake. I’ll be all right in a minute.”

“Your finger? Take off that bandage and let me look at it.”

Sally did so, and he exclaimed at the horrid sight of it. Turning back to the sideboard, he poured out some brandy and handed it to her.

“Here, drink this. How long has your finger been like this?”

“Only a day or two.”

“Why so secretive about it? Done anything for it?”

“I’ve bathed it and poulticed it.”

“If you’d been sensible and gone to a doctor he’d have bound your arm up—located the poison. That would have brought it up quickly and you could have had it lanced. It would have been all over by now. But you *haven’t* been sensible, of course.”

“No, sir!” she said, aware that he was making an effort to hide the annoyance she believed all men must feel when the domestic machinery got even ever so little out of hand. “Perhaps I’d better go to the doctor this morning.”

“Yes, I think you had. Go upstairs and lie down while I have my breakfast. Can you walk upstairs, do you think?”

She said she could, and presently she did; but when an hour had passed and she had not put in an appearance, he went upstairs and knocked at the door of her room. Sally was lying on her bed, her eyes closed, her face drawn with pain. She turned her head faintly and apologetically as he came in and stood looking down upon her.

“Pain bad?” he asked.

She nodded. He saw the slow reluctant tears slip from beneath her closed lids and slide down the quite alarming pallor of her face.

“I’d better get the doctor here,” he said. “Do you know the nearest?”

“Just round the corner . . . to the left. Dr. Browne, I think . . .”

“All right. You’d better stop here.”

He clumsily pulled the eiderdown up over her and went out. He was back within ten minutes. The doctor would come—presently; but he had a

surgery full of patients to see first and two urgent calls to make after that. He'd tried another man, but he'd been called out.

"It'll be hours before he gets here, I'm afraid. Can you stick it until then?"

"I'll try," said Sally. "I expect I'll get used to it presently."

"What about aspirin? Twenty grains of that may deaden the pain a bit. I'll see if I can find some."

Sally knew where the aspirin was. Blanche, a martyr to headaches, had always seen to it that there was a good supply in the house. Sally took her twenty grains, and Saril went away and left her with her misery.

It never occurred to him to clear away the breakfast things. He merely shut the dining-room door and went up to his study, which Sally had already swept and dusted. With a sigh of relief he slipped into his desk-chair and began to work. Not too successfully. After an hour not successfully at all. He pushed back his chair, got up and looked at his watch. A quarter to ten. He'd better go and see how she was. No sign of the doctor yet, confound him! Until he'd been he'd have that girl and her finger on his mind. Useless to try to do any work. The sight of her finger and of her face was considerably upsetting. Poisoned fingers were painful, he believed. Never had one. Not he. Never ailed anything. . . . Besides, poisoned fingers! Healthy people didn't get them. Of course the girl always looked pale. Fragile. But she'd never been ill—never complained of anything. Strong and wiry under that delicate look, he'd always supposed. Never thought about it much, though. Complete fool not to have done something about it before. He'd noticed the bandage, but hadn't thought twice about it. Women were always appearing with tied-up fingers—the badge of all their tribe! Couldn't be trusted for five minutes, any of them, with a bread-knife.

Gipsy, who had followed his master upstairs, looked at him with pleading, inquiring eyes. Where is she? What have you done with her? he seemed to ask. And what about my morning run? For Sally always took him out for ten minutes whilst Saril was engaged with his breakfast.

"All right, come on," he said. "We'll go and see how she is."

Together they went upstairs. Saril tapped at Sally's door and went in. He saw at once that the twenty grains of aspirin had done very little for her.

"I've brought Gipsy to see you," he said.

“Poor Gipsy. He must want to go out,” said Sally, opening her eyes and advancing the uninjured hand to the dog, who had gone up to the bedside and put his nose upon the counterpane. “He’s had a run in the garden,” Saril said.

He saw that Sally had been crying, that she was beyond words, that for the moment there was nothing in the world but pain. He said on the impulse: “Damn these doctors! I think you’d better let me have a go at that arm. If it’s tied up it’ll be easier. I saw it done once. I think I can do it. Will you risk it?”

Sally nodded.

“I want a long scarf—or some bandage lint. Is there any?”

“Yes, in the cupboard in the bathroom.”

“All right. Can you manage to get out of your frock while I fetch it?”

“Yes,” said Sally, sitting up.

When Saril came back with the bandage and lint Sally was sitting on the edge of the bed with a dressing-gown pulled up against her chin, the arm with the injured finger hanging outside, and all the while he twisted and pulled at the bandage lint she continued to hold it together with her free hand. But Saril was too concerned with his self-imposed task to notice this, and not until it was finished did it occur to him that the arm was white and shapely and very soft to the touch.

“That feel better?” he asked.

Sally smiled faintly.

“Yes, I think so, thank you, sir,” she said, and was not sure if it was not rather that the pain of the constriction on her arm was so severe as to dull her mind, temporarily at least, to the hideous pain of the finger.

“That’s all right, then,” said Saril. “Now you stay where you are for a bit.” He looked at her so anxiously that Sally contrived another smile as she lay down again upon her bed. “Let Gipsy stay.”

Gipsy, indeed, made no attempt to move. Already he had laid his nose again along the counterpane and explained things to his master by a slow slewing round of his eyes in his direction and a quick thump-thump of his tail upon the floor. Saril shut the door and retreated.

Either the bandaging did actually lessen the pain in the finger, or fatigue and aspirin were doing their work, but presently Sally fell into a light sleep and, of course, the doctor timed his visit to awaken her out of it. The sound

of voices and of Gipsy's angry barking tore her out of Elysium, and she opened her eyes to see Saril showing in a short dapper little man with very dark, very, bright eyes, carrying the usual small and shabby black handbag. He stopped upon the threshold, obviously by Gipsy's objections, which he seemed in no hurry to relinquish upon Sally's command. Sally sat up and put her hand through the dog's collar.

"All right, Gip, may come," she said, "may come."

Gipsy stopped barking and sat down, keeping, however, a wary eye upon the new-comer, who came and sat on the edge of Sally's bed and looked keenly at her. His face wore an expression of unalloyed surprise, as if he'd expected to see somebody very different.

"Well," he said, "what's the trouble?" He picked up her left hand, stripped off its covering, pursed up his lips. "Painful?"

"Yes, rather."

The doctor pulled back the dressing-gown and looked at the bandaged arm.

"Who did this?"

"Mr. Saril."

"The man who showed me up? When?"

"About an hour ago."

"Too late, of course. Are you Mr. Saril's servant?"

"Yes."

"What's become of the other woman he used to have here? . . . I've forgotten her name. She used to come to me for indigestion."

"She's gone, sir."

The doctor pursed his lips again. "How long ago?"

"Only a few weeks."

"Since you've been here?"

"Oh yes."

The doctor said nothing germane to that. He picked up her hand again, looked at the finger, turned over the hand and looked at that. For a second his eyes swept the white skin of Sally's young bosom and shoulders, then he said: "I won't interfere until to-morrow. It ought to be ready for lancing

then. . . . That bandage'll do. Pity it wasn't done sooner—saved you a lot of pain. I'll send you round a sleeping-draught for to-night. You look anæmic. Are you?"

"I don't know. I'm never ill."

"You look as if you've been overdoing it. Worried, too, about something, eh? Some boy you've quarrelled with? No? . . . Don't get out enough, perhaps."

He made a rapid examination.

"Do you do all the work here?"

"Oh yes—it's quite easy."

"Easy? This is a big house. How old are you?"

"Twenty, sir."

"Are you happy here?"

"Oh yes—very."

Again the doctor looked at her keenly. A good-looker. Not like any servant, either, he had on his panel. That housekeeper woman had hinted this was a queer house—never could quite make out why—something to do with its master. What was it? Lived like a hermit . . . went nowhere, saw nobody. . . . Disagreeable kind of woman, though. Seemed to remember he'd advised her to leave—find another job. He felt like offering the same advice to this girl. But she said she was happy. . . .

He said: "Are you sure you aren't worrying? Got anything on your mind?"

Sally shook her head.

"No, sir."

"Well, you're run down. You need a tonic—less work and more fresh air. The finger will soon be all right. That's only a symptom. You must look after yourself—not allow yourself to be overworked. Go to bed early to-night, take my sleeping-draught, and I'll come round about this time to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir."

"I'd better have your name."

"Sarah Dunn, sir."

"Age?"



“Twenty.”

“Sarah Dunn, aged twenty. Have you always worked hard?”

“I’ve always been in service, sir.”

“Same thing. How many other places have you had?”

“Three—not counting the first where I only stayed a little while.”

“Didn’t you like it?”

“My grandfather thought I was overworked.”

“Your *grandfather*! Parents dead?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What sort of mistresses have you had? Kind?”

“Oh yes, sir. . . .”

She explained briefly how she had left her first place because of her grandmother’s illness and her second because her mistress had gone away to France.

“And what about the third? Didn’t you like that?”

“Yes, sir, but I only went there temporary.”

He saw that she had suddenly, for some reason, begun to resent his questions. He had noticed that people did, and yet they were never prompted, so he firmly believed, by mere idle curiosity. He did get genuinely interested in his patients. To ask them questions was almost always the only way in which he could get to know enough about them to be of assistance. He didn’t quite know why he should think this girl required assistance, his or anybody else’s, but for whatever reason it was he certainly did. Perhaps it was her incongruous position in that house with nobody but the abrupt and aloof individual who’d answered the door to him. Queer, eccentric, his recent housekeeper had called him, and there were stories about him, rumours which he seemed to have heard but could not recall. Certainly that other woman had not made any personal complaint, had merely found the job dull and the house “get on her nerves.” This man, Saril, had a cultured voice—not unpleasing in texture and timbre—he was obviously an educated man, despite his shabby clothes, but he so obviously resented his intrusion—had been so curt in his explanation. “My housekeeper seems to have poisoned her finger and is in a good deal of pain. She’s had some aspirin. . . . Yes, upstairs in her room.”

No more, no less. Well, it was adequate and accurate, Dr. Browne reflected—and few speeches were that. All the same, as he sat there considering Sally, he went on feeling a little worried about her. She wasn't the kind of person he'd expected to find. Too young, for one thing, for this kind of situation. Also, she seemed a cut—several cuts—above the average servant, above that recently-departed housekeeper who, anyway, was old enough to look after herself (Dr. Browne didn't remember that he'd been particularly worried about *her*), and he wondered a little if Sally really was. She looked delicate, strung up. He wondered why this Mr. Saril, her employer, should have been so extremely off-hand and unfriendly. He didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. Anyway, unfriendly or not, he'd have a word with him on the way downstairs.

“Well, I must be going,” he said to Sally, “if this handsome animal will allow me. Do you think he will?”

“Oh, yes sir, he's quite gentle,” Sally said. “Friend, Gip—may go . . .” Gipsy looked at her, looked at the doctor, thumped his tail, continued to look at the doctor, and remained where he was. The doctor got up and stood looking down upon his patient.

“Stay where you are for a little while—and when you get up don't do anything you haven't got to do. Take it easy. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, sir,” said Sally, “and thank you.”

Dr. Browne stood still for a second at the window looking down upon the tangled weed and grass below that was the Holly Lodge garden. Depressing, he thought; then with a smile and another good-bye he went.

(2)

Saril came out of his study door as Dr. Browne came down the last step of the staircase that ran down from the top floor.

“Nothing I can do at the moment. The aspirin and your bandage have done something for her. The aspirin might be repeated later. I'm sending round a sleeping-draught and a tonic. The finger's only a symptom. She's very run-down. This house, single-handed, is too much for her.”

“She never complains.”

“She isn't the complaining sort, I fancy. All the same, she's doing too much and not getting out enough. Can't you get her some assistance? A girl, perhaps, in the morning? She isn't fit to do everything at the moment.”

“Yes, of course she can have assistance if it’s necessary.”

“Good. I’d see about it at once if I were you. I’ve told her to keep quiet for a bit. She won’t be fit for anything but the lightest duties for a few days.”

“I see. When do you propose to lance the finger?”

“To-morrow, I hope. See that she takes her sleeping-draught and tonic, and has plenty of rest and fresh air. Good morning. Don’t come down. I can find my way.”

John Saril wished him good morning and left him to do it. Half an hour later he went out, and upon his return went up to Sally’s room.

“It seems you’re ill,” he said, “and over worked. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t think I was, sir.”

“Well, this man seems to think you are. Did you like him?”

“Yes, I think so, sir. He was very kind.”

“Did he ask you a lot of questions?”

“He did, rather.”

“Did he tell you you oughtn’t to be here?”

“Oh no, sir . . .”

“Probably thought it. Would you like to change your mind and go?”

Sally staggered him by immediately bursting into tears.

“Oh, please, sir, don’t send me away; oh, please, please . . .!”

“I don’t want to send you away, but perhaps you ought to go.”

“Oh no, no . . .”

“All right. We’ll talk of it when you’re better. Don’t cry like that, for heaven’s sake.”

Sally made an effort, stopped crying, and leaned back on her pillows. The dressing-gown she had earlier taken such pains about had slipped, and his eyes took in the white flesh of her neck and shoulders and the thread of blue vein that ran down towards the young and swelling bosom. He looked away again hastily, let his eyes dwell upon her face, and was caught by the white, exhausted look of her. A queer kind of emotion seized upon him in that moment, vaguely disturbing. His mind registered it, then locked a door

upon it. All that was left of it found its way into his voice, which was kind and unusually gentle as he said: "You're to get into bed and stay there. I've engaged a girl for the rest of the week. If she's any good she can stop, as it seems you ought to have assistance. She'll do everything for the next day or two and sleep in, so there's nothing for you to worry about. Just get well."

Sally said nothing. Her hand belatedly reached up and pulled together the folds of the dressing-gown. Saril's eyes took in the gesture, saw that her own were closed, their lashes making a shadow like a bruise upon the whiteness of her face, that her mouth was pale and quivered slightly as he looked at it. She seemed incredibly young and terribly vulnerable. A mere child. Again that queer fleeting emotion seized upon him. Again he bundled it back behind some mental lock and key.

"Don't forget," he said, "there's nothing for you to worry about. Nothing at all;" and without another word went out of the room.

(3)

"Well, really, my dear, I thought you heard *all* the scandal of the neighbourhood!"

"So I may, but I don't remember it all, thank heaven!"

The Brownes faced each other over the dinner table, and Violet laughed as she spoke.

"There was *something*, I seem to remember—when, we first came here. His wife had gone off with another man. There was a daughter, too. She came here once, I remember. Not very taking, I thought. However, she managed to find a husband, I believe. I heard she didn't get on with her father."

"What's he do?"

"I'm afraid I've forgotten that, too—if I ever knew. But I remember people telling me what a marvellous garden he had—he grew things nobody else had ever heard of."

Walter Browne thought of the wild waste he had looked down upon from Sally's bedroom, and gave it up.

"You're not very useful this evening," he said. "You must be inventing the bit about the garden, anyway. An appalling wilderness is all he's got now in the way of a garden, I assure you."

“Oh well, my dear, I expect he got discouraged. People who try to make gardens here often do. . . . I shouldn’t worry about the girl. I expect she knows how to look after herself. Girls do nowadays, you know.”

“This one didn’t seem that sort, somehow.”

Across the dinner table they smiled again at each other, for all the world as if it were Thursday and a free evening instead of Friday with over a dozen patients sitting in the consulting-room.

“Oh well, I daresay you’re right, my dear,” he said, and helped himself liberally to cheese. “All the same, she was an extraordinarily pretty little creature. It doesn’t seem right to me that she should be there . . .”

“But you said she said she was happy there!”

“I don’t see what difference that makes.”

His wife regarded him soberly.

“I don’t suppose you do,” she said; “and from your point of view, of course, it doesn’t. You’re an incurable romantic about girls, you know, Walter. Even modern girls. You’d feel a lot better about it if you’d had half-a-dozen daughters instead of three hefty sons.”

“Should I?”

“I expect so.”

“Oh well . . .”

Across the dinner table they smiled at one another again.

## CHAPTER FIVE

(1)

Sally was not to be persuaded to spend more than one day in bed. With her finger lanced she declared that there was no pain left in it to speak of and that she could not lie up there doing nothing. Ruby Masters, the girl Saril had hurriedly requisitioned two days earlier, was clearly relieved by this decision.

“A queer place this, and no mistake,” she said. “’E never speaks to you if ’e can ’elp it. Makes a girl feel like a bit of the furniture. Still, it’s better than them wot speaks too much, I daresay.”

“Yes, I think so, too,” said Sally. Ruby was, she thought, rather like her name, with her deep, dark red cheeks and bright brown eyes. She looked very strong, and she seemed willing and friendly, but she had the tendency to perpetual conversation which all Sally’s fellow-servants had held in common. Ruby’s tongue was never still for a second; she could not do the simplest task without a running commentary and the taciturnity of a John Saril was frankly beyond her comprehension.

“I’ve ’ad both sorts,” she confided to Sally, “them as speaks too much and them as don’t speak at all. One place I was at there was no dodgin’ the master—in and out o’ the kitchen, ’e was, all the time. Nothin’ *unpleasant*, of course—’e always be’aved like a gentleman to us girls, that I must own, but some’ow ’e seemed to like the kitchen best. . . . Orlways potterin’ about and givin’ orders and watchin’ things done. . . . Queer, when a man’s got a wife, seems to me. Not that *she* cared, bless you! All *she* wanted was to be everlastin’ out. Easy kind o’ place it was. Sort o’ friendly, if you know wot I mean.”

She paused as if hoping Sally would ask her why she left so excellent a situation, but as this did not happen she sighed a little as one who was inadequately appreciated as a raconteur, but could not give up the rôle.

“’Nother place I was at was quite the reverse. I wasn’t there long. I don’t ’old with stayin’ long in any place, but the cook there’d been there three years when I left, and the master’d only spoken to ’er once. ’E ’appened to meet ’er in the ’all one day and ’e said, ‘Oh, cook, may I ’ave a box of matches, please?’”

Sally laughed, so did Ruby.

“Well, ’e was a writer—there was orlways bits of ’is in the paper. Funny things ’e wrote. *I* couldn’t make ’ead nor tail of ’em. This one seems to write a bit, too, don’t ’e?”

Sally nodded.

“Oh well,” said Ruby, “must be a livin’ in it, I s’pose. Bin ’ere long?”

“No, not very.”

“Like it?”

“Very much.”

“Don’t you find it *lonely*?”

“No.”

“Sleep ’ere o’ nights, too, don’t you? You *’ave* got a nerve! *I* wouldn’t . . . not with no one else in the ’ouse but ’im. ’Tain’t right. Don’t your people mind?”

“I haven’t any people.”

“My! Aren’t you lucky? Wish I ’adn’t sometimes—straight I do. Always botherin’ about something! Anybody’d think I was a school-kid, the way they carry on, ’stead of a young woman engaged to be married.”

“Oh,” said Sally, “are you getting married soon?”

“Oh, I dunno . . . ’*E*’s pressin’ enough—good job ’e’s got, too. Still, I’m only nineteen; can’t say I want to get tied up yet. But since I bin ’ome I can’t ’elp thinkin’ I might just as well. Keepin’ ’ouse for my father since my mother died’s no joke, I’m blest if it is! I got a sister, too—does dressmaking at ’ome. I bin at ’ome six months, and I got so sick of it I put my name down at the Registry. They sent me ’ere. Not that I meant to do more than a mornin’ job, but I said I’d be willin’ to oblige, seein’ it was a case of illness.”

“Will you be staying on, then, for mornings after this week?”

“Might as well for a bit. I can get on with you orlright—and I’ll be glad of a bit o’ money. My job at ’ome’s acting unpaid. Fair gives me the pip . . . You got a boy?”

“No,” said Sally.

“You *do* surprise me! I should ’a’ thought you ’ad no end. You’re too ladylike, shouldn’t wonder. Too quiet. Chaps like the sort they can take a few liberties with, these days, if you ask me. Can’t see any young fellow gettin’ fresh with you, if I may say so.”

“Thank you,” said Sally, sensing a compliment.

“I s’pose marriage doesn’t attract you? Seen too much of other people’s, probably?”

“Oh yes,” said Sally, “I think it would be very nice to be married—if one fell in love!”

“Lor’, you do want a lot! Fancy believin’ in love and all that this time o’ day!”

“Aren’t you in love with your young man?”

“Well, I ain’t *soppy* about ’im. ’E’s orlright, of course . . . and I s’pose I got the same sort o’ feelings other people got; but I dunno. I don’t feel drawn to marriage, some’ow . . . ’Course I’d like a ’ome of m’ own and all that . . . If you ask me, that’s why *most* people get married—not ’cause they’re ‘in love’ or anythin’ o’ that sort. You can’t tell me my father and mother were ever in love. Love’s only on the cinema, if you want to know. There ain’t no *real* men like Ronald Colman or John Gilbert. Stands to reason.”

Ruby sighed, wrung out her dishcloth, and lapsed into one of her brief (and rare) silences in which Sally made good her escape.

(2)

Saril was not only relieved, he found, but definitely glad to see Sally about again, finding the cheery and garrulous Ruby a terribly sharp thorn in his flesh. After the visit which followed upon the doctor’s departure he had not again gone to her room. Her meals for the rest of the day and the one succeeding were taken up by the hastily-requisitioned Ruby, and it was Ruby who showed up Dr. Browne when he came to lance the finger. Saril suffered a distinct shock to realise that he was glad Ruby was there, and that there was no necessity for him to make another journey to the top floor. After that second visit Dr. Browne had not called again, though Sally had gone twice to the surgery to have her finger dressed. She still took her tonic, but she maintained it was all nonsense and that she was quite well. Saril’s offer to send her away to the sea for a couple of weeks she would not consider; and again Saril was conscious of that sensation of relief. He was aware that he did not want her to go away—and aware, too, that if he was honest it was not alone because he did not want to be left with the talkative and bouncing Ruby. It was not only that he had grown used to and appreciative of Sally’s domestic talents; he had suddenly become aware of Sally as a human being as well as a servant. He liked to see her about—to see her faint, rather uncertain smile when she brought him things or answered his bell; he liked her soft voice and the way she moved, the long fine lines of her slim body, the brave carriage of her neat sleek head, and the way the rare colour came into her pale face, which he did not stay to consider as pretty or not pretty. Like the rest of her—her slim but rounded figure, her thin hands and well-shaped, well-kept nails, all so unusual in a servant—her face had a distinction of its own. It belonged to no type, but something in its modelling, something lacking in perfection, but all the more provocatively attractive for that very reason, made you look at it again and again. He wondered why he had refrained for so long from looking at her—at least from looking at her in this seeing fashion. It was not like him not to



see, at a glance, what a woman was like. He thought of many reasons to explain this, but knew that the correct one lurked at the back of his mind—he had not taken any notice of Sally because he'd known from the first that it was dangerous. Usually it had given him no more than a "kick" to realise such a thing about a woman with whom he was brought into contact; but there was nothing of that kind here. Women he'd found accommodating, as casual as himself, so that a little love-making here and there was of no importance either to them or to him—merely something you took in your stride and dropped as comfortably. What was it that must have warned his subconscious self that Sally was not as these? The fact that she'd had a love affair of sorts with some young man with whom he believed her still in love? He thought not. Some other man in the background had usually but made his task the easier. No, somehow or other Sally had not fitted (she did not fit now) into the cynical code which had embraced these other women he had known.

The state of mind these reflections induced in Saril was responsible for the fact that for the first week after Sally's return to her duties and her refusal to take the proffered holiday he reverted to the early days of his acquaintance with her, taking no more notice of her, so far as the beholder might be aware, than of the furniture, and speaking to her only when the necessity arose.

But Sally, curiously enough, was grateful for his silence. To come into his study after a morning of the ebullient Ruby was strangely soothing and quietening to the spirit. Until she realised that she had not known how Ruby's eternal chatter of love and marriage and things akin fretted and worried her nerves, pushing her mind back to that brief wild dream of happiness, to her own aroused, unsatisfied and still turbulent emotions.

(3)

One fine afternoon soon after Sally came in from her walk with Gipsy, Saril rang the bell and asked her when she appeared if she could spare time to go through some papers for him and cut out and paste together certain articles which he had blue-pencilled.

"No, don't take them downstairs," he said. "Sit at the other table. Here are scissors and paste. This is an old batch . . . a good many of them, I'm afraid, are very stale—but these are this week's. Do those first. You'll have to look carefully through them for yourself, for I haven't marked them all. The articles are all on gardening themes, and are signed either with my name

or initials. Sometimes they're mere paragraphs. Don't miss any if you can help it."

Sally, glad to be of assistance, sat down with the little pile of newspapers and began turning over the pages. The room was quiet save for the rustle they made and the clip-clip of Sally's scissors, for neither spoke. Once or twice Saril glanced up, considered for a moment that pale, composed face bent above her task and looked away again, conscious that, for all he liked to have her there, he was finding her more disturbing than he had expected. Why, he wondered, had he kept her there? Why hadn't he let her take the papers downstairs? Was it merely that he wanted her there—or only that he wanted to convince himself that he was getting alarmed about nothing, that, since he knew her unattainable, Sally was not really as inimical to his peace of mind as he had begun to suppose? Saril dismissed these conjectures with impatience. There she sat, doing this job as she'd done every other since her arrival, competently and quietly. The rest was in his mind and entirely under his control. He busied himself again in his work and resisted the temptation to acknowledge her presence by word or gesture. This girl was not for him. Besides, in a mood of satiety and disgust, he'd sworn over five years ago to have done with women—and kept to it. He wondered now if that was because, filled with Blanche Boyes, these years had offered so little of temptation.

Gradually a sense of something different about the room stole over him; he felt as you feel if a clock stops suddenly and after a moment or two he realised that it was just this cessation of something which had been steadily happening and now had ceased to happen, which made all the difference. Sally was no longer turning over the newspaper pages or plying her scissors. He looked up then and saw why. She was sitting quite still at her desk, her elbows upon the outspread printed sheet and her two hands pressed tightly over her eyes. He stared at her for a second, then said involuntarily. "Hallo! What's the matter?"

Sally jumped, took down her hands and lifted to him a face that was not only white but looked almost lifeless. He rose and went across to her and as he did so with a quick, almost terrified gesture, she turned the page and made a hasty unconvincing show of continuing her hunt for gardening paragraphs. So it was something she had read in the paper! Something shocking, apparently, to make her look like that—as if her heart had quite suddenly failed of its task. Saril went to her side and endeavoured to turn back the page. For a moment she resisted, then gave it up and sat back in her chair whilst he picked up the paper and ran his eye exploringly up and down

the printed column. It did not take long to find what he was looking for. He was drawn to it almost at once by the photograph of an undeniably, but weakly handsome young man side by side with that of a smiling, pretty girl. She had a mass of short very curly hair, obviously very fair, and a broad, very toothsome smile, and above the photograph was written: *Romance of Sir Thomas Vibart's only daughter*. Saril glanced at the paragraph and read:

“Miss Iris Vibart, the only daughter of Sir Thomas Vibart, the well-known conductor of the famous Donnington Orchestra, has just become engaged to Mr. Colin Stawell, the only son of Mrs. Arthur Stawell, of Streatham Common. The two young people met at the beginning of the summer when Sir Thomas invited the young man, of whose exceptional musical talent he had heard, to come and play to him at his lovely house, Wanderlust, near Horsham, Sussex. It was a case of love at first sight (or first hearing, perhaps) and Miss Vibart's friends say that the marriage is to take place at the end of the summer when Mr. Stawell, who is still at Oxford, will come down. Miss Vibart, who is an ash blonde, with masses of lovely curly hair and large blue eyes, is just eighteen.”

Saril put down the paper, sat on the edge of the table and looked considerably at Sally, who raised her eyes to his and showed him a face that looked lifeless no longer but was ravaged by suffering so intense, so desperate and hopeless, that it robbed him of the scornful amused comments which had lain upon his tongue. What, he wondered, had really happened to these two? Had they been lovers or not? She had said not when he had asked her, that first morning and he had believed her. Did he believe her now? He didn't know. That look on her face had something dreadfully like Knowledge in it. He'd have sworn that what she felt was what he'd felt during those first weeks after Margot's disappearance. Was it all no more than imagination upon her part? And if she'd never belonged to him oughtn't she by now to have realised what a hopelessly silly and romantic affair it had all been—worth so much less of pain and heartbreak than she was bringing to it?

He heard himself say: “My dear child! . . .” was surprised to see her face crumple up and found that she had risen from her seat and thrown herself upon his breast, bursting into wild and frantic tears.

This, he thought to himself as he sat there holding her, had happened before. No, not quite . . . Last time he had been embarrassed and had hastily

summoned a cab and let her get her crying over in the farther corner of it; but this time it was not embarrassment of which he was conscious. His arms were holding her tightly and his lips were pressed to her hair. Moreover, he did not care how long they stayed there.

## CHAPTER SIX

(1)

From that day, although the relationship between Saril and Sally did not advance beyond the point at which that afternoon it definitely arrived, neither did it sink beneath it, nor fall back into that impersonal state to which since that day in Sally's room Saril had determinedly held it. He doubted if Sally had quite realised his part in that unexpected quarter of an hour—he doubted if she'd been conscious of anybody's emotions but her own, and if she had been aware of those kisses upon her head she gave no sign of it and was not likely, he knew, even if she were, to attach undue importance to them. She'd see them as a sign merely of his concern and sympathy, for she was definitely not of the sort who believe that any man who shows a woman kindness must be, some little way at least, in love with her. It was Saril's experience that to give the average woman an inch where emotion was concerned was to find yourself giving her an ell—that "kindness" to most women involved you in things in which, in the first place, you hadn't had the least intention of becoming involved. Sometimes it was worth it and sometimes it wasn't—more often it wasn't.

So far as Sally was concerned, behind that quite genuine desire to console engendered in Saril by the sight first of that lifeless and then pain-ravaged face she had shown him, his attitude, as he quite honestly admitted to himself, was strictly dishonourable. He had refrained in the last few weeks from making love to her not because he had no desire that way—on the contrary—but because she had so obviously not wanted him to do it; because he recognised that she was "different" (and therefore dangerous) and, too, because she was still (or so she fancied) in love with another man. Whilst he overlooked that fact that emotionalism in her had intensified, even if it had not aroused, the state in himself, he was not unaware that it is frequently by no means a difficult task to get a woman to allow you some at least of the privileges she would, if fate were kinder, have willingly showered upon somebody else. But John Saril was sufficient of an egotist in these matters to prefer not to be accorded favours by proxy. He told himself in the days that followed that he did not want Sally as badly as all that, that he could quite well wait until she came out of the mist of her romantic

dreams and, with her young man safely tied up to his tow-haired and doll-faced young woman, discover for herself the relative value of substance and shadow.

As the days succeeded each other, however, he began to wonder if this was as true as he had supposed. Certainly it was less easy. There was, of course, something definitely provocative in the very ease and innocence of Sally's bearing. She flaunted none of the airs her successors had flown like banners, and with less justification. If he put an arm round her waist, laid a hand on her arm or addressed a few teasing or pleasing words to her, she did not become arch, self-conscious or flirtatious. Had he kissed her again, she might have resisted or objected—Saryl wondered about that; but he refrained, and Sally remained the quiet, capable, eminently satisfying little person he had known from the first, which he began definitely to recognise as a nuisance. Proud at first of his own scruples (of his hesitancy to add this girl to the long list of his casual meaningless amours), he ended by being thoroughly annoyed by them and not a little mystified. It was so long since he had had scruples—about anything, and if it was some time since he had indulged in an "affair," it was first of all because Fate had sent him Blanche and the dull girl who'd married the baker's assistant, neither of whom would have afforded temptation to a monk; and secondly, because of the heavy lethargy, the creeping disgust which had somehow made it just not worth while to take a hand in Fate's game. He accepted Blanche and her dull assistant; had accepted them so utterly that when Fate relented and sent him Sally he had looked at her as at the others with cold and indifferent gaze.

The fact was that he had *liked* none of the women he had so easily possessed in the last ten years. He had seen them merely as women, mere bodies, and taken from them what he wanted, out of a queer spite twisted not against them but against the one woman he had loved and who had left him. And, quite naturally and inevitably, those affairs, one by one, had come to an end. They were easily achieved, easily discarded, and as easily forgotten. But all the same something deep down in him resented them, maintained a deep scorn for that paltry side of him which took women cynically, casually, as an anodyne, as an easy means of dulling the memory of the one woman in the world he'd ever wanted in a complete and utterly satisfying fashion. Like Gilbert Yorke and Sanchia Hanson, he fancied himself as the world's faithful lover—completely monogamous and single-minded, and considered, as did they, that Fate had played him a scurvy trick, for ever preventing him from playing his allotted part or even from knowing whether or no, in fact, he could play it.

It was a long while since, consciously, he had thought of Margot. Even, of late, there had been times when he thought the magic that belonged to her was wearing thin, that if he liked he could step outside it. But he doubted it, these days, finding himself as hopelessly suspended as ever in that old world to which she belonged, as inescapably enmeshed in those fifteen years he had spent with her. Even now it seemed to him equally incredible that she could have smashed their association of fifteen years by the simple premeditated act of walking straight out of it, as that he should have played the rake for nearly the whole of the period which had followed her departure.

She had been thirty-five when she left him, and it had been the simplest thing in the world to look at it as some kind of physiological disturbance liable to overtake women approaching middle age as men at forty or even later. At the same time, it had been as impossible to overlook or to belittle the feeling for another man which had driven her from him as it had been painful to learn of its predecessors which had not. Of all those affairs she had indulged during his absence first in British Columbia in nineteen-thirteen and then during the years of his war service, none of them, apparently, had mattered enough to make her smash (or think of smashing) their life together; and even when the one for which in the end she so ruthlessly did smash it occurred, the memory of all those other attractions effectually prevented her from stamping it with finality. She did not ask for a divorce, though she would not complain if he sued for one. Even when he'd been torn in pieces by her ruthlessness, her egotism and her calm assumption that she had the right to do this thing to him, he had known he wouldn't divorce her. He wanted her still, even with the knowledge of her numerous and meaningless infidelities. He saw her still as somebody fine and worth while upon all but this one side of life. He had loved his years with her, for she had been good to live with; vital, amusing, keenly interested in his career and in the world of ideas in which then he had moved so hopefully. She had a fine sharp-edged intelligence, a sense of humour and a sense of values, which always knew when even humour should be put in its place. And yet, and yet—*all that!*

Her horrible frankness had torn at him, her pains to explain just *how* unfaithful she had been—"but not spiritually . . . not till now." With every word she had spoken a little more of the substance of life had been kicked away, a little less foothold had remained, so that when she had finally gone, nothing had mattered. His house had fallen about his ears; his much-trying servants left him—all but the pretty one, who'd always (so she said afterwards, but only once) "known what *she* was from the first." Easily and,

as it seemed, naturally, she soon became his mistress and lived so until she, too, grew tired of him and his spleen and moodiness, and betook herself to fresh pastures.

(2)

In those days he probably resented what Margot had done to him, her destruction of his manhood, his career and his life, quite as much as he longed for her physical presence (which longing his casual amours did something to deaden), and for the gracious and satisfying quality of her mind, for the absence of which the casual amours did nothing. He hated himself for allowing himself to go to pieces; for “dropping out,” for retaining no further hold upon the profession he had loved and in which he had begun to make his mark, than would enable him to pay his way, but he seemed incapable of doing anything about it. He had not even the energy to get out of the house which he had shared with her since his return from the war, and which had been meant for a temporary residence whilst a permanent home was being built in the country. Where the wilderness now ran riot there was to have been an experimental London garden. There had, in fact, been one, briefly and now incredibly; for it did now seem to him incredible that he should have completed even that much of his scheme in those two years before the blow fell, since he had lived with the knowledge that it was about to fall almost before they had established themselves. Had he not had almost to bully her into taking any house at all with him in that January of 1919, when the army released him? Even then, surely he had known that she had finally consented only because of his scheme for that experimental garden which he had planned and about which he had written already in anticipation, outlining its scheme to many interested bodies? She’d cared, as late as all that, for his work, for the position he held in the horticultural world. What would she think now of the wilderness, of what had come of his dreams and ambitions along that particular line? Would she be sorry or had she by this time ceased to think of them, to remember what they were? “Far too much will be expected of you,” she’d said, and he had laughed. He’d had the idea then of coaxing even the Scots pine to grow in London. Margot had laughed, assuring him that what was chiefly wrong with London from a horticultural point of view was wrong trees—or trees in wrong places, and wherever they’d been, in those early days, they’d grown indignant at the numerous pollarded trees of the suburbs—all looking like so many cedar-mops. Even now he could never see a pollarded tree without thinking of this woman who, ten years ago, had walked out of his life as coolly as if she were going out to pay a call. From that day to this, he’d

neither seen nor heard of or from her; but he wanted her now as he'd always wanted her. She'd become in those fifteen years so much a part of his existence that her very going had torn his life to shreds.

He'd expected her to come back. He saw now that at any moment in the last ten years he'd expected that and lived for it; that the expectation had slowly robbed him of effort or ambition. And she hadn't come back. The thing had been final, after all. She'd never come back now. He told himself this in those cold hours which crept up towards the dawn in which he hardly ever slept. At four o'clock each morning his day began: whatever time he went to sleep that was his hour for waking. And after ten years it was still Margot who walked into the arid sleeplessness of those early hours and sat down in their midst. He did not quite realise when, for the first time, this ceased to happen, when the thought of Sally and the image of her crept into his mind and ousted that other.

He began to see that something would have to be done about it. He even had bright hard thoughts of getting rid of her, of finding some likely excuse, of pleading the difficulty of the times, of the need for economy—and in August, 1931, there was enough talk in the papers and elsewhere to make such an excuse a feasible one, for a world which for thirteen years had existed as if it never expected to pay bills or have them presented found itself face to face with bankruptcy. Saril's own investments had depreciated almost unbelievably; in some of the manipulated companies that had smashed the previous year he had lost a considerable amount of money. The income-tax was ruinous. He did fewer articles, less good and saleable articles, and was deservedly paid less for them. He seldom thought about these things and cared nothing for them, but here and now he saw them as an excellent reason for removing from his life this new disturbing factor. Did he really want it removed? Although in the chilly dawn he would decide that he did—that since Sally was not for him he could not continue so hopelessly to desire her—he knew when the day was begun, when she came in fresh and neat and demure with his early tea, that he could not any longer bear the thought of life without her. Whether he ever had her or not she had to remain, for he had got used to her. She made him comfortable; she made life endurable. She was the first clean and pleasant thing that had come into his life since the woman who'd shared not alone the passion but all the effort, disappointment, contentment and ambition of their mutual existence, had walked out of it.

So Sally stayed, and one evening, in spite of all his good resolutions, he began to make tentative love to her.



Two people only besides Colin Stawell had attempted to make love to Sally before—Gilbert Yorke and the young man who had lodged with her grandmother. Gilbert Yorke had been very drunk, and the young man lodger very business-like, his mind far less upon Sally as a person to be loved than as somebody who would run his home, cook his meals and darn his socks. Sally had been fond of Gilbert Yorke, but his alcoholic love-making had filled her with frantic distaste. She was not in the least fond of the lodger, and his love-making had been so tepid, so hasty and unconcerned, that Sally had been filled with distaste of quite another quality. It was left to Colin to show her the sweets of love, even of love frustrated. She had been in love with Colin, and even if his love-making had been as clumsy and unregardful as that of the young man lodger, it would have made no difference. But Colin, stirred by his own discontent and his amorphous longings after happiness and self-expression, and genuinely on fire for the girl who so unexpectedly showed him a sympathy and understanding (as he saw it) comparable with nothing he'd known before, had proved himself an adorable lover; so that even now something fainted within her at the remembered tones of his voice, the ardent gaze he bent upon her, the touch of his long thin hands. She'd be old, she sometimes thought, old or in her grave before the sweetness and terror of these things left her. She would have given herself to Colin with no thought of right or wrong, of common sense or worldly wisdom, for love is like that, and she would have faced whatever came to her as a result of this loving, as her mother had done before her. But the fates had mocked her; had turned her fine high moment of supreme emotion to a mere making of somebody else's bed, and the laughter that was laughter only because it dared not be tears. And having not given herself to Colin she believed she could not bear the thought of surrender to any man. Because of him there were, indeed, no other men in the world, even though in the end all his protestations of love had been shown to mean so little. For love is like that, too—a dark, wild ecstasy, a river in flood . . .

So now, when John Saril put his arms about her and pressed his lips to hers, something stood quite still within her: something shy and hidden looked out in fear from its hiding place, and Colin, Colin, cried her stupid loving, romantic heart. But Saril's kisses were difficult to evade; his body against hers was hard and importunate, and things remembered, unbearably sweet (and never, never in this world for her ever again) pressed like a heedless hand upon an open wound.

“Sally, let me love you . . . Sally . . .”

Her fluttering heart stood still, as if to listen to that younger better-loved voice which had said the same thing when she had been so sleepy, so full of the desire, indeed, for sleep that she had not understood, and the mocking fates had marked the score and passed on.

“Sally . . . don’t you like me a little?”

Her dark, recollecting gaze met Saril’s burning one.

“Why, yes, indeed, but not like that. Never like that . . .”

“Sally, be kind . . . be kind to me . . .”

She looked at him sorrowfully, regretfully, as she had once looked at Gilbert Yorke. There was kindness in that look and gratitude and affection. But not love. And no desire . . . His talk of love had but sent her hurtling back into the past. She lived still in her dreams and frustrated desires. The thing she had wanted and might not have stood between her and the thing she could have for the taking. He knew himself beaten. He let her go.

“What now?” he said. “Do you want to leave me?”

Sally shook her head.

“Not although I’ve made improper proposals to you?”

Again Sally shook her head.

“Do you want me to promise I’ll not make ’em again?”

Sally looked at him and for a moment she did not speak. The thought raced through her mind that here, her grandmother would have said, was another example of the ravening wolf from which she should flee. But her mind was full of quiet thoughts, of gratitude, kindness and tenderness, and the wolf idea could not live with them. So she smiled and once again shook her head.

“No, sir,” she said. “I don’t want you to promise anything.”

Saril laughed.

“That’s as well, because my promises, I feel, wouldn’t be worth very much. But I’ll try not to worry you. It won’t be easy, because, you see, I’m very much in love with you.”

*In love.* Sally considered the phrase. He did not say, as Colin had said, as the young man lodger had *not* said: “I love you.” Sally pondered the difference, felt it weighty, but did not know why. She said nothing.

Saril looked at her, his laughter stilled, faded to a slow smile that plucked strangely at Sally's heart.

"Sally—do you like me at all?"

"Oh yes, sir—very much."

"Enough, do you think, to stop calling me 'sir'?"

Sally smiled.

"Oh yes, sir, if I can remember."

"Try, will you?"

"Yes, sir," said Sally.

And then they both laughed—abruptly, light-heartedly.

(4)

In the days that followed Sally's simple mind and heart knew neither fear nor alarm. Nothing that she saw of John Saril, nor the knowledge that he desired her, pushed her over to her grandmother's belief that men, where women were concerned, were ravening wolves, especially when they were employers. She thought of the proposal John Saril had made to her without disgust, wondering just a little if, had he been free, he would have offered her marriage. Sally's feeling for young Colin had been so instinctive a thing, so touched with idealism and the seeming inevitability of all young love, that marriage was but a part of it—something which, if it had not existed, one would have invented out of hand. Yet, even so, she had contemplated—and with something approaching ecstasy—the thought of belonging to him without it. She couldn't have explained that, even if she had thought deeply enough about it, which she hadn't, merely acknowledging the fact, saluting it as a true one. Her feeling for John Saril, that warm, grateful regard which went out towards him from her young heart, had, she knew, nothing to do with love, if love were to be prejudged by what she knew of it through Colin, but as the days passed she wondered at times if it might not, had that been possible, have had something, perhaps, to do with marriage. It symbolised a sense of security, of content, of usefulness, the like of which she had never known before. Her service with Mildred Yorke, with Sanchia Hanson, had known content and usefulness, but never security, and sometimes it seemed to Sally that that, carrying with it the seeds of futurity, was the only thing in all the world that mattered.

She thought sometimes a little wistfully of what the buxom Ruby said, that love wasn't real, had no place in the life of the common people—not, that is, the love of the novels she read, the films she saw. And she supposed that Ruby was right because just as she could have contemplated love with Colin without marriage, so she could contemplate marriage with John Saril without love. But arrived at this point, she remembered that she would never love anybody but Colin, and that therefore marriage with anybody would look rather as that with Saril looked. He had not asked her to marry him, and she preferred to believe that that was merely because he had a wife already. For, like most of us, Sally believed what she wanted to believe. However, her heart rejected Saril as a lover, though her head considered him as a husband. Her grandmother had told her that her mother had never any desire towards marriage, and Sally had never understood this. A husband, a home, children—it seemed to Sally that these were the things all women wanted. Even through the faint mists that hung still around that fleeting *affaire Colin* that piece of knowledge floated in to her. She was very far from understanding her feeling for John Saril and quite incapable of analysing it or worrying about it. Her simple mind accepted it. She would have told you she was happy, that service with him had made her happy—that already the idea of leaving him filled her with dismay.

Perhaps at the bottom of it all, at the bottom of everything that concerned Sally in her relationship with John Saril, was her sense of gratitude, her inalienable conviction that the kindness he had shown her, the way he had taken her from the first on trust, counted with her as a quality so positive, so outstanding as automatically to cancel out those others which kept it company, for which his daughter hated him and by which he had come to hate her. His subtle, modern, teasing mind was beyond her. She saw only that, bitter, hard, hateful as he was to others, he was never any of these things to her, and, being Sally, she took to herself no flattering belief that this was due to something commendable in herself, seeing in it no more than proof of Saril's fundamental human decency, which circumstances she could only guess at and was not, in any case, clever enough to comprehend, had taken and twisted out of shape. Kindness, sheer and unadulterated, was how she saw what he had given her, the kind of natural unconsidering kindness which Gilbert Yorke had so often exalted to her, and from it she drew the note of the essential man, so that he seemed to her worthy of every effort she could make.

This passion of service had been engendered in her from the first, from the day he had tossed at her that simple statement of fact: "I'll take you on trust—come to that, we take each other on trust." The words were as truly

engraved on her heart as ever Calais on the hapless Mary's. And it had grown steadily, for taciturn though he so often was, gruffly impersonal, seeming not to notice her or what she did for him, when she was ill he had tended her, had engaged assistance immediately that silly, kindly doctor had said she was overworked and needed it, and had persistently worried her to go for a holiday. No other employer she had known had done as much, not Mildred Yorke, not even Gilbert, not Sanchia Hanson. Good employers as these had been, it would never have occurred to one of them that she was overworked; nor would they have believed it if they had been told. Somewhere, somehow, was born in Sally a deep desire to do something for Saril, something that would show her not unmindful of these things, that would "make up" to him for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Keeping his house spotless, ensuring him an atmosphere of peace and quiet, the kind of meals he liked, and bright, well-tended fires—these were the only means she had of doing it, but these services she performed with all her might and with a fund of passion hidden entirely by her look of sweet, unruffled serenity.

(5)

Saril's thoughts over the same period, if much more complicated and devious, at least brought him to the same conclusion—that the idea of an existence in which Sally had no part was disastrous. He did not, however, arrive at it without a twist of his mouth, a savage comment upon a life which, starting with high hopes of a distinguished career, with a keen, sharp interest in affairs, social and political, should have tumbled so early into a mere matter of personal relationships. He did not make excuses for himself: he saw the whole thing as a piece of colossal folly it was now beyond his power to correct, as it was long past him to correct the bias of his mind, which was towards a cynical blasé indifference. He even wondered sometimes if Margot's going were really the explanation of it, if that of itself could so have brought him to futility. But what else could conceivably so have checked his career, the pursuit of those ambitious heights in it which already he had essayed? What else could have so definitely turned the dangerous erotic side of his nature, so sharply understood and keenly satisfied by Margot, so far in upon itself? Was it perhaps the uncertainty rather than the shock, the cruel loss of her going? Would things, perhaps, have been different if she had been less candid, less self-revealing alike as to her past and future? She had left him nothing—with an assault of fine words she had razed to the ground all the built-up structure of his life and all that he had believed his marriage and his existence with her to have been. Yet

after ten years he found himself wondering how he had come to tumble so quickly into the mire of indifference; how, for example, he had refused to join the plant-hunting expedition to Sierra Nevada three months after Margot's departure, and what would have happened if he had? But these were mere conjectures worthy at this time of nothing but dismissal. Success had meant nothing to him without the woman who had shared that side of his life as intimately as all others—and, anyway, if he'd gone to Sierra Nevada, his whole life would have been altered, and certainly he would not have met Sally. Not to have met her seeming to be still the one disaster averted in a life mainly disastrous, he embraced at this juncture the fact of Sally's presence and dismissed that poor ghost which was Saril as he might have been if this, that or the other thing had or had not happened. *Not in our stars, dear Brutus . . .*

For good or ill this was his life. It was too late to do anything about it, and it seemed in these days less incongruous than it might earlier have done. In a world of muddle and failure, what, after all, did one's own personal failures matter? Why should it be so important that life for him should be so much fuller or more satisfying than it was for the people in the slums all around him? Life was a silly business, anyway, and sex, as that man whose novels Margot used to read had said in one of them, "the fundamental blunder of creation." Useless to think about it.

Nevertheless, one evening to Sally as she sat by his study fire mending his socks he said: "What do you think about all day, Sally?"

Sally smiled upon the socks, remembering the day when Gilbert Yorke had asked her that and been a little scornful when she said the children—*his* children, for looking after whom he paid her. And when she'd said she didn't think—much—about what he called "the questions of the day," he'd laughed and said: "Well, some day some man'll kiss you . . . and then you'll think about 'em even less . . ." He had, she remembered, seemed to think it rather a pity. So now she said to Saril: "All kinds of things. You wouldn't think them very important, I expect."

"Wouldn't I? What kind of things?"

"Well, what I can give you for dinner and if Ruby remembered before she went to make up your fire and if the butcher's boy's shut the gate or left it open, so that Gipsy can get out. And if, when you go out, you've remembered to take your raincoat—and if you've left off the boots that want repairing, and about the laundry and the mending . . ."

"Go on."

“Well . . . lots of things of that kind. And sometimes I wonder what you’d say if I asked you if I could do something in the autumn to the garden . . . and why you don’t yourself . . . and how you can *bear* to write about gardens and live with a wilderness like that.”

Saril was quiet for a moment, turning over in his mind that Sally had lived in his house for three months and he’d not even suspected that she cared for gardens and shared the ambition that from his youth upwards had been used to fire him to make the wilderness blossom as the rose.

“Do you know anything about gardening?” he asked her.

“No—only that I like gardens and like doing things in them.”

“Was there a garden at Streatham?”

“Yes—they had a lovely rockery. I used to weed it sometimes. They had an awful lot of pearlwort—and something the gardener called ‘daisy,’ but the pearlwort was the worst because it looked like part of the plant—and in time it *was* the plant. Their gardener didn’t like weeding.”

“Gardeners never do. Well, in the autumn I’ll have our wilderness dug up and you shall plant it with bulbs. We *did* have a garden once, you know—not for very long. An experimental garden which I meant to use just to see what things I *could* coax to grow in London soot.”

“Did you get tired of it?”

“What makes you think that?”

“It looks like something really begun . . . and then just left to die.”

“Yes, that’s about the truth of it, I expect. Funny how hard it is to kill some things, though—even by such thorough neglect as mine. The buddleia seems to survive everything (so *that* was what the mauve-flowering thing was called!) and some of the sedums. You’ll do all right with your bulbs. They’ll be underground out of all the soot and grime. They know nothing about the London winter and have nothing to grumble about.”

“There’s a big tree at the bottom of the garden,” said Sally. “Ruby and I have been contradicting each other as to what it is.”

“Oh? What did *you* say it is?”

“I?” Sally blushed. “I’m afraid it was I did all the contradicting. I don’t know *what* the tree is, but I know it isn’t any of the things Ruby said it is—a cherry or a plum.”

“How?”

“I’ve seen it before—in the garden at Green Acre. That was Mrs. Yorke’s garden at Mayes in Kent. It had white flowers in summer—there were a few on ours this year, which was really how I recognised it—and red berries in the winter.”

“Quite true, it has. It’s a cotoneaster. There are many varieties. That’s a *frigida*. It was planted not as an experiment—we *know* the cotoneaster *frigida* will make a fine tree in London, thirty or forty feet high—but because my wife thought it a handsome tree and one that would soon shut out the ill-kept windows of the house opposite. But perhaps they aren’t ill-kept these days.”

“Oh yes, they are—it’s a *very* dirty house. You’d soon see if you ever went down to the bottom of the garden.”

Saril couldn’t remember when he’d been to the bottom of the garden. After a while he said: “Well, what else do you think about, Sally?”

“People, sometimes. . . . Those you meet in shops and the streets—and the funny odds and ends of their conversation. And sometimes I think about my grandfather, who’s dead and about the people I’ve worked for . . .”

“I see. Do you ever think of ‘affairs’—the questions of the day, like Free Trade and Labour and unemployment? When you’re old enough to vote what are you going to do about it? Or haven’t you ever thought about that? Has anybody ever asked you that before?”

Sally nodded, thinking of the day Gilbert Yorke had said he’d have liked to marry a woman who was an M.P., and how she had laughed, not believing him, and finding the idea of Mildred Yorke as a Member of Parliament a little beyond her powers of imagination.

“Yes, once, but that was a long time ago—I must have been about seventeen. I didn’t know anything about politics.”

“Do you now?”

“Not very much, except that it doesn’t seem to matter who is in power. There always seem to be people like my grandfather who work all their lives and never really have enough to live on and who have to go on working even when they’re ill and ought not. My grandmother used to say things had always been like that and always would.”

“And I suppose your grandfather always bought the *Daily Mail* and voted Tory?”



“I don’t think so,” said Sally. “I remember grandmother telling me once he was once out of work for nearly a year because he’d come out on strike . . . years ago . . . when I was a baby. She didn’t ‘hold with’ strikes. My grandfather used to say they were the only weapon the workers had—that if industry really couldn’t afford better wages, then the system was wrong and ought to be changed.”

“You can only change systems when you’ve changed hearts. The problem is how to create a gigantic social conscience. So long as people think it’s all right for *them* to be comfortable and well-fed while millions of people are destitute, so long will the ‘system’ go on.”

“Do *you* think the system’s all right?”

“A system that spends millions on armaments, that produces wars and slums and even in times of greatest prosperity has an enormous unemployment figure? What is there about such a system that I should approve of it? But I’m not the person to set it right. . . . I believe I thought I was once, but that must have been a long time ago.”

“But if you feel like that *oughtn’t* you to help?”

“I believe I thought so once . . . but it’s a thankless task. People hug their chains. And to-day money’s the only thing that counts. This precious National Government’s not going to last. There’ll be a General Election—a dirty one, too, if I know anything about it. And the pendulum will swing right over; people will vote as solidly for the Conservative ticket as a year ago they did for the Labour—and will as little know why. Then they’ll get sick of their new leaders and swing back. . . . That’s all the political conviction there is. Since people are determined to go to hell, much better let ’em go there in their own way.”

Sally folded up her pile of socks, put away her needle and wools and got up. Democracy might or might not be going to hell, might or might not deserve it, but the kitchen boiler had still to be made up and Gipsy given his last run. But she sighed a little as she went downstairs and put on her hat, as if she were tireder than usual or as if the conversation had depressed her. Also, she felt very ignorant, wished she knew more about things and wondered if, when she was old enough, as she soon would be, to have a vote, she’d be one of the people who earned Saril’s contempt because of their lack of conviction, their capacity for swinging like pendulums. And as she walked round the quiet streets with Gipsy, she wondered that a man like Saril, educated, capable, should be so content to do nothing, to look on in cynical indifference.

A day or so later, Sally came in from her morning jaunt to the shops to find Caroline Bracey and her two children seated in the kitchen being regaled with coffee and some of Sally's freshly-made cakes. Her surprise was crossed and recrossed by relief at the knowledge that this was one of the rare occasions when John Saril happened not to be at home, and she conquered her natural impulse towards friendliness which always made it so difficult for her to be disagreeable to any human being, to the extent that having wished Caroline "good-morning" she went about her tasks ignoring her. The children, unruly, noisy as ever, were amusing themselves by clambering over chairs, opening drawers and cupboards, shutting their fingers in them, squealing, being comforted, kissed and permitted to repeat the programme *ad nauseam*. Sally, keeping her patience with difficulty, found it snap abruptly asunder when the small boy struck Gipsy sharply across the nose with a wooden spoon he had taken from the kitchen drawer. Gipsy, the gentlest of creatures, merely looked surprised and moved coldly away, whereupon Norrie followed him and proceeded to repeat the performance. Sally put out a hand, turned him sharply by the elbow and had a short brief tussle with him for possession of the spoon. Norrie was strong and his grip, reinforced with anger, was not easily loosened, but with the spoon in her hand Sally said sharply: "How dare you do that? You deserve a good whipping. It would have served you right if Gipsy had bitten you!"

"*Would* it, then?" said the boy, and struck Sally as she bent over him with his doubled-up fist upon the breast. Sally caught his hand and slapped it once, very lightly.

"This is my kitchen," she said, "and I expect little boys to behave in it!"

"'Tisn't your kitchen, then—it's my grandfather's!" said the boy. "You haven't any right in it at all! I heard mummy say so to dad, so there!"

"Keep your hands off my child!" said Caroline at this juncture, getting up and gathering Norrie to herself. "I can do all the slapping that's necessary, thank you!"

"It's a pity you don't, then," said Sally coldly, and taking Gipsy by the collar she went out of the room. She did not return until the front-door banged and the coast was clear.

The Ruby she confronted was a strangely different Ruby from the girl to whom she had earlier said good-morning. Feeling but ignoring this she said:

“Why did you let Mrs. Bracey in, Ruby? I told you Mr. Saril had given orders that she was not to be.”

Ruby instantly bridled.

“’Ow could *I* prevent ’er? She asked for Mr. Saril and when I said ’e was out she just came in.”

“Well, it’s very unfortunate,” said Sally, recognising this move as a “try-on.” “If Mr. Saril hears of it he’ll be very annoyed.”

“I can’t ’elp that . . .”

“You wouldn’t like to lose your place.”

“Wouldn’t trouble me. There’s plenty other places, more respectable than this, from wot I can ’ear of it.”

Sally looked up from her checking of the goods from the greengrocer.

“What do you mean?” she said.

“Wot I say.”

“Don’t speak to me like that, Ruby.”

Ruby looked sulky but had the grace to hold her tongue. Sally said firmly: “So long as you stay here you must do as you’re told. Mr. Saril has his own reasons for his orders about Mrs. Bracey, and it’s not your place or mine to question them. I shall say nothing about this occasion to Mr. Saril, but if it happens again I shall. You understand?”

Ruby answered sulkily that she did. However, as the day advanced, she recovered her temper and the incident faded from Sally’s mind.

It was not until much later that she began to suspect that Ruby had established herself with the Braceys on the footing of that maintained by the erstwhile Blanche, that Ruby, in short, was *persona grata* at the Braceys’ house in Peckham Rye. But by that time neither the Braceys nor Ruby mattered very much, for Sally’s life had taken a plunge forward—into a happiness that was as steady, as unquestionable as it had been unexpected.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

(1)

Perhaps Sally’s surrender had been inevitable—a mere matter of time. Certainly it was helped onwards by the most ordinary events—by the Press

paragraphs concerning Colin's wedding which coincided with an anniversary of Saril's own of bitter memory, which again coincided on a wild wet morning with a domestic event known as the sweep; with a flare of bad temper and some insolent remarks upon Ruby's part; a mood of unusual depression upon Sally's and John Saril's abrupt announcement that he was giving up Holly Lodge and going away. A more sophisticated person than Sally might have suspected this last factor in the situation; certainly Saril himself was not entirely unaware of the effect he was creating not only by his decision but by the moment he chose to announce it. But Sally took it as part of his endeavours to extricate them both from a difficult situation, and was swung quite round by it. Never having heard of the psychological moment she ascribed nothing to it; but Saril knew all about that though he did not allow the knowledge to influence him. At this point of his relationship with Sally he was something less than scrupulous.

He had made his decision over-night and had meant then to adhere to it, though he had felt a little martyred and heroic about it none the less. And the chances are that if Sally had not ordered the sweep for that morning, if it had not poured with rain, so that Ruby (who had quarrelled with her young man over-night and was in a bad temper to start with) had arrived wet and in a much worse one; if the sweep had not, like Ruby, appeared to think that there ought to be somebody he could blame for the weather; if he had not proved not only surly but incompetent, having to be brought back to sweep the soot out of the cowl where he had pushed and left it, so that when the fire was lit the smoke rushed out at every crevice of the stove and filled the house instead of going up the chimney; if Sally, running downstairs to see if the house was on fire, had not encountered Saril coming out of his study on the same errand; if Ruby had not been rendered late in leaving and had not grumbled about being late in consequence for an afternoon engagement for tea; if she had not lost her temper and said more than she meant; and if Sally had not looked at Ruby's picture paper and gone about all the morning with a lot of hopeless ideas about Colin and marriage in her head; if Saril had not remembered that anniversary of his own marriage; if he had not laughed and told Sally they were in the same boat, Sally's history might have been very different. But these things did, in fact, take place and Saril, who had meant to be common-sensical and strong-minded, found himself once again with a Sally weeping in his arms, in obvious need of consolation and not quite certain of anything save that Saril's embrace and kisses were strangely and unexpectedly consoling.

In love with another man though she was, they did not, strangely enough, disgust her, but Sally was not the first woman to forget one man in

the embrace of another. Neither did Saril disgust her, though he was old enough to be her father. He was no bungler in love. He had the remnants of definite good looks and no middle-aged paunch. Moreover, she liked and was grateful to him—and he liked and admired her, which was balm just then to her wounded spirit. It was true, too, that she would have married him if he had been free and could not answer him when he said: “Well, what’s the difference?”—couldn’t explain that essential difference between heart and head. Her “I don’t love you and you don’t love me” had made him laugh again. “You think too much of love,” he said, and seemed to know that her thoughts were on Colin and the tow-haired young woman with whom he would soon be getting himself to bed. “How many people marry the people with whom they fall in love?” he’d asked her, and she’d had no answer, either, to that. She believed in marriage and no longer believed very much in love, or didn’t believe that love—“that kind of love”—would ever come again for her. The quiet grateful ministering affection she felt for John Saril had long ago become the best and sweetest thing in her life. From the first it must have seemed a little absurd not to yield to it.

Torn asunder she had certainly been when Saril had chanced upon her that evening of Colin’s wedding-day, utterly broken by the Press pictures which had shown him leaving the church with his beautiful smiling bride upon his arm, and Saril’s kisses and embraces had so ministered to her emotional state that she was ready enough for what followed. But though Saril knew this Sally did not. She knew only that his kisses and caresses, as once before, were infinitely consoling, and something wild and frantic in her had urged her to that which he desired and which he told himself he had intended. She had thrown herself, with simple, unreasoning abandon, into love as into some Lethæan stream and emerged solaced and made free of the long pent-up emotions which had been so casually aroused in her by Colin Stawell. But though that initial surrender is as easy of explanation as Saril found it of accomplishment, the steady continuation of a relationship so begun is to be explained by nothing save the visualising of physical love as no mere orgy of sex but as an emotional impulse which yearns at least as much toward giving as getting. Sally did not recognise this state in herself; but it was there. The essential loving unselfish Sally came out in this as elsewhere.

To say that she and Saril became lovers by accident is not, perhaps, quite accurate. Their relationship arose, quite simply and naturally, out of their peculiar circumstances and propinquity, out of their hungry emotions; it probably was, as Sally came to believe it, entirely inevitable. But lovers? More accurate, at least at first, to say that Sally allowed herself to be loved,

gave herself up to it in the mood of the healthy-minded young woman who has decided that this, after all, was the thing for which she was created. She took to it no sense of immolation, no conscious intention of being “kind”—her nature was at once too deep and too simple for that. But Saril did not deceive himself. Kind he certainly found her, and sweet, but he did not believe her stirred by passion for himself; and what passion he brought to their relationship was of the body only. That ecstasy of body and spirit would never, he knew, be his again. He did not look for it, he did not desire it even. But the relationship, such as it was, suited both of them; neither did it in any way spoil the quiet efficiency of her conduct of his house. As the weeks went by his affection for her deepened surprisingly and he lost whatever sense he had ever had of having taken her selfishly, of having used her moods for his own ends and pleasure. And Sally, it was clear, was happy too, and had neither regrets nor scruples.

Her happiness, in fact, amazed Sally, who had yielded herself with trepidation and misgiving, actuated by motives that certainly were not selfish though not easily defined and entirely beyond her capacity to analyse. And a thing to which she had gone almost accidentally came to mean to her a quiet intensity of happiness that illumined her days like a torch in a dull room. She ceased to think about her position or to regard it as equivocal. She took it for granted and it rewarded her by the quiet length of happiness and contentment that unwound itself before her.

She harboured no illusions, keenly aware that John Saril would forget her to-morrow if the woman who was still his wife came back. He had not told her that, but she did not need to be told. When he said: “I’ve never divorced her,” Sally understood. She thought: “He belongs to her, as I belong to Colin,” and the one state seemed to her no more hopeless or unreasonable than the other. She had been lulled—perhaps it was true of both of them—into a trance in which she accepted Saril’s code and knew nothing except that life had opened its arms to her. The hints and veiled insolences which Ruby let drop from time to time troubled her not at all.

That young woman certainly received the shock of her life when she found Saril one late October day digging up the wilderness upon which she had looked out each day from the kitchen window. A week’s hard work revealed the buried garden beneath and Ruby, casting her bright look upon it, remarked: “Then it *was* true, after all. Can’t say I ever believed it!”

“Believed what?” asked Sally.

“Why, that there used to be a garden ’ere. A *real* garden—sort of thing you only see in parks and that . . .”

“Who said so?”

Ruby hedged.

“Oh, people. . . . People that ’ave lived in these parts for years. My sister, for one.”

Sally did not see how Ruby’s sister could ever have been in a position to know whether the two hundred feet of ground at the back of Holly Lodge had been cultivated as a garden or not. She said: “Who else?”

“Oh, I dunno,” said Ruby, tiring suddenly of the subject. “I can’t remember.”

Sally thought that she remembered, on the contrary, very well. Who but Caroline Bracey, who’d grown up and lived there until she was married, would know whether there was a garden at Holly Lodge or not? With a start, Sally realised that she would be wise to get rid of Ruby at once. She never quite knew why she didn’t.

The excavated garden, as if grateful for its return to the light, grew and prospered. The rockery was freshly planted with such things as went underground for the winter or with such as might be reasonably expected to withstand the fogs and dirt of that season in London. But though Sally missed several of the loveliest names with which the Streatham garden had made her familiar, what seemed to her a fabulous number of bulbs were put into the freshly dug ground, the untidy shrubs were trimmed into shape again and thoroughly dowsed with the hose-pipe. So much unheard-of activity upon the part of her master inspired in Ruby the deepest suspicion. Moreover, she resented Sally’s assistance in these horticultural pursuits and was inclined to think herself overworked in consequence. But Sally remained still at the point when Ruby’s moods and rudenesses, her veiled hints and edged insolences were no more than an excrescence upon a life grown unexpectedly smooth and beautiful.

To those late September and early October days belonged Sally’s first visits to the London parks, to Kew and to the Horticultural Gardens at Wisley. To this time also belonged the resumption of that book on London gardening which Saril had planned ten years ago and abandoned with the rest of his ambitions. In the afternoons when Ruby had taken herself off, Sally would sit herself down before the ancient Remington and tap out such phrases as: *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party*

in a determined effort to master the keyboard and acquire sufficient dexterity to enable her to type the chapters as they were completed. The book moved slowly, for Saril's knowledge had staled a little, his observation lost its edge, and he was strangely and unaccountably tired. All that digging, said Sally, must have been very fatiguing. He ought to have taken longer over it or have had a man in to do it. Exercise was good for him, Saril replied. He'd had too little for too long.

The troublous times in which they were living concerned them but little. Sally understood nothing whatever of the political situation and to it Saril brought a cynical indifference partly natural to him and partly induced by that mood of general indifference which he had allowed for so long to envelop him. As Holly Lodge boasted no wireless they were spared the humour (1) of hearing Mr. Snowden enumerate the dire disasters which were infallibly to overtake the country if Britain went off the gold standard, and (2) when this happened, the reasons why none of them did. A good deal of literature was left at the house as the election drew near, which Sally dutifully collected and put upon Saril's desk. It aroused in him a faint far humour which he expended upon the one canvasser who troubled to call upon him, and who left with only the foggiest ideas of Saril's political bent and none at all upon his voting inclinations. The election, he told Sally, was a ramp, a sordid dirty party affair; the world was in travail and the Government which it was obvious would be returned (and which eventually came into being) proposed to solve all its troubles by putting on a few tariffs. As well, said he, put a plaster upon a patient suffering from a cancer. The sum-total of the election, to Sally as to most housekeepers, was that she presently paid more for a good many things she needed in the shops, and that she heard the word "British" more often than she had ever heard it before.

(2)

Held back by the little summer, pushed forward by several bad fogs, some rain and a gale or two, autumn slipped a little nearer into winter's lap. At Holly Lodge the fires, before which Gipsy lay so happily, were warm and bright; the book continued to move, and Sally, with a supreme effort and some not unnatural pride, produced a very fair typewritten copy of the first five chapters. Somewhere in the first days of November, however, a tiny crack appeared in Sally's happiness. John Saril developed a cough, complained of aches and pains and was, with difficulty, persuaded one wet and dismal morning to keep to his bed. He did not seem very ill, but his temper suffered and he gave Sally no peace until she allowed him to sit up in



bed and tinker with his last completed chapter. On the third day he got up, insisted upon taking Gipsy for a run, followed this by some odd jobs in the garden, and the next day went down with a sharp attack of influenza. Alarmed, Sally sent for the doctor—the same man whom Saril had summoned when she had poisoned her finger and whom she had not seen since. He asked her, as before, a good many questions, said she was looking well, told her to look after herself and that Saril would be all right if he stayed where he was. He also looked down in amazement, as Sally could see, upon the wilderness blossoming or about to blossom as the rose, but seemed by then to have exhausted his flow of words or to have been stricken dumb by the sight that met his eyes, and with a final reassuring nod he took himself off.

The effects upon Sally of this final gesture, however, did not unfortunately last long, for by the evening Saril was definitely worse and his hard and difficult breathing frightened Sally all the night, so that in the morning she put on her hat and coat and ran off for the doctor, who duly arrived, agreed that Saril was worse and ordered a nurse. He was kind and gentle to Sally and if he considered her concern for a mere employer a little excessive he did not evince it. His comments upon the situation, as his shrewd eye read it, he reserved for his wife, who did not take them very much to heart and had expected them, anyway. She considered her husband took too much interest in his patients (aware that she meant women patients) and thought with a sigh that he was wasted as a G.P. in one of the poorer and duller districts of London.

The nurse, however, took less trouble about hiding the conclusions at which she also very promptly arrived, and which, she found, were entirely shared by Ruby, who stayed until five these days “to oblige,” and was inclined to be a little self-righteous about it. Nurse Manton’s attitude to Sally was polite but distant, though Sally, it is true, her mind elsewhere, scarcely noticed it. For a day and a night it was by no means certain Saril would pull through and faced with that thought Sally was staggered to discover how the bright new world in which she had lived for the past two months fell about her ears. She did not wonder what her future would be if John Saril died, for she could not imagine life without the quiet busy content, the satisfying companionship that had been her life since she had become Saril’s mistress. Not that that harsh word entered her mind. If she thought about it at all she thought of herself as his wife, and knew that no ceremony could be more than a mere trapping or make her feel any more bound in honour to the bargain upon which she had entered. She thought of her relationship with Saril exactly as she would have regarded it if the ceremony had indeed

preceded it, and those days when she had imagined herself for ever bound and futile before an unwanted loyalty, an abortive love affair, seemed very long ago. That passion of feeling which Colin had inspired in her seemed already a little unreal—and “you think too much of love,” John Saril had said. Had that, perhaps, been not love at all? Or did you, perhaps, have to choose between love—“that kind of love”—and marriage? Sally wondered a little about this, but not very much, for she accepted the fact of her own happiness without the wish or capacity to pull it to pieces.

With the knowledge that Saril was not going to die, Sally took upon herself the responsibility of refusing Caroline Bracey admittance to her father’s room. She saw her in the dining-room, scene of that recent fateful interview, and noticed Caroline’s glance of disapproval at the fire built and maintained all day that Nurse Manton might eat her meals in comfort. These nurses! One would think they were duchesses!

“Mr. Saril,” said Sally, “is not allowed to see visitors yet.”

“Surely I’m not a visitor?” said Caroline Bracey.

“I mean he’s not allowed to see *anybody*,” said Sally. “Dr. Browne’s orders were very strict.”

“I shall see Nurse Manton,” said Caroline, summoning her dignity, an edgy, unprepossessing thing, like her new hat, in which she strove, apparently, like all her sex just then, to appear as much like Queen Elizabeth as possible. “It’s outrageous that I shouldn’t be allowed to see my own father!”

Luckily, however, Nurse Manton was used to the Caroline Braceys of the world and heavily backed Sally’s decision.

“In a few days’ time—say on Friday—I think a few minutes would not hurt him. But before then, I’m *afraid*. . . . His heart is still very weak. Excitement *must* be avoided.”

Nurse Manton folded her hands upon her flat white-aproned stomach and looked very wooden. Caroline flapped the wings of her dignity a little, then gave it up and retreated.

Told of her call Saril said only: “Don’t let her in, Sally. I won’t see her. She only comes because she thinks I’m going to die. Well, she’ll be disappointed. I’ve no intention of dying. When I have I’ll send her a postcard.”

When Friday came, bringing with it a Caroline Bracey reinforced by her husband and with the new hat doing its best to fall off the back of her head, Sally tried to persuade Saril to alter his mind. But he was adamant; the strength of his refusal left Sally astounded and helpless and her second interview with Caroline was only a more unpleasant version of the first. Sally felt a little sick when it was over. So much human animosity had never, she thought, flowed from anybody before. If she could kill me I think she would, thought Sally, but she thought, too: I suppose it's natural. Why *should* she like me? I'm only in her way. . . . But for all that she snapped a little at Ruby when she said: "Well, I do call it a bit *thick*. Her own *father*!"

"Who *told* her her father was ill, anyway?" she asked.

"'Ow do *I* know?" said Ruby, "these things get round. Only fair she should be told, anyway, with 'im as ill as all that! After all, she's the next of kin. You can't get away from that. That's *my* opinion, any'ow."

"You can have what opinions you like so long as you don't act upon them," said Sally darkly, and went out of the room.

The thought of that understanding between Caroline Bracey and Ruby oppressed her for days. Then suddenly she forgot about it, for once again the sun was shining and John Saril was downstairs, his chair drawn up to the fire, and Nurse Manton had packed her bag and departed.

(3)

Saril took a long while over his recovery. He had grown very thin; he was so weak that a walk to the bottom of the garden tagged him out. He looked much older and his dark fine eyes seemed to have receded a little into his head. When he was stronger, Dr. Browne said, he ought to go away for a while, but Saril shook his head and refused to acquiesce. No place like your own home in the winter, he told Sally, who agreed but thought he should go, all the same, for she had all the respect of her class for medical opinion. They'd go, said Saril, in the spring, not a minute before.

"But then we shall miss all our daffodils," said Sally, whose eyes sought hungrily each morning for signs that the miracle of spring was going once again to happen, although, as John Saril reminded her, winter, according to the calendar, had not even begun. "It's autumn, whatever you and I may think about it, until the twenty-second of December"—which statement Sally accepted without its making the slightest difference to her feeling on the matter.

“And as for the daffodils, we shouldn’t be away all that time. They’ll last for weeks—even though they’ll get dirtier every day. You’ll see your daffodils all right, never fear.”

Sally smiled, but a little fear knocked softly at her heart. She did not know why.

A new tenderness was born in her these days as she looked at Saril, so thin of body, so gaunt and shadowed of face, and every time Dr. Browne said: “See that he takes it easy for a bit. No gardening, mind. No gardening on any account,” that little knocking came again at her heart. But at last the doctor paid his final visit. “He’ll do if he goes slow,” he said. “His heart’s still weak and he’s got to be careful. Don’t let him forget it. I wish he’d go away—the sea air would do more for him than anything I can do. Sidmouth—or somewhere like that. He’s curiously obstinate on this point.”

“Yes,” said Sally, “he is.”

Dr. Browne smiled.

“But not, perhaps, quite so obstinate with you?”

Sally smiled, too. Also, she blushed a little, as the doctor did not fail to notice.

“Oh yes,” she said, “I think he is.”

Dr. Browne grunted and looked at Sally reflectively. She’d improved, whatever her position in this queer household. She looked different—happy, less wrought up. And she *was* different, too. She no longer called him “sir,” for one thing. And something had happened to Saril, surely, besides his illness. He’d grown more human, less sparing of words and the ordinary coinage of human amenities. She’d done him good, that was certain. And that garden! Was that her doing also? It looked as though Vi’d been right there, anyway, when she’d said there used to be a good garden at Holly Lodge. There was an established look about the order that had taken the place of that wild tangle of grass and weed he remembered and which had so emphatically contradicted Vi’s statements on the matter. It certainly wasn’t made yesterday. He spoke of it now to Sally.

“You’re going to have a garden here next year, I see. Are you fond of a garden?”

“Oh yes,” said Sally, quite forgetting how in the last few weeks she had come near to hating this one because it had been the cause if not of Saril’s

initial illness, at least of the serious turn it had taken. “But I know very little about them.”

“Mr. Saril’s the gardener, is he?”

“Yes,” said Sally.

“Did he do all that?”

“Yes.”

“Tut, tut. Most foolish, *most* foolish. Much too hard work after years of taking practically no exercise at all. Heart couldn’t stand the strain . . . not to be wondered at. Keep him *out* of the garden—out of it altogether. A little bit of weeding won’t hurt you occasionally, will it?”

“No,” said Sally and nothing else. She had, Walter Browne thought, the most amazing and unexpected way of making you feel that everything there was to say on a subject had been said. There was no getting beyond those quiet negatives and affirmatives of hers. She was a young woman of few words—obvious enough, he thought, why she should have appealed to Saril. But what a position! Why didn’t he marry the girl and be done with it? Couldn’t, perhaps. . . . Tiresome of Vi to have remembered so little of the local gossip which had belonged to their early days in the neighbourhood. New people, too, on either side, and neither of them patients of his—never had been, these neighbours of Saril’s, though, at any time. Pity—he’d have liked to have known the truth of this matter, if only because *not* knowing it was so teasing. Well, well, time would show. But he liked this girl; she interested him, though he no longer felt that she needed help. She gave him now the impression of self-confidence and common sense. Young he knew her to be, but that look of pathetic uncertainty, of emotional frustration and unhappiness had gone and in its place was a grave assured air that her blushes seemed only to deepen. He felt, as before, a keen interest in her, a wish to tell her that if ever she was in need of a friend she must remember his existence; but looking at that pale composed face, with its clear calm gaze, this seemed an absurd thing to say and it went unsaid. He made his adieux with no more than a smiling reminder: “Well, look after him. It’s just a case of ordinary care and common sense. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, doctor,” said Sally, and hurried back to Saril, who smiled at her and said: “Well, good riddance to him! What a gas-bag!”

“But very kind!”

“Oh, probably!”

“You’re a very ungrateful patient.”

“Am I?”

“Yes, indeed.”

Sally poked the fire with a certain precision and sat back on her heels seriously regarding him.

“You know you’d have relieved his mind if you’d gone away a week ago when he first suggested it.”

“Do doctors have to have their minds relieved?”

“I think they like it, sometimes. . . . After all, he was very worried about you and still is, a little. He says you’re not to garden—that you oughtn’t to have done all that, after so many years of not doing it.”

“*Did* he? Well, I certainly don’t feel like gardening at the moment.”

“What *do* you feel like?”

“Oh, just talking to you, I think. Or are you going to run away?”

“Not if you want me. I suppose you won’t alter your mind and go away now, will you?”

“Aren’t you a little over-anxious about relieving Dr. Browne’s mind?”

“It wasn’t his mind I was thinking of this time.”

“No?” Saril laughed. “Don’t worry, honey. We’ll go away in the New Year. Not a day before.”

And that was the end of the argument, as Sally had known it would be.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

(1)

Out of John Saril’s illness, his slow recovery and the small daily intimacies that belonged to it, there emerged for him and for Sally a deepening of the mutual satisfaction they had in their relationship, together with a subtle change not easy to define but none the less real, all the same. That they were both happy they never questioned—that they suited each other Saril certainly knew and acknowledged, and never ceased to be surprised about. For this quiet uneducated girl, with no brilliance of mind or speech, was so much the antithesis of the clever woman he’d married and spent ten weary years in trying to forget, that the attraction she had for him

was unfailingly an amazing thing. That they loved each other perhaps never occurred to either of them, for they had done with love, they thought, for each believed still in the bondage of old incredible loyalties, was still drawn, aspiring, after the ideal of a single romantic love, which should fill a lifetime. And yet, as the days passed and Christmas approached, both were secretly surprised to discover how increasingly seldom these hopeless loves engaged even a few odd moments of their days. Without either realising it, the situation to which they had both succumbed as something in the nature of consolation, compensation, became less and less anything of either, taking on the form and lineaments of something which had sprung of itself into being, which owed nothing to hopeless unrequited love or to love spurned and rejected, nor to some impossible for-ever-to-be-regretted he or she. Sally was too simple-minded, too unsubtle of intellect, to dwell overmuch upon the situation or to do much with it. Perhaps Saril's view of love inclined her now to think of the feeling she had had for Colin rather as one thought about a wild creature of the forest, lovely but untamable, which one regretted but was, on the whole, glad to see led away out of sight. And Saril, who had lived with his own wild creature for fifteen years, knew that he had never had any illusions about it, had lived with it neither happily nor, even, hopefully. At the back of his mind there had lurked always the knowledge that it was not only untamed but untamable, that sooner or later it would break from him and run away.

Caroline, that unbelievable daughter of his, as he would never forget, had hated her mother and reviled him for giving her such a parent. A woman of the streets, she had called her, which was not true, but only Caroline's pleasant way of rendering a thing already regrettable in as disgusting a fashion as possible. Margot came of good family, but had been most reprehensibly brought up by an adoring father. She had taken a first lover at sixteen and already had no reputation to lose when Saril had taken her from the last of them and insisted upon making her his wife. Strange that from a union so passionate, so coloured with what passes for romance, should have resulted, he thought bitterly, in the narrow strait-laced utterly bourgeois Caroline. He had hated her from a child and she him because of the contempt in which she had held her mother and the things her sharp commonplace young mind had detected about her; and sometimes Saril thought he hated her most because she had somehow typified all that was unsatisfactory in his marriage and because he believed that if she had been different, if she had possessed even one of the qualities of her mother (even the less desirable ones) their marriage would not so easily have tumbled into the dust. This was probably a delusion like so much else he harboured in his

mind on this subject; but he had not yet entirely succeeded in turning it out. Neither had it as yet occurred to him that he and her mother between them might have had something at least to do with Caroline's unwelcome temperament and development. He saw her all the time as an unpleasant human being, not as an example of cause and effect. Not that that would have made her any the less unpleasant. . . .

However, Caroline, he thought, was for the time being, at least, successfully shut out. He knew nothing of the one visit she had paid to the house with Ruby's assistance and nothing of that young woman's friendship with Caroline and her husband, and he did not connect Ruby with Caroline's knowledge of his illness. He could not have said when the idea of a final exclusion of Caroline by the simple process of leaving the one place in which she knew where to find him first occurred to him. But his mind began definitely to play with the idea. In the spring, perhaps, when Sally had had a good look at her precious bulbs, they might begin to think about it. Neither did he know when the wish that he might be married to Sally first came into his consciousness—perhaps when he explored the idea of leaving town, for in the country you needed, he knew, to have your marriage certificate framed and hanging on your walls. He began seriously to think of starting proceedings for divorce, of engaging people to try to trace his wife, but could never quite bring himself to begin.

There were other considerations, too. Not only was it certain that he and Sally could live in no village in the English countryside in the blessed anonymity of London, and that her position, unless bolstered with a servant or two and the usual appearances of normal marriage, would be invidious; but a Sally without her household duties might very well be a Sally bored or (far worse) boring. True she had learned to type, that her spelling was quite creditable and that she had a deep instinctive liking for his subject and was already making acquaintance with it. But was that going to be enough? Her secretarial duties would be but intermittent. There would, of course, be the garden. At the best, wouldn't she perhaps turn into something very like the middle-class wife with too much leisure on her hands that the system he despised created by the thousand? Unused energy, energy running to waste—that, he thought, was what made the middle-class woman the crux of the feminine situation. Too late he'd recognised it as the reason why Margot had come to shipwreck, first as a young girl with no calls upon her allegiance or mind and with nothing to think of but her own pleasure, and then, later, as a wife with one child entirely taken off her hands by a capable nurse, a house of whose duties she was similarly relieved and a husband whose chosen job took him at intervals to the remoter corners of the earth. True, there had also



been a war, but that, in Saril's opinion, was blamed for altogether too much. He urgently did not want Sally to become like the average married woman of his class and fear that she might hold him back from the contemplated change quite as much as consideration for her position as mistress rather than wife.

If things went on as they were going, of course a cottage, with Sally doing all the housework, might very well be all soon that he could afford, so that Sally's soul and reputation would both alike be safe. There was, he knew, no reason why they should not live so even now if he chose, but he did not choose, for Saril knew life in the English countryside and was aware that any such attempt would be counted as an eccentricity that would but draw attention alike to himself and to Sally's position. On the whole, he was minded to stay in London, to look for a house in some district where gardens were to be had, and there to continue that unnoticed, unnoticeable kind of existence only possible in big towns where knowing your neighbours was suspect rather than expected.

He was moved by these and similar reflections to look into his affairs, long since taken out of the hands of the family solicitors, a class whom Saril regarded as the most unnecessary of middlemen. He considered himself perfectly capable of looking after his own affairs, even though he had chosen for so long to neglect them. He discovered, a little to his surprise, that he was one of the lucky ones, that the financial blizzard had not demolished many of his middle-class bulwarks, though it might very well do so yet. His position was sound, far sounder than he had imagined. In the New Year, whatever else he did or did not do, he would make a will and lodge it with his bank manager. He was more than twice Sally's age and that was no more than a sane and sensible precaution. He'd never meant Caroline and her little beast of a husband to profit by his death, anyway, but what his spite against the Braceys had never quite brought him to accomplish his affection for Sally was likely at last to achieve.

(2)

He sounded Sally about the country and found, of course, that the idea left her almost distracted with pleasure. She saw none of the disadvantages and did not seem very perturbed when he pointed them out. Why couldn't they have another Ruby and live in the country, simply, as they lived here in Camberwell? Because, said Saril, the English countryside would not believe in a housekeeper of twenty—and such a pretty one, too. She'd be talked about at once.

“I shouldn’t mind,” said Sally, “and, anyway, if they felt like that they wouldn’t call on us, and you know you’d hate it if they did!”

Saril said nothing to that, aware that whilst he would certainly hate being “called upon,” he’d hate it more, in the circumstances, if he were not. He didn’t want people to call, but he wanted them to want to call. More especially he didn’t want their not calling to be, as he knew it would, a reflection upon Sally. It surprised him, these days, to discover how much he had her upon his conscience. After a while he said: “How would you like to go abroad? To the Sierra Nevada, perhaps?”

“You mean on a plant-hunting expedition?” Sally knew by now enough of Saril’s botanical pursuits to be sure he did.

“Yes, a very modest and quite private one, but it ought to be fun. And I think you’d like it. No use until the spring—early June, for preference. I suppose you’ve never seen a mountain in your life, have you?”

Sally shook her head.

“Well, we could start with the English variety, and see how you got on. We could do Great Gable or Pike O’Harrison or Pike O’Stickle—or Helvellyn, even. We might begin a book of wild flowers—spring ones—and go back for the summer ones, though not until the next year, if we go to Spain.”

Sally’s ecstatic face rebuked him, for he recognised these plans as mere procrastination, an easy means of delaying his decision regarding the move to the country. He had always known the Sierra Nevada, of course, as a tempting hunting-ground; but for the smash would have joined the expedition which set out soon afterwards. But if the Sierra Nevada, why the Sierra Nevada plus Sally? Why not leave her behind? Ten to one she couldn’t climb.

The more he thought of these things the less certain he became about any one of them, the less inclined to any course of action. It was simpler to do nothing; to go on as he was. It suited him very well. Why add complications that would certainly prove difficult and might, even, prove disastrous? The girl was content. She made no demands. She had, he imagined, all she wanted. She was a simple creature. She asked so little of a man and had obviously quite recovered the equilibrium she had temporarily lost through that silly unsuitable love affair. Why spoil her by inoculating her with his own subtleties and temperamental reactions?

One thing, at least, was certain. Out of these hints, these tentative plans for the future, out of his illness and the long close days of his convalescence they came together in a depth of feeling and passion hitherto unknown between them. And from this again was born Saril's desire for the freedom that would allow him to safeguard Sally's position by making her his wife. He finally decided to move in the New Year, to do something about it, to begin that process which eventually would wipe Margot out for ever. Well, she'd been wiped out long ago in actual fact; nothing but sentimentalism kept her hanging about still on the edge of his perceptions, accounted for the strange aversion he felt from making the position legal. But he did not mention the subject to Sally. Time enough. . . .

He was staggered one day when she said she wished they might have a child.

"Why?" he asked.

"Wouldn't you like one?" she inquired, by way of answer, a trick not usual to Sally. He laughed as at a very good joke.

"There was a young woman named Caroline . . ." he began.

"I know. . . . But wasn't she nice *once*? As a little girl?"

"Perfectly horrid always."

"I expect you only imagine that."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, I've not known any *altogether* horrid children."

"That's no reason, I assure you, for asserting that there are none. You should read *High Wind in Jamaica*."

Sally smiled in that fashion so singularly her own which negated a conclusion without words. Saril found it distinctly fascinating.

"Anyway, there are too many people in the world."

A little lift of Sally's arched brows acknowledged the familiarity of this line of argument.

"Don't you know, my child, that long before the war, when poverty and unemployment weren't very much regarded by the powers that be, when they were taken for granted as the necessary accompaniments of our blessed civilisation, it was alleged by social workers that nothing really effective could be done about it unless it were possible to keep the birth-rate

stationary for at least three years? And of course it wasn't. Not for three *days!* Not for *one!*"

"But *we aren't* poor."

"Not *so* poor, perhaps. But the argument of numbers still holds. All the professions are crowded out. Middle-class youth is dished, whichever sex it belongs to. . . . Fewer jobs for young men and none at all for young women pretty soon, if the present belief continues that women can live on air. Women are the economic concern of their men-folk, poor wretches, if they happen to have them. Fathers, brothers, husbands. And there aren't enough husbands to go round, thanks to our wars and infant mortality. No, no, Sally, the business of having children has become a purely selfish business, a mere satisfying of the personal ego. The real benefactors of the race are those who have none, and the people who still write and talk of children as a national duty are mad and ought to be locked up."

Sally thought of Gilbert Yorke, who would have agreed with Saril, and of Mildred, who would not, but she said nothing, for she had nothing to contribute to the discussion, which seemed to her a very excellent reason for adding nothing to it. So Saril went on with his monologue and all the while Sally thought it a pity he and Gilbert Yorke couldn't meet and get to know each other. And presently she forgot to follow the argument at all and fell to wondering where Gilbert was now and what he was doing and whether he had forgotten Mildred and if he was happy, and presently, looking down upon her, Saril saw that she was asleep.

Well, well, it must seem rather like sour grapes to her, he thought, a mere result of his peculiarly unsuccessful incursion into fatherhood. He sat staring at the fire and thinking of the initial dismay which had flooded him when he had known that Margot was going to have a child and which later had seemed to him a good thing only because he thought that by the child he might for ever hold the mother. Motherhood not as a loving bond but as a fetter. . . . That, now he came to think of it, was the highest conception he seemed ever to have had of it. And somehow, now, when he looked at Sally's sleeping face there seemed something wrong with it.

## CHAPTER NINE

(1)

The week-end before Christmas John Saril took Sally down into the Surrey border country, in order, he said, to see some winter-flowering shrubs

in a garden there, but also because he felt a sudden urgent need to escape from the black fogs which had enveloped Camberwell so perpetually for the past few weeks. But to this he did not refer. The flowering shrubs, he knew, would be excuse, reason, enough for Sally.

Gipsy went with them and Ruby was left to keep the house in order and to draw her own conclusions. Within an hour of leaving the house, however, Sally had forgotten all about Ruby, for the train had carried them clean out of the fog-belt that surrounded London and was drawing them along a high clear belt of country green with fir and pine and topped with a sky which, if not blue, was at least visible—and it was so long since Sally had seen the sky that she felt as if summer had untimely arrived. But when they reached their station, it was cold and there was a hint of snow in the air. They walked sharply along a steep open ridge for a mile or so, to come presently upon an inn at which Saril said they were expected. They went in, were shown up to a room where a bright fire burned and whose window looked across miles of outstretched moor, stuck here and there with pine and fir, all bending one way like Emily Brontë's trees, showing the force and direction of the wind that blew up there. It looked, Sally thought, cold and wild; desolate, too, and a little frightening, so that she glanced back, like a child, at that reassuring warmth upon the hearth. Yet it was fascinating, too, and she could not tear herself away from the window, and suddenly, though that was summer and this was winter, with the hand of night already in the sky, she remembered of what it reminded her. That long day in the sun with Colin came back to her, a sharp, surprising pain. She said faintly, without turning: "Is this anywhere near Hindhead?"

"Half-a-dozen miles away. Do you know Hindhead?"

"I went there once," she said, coming away then from the window and going over to the fire.

Saril did not ask with whom; he fancied he knew and that it didn't matter—a conclusion which Sally's serene face seemed comfortably to confirm. Warming herself there before the fire Sally knew only that the pain had gone, that sharp though it had been it was also brief and unimportant, like a stitch in the side after too sharp a walk. Holding out first one foot and then another to the blaze she felt nothing, nothing at all but a quiet steady content which beat within her like a pulse and yet seemed to flow out of and around her and to embrace the universe.

"How lovely to have a fire in a bedroom!" she said. "A proper fire!" at which she smiled, thinking of the gas-fires at Holly Lodge she thus belittled

and of how grateful she had been to them when first she went there, how luxurious she had thought them.

Saril did not say he'd made sure of the fire by ordering it when he engaged the rooms. He said instead: "I've been here before—years ago," and though he did not say with whom, any more than had Sally, she thought she knew. She wondered a little, if that were so, why he should have chosen to come here with her now, but she asked no questions, just smiled at him and stooped to pat Gipsy as he lay on the hearth-rug in some eighth heaven of delight that had magically followed the seventh which had been the run across the open heath. He twisted his head and let his eyes rest approvingly upon his owners, his tail thumping the floor. "I don't know what we're doing here," that dark beautiful gaze seemed to say, "but it seems to be all right." Nevertheless, though he edged a little nearer the blessed warmth the dark gaze followed their every movement. It was only all right, he wanted them to know, so long as they shared these unexpected heavens with him. Nothing was going to induce him to stay in either of them alone.

(2)

They tramped across the heath next morning to the garden Saril had come to see. The large flat-fronted house to which it belonged was shuttered and dead-looking, but the garden, at least at the point from which they regarded it, was most gloriously alive. Saril walked up to one of the men working in it and asked for somebody by name. The man went away and presently came back with the tallest and thinnest man Sally had ever seen, who stared first and very hard at Saril, then away from him to Sally and back again to Saril. Suddenly he took off his hat and grasped Saril's outstretched hand. "If it isn't Mr. Saril," he said. "Why, bless me, I thought you was a ghost, sir."

"Not yet, Mallard," said Saril, "though you're to be excused for thinking so. Sally, this is an old friend of mine, Mr. Mallard. Mallard, my wife."

Mr. Mallard looked faintly surprised, recovered himself and shook hands with Sally, into whose pale face a becomingly faint colour had swept. She observed with pride that Mr. Mallard was overjoyed at this unexpected meeting and though much of the subsequent conversation was beyond her, she sensed that it concerned things which he and John Saril had formerly shared and from which, it appeared, Mr. Mallard had lamented continually that Saril had dropped out. Presently, seeing how absorbed they were, she took Gipsy and wandered off with him around the garden. When she came

back Saril and Mallard were still deep in conversation, but Saril put out his hand and drew Sally towards him.

“I’ve been telling Mr. Mallard, Sally, that we think of going plant-hunting in the spring in the Sierra Nevada,” he said.

Mr. Mallard smiled. “And I’ve been telling *him*, madam, that he’s a spring too late. He ought to have come with us last year. That’s about the fifth expedition he’s missed. Wicked, *I* call it.”

There was a little pause, then Saril said: “Do you think my wife will manage the climbing? She’s keen but hasn’t done any yet.”

Mallard considered.

“It’s a bit hard-going, sir, but quite possible I should say for ladies,” but Sally thought he looked as though ladies had much better keep their place and stay behind. “The cold wind was the worst thing, sir. Like a knife it was on some of the cols. On the other hand, the levels were a good deal too hot for comfort—and as there are practically no trees there was precious little shade. A desolate kind of country, sir, but good from our point of view.”

The plant-hunting point of view, Sally thought, feeling somehow completely shut out by that “our.”

As if he understood this Saril smiled at her and said: “Oh, well, perhaps we’ll go and have a look at it for ourselves,” and then to Mallard: “I’d like to see what I could do with that Anarrhinum. Didn’t you get *anything* out of the seed you collected?”

“Devil a plant, sir. . . . But we did well with the Spanish Alpine buttercup—a lovely thing. I can spare you some of those, if you like, sir.”

“No use to me at the moment, Mallard, I’m afraid, thanks all the same.”

“Well, whenever you like, sir. . . . You’ve only to give me a ring.”

“Right you are,” said Saril, offering his hand. “Good-bye, Mallard. I congratulate you on the fine show you’ve got. Remember me to Sir William if you’re writing.”

“I will, sir. He’ll be surprised, I can tell you. He often speaks of you, sir. Quite like old times it’s been to see you.”

Sally thought Saril looked a little less elated than when she had gone away with Gipsy; but she supposed that was only natural. It can never be pleasant, she thought, to hear of the good things you have managed to miss

and Mallard seemed full of them. But Saril's conversation was easy enough and she supposed, as it went on, that she was mistaken.

"Fine chap Mallard and a first-rate gardener," he said. "Did you ever see such perynettass?"

Sally had never seen any before of any quality whatever, but Saril had obviously forgotten that, so she, too, waxed enthusiastic about the perynettass and all the other winter-flowering shrubs, which she thought truly wonderful to see in mid-December.

"I'd like to take him with us if we get off in the spring," continued Saril, "if Sir William will spare him. But that won't be easy—two springs running and a personal jaunt at that."

"Do you know Sir William very well?"

She didn't say "Sir William who?" Sally was always able to separate the essential from the non-essential in a conversation, which Saril had long ago placed heavily to her credit. He said now: "I used to. Very well. He's a keen gardener and grows some of the best winter-flowering things in the country." He laughed. "And goes to Egypt every year while they're out! I sound like you and your daffodillies, don't I?"

"Yes," said Sally.

Saril laughed again.

"Having planted them you have to be there when they flower or you feel cheated. You can't take them, as Sir William takes his perynettass, for granted."

"Not yet," said Sally. "Perhaps I will in time. But just now I can't even *begin* to believe I'll see them in flower."

The miracle of spring, Saril saw, had been increased by this much for Sally, the London-bred; it was not only that lovely things sprang out of the dark cold earth but that they sprang out of it for her, because she had planted them. If she were not there to see it she never could believe in that particular miracle. Saril smiled and pinched her arm. "But the earth isn't cold," he said. "It's warm and dark and the bulbs like it. You'll see them all right, unless they go to Australia."

Sally laughed, for this, she knew, was the common fate of lots of things you planted in London gardens.



They spent the next day walking, and, enticed by the clear cold air and brighter skies, went farther than they meant. They were all three, humans and dog, very tired when they got back to the inn, but whilst Gipsy lay with his head upon his outstretched paws, taking his rest after what he regarded as a normal day, the humans were inclined towards that self-righteous mood which overtakes those who have walked more than is their habit. It was Saril who suggested that Christmas spent in the country might be better than Christmas spent in Camberwell, but Sally needed little persuasion to this point of view, even though she did not relinquish without a pang her own personally planned, cooked and controlled "first" Christmas. "You've cooked enough dinners for me this year, goodness knows," said Saril. "You've earned a change," and Sally acquiesced. Besides, the more walking she did now, she told herself, the easier would she find the climbing they planned for the spring in the English lake district, about which Saril had already fired her ready imagination. The very names of the places—Honister Pass, Skiddaw, Great Gable, Pike O'Stickle, and the rest—filled her with a deep rich pleasure and sat immovably in her mind wrapt in unspeakable loveliness. She saw, too, that Saril was pleased with her present walking performance, and with her pleasure in the simple formula of these days. It astonished her to find how easy it was to please him, and how much, in pleasing him, she pleased herself. All thought of Ruby and of the reputation she had left behind in her keeping faded from her mind. Forgotten, too, were the Braceys and Ruby's unnatural friendship with them, about which she had refrained, for reasons she understood neither then nor afterwards, from informing Saril.

In these days of soft mild weather, open air, of frank and easy companionship; in these moonlit nights of quiet passion and deep slumber Sally was happier than she had ever been in her life, and so, too, was Saril, whose mind was now firmly made up, spurred at last to action by the mood of this brief holiday, the first he had had for years. Not only was he resolved to take the initial steps as soon as they got back towards legalising his position with Sally, to sell the Camberwell house and find somewhere to live in the country, but to begin the search at once; to find, if possible, a suitable house in the district in which they were staying. They had already looked at one or two on their walks, small places all, well outside their respective villages and showing traces of not very successful gardens. Gardens, as Saril explained to Sally, were not too easily here to be obtained. In the light sandy soil of the neighbourhood nothing grew really easily save the pine, the fir, the heather and gorse. You fought for your garden and paid for it—a

hundred pounds an acre at a rough computation. But so much the more fun, said Saril and Sally agreed.

They were particularly taken, on the very last day of their stay, by a little house set cunningly against a pine wood, a little house of two storeys, with gracious winning lines and a single golden cypress set like a sentinel in shining armour against its front porch. They loved it so much at sight that they walked three miles to get the key and found that they liked the look of it from the inside even far more. They chose their rooms, arranged their furniture, examined the view from each window, grew ecstatic over the setting sun that streaming through the pinewood converted it into a roofless cathedral, and fell more in love with it all every minute they stayed. The house, the agent had informed them, was called Squirrels; it was for sale and at a price which Saril considered reasonable, even though he knew he could not buy it until he had disposed of Holly Lodge, which, however, he could not believe would prove difficult. He'd buy Squirrels, he decided there and then, and give it to Sally as a wedding-present. Sally smiled, but asked no questions. He could call it a wedding-present, if he liked. She felt herself his wife, ceremony or no ceremony; as married, went the phrase in her mind, as she ever would be. She did not know why it formulated itself like that, but she did not care, for she was made supremely happy by Saril's remark, which told her that he, too, felt that way and had a will towards permanency, which was Sally's sole conviction regarding marriage. It should be meant to last. She would have died rather than have asked John Saril to take the step she now knew to be in his mind. If he ultimately did nothing about it, she would understand, but that it should be there at all completed her cup of happiness and set it brimming before her.

Tired, a little foot-sore, but happy and content in the knowledge that they had possessed themselves of a three months' option upon their house, they walked home. The dark fell about them softly, like a silken gown, and the moon came over the hill and showed to each the happiness in the other's face.

(4)

Saril fell asleep in his chair that evening before dinner, and Sally's heart gave a little jump as she looked at him, for his face looked drawn and a little grey, and she knew he must be feeling very tired to fall off to sleep like that in his chair at that time of the evening. When he stirred she rose, and going over to him, sat on the arm of his chair and drew his head upon her soft breast.

“You look so tired,” she said. “Have we walked too much?”

He kept his head where Sally had drawn it, and his voice was muffled with fatigue as he said: “No, not a bit. I’m just sleepy. It’s the fire and the fresh air.”

“Are you sure that’s all?”

“Of course . . .”

“You must go to bed early. Would you like to go now and have your dinner in bed?”

He sat up.

“No, of course I wouldn’t. I’ve ordered champagne to celebrate our finding the house, and I’m not going to drink champagne in bed to please anybody.”

“Then you must go to bed early—quite soon after dinner.”

“All right . . .”

He put up his hand and stroked her face, then moved it to enfold her breast.

“Kind Sally,” he said, “lovely, darling Sally, I’m glad I met you.”

Sally put her hand over his as if she would keep it there on her breast for ever. Unseen of Saril a shadow passed over her face. She was divinely happy, but the pain that is in happiness was there for her, too, and for the first time. That and a kind of desperate tenderness lay a little heavy upon her spirit, but still she pressed his hand upon her heart as if afraid it would soon be gone for ever.

## CHAPTER TEN

(1)

They got back to London on the Tuesday, to find the fires Ruby had been ordered to leave banked up dwindled and spent, and Ruby’s idea of a cold meal so much worse than they expected that Sally cleared it away and went into the kitchen to prepare an omelette, the secret of which she had discovered by observation of Ethel, that objectionable woman who had cooked for Sanchia Hanson. Sally therefore never made an omelette without thinking of Ethel, and, by a logical process, of Sanchia. As she coaxed the omelette into shape she blamed her thoughts of Sanchia, her memory of that

white-faced, unemotional woman who had gone away to France leaving behind her, in six feet of English soil, all that she cared for in the world, for the mood of vague disquiet which, had descended upon her. Even when her mind twisted in desperation to the thought of that little house against the pines, to Saril's talk of giving it to her as a wedding-present, and to all the sweet implications of that phrase, her depression did not lift. She must, she thought impatiently, be a little tired, and Ruby's unimaginative meal and casually laid table, which seemed to give forth the very essence of Ruby's righteous disapproval, had been the finishing straw. But though she told herself these things and that a night's repose would adjust her sense of values, none of the lovely happenings of the last few days would come real again for all that. Not that blissful vision of something permanent and satisfying going on day by day in that little house by the wood, not the house itself, not the thought of herself as John Saril's legal wife; none of them. They lay, like a mirage, just outside her reach, things of dreams and mists built up out of human desires and longings. As she turned the omelette on to its dish Sally knew with sudden certainty that she would never be John Saril's wife, that things wouldn't fall out that way. All the cruel irony of fate, the unfairness of life, seemed to have risen before her, and wondering a little where all her sunny happiness had run away and why, she carried in her omelette and set it down upon the table.

Saril was engrossed in his post—a dull one, he said: a lot of bills, a demand for income-tax, and a twopenny-ha'penny Christmas card from Caroline and her brats.

“Well, next year we'll not be here,” he said, and smiled at Sally serving the omelette, and rallied her upon her serious face. But after he was in bed that night he found himself a little worried about that look on Sally's face without knowing why. As the night wore on and sleep still refused her office, he found that Sally was definitely on his conscience, and was disturbed because for this neither could he find an adequate reason. It was true he had taken her first in selfishness, that his liking for her had very little to do with it, that he would have wanted her even if he hadn't liked her at all, and that he would have been as unscrupulous about the consummation of his desires, at any time, as in fact he knew himself to have been. But it was also true that his feeling for Sally had suffered a sea change; that she was now a good deal more to him than he had even intended she should be or believed possible—a good deal more than just somebody with a pleasing body for whom he had a liking. He had grown tremendously fond of her, had achieved a community of spirit with her that was as surprising but as undeniable as the bodily delight he had in her; and he had come to know that for all she never spoke

of it these things had happened, and with the same element of surprise, for her. They had been very happy together the last few days, too happy for him to think even once of the incongruity of their ages as he so frequently did, to remind himself of the jibes regarding May and December, or at least October, that were general to such a disparity of generations. Why, then, did Sally's serious, preoccupied face perturb him? Was it because he had exposed her to the risk of having a child? Maybe, but why, after all, should that worry him, since he did not believe it worried her?—especially now that he had made up his mind to marry her though he spent his last farthing in bringing it about? Perhaps it was the mere thought of the endless things to be done before that could be achieved. They came now relentlessly crowding upon him in the dark. And something else came with them. Some hot-footed fear, some edged dismay that whispered to him that he had wasted too much time, that things left undone so long might well prove undone forever.

That meeting with Mallard—disturbing, certainly. Mallard had certainly inferred that the business of picking up the threads of his long-discarded aims and ambitions might not prove too easy. How frayed they seemed now, hanging limply down before his mental vision in a helpless, hopeless tangle that surely could never be straightened out! Well, and what if they were not? What if it were true, as Mallard's eyes had seemed to declare, that the old life was not so easily to be retrieved, if already he was forgotten, crowded out? What if he had wasted too much time, if life now could never be run back into the old familiar mould, if, so far as his work was concerned, the gap of years could never be bridged, and he must take his failures and omissions to the grave? Did it all matter so much? There was still Sally, so good, so really and truly good; there was still the life they would have together, the children they might have, the gardens they would make, the long sunny days of life in the house against the wood, the quiet, lovely nights . . . And yet his uneasiness of spirit continued, and when at last he fell asleep it was with Sally's concerned face in his mind. His troubled dreams were full of her, and in the morning he awoke to find her standing at his side, a cup of tea in her hands. Her face was pale as if she, too, had not slept very well, but she smiled and said it was nearly half-past eight and much colder; that a little snow had fallen, but that he would have to be very, very quick if he wanted to see it. Then suddenly, as she watched him stirring his tea, the smile ran off her face like sunshine from a hill, leaving it serious as he had seen it at supper, and as he lay there in the dark and been tortured by it in his dreams.

“You still look very tired,” she said. “Haven't you slept?”

“Not till nearly three. I missed you. Why did you desert me?”

She did not answer that, but she said: “You must stay in bed this morning and try to make up.”

“I can’t sleep in the daytime,” he asserted. “You know I can’t.” But Sally went away and left him, and he found, surprisingly, that he could. Yet though he did not wake until the luncheon hour was long past, he still felt singularly unrefreshed. A quick impatience seized upon him. With so much to do he could not afford to feel off-colour. What had come over him? He usually had all the health and strength in the world. Well, he would not stay longer in bed. He had a busy day in front of him. In five minutes he would get up . . .

Sally came in with lunch before they were over and sat on the edge of his bed and watched him eat and wondered what arguments could keep him in bed for the rest of the day, and knew the answer—none. She was reduced to doing what she could to keep him talking there, to spin out the conversation so that by so much at least his uprising might be delayed. And as she looked at him that little soft knock came again at her heart, like a warning, gentle but firm. “Take care, take care,” it said. Of what? Of what? She did not know. She knew nothing except that a little panic had been born inside her, that she was frightened and did not know why or at what.

“You can’t do both to-day,” she heard herself saying. “Not the City *and* the house agent’s. Go and see the agent to-day and ring up the solicitor for to-morrow. *Must* you go to the City for one?”

“Yes,” said Saril, who’d decided to use his old firm in this business of washing out Margot and so save himself at least some part of the trouble and explanation.

“All right,” said Sally. “But not to-day.”

“We ought to get started.”

“One day can’t make any difference.”

“I’d feel happier to know it was all begun. Wouldn’t you?”

“I don’t know. I *am* happy.”

“Are you? You look a little worried, Sally.”

“Only about you. I feel you ought to be made to stay in bed and stop bothering about anything or anybody.”

“I can’t. I’ve done that too long. Why, you may be going to have a baby.”

Sally smiled.

“I don’t mind,” said Sally. “You don’t have to bother about me,” and saw that that was what he was doing and that he had hoped she would ridicule the suggestion. He said: “There’s no room for illegitimate children in this world, my dear.”

Sally went on smiling.

“Oh, *you!* You’re an exception to every rule,” Saril told her. “All the same, I’d rather, if that is to happen, that we were safely married. And there’s no time to spare.”

A loud crash from the kitchen startled them both. Sally kept quite still until it was all over, then quietly took away Saril’s tray and smoothed his pillow. “Now stay there until your bath is ready. Promise.”

“What a tyrant you are!” he said, but he gave the promise she required and stayed quiet upon his pillows until she came in and once again sat on the foot of his bed.

“Have we anything left?” he inquired.

“It was pretty thorough,” she said. “Ruby’s breakages always are.”

Saril laughed.

“She’s like *Punch’s* butler,” he said.

But Sally could not claim acquaintance with this gentleman. Saril introduced them.

*“I never cracks or chips, when I breaks I smashes utterly.”*

Sally laughed and laughed, rather more, Saril seemed to think, than the joke demanded, for he said before she had properly finished: “What about my bath, young woman?”

“Not quite ready,” she said. “You’re in such a hurry.”

A sudden thought seemed to occur to him.

“Is Ruby being tiresome?” he asked her. “About our absence, I mean.”

“Oh, a little . . .”

“Get rid of her.”

“Let her stay till we leave. *I* don’t mind.”

“I think I do, rather. I won’t have her insolent to you. Tell her not to come back to-morrow.”

“But that will be awkward, as I want to get several things done in case we have people to look at the house.”

“Much better get rid of her.”

“If you’d really rather I’ll give her notice to-day and she can go at the end of the week.”

“Servants under notice are always impossible. Much better get rid of her at once and be done with it.”

“But I do want those things done. . . . I could give her a week’s money on Saturday in lieu of notice, if you’d rather.”

“Capital. Now run away and let me get up, honey. And what about coming down to the house agent’s with me? You know more about this house than I do.”

“All right. Of course,” said Sally, and was gone.

The interview with the agent proved satisfactory enough, but he could not understand why, since Saril wanted a quick sale, he refused to allow him to put a *For Sale* board in the front garden, and Saril did not explain. But Sally knew why he refused. He did not want to advertise his plans; he suspected that Caroline might have acquaintances in the neighbourhood, or thought that she might take it into her head to come to see him. As for Sally herself, she was well content to have Ruby leave at the end of the week in ignorance of their own contemplated departure.

They made an appointment over the telephone with Saril’s solicitor; had tea out, and then went back to the house and collected a bored and disgruntled Gipsy, who did not think much of the Camberwell streets after the open heath, and obviously thought them a little mad for having made the exchange. They eventually got home in improved spirits, to find the house quiet and dark and waiting patiently, like an old friend, to receive them, so that Sally said it seemed rather dreadful to remember they had spent their afternoon planning to get rid of it.

Saril went up to his study, and when later Sally looked in while the dinner was cooking, she found him sitting at his desk. He took up a sheet of paper and held it towards her.



“Read this,” he said.

It was an ordinary sheet of headed note-paper, and on it were a few lines in Saril’s clear, upright handwriting. *I bequeath everything of which I die possessed to Sarah Dunn (“Sally”), whether she be at the time of my death legally my wife or not.*

Sally read it through twice, then stood there with a fine bright mounting colour in her cheeks, her eyes a little dim. Without a word she came and laid the sheet of paper down upon Saril’s desk, put her arm round his neck, and stood there silently.

“That makes that all right, anyway,” he said. “Remind me to take it to Robinson’s to-morrow, where I can sign it and get it witnessed.” He slipped it into an envelope, wrote something outside it, and put it away in a drawer. Pushing back his chair, he pulled Sally down on to his knee and kissed her ear.

“Better still if I’d got it done to-day.”

Sally said, as she had said before, “What difference can one day possibly make?”

Saril looked at his watch. “There’s still time. It’s not six. I’ve half a mind to go before dinner.”

“You couldn’t possibly get to the City by six,” Sally demurred.

“I needn’t go to the City. Hilton would do it for me. And take charge of it, too.”

Hilton, as Sally knew, was Saril’s bank manager.

“Oh, do leave it until to-morrow morning,” she said. “I’m sure you’ve done enough running about for one day. Just sit still and finish that article while the dinner’s finishing. It’s very cold outside—I’m quite sure you oughtn’t to go out again.”

So Saril left the unsigned will in the drawer.

(2)

Over dinner Saril began suddenly to talk again of Squirrels. But though Sally listened, she had very little to say, for somehow the little house seemed thousands of miles away, out of all possible reach. She could not believe that she would ever live in it—she did not know why. It was just part of a lovely dream in which somehow she had played a beautiful and interesting rôle.

She found, with a little dismay, that she could not even very well remember what it looked like and that she would ever see it again; that she would one day go to live in it seemed but the most improbable part of the dream. Only that night, when she lay in Saril's arms and thought again that for this, whatever came of it, was she created, did the dream fade and reality come back to her. For though her love was quiet and inarticulate, she yielded herself to it as one yielding herself to life, for to Sally it was the same thing.

Yet to-night some trouble stirred still at the back of her mind that she could not understand and could not entirely quieten. Still awake at midnight, she got out of bed and drew aside the blind. The moon was waning and stars powdered the sky. It looked very cold up there and touched her spirit to awe. Standing there she tried to remember what Saril had told her about the universe—that the earth was a planet, a mere chip thrown off by the sun, that its position in space was insignificant, its civilization, like its existence, no more than an accident; that there was no reason why we should suppose that there is anything like us swinging out in space, and Saril had laughed and said that that was the most cheerful thing about it all. The universe, it had seemed to please him to remember, was entirely indifferent to emotion—all that emotion which so short a time ago had found them in each other's arms—indifferent to the things men cared for, to art, ambition, accomplishment, to human life.

It was a hard saying—too hard for Sally, who dropped the edge of the blind and crept back into bed.

Saril's hand stole out and sought her, as if even in his sleep he had missed her. And soon Sally's mind gave up its teasing problems, and she, too, slept.

(3)

She awoke with that feeling of well-being, like no other human sensation, which follows upon sound, healthy sleep, and for a long while she lay quite still, fearing to disturb the happiness which had awakened with her and which was telling her that to awaken to a new day was the highest form of earthly bliss. In five minutes she would rouse and go downstairs to make early morning tea, but for those five minutes she lay quite still, her eyes shut, allowing her comfort and content to flow over and over her.

She got out of bed without disturbing Saril, who lay with his cheek turned away from her. He did not stir, and she moved quietly, getting into her dressing-gown in the cold because the sound of the gas-fire being lighted might awaken him. The kitchen, when presently she got down to it, struck

very cold and some of the happiness that had awakened warm and lovely at her side and come down the stairs with her was immediately slain by it. Cold kitchens in which boilers incontinently went out were so very familiar a little bit of everyday life; even the quiet joys of the night, the satisfactions of many hours of sleep, thinned out a little in their presence. Sally would have been glad if the boiler had not chosen this particular time to misbehave, and frowned at it as she stood waiting for the kettle to boil, thinking that she must remind Ruby to rake it out more thoroughly. Gipsy, too, thought the kitchen cold, and stood at the door asking to be let out, not understanding Sally's hesitation, for he had never appreciated the fact that since the wilderness had disappeared his morning run in the garden that had taken its place was in disfavour. Sally, however, put her head outside, saw that the gate which led into the garden was shut, and let the dog out into the long narrow strip of ground at the side of the house. Then, because it really was a cold morning and she was shivering a little, she shut the door upon him. The kettle, surely, was terribly slow, and standing by the table, in front of the spread tray, Sally yawned, as if after all the night had not been long enough. Almost the end of the year—only one more day to go, she reflected, and found herself, like most other people, a little sobered by the thought. But when she tried to push her mind forward, to send it exploring into the New Year, it jibbed and would tell her nothing.

The postman came, making a great clatter and banging, as he usually did, and setting Gipsy barking. Poor Gipsy, he must be cold out there. She must let him in. But at that moment the kettle boiled up and over, and hastily she made the tea and ran upstairs to collect the letters. As she stooped to pick them up she heard her name called faintly, called back "Coming," and turned to run back to the kitchen for the tea-tray. Before she got as far, Saril's voice came again—"Sally! Sally!" this time carrying accents of such urgency that it sent her spinning round and flying up the stairs in consternation. There at the open door she saw Saril, dressing-gown clad, his hand at his side, his face ashen. "Brandy," he gasped as she reached his side, and half-led half-dragged him back to the bed.

"Oh, lie down, lie down," she said, "keep still, my dear!" and with terror and certainty knocking at her heart rushed away downstairs to get the brandy.

She saw when she came back with it that he was beyond anything the brandy could do for him, beyond any aid, too that she could give him. He died in her arms without fuss or cry. He breathed her name once and looked

at her in mute despair before the sight of her agonised, pitying face and the despairing memory of things undone faded from him for ever. . . .

Sally, who had seen death before, put down the brandy glass and sat weakly on the edge of the bed. It was not grief which shook her in those first few instants, but a sense of something made suddenly clear. This, then, was the explanation of her troubled mood: she must, all the time, have had this dread in her heart, have known that this or something like it would happen. She felt cold, horrified—a hundred things, but not surprised. This sense of fatality, of sweet things never to be, had been with her all the time, only she had not recognised it.

Presently she got up and did mechanically the necessary usual things. She felt nothing, suffered nothing. Her eyes were dry.

Later she went to the 'phone and called up Dr. Browne, who came and unhesitatingly gave the necessary certificate. Death from sudden heart failure, he said, by no means unexpected. His heart had been in a very weak state. He asked Sally very few questions, but he looked at her with concern, wondering what her position was and what she would do now. If there was anything, he said, that he or his wife could do. . . . Nothing, said Sally, really nothing. The hand she gave him was cold. The eyes that looked into his calm and unafraid, and yet somewhere deep down within her terror was beginning to rise.

He went away, and presently Ruby arrived to receive the news with many exclamations of horror and interest, looking at Sally with eyes alternately widened with fear and narrowed by respect and curiosity.

“You must feel *awful*,” she said. “Why don't you go and lay down?”

But Sally shook her head and there was something about the white, rigid composure under which she was smothering her deadly fear which silenced at last even Ruby's restless tongue.

When the last things were done Sally put on her hat and said she was going out. She wanted, she said, to buy some flowers, and that was true. But she had to get out of the house, to walk and feel the cold air upon her face. The nearby shops were poor in florists', and it was close upon an hour before Sally put her key in the door and let herself into the house again.

Let herself in—she knew it as she stood on the mat withdrawing her key—to an atmosphere not alone of death but of hostility. It flew to meet her from every corner of the house, armed with anger, like a sword both sharp and heavyheaded. For one second surprise at seeing Caroline Bracey left

Sally without words, then it faded out, leaving in her mind nothing but that faint recognition of something as inevitable as all that had preceded it. Of course—the thing was simple. She ought to have thought of it before. Ruby had only waited until the door had closed behind her, to run to the telephone. One message to Peckham, another from Peckham to the City, and a couple of taxis had done the rest. “Mind you let us know if anything happens.” Why, long ago, they must have arranged it with some such form of words with Ruby, whom she had always known for their spy. Known and done nothing. She had only herself to thank. Saril was dead, and the vultures had closed already about his dead body. She ought, she felt, with a sudden rush of pity and remorse, to have saved him from that.

With her flowers against her face Sally stood confronting the enemy. The victory was theirs—uncontested.

“You get out of here,” said Caroline Bracey’s voice, ugly with triumph and revenge. “And the quicker the better. *We’re* in charge here now—and we don’t need *you*.”

The dining-room door stood open behind her, and Sally caught a glimpse of open drawers, a paper-strewn floor, and the white, unhealthy face of Caroline’s Elf. From the kitchen stairs Ruby’s moon-like face stared out, red and tense with enjoyment of the situation she had helped to bring about. Not moving, not speaking, Sally looked from one to the other.

“As quick as you like,” said Elf’s voice from the doorway. “We don’t care for your sort.”

Still Sally did not move or speak. Her face as white as the flowers laid against it, she looked at Elf as though he were not there.

“No use standing there,” said Caroline. “We’re in charge now, I tell you. If it’s your money you want, you can say what’s owing to you.”

A faint smile twisted down the corners of Sally’s mouth.

“There’s nothing owing to me,” she said, and moved on up the staircase. For one moment she thought Caroline was going to follow, to try to prevent her from going upstairs with her flowers, but she turned away and left her alone. At the top of the staircase Sally paused, opened the door of the study and looked in. All was as Saril had left it over-night. Evidently the search had not yet reached this floor; the Braceys were still hunting for what they wanted in the downstairs rooms. Sally did not doubt what they were looking for, and she wondered what they would say if she went downstairs and told them where to look. She shut the door again and stood for a moment outside

it, holding on to the handle as if afraid to let go. For one moment she thought: If I'd let him go last night, as he wanted, the will wouldn't be here. It would have been properly signed and witnessed and in safe keeping. And the Braceys' presence here wouldn't matter. Oh, poor John! Poor John! She felt suddenly that she had failed him, had allowed the one thing to happen she knew he would have given his soul to prevent.

Even as she stood there Elf Bracey and his wife came up the staircase, pushed her roughly on one side and went in. She heard the sound of drawers opening and shutting, a cry from Elf, another from Caroline, then a short silence, followed by a babble of words. They were congratulating themselves, she supposed, upon their luck—upon the way the fates had fought for them. For one moment Sally hated them so violently that she shook from head to foot with it. Murder sat in her heart and something seemed to have snapped inside her head and to be spinning round and round. By an immense effort she controlled herself and moved away along the landing to the quiet room beyond.

He lay there very quietly, all the tiredness gone already from his face, nothing there any longer but a great sense of peace and remoteness. Strange, she thought, that he should be lying there so indifferently whilst all that was going on a few yards away. All her anger slipped from her as she stood there, looking down upon this man she had served and come to love. With a tender little gesture she laid the flowers upon the heart which only a few hours since had lain above her own. "Good-bye, my dear," she whispered, "I'll miss you . . ." and was racked by the sudden thought that she'd not know where they laid him. She stooped, put her warm, trembling lips to his that were already cold, and with a last lingering look went away.

(4)

Upstairs she collected her belongings and folded them away into the small shabby trunk that had followed her fortunes since the day she had left home. Mechanically her fingers smoothed and folded her garments to order and laid them away. She had scarcely more of them than she had arrived with nearly nine months ago, and the only present John Saril had ever given her, a small, square-faced watch of gold, was on her wrist. Her packing did not take long, but even before it was finished, Alfred Bracey appeared upon the threshold and stood there impatiently regarding her. The trunk fastened, he seized it, dragged it to the door and called loudly to Ruby, who came running up the stairs as fast as her fat legs could carry her. She seized one

handle, Elf the other, and between them they bundled Sally's belongings with crazy dispatch down the stairs and along to the front door.

When Sally reached the hall Caroline was already there holding open the front door. The trunk was pitched outside, and taking Sally by the shoulders, Elf pushed her after it with so much force that she staggered down the first few steps and only recovered her balance by catching at the trunk, which she brought toppling down upon herself. The front door banged, and she picked herself up to see a passing taxi-driver regarding the scene with the profoundest interest. Presence of mind returned to her. "Hi, taxi!" she cried, and dragged the trunk through the gate in time to see that the cab had stopped a few yards down the road.

The driver got down from his box and came towards her. She indicated her box, and turning to look back for the last time at the shut house with its drawn blinds, became aware of the sharp, angry barks of Gipsy, who, though shut away from the scene of her violent departure, had not been unmindful that something unusual was happening. He was there still, of course, outside the kitchen door where she had shut him hours ago, and in the rush and terror of events forgotten all about him. Her heart swelled within her. She could not go away and leave him there. She had to go back and say good-bye. It was not possible to go without.

She ran back to the side door, opened it and called the dog softly by name. He came bounding towards her, but his frenzied barking, which she vainly tried to subdue, was his undoing. Even as they got through the front gate Alfred Bracey came hurling himself down the steps and through the gate, and before Sally or the dog realised what was happening had the animal firmly by the collar and was dragging him, snarling and growling, back through the gate and up the steps into the house. But even as Sally stood there helpless, she saw the door banged-to and found the tears suddenly and dreadfully pouring down her face, for the whole world had filled up suddenly with the most desolating and heartbreaking sound in the world, the long-drawn-out, hopeless moaning of the dog who knows himself deserted. Sally clapped her hands to her ears and began to run.

But for the waiting taxi she might have run for ever, but the sight of the driver standing there holding open the door for her stayed her frantic pace. He eyed her streaming face with curiosity, tinged with an uneasiness not unconnected with his fare. "Where to, miss?" he asked, as mechanically she got in and sat limply down in the corner. Obviously this was Queer Street, and the sooner he got out of it the better. . .

“Anywhere,” said Sally, brushing the tears from her face with the back of her hand, like a child.

“That’s a funny sort of address, miss,” said the man. “You want to go to Victoria or Waterloo or one o’ them stations now, I expect . . .”

“Yes,” said Sally, “Victoria, I think.” Victoria would do as well as anywhere else; she had to leave her trunk somewhere, of course. . . . It was some time before she could quite stop crying, and when she had succeeded the thought of Gipsy nearly made her start again. Poor Gipsy, what would happen to him? The Braceys hated dogs, and Gipsy did not like the Braceys. She wished that she had been a little quicker to have brought Gipsy would have been something, and not to know what they would do with him was the awful thing. Oh, Gip, I hope they aren’t cruel to you . . .!

But she would know nothing now about anything that belonged to Holly Lodge. She was driving away from something that had been her life, that was her life no longer, and was vaguely aware that this or something very like it had happened to her before. All her life she seemed to have been leaving things behind, beginning again. Only this time there seemed nowhere to begin. She felt very tired. She was cold and her head ached. She couldn’t get the thought of Gipsy out of her head, and she was slowly becoming conscious again that she was very frightened. She felt, this time, entirely alone. The things she’d lived with during the past year, that had become her life, were over and done with. Here she was driving relentlessly away from them. To where? To what?

Commotion was beating itself up somewhere inside her; the hands folded in her lap were trembling. Wild regrets and fears and doubts came crowding so hotly upon her that she thought she must scream. There seemed no place in the world for her and terror rose in her like a tide as she wondered what was going to happen to her now, when she might be going to have a child. Oh, she thought bitterly, if she hadn’t been such a fool, if she had managed better, she would not now be in this position. John had not meant that this should happen to her; he had wanted to know that she was safe, provided for. . . . She ought not to have allowed herself to be pushed out like this, but that will, unsigned, its existence known only to herself? Of what use was it? Yet she was convinced now that she should have taken it from the drawer, made some attempt to see that the wishes John Saril had enshrined in those few lines were carried out. . . . The memory of his dying face, with its agonised, beseeching look of frustration that seemed to be asking her to do what he had failed to do, tore at her heart, and again and again it seemed to her that she had screamed aloud, but if she did, nobody



regarded her. The world was going about its own business, and she and her miseries were not its concern.

Perhaps there was something heartening in the mere sight of it; perhaps as she sat there watching it some of the courage that had been her mother's was born in her. But gradually the blind panic which held her released its grip; little by little she ceased to be so dreadfully afraid. The unknown terrors of the future receded, and the memory of that frustrated face. She thought: I wouldn't like him to know, wherever he is, that I'm afraid, or that I blame him. . . . Her heart, she knew, blamed him for nothing. Ah no, no—there was no end to the things she owed him, for which she would be everlastingly grateful. She had known kindness, love, had desired and been desired. She had sweet things to remember, to harbour against the coming years, and whatever of good or bad, hard or smooth, they were bringing to her. She sat very still, remembering them, letting them run through her tired mind and body like healing balm, until gradually the last flicker of the tumult within her had died down and her eyes gazed quietly out upon the busy world beyond, upon the spectacle of the moving London crowd going about its own affairs. Unconsciously she lifted her chin and squared her shoulders. She looked very proud and utterly composed. So, surely, must her mother have looked when she had angered Eliza Dunn all those years ago with her remarks, when she had said: "I shan't starve nor the child neither . . ."

When Louisa's daughter stepped out of the cab at Victoria, she gave the taxi-driver the surprise of his life. That pale, composed face, that serene, untroubled gaze, the air with which she told a porter to take charge of her shabby trunk—remembering the limp creature who had got into his cab, he had expected none of these. And no trouble about his fare, after all, neither. She paid what was due and bestowed upon him a shilling tip—and with the fine, careless gesture of one who had no troubles nor expects any. As she turned away into the station to follow the porter shouldering the trunk, the driver looked at his tip, put it away in his pocket, and favoured the little group of porters standing by with a portentous wink before he climbed on to his seat, clicked up his flag and drove away.

Wonder wot 'er game is, he thought, and wot she's bin up to. Kicked out all fair and square she was, and no mistake about *that*, neither. Superior kind of servant, he supposed, one o' them there mothers' 'elps. 'Elped 'erself to too much, shouldn't be surprised. Pretty piece o' goods, though, and no mistake. Got guts, too—gawd-love-a-duck, the way she'd got out o' the bloomin' keb! You'd 'a' thought she owned it . . .

Ah well, none of 'is business, anyway, and a shillin' was a shillin', w'erever it come from. First 'e'd 'ad, too, for weeks, in the way o' tips. Rotten mean, people were, this year, Christmas or no Christmas. Three blinkin' pennies was more like it . . .

“Well, good luck to you, miss, whoever you are, and a Happy New Year,” he said, and changing into top drove on.

THE END

*Headley—Chelsea.*

*March, 1931—New Year's Day, 1932*

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Maids and Mistresses* by Beatrice Kean Seymour]