

The
UNLIT LAMP

ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING

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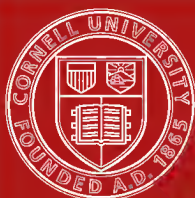
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THE UNLIT LAMP

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A STUDY OF INTER-ACTIONS

BY

ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING

Author of "Invincible Minnie," "Rosaleen Among the Artists,"
"Angelica," etc.



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CONTENTS

BOOK ONE—THE BRIDE

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A DANCE ON STATEN ISLAND IN 1890.....	3
II. A VINCELLE IN HIS NATURAL HABITAT.....	15
III. GILBERT GOES A-WOING.....	26
IV. CLAUDINE'S PECULIAR MOTHER.....	37
V. CLAUDINE LEARNS TO ADAPT HERSELF.....	49
VI. THE KEYNOTE	59
VII. THE HEDGE WHICH GREW SO FAST.....	73
VIII. A YEAR LATER	88

BOOK TWO—THE BREATH OF LIFE

I. AFTER TWENTY YEARS	97
II. THE FORSAKEN PROVIDER.....	110
III. THE SUITOR WITH CREDENTIALS.....	122
IV. THE UNABASHED OUTCAST.....	132
V. THE BREATH OF LIFE.....	143
VI. THE UNLAWFUL PICNIC.....	155
VII. STEPHENS EXPLAINS HIMSELF	170
VIII. THE THING IS ON THEM.....	181
IX. BERTIE	196

BOOK THREE—THE CUP IS OFFERED

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ANDRÉE'S RECITAL	211
II. THE BITTER TRIUMPH.....	222
III. ANDRÉE'S WEDDING	229
IV. THE BEGINNING	241
V. THE HOUSEWARMING	252
VI. DISCORDS	264
VII. THE PASTRY-COOK'S DAUGHTER.....	273
VIII. MUTINY	284
IX. HOME AGAIN	299
X. DESTINY INTERVENES	311
EPILOGUE	322

BOOK ONE

THE BRIDE

THE UNLIT LAMP

CHAPTER ONE

A DANCE ON STATEN ISLAND IN 1890

“GOOD Lord!” said young Vincelle, turning up the collar of his overcoat. “I didn’t know we were going to the ends of the earth.”

“It’s worth it,” said his friend.

They sat in total darkness while the hired hack dragged them up the hills of Staten Island; it was a bitter night, and Vincelle wasn’t prepared for it. He shivered and pulled the rug higher over his knees. He was taking a little more than his share of that rug, but Pendleton, feeling himself more or less responsible for the cold, made no complaint. It was he who had persuaded Vincelle to make the arduous trip from Brooklyn to Staten Island, to attend a dance, and to see the prettiest girl there was to see. And Vincelle was a fellow accustomed only to cities, to warm, well-lighted houses and theatres and swift transitions in street cars and hansom cabs; he was, moreover, not adaptable and not compliant.

He looked out of the window with a sort of dismay; nothing but bare trees against a sinister night sky; now and then a lighted house in a big garden. The horse went steadfastly forward, with a monotonous jerking

of his head; outside on the box loomed the swathed and shapeless figure of the coachman, who didn't appear to be driving, but to be waiting to get somewhere.

"Is it much farther?" asked Vincelle, in an ominous voice.

"It's not really far from the ferry," said his friend.

"Only being uphill all the way makes it seem longer."

"I'm numb with cold . . . Why the devil wasn't I satisfied with the pretty girls in Brooklyn?"

"It's worth it, I tell you!" Pendleton assured him, earnestly. "I've never had such good times in my life as I've had at the Masons'. Informal, but a good tone, you know. Charming people!"

Vincelle didn't answer at all. He made up his mind to be very critical; he felt that the Masons needed to be almost superhumanly charming to compensate for so much discomfort.

They began the ascent of an outrageous hill, and the cheerful Pendleton, looking out of his window, announced that they were "practically there—the house is at the top of this hill." He turned down the collar of his coat and gave his silk hat a careful rub with his sleeve; he began to stir about under the rug. But Vincelle made no preparations whatever; he intended to look cold and uncomfortable; it was not for him to please, but to be pleased. The carriage entered a gravel driveway with a sudden burst of speed, and drew up under a porte cochère. Lights were shining from the long windows curtained in white, and the sound of their wheels had brought a man-servant to the door.

For a moment Vincelle lingered while Pendleton made his arrangement with the driver, and then they entered

the house together. And it astonished Vincelle. It was so extraordinarily full of light and colour; on either side of the hall were open doors, showing big rooms brightly carpeted, with blazing fires and flowers everywhere. From some distant region he heard voices, laughter, footsteps. The man-servant ushered them into a smaller room, carpeted in red, and lined with book shelves, where on a little table before the hearth stood a huge punch bowl; he proffered and they accepted; then he led them up the fine stairway to a bedroom which was hospitably ready for them with a roaring fire. He returned with a jug of hot water.

“Dinner in half an hour, gentlemen,” he said, and went away.

No use denying that Vincelle was impressed. Certainly they didn't do things in this way at home. Jugs of hot water, instead of a chilly and possibly very distant bathroom, wood fires instead of hot-air registers and gas logs, flowers in February, instead of potted palms and rubber plants. Moreover, this idea of leaving it to a servant to welcome guests impressed him by its casualness; his mother always received visitors with ceremony, as soon as they crossed the threshold. He recognized here something exotic and rather disturbing; he got up and went over to the bureau, where he could critically regard himself, for he had decided that, after all, he would try to please.

He was a handsome fellow, very dark; he had heavy features and a sullen and obstinate mouth; he was not very tall, but stalwart and powerful. He was twenty-five, and though he looked even younger, owing perhaps to that tragic sulkiness, he had a thoroughly adult

and responsible air. He was no fop, like Pendleton; there was sobriety and decorum in the cut of his coat; he was even then every inch the business man. Evening dress did not become his thick-set figure, but he was naturally not aware of that.

“Do they have a gong—or send after you when dinner’s ready?” he asked, still intent upon his image.

“They do not! You’re supposed to know, and if you’re late, they don’t wait for you. Come on! You’re lovely enough!” said Pendleton. He surveyed his friend good-humouredly; it didn’t disturb him that Vincelle was handsome and he was not, or that Vincelle had money and was almost sure to make more. The Masons wouldn’t care about that. He was consoled by certain advantages of his own; he was lively, cheerful, witty in a very mild way; everyone liked him; he was, in an innocuous sense, a “ladies’ man,” master of the utterly lost art of polite flirtation. He was tall, slender, elegant, with a long, sharp nose and a bulging forehead; his hair and eyebrows were so light as to look almost white; he had wrinkles about his little blue eyes; it is of no significance to say that he was twenty-seven, because he was ageless, and would be in no way different ten or twenty years later.

“Come on!” he said, again.

In great decorum, conscious of their immaculate appearance and their value as eligible and admirable young men, they descended the stairs and entered the drawing-room. The subtle air of excitement which Vincelle had felt upon entering the house was intensified here, the same abundance of light and flowers, and a big fire. But with the addition now of an agreeable babel of voices.

Pendleton led him forward to a stout lady in black silk, with an august, kindly face and a very high colour.

"Mrs. Mason," he said, "may I present—"

"This must be Mr. Vincelle," she said, cheerfully, and held out her hand. "You're just in time. We're about to have dinner."

And she took the arm of a young man in spectacles and led the way into the dining-room, followed by all the others, without order or ceremony. She was not the aristocratic person the young man had expected, but she was dignified, and that sufficed for a mother. No more introducing was done, and he sat down between two girls who talked to him immediately and agreeably. But he couldn't respond; he was a little out of his element; he was accustomed to formality, ceremony, an air of sobriety, and it didn't agree with him to be plunged suddenly into the midst of a dozen strange people, without, one might say, his passport. If people didn't know who he was, then where was his prestige?

He looked about him. There were certainly a dozen people, all of them young, with the exception of the hostess, and a queer, bearded man who was unaccountably dressed in a rough grey suit and who likewise had the effrontery to wear run-down morocco slippers. That was bad; that was odd and eccentric, and everything he objected to most strongly. But the two girls beside him addressed him as "Professor," and if he were a professor, that explained it, though without justifying it. His glance left this unpleasant object, and sought for his friend, and found him opposite, lost in conversation with a girl. That must be *the* girl, of course! He stared at her, entranced. Pendleton hadn't exaggerated in the

least. She was charming, fascinating! Mentally he made use of the adjective which probably four out of every five of the young lady's admirers used. He called her "fairylike."

As a matter of fact, she wasn't quite pretty, but no male person had discovered that. She destroyed judgment. She was a little, slight thing, rather pale, with reddish hair that stood out like an aureole of fine copper threads. She had warm brown eyes, the kindly eyes of her mother; small, pretty features. But her charm and her distinction lay in her wonderful animation. One could, he thought, look at her for hours, and never tire of her gestures, of the change of expression on her mobile face. She was witty, too; or it seemed wit to him, her dear little grimaces and her jolly, good-natured banter. No, he didn't blame Pendleton in the least; she *was* worth the trip. Her dress satisfied his exacting requirements too; it was white, much beruffled, cut a little low in the neck, with short sleeves, and it had a train. It was the dress of a young lady, for in these days there really weren't any girls.

She raised her eyes and met this new young man's glance, and smiled at him—a hostess's smile, friendly, but a little impersonal. He was gratified to see that she didn't appear at all serious with Pendleton; she was, he thought, somewhat mocking. And from that hour, he decided to consider his friend's well-known worship as a thing of no consequence, simply one of Pendleton's innumerable little loves—a sort of joke. . . .

It was an excellent dinner; he couldn't remember a better, and it was surprisingly abundant. He was accustomed to frugality, and more or less austerity. His

mother had finer linen, more silver, more magnificence, but never had she had on her table a feast like this, such honest, unpretentious excellence in food. There was one wine served throughout the meal, which was not according to his standard of elegance, but it was a good wine, beyond denial.

When the meal was finished, the ladies rose and fluttered away.

“Not much time, you know!” said Mrs. Mason, warningly, as she left. “It’s after eight!”

The professor then produced a box of cigars and a decanter and they lingered for a time in the warm room, very content. But the sound of carriage wheels interrupted them; they threw their cigars into the fire and went into the big room across the hall, where Mrs. Mason was waiting. A succession of bundled-up forms went past and up the stairs, descending in due time as more young ladies; the room began to fill. Pendleton was busy taking his friend about and introducing him here and there, not leaving him until his card was quite filled and he had secured two dances with Miss Mason herself.

What was it about this particular dance which made it different from all the other dances he had attended? Why did he have such a surpassingly enjoyable evening that he looked back upon it with a smile all his life? There were pretty, lively girls, a floor like glass, good music, a matchless supper; but there was nothing unusual in that. No, there was some quite special quality about it; a charming festivity, a revel wholly youthful and innocent and happy. He held the adorable Claudine in his arms for two waltzes; he had very

little to say to her, but he was by nature taciturn; he listened instead. He was lost. . . .

The carriages began coming back and the dance guests to take their leave. He watched one group after another of bright faces vanish, then at length the front door closed upon the last one, and Mrs. Mason, with a sigh that was half laughter, sank into a chair.

"Mercy!" she said. "I'm getting too old for this, children!"

There were only the house guests left now, and the family, standing about the big room. There were himself and Pendleton, the lovely Claudine and her mother, and five other persons, whom he was beginning to be able to place now; there were a daughter and her husband, there were two bosom friends of Claudine's, and the incomprehensible young man in spectacles.

"It's after two o'clock," said Mrs. Mason. "There's a little sort of breakfast laid out in the dining-room for you young people, if you're hungry again. But don't be long over it, and don't disturb your father as you come upstairs. Good-night, all of you!"

She rose heavily.

"And, Lance, you'll put out the lights and lock up?" she added.

The young man in spectacles nodded.

"Mother," said Claudine, "it was lovely! It's so dear of you!"

Her mother looked at her for a moment with a faint smile.

"You're only young once!" she said.

Trite words, certainly, and none of her hearers felt their force. Her other daughter kissed her warmly,

her son-in-law escorted her to the foot of the stairs, and her stout, black-clad figure was seen ascending, wearily, a little bent.

She puzzled Vincelle; she had no elegance; he felt sure that his mother would call her "ordinary." Yet there was about her a dignity, an authority, he had never seen surpassed. And her way of entertaining you had a sort of vigour and originality about it; he felt that she didn't care much what other people did, or what was correct, but was concerned only with comfort, gaiety, and this unostentatious, invincible dignity of hers.

"Come on!" said Claudine, and they all followed her across the hall.

A new mood had settled upon them; they weren't conscious of being tired, but they were, all of them, subdued, inclined to a pleasant seriousness. The room was shadowy, except for a hanging gas lamp above the table, and the glow of the fire. They sat about the table, hungry in spite of the hearty supper they had consumed a few hours ago, and the young man in spectacles began to talk in an unaccountable and eccentric fashion about Pre-historic Man, and drew a picture of him, cowering and shivering on such nights as this.

"A life of incessant fear," he said. "Imagine that. Never to know security. Never to see any possibility of safety. No chance of old age."

Vincelle listened, but he felt vaguely that Pre-historic Man was rather blasphemous and Darwinian and free-thinking. It was also displeasing to observe that Claudine was interested.

"It's safety that's made us develop, isn't it, Lance?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"It's safety that's making us decline," he said. "It's making us soft and weak and dull."

"But if we weren't secure, we couldn't have any art," said Claudine.

"Art!" said the young man, with a harsh laugh. "Art! The opium dreams of drugged, idle people!"

The married sister interposed, laughing.

"Don't be so serious, Lance! Claudine, dear, you're not attending to us!"

For Claudine was sitting at the head of the table, dispensing tea and coffee. The sparkling brightness had gone from her face, she looked pale and a little weary, but lovelier than ever. Vincelle was now disposed to admire her more seriously; she had poise and dignity, and she could talk in a way to startle him. She had something to say even on the topic of Pre-historic Man; she had ideas which *he* couldn't have had.

"Life lost its meaning," Lance went on, "when it ceased to be a struggle."

"For Heaven's sake, when did it cease to be a struggle?" said Pendleton. "They forgot to tell me. I thought it was still pretty hard to get a foothold."

Lance ignored him.

"Man waged a magnificent and heroic struggle with Nature," he said, "but was defeated."

"But was it really so heroic, Lance? It was an involuntary struggle, it hadn't any aim. It seems to me that now, when we're conscious, and can really try to improve—"

"We don't. We can't. It's too late. We're in the final stage of evolution. We went the wrong way."

"Lance is a paleontologist," murmured the girl next to Vincelle. "He's wonderful, isn't he? But so gloomy!"

Vincelle had no idea what a paleontologist was, but he didn't like them. He felt horribly out of it. He couldn't be learned, and he wouldn't be funny, like Pendleton. He was quite aware that he wasn't making any sort of impression here. Claudine must have become conscious of his dissatisfaction—perhaps he showed it—for she suddenly addressed him.

"What do you think, Mr. Vincelle? Do you think we're a miserable, doomed remnant?"

He flushed.

"I've never given it much thought," he said. "I've been busy keeping up with business."

His poor little remark sounded so sulky and infantile that even he was confused.

"And politics," he added, in an attempt to sound broader-minded.

Lance drew out his watch.

"I'm going to lock up now," he said. "Five minutes before the lights go out!"

There was a chorus of good-nights.

"Don't forget that Father's asleep!" warned the married sister, as Claudine and her two bosom friends went chattering up the stairs. Pendleton and Vincelle followed them and turned down the hall to their own room. Pendleton began flinging off his clothes, but Vincelle sat motionless in an armchair before the fire.

"Who is that fellow they call Lance?" he asked.

“Oh! Him? He’s a cousin. The Professor’s protégé. He lives with them, you know. Nice chap; a little bit crazy. But then the old man is too. Both scientists, you know. Professor’s a botanist. Come to bed, old boy, and get that light out, will you?”

Tall and lanky in his night shirt, Pendleton stretched tremendously.

“Come to bed!” he said, again. “Come and get your beauty sleep, my boy. Your face is your fortune, you know.”

Vincelle answered him with a sudden burst of anger.

“Oh, yes, but I’m not quite a fool, you know. A fellow can’t hold a position in a business like mine without some trace of brains. I may not know much about Science, but I know a damn lot about the Art of Making Money. And I’m not a boor, either,” he added. “Hitherto I’ve always managed to hold my own in any sort of social gathering. I’ve been considered worthy of a word now and then. . . .”

A loud, artificial snore from his friend cut him short. He turned out the light and undressed in the firelight. But he felt his face burn in the dark with a resentment he was not able to analyze.

CHAPTER TWO

A VINCELLE IN HIS NATURAL HABITAT

HE waked the next morning to a marvelous peace. Pendleton was still sleeping beside him, and there was no other sound but his quiet breathing. Vincelle felt very wide awake; he got up instantly, and he was glad to believe, from the silence, that it was still very early and that he would be able to get home before eleven. He had forgotten to wind his watch the night before and it had stopped, but he fancied that he could sense the time. He went over to one of the windows and pulled up the shade with a rattle; it wasn't his nature to consider the sleep of friends. It was a bright, frosty morning, very clear; before him lay a neat back garden, and behind it a stable. Not a sign of life. He drew on his socks, always the first step of his routine, and suddenly a disturbing thought assailed him. He went over to Pendleton and shook him and shook him until he opened his eyes. Pendleton swore at him.

"Look here!" said young Vincelle. "Where do I shave?"

"Don't shave!" said Pendleton. "Go to sleep again like a Christian."

"No. I told Mother I'd try to get home in time to take her to church."

Pendleton pulled out his watch from under his pillow.

"Ah!" he shouted, exultantly. "Half past eleven already, my son! Foiled!"

Vincelle frowned.

"I haven't missed in years," he said. "Poor old lady! She counts on it."

"Now perhaps you'll shut up and let me go to sleep again."

"Where can I shave? Is there a bathroom?"

"Ring the bell," said Pendleton. "And some one'll bring you hot water."

But when he was dressed in the clothes he had brought with him in his bag, he hesitated to go down alone in this strange house. He strolled about the room, smoking, until Pendleton was ready, and they descended together. There wasn't a soul to be seen.

"They've all gone to church," said Pendleton.

This struck Vincelle as grossly inhospitable, someone should have been there to attend to him. But a nice little servant brought them an excellent breakfast in the dining room and after it they sat comfortably in front of the fire, enjoying cigars from an open box on the sideboard.

"As soon as they come back, we'll go," said Pendleton. And they did so. Mrs. Mason offered them the use of the family omnibus in which they had returned from church, but Pendleton said they'd rather walk. She did not invite them to stop for dinner, which Vincelle considered impolite. If she didn't want them, why couldn't she simply invite them in a half-hearted, unacceptable manner?

"I must thank you for a most enjoyable time," he said ceremoniously.

She smiled and held out her hand.

"Come again!" she said.

Claudine, too, gave him her hand, but her glance and her smile were lamentably devoid of significance. Evidently he wasn't, for her, a special person; he was nothing but a young man who had come down for a dance. They set out down the hill, and he was able now to gain an idea of the place at his leisure. It was a big wooden house with a cupola on top; it had no pretension to beauty or architectural style, it was in fact, quite hideous and ungainly, made of grey clapboards with a slate roof; square, except that on one side a little greenhouse was built out from the veranda. The garden, too, although large, was not like the gardens of other people: there was no fountain, no nicely set out shrubs. There was a beautiful old box hedge enclosing it, but inside it looked irregular and untidy.

Pendleton was talking cheerfully.

"What do you think of her?" he asked.

"Very attractive," said Vincelle.

"Did you ever see anyone like her?" he pursued.

Vincelle admitted that he hadn't.

"I don't mind telling you I'm pretty hard hit," said Pendleton.

This was something his friend had very much wished not to hear.

"What about *her*?" he asked, briefly.

Pendleton groaned.

"She's such a little flirt!" he said. "Of course, I'm not in a position to marry now, anyway. I'm not mak-

ing enough to keep myself. And by the time I can ask her . . . with all these fellows hanging round her all the time . . . Lord!"

Vincelle considered this frankness unmanly and indecorous. Never would he have admitted a liking for a young lady until he was certain that she returned it.

They crossed on the ferry, standing outside in the fine, cold air, on the deck of the ark-shaped old boat. They reached New York and just caught the Wall Street ferry and at last disembarked in the familiar air of Brooklyn. They both lived in the august Columbia Heights district, Pendleton in a house which was respectable, but no more, and Vincelle in a fine one, on a corner, with a garden quite twenty feet wide. He respected this garden, because it represented extra property and also because it kept them aloof from all neighbors; through the high iron fence could be seen its winter desolation, a complete and woeful barrenness. At the best of times it was hardly an oasis, nothing grew in it, and nothing was intended to grow in it, except a wretched ancient wistaria, two bushes of Japanese holly and a tall shrub, dry and dead. The common use of the garden was as a place in which the house plants could stand, the rubber trees and palms and orange trees in tubs. Every Spring old Mrs. Vincelle bought a number of potted geraniums and had them planted in a certain bed where they blossomed, mangily, for a month or two.

He bade his friend good-bye here and ran up the brown stone steps, opened the door with his latch key, and entered into a chill vault, dark, muffled, dismal. He hung up coat and hat on a gigantic piece of furniture

which towered up to the ceiling and which was at once a hat rack, a pier-glass, a bureau with six drawers and a low table with a marble top. Then he ran up the thickly carpeted stairs to a bedroom on the floor above where he knew he would find his mother.

Sure enough, there she was, sitting in her rocking chair, with folded hands, looking out on to the quiet street, a fragile little old lady of sixty with a contemptuous, wizened little face and melancholy brown eyes. She was dressed in her Sunday dress of black silk with a white lace vest, she wore her best earrings, her diamond brooch, and a fine wool shawl bundled about her narrow shoulders.

“Well!” she said with a smile.

Her son approached and kissed her reverently.

“I was very sorry, Mother, to miss taking you to church,” he said, “but I didn’t wake up until eleven. It was three o’clock when we got to bed.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“Did they dance on Sunday morning? Well, I dare say no one thinks of such things any longer. However, it didn’t matter, Gilbert. I had a touch of rheumatism, I shouldn’t have gone anyway.”

“Pshaw!” he said solicitously. “Your shoulder again, Mother?”

“It doesn’t matter. Sit down, Gilbert, and tell me all about it.”

He sat down opposite her, smoothing his sleek black head.

“Oh! The usual thing!” he said.

“Are they nice people?”

“Oh, yes, nice enough. The father’s a professor.”

"That may mean anything," said the old lady. "I've known some professors who were very nice people and some who were impossible. Did you see that girl that Ashley is so enthusiastic about?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"Mrs. Pendleton tells me he's head over heels in love with her."

"Oh, well, you know what Ashley is. He's always in love."

"Is she as pretty as he imagines?"

"I don't know what he imagines," said her son, a little peevishly. "She's a very attractive girl. Look here, Mother, I haven't had any dinner."

"Mercy me," cried the old lady. "And it's nearly four o'clock! Why didn't you stay in Staten Island? Our dinner's over and done with hours ago. Ring the bell, Gilbert!"

He did so and it was promptly answered by a woman servant.

"Fetch Miss Dorothy," she said.

She had risen in her agitation regarding her son's shocking hunger and began pottering about the room, frowning, lifting up little articles from the bureau and the table with trembling old hands. It was a fine, big room with a Turkish rug on the floor and an assemblage of solid walnut furniture. It was crowded with knick-knacks, photographs, a hundred and one mementoes of her past life. It hadn't the look of a bedroom, for the bureau was hidden behind a screen and the bed was a folding one, displaying nothing but an immense bevelled mirror set in a broad frame of polished wood. Her

son had never, even in childhood, seen the least trace of disorder in this room.

"Pshaw!" said the old lady, "she's asleep again, I suppose. The older she grows the lazier she gets. She's forever creeping upstairs and going to sleep. . . . All nonsense. . . . Here am I so troubled with insomnia that I don't get five hours rest out of the night and I don't think anyone's even seen me taking a nap. . . . Well, Dorothy!"

A woman stood smiling in the doorway, a stout, grey-haired woman with a tousled, guilty air, a cousin, who earned her bitter bread as a companion for various relatives. She was always spoken of as staying with Aunt This and Cousin That; after two or three months she was sent away, with a sort of rage engendered by her submission, her poverty and her stupidity, and then when the memory had worn off, she was recalled. Her usefulness was never admitted, but always exploited.

"Why, Gilbert!" she said, with an air of pleased surprise. "I didn't hear you come in!"

"I don't think you'd hear a sound if the house was on fire!" said the old lady, tartly. "It's dangerous, the way you sleep. We could all be murdered in our beds, and it wouldn't disturb you."

"Why, Cousin Selina, I wasn't asleep! I was writing letters!"

"Well, now perhaps you'll be able to attend to this poor boy. He hasn't had any dinner. And I'd calculated on his having a hearty meal there, so I hadn't planned for a very big supper. And Katie's out. Run down to the kitchen and see if you and Mary can't

fix up something nice for him. And tell Mary supper at five instead of six."

Miss Dorothy looked terrified. She knew so well the very meagre resources of this household where there was never quite enough of anything, where each egg was mentally numbered.

"I'll do my best," she said, doubtfully, and vanished.

"Now run upstairs and get ready!" said the old lady.

There were three big, unoccupied bedrooms on her floor, but it had seemed to her, and to Gilbert, more fitting for a bachelor to live on the floor above. He had a very large room there, furnished with austere majesty, an ugly and uncomfortable room which he accepted as he accepted everything else in the life his mother had arranged for him. There was a black dressing-room attached, furnished with a marble wash basin and two big clothes presses: it was supposed to belong to his room and the one next, jointly, but as Miss Dorothy now occupied that adjoining room, the second door was well bolted.

He sat down in a large, high-backed rocking chair with a tapestry seat, one of the many pieces of furniture sent upstairs in disgrace after long service. He began, absent-mindedly, to rock and to think—about Claudine. His thoughts were all distressful and clouded; he felt himself irresistibly attracted by that gay little creature, and he resented it. He resented everything about that dance, the casualness, the cheerfulness; his own home seemed to him admirably correct and majes-

tic. He felt quite unaccountably insulted. These people had treated him in cavalier fashion. . . .

He was naturally inclined to sulkiness. It was his refuge from an incomprehensible world. And perhaps his great capacity for being offended came from an equally pathetic source, perhaps it was a sort of protest made by his youth and his manhood against his bondage. He wasn't aware of the bondage: he believed that his relations with his mother were ideal and that he "humoured" her in a respectful way. But as a matter of fact, he was less free, he was more under her dominion, than even Miss Dorothy. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that he was hypnotized. He had been led to believe that he was happy; the poor, sullen lonely creature. He never laughed: he very seldom smiled; he hadn't a spark of humour or gaiety in him. Pendleton privately considered him "heavy," and heavy he was. It hadn't prevented him from making a few conquests though. His handsome face, his invincible innocence and possibly his money and his well-known ability in business had won two or three little hearts; but though he had been flattered, he hadn't been much touched. He had never before in his life experienced anything like this; this was positively uncomfortable. He was obsessed and annoyed by the memory of Miss Mason of Staten Island. Her sparkling face, her liquid voice, the surprising novelty of her had completely captured him. The idea of a girl as pretty and popular and charming as she being able to talk with a—what was it—a paleontologist in so grave a way. . . .

Summoned by Miss Dorothy he descended through the silent house to the dining-room in the basement, always

used when the family was alone, and attacked the dismal feast set before him. He was silent because he was silent by nature, having nothing to communicate, and the two women were silent, for what in Heaven's name had they to say to him or to each other? Meals in that household were perfunctory and ascetic; the old lady didn't like to waste money on food, it needn't be either appetizing or nourishing so long as it was according to tradition, and decent. They finished, and all went solemnly up-stairs again; the little old lady first, noiseless over the thick carpet, incredibly slight and unsubstantial, then her son, the staircase creaking under his heavy tread, the quiet darkness reverberating with his loud, masculine cough, and last of all Miss Dorothy.

They went into the back drawing-room and sat down in the chairs they invariably occupied. The old lady closed her eyes, for that nap she always took, and always denied. Miss Dorothy, owing to the fact of its being Sunday, couldn't take up her fancy work, which was then one of her strongest claims to gentility and gave her at least a semblance of elegant uselessness, and she too closed her eyes, not to sleep, but to continue in her weary and muddled brain her intricate calculations, "planning" she called it. She had to plan for a new black skirt. Could she manage with that alpaca Cousin Selina had given her and if not could she possibly spare the money to buy a new one? She hadn't a salary; simply, when she left to stay with the next relative, Cousin Selina would give her something in an envelope and it might be enough or it might be very little. She had no occupation for her thoughts but her

planning; poor soul. She hadn't a single interest in life.

As for Gilbert, he being a man, had to read the Sunday newspapers and to smoke. He had an arm-chair and a foot-stool and a smoking stand, placed ready for him, in a good light. But his peace was gone. He was sunk in black depression.

CHAPTER THREE

GILBERT GOES A-WOOING

“WELL . . .” said the old lady. “She’s very—
peculiar.”

There was no word her son could have disliked more; he frowned.

“Why?” he demanded. “In what way? How is she ‘peculiar’?”

“She’s been brought up,” the old lady began, and stopped. “After all, you’re the one to be suited, Gilbert. You’re marrying her, not I. If you’ve got it into your head that she’s the only woman on earth to make you happy, very well. Marry her. And I only hope you *will* be happy.”

“Yes,” he said, “that’s likely, if you’re going to quarrel with her.”

“Gilbert,” said the old lady, “I’ve never quarreled with anyone in my life.”

True enough, he was obliged to admit it. He saw that he had used a wrong word. She didn’t quarrel, she didn’t argue. But she conquered. And when she disapproved of people, she changed them. He had never tried to understand her methods, but he had seen the results. He supposed it was force of character and that it must be admirable and beneficent.

"You needn't worry about that, my boy," she went on. "I've never yet had a word of disagreement with any of my sons- or daughters-in-law."

"I know it, Mother. But living under the same roof . . . and she's been brought up very differently."

"Yes; just as I said," the old lady observed. "Very peculiar. . . . However, if you've made up your mind, my boy, there's no use talking about it. I'll do my best, as I always have done and always expect to do."

Her son believed this; he had never doubted that she was a perfectly noble, perfectly wise and magnificent woman and he worshipped her. There was an inscrutable and malicious smile on her shrunken lips; the changeless, infinitely remote smile of god-like amusement at earth's follies which one sees on the face of a bronze Buddha. She had a majesty beyond the need of charm or of fashion. She belonged to an old Brooklyn family which had become aristocratic by reason of having lived in the same place for four generations, and she had married into a similar one. She had always been rich and immeasurably secure, living isolated in the big house on "The Heights" like the somewhat ferocious monarch of a desert isle, an obscure and uncomfortable existence in which nothing was accomplished and nothing enjoyed. She disdained society as frivolous; and all luxury was to her abomination. She made, she said, a "proper use" of her money.

Her chief claims to moral excellence were these: that she had borne six children, and that she had lived for sixty years; and above all because of her marvelous lack of sensibility, an imperviousness which no actual image of Buddha could have surpassed. She had looked

on at suffering, anguish, despair, unmoved, and that was fortitude; she had witnessed birth, death, without a gleam of curiosity or speculation, and that was common sense. She had been "just" toward her little children with all the blindness proper to that virtue.

"It makes no difference *why* you do things," she always said. "A thing's *right*, or it's *wrong*. I don't want to hear your reasons."

He recognized the old familiar attitude now, the old air of saying—"Very well; go your own way, and learn by bitter experience!" Within herself he felt she was saying—"You'll have to reap what you sow. You'll make your bed and you'll have to lie in it." And so on.

"You don't approve of my marrying her then, do you?" he asked.

"You're twenty-five years old," said his mother, "You're old enough to decide for yourself."

He felt more irritated than his ideas of filial piety allowed. He drank his coffee slowly and reminded himself that his mother was a widow and that all her other children had married and left her. His thoughts were readily distracted that day, though, and goodwill very easy to him. He sat back, lighted a cigar and looked about him, at the dismal basement dining-room, used for all the family meals, with its barred windows through which one could see the feet of passersby, and the horrible walnut buffet and sideboard and the massive square table, and the twelve chairs, three invalided and permanently in corners, the faded carpet that had once been upstairs, the immense crayon picture of a lion's head, the general economical hideousness of this

room which proclaimed the old lady's genial idea that anything was good enough for the inmates of the house, and the owner. He had never liked the room, but he fancied it this morning as it *might be*—a Paradise, with the charm, the youth, the mysterious strangeness of a young wife in it.

Here, without question, the young wife would have to come, because Gilbert could not and would not consider leaving his mother alone. And to be candid, dared not. He owed everything to his mother, he said. Hadn't she made sacrifices to give her children every advantage, lessons of various sorts, and unstinted moral advice? She talked candidly of moulding their characters, and that is just what she had done. She had moulded them in her own image, supreme and devastating blasphemy. They were all of them like fainter copies of her own sharply written character. This man sitting across the breakfast table from her now was literally made by her. By nature credulous and imitative, he had lent himself perfectly to her manipulations; he thought exactly as she had taught him to think; he disagreed with her in some points, because she had taught him that a man must in certain respects disagree with women; he knew things, he had had experiences unknown to her, but she had caused him to believe, sadly, that a man must so conduct himself. She had taught him that, as a man, he must disappoint his mother. She despised him a little, but she certainly, undeniably loved him.

She looked at him, stalwart black-avised fellow, with his heavy brows and his obstinate mouth. Wasn't he *manly*, she thought!

“Ah, well!” she said with a sigh. “No doubt it’s all for the best, Gilbert.”

He finished his breakfast in manly silence,—which no decent woman dare trouble—and getting up, went round the table to his mother, dutifully to kiss her good-bye.

“I’m sorry you didn’t—take to her, Mother,” he said, a little grieved.

“Well,” she answered. “*You’re* marrying her, Gilbert, not *I*.”

“If she’ll have me,” he said. “I haven’t asked her yet, you know.”

He had long ago promised his mother never to propose marriage to any woman without telling her first. And it was in loyalty to this promise that he had lured Miss Mason from Staten Island to Brooklyn under pretense of showing her a wonderful picture on exhibition in a department store—a Dutch peasant sweeping her cottage, and the motes in the sunbeam were reputed marvelously life-like. It was a quite natural thing, after gazing at this picture for fifteen awkward minutes, to suggest a call on his mother living so near. The old lady had heard more than one mention from her son of this Miss Mason from Staten Island, and she knew, and Miss Mason knew, that this was a visit of inspection.

After it was over, and the beloved young lady had left the house on his arm, he had, of course, to take her back to Staten Island. And never had she been so nice to him, so kind, so gracious, never had he felt so encouraged. The next evening was her birthday, and he had been invited to the little dance by her mother.

“Why don’t you come to supper?” Miss Mason had suggested. And they had both turned red and become

silent, a little startled and alarmed. Because they knew, both of these, that this would be the time. . . .

"She may refuse me," he said, and with a glance his mother saw all the anguish he was trying to hide.

"I don't think she will!" said she with a most detestable smile, which fully expressed her opinion of Miss Mason and her matrimonial hopes. "I don't think there's much fear of *that!*"

But Gilbert knew better, and he spent a day of black misery in his office. As the afternoon wore on he became *sure* that she would refuse him. She had such a lot of fellows hanging around—and all of them had those qualities which he lacked, those fascinating social graces. . . . He so silent, so unready, a clumsy dancer, a man interested in nothing but business—and the Republican party. He dreaded, he shrank from asking her, and yet he was feverishly impatient to do so before those other fellows had a chance.

Never was there a lover more humble than he. And he liked to be humble; he liked to think how a great, powerful fellow like himself could be brought low by a slip of a girl. It was a wonderful example, he thought, of the Power of Love. Well, who knows. . . .?

He had been seeing a great deal of Miss Mason during the past three months. He had gone with Pendleton to make their party call in due form and he had found her on that occasion more friendly and more intimate. It was a Sunday afternoon, and she was alone with Lance. Her mother and father, she said, had gone out for a walk in the Silver Lake woods—which Vincelle thought a very peculiar thing for an elderly couple to do, above all, on a Sunday afternoon, when respectable

people were best invisible. There were a good many things about this family which he could not approve of; Lance was one of these. That thin sunburnt young man in spectacles with his gloomy face and didactic air jarred upon him beyond reason. He had observed too, that Lance had been reading to his cousin, in cosy intimacy, before the fire in the library.

But Claudine had been remarkably kind to him, and gentle and friendly. Moreover, Lance had had the decency to remove himself and his big book. Pendleton, of course, monopolized the talk, with his flippant nonsense, but Gilbert felt that that did him no harm. He felt that he, sitting in silence, with only a word now and then, a sensible word, mind you, appeared more manly, and he was right! He touched the heart of the lively young lady; she felt suddenly rather sorry for him, and because he was stupid she fancied him more honest than others. She quite cordially invited him to come again.

He did, and this time alone. He didn't even mention the fact to Pendleton, and when Pendleton learned of it he took it amiss.

"I introduced you there," he said, "I didn't think you'd go behind my back that way, Vincelle."

"I was invited," said Gilbert, "and I went. I didn't know the family was your private property. I didn't know I had to account to you for every—"

"Damn unfriendly, *I* call it!" said Pendleton.

Gilbert smiled scornfully.

If their friendship had been a more genuine one, this would have caused a serious quarrel; but it was a forced sort of friendship, simply brought about by propinquity.

They had grown up together, gone to the same school, the same dancing school, they moved in the same set. They had no respect for each other; Gilbert despised the other's frivolity and lack of money-making ability, and Pendleton looked upon Gilbert as a surly and ungenerous young boor. After their brief disagreement about Miss Mason they went on as usual, except that they were wary about the Staten Island visits. They went down there at different times, never again together, and each took what advantage he could get.

The unhappy Gilbert had suffered much, and perhaps learned a little. He had been dreadfully humiliated. Once Claudine had asked him to ride with her and he had been forced to admit that he didn't ride. Her astonished face. . . ! And he hadn't read any of those books she knew so affectionately.

He had, when younger and slimmer, played tennis, but of late years since he had become so engrossed in business, his great recreation had been poker. As for books, he liked reading as much as the next man, provided they were entertaining books. And he liked music, too; not operas, but not trashy stuff, either; he liked Schubert's *Serenade*, and *Traumerei*, and things like that. . . . He hadn't Pendleton's talent for picking up information, for knowing something about everything, but when he heard Pendleton talking so glibly, he consoled himself by remembering that he had had an education *exactly* like his, of precisely the same length and the same price. So Pendleton couldn't really know any more than he did, no matter how he talked.

The free, careless air of that household had encouraged him. In other families where there were marriage-

able daughters, he had had an uncomfortable feeling of eligibility, he had felt that everything he did was important and significant, and that he must be careful. Here it was obvious that no one cared. He could come and be welcome, or he could stay away. He had begun to bring flowers and candy, which Claudine received with pretty appreciation. But other people brought flowers and candy, also, and were as nicely thanked.

He made an effort to study her to learn if she really was a flirt, as Pendleton said. But he couldn't decide. She reigned like a queen over a court of admirers, but without undue coquetry. She was, in spite of her gaiety and liveliness, a serious girl. She read marvelous books. She played astounding music; she was a great companion to her father on his botanical walks and she collected "specimens," dried and pressed in a book. Weeds, they looked like to Gilbert, but he was willing to admit their value. He had never imagined anyone so happy as she, so interested and delighted with life. She was a fine horsewoman, she skated and danced beautifully; she took long, long walks in the country, and enjoyed them wholeheartedly; she went to the opera, to concerts, she read, she practised her music, she painted in water-colours, she had any number of friends and all sorts of informal society, she hadn't a dull or idle moment in her existence.

He saw no evidences of domesticity in her, but that didn't trouble him. It wasn't an era of domesticity. A wife, in his class, was an ornament and a diversion. Domestic science was an unknown term to both of them. Claudine had escaped the thorough training of her two elder sisters; her mother had conscientiously taught.

them to cook, to sew, and to superintend a household, just as she herself had been taught, but with this youngest and brightest child, she had lost heart. She was growing older; she was tired. And moreover, it seemed to her that the time for all that had passed. No one would ever expect Claudine to cook or to sew.

“Let her enjoy herself while she can,” her mother said to herself. “Youth is over so soon.”

She would make a charming hostess, let that suffice. Gilbert asked no more. He was completely dazzled.

His feelings would be incomprehensible to a later generation. They were such polite, respectful feelings! He never thought of Claudine and himself as a woman and a man. She was a young lady, and he was a gentleman, and even in his most secret soul he respected her. He wanted to marry her and he let it go at that. He didn't even analyze her charms.

He was a man of invincible honesty. He wasn't clear-sighted; he had no self-knowledge, but neither had he any subtlety. He loved Claudine: he longed to give her everything he had. He felt himself unworthy and inferior beside her purity, her innocence, her lovely young spirit. He had tried to the best of his ability to set before her whatever advantages there might be in marrying him, but not through conceit, only to persuade her.

He had brought with him on one occasion an old magazine, to show her an article in it— “The Old Vincelles of Brooklyn.” It had been written by a sort of Miss Dorothy, a humble and admiring relation, and it was a narrative of that singularly unillustrious family, beginning with the Huguenot who had come first to

American shores, and mentioning with solemn veneration a long line of lawyers, ministers, and business men, all respectable, serious, and thrifty. Not a vagary, not a passion, among them.

He showed her this not from pride—although he was proud of it—but merely as an added inducement, in the same spirit he had talked to her of his “business prospects,” and his remarkable progress. It was as if he said, “Here is all I have, beloved girl, won’t it compensate for what I am?” And now he rested his case. He had nothing further to offer. His inarticulate and unhappy wooing was at an end. He was going to ask her, quite simply, if she would have him.

He arrived at the house in the June twilight. The house was still unlighted, the windows were open, the curtains fluttering gently in a little breeze. There was a magical fragrance from the garden: it was in all ways a magical evening. He never quite forgot it.

He dismissed the carriage at the gate and walked along the drive, the gravel crunching under his deliberate tread, the perfumed breeze blowing against his miserable and sullen face. Because, under his serious and pompous demeanor, he was after all, very young; almost a boy. And his whole heart was set on this, his whole heart! Claudine was the one woman on earth for him.

If she only knew the power she held in her little hands, he reflected!

CHAPTER FOUR

CLAUDINE'S PECULIAR MOTHER

§ i

NO one could have known this better. She was in her room, standing before the mirror, looking with critical attention at her image. She was at her loveliest and well she knew it. She was in white, with a pale green sash about her twenty inch waist. Her red hair was curled over her forehead in a low bang, below which her brown eyes were marvelously bright and alluring. Her face was radiant with happiness, but there lay over it a faint shadow, a sort of tenderness.

This was to be the day. She knew it. She had read his determination in his face the day before. And it was all coming out just as she had wished it to come. Ever since her school days that had been her dream—to be proposed to by a dark, handsome man in evening dress, at a dance. There had been other proposals but none of them just right; there had been other men to whom her fancy had strayed, but never like this. She felt for this silent and stalwart young fellow a pity, a compassion that bordered on pain. She didn't like to let him out of her sight. She longed so to make him happy. He seemed so lonely, so helpless, so neglected, so pitifully in need of a comrade. Since she had seen

his horrible home and his chilly old mother, she had loved him more, felt more sorry for him than ever. Oh, no doubt about it, he was the man!

The sense of impending change was upon her. This room would never look the same to her again, her own face would never have quite this look again; after this evening everything would be *different*. She was lively and high-spirited, but she was in no way frivolous. She wouldn't make a promise unless she meant to keep it. This was the most important step in her life, and she had considered it well. She had studied her man; she felt that she knew him. She was well aware that he wasn't clever, and that he wasn't very good-natured, but she was so accustomed to good-nature, to kindness, tolerance, that she did not know their value. Let him be a little cross if he wished, the dear old bear! She would wheedle away his ill-humour with her own gaiety. She would be the light of his life, she would bring youth and happiness into his monotonous existence. She could be more to him than to any other man.

Divine and naïve idea of a young girl, innocently conscious of her own immeasurable value!

§ ii

It had been a beautiful day for her, a day of profound significance. She had been waked up by her mother coming into her bedroom to kiss her and wish her "many happy returns." Half asleep she had watched the stout figure moving about the room, pulling up the shades to let in the light of the summer morning, picking up the clothes she had left carelessly about, folding bits of ribbon, straightening the articles on her bureau with

that silent and inexhaustible kindness she counted upon as she did upon the very sun.

“Well!” said her mother at last, with her benevolent smile, “are you never going to look at your little presents, chickabiddy?”

Then she had sat up, her short heavy braid over one shoulder, and began opening the packages always found on birthday mornings at one’s bedside. The gifts had brought tears to her eyes. The love in them, the unspeakably dear intimacy! Her mother had embroidered a dozen linen handkerchiefs, and an exquisite sachet case for them; her father had presented her with the bottle of Cherry Blossom perfume he had bought every year since she was a child—and which she didn’t like—and a big box of chocolates with a ten dollar gold piece on top. Lance gave her a book of verse. Then there was a photograph in a silver frame of her eldest sister with her three babies; there were six pairs of French gloves from one brother and a beautiful edition of “Ingoldsby Legends” from the other, and from the sister who had married only a year ago a combing jacket, trimmed with pale green ribbons. She had so well remembered Claudine’s tastes!

“Oh, Mother!” she had said, with a sob, “you’re all so good and dear! I wish . . .?”

“What *do* you wish, Goosie?”

But she didn’t quite know. Perhaps she wished to clutch at Time and hold him here forever.

She had got up and dressed and gone into the garden before breakfast to look at the flowers, and to pick a very few. The roses were just beginning; they were so lovely that she almost wept again. The buds were

drooping in a sort of enchanted drowsiness, some yellow, some so faintly pink, some a dark and wonderful red; she touched with her finger the waxy satin petals, she bent over them to inhale the fragrance of them, that heavenly fragrance warmed with the sun. She went about from one bed to the other, to see what new thing had come up, what was flourishing, what was disappointing. Her father was a notable gardener; she hadn't his skill, but she had his love for growing things. She enjoyed the garden perhaps more than he did, for she had not his anxieties about it. She sauntered over the wide lawn that ran all down the hillside, the sun warm on her bare head, her white dress trailing over the grass, and as she went she reflected, with a little fleeting melancholy in her happiness, Nineteen! Nineteen such wonderful years in this garden!

But the years to come she thought, would be far more wonderful.

§ iii

The Masons were quite unabashed in their family celebrations—Mrs. Mason had a perfectly clear conception of the value of these ceremonies in holding together a family, and she made the most of them, in her calm way. It was a revelation to young Vincelle; he thought it somewhat childish and absurd and not quite the thing. The table that night was set with unusual magnificence with a lace cloth and four silver candelabra, and at the end a wonderful cake was brought, frosted with pink and white and green, and bearing twenty candles, one for good luck. He was the only guest and he felt embarrassed.

After the dinner the dance, the same sort of dance that had been on the occasion of his first visit, but without that unique flavor. He felt a little chilled, a little aloof, dreading unspeakably what lay before him. Never had Claudine seemed so distant, never had she seemed so much a stranger. He began to grow certain that he had no chance at all. Perhaps it would be better if she did refuse him, and he could go home again. . . .

Young men invited to dances at Mrs. Mason's house in those days were expected to dance, and Gilbert had not much time for reflection. He went dutifully waltzing about the ball-room with one young lady after the other, and once or twice went out upon the veranda with a partner. Actually a moonlight night; he couldn't have devised a better setting. . . .

The moment came. He stood out there with Claudine, on the lawn, in the moonlight. She had suddenly grown quiet: he could see her face plainly, and it was grave, serious, almost sad. She looked more than ever like a spirit, in her white dress with her slim bare neck and arms.

The breeze blew the end of her silvery scarf against his face, and brought to his nostrils the faint scent of the perfume she used—some innocent, old-fashioned thing of her mother's. He took her by the arm and led her under the shadow of a row of horse chestnuts.

Poor devil! He had no fit words. God knows what he faltered out. . . . But she didn't care. Tears came to her eyes; indeed they were both very close to weeping. She reached out and touched his hot trembling hand, and they clung to each other, mute, with their pitiful young love, their hearts aching with the beauty of

the matchless night and the supreme moment, unique in their lives, never again to be recaptured.

"Don't tell anyone to-night!" she whispered, and for these few hours it was their secret.

§ iv

The very next day the trouble began. His mother received the news of his acceptance with a smile of satirical amusement.

"You're old enough to know what you're doing," she said. "And so is *she*."

"Claudine's only nineteen," said her son, answering her tone rather than her words.

"*Is she?*" said his mother. "I shouldn't have thought so. She seems very sophisticated. . . . But I suppose that's her upbringing."

Pursuant to Claudine's instructions he had taken an afternoon off from the office so that he could go down to Staten Island, and see her father. This ordeal didn't particularly distress him: he felt that as a son-in-law he was faultless. He had practically no past; nothing that could be troublesome, anyway, and financially he was ready and anxious for the most minute investigation.

The Professor received him with kindness. He said "Well, young man!" offered him a cigar and said that as Claudine had made up her mind, what were they to do? He asked him a few questions, and then sent him off to Claudine. But, as he left the library, he met Mrs. Mason in the hall. And her look astonished him. Her bland face wore no smile for him: on the contrary, she gave him a glance so cold, severe and merciless that he winced.

When he learned the truth he was still more taken aback. She objected! Claudine was tearful and dejected. She said they'd had a dreadful time that morning.

"Father says I'm to decide for myself, and that neither he nor Mother ought to interfere. But Mother said—Oh, Gilbert, I can't understand Mother! It's not a bit like her! . . . She said she'd never consent to her dying day."

"But why?" cried the affronted and amazed young man.

"She thinks—we're not suited to each other."

"Rubbish!" he said, scornfully. That was a woman's objection for you! Nothing against him financially, morally or physically, but some absurd feminine notion of suitability. He was a little relieved.

"I suppose the truth of it is, she doesn't want to lose you, Claudine. I don't blame her."

"Oh, no!" said Claudine, "it can't be that, because—" she stopped short with a sudden blush.

"Because what?"

"Because—I know it isn't that. . . . Oh, Gilbert, do try to—win her affection!"

"I don't see why I should!" he answered. "Upon my word I don't see why I should humble myself—"

"She's my mother, Gilbert, and I love her."

"Yes, of course, my sweet girl! But, after all, if you're going to marry me, I come first, don't I? If you really love me—" She began to cry.

"You *know* I do! Only—you can't imagine how dear and wonderful Mother's always been."

He said he could have a talk with her and he did. It was not a pleasant talk. This benevolent matronly creature, whom he had always taken for granted as a part of Claudine's background, had suddenly come alive as a woman, as a difficult and unmanageable feminine creature.

She said:

"I should prefer not to discuss this matter with you, Mr. Vincelle."

"But why?" he protested. "If you have any objection to me, isn't it only fair to tell me what it is? To let me defend myself?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "I couldn't put it into words. . . . I am positive that you cannot make Claudine happy."

"Why do you think I can't make her happy, Mrs. Mason?"

"It isn't in you," she said frankly. "You are not suited to each other."

"Well, I believe a woman can adapt herself to any man, if she really cares for him."

"Claudine's not adaptable. It would be necessary for *you* to make concessions—to be very tolerant and wise. And I don't think you would be."

He smiled indulgently.

"I think I understand her," he said. "And I'm used to feminine ways, you know. My mother—"

She shook her head.

"It won't do!" she said, with emphasis. "I shall never consent to it."

This was the most outrageous affront imaginable. If she had objected to him for any other reason, because

of his morals, his religion, his social standing, his financial position, he could have endured it, because he could have argued and proved her absolutely wrong. But just simply to dislike him. . . .

Of course, he knew how perverse, unreasonable and provoking women were, a man must take that into consideration. But that a mature woman should be so idiotic as to insult an eligible suitor for her daughter's hand was a thing unheard of. He despised her; she had no common sense; she had no regard for her child's welfare. . . .

He asked Claudine if she would marry him without her mother's consent.

"As long as your father agrees, and there's no valid objection," he said. "You wouldn't jilt me because your mother's taken some sort of—" he checked the words on his lips and said, very moderately—"taken a dislike to me, would you?"

But he could get nothing sensible from her; only that she really did love him, and that her mother was so dear and wonderful, and that there was no hurry, anyway, was there?

He refused to stay for dinner; he went home in a state of sullen rage, and he carried his intolerable hurt to the person whom he fancied best appreciated his worth. He got cold comfort.

"There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," said his mother. "They're very peculiar people. They'd never suit *you*."

"I don't want to marry the family," he said sharply. "Claudine's not responsible for her mother."

“Her mother’s responsible for her, though. She’s brought her up according to her own ideas. If you take my advice, you’ll put the whole thing out of your head.”

He went up to his own room, with a most unpleasant fancy that all these women knew things about him which he didn’t know; that they were all, his own mother included, ruled by motives not to be comprehended by him. He was very unhappy. If it were only a matter of Claudine and himself! When he had the dear little thing in his arms, she was his, she loved him, she forgot everyone else; if they were married, it would always be so. He did understand her; he knew he could make her happy if they were alone.

If they had a little house somewhere, by themselves. . . . He began to dream impossible rustic dreams; he saw them in a vine-covered cottage, such as he had certainly never seen; he fancied Claudine running down the path to meet him when he came home, flinging her arms about him, her bright sweet face uplifted, her curly hair blowing . . . oh, he was frightfully unhappy!

He didn’t know whether he ought to go down to Staten Island again, or not. But Claudine wrote to him, and told him to come. Her mother didn’t in the least mind their seeing each other. So he went, sulky and reluctant, and was very well received. Mrs. Mason was quite natural and pleasant, and treated him just as she treated everyone else; and Claudine was heavenly. She found a chance to slip out into the garden with him, and as soon as they were alone, she kissed him, quite of her own accord.

“You see,” she said. “Poor mother thinks that if we see each other often enough, we’ll quarrel, or something

of the sort. So if we just wait long enough, and she sees that we *don't*, she'll realize that she's wrong; and it will be all right."

"How long will it take?" he asked, gloomily. "Five years?"

"Oh, mercy, no! Only be patient."

"I can't be! I don't want to wait! I love you so! I don't want to waste years—"

"They won't be wasted, Gilbert. They'll be the happiest time of our lives. You're happy now, aren't you, this very moment?"

"Not so very. I want you for my own, Claudine."

"I am your own. I love you and love you, darling Gilbert."

Impossible to argue with her innocence; he resigned himself to get what joy he could from these stolen moments. And he knew that no matter how long he had to wait, no matter what humiliation and unpleasantness he had to endure, Claudine was worth it.

Suddenly, without the slightest pretense of reason, Mrs. Mason gave in, she no longer objected.

"Marry him if you want to, chickabiddy," she said.

They were all astonished and a little uneasy. A change had come over that incomprehensible woman. Her color was as ruddy, her activity as great, she was as kind, as pleasant, as competent as ever. But an immense moral apathy had seized her, she no longer interfered, no longer gave advice. Let her husband smoke fifteen cigars a day, let her child marry whom she would, she seemed indifferent. She had become strangely and terribly remote. She seemed to have a grim secret of

her own, a knowledge of some event in comparison with which all these things were of no importance.

No one realized what shadow had fallen upon her. They were willing to accept her change of heart as a whim. But she who was about to be exiled forever had come to see the futility of resistance. She saw her own death coming toward her; she could bear to watch it. And she saw so clearly too that when she was no longer standing in the highway, the others would still go on, and that cry after her child as she might, no sound would ever again reach her.

Gilbert and Claudine were married that autumn in a little church on Staten Island. Old Mrs. Vincelle was brought there, like a Buddha carried in a procession, and there were a certain number of Brooklyn *haute bourgeoisie*. But it was a Mason wedding, and Mrs. Mason dominated it. She gave a marvelous breakfast after it in the house on the hill, and hers was the last face they saw as they drove away. She had come out into the road, to look after them, a stout, dignified figure in black silk waving her hand, and smiling after her youngest child. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

CLAUDINE LEARNS TO ADAPT HERSELF

BEFORE she had been in that house an hour she knew that she could never be happy there. She wasn't ready when the dinner gong sounded, but Gilbert hadn't waited. Lateness upset his mother, he said. She had tried to hurry then, but she was an inveterate dawdler, and it was some time before she was quite dressed. She came downstairs with the sprightly air proper to a bride just returned from her honeymoon, but it was a forced and desperate sprightliness. She felt all the helplessness and terror of a deserted child among strangers as she descended the dark old staircase, padded so thickly with carpet that it was like walking in a bog.

On the newel post was a standing lamp in which burned a gas jet turned very low, in a shade of red, green and blue glass. She turned along the narrow hall, past the open door of the front parlour, feebly illuminated, the middle parlour, the obscure and neglected back parlour, all dark, still, and bitterly unfamiliar to her. She reached the steep flight of stairs leading to the basement, and began going down in utter darkness and silence. The door at the foot of the flight was closed;

she fumbled for the handle in an absurd panic and stumbled forward as it burst open.

They were sitting at the table in there, Gilbert at the head, his mother at the foot, and they were taking their soup, evidently determined to begin right with the child, to show her, pleasantly but inexorably, that she would never, never be waited for. She sat down at the place laid for her, facing the door, and the servant brought her a plate of soup.

“*Well!*” said old Mrs. Vincelle.

Her tone was tart, but good-humoured, and she smiled at her daughter-in-law.

“We’re old fashioned here,” she said. “Meals served on the minute. That’s the way I was brought up. And Mr. Vincelle was very strict; if one of the boys was late for a meal, he had to sit at one side of the room till we’d all finished and then eat by himself.”

“I know. . . I’m sorry,” said Claudine. “But I couldn’t find things, this first evening.”

Gilbert looked at her indulgently for an instant, and then turned his attention to the roast chickens that had been set before him. He rather prided himself upon his carving, he felt sure that Claudine would observe and admire his dexterity. He had had, in fact, ever since they had arrived that afternoon, an air of showing off, as much as to say—here you can see me in my own kingdom, at my ease, my natural self. He had consciously tried to impress her; he had given a great many orders to the servants, and had found fault. But he had not produced the impression he intended; Claudine saw him suddenly as a little boy, pampered, spoiled, but led by the nose. His mother ruled him absolutely.

In a way she was pleased to find that in spite of his sturdiness and his impatient masculinity he was certainly very human, but on the other hand, it frightened her. She so greatly needed to respect him, to look up to him, to see in him a great spiritual authority. She had left the security and peace of her girlhood to follow him, and he *must* lead.

Why did he look so young and sulky to-night? He caught her looking at him and he smiled again, tenderly, but with a sort of constraint. It never occurred to her that he too was suffering from a great disappointment. He had believed, poor devil, that with Claudine he would have a new life; and lo, it was nothing but the old life with a new person in it. She was overshadowed; she had suddenly lost importance; she had quite ceased to be that rare and precious creature he had adored, and had become a sort of phantom.

"You're not eating!" said the old lady, suddenly. "Don't tell me you don't like chicken!"

For she too had her disappointment. She had arranged a dinner really sumptuous according to her very frugal mind, and no one appreciated it!

"Oh, yes, I do like it, very much!" said Claudine, hastily. "Only . . . I think I must be a little tired. It was so stuffy in the train."

"You mustn't take notions about your food," said the old lady. "A young married woman owes it to other people to keep up her health and strength. You must *eat*, whether you *feel* like it or not."

"Yes, I know!" said Claudine, pleasantly.

She was mortally afraid of bursting into tears. All their meals hitherto had been eaten in hotels, or trains,

or boats, where there was plenty to divert her, to make her forget that thing which had been gnawing at her heart all the time these last two weeks, but now in the quiet room, with these two quiet people intent upon their food, there was nothing to help her. It rushed upon her like a flood—that terrible homesickness. . . . On this mild September night they would be sitting in the lofty dining-room, with the windows open on the dear old garden. She could imagine them in the light of the suspended lamp, her mother, her father, Lance, perhaps other familiar friends' faces, the neat and smiling Selma waiting upon them; she could imagine their talk, casual, cheerful, full of family jokes, with the scholarly leaven introduced by her father and Lance. . . . And at every pause would be heard the sounds from the dark garden, the trees stirring, that branch of the big grape-vine tapping against the window. . . .

Gilbert and his mother were talking, in a disconnected and perfunctory way. She asked questions about the honeymoon; he gave her the names of hotels, details of the accommodation they had secured; she had a little gossip for him of old friends. When they stopped talking, there came to her ears utterly unfamiliar sounds—a carriage rattling by over the cobblestones, a footstep ringing on the pavement overhead, passing the barred window, mournful whistles from the river.

After the roast came the pudding, a vanilla blanc mange, made in a ring, the centre filled with strawberry jam, and cream poured over it all. And this demolished, they all rose; Gilbert gave his arm to his mother and they started up the stairs, followed by the disconsolate bride. She felt more than ever like a forlorn child, fol-

lowing these two people so much older and solidier, so much more positive and self-assured than she. Her life was to be nothing but a wretched struggle to please them. . . .

They entered the austere front parlour where a flicker of gas revealed the shrouded furniture, the huge, gold-framed pictures on the walls, the grand piano; they passed through this to the second parlour, and in here the dutiful son made a light and settled his mother in her favourite chair. The younger woman sat down near her, with an uncertain smile and her husband drew out his cigar case.

“Do you ladies object?” he asked facetiously.

“Go along with you, Gilbert!” cried the old lady, “I do declare I’ve missed the smell of smoke since you’ve been away.”

She leaned back in her chair and regarded him with complacency as he blew out great clouds of smoke.

“Nice to be *home*, Claudine?” he asked.

“Oh, yes!” said the little liar.

He hadn’t much more to say; he was a silent fellow at all times and to-night he was tired and a bit out of sorts. All this travelling about had unsettled him; of course it had to be done, but he was glad it was over. They would be much happier now, being settled down. To tell the truth, the honeymoon had not been quite the rapture he had imagined. Claudine had been—he reflected: well, Claudine had been too damned polite. She had pretended to like everything; she hadn’t been quite human. No matter what went wrong, she had kept on smiling. . . . With undeniable relief he allowed his mind to drift back to Business.

The old lady dozed, her two withered hands lying on the arms of the chair. There wasn't a sign of life in the room. Claudine got up and crossed the room to an immense walnut secretary and tried to read the titles of the books on the shelves with eyes dimmed by absurd tears. Hopeless volumes of sermons, forgotten and tedious poems. But she kept on looking at them, with a false interest, only that she might keep her face turned away.

Gilbert was touched by her lost young figure in that silent room.

"After all, it's pretty dull for her here," he thought, and he wanted very much to make her happy, but didn't know how. He had expected that somehow she would light up, transform, enliven this household; he hadn't quite realized that he would be literally expected to do what all young lovers so gallantly promise—to make her happy. He couldn't help thinking of Mrs. Mason's words.

He wanted to get up and put his arm about her, but he was afraid of his mother's ridicule. And blind instinct suggested to him the one thing that could solace her pain, that at once dried her tears and made eager her leaden heart.

"Play something for us, won't you, Claudine?"

"Do you really want me to?" she cried.

He got up and went into the front parlour, where he turned up the gas and opened the piano. Then he seated himself near by, with a pleased smile.

"Now!" said he.

She ran her strong little fingers over the keyboard in ecstasy. The piano was out of tune and very stiff,

but it was music anyway. She hesitated a moment; she considered her audience, and fate inspired her to play *Traumerei*. This was one of the few pieces they both knew and, like very many others, they were delighted to hear what they knew.

“Brava!” said the old lady.

“I always did like that thing,” said Gilbert dreamily.

Her heart warmed to them, poor darlings who knew so little beauty! She felt that in this way she could reach them, could make them understand her. She went on, a tranquil flow of undisturbing harmony, melodies which she believed they would recognize and like. She played to them with profound earnestness, as anxious as a siren to charm the careless sailors.

Gilbert sat lost in admiration. This was beyond question a proper wife, a young, charmingly dressed creature who played the piano soothingly in the evening. He thought she had never looked lovelier, so straight, so slender, in her beruffled blue dress, her curly head thrown back. What greater charm could a woman have than a lulling art like this, to dispel the cares of the harsh masculine world? His heart swelled with proud affection; he was passionately anxious to cherish and protect this exquisite young creature so miraculously thrust into his dull existence.

She stopped playing; let her hands rest on the keys, and waited, perhaps to be urged to continue. But her hearers seemed to take it for granted that the playing was ended.

“Brava!” said the old lady again. “I hadn’t any idea you were such a musician, Claudine. Very pretty!”

And Gilbert said:

“You have a fine touch, Claudine.”

She knew that he couldn't have distinguished a good touch from a poor one, but she was not annoyed. She felt very kindly toward them both, because they had listened willingly to her music, and because she had been able to play and to solace herself. She got up and closed the piano, and Gilbert bent over her, to kiss her warm cheek.

“Wonderful little woman!” he said. “I'm a lucky dog!”

She was very happy. Here was a way out; she would practise her music faithfully, perfect herself, become absorbed in it, and there would be no tedious hours. She could become a really fine musician, the wonder and delight of a little circle.

She followed Gilbert back into the second parlour, lost in her dream. But to the others the music, a pleasant little interlude, was over, and the rest of the long evening stretched before them. The old lady began to crochet, and Gilbert took up his newspaper.

“Like to see the Woman's Page, Claudine?” he asked.

Now Claudine had a lamentable dislike for newspapers. She never read them; she wasn't well-informed. No one in her house showed much interest in current events, they envisaged human life as an immense and absorbing history, and the present as one small day of it. Her father was a sort of benevolent Anarchist who couldn't endure the thought of restraint laid upon evolution; her mother was blandly indifferent to anything outside her own family; Lance lived in pre-historic ages. Nevertheless, she accepted the Woman's Page, read the

fashion hints, a little article on the care of house plants. Then she put the thing down and sat doing nothing.

"Don't you do fancy work?" asked the old lady.

"Yes, sometimes," said Claudine. "But . . ."

She rose.

"I think I'll go to bed now," she said. "I'm so tired."

Gilbert looked up from his paper and the old lady stared at her, affronted and amazed.

"It's only half past nine!" she said tartly. "I should think you could wait till eleven, like the rest of us. I dare say you're not any more tired than anybody else."

"Never mind, Mother, if she's tired . . ." Gilbert began, but Claudine had sat down again with flaming cheeks.

"No!" she said. "I'll wait!"

This was her first rebuke and she felt it a most unmerited one. It was the first time she had ever heard of a fixed, arbitrary bed hour for adult people. It had occurred to her a natural thing to go to bed when you were sleepy. Sometimes at home, the day after a dance, she had gone to bed directly after dinner, with a book to divert the few waking minutes, and at other times she had sat up almost till morning reading or finishing some enthralling bit of sewing. She felt a great anger toward Gilbert, with his half-hearted protest. There he sat reading his silly paper, page by page, every word . . . what did he expect her to *do*?

The old lady glanced up suddenly.

"Come, child!" she said. "Don't sit there and brood! Gilbert, get her the 'Pigs in Clover'!"

"She won't like it," he answered, deep in his paper.

“Rubbish! It’s something to pass the time and that’s all the young folks care for in these days. Get it for her!”

So from inside the secretaire Gilbert brought out a round box with a glass cover inside which were marbles to be rolled through certain partitioned alleys, and finally, if one were skilful, into a sort of little house. He kissed Claudine as he gave it to her, an apologetic, almost a guilty kiss, but she had no smile for him. She sat with the thing in her hands, twisting it this way and that, letting the little balls roll as they would through the alleys, and ready at the least word, the least gesture, to burst into outrageous and most bitter laughter.

One of the marbles suddenly rolled into the pen, and, unaccountably, with this feeble satisfaction, the storm within her subsided. She remembered having read somewhere that lunatics were given games and diversions like this to quiet them. She wished that she could tell that to her father . . . she wished that her father could see her, rolling marbles about in a glass-covered box.

Gilbert was gently shaking her.

“Sleepy-head!” he said. “It’s after eleven! You’ve been dozing!”

Both he and the old lady were greatly entertained. Their dazed victim went upstairs, quite well aware that now, when at last she could get into bed, she would lie awake for hours.

CHAPTER SIX

THE KEYNOTE

SHE waked up in the dark, terrified by a great banging at the door. She thought the house was on fire, that someone was ill, that thieves had broken in. She shook Gilbert fiercely. But he didn't stir.

Barefooted she rushed across the floor and unfastened the door.

"What is it!" she cried.

"It's seven o'clock, ma'am," said a meek voice.

"Seven o'clock!" she repeated.

"Yes, ma'am, I always call Mr. Gilbert at seven."

"Oh, I see!" she said. "I didn't know. . . ."

She closed the door and went back to the bed where Gilbert still slept.

"Wake up!" she said, severely.

Still he didn't move. She clutched his big shoulders and tried to shake him, but he only groaned.

"Oh, do wake up!" she cried, in a sort of desperation.

"All right!" he murmured, but his eyes remained closed.

She was on the point of tears! She would really have liked to hurt him. She seized his hair and pulled it vigorously, and at once he sat up, dazed and resentful.

“Look here!” he said. “That’s no way.”

“It’s seven o’clock!” she said coldly. “I should think, if you’re so sleepy in the mornings, you’d go to bed earlier.”

She herself was very weary and depressed. She had, as she had expected, lain awake a long, long time, unhappy in the darkness of that unfamiliar room, with the shutters all closed, and no sight of the sky to console her. At home she had always kept her windows unobscured so that lying in bed she could watch the moon, the stars, the clouds, the sky whether clear, stormy or ominous. The very shapes of the furniture had distressed her, she had tried to make them out in their corners, as she had listened to the muffled, unfamiliar city noises.

She wasn’t at her best in the morning; that was a recognized fact at home, and she was always carefully let alone. But Gilbert put her to shame. When at last he was roused, he was marvelously cheerful; he got up whistling, and set about dressing in leisurely fashion, talking a great deal. He was very much pleased at occupying the majestic room on the second floor, it gave solidity to his new importance as a married man. He thought his mother had arranged it very tastefully, he pointed out to Claudine the new velvet lambrequin on the mantelpiece and the pincushion the old lady had made for them. He picked it up from the bureau and looked at it with affectionate eyes—a tremendous long blue sausage covered with pleated silk and lace.

“Wonderful, at her age, isn’t it?”

Claudine obliged herself to say “yes,” but unkind thoughts possessed her as to the value of such work at

any period of life. She sat listlessly combing her hair, trying to hurry, so that she shouldn't again be late, but quite sick with longing for a breath of air, a glimpse of sunshine.

"I really can't get dressed in the dark!" she said, irritably. "Couldn't we have one of the shutters opened, Gilbert?"

"No," he said. "Not possibly. The people across the street could look in."

"Then light the gas," she said. "I can't do my hair in the dark."

He was a little shocked at this extravagant idea, however he did it, and kissed her, because she looked so pretty with her hair about her shoulders.

They descended the stairs together and entered the basement dining-room, where the old lady was pottering about among her rubber plants and ferns. She took her seat at once at the foot of the table behind the coffee urn and the process of breakfasting began, a meal astounding and repulsive to the bride. Such coffee! And no cream, no fresh fruit; prunes, oatmeal, ham and eggs, poorly cooked, poorly served.

"You're moping!" said the old lady, suddenly.

Claudine looked up with a faint smile.

"I'm never very lively the first thing."

"Nonsense! A young married woman can't give way to all sorts of moods and fancies. It's her duty to be bright and smiling and start her husband off cheerful."

Gilbert frowned.

"Never mind, Mother!" he said. "Claudine's got her own way of being cheerful, and it suits me. I understand the little woman, don't I?"

Claudine was delighted, she would have liked to jump up and rush to him and kiss him. Their eyes met in a friendly and beautiful understanding. This was what she loved in him, for which she had married him, this solid loyalty, this sympathy. She was no longer unhappy.

"Now!" he said, cheerfully. "Let's see the news!" and picked up the newspaper. He read an item aloud now and then, not because it could by any possibility interest the two women dutifully lingering over their coffee, but because it interested him. He smoked a cigar leisurely, and then it was time to go.

Claudine went upstairs with him into the front hall, she took down his tremendous overcoat from the rack and laughingly let her arms sink with its weight.

"Mercy!" she said. "How *can* you bear it, Gilbert?"

"It's nothing compared to my winter one," he said in his schoolboy way, and suddenly lifted her up, kissed her warmly, and set her down again.

"Good-bye, sweetheart! Be happy—and don't quarrel with the Old Lady!"

Then he ran down the stairs again to take leave of his mother, and left by the basement door. From the front parlour window Claudine saw him walking off in the cool September morning, big, stalwart, determined . . . *going out*. . . . Envy possessed her. Oh, didn't she wish *she* could walk out of the house like that, away from the old lady, and forget it all!

She didn't quite know how to proceed; she didn't know just what her share in the housekeeping was to be or what diversions and duties would fill these days. But she was already aware that she needn't ask, that old

Mrs. Vincelle would certainly inform her as to what was expected of her.

She went up the dark, thickly carpeted stairs to the floor above. It was perfectly still and silent, and in order, swept and dusted, all trace of activity vanished. She looked in at all the open doors with infantile curiosity, all alike, thick, dark carpets on the floor, lace curtains at the windows, shades pulled half way down, marble mantelpieces covered with fringed velvet lambrequins, small tables on which were photographs in silver frames, huge bureaus, huge arm chairs, huge rocking chairs, with lace antimacassars, and inevitably a horse-hair sofa furnished for naps by a folded "Afghan" of bright coloured stripes. Her bedroom,—their bedroom, was no different from the others; there was nothing intimate or friendly about it. Whenever she went into her own room at home, a hundred things at once suggested themselves to her, letters to write, a bit of sewing to be done, a book to read. Here there was nothing whatever; she couldn't imagine anything to do here. She very unnecessarily "tidied" the bureau top, and looked at her own reflection in the mirror. Mrs. Gilbert Vincelle—a young married woman. . . . Romantic and interesting creature. . . .

She wandered downstairs again; the chambermaid was dusting the second parlour, scene of last evening's bitter ennui, but the front parlour was empty, and she ventured in, drawn irresistibly by the piano. She opened it, half afraid to disturb the musty silence of the house; she ran up a scale, and it sounded monstrous. But the touch of the keys restored her courage; she began to play, and as usual lost herself in her playing. She had not yet

unpacked her music; she had to draw upon her memory, fragments, entrancing bits, which she played over and over.

She was interrupted by the voice of the old lady, raised shrilly to penetrate the music.

“I’ve ordered Willie for eleven,” she was saying.

Claudine stopped, a little dazed from the harmonies.

“Ordered Willie?” she repeated, stupidly.

“The carriage. We’ll just have nice time to get your wedding presents put away first. Annie has them all unpacked in the back parlour.”

It was an imposing array, and it raised Claudine’s spirits. She stood surveying all the silver, the cut glass, the fine china, the linen, the clocks, vases, lamps. She looked at them all over again.

“Isn’t this lovely. Don’t you really think this is the prettiest?” she kept asking her mother-in-law, and the old lady replied with grim indulgence.

“But this isn’t going to get your things put away,” she said, at last. “Now, let’s see. . . . The linen you can put up in the linen cupboard; I’ll have a shelf cleared for you. We’ll take the cut glass down into the dining-room. As for the silver—well, if I were you, I’d put it in the safe deposit this day and hour, but of course you won’t. The young folks are all for display these days. So we’ll take it into the dining-room with the rest.”

And thus was all her glittering new wealth disposed of. It gave her an unpleasant feeling of childishness; her things were all superfluous, toys to be made room for among the regular, adult, useful things. No tea would be poured from her silver pot, no dinner served

with her array of intriguing dishes, of flat and perforated and curved silver; in whatever room her clocks went, they were unnecessary second clocks. She arranged a great many ornaments in her bedroom, where they were quite incongruous; she even put in there a china umbrella stand because there was already one in the hall.

It was high time now to dress; she found some satisfaction in getting into a new grey broadcloth costume which she felt gave her quite a new dignity. She observed that she was rather pale and that, too, pleased her. She looked like a woman of experience, a mysterious and perhaps somewhat disillusioned creature. The old lady, in a black mantle and a small jet bonnet with a widow's veil, was waiting for her in the hall, they descended the steps and got into the little closed carriage and went rattling off over the streets of Brooklyn. A most uninspired city, Claudine reflected, calm, quiet, self-sufficing, an absolutely Vincelle place. They went first to the butcher, who came hurrying out to receive the order, for old Mrs. Vincelle rarely set foot in a shop, then to the fruiterer's, then the grocer's. She inspected nothing; the only question she permitted herself was "Are the oranges good to-day, Frank?" and yet she prided herself upon her old-fashioned virtue in going to market in person every day and she believed herself a match for any tradesman.

Then, without further instruction, the old coachman turned the heads of the two fat horses, and they went trotting off to Prospect Park, for the invariable daily drive along the same route to the same spot. It was a beautiful morning and Claudine was happy. From

time to time the old lady inclined her head to the occupants of other carriages and then Claudine would feel the charm, the interest of her new position as a young married woman. She was conscious of her youth, her slight, delicate figure, her new tailor-made costume, all the touching dignity of a bride.

They reached the consecrated turning point, they turned and drove home again. The old lady talked a little, she pointed out a house now and then, or gave a word of explanation of some regal old dowager driving past. She was affable, she was almost kind, and in her heart she was a little proud of this pretty young creature—an acquisition of her son's and therefore the property of the family. And what a blow to Brooklyn, that Gilbert should have passed over all its maidens, and taken a wife from Staten Island!

They reached home at one, and lunch was at half past one, the nastiest sort of lunch, wafer-thin slices of dry cold mutton, all sorts of little warmed-over concoctions. Claudine made up her mind to change all this as soon as possible.

After the meal they went upstairs and the old lady lay down on the horsehair sofa in her bedroom and drew the gay colored "Afghan" over herself.

"You might as well rest, Claudine," she said. "No one will be coming to call this afternoon. They'll give you a day or two to settle down."

And she resolutely closed her eyes.

Claudine hesitated.

"Would it disturb you if I played the piano?" she asked.

“Yes, it would!” said the old lady, affronted. “I dare say you can wait.”

Once again that dread feeling of despair came over Claudine. She didn't *know what to do!* Her clothes were all quite new and perfect, there was nothing about them to alter or to mend. She looked in vain for something to read, but it was a house almost destitute of books. She wandered about, looked out of the windows, but there was nothing to see except a quiet street, lined with brownstone houses, and one solitary nursemaid with a perambulator. She would have liked to go into the kitchen. She had, in fact, expected to play the rôle of young mistress of a big house, but she dismissed the idea. Her mother-in-law would never, never allow that.

She unpacked her music and mapped out a course of study for herself—an alluring course of exercises and immensely difficult pieces, which she intended to attack with new patience and energy.

“Goodness knows I'll have time enough!” she reflected, ruefully. “I'll set aside two definite hours every day, and not let anything distract me. This afternoon I'll run over the things I've picked out.”

At three o'clock she heard the old lady creaking about in her room, and music in hand she flew downstairs. Never had her fingers been so nimble, so sure, never had she worked with such complete satisfaction. Here was a field for definite accomplishment, a little living stream running beneath the stagnant lake which was to be her existence. She was expected—she was required, to be utterly passive, she was not to do anything, she was simply to *be*. To be a Good Wife. That was to fill the

universe, that was to comprise everything. She was very willing to be a good wife, but she couldn't help thinking that there could still be a certain amount of time left impossible to fill with wifeliness.

Now Claudine was not the material of which artists of the first rank are made. She loved music, as she loved literature, and flowers, and many other things. She had, to a certain extent, that quality known as temperament, a sensitive and ardent soul. But she had very little patience, and she was neither thorough-going nor resolute. It is possible, even probable, however, that under the pressure of her ennui and with the spur of her enforced insignificance she might have developed her talent into something remarkably good, for she had a talent. But it was not to be.

She completed an hour of Czerny's *Finger Dexterity*, then she opened her Liszt Album and attacked a terrific piece which needed all her intelligence. She frowned; she played over and over again a superhuman run.

The old lady's voice interrupted her.

"Mercy on us child! How long is this going to keep up? Your husband will be home before you know it and you haven't changed your dress."

Claudine looked round with a distrait smile.

"I will—in half a minute. . . . This piano needs tuning badly. And more than tuning. It needs—"

"It'll do very well as it is, I dare say!" said the old lady, briefly.

"But it isn't good to practise on a piano—"

"Practise! What do you want with practising? You play very nicely."

“Oh, but not nearly well enough! I’m going to keep on with my lessons.”

“What!” cried the old lady. “Lessons! A young married woman fiddling about with piano lessons!”

Claudine was surprised at this sudden hostility.

“Yes; why not?”

“Haven’t you anything better than that to do with your time?”

“What else *should* I do?”

“I never heard such rubbish in my life! A married woman taking lessons! What do you think you’re going to do? Give concerts?”

Claudine was not skilled in quarreling. She had always been quite free to follow her inclinations, and her inclinations had never been harmful or ridiculous. She was accustomed to dignified independence, no one in her household had the least desire to interfere with any of the others, and she could not understand such interference. She felt herself growing very angry with this meddlesome and tyrannical old person, but she made a gallant effort to answer nicely.

“It’s only that I’m very fond of music,” she began.

“You’d better be fond of your husband, that’s my advice! Piano lessons! . . . Very well, young woman! There’ll be no practising on *my* piano! It’s there to be *played* on and not fiddled on and banged on.”

Claudine actually turned pale.

“But you surely can’t mind my practising . . . ?” she cried.

“I *do*. All the neighbours ’ll hear you. A married woman strumming and jigging away like a school girl. . . . Piece of nonsense!”

Anger got the better of Claudine.

"I never heard of anything so unreasonable and so ridiculous!" she said. "I don't intend to give it up."

"Women that can't give up their childish nonsense have no business to get married. Now then!"

She walked over and closed the piano and handed Czerny and Liszt to her daughter-in-law.

"You put all this nonsense out of your head!" she said. "And run upstairs and put on a nice fresh dress and see if you can't tidy that wild looking head of hair before Gilbert gets home."

But when Gilbert got home he was not welcomed by the smiling and charming young wife he had a right to expect. Instead he found Claudine locked in the bedroom, her eyes red with weeping, and in a state of terrible excitement.

"Gilbert!" she cried. "Your mother says she won't let me practise on her piano!"

He was astounded and a little frightened. So they were at it already!

"Well . . ." he said. "I don't know. . . . It'll probably blow over, if you'll use tact and patience. . . . Anyway, it's a small matter."

"It's *not!* It's not! My music is all I have left!"

"Hold on, Claudine! That's rather strong!"

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Gilbert dear. Of course, you come first, only you're away most of the time. . . . And you don't know what it means to me. The idea of her being so domineering and cruel!"

"Claudine," he said, very gravely. "I hoped this would never happen. Especially as you're so fond of your own people. . . . I thought you'd understand how

I felt about—Mother. I *know* she's unreasonable sometimes—but remember that she's old, and I'm all she has left."

As an argument this seemed remarkably weak to Claudine, but the tone, the very pitiful inconsequence of the poor chap, touched her to the heart. She began to weep in his arms, bitterly, forlornly, knowing herself defeated, pitying herself and pitying him still more.

He kissed her and smoothed her disordered hair, perplexed and unhappy. He was very tender and kind to her; he bathed her eyes with cold water, he took the pins out of her hair and released the complicated structure. Her sobs ceased; she grew calm and tranquil again, and when the gong sounded for dinner, she came downstairs on her husband's arm, smiling, nicely dressed, the very model of a bride.

But that night, when they were alone in the bedroom again, she returned to the subject.

"Gilbert!" she said. "Let me get a piano of my own!"

"I couldn't, dear. Mother would never consent to that. No, darling, better put the idea out of your head for the time being. You'll find lots of new things to interest you."

"But won't you speak to her, Gilbert? Won't you *help* me? Gilbert, if it's something I want so very, very much, don't you *care*?"

"Of course I care!" he protested. "I want you to be happy. But . . . after all, it's Mother's house, and she has to be consulted."

"Then let's live by ourselves, Gilbert!"

“We can’t move to-night!” he said laughing, and turning out the gas, got into bed.

But Claudine could not sleep. She had a dreadful feeling of being trapped, of being a captive, helpless, weak, insignificant.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HEDGE WHICH GREW SO FAST

§ i

IN order to escape she had told the old lady a deliberate lie. She had said she was going shopping with Mrs. Martinsburgh, because Mrs. Martinsburgh was a highly approved of young married woman considered to be a good influence for the peculiar young Mrs. Vincelle. Whereas she was really going to meet Lance. She had written to him to meet her in a certain respectable restaurant where ladies on shopping tours often went to lunch.

It was a risk; she was quite likely to be seen there and her outrageous escapade reported to the old lady, but she was desperate. She had to see him. She went upstairs and secured a table, self-conscious and wretched at being there alone. She dared not look about the room for fear of seeing a familiar face, she dared not tell the waiter she was expecting someone. She pretended to study the menu, taking a long time to order, hoping and hoping that Lance would come. But he was late as he always was. Her lunch was set before her and she felt obliged to begin eating it. The room was full, she

expected every moment that someone else would be put at her table. She had laid her muff and hand bag on the chair beside her as a futile protection, and sipped her chocolate with an engrossed air.

By raising her eyes, she could see her own reflection in one of the mirrors which lined the room; she was paler, thinner, more elegant but—what was it that had gone from her face? She fingered her veil with a delicate little gesture, and glanced down again to her hands, adorned with rings. She wondered if Lance would find her changed?

And just at this moment she heard his voice, his calm, serious voice, always so low that it was difficult for strangers to understand him.

“Hello, Claudine!” he said. “Am I late? How are you?”

He sat down beside her and looked at her seriously through his spectacles.

“Well!” he said. “You’ve changed. . . . What on earth did you want to see me for?”

The recollection of her suffering rushed over her. Her eyes filled with tears.

“I had to—talk to someone,” she said. “And there was nobody else.”

“But—” he began, and stopped. This was a matter for caution, she who had a husband, a mother, a father, brothers and sisters, and yet could find no one but himself to confide in.

Five years before, when he was a boy of twenty, he had come to live with his uncle, Doctor Mason. He was a youth of strongly scientific tendency, too poor to study, and the doctor had offered to keep him. His mother

was a garrulous, vulgar woman, with a bitter tongue, well able to make life a burden for her household. Her husband, the doctor's younger brother, endured her with English fatalism; he was an ineffectual sort of chap, anyway, who like so many of his countrymen had turned to farming in the hope of finding in it a refuge from competition and struggle. He had a wretched, stony, hillside farm in Sullivan County, which produced next to nothing; the family were kept alive only by the exertions of his relentless wife and the boundless charity of his brother. Lance, amazingly christened Launcelot—had lived in calm, unceasing opposition to both parents. He *would* be a paleontologist, and he would *not* devote himself to money-making. If he did make anything through that work, his parents could have it, if he didn't they would have to do without.

He was the most unimpressionable, unsusceptible young man ever born. Nothing moved him, nothing troubled him. He was a pleasant housemate, for he was never impatient or cross, but he remained marvelously aloof. He sat at the doctor's feet, worshipping his scientific knowledge, grateful to him for the opportunities he had given him, the years in college, the quiet and peace for independent study, he was grateful to his aunt, too, for her kindly care of him. But he would have been delighted to go to the ends of the earth on an expedition, and it wouldn't have cost him a pang to bid them farewell forever.

The only soul with whom he was really human was Claudine. They had been like brother and sister, only at once more friendly and more formal than brothers and sisters usually are. And Claudine was quite con-

scious of something not at all brotherly in Lance's regard. She had had too many suitors to be deceived. She had very carefully maintained a nice balance. She knew that he thought she didn't know, and she was artful about it. She thoroughly respected Lance, he was the most candid, unbiased, truly independent person she had ever known, and he was kind, consistently and invariably kind, without effort, simply because it was his impulse to be so.

It was upon his candour, his intelligence, his kindness, that she counted now.

"Oh, Lance!" she said. "I'm so unhappy!"

"What's the trouble?"

The waiter was hovering near.

"You'd better order something," she murmured.

"I'm not hungry!"

"But you must, Lance! Please! It would look so queer."

"A glass of milk," he said, "and a piece of apple pie, then!"

The waiter was astounded and offended at this plebeian order; he had, nevertheless, to go and fetch it and they were able to talk again.

"What makes you unhappy, Claudine?" he asked.

"I suppose I ought to bear it, and say nothing, but I can't any longer. Lance. . . ! I want to leave Gilbert!"

This time she had certainly shaken his scientific calm.

"What!" he said. "After three months!"

"I wish I could tell you. . . . But I could never make anyone understand. It's just—unendurable."

"Isn't he—decent to you?"

"It's not altogether Gilbert's fault. He tries to be kind. He thinks he is. But it's the whole life. Oh, Lance, it's so horrible! It's like being buried alive. . . ." She had to stop, to struggle with her tears. "I've tried. I've really tried my best. But I can't stand it. I want to go home and live with Father and Mother. Oh, Lance, do you think it would be wrong?"

He regarded her thoughtfully.

"Do you mean as a general principle?" he asked. "Do you mean—do I think it's wrong for a woman to leave her husband?"

"I suppose I do mean that."

"It's hard for me to say," he went on, frowning. "I can't say I've ever thought much about the modern system of marriage. I suppose it's the best—or at least, the most expedient system for our present stage of development. But I haven't considered exactly what it is. Is marriage popularly considered indissoluble? No, there's divorce. No! . . . I suppose it's an arrangement for the convenience of both the parties to the contract. In that case—"

"But I never thought about divorce!" she cried. "I only wanted to get away. Can that possibly be wrong?"

Lance was never greatly concerned about ethical problems, certainly not about the relations between men and women. It didn't seem a matter of much importance to him. He envisaged the human race as gradually progressing, adopting now this expedient now that; marriage he had looked upon as a rather silly but necessary part of modern existence. As for woman's revolt, feminism, and so on, he merely smiled at it all. He knew too much about Pre-Historic Woman.

He bent his mind to the problem as to whether the sanctity of marriage was a help or a hindrance to civilization.

"I can't see that there's anything wrong in it, Claudine," he said.

"Then you think—" she began. "But oh, I don't know what Father and Mother would say. Everyone but you would think I was wicked—and that my life was ruined. . . . Just because I want to be myself!"

He glanced up in surprise at her tone, and saw her eyes fastened on him, swimming in tears, the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen. It came to him with a sort of shock that this was Claudine's specific case, and not a general problem; that it was not women who wished to leave their husbands, but Claudine who wished to leave Gilbert. He saw that she was a lovely and innocent young thing, unhappy and desperate; he saw suddenly what this might lead to. She would be cast adrift, blamed, gossiped about, always under a sort of cloud. Her position in her own home would be an equivocal one, an unending embarrassment and distress. Hers was not a strong spirit; she couldn't go forward unsupported. A terrible pain seized him, he turned his eyes away because he couldn't bear to look at her. And the most intolerable part of his pain was his certainty that she could grow out of her pain; that what she now found unbearable she could one day regard with indifference. She suffered cruelly; she thought her fate was a lamentable and wretched one, and it was really nothing; a trifle, a few moments in her history.

"What would be the sense of my going on?" she

asked him. "I don't make Gilbert happy, and I'm—dreadfully unhappy myself."

"It isn't important—to be happy," said Lance. "The question is, are you useful?"

"No! No, I'm not!"

He pushed away his plate with a nervous gesture.

"You want to know what I think," he said. "Well, I think you'd better go back to your husband."

§ ii

She went home, to dress for a euchre party which was to be given in her honour. She felt numb and cold, ready to die of despair. Everyone was against her. No one understood, no one cared, what she suffered. She had appealed in vain to all the people who loved her, and they had all said—"Continue to suffer. It is best for you."

She had gone to her father for his support in the piano battle.

"Buy me a piano of my own, Father!" she had entreated. "Send it to me as a present. Then the disagreeable old thing *can't* object."

"But, my dear!" said her father. "When in Rome—you know! If I were you, I should avoid conflicts. There's no use exasperating your mother-in-law. The wisest course is to conciliate."

She had gone to her mother, to pour out all her misery at living under the domination of a strange woman, at not being mistress in her husband's house. But her mother had no comfort to give.

"I don't see what's to be done, chickabiddy," she said. "You can't expect Gilbert to leave his mother

alone at her age. It can't be cured, so it must be endured."

Gilbert was still more hopeless. When he saw her dejected, weary, full of nervous excitement and irritability after her long day of emptiness, his remedy was the theatre; and when even that didn't enliven her, he too became irritable. He was beginning to lose patience with her, he was willing now to admit that she was peculiar. And he felt that he was justified. . . .

Justified in doing things which she never mentioned to anyone. They had had quarrels, the very memory of which appalled her. She remembered coarse words he had used, brutal expressions, sneers, gibes. He was always very sorry, always apologized, he said he had the devil's own temper; but Claudine could not forget them. She was neither quick to anger nor quick to forgive. When her temper was aroused, she was cold and contemptuous and often childishly indignant, but she was never fierce, never cruel. She could not understand or forgive his absolute loss of dignity.

And she could not understand what he called his weakness! She remembered the first time he had revealed it as one remembers a nightmare, the very thought of it brought back the incredulous horror she had felt. He hadn't come home to dinner that night, he had sent a telegram, "Detained on business. Will not be home till late," and Claudine and the old lady had sat down at the table alone, in that sort of hostile intimacy which had grown upon them. After dinner they had gone up to sit in the old lady's room where it would be cosier for two lone women, the old lady with a book

and Claudine with the fancy-work she had taken to in desperation.

Just before bed-time Gilbert came in, flushed, jolly, anxious to talk. He had sat down and entertained them with a long account of the dinner he had attended, and the speeches he had heard.

"Best thing for business," he said. "You get to know just the men you need to know. It was an impromptu thing, but wonderfully well done."

And he told them everything he had had to eat.

"And by the way," he said, "They had some oyster pâtés that were the best things of their kind I've ever eaten, bar none. I spoke to the waiter, and he packed me a couple in a box and I brought them home. They're downstairs with my overcoat. Will you get them, Claudine?"

She did so, and he opened the box and took the pâtés out.

"Just try this!" he said, offering one to Claudine.

"I couldn't eat it now, thank you, Gilbert," she said. "Tomorrow I'd enjoy—"

"No! Nonsense! Eat it now! I want you to!"

She shook her head, smiling.

"To oblige me!" said Gilbert in a grieved voice.

The idea of gracefully yielding, of doing something she *didn't want to do*, never occurred to Claudine.

"No, thank you!" she said, more firmly.

"I insist!" said Gilbert.

That made her laugh, she thought he was rather funny, anyway, with his excessive garrulousness and his oyster Pâtés. She was about to answer him with a good-humoured joke, when she saw his face suddenly change,

and grow convulsed with rage. She hardly heard what he said, she was so startled. He jumped to his feet and addressed her in a furious trembling voice, and suddenly took the pâtés, on their little frilled paper plates, and threw them on the carpet and stamped on them.

His mother got up and came near to him.

"Gilbert! Gilbert!" she whispered, patting his shoulder. "You'd better get to bed, my boy!"

He threw a savage glance at Claudine and walked unsteadily away. The old lady bent over her cherished carpet, regarding the damage with distress.

"Dear! Dear!" she said. "*I don't know. . . .*"

She never looked at Claudine, standing behind her, wringing her hands, her teeth chattering with a sort of nervous chill.

"I don't know!" she said again. "I suppose I'd better leave it so until the morning. Then in the daylight, perhaps. . . ."

As she straightened herself she met the eyes of her daughter-in-law.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Let me stay with you!" cried Claudine.

The old lady looked at her with frigid contempt.

"You go to Gilbert!" she said. "Your place is with your husband."

"No!" cried Claudine, desperately. "I can't!"

"You go!" said the old lady. "Quick! I'll have none of this under my roof."

And she went so far as to take her by the arm and hurry her out of the room. But there was no cause to be worried about any further scene; Gilbert had gone to sleep, fully dressed, on the bed.

§ iii

And the next morning he regarded it all as a great joke. He complained ruefully of a headache, but he was proud of it. He burst out laughing when his mother mentioned her damaged carpet, and to Claudine's surprise, the old lady was wonderfully indulgent. He told Claudine not to mind, it wouldn't happen again; but it did, more than once. Only on special occasions, though, as he pointed out to her; he was no drunkard. He was simply a good fellow; and he felt that she ought to appreciate his social qualities. He was sincerely aggrieved at her attitude, her scorn, her cold aversion. He told her she was straitlaced and puritanical; he thought she was shocked because he could not imagine that she was disgusted. She didn't find him devilish; she found him repulsive. It was not a question of forgiveness; she felt for him a profound distaste and aversion which she never again overcame. It was not even that she had ceased to love him; she had simply discovered that she never had loved him. She was not by nature affectionate or indulgent; she was fastidious, always a little apart from life, never quite human. She was a dutiful egoist.

She looked back over these three months of married life with a sort of cold wonder. The long, long days, the tedious drives, the dull calls on dull people, the unpleasant meals, the stuffy dismalness of the house! She thought that the Vincelle friends were the most unspeakably tiresome people in the world. To go with her mother-in-law and sit in their augustly gloomy parlours for the required fifteen minutes, or to receive

them in like fashion at home, to sit at their dinner tables, or to see them sitting at hers, was an infliction almost beyond her endurance. Except at dinners, she saw nothing but women; they had euchre-parties, receptions, luncheons, once in a while a *matinée* party. A harem world of pampered women, interested in nothing, women whose husbands were pleased to see them expensively dressed, wearing jewels, who required them to be ladylike; but didn't expect them to be seductive. They were all good, all complacent, and they seemed to Claudine years and years older and more mature than herself. She made no friends. Vincelle heard that one of the young married women did china painting, and that aroused a spark of interest in her. She approached the alleged artist, young Mrs. Ryder.

"Oh, yes! I love it!" the artist told her. "Of course I don't have much time; but I positively made up my mind *not* to drop it after I married. It's such a mistake, don't you think, to get into a rut? I believe a man thinks ever so much more of his wife if she has some interests of her own."

Claudine's heart sank; then it was, after all, nothing but another harem accomplishment, a trick to secure attention.

"Of course I don't have much time," the other went on. "There's so much to do, isn't there?"

"What *do* you do?" Claudine asked, with earnestness. "I wish you'd tell me what you do all day?"

"Oh . . . so *many* things!" murmured the other, taken aback. "There's the house-keeping, of course—and social duties . . . and with a man in the house there are such a lot of little things. . . ."

Now it must be admitted that Claudine was not a lover of her kind. She had no special interest in humanity; she was not ready to see the simple human qualities in those about her. She was an aloof, eager soul, greedy for activity, for gaiety, and for something more than that. She wanted food for thought; she was not very original, she needed perpetual stimulation, a constant flow of external impressions. She did not wish to meditate, she wished to observe.

She was baffled at every turn. She tried to discover what it was that enabled the old lady to pass the time so tranquilly without impatience or weariness. After a few orders to the servants and her marketing, she had nothing to do. Other old ladies came in during the afternoons to talk with her; often there were old ladies from the country spending a few days with her, they talked of other old ladies known to them with a sort of good-humoured indifference. . . . Perhaps that was the key to it—a profound and cynical indifference, nothing mattered; one endured and existed, and life consisted not in accomplishment, but in a perfectly passive Duty.

The old lady said Claudine was excitable, and even went so far as to call her frivolous. And yet the only part of Claudine's life which either she or her son took with any seriousness were these horrible little frivolities, the euchre club, the dinner parties, the calls. Her social duties. . . .

“What in the world makes you so restless, child?” the old lady asked her one afternoon. Claudine had come into her room and was wandering about looking at the photographs, asking idle questions.

“I don’t know what to do with myself!” she answered suddenly.

“Do? Why, what under the sun do you *want* to do?”

“I don’t know. . . . But it seems. . . . Oh, it seems such a waste of time!”

“I must say you have very queer notions for a young married woman, Claudine. I’ve never heard of anyone else with such notions. You have your home, and your friends. And there’s the euchre club, and Gilbert takes you to the theatre every mortal week. What more do you want?”

This Claudine was unable to answer. The old lady regarded her severely.

“I only hope,” she went on, “that the time will never come when you’ll look back on these days as the happiest time of your life. . . . I remember when I was a young married woman—” she sighed. “I can tell you, I hadn’t much time to worry about what to do, with my five children.”

“I wish I had five children,” said Claudine.

The old lady looked at her again.

“Humph!” she said.

§ iv

She was ready now for the euchre, she cast a last glance in the mirror and gathered up her little possessions, handkerchiefs, gloves, cardcase, and muff. A composed and mature figure she looked, in her grey broadcloth dress with a trailing skirt and well-boned bodice, slender, dignified in spite of her smallness. A lady—a young married woman, a finished product. She was

supposed to have done with adventure, romance and excitement, she was presumed to have settled down.

She smiled frigidly.

“We’ll see!” she said. “Just wait! They’re all against me—even Lance. But I won’t give in! If I can’t get away, then I’ll change all this! I won’t have a life like this. I won’t! I won’t!”

CHAPTER EIGHT

A YEAR LATER

§ i

THE old lady was going upstairs to the store-room on one of her periodical rummaging excursions, conducted for mysterious purposes of her own. She looked through trunks, bags, and boxes, and emerged from the dark little room quite exhausted, but without bringing anything with her. As she passed the big bedroom she looked in at the open door and smiled to herself, with grim satisfaction. There sat Claudine by the window, her head leaning against the back of a venerable rocking chair, her eyes fixed dreamily on the ceiling. She had been sitting there quite three-quarters of an hour, and perfectly content in her idleness. Not a trace of restlessness, of mutiny, about her, the sparkle too had gone from her glance, she had a new, half melancholy charm. . . .

The old lady admitted that Claudine had at last "settled down." She was still peculiar. Perhaps more peculiar than ever, but that was a matter beyond hope of remedy. It was her bringing up. She had queer notions about sitting alone, and she very obviously discouraged conversation, she read pretentious and quite immoral books, but as she never said or did anything

improper, Gilbert and his mother were agreed to overlook these unpleasant eccentricities. Naturally, they remonstrated with her at every opportunity, but in a despairing way.

She was conquered, and she was happy. Not one of the hopes of her girlhood had been fulfilled; she had seen no foreign countries; she had met no remarkable people; she was denied the active and interesting life she had expected. But she was able to smile at these lost hopes. She was happy.

She had lost the best and dearest friend of her life, her mother. She was obliged to live without a confidant, without sympathy or encouragement. In losing her mother she had irrevocably lost her girlhood, and been cast adrift on a strange sea. But she had resigned herself even to that bitter loss.

She was well aware that she had missed the beauty and romance of the love between a man and a woman. She certainly didn't love Gilbert, she didn't even like him; she was in fear of coming to hate him. But even that she endured with tranquil indifference, as she endured her fettered existence, her hostile mother-in-law, her wearisome social duties.

Because she had Andrée. She wanted nothing more. Andrée was enough to fill heaven and earth for her. Her love for Andrée, her hope for her, the watchful care of her, gave her utter and complete satisfaction.

It had come as an astounding revelation. She had looked forward to the coming of a baby with despair and revolt; it would be, she thought, another link in the chain slowly forging to bind her to slavery. She didn't feel old enough or wise enough for a baby. She looked

upon the whole thing as a horrible indignity put upon her by merciless Nature, and she even hoped that she might die.

She took it for granted that it would be a son, because everyone else required a son from her. Another Gilbert, she thought, a pompous and obstinate creature whom she could never hope to influence, and who would soon learn to disapprove of her. She looked forward to its birth with dread and terror, she imagined the wretched tedium of being obliged to carry it about, to nurse it, to be perpetually tied to it, the broken nights, the distasteful duties.

And to think that it was Andrée who had come, after all! This son, who was to have been named Andrew, after Gilbert's father, had been miraculously transformed into that wonderful little dark-haired baby, that tiny, plaintive little creature whose first cry had almost broken her heart.

She had lain with the little bundle beside her, and from time to time reached out a weak hand to turn down a corner of the blanket and look at its sleeping face. The *queer* little thing! The pathos, the marvellous appeal of its weakness, its aloofness, the charm of its doll-like completeness! She never tired of looking at it, she never wanted it out of her arms. Its fierce and despairing cries pierced her soundest sleep; its faintest stir aroused her.

She occupied the big room on the third floor, so that the baby shouldn't disturb Gilbert, and after the nurse went, she was alone with the baby. Miss Dorothy had eagerly offered to take charge of it at night, but Claudine wouldn't listen to that. She had a little bas-

sinet beside her, where the baby was supposed to sleep, but at the least sound, she would take it into the bed, to lie close to her, while she comforted its inexplicable little woes, whispered to it, sang to it, stroked its downy, restless little head.

She passed hours of mystic happiness alone with it in the big silent room, where a night-light burned dimly. They would lie looking at each other; she would gaze into its solemn unfathomable eyes, trying to impress her image upon it, trying to reach it. It would fall asleep clutching her finger, and she would weep with joy and terror, afraid of everything, haunted by spectres of croup, whooping-cough, of accidents, of all the cruel chances of life.

Gilbert had very much objected to the name *Andrée*. But Claudine was so ill and weak, and so determined, that he had submitted to it. He thought it was a charming and wonderful baby, and that it would undoubtedly be a comfort to him in his old age. He boasted about it to his business friends; he said it was the greatest thing in life. But he saw only the promise in it; he was impatient for it to develop, to become responsive and human. But Claudine loved it at each moment; she dreaded its changing. Every day she thought, "This is the very sweetest age! I wish she would stay like this forever!"

It was now two months old, and on this day was taking its first airing, in the arms of a highly recommended nurse-maid. The old lady had a prejudice against perambulators; she thought it all nonsense anyhow to take babies out into the street, but as Dr. Perceval was newfangled and insistent, she made no objection

to a daily outing, provided it was carried. Perambulators were against nature; babies were meant to be carried, she said.

Claudine took little interest in this discussion. As long as they did nothing actually harmful, she didn't care. Her only concern was to protect it, to keep it near her; matters of hygiene she considered a little unreal.

She heard the sound of heavy and deliberate footsteps ascending the stairs, and she rushed out into the hall.

"Be careful, Katie!" she called. "Go very slowly, and be sure you don't catch your foot!"

She watched with frowning anxiety the progress of the nurse and the bundle in her arms, and the instant they reached the hall, she snatched the baby.

"She's asleep!" said the nurse, warningly, but in vain, because the wicked mother had kissed it until it was awake and crying and had to be rocked. It was the first separation, it had been out of the house nearly an hour. Who was to blame her for her rapture at getting it back alive and well?

And it looked so queer and darling in a little lace bonnet, with muslin strings tied under its querulous face, and a coat with capes encasing its helpless arms.

"Oh, Andrée!" she cried. "My heart's darling! I don't think I can ever let you go again!"

§ ii

A year later there was another little girl, and after that, the requisite son. They were delightful, pretty, healthy babies, and she loved them passionately. But they were not like Andrée. There could never be any-

thing in the world like *Andrée*. She concealed her fanatic worship of her first-born; she was a wonderful mother to them all, patient, gentle, wise. She took an unfailing delight in them; she gave her life to them joyfully; she was flattered and enchanted by the solemn loyalty of little *Edna* and the teasing affection of her small son. But the look of understanding in *Andrée's* eyes was immeasurably dearer to her; the clasp of *Andrée's* hand, a kiss from her, were the very consummation of her life.

BOOK TWO

THE BREATH OF LIFE

CHAPTER ONE

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

§ i

“**L**ORD! I’ll be glad when this is over!” said Andrée. “And this is Father’s idea of a holiday! The poor thing actually said he envied us!”

Her younger sister was engaged in drawing on her stockings.

“Come on, Andrée!” she said. “We’ll be late for lunch and Mother does hate that so. . . . No: I suppose this *would* be a treat for poor Father, after being shut up in a hot office all the time.”

“I’d like to see him stand it for *one week!*” said Andrée, grimly. “Just for one week, that’s all!”

“And then, of course, it’s cheap,” said the sensible Edna. “I suppose he has to think of that, poor thing, with Bertie going to college and you and your awful Mr. MacGregor. We must be a tremendous expense.”

“I don’t want to be!” cried Andrée. “And I wouldn’t be, either, if he wasn’t so darned obstinate. I’ve told him and told him that I could easily earn enough to pay for my lessons by teaching. Mr. MacGregor says I’m thoroughly qualified, and that he’d help me to get pupils. But no! Father pretends to

be so advanced, and says he wants us to be able to earn our own livings, and then when we can, he stops it. He and Mother are both hoping and praying I'll get married before I have a chance to do anything. But I won't! I'm going to—"

"Oh, Andrée! For pity's sake! *Not* that! *Do* get your shoes and stockings on! It's after twelve!"

They were sitting on the bank of a wide, shallow stream running its hasty course down the mountain side; a favourite spot with them. They liked to come there in the morning and with bare feet and skirts pinned up, to pick their way over the stones, with the cold water lapping about their ankles. It was like a broad and deserted highway, lined with trees. On either side were the dark woods, of which they were both a little afraid. They would ascend the stream, "stepping stones," past the sombre belt of woodland to the wide meadows basking in the sun, and then suddenly the banks grew high and rocky, the stream went out of the sunlight and entered a ravine, gloomy and mysterious, and was no longer a stream but a deep and ice-cold pool, fed by a trickling waterfall. Farther than this they had never gone, the climb up the rocks beside the waterfall would have been a very difficult one, and moreover it was a spot where they didn't care to linger. City born and bred, they had a sort of horror of this silent, imprisoned place.

The stream—the "crick," the country people called it, had an unfailing charm for them. They came to it every fine morning and indulged in pursuits which they were a little ashamed of and which they justified by their ennui—an ennui more pretended than real. They

talked to each other and to their mother a great deal about the horrible dulness of the little Catskill Mountains summer resort, but they were really very happy in it, and they secretly enjoyed their infantile amusements. They whittled little boats of soft wood and sailed them; they brought tin pails and scooped up the lazy, fat pollywogs that lay along the edges of the shallow pools in long rows, nasty creatures with a sort of horrible fascination about them. Andrée would watch them wriggling sluggishly in the pail for a long time, with the sun shining through their translucent, speckled tails, and sniff the queer primeval smell of them.

“Aren’t they horrible!” she would cry.

“Don’t look at them, idiot!” her sister would say. “You’ll be having nightmares about them again to-night.”

Andrée was very irritating about such matters. She wouldn’t keep away from things and people and facts that troubled and tormented her. That pool, for instance. . . . She would argue Edna into going there with her and insist upon lingering beside it, looking into the dark depths of the water, standing in its icy shallows, laying her hands against the wet moss-grown rocks, until she became so filled with her absurd dreads and fancies that even the sensible Edna would become infected.

They had been there that morning; they had sat on a fallen tree and stared at the quiet pool, the dark face of the cliff over which the puny trickle of water ran, ran, ran, had been running, just in this way, for God knows how many centuries. And suddenly they had seen a great black snake, swimming rapidly and silently

on its way. They had fled in a panic, barefooted over the stones and rough ground, out to the ravine and into the sun again.

Edna had been angry.

“Why *will* you go there!” she cried. “You’re so morbid!”

There was nothing morbid about Edna; she was a distractingly pretty thing of nineteen, very like her mother in her young days as far as appearance went—small, slight, self-confident, with crisp fair hair like a halo about a flower-like face. She was alert, independent and unsociable; her most profound instinct was to keep silent, to stay alone, to be untouched, undisturbed while her strong spirit grew. She was a disappointment to her mother because she was so difficult, so impossible to influence. She wished to take every new idea and run off with it, to examine it alone, in peace; she never wanted to talk over anything. Nor did she care much for reading. She observed, and she made deductions from her observations, she formed intelligent opinions, she judged people with sane and kindly indifference.

But she did not understand, as Andrée did. Andrée apparently never did any thinking. She simply knew things, spontaneously. She knew what people would do, what they were, she loved them or hated them. And she was forced to discuss everything with everybody, to talk, to think, until her brain was sick and frightened. She couldn’t quite believe anything or quite doubt anything. She was a thin, tall girl of twenty, pale, dis-trait, not very pretty, but with a face wonderfully mobile and sensitive. There was a perverse charm about

her, about her moods, her immature high-mindedness, her terrible dependence upon others. She would ask your opinion, and if it differed from hers she would begin to doubt herself, and if you agreed with her, she was obliged to change her mind. . . .

They had got their shoes and stockings on and set off by a convenient path for the little hotel.

“If only we didn’t have to eat with all those people!” said Andrée, sighing. “It takes my appetite away. I do so *hate* the noise they make . . . and those awful babies!”

Edna laughed at her.

“Poor grandma always used to call you ‘pernicketty.’ And you are, aren’t you? They’re not such bad people.”

“How could they be worse? They’re stupid and vulgar and horrible to look at and horrible to listen to. We wouldn’t think of bothering with such people when we’re at home, and I can’t see why we should here. They’re not any better in the summer time or in the mountains, than they are in the winter, in the city.”

“Mother hates snobbishness—”

“Ha! *Does* she? She’s the worst sort of snob in the world. She doesn’t like *anybody* at all. She’s bored with everyone, just as much bored with right people as with wrong ones.”

They had come now to the hotel grounds, and were walking across the lawn with great decorum. And just on time, for a bell rang out with a loud and hostile clamour, and the embroidering ladies on the porch began to collect their work and rise.

Andrée and Edna hurried up to their room for the

process of "neatening," which their mother considered indispensable. She was there, in the adjoining bedroom, standing before the mirror.

"How hot you are!" she said. "Hurry, I'll wait for you."

She was a pleasure to the eye, as she always was. She had a well-deserved reputation for being the best-dressed woman in her set, and she took infinite pains to sustain it. She wasn't by any means beautiful, the promise of her young days had never been fulfilled; she was pale, colourless, except for her bright hair still untouched by grey; she was thin and angular, and her features were as tranquil and expressionless as a statue's. But the dignity of the small creature! She was absolutely imposing, she had a look of melancholy and resignation, but a melancholy without lassitude, a resignation without weakness. She had a passion for reserve. Even in her limitless devotion to her children she was a little formal, a little aloof. She was certainly in no way tyrannical or severe, but she commanded unflinching respect. They adored her like a goddess, instead of loving her like a human being. She was a perpetual mystery to them.

Poor Claudine! Like a strayed nymph, forever astonished and affrighted at the strange world into which she had been betrayed! She had known no way of adapting herself, she could never feel at home, her one refuge had been to withdraw into herself.

She was courteous and agreeable enough to all her fellow-guests, but she fled from them. She went off every morning after breakfast, her thin form, straight as a dart, charmingly dressed in clear summer colours,

a parasol held over her burnished head, and two or three portentous volumes under her arm, to find a secluded spot in the woods where she could read undisturbed. She read Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius and Schopenhauer and Emerson, with ardent attention, marking passages, meditating on them, trying to appease and fortify her desperate spirit.

The idea of her being desperate would have seemed ludicrous to anyone who knew her. She was calm, so self-possessed, so well-poised! She had a great social success in her own milieu, she was something of an authority upon correctness in dress and manner. She was moreover a lady of unblemished reputation, she was never even indiscreet or stupid. She was quite perfect. Not even the resentful Gilbert could find a flaw in her public demeanour.

And yet, in her own heart, she was bewildered and lost.

§ ii

They went down, all three, to the dining-room, and sat down at their small table, accompanied by a great many glances from the other guests. They never suspected how much they were gossiped about, how much interest they aroused. It was the first time they had come to so small and cheap a place for their summer holiday; heretofore they had stopped at lively and agreeable resorts with others of their own comfortable sort. But Gilbert had taken one of those unaccountable fancies to which husbands are so prone. It may have been an obscure resentment at the sight of the care-free and pampered existence of his women-folk, or one of

those sudden anxieties he often felt at the thought of the future. However, from no matter what cause, he had suddenly required Claudine to retrench and she had obeyed, with her usual profound and polite indifference. Hence the "Pine View Villa," in the Catskills, and two small rooms without a bath.

Their attitude aroused resentment. Claudine had her own special tea, which she made in a pot at the table, and they had extra milk and cream, and various potted delicacies ordered from the city. The landlady took this as a reflection upon her table and it was. And then they had made a special arrangement whereby Andrée was to have the exclusive use of the piano in the mornings, and on chilly or wet mornings, when some of the ladies would have enjoyed sitting in the parlour and rocking and chatting, they were not at all pleased by the vigorous rhythm of her interminable exercises. She regarded them no more than so many chairs.

Edna was the most approachable, but she had a scrutinizing air, an amused sort of interest outrageous in one so young. Altogether a conceited, snobbish, intolerable family; that was the verdict.

"Take the tea and the anchovy paste, Andrée!" said Claudine. "And will you bring them up to my room, please? I'd like to speak to you for a moment. Edna'll wait on the veranda for you."

She closed the door of her room and sat down.

"Andrée, dear," she said. "Was that another letter from Mr. MacGregor this morning?"

"Yes, it was," said Andrée, nonchalantly.

Claudine waited for a moment.

“I wish you’d show it to me!” she said, coaxingly.

“I’d *rather* not, Mother, it’s private.”

“But Andrée, my dear, why should you have private letters from that man which you can’t show your mother?”

She had adopted a very tranquil, reasonable tone, to conceal her own distress and the advantage which it gave to Andrée. She was confronted once more by the terrible *independence* of her children, they all led such busy, lively, entertaining lives in which there was no need at all for her. They loved her, but they would have gone on in exactly the same way if she were not with them. She was unessential, they needed nothing from her. She had never been able to understand how it had happened. When they were little, she was their universe, she consoled, protected, she alone understood them. She had wished to give her life to them. And then little by little they had got upon their feet and walked away, leaving her still standing with empty arms in the nursery. She couldn’t follow them; she didn’t know how to draw near to them, how to win them. She was helpless, just as she was now helpless before Andrée. The very sight of Andrée frightened her, the fragile and mysterious charm of her beloved child wrung her heart, robbed her of worldly wisdom and common sense. She could have knelt before Andrée and adored her, and wept for the pity that touching youth and ignorance caused her.

“I have loved you every moment of your life, from your first breath!” she might have cried. “There is no one in the world for me but you! I love my other children, but oh, not like you! Not like you! I

wanted to give all my life to your service. I wanted to live for you, to wear myself out to give you happiness. And you will not have me!"

She stole a glance at the child's downcast face, mutinous, impatient.

"Andrée, my dear," she said again. "Why should you have letters from that man which you don't wish me to see?"

For answer Andrée put her hand inside her blouse and drew out a crumpled letter.

"Here!" she said. "Read it then, if you want!"

But it was impossible to do so, to pry into her poor little secret.

"I don't want to read it, my darling. I only want to talk to you about—"

To her great surprise Andrée began to cry.

"Oh, Mother!" she sobbed. "That's just what I *knew* you'd do! Talk it over, and talk and talk, and spoil everything. . . . Why can't you understand? It's nothing, just nothing at all, and you want to talk it into something. Why can't I be let alone? I'm so unhappy!"

"*Unhappy?* Andrée, why? Tell me! Let me help you!"

"I don't know why—except that I never have any peace or freedom. It's *disgusting* to have to talk about every thought that comes into your head. . . . How would you like it? How would you like to have to tell exactly how you felt toward everyone and everything?"

Claudine turned away her head.

"I see how you feel," she said. "It must be disgusting, as you say. . . . But you're surely fair-minded

enough to see that I must make every possible effort to safeguard you. You are young and inexperienced."

"When you were my age you were married and had a baby."

Claudine smiled, one of her rare and enchanting smiles.

"That's true. I had *you*."

"So you see I'm not so very young. And as for experience . . . well, honestly, Mother, I don't think you've had much."

Claudine was startled. She who had suffered so much, been so cruelly disappointed and mocked by life, who had learned so many, many bitter lessons, to be reproached with lack of experience by this baby? She smiled again, sadly.

"You've never been to Europe, or met any famous people, or anything. And you've never—" Andrée flushed and hesitated. "You've never had any romance. Nothing but just Father, and he's not very thrilling."

"My dear!"

"*Please* don't be shocked! It makes it so hard to talk to you. It's no use my pretending that I want a life like yours or that I'd marry a man like Father. I wouldn't for *anything!*"

"Andrée, I really—"

Andrée shook her head. She alone of the three had never been drawn to her father, had never been influenced by him.

"No," she said. "It's no use talking. I want something *very* different. I don't want any stuffy family life. I'd like to go away, by myself—"

“Andrée! Think what you’re saying! How can you be so cruel? What should I do without you?”

“You’ve got Bertie and Edna. And you’re settled down and all that sort of thing. You have lots of things to interest you, but I haven’t anything. That’s why—” Once more she stopped, her cheeks scarlet.

“That’s why I like to hear from—Mr. MacGregor. He encourages me. He says there’s no reason why I shouldn’t make a name for myself, giving concerts. *He*—well, I know he exaggerates, but he says I’m a—a—sort of—wonder.”

“Is he urging you to leave your parents?”

“Heavens, *no!* He just encourages me. He says to keep on practising and practising. And when I get back he’s going to give me a lot of extra time.”

“Why?”

“Because he thinks I’m—promising.”

“Andrée, isn’t there anything more personal beneath this interest?”

“I don’t know,” said Andrée, curtly. “I don’t want to know.”

Claudine was still for a moment, thinking with supreme displeasure of that man, that music teacher, who had by flattery, by chicanery, won her child’s interest. It must be stopped! Should she ridicule him, point out to Andrée that Mr. MacGregor was as old as her father, and a man of no distinction, either mental or physical, a shaggy, lumbering, grey-haired creature only too well used to the silly admiration of young girl pupils? No, ridicule was not a weapon Claudine could handle. She thought for a moment of appealing to her affection, but that too she rejected. She *dared* not. . . .

“Andrée,” she said at last, very gravely. “I am going to ask you to promise me something. If Mr. MacGregor—if this thing—”

“I know what you mean. You mean you want me to promise to tell you if anything happens.”

“Yes.”

“But don’t you see that that isn’t a fair promise?”

Claudine was startled.

“Surely your mother has the right—”

“Oh, yes, you have all sorts of rights!” said Andrée, bitterly. “And I haven’t any. But if I were you—if ever I have a daughter—I’ll never, never ask her to promise to tell me things. I wouldn’t want to know them if she didn’t *want* to tell them.”

Claudine approached and put her arm about the unwilling girl.

“Very well!” she said, with a sigh. “I will leave you free to do as you please about telling me.”

Then Andrée bent down and kissed her.

“You *are* a darling!” she cried. “Now I’ll rush to Edna!”

CHAPTER TWO

THE FORSAKEN PROVIDER

§ i

“ONE of Gilbert’s bad mornings!” thought Miss Dorothy.

And she slipped into her place behind the coffee urn, a little more ingratiating, a little more careful not to disturb him, than usual. He sat at the head of the table, glowering behind his newspaper, and by the very sound of the grunt with which he answered the cousinly good-morning, she was warned of what might be expected. She sat very still, in order not to attract the lightning.

He ate his grape-fruit, quite reasonably, and a little dish of oatmeal, and then Delia brought in the eggs and bacon. He glanced at the plate suspiciously.

“Are these Murray’s eggs?” he demanded.

Miss Dorothy sent the girl a warning glance.

“Yes, sir,” she said.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When did they come?”

“. . . Yesterday, sir.”

“Let me see the box!”

“It was thrown away, sir.”

His face became alarming.

"Dorothy!" he said. "I don't believe it. I don't believe these are Murray's eggs!"

He leaned across the table and sniffed at the dish.

"No!" he shouted. "They are *not!* I know it!"

He flung down his napkin and pushed back his chair. He had for a few weeks past been importing eggs for his special use from a fellow he knew in the country, and he knew that he was being duped, that these immoral women, Miss Dorothy and Delia, used *his* eggs for other purposes, for the household, for puddings, perhaps even ate them themselves. His appetite was extremely delicate at breakfast, no one could quite comprehend how he felt, especially the morning after a banquet. Suddenly his anger turned into a frightful gloom.

"Take them away!" he said, with a sigh. "Take the damned things away and never bring me eggs again. Never! . . . Good Lord! I can't trust *anyone!*"

Miss Dorothy flushed, and smiled nervously.

"Would you like . . . a slice of ham, Gilbert?" she ventured.

"Nothing! . . . More coffee!"

He had put down his paper, and she was in the full glare of his bilious and lowering regard. He picked the thing up again, not to read it, for he had finished all that interested him, but as a screen to conceal from him this scene which he so hated to contemplate, from that dining-room where he had eaten so many hundreds of breakfasts. Claudine hadn't really changed it, or anything else. By the time the old lady had departed this life, Claudine had no more ideas, no more desire to

make changes. The huge sideboard opposite him was crowded with cut glass, silver, hand-painted china, wedding presents, Christmas presents, birthday and anniversary presents, milestones along the road of twenty years of married life. All very neat, comfortable and prosperous, and yet it offended him. He couldn't really find fault with this home or this atmosphere, couldn't well imagine anything much better. If he had been compelled to furnish a dining-room according to his own taste, he would have produced something very similar. He had even a sort of pride in the old furniture and the curtains and the presents. And yet it hurt and angered him so.

He looked up stealthily and saw Miss Dorothy, with such a pleased face, just about to begin her grape-fruit.

The face of a fool he called it to himself, a half complacent, half terrified countenance, a sallow, soul-wearying creature in gold eyeglasses, who existed through his benefactions, one of the thankless crew he laboured unendingly to feed and clothe.

And not one of them made the least effort to comprehend him. He was a man, and therefore to be humoured; he was a man and therefore to be conciliated. Like so many sun-worshippers did they all bow down before the inscrutable source of all comforts, all security, supplicating him to continue shedding his golden rays. Not from humility, you understand, or because they had the least admiration for his productivity, but because only in this way could they obtain what they wished. It was really a worship, with rites and sacrifices, and splendid rewards to be got if you understood how to go about it. Claudine and his two daughters and even the unfort-

unate Miss Dorothy had all a dearly bought knowledge of what topics would infuriate him, knew his good hours and his bad ones, could read the warning symptoms of his more deadly moods. They knew what he liked to eat and what he liked to hear. And nothing else. His queer, gloomy soul remained mysterious and solitary. In an alien world he groped for light, he existed like a sensitive child among impervious and indifferent adults. Even his children seemed to him possessed of worldly knowledge impossible to him; they were aware of things, they discussed things, of which he was ignorant. They were somehow freer and brighter.

To be considered cross when the spirit was writhing, crying for help . . . ! He was passionately convinced that his malign fate had driven him into an utterly wrong life and that somewhere else there was an utterly right life, beautiful and satisfying, which he ought to have been enjoying. He had no idea of making adjustments, or of trying to modify his environment; he wanted, most naïvely, to step into another world.

What it was he so thirsted for, he didn't exactly know. It was not peace, or love, or fame, or money, or any of those things a man might legitimately demand from his destiny. He knew only that his daily bread was ashes in his mouth, that his soul found no nourishment, and pined and sickened, that it lived in a universe everywhere insipid and meaningless. And that with all his heart he resented this fate, above all, this marriage of his. Because it was his conviction, that he, as well as every other man on earth, was entitled to an ideal marriage, and a more or less ardent and beautiful wife. The men who got rather less than this had been cheated, de-

frauded of what he called "the greatest thing in life." It never occurred to him that he was disappointed because he expected too much, he believed himself disappointed because he had received too little.

He never thought of Claudine without a savage resentment. She had swindled him. She was to have brought light, gaiety, charm, into his life, to have transformed it into something resembling her old Staten Island existence, she was to have been perpetually alluring, fairylike, sparkling. And she had failed in all of this. She was nothing more than a decorous and virtuous wife, and she regarded him with something criminally like aversion. She was cold. And he believed, like more than one other man—that her coldness was a fault in her own temperament, and not due to any lack of fascination in himself. It was certainly not a happy marriage. He had grounds for believing that she thought herself a martyr, and he *knew* that he was one.

§ ii

Some occult sense warned him of the time. He glanced up at the clock on the mantelpiece, and caught sight of his own face in the mirror behind it. And he wondered, as he always did when he really, consciously regarded himself, *how* it was he looked like *that*, how it was possible that his appearance should so little express himself. It was another cause for resentment.

A heavy, grizzled man of forty-five with a straggling little mustache over a brutally obstinate mouth. He had a surly way about him, but he was not unattractive; on the contrary, there was something about the gloomy

and bilious gaze of his black eyes that engendered pity and good-will.

But neither pity nor good-will dwelt in Miss Dorothy at that particular instant. She was not resentful, because resentment didn't belong in her stock of feelings, but she was *miserable*. He was upsetting all her neat little plans for the day, he was keeping back Delia. He was so late, why on earth didn't he get up and be off to his office, where he belonged? Every moment of these days was so precious to her, when she was sole and undisputed mistress in this house which she had always regarded with awe. She could wish that the summer would last forever, and Claudine and the children never return. Think of the joy of going to market in the electric coupé! Think of the charm of eating her lunch alone, benevolent chatelaine of all this domain!

At last, with his terribly rough gesture, he shoved away the plates before him, so that they upset a milk jug, pushed back his chair in a way that made furrows in the carpet, and got up. He went heavily upstairs and took his straw hat from the gigantic hat-rack. He frowned, there was something he didn't like about that dark hall, with the rug removed for the summer. There were certain changes from his mother's day, the glass top of the front door was covered with shirred green silk, and over the open door of the front parlour hung a portière of bamboo tubes strung together with green and blue glass beads, hung there fifteen summers ago. On the shelf of the hat-rack was a little rubber plant in a horrible green scalloped bowl, and a clumsy bronze statue of a fat shepherd boy, holding out an altogether incongruous little tray for visiting cards, a wedding anniversary

present from his senior partner. Each of these objects *per se* he regarded with more or less admiration, but the ensemble disgusted him. He felt that there was something wrong here, and that it was of course his wife's fault. He execrated her in silence.

He set off down the tranquil street, blazing in the July sun, removing his hat now and then to salute a familiar face. He knew so many people in the neighbourhood, through having lived there all his life, but they were not his friends, these people. They respected him as a man who paid his bills promptly and provided well for his family, but they didn't like him, had no warm feeling for him. He was too gloomy, too preoccupied. He had an air of misery about him which was distressing to a hostess. Claudine was obliged to confess, and to apologize for his reluctance to make visits. She said he was such a man's man! He was only happy among his business associates. But what she didn't know, what nobody suspected, was the positive hatred concealed beneath his *farouche* manner for all these respectable people. He despised them and loathed them, and was mortally sick of them, and worst of all, he couldn't feel justified in such feelings. Theoretically they were what he admired, and he couldn't see in what way he differed from them, and, yet he knew that he *did*. This feeling, like all his other feelings, he kept gloomily to himself.

He jumped on a crowded car going across the bridge, very hot, very angry at being jostled, and was carried off to New York, to make more money. . . .

§ iii

Not only at home were his moods known and respected, at his office it was a recognized thing that the early morning was a bad time for him, and that it was most unwise to disturb him. As usual he strode through the outer office and shut himself into his own small room, without exchanging a word or even a nod. He looked through his mail which had been opened and neatly sorted for him, then pushed it aside, staring after it with a distraught and wretched look. He couldn't put his mind on it, he hated every detail, every possibility.

"Why the devil am I slaving away here?" he asked himself. "Working day in and day out, so that she can go flaunting in fine clothes and idling away the whole summer up there in the mountains."

He remembered the extensive wardrobe Claudine had taken with her. Never did she suspect, never could she have suspected, how he resented it. The primeval male in him would deny all luxuries to the unloved woman.

"*She!* In her silk dresses—loafing all day long—servants to wait on her, *never* does a useful thing! Good God! Think of the time and leisure she's got, and she doesn't even read the papers! Not even charitable! Useless, through and through.... Where would she be if it weren't for me? She's got everything she wants, without raising a finger for it. Food, clothes, jewels, money to spend, fool women to jabber with—"

It seemed to him quite intolerable to think of her privileges; he couldn't have endured it at all if he hadn't had a certain very curious consolation for his grievances. His delight was to picture his wife as cast away

upon a desert island, and he gloated over her utter futility there. He could imagine how helpless she would be, how incongruous, she with her fastidiousness, her chilly dignity. *She* wouldn't be able to make herself dresses out of grass, sewing with a thorn for a needle. She wouldn't know how, and couldn't learn how, to grind flour from exotic roots, to tame birds, to construct houses. Incurably romantic Gilbert! That was his test for any woman; how she would look and behave on his classic desert isle. She must be lovely, strong, and young, and she must be altogether daring and brave and unwifelike, she must be resourceful and full of alluring wiles, she must urgently *need* him, and yet be entirely independent.

He glanced at the clock, took up his hat, and went out to a celebrated café near by, had two whiskies and soda, and immediately felt much better. He would confess to you that he was rather too dependent upon "bracers," but like all that army, he was merely waiting for a propitious day to renounce the thing entirely. Some day when he wasn't worried or depressed. No hurry about it; it didn't interfere with his business, and it helped him beyond measure through his fits of awful despondency. He was willing to admit that perhaps his health might be better if he drank less, but he couldn't become really interested in his health.

He chatted with the other ten o'clock frequenters of the bar, whom he knew very well, for they came with great regularity. He felt ready for business now; he went back—in fact, he now entered the office officially for the first time, in his proper character, nodded genially to the cashier and to his stenographer, an ambitious

young Cuban, and began to pace up and down the big sample room, planning his autumn campaign and reviewing his "line." A very fine line this year; he looked upon it with satisfaction as it lay spread out before him on a big counter sloping steeply on both sides and divided into little compartments filled with red rubber cows and white rubber horses, big, brightly colored balls and tiny hard rubber ones, dolls in knitted dresses, rattles, teething rings. There were among these several novelties which he considered very promising. . . .

"A gentleman to see you!" said the young Cuban, with his alert and zealous air.

"Who?"

"Mr. MacGregor."

"Don't know him. Where's he from?"

"Didn't say," replied the young Cuban, with a creditable imitation of his chief's brusque business-like tone.

"Bring him in!" said Gilbert.

He stood facing the door with a non-committal expression which would be either menacing or genial, as circumstances might dictate. But the man who entered was a type not familiar to him; he couldn't place him; a big, shambling, rugged man of forty or so, a bit uncouth in appearance, but not without distinction. His face was ironic, but his smile was genial.

"Mr. Vincelle?" he asked.

"What can I do for you, sir?" inquired Gilbert, briefly.

"My name is Alexander MacGregor," said he. "I have had the pleasure of instructing your elder daughter in music."

Oh, a music teacher! Probably about a bill, or those

outrageous "extra lessons" which his children were forever in need of.

"Sit down, sir, sit down!" said Gilbert.

Mr. MacGregor did so.

"I hope I don't find you very busy?" he said. "This is quite a personal matter. . . ."

"Cigar?" asked Gilbert.

Mr. MacGregor accepted one.

"It's about Miss Andrée," he said. "I understand that you're going out there this afternoon, and I thought—"

They talked for more than an hour, and Gilbert was captivated. He liked this fellow! He liked his cool, manly air, his practical outlook. Mr. MacGregor began his proposal by stating his financial position, which was sound and satisfactory. He put forward his own good points with assurance and he affirmed that his age was an asset.

"Andrée is very temperamental," he said, "and hard to understand. A young, inexperienced man wouldn't be able to. She requires the greatest tact. A rare, peculiar nature. Only men of our age can appreciate it."

Well, thought Gilbert, after all, why not? Wouldn't he himself be a marvelous lover for a young girl, if she were the right sort of young girl? There was a sort of indirect flattery in Mr. MacGregor's idea.

Moreover, he found Andrée an intensely irritating young woman, and he would be glad to see her safely married and gone away. She was a sort of ally to her mother. She was antagonistic; she didn't admire him; she wasn't the sort of daughter he had expected.

And he was delighted with Mr. MacGregor's old

fashioned idea of asking his permission before speaking to Andrée. It was really the first time he had ever been treated as a father should be treated. He took Mr. MacGregor out to lunch, to a sedate little second floor restaurant known only to connoisseurs. They ate largely and critically. . . .

By two o'clock indigestion had engulfed Gilbert in black misery. He lingered at the table, chewing a cigar, and meditating. It was Saturday; the office was closed; he had nothing to do until train time. He ordered more liqueurs, more coffee, and refused to be parted from Mr. MacGregor, clung to him, in fact.

Of course, he said, it all depended upon Andrée herself. Of course it did, Mr. MacGregor agreed.

"See here!" said Gilbert. "Come out there with me, and we'll see. You'll have plenty of time to pack what you need for over Sunday. Come on!"

Naturally Mr. MacGregor went.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUITOR WITH CREDENTIALS

§ i

IT was a filial duty, as well as a wifely duty, to meet Gilbert's train. He wished them all to do so, he liked to see these three charmingly dressed, feminine creatures all looking for and expecting him. But he never showed this; he always wore the distracted and annoyed expression of a tremendously busy man snatching a little time for his family.

He got off the train in his rather clumsy way, and they started toward him, when the sight of Mr. MacGregor following him, bag in hand, changed their politely eager smiles to looks of consternation.

Gilbert kissed them all perfunctorily, and then brought forward his companion.

"I've brought Mr. MacGregor down with me," he announced. "I hope the place isn't crowded."

"It isn't," said Andrée. "I don't see why it should be. I don't see anything to bring crowds of people here, I'm sure."

"Hush, Andrée!" murmured her mother, and bestowed a gracious and expressionless smile upon the visitor. "I'm sure there'll be a room for Mr. MacGregor. Hadn't we better get into the bus now? It's waiting, you know!"

All the way to the hotel she was quite perfect; she told Mr. MacGregor about Andrée's difficulties in practising, she was gay, in a formal, stereotyped way; when they arrived she arranged with the landlady for a room, even went about, picking him out a nice one. Then they all sat on the veranda for an hour or so, in the terrific heat, looking out over the sun-scorched lawn and the dusty road, and the motionless fir trees, and talked more. It was not an altogether successful conversation; Andrée was perverse and wilfully tactless, Edna was frankly indifferent, and Gilbert very garrulous. He wished to talk about the wholesale rubber business, and he did.

Then it was time to dress for dinner and they all went upstairs. The door into the girls' room was locked, and Gilbert sat down, prepared for a more confidential talk, and an accounting of Claudine's expenditure. But she attacked him at once, with a fiercely restrained wrath.

"Gilbert, what made you bring that man here?"

"Who? You mean Mr. MacGregor? I wanted to!" he answered, defiantly.

"It was a stupid, meddling thing to do!" she cried.

"See here, Claudine—!"

"You don't realize the trouble it may cause. . . . Why didn't you consult me?"

He laughed unpleasantly.

"I don't think I'll start that now, after twenty years—"

"You've no right to bring any man, where the girls are, without consulting me. . . . I particularly didn't want this man."

"Why?"

"I don't care to explain."

"It's no use your being so high-handed with me. I'll bring anyone I see fit. I consider my judgment—"

"Then I shall take *Andrée* away."

"Going to leave me? I've heard that before!"

She was quite white with anger.

"When it's a question of *Andrée*—" she began.

"There it is again—your cursed, unfair, unwomanly favouritism. What's the matter with MacGregor? Not good enough for your princess?"

"Then he's spoken to you!" she cried, in horror.

"Yes, he has, and very decently, too. I don't see how she could do much better, if you ask me."

"Gilbert! Are you mad? That old man—old enough to be her father!"

This touched a sore spot.

"Even that isn't so very ancient," he said, with infantile resentment. "No one but you would call a man of his age old. He's a fine fellow. He has a good name, and he's well fixed, and he's very fond of *Andrée*—"

"You're—you're positively wicked!" she cried, choking with sobs. "*Andrée*—that wonderful, beautiful child—and that silly old man . . . ! I'm ashamed of you! I'm disgusted with you!"

He was astonished and somewhat alarmed. How was he to explain to this unreasonably violent woman his pretty fancies about young brides and adoring, distinguished, grey-haired husbands?

"See here!" he began, but she wouldn't listen to him.

"I won't allow him to say a word to her! Not a word! I'm going to speak to him myself and—"

Gilbert sprang to his feet.

“No, you don’t! I’m not going to be made a fool of! I told him he might speak to Andrée—”

“And I’ll tell him he can’t. I won’t have any interference where Andrée’s concerned.”

“I tell you I have something to say in this matter!”

She looked at him with a cold smile, and deliberately turned away from him. It was a trick of hers, and it always infuriated him. He raged at her in a way of which he was afterward ashamed.

She went on dressing, entirely disregarding him; then when she was ready, she said:

“I’m going downstairs now. Perhaps you’ll dress, when you’ve finished your bar-room tirade.”

§ ii

It was a jolly dinner. Both Claudine and Gilbert were in high spirits, as angry people often are, and Mr. MacGregor appeared greatly entertained. The girls were ridiculous; Claudine recognized their mood and frowned. She knew and dreaded this high tension, when every remark provoked a giggle, when they exchanged glances and were scarcely able to control their lips, trembling with laughter. A thought came to her which made her flush with shame. Could they have heard their father . . . ? He had certainly talked very loudly. And unfortunately that was the sort of thing they considered funny.

Poor woman! She was in misery, before her wretched task. She was afraid of the inscrutable Mr. MacGregor; he was so masculine, so self-assured, so old and sensible. But she was determined nevertheless to drive him away,

no matter how outrageous she had to be. He should not be given the opportunity of putting ideas into Andrée's head—silly, headstrong Andrée! She wouldn't leave them alone for an instant.

As they rose from the table, said Mr. MacGregor:

“Miss Andrée, shall we have a little music? We might run over that new duet—”

“No, thanks!” said Andrée, laughing. “Not with you!”

“Nonsense! Come along!” he said, with authoritative, professorial air. “I want to see what you've been doing.”

“No!” she repeated. “I don't want to! I won't!”

“Come, Andrée!” said Gilbert, severely. “This is no way to behave. When Mr. MacGregor—”

“All right!” she interrupted, and led the way into the parlour where a group of old ladies was already installed. Mr. MacGregor drew up a chair beside the piano stool and they sat down, side by side, the big, stoop-shouldered man with his grizzled hair, and the slight young girl. He spoke to her for a few moments in an undertone, pointing a square finger at the music; and she nodded petulantly.

“Now!” said he.

The four hands were poised above the keyboard in the manner made famous by his teaching. Then they began, a majestic, crashing piece, a prelude in tremendous chords. The group of old ladies was annoyed at first, but some instinct warned them that it was classical music and worthy of respect, and they all sat rocking and listening.

But Claudine could take no pleasure in the noble

work. The sight of Andrée and Mr. MacGregor side by side filled her with terror and impatience. She thought of the man's great prestige, the illustrious pupils who publicly lauded him, the recitals given by his conservatory which she had attended, and where he was a demi-god, adored by students and parents. He had written books on technic, he was a prominent man, respected in certain estimable circles, he was well-to-do, his reputation was unblemished. His attention must seem such a dangerously flattering thing for his young pupil.

Oh, damnable music! She imagined she could actually see it weave its spell about her child. The duet finished, Mr. MacGregor consented to play alone, and it was marvelous playing. Andrée stood beside him, watching his hands, never raising her eyes. And he never looked at her either; sinister fact!

"And now, you, Miss Andrée!" he said.

She consented instantly. She was fired; she wanted to play now. And Mr. MacGregor crossed the room and sat down beside Claudine.

"She is remarkable," he said.

Claudine looked intently at him.

"You think she would make a concert player?" she asked, briefly.

"She undoubtedly could, if she would. But her temperament is peculiar."

Claudine smiled.

"Her temperament is more or less familiar to me," she said.

"Oh, I wasn't presuming to inform her mother!" he hastened to say. "It was simply that I thought my interpretation—as a musician—might be of interest. I

don't hesitate to say that she is one of the most promising pupils I have ever had the pleasure of teaching."

"Then do you think she has a fine future before her?" asked Claudine. She would bring him to the point; he should be made to declare himself so that she could demolish him.

"If she chooses. But I'm not sure that she has the temperament for a public artist. She is too rebellious—"

"Then what do you think she is suited for?" asked Claudine, boldly. But she never had Mr. MacGregor's reply, for Andrée had suddenly stopped playing and got up.

"Mother!" she said, "Do you mind if Edna and I pop over to the drugstore? We want some things—"

Mr. MacGregor had risen, prepared with a gallant offer to accompany them, but before he could say a word, she had gone, her arm about her smaller sister. And with the cessation of the music, Gilbert intended to be heard. Mr. MacGregor was rather interested in the stock market, in a prudent way, and Gilbert had information to give, and prophecies.

Claudine could not endure it; she went out on the veranda to await the return of the children, but though she lingered there for an hour and a half, there was no sign of them. Thoroughly vexed, she went upstairs and there they were in their own room. She heard Edna shrieking with laughter.

Quite shamelessly she stood close to the crack of the door.

"Gosh!" said Edna. "If he married both of us, and

another one thrown in, it would just about make a wife of his own age. The conceit of men!"

"Well," said Andrée, "the girls at the conservatory do make awful idiots of themselves about him, you know."

"But, oh!" cried Edna, "you don't know how funny you looked, playing that duet, and both—pouncing—!"

"Shut up!" said Andrée, impatiently. "I knew you were laughing. There's nothing really funny in it, of course not."

There was silence for a moment, broken by giggles from Edna.

"But, honestly, Andrée," she said, at last. "Have you encouraged him? I'm sure he came to woo you!"

"I never dreamed he'd come. . . . I wish he hadn't! He wrote such heavenly letters. And now he's spoiled everything."

"Father adores him; you can see that. What do you suppose he told Father?"

"Goodness knows! Father swallows everything. . . . Oh, dear! I really liked him—when he was miles away!"

Claudine now knocked at the door; and entered.

"Children," she said. "Where have you been? I waited and waited for you—"

"We just came up here; we didn't go to the drug-store after all. We thought we'd like a nice quiet little talk," said Edna.

"It's very close and hot up here," said their mother. "However I suppose you're not going downstairs again this evening—"

"Not unless Andrée wants to play another duet," said Edna.

Andrée scowled at her.

"Your playing was beautiful, my dear," said her mother. "Mr. MacGregor must be a very competent teacher."

She kissed them both and went back into her own room, unaccountably relieved. She undressed and put on a thin silk dressing-gown and sat down near the window in the dark.

She deliberately tried to banish all thought of Gilbert. He would inevitably go to the large hotel down the road and have a number of whiskies and soda, and come back, either contrite or quarrelsome. One was as bad as another. . . . She sighed, bitterly. Better think of Andrée.

It was a hot, still night; the world outside seemed restless and fevered, noisy with insects, not sleeping, not tranquil. She could hear dogs barking frantically, and a strain of stupid music from the hotel, chattering voices on the veranda, sounds from other rooms. . . . Oh, my Andrée, how little life has to give you! Even the best of it is so poor! A profound melancholy overcame her; she could not so much as imagine a future for her child that would be happy.

The door opened softly, and Edna's voice whispered:

"Mother!"

"Yes, dear?"

"May I come in, just for an instant?"

"Of course!"

"Andrée's asleep. . . . But I was so afraid you'd be worrying, Mother darling. I knew how you must feel.

when you saw Mr. MacGregor. . . . Oh, Andrée's such a chump! But he's done for! I made her laugh at him, and that's spoiled everything."

"You dear girl! How clever and sensible of you! You really do understand Andrée wonderfully."

Edna sighed.

"She is a worry! She'd marry anyone—she'd do anything, if she was caught in a certain mood. I hope you'll be able to keep that old nuisance—"

"Really, my dear!"

"I hope you won't let Mr. MacGregor talk to her tomorrow. It might undo all the good I've done."

Claudine put her arms about the child and kissed her fervently, the sort of kisses she so often gave to Edna in which were all her secret contrition for her favouritism, all her remorse at the inadequate return she made for this honest and beautiful affection. She had a superstitious dread of being punished some day for her wickedness; some disaster would overtake little Edna, and then she would repent, too late, her idolatry of Andrée.

"Good night, Edna darling!" she said. "You're such a comfort to me!"

And how much dearer was the pain that one caused her than the comfort the other gave!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE UNABASHED OUTCAST

§ i

CLAUDINE waked up to the dull peace of a mountain Sunday. She could hear the grinding of the ice-cream freezer on the back porch, and far away the bell of the little Roman Catholic church. She rose and dressed while Gilbert still slept, and going out into the hall, knocked on the door of the girls' room. Andrée was up and half dressed, combing her misty dark hair.

"Edna's pretending to be asleep," she said, scornfully.

"There's no hurry," said Claudine. "She can wait for Father and have breakfast with him. Finish dressing, and we'll have time for a little walk."

She sat down and watched her child with tender eyes. There was an awkward, impatient grace about her, in the hasty movements of her arms as she arranged her hair, something so immature, so touching. She slipped on a white frock, because her father was inordinately fond of seeing young girls in white, and announced herself ready. But Claudine saw untidinesses; she tucked in a stray lock of hair, straightened her collar, tightened her belt.

"Now!" she said. "You're nice!"

They went out, closing the door quietly on the motionless Edna.

“What on earth is that row!” said Andrée.

They paused for a moment in the hall to listen. Some outrageous person was playing with vigour on the piano, and whistling, to accompany the vulgar air.

“And on Sunday morning, too!” said Claudine, with a frown, “when so many people want to sleep!”

They went on down; the dining-room was still quite empty at this early hour, and the veranda deserted. But every corner was permeated by that loud, shocking noise!

“Let’s see what it is!” said Andrée, and they looked cautiously in at the open door of the parlour.

“Oh, I know him!” said Andrée. “I saw him come last night, on the train with Father and Mr. MacGregor. Horrible, vulgar little wretch!”

Seated at the piano was a slight, fair-haired young man with a minute yellow mustache and a cheerful, impudent face. He wore a new black suit and white buckskin shoes and some awful sort of necktie; he had an air of being specially got up for Sunday. The place was a cheap and obscure one, but they had never before seen in it a guest like this. People of his kind found nothing to please them here.

Claudine was affronted.

“We can only hope he won’t stay long,” she said, as they turned away.

They went into breakfast, alone in the room, but their peace was destroyed by the playing and whistling; at first they frowned, and Claudine even suggested speaking to Mrs. Dewey; but in the end they were forced to laugh.

They went out for a walk, a carefully selected one, where no cows would be met with to terrify Andrée and a good view might be obtained for Claudine. They talked together in one of their few hours of perfect accord.

"I have some influence over her!" thought Claudine, happily. "If she ever contemplates anything foolish, I am sure I can dissuade her. She is mine! We are bound together by a thousand ties."

Andrée broke into her meditation.

"You're awfully pretty, Mother!" she said, suddenly. "I love the way you look. . . . There's something—I don't know how to describe it—something old-fashioned about you."

Claudine was not greatly pleased.

"Old-fashioned?" she said, thinking of her new frock, her chic and becoming coiffure, every dainty detail of her costume.

"Yes. You haven't the look other women have. You're so distinguished and—mysterious. Have you had a very sad life, Mother?"

"Mercy, no, child!" said Claudine. She shrank at once from any invasion of her reserve; her dignity compelled her to maintain her aloofness, her air of slightly inhuman tranquillity.

But Andrée was insistent.

"But I do wish you'd tell me one thing!" she said. "Did you really mean to marry Cousin Lance, and were you parted by something?"

"Where did you get such a ridiculous idea?" asked her mother, frowning. "No one ever thought of such a thing."

“Edna said she thought so. . . . Mother, I wish I knew you better!”

Claudine was startled and touched.

“My dear!” she cried. “But don’t you. . . .?”

She stopped.

“After all,” she went on. “I think it is better just to love people, and not to trouble about trying to know or to understand them.”

They had reached a little summer-house built out on a rock over a deep pool in a rocky basin. It had not at all the sinister aspect of that other pool; this was sunny, open and dark blue, with wild flowers growing about it, and ferns. From where they sat, they could see the line of mountains beyond. Andrée didn’t like mountains; the sombre and majestic environment exasperated her restless soul. She sighed, but grew quiet looking at her mother’s rapt face. She was drawing strength and assuagement from the hills. Poor mother, with her philosophers and her scenery! A phantom existence, Andrée reflected.

“Hope I don’t disturb you?” said a cheerful voice, and they both turned, to see with horror the common little man, with a great bundle of Sunday newspapers under his arm. He had politely taken off his hat and stood smiling at them.

“They told me down at the house that this was a pretty walk,” he said. “And it certainly is. Fine air to-day, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Claudine, in her most distraught, affable way. “It’s a lovely day.”

“Would you like to see the papers?” he asked.

"No, thank you. We're going back at once. . . . We just stopped for the view."

He smiled.

"A tame little view!" he said. "I guess I'll find something better than this before I've finished."

"How?" asked Andrée, abruptly.

"I'm going to climb some of these peaks. I've done a lot of climbing in the Alps," he said. "I've got the head for it, and the legs. Why, there wasn't one of those millionaire sportsmen who could beat me at it. These peaks look like hills to me."

His boasting was somehow ameliorated by his good-humour. And one couldn't help believing that he actually had defeated millionaire sportsmen.

"I suppose you ladies don't climb?" he asked.

"I haven't," said Andrée. "But perhaps I shall some time. It might be rather fun. I'd never thought of it."

"We must go," said Claudine, firmly. "Your father will be wondering what has become of us. Come, dear!"

She smiled politely at the dreadful little man, and they walked off. At a turn of the path Andrée, looking back, saw him spreading out his papers, his straw hat jauntily at the back of his head.

"I'm afraid he's going to be a nuisance," said Claudine.

"I guess you can dispose of him!" said Andrée, grimly. "Lord! How I do hate Sundays!"

Claudine felt obliged to remonstrate, but weakly, because she was quite in agreement with her child. They sauntered back with reluctant steps, each lost in her own incommunicable thought.

§ ii

The great mid-day dinner had been disposed of, the chicken, the ice-cream, and the other decent, traditional things, and the entire party went out on to the veranda and sat down, constrained, almost enraged with one another.

“Let’s take a walk, Father!” said Andrée, suddenly.

“Not on your life!” said Gilbert. “*I’m* not nineteen, old girl!”

He took a bill from his pocket.

“See if you and Edna can’t find some place to buy yourselves a box of caramels,” he said. “I want a look at the papers.”

“I shouldn’t object to a walk,” said Mr. MacGregor.

“Then I’ll show you a nice, cool, after-dinner one,” said Claudine, brightly, “while the girls go for their candy. Run up and get me my sunshade, please, Edna!”

Gilbert looked up with a scowl; but he met so cold and steadfast a glance from his wife that he looked down again. Better let her alone; she was capable of the most alarming retaliations. Anyhow, she couldn’t do any real harm; love was not to be so easily discouraged. He pretended to be deep in his papers, but he was none the less well aware of his daughters going off in one direction and his wife and Mr. MacGregor in another. He was ready to laugh at the woman’s folly.

Claudine had started with the firm intention of approaching and utterly routing Mr. MacGregor. But, to be brief, she didn’t so much as mention Andrée’s name. She couldn’t! Instead they chatted affably as they strolled; Mr. MacGregor gave some information,

more sentimental than scientific, regarding Scotch wild flowers. He was really very nice and flattering. She hadn't for years met anyone who took so frank an interest in her. He was by no means a botanist, but he confessed to a love of Nature, and he admired her quite extensive knowledge. Moreover, he too was a reader of her beloved philosophers, and they had an interesting if somewhat superficial discussion of their theories of life. Claudine's idea was that one should try to deny the reality of suffering; she had a pitiful hope that if she were to train her reason sufficiently she would in time be able to reason away her unhappiness. Mr. MacGregor, on the contrary, had a tinge of Calvinism in his philosophy, he thought it better to hug one's pain, to rejoice in its cruel embrace, to be made strong by it.

Then they talked a little of music, Claudine's old love. But Mr. MacGregor was so very practical. He looked upon a masterwork as a thing to be expressed through high technical perfection, he read no meanings, no sentiment into music, he had none of Claudine's mystic delight in sound itself.

They both became mollified. Mr. MacGregor was able to forgive this charming and interesting woman her obvious interference in his love-making, and she was willing to admit that as a man he was strong, sensible, and rather likeable. She couldn't help contrasting his ruggedness, his well-furnished mind, his varied interests, with the bilious and tiresome Gilbert. Here was a companion, who could walk, and who could talk.

They came leisurely home; Gilbert saw them crossing the sunny lawn, both of them annoyingly cool in spite

of the midsummer weather. He himself was quite wretched from the heat, and irritated by the newspaper. He got up and went to meet them.

"Tell you what!" he said. "We'll see if we can get a motor somewhere in the place and go for a drive in the cool of the afternoon—about five. The children will like it."

It was of course unimaginable either to him or to Claudine that he should find the conveyance. He was a sort of Sultan; he never did things of that sort. He gave orders, and he paid. So Claudine found and despatched a fat youth belonging to Mrs. Dewey and the thing was done. They then retired to their rooms until five o'clock; Gilbert dozed and his wife gave her attention to her finger-nails.

"What have the children been doing?" she asked suddenly.

"Don't know. . . Haven't seen them," he muttered. "Good Lord! This room is *hot!* Can't you find some way to keep the flies out? What good are the screens?"

Claudine didn't answer; an alarming thought had entered her mind. Suppose those provoking girls weren't back when the car arrived? Gilbert would be in a terrible rage; and there would certainly be a scene. . . . Where could they have gone, on this drowsy Sunday afternoon in that little village so devoid of resources?

Her fears were confirmed; they didn't come back. Gilbert had got into the car, Mr. MacGregor was standing near.

"Call the girls!" said Gilbert, impatiently. "I sup-

pose they're making themselves sick with their caramels."

But they were not in the house, not in the grounds. Mr. MacGregor went down the road to the hotel, and to the drug-store where they must have gone for their candy, but he did not find them. They wasted half an hour, and then went off without them.

Gilbert didn't spare Claudine. He remonstrated all the time, in a manner which, if he had not been a man, would certainly have been called nagging. He said it was disgraceful; hadn't she any control over her children? Didn't she take any interest in them? Was she in the habit of neglecting them in this way? That was the way with women; they hadn't a damned thing to do *but* look after their children, and they didn't even do that properly. And so on. Claudine endured it with a set smile; she scarcely heard him. Mr. MacGregor, however, did hear him; it was not a pleasant drive for him.

§ iii

They got back a little late for the meal known as Sunday night tea. She hurried upstairs to wash and brush her hair, and there in their room were her daughters, both stretched out on the bed.

"Edna!" she cried. "Andrée! Where have you been? Your father had a motor to take you out . . . he was so disappointed. You have no right to worry and annoy him so. . . . Where have you been since dinner time?"

Edna raised herself on one elbow.

"Sorry, Mother darling! We went out with that funny little man. We ran across him as we were coming

out of the drug-store and he began to talk. Said he was going to walk to a place called 'The Brave's Leap,' and asked us if we didn't want to go along, so we did. It was heavenly! Miles and miles. . . . We're awfully tired, but it's a nice tiredness."

"What an outrageous thing to do! I'm surprised at you! The man's a perfect stranger—and not a desirable person at all. I can't tell you how annoyed I am. And your father's plans all upset—"

"But we didn't know about Father's plans," said Edna.

"We didn't miss much," said Andrée. "I hate those silly drives. As it was, we got a lot of splendid exercise and a lot of fun."

"You mustn't do such things without asking me! I thought you both knew better than to go off that way with a stranger. It was very wrong and inconsiderate. Naturally your father expects to see something of you in the little time he's here—"

"But, Mother dear," said Edna, patiently. "We're not children. We couldn't leave Mr. Stephens standing in the street while we ran home to ask mother. He's a very nice little beast, and there was really absolutely no harm in taking a walk with him."

"I have no control over them!" thought Claudine, bitterly. "Gilbert is right!"

Aloud she said, in a tone of great displeasure:

"There is no time to argue with you now. It's late. Please get dressed at once for supper."

"We don't want any supper," said Andrée. "The nice little beast had all sorts of things in his knapsack. We've been eating all afternoon."

“And we stopped at a funny little inn somewhere on the road and had ginger ale and more sandwiches. Mother, I wish you’d been there! It was the only decent time we’ve had in this place. We saw the most beautiful waterfall, and a wonderful gorge that an Indian’s supposed to have jumped across. And the man’s really very nice. Of course he’s common, and all that sort of thing, but he’s the most cheerful creature!”

“He said he was ‘athletic,’ ” said Andrée, “and he is! He showed off all the time, and it was very amusing.”

But Claudine was not listening; she was thinking with dread of what she should say to Gilbert.

And in the end she was certainly not candid.

“The girls went for a long walk in the mountains,” she told him. She didn’t mention the “nice little beast,” and neither did they, whether from dissimulation or carelessness she didn’t care to investigate.

On an early train the next morning Gilbert and Mr. MacGregor went back to the city, and she drew a breath of relief. Now she had only two adversaries to struggle against—and perhaps the common little man as well.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BREATH OF LIFE

§ i

“**T**IRED?” asked Mr. Stephens.

“Not a bit,” said Andrée. “Edna and I owe you a vote of thanks for putting a little life into one of those ghastly Sundays. I loathe Sundays.”

“You wouldn’t if you’d ever done any work,” said he.

She looked at him in surprise. He was sitting on the rail of the veranda where she had found him when she came out after her late and solitary breakfast. He looked well in his white flannels; he wore his great variety of clothes with a sort of innocent gusto, like so many fancy dress costumes, and though so obviously not to the manner born, he had no awkwardness; there was, on the contrary, an engaging and honest assurance about him, and a remarkable vitality. His features were sharp and by no means distinguished, but they were good. His blue eyes were frank and intelligent. He was wiry, well knit, not without vanity in his strength. The cheerful grin had vanished from his face with his last words, leaving it quite serious.

“I have done work,” she answered. “You don’t know what hard, tiresome work practising is.”

"It isn't work," he interrupted. "It's preparation for work. You've never had to go on when you were tired. In fact, you've never had to do it at all. Your conscience has been your master, and I can tell you, it's a darn sight easier master than hunger."

This was extraordinary talk.

"Well, I suppose I'm lucky then," said Andrée. "I've never had to earn money, and I don't suppose I ever shall."

"It's not lucky to be useless," he said.

"Useless!" she cried. "Do you think making music is useless?"

"Of course it is. Lots of people get on without music. Fine, high-minded people, too."

Andrée smiled scornfully.

"I dare say!" she said. "But there are some people who wouldn't think life was worth living without art."

"No, there aren't. Not one. If you gave any human being his choice between a decent happy life without a sign of art, or death, no one but a maniac would choose death."

"I should!"

"Then that's because you don't know anything about death, or life either."

She shrugged her shoulders, and half turned away.

"You'd better not bother to talk to such a fool, then," she said. "I'll admit I can't talk to people who despise music."

"I don't despise it. I'm very fond of it. I play a little myself. In fact, I think I've got quite a talent for it. If I could have studied, I'd have been a pretty good musician."

"I don't doubt it, judging by your performance yesterday morning," said Andrée.

She was glad to see his face flush as she walked away. He needed taking down.

Still, she couldn't help thinking of him. He was an interesting, if an impertinent man. Her mother had said nothing further about him, but he was obviously in the category of impossible persons. Perhaps they had encouraged him too much. . . .

But the beastly part of it was, that he was always doing such interesting things, things you couldn't help wanting to do yourself. He lived in a sort of world of his own, quite cheerful in his ostracism. Perhaps he didn't even notice the scorn and disapproval of the respectable old ladies, or the contempt of the matrons. He walked about the corridors with his hat on, he sat on the porch whistling loudly, late at night, when his betters wanted to sleep. Complaints poured in upon the placid Mrs. Dewey. And still, in spite of all this, Andrée and Edna followed his activities with envious eyes. One day a lean, worn horse was brought round for him from some mysterious source, and he came out and packed on it a most peculiar burden in a water-cloth cover. He was there a long time, inspecting the girths, readjusting his load, intensely serious. Then he glanced up and saw the girls in the doorway.

"I'm off for a little camping trip," he said. "A couple of days—exploring the hills."

He mounted nimbly and turned to wave at them, and trotted off, straight and soldierly, in khaki breeches and a white shirt, and a big sombrero on his neat head.

The next thing he did when he returned was to order

a canoe from the city and carry it on his back a long way to a suitable little river. He was away in it for three days and came back with a fine basket of fish which he asked Mrs. Dewey to cook for the entire house.

And that evening after dinner he frankly approached Claudine.

"They tell me you know a lot about flowers," he said. "I don't know much, but I know enough to spot rare ones. I've brought back three or four specimens I think you'd like to have."

"Thank you!" said Claudine. "You're very kind!"

She hadn't the heart to snub the friendly creature; besides, it was very nice of him to think of her.

"I'll be very pleased to see them in the morning," she said.

"Do you mind smoking?" he asked.

She was startled; did he intend to stay by her side?

"Not at all! And anyhow, I'm going in directly. I have letters to write."

She left him sitting on the rail in his characteristic attitude, the attitude of a small boy, a rather humorous figure. And yet, in a way, a singularly manly and independent one, quite indifferent to the disapproval of the rocking old ladies, quite sufficient unto himself. Solitary, he was not lonely, not forlorn; he no more objected to being ignored than a cat might have objected. He somehow stood out against the background of mountains and starry sky with a startling individuality, like the epitome of valiant humanity defying nature. She thought of him with great indulgence, in spite of the fact that he had driven her indoors.

§ ii

Claudine came out the next morning, prepared for the excursion she made every fine morning while Andrée practised and Edna sat in the room with her, driven by her sister's industry to the study of Italian. She had with her two volumes of philosophers and a note book and fountain pen, for the studying she did, copying out and commenting upon the passages that impressed her, getting what comfort and peace of mind she could from them.

She put up her dark green sunshade and started off across the lawn, very trim and elegant in starched white; she looked remarkably young, her calm and serious face hadn't a line, a wrinkle, her coppery hair was as bright and heavy as it had ever been, she was straight, her outlines neat and clear. She had never been supple; there had always been a sort of woodenness about her small body, but it had a charm all its own; it gave her a peculiarly "ladylike" air of being not quite human.

She left the grounds and entered upon the highway, inches deep in clean white dust, and she heard no foot-steps behind her, no sound until an anxious voice said over her shoulder:

"I've brought those little plants and things for you to look at. I was afraid I wouldn't be there when you got back. I'm leaving at noon for two or three days and they'd be withered by the time I got back."

It was the nice little beast, coatless, in riding breeches and puttees. He proffered a small tin case, and she took it from him with a smile.

"Can't I carry your books and things to wherever you're going?" he asked.

She hesitated a moment, and then said, "Yes, thank you!" and they went on, side by side, Mr. Stephens gallantly holding the parasol very high over her head.

He glanced down at the books.

"Marcus Aurelius and Nietzsche!" he said. "That's a queer combination!"

"Do you know them?" she asked, in surprise.

"Oh, yes! I've read about everything you could think of. I used to read things like this a lot. But not any more. They're not real enough."

"Some people have found them very real nourishment for the mind," she said lightly. She couldn't take this person seriously.

"I haven't any use for mind without body," he answered. "That's what I like about Christianity. It's so solid and material—"

"But it's just the spirituality that is so admirable in it!" she protested.

"Not for me, it isn't. What appeals to me about it is the human, natural, unspiritual part. Tells you to *do* this and that, instead of thinking this and that. It's what you do, not what you feel, that counts there. I've never thought Christ cared whether people believed in Him or not. My idea is that He sort of had an idea that He'd help people by a few practical ideas on how to make the world a decent place to live in. If you behave in this way, He says, you can all be more or less happy. You see," he went on, "I'm a Socialist."

"Oh, mercy!" said Claudine, rather shocked.

"Yes, I'm a Socialist. And the way I see it, to be

a good Socialist, you've got to be either an atheist or a Christian. If you're an atheist, and you think this world is all there's going to be, then you feel so doggone sorry for the people who aren't getting anything out of it, that you'd do all you possibly could to help them. I used to be an atheist. I was working in a factory when I was about eighteen, and when I'd see those kids starting in—boys, children really—and knew they'd never get even a fair living out of a whole life's work, I guess I was a kind of Anarchist too. I thought the best thing they could do was to grab what they could, to try to wipe out the—hogs that kept all the good things away from them. But then, one day, I thought I'd read the New Testament, along with a lot of other stuff I had in hand. And, Gosh! . . . it was like a— a lamp being lighted in a dark room. Right away I felt that it was *right*. That He'd got hold of the right idea of how to run the world. I'd always hated the idea that we were a lot of fighting animals, all struggling to get food. Evolution didn't suit me altogether. It was too darned unfair to the beginners, you know, the cave men and those fellows who just opened the way for us. Well, I thought after I'd read about Christ, this living's just a job, and here's the way to do it. And after it's done, we'll get a rest. We need it. Why, hang it all! Even a baby a year old has had a hard life, trying to get adjusted. . . . I don't believe in all this stuff about a whole lot of future lives, and keeping on developing. No, sir! This life is enough; it's hard enough, and we learn enough. I guess we deserve peace after this, and I guess we'll get it. Is this where you always stay?"

"Yes," said Claudine. "But I wish you'd sit down and talk a little. I like to hear you."

"I talk too much," he said, seriously. "Somehow I'm always so full of stuff I want to say that I kind of spill over. And—d'ye know—somehow it seems—valuable—the stuff I want to say. Not particularly because it's me, but because it's—human nature."

"It's really very interesting," said Claudine, blandly. He laughed.

"Do you know," he went on, "ten years ago the idea of anyone like you—a lady—saying she liked to hear me, even agreeing to listen to me—would have seemed like a pipe dream. I used to think that if I ever got a chance to talk to your sort, I'd give 'em a piece of my mind. But when I got to know more about 'em, why, I saw nothing could be done that way. No, sir; you can't make people understand by talking. They've got to see—and feel. If *you* ever saw or felt what life was really like, you wouldn't be satisfied to—"

He stopped abruptly.

"I didn't mean to talk that way to you," he said. "It's rude. And you're so kind and nice."

"But I want you to! I want to hear what you think! I shouldn't be satisfied to what?"

"Well . . . to take everything and give nothing."

"But do you imagine that I give nothing? I have three children."

"That's nothing. I'll be frank, if you really want. . . . What I mean is, you *don't count*. You don't try to help. You just try to make life bearable for yourself. Don't you see? Even with your children. You don't teach them to serve. You just tell them to live decently."

“Even that is something—in a world like this,” she said, with a little smile.

He shook his head.

“Not to me! Better to forget your own life—even your own decency—a little. . . .”

“But—since you have so clear an idea of the scheme of things—what would you like people like me—myself for instance—to do?”

“I guess it’s too late for you to *do* much,” he said, gravely. “All you could do would be to learn to understand.”

“Perhaps I do.”

“You couldn’t. No one understands—really—by intuition. You’ve got to know, through experience—either inside or outside yourself. And I guess you—”

“Do go on! I’m not easily offended.”

“Well, I guess you’ve felt, instead of experiencing. It’s altogether different.”

“I wonder what experience you would countenance?” she asked. “Do you consider that the mother of three children, a woman who has lost both her parents, who has lived nearly forty years, is still without experience?”

He made an extraordinary answer.

“Your soul’s all right,” he said. “It’s your heart that’s undeveloped.”

“Heavens!” she thought. “Is the queer little creature trying to make love to me?”

But he went on.

“The great thing in the world is *compassion*.”

Then he stopped short and pulled out of a breeches’ pocket a gold cigarette case.

“Isn’t it a beauty?” he asked. “I paid what lots

of people I know could live on for months and months for this."

"But—" she began, bewildered.

"I suppose you're wondering what a fellow with views like mine is doing with a toy like that. Well, in the first place, it isn't a dead loss. After I've used it a few years more, I'll sell it or pawn it for quite a lot. It's solid gold, you know; one of the best I could buy. *Isn't it a beauty?*"

"Yes, it is!" she agreed, terribly touched by his naïve pride. "It is—a beauty!"

What an extraordinary conversation this was, she and this freckled young man, sitting facing each other on great sun-warmed rocks in the little glade which she had for weeks looked upon as her especial domain! She had certainly never met anything at all like him before, no one so absurd and so honest and so touching.

"But I was going to tell you why I had this thing," he continued. "It's because I think everyone's got a right to a few pet follies. Now, some people think a Socialist can't consistently have a balance in the bank. Well, my idea is this. . . . I've been able to grab for myself my share in the good things in the world. And that's what I want to see every other fellow do. Not grab, if you could get it any other way, but generally you can't. I want everyone to get a share. And a chance. I've got mine, and I'm going to help other people to get theirs."

"But how did you get yours?" she asked, with an irresistible curiosity. She knew that he wouldn't resent any sort of question.

"Fought for it. Fought for it like a devil. You see,

I'd made a little invention—an improvement for a certain type of printing press. I'll explain it all some other time. Well, of course, the fellows on top wanted to take it. . . . I won't go into that either just now. But, anyway, I knew. I knew the profit it would make, and I made up my mind that a good part of that profit was coming my way. So I grabbed my share. It's what everyone ought to have; a decent share in the profit of his work. It was a good kind of grabbing. . . . And now I'm able to do what I'd like to see every other fellow in the world able to do—work hard, at some kind of useful, manual work until he's thirty, and then play for three or four years, before he settles down to work his brain. Brains aren't much good until they've had those two things—manual work and play."

"What is your brain going to do?"

"Write. I've got it in me. . . . But I've got off the track. I was showing you that cigarette case because I wanted to ask you if you could imagine what it was like to be an outcast, to have money enough to buy things like that, and to see how they're begrudged to you. Every time I used to go in to buy things I'd earned enough money to buy, I was made to feel that. My money was good enough, but I wasn't. If you could have seen the swell English tailor I bought my clothes from! He hated me for being able to get them. Because I'm 'common.' Well, as a matter of fact, I'm really very uncommon—darned uncommon. . . . The point I'm making is, that all the fine, good things in the world are put aside for a few people. Everybody knows it. All the shop people know it. They don't want outsiders to get any of their choice things. They're

like watch-dogs—fool watch-dogs, starving to death while they watch other people's meat. . . . When I was younger and doing more reading and thinking, I used to think the best way to bring about the changes I hoped to see was for the people on top to be awakened. They've got the money, the leisure, the power, the education, I thought. . . . But I learned pretty soon it would never come that way. They haven't got either brains or compassion enough. They've used all their privileges to corrupt, not to enlighten. And not through wickedness or diplomacy, mind you, but from stupidity."

He pulled out his watch.

"Oh!" he said. "I've got to go! Are you all right?"

"Perfectly, thank you!" she answered, smiling.

"Only a little confused by all you've been telling me."

It was not his words, however, that remained in her memory after he had gone. They meant little to her. It was the curious vitality and force of the man, his candour, his innocence, his baffling air of certainty. She thought of his activities, his ideas, his tireless flow of talk, and the woods, usually so full of interest and charm for her, were suddenly blank. The mystery and wonder she had seen in the smallest plant were suddenly nothing at all in comparison to the wonder of a human being.

She became uneasily doubtful of her philosophic attitude toward her fellows, her great desire to escape them.

"He's . . ." she thought, with half a smile. "He's a breath of life in all this stagnation. . . . A breath of life!"

CHAPTER SIX

THE UNLAWFUL PICNIC

§ i

AFTER lunch they all, Claudine, Andrée, and Edna, dressed themselves in their ceremonial garments, the modish and immaculate white required by the gold-providing Gilbert, and went down to the railway station to meet him. There were other wives there, and other children, and a little swarm of bucolic onlookers. And there was also the "breath of life" in tramping outfit, with immense waterproof boots and a new Panama hat. He came over to them immediately.

"I'm taking the next train up," he said, with his invariable assumption that everyone was interested in his doings. "They say there's an old fellow away up in the mountains who's a regular wild man. An Italian; he used to lead round one of those dancing bears, but it got away one night and he went into the woods after it, and never wanted to come back. Two or three people have told me about him. His hair's got long, and he has a beard down to his waist. They say he won't speak, but I guess I can make him. He runs away and tries to hide."

“That sounds more like the bear,” said Edna. “Perhaps he ate the man and they’re both merged into one.”

He laughed.

“Well, I’m ready for bears, too,” he said. “I’ve got the best kind of rifle made, and I know how to use it.”

“Everything you have is the best there is, isn’t it?” said Andrée scornfully.

He reddened, but he answered cheerfully:

“You bet! And I’m proud of ’em, too. I earned ’em. They weren’t given to me by anyone else.”

Andrée turned away.

“Let’s walk up and down, Mother!” she said. “It’s so much hotter standing still.”

Claudine very willingly assented; the last thing in the world she wanted was for Gilbert to find them talking to that young man. He would be angry, and not without cause, for this was certainly not the sort of acquaintance for the mother of two young daughters to cultivate. Edna might talk to him with impunity, her sensible ideas and her humour legitimized almost anything. She put her arm through Andrée’s and they began to saunter up and down, keeping a discreet distance from Mr. Stephens.

“He needs to be sat on!” said Andrée, with a frown.

“I don’t believe you can do it!” said her mother, smiling.

“He is a thick-skinned little beast. He’s insufferable!”

“I don’t think so. He’s polite enough, if he’s treated politely.”

"But I'm not going to treat him politely. . . . There's the train!"

They halted and stood watching, while the engine roared past them and stopped neatly at the proper spot, and the handful of passengers alighted.

"O Lord!" groaned Andrée. "Again!"

For she had seen the gaunt, ungainly form of Mr. MacGregor coming down the steps, bag in hand. He lifted his hat and came toward them.

"I am charged with a very unwelcome message, I'm afraid," he said. "Mr. Vincelle is unable to get away this week, and he asked me to come down, and see if I could be of any service to the ladies!"

Oh, cowardly Gilbert! Claudine could have laughed at his infantile ruse. She welcomed Mr. MacGregor with cordiality and beckoned to Edna, who came, but who naughtily brought the little man with her.

"Look here, Mrs. Vincelle!" he said, eagerly. "I've been talking to Miss Edna. . . . As long as your husband didn't come out, you're all more or less free, aren't you? No plans made, I mean? Well, won't you all be my guests on a little picnic?"

"I'm very sorry—" Claudine began, but he was not to be stopped.

"Why not?" he said. "It's a hot afternoon, and I'll show you a fine, cool spot. I'll arrange everything. I'll see to the supper, and everything else. All you have to do is just get your bathing suits—"

"Bathing!" said Edna. "I didn't know there was any in this place!"

"There's a wonderful swimming pool. And I can lend *you* a bathing suit," he said, looking directly at

Mr. MacGregor, to whom he had not been, and never was to be, introduced.

"I'm afraid we're not the same size," said Mr. MacGregor.

"Doesn't matter. You can get into it. We can start about four and come home by moonlight."

The girls were both frankly pleased with the idea; Claudine confessed to herself that it was an attractive prospect. But impossible! They couldn't be the guests of this man, they couldn't really, openly, admit that he existed. She looked covertly at Mr. MacGregor, hoping for support, for some grown-up, tactful remark that should help her to get away. But he had taken it for granted that Mr. Stephens was a friend of the family, and he wanted to go on that picnic.

"Some other time—" Claudine began, with her most condescending affability, but Edna broke in, with a wail.

"Oh, Mother, I'm so longing for a swim! Do let's go!"

"It'll be very nice, I promise you!" said Mr. Stephens, solemnly. "I'll take all the responsibility for seeing that you all enjoy yourselves."

"After all, Mother, why not?" murmured Andrée, in her ear. "I'd like to eat somewhere except in that disgusting dining-room for once. And a moonlight walk!"

"I'm afraid Mr. MacGregor wants to rest after his journey," said Claudine, and her tone was threatening. But Mr. MacGregor did not understand; he thought that he was expected not to want to rest, and he insisted that he longed for this picnic.

Claudine was miserably conscious of her lack of char-

acter; at her age she had no business to allow herself to be entrapped into so undignified a position. She knew she should have prevented this thing, that even now she ought to destroy the project, but she was quite unable to do so. She was committed. . . .

§ ii

It was an imposing safari, observed by the people on the veranda with excessive interest. First went Claudine under a parasol held by Mr. MacGregor, then the two girls, arm in arm, and behind them, alone and unheeded, the young host, carrying a number of things, and behind him Mrs. Dewey's fat youth, and a young man never accounted for, both heavily laden. Like a general the little man called out his orders.

"To your right now!" And Claudine and Mr. MacGregor would lead the march in that direction. Once they had to make a *détour* to avoid a field of cows, through which *Andrée* refused to pass.

"Now!" he said. "Just down this hill, and you'll see the place. It's beautiful! Fern Glen, I've named it. It's a regular, natural swimming pool—water cold and clear as can be. And quiet! Lots of nice little birds, too, Mrs. Vincelle, just what you like."

But instead of the exclamation of admiration he had expected, he heard a tragic cry from *Andrée*.

"Why, it's nothing in the world but our horrible old snakey pool!"

"I didn't realize we were getting here," said Edna. "We've always come up the stream."

"But what have you got against it?" asked the

young man, horribly chagrined. "It's a beautiful spot, and it's *not* snakey."

"It is!" said Andrée. "We've seen snakes swimming in your beautiful natural swimming pool."

"They weren't poisonous snakes, then," he assured her. "And they'll keep out of your way."

"I won't give them the trouble," said Andrée.

"We'll look after you, Miss Edna and I," said Mr. MacGregor. He always made a point of pretending that he and Edna were the firmest of allies, perhaps because she was the only member of the family he didn't at all fear.

"I believe I'll risk it!" said Edna. "It looks so lovely and cool and I'm so terribly hot."

The fat youth and the young man had gone away again, and Mr. MacGregor and the host withdrew, to return very promptly in their bathing suits. Claudine was filled with quiet amusement at them; each was so evidently satisfied with his superiority over the other. Mr. MacGregor had an air of saying "I don't believe you realized what a fine, big man I am! This poor chap's tights are too short for me, and my chest almost bursts his poor little jersey. I may be an artist, but what a manly one!" And young Stephens, straighter than ever, couldn't keep a grin from his freckled face; he was itching with a desire to show off. He was, moreover, very proud of the arrangements he had provided for the ladies; a little tent to serve as their dressing-room, with a mirror fastened to one of its sides.

It was characteristic that Andrée should be the most daring and reckless of them all. Claudine could not swim; she waded waist deep into the pool and stood

there throwing water over her shoulders, like a little statue in a fountain, Edna thought, full of a precise and formal grace, not one burnished hair out of place. Mr. MacGregor swam powerfully all about the pool once or twice, to show his strength, and Edna followed him, and though she didn't go nearly so fast, she wasn't nearly so tired. He felt a little pang of envy for her youth that tinged his admiration for her with an almost unkindly feeling. Seen in a bathing suit, she was more robust than one would have imagined; she was small, like her mother, but it was not at all a fairylike smallness. She had a beautiful, a perfect figure, well-developed, supple, and sturdy; her skin was as white as a Dryad's in that tree-shadowed place, and her blond hair was like sunshine, although her dimpled face had no sort of resemblance to any wild wood creature. Never would she pine or die for love! She was a young woman, not a sprite, and she had all of woman's marvelous resources against suffering. Compared with her, Andrée was an immature and *farouche* schoolgirl.

And yet it was she they all looked at. She was a fleet swimmer, but with little endurance. She had a well-known trick of swimming out too far and becoming panic-stricken and needing help to get back to the shore. She had a positive talent for alarming and distressing the others, for being perpetually the centre of attention. It was not that she consciously tried to "show off," like Stephens; what she did, she did to satisfy some requirement of her own nature. She insisted upon swimming too near the waterfall; she *would* dive, heedless of remonstrance. She was wayward, taciturn, defiant. She was the only one of the women to get her hair wet, the

only one who emerged dank, shivering and dishevelled. And when they sat down on the pebbly shore for supper, she alone was untidy, she alone out of spirits. Her damp hair hung about her shoulders, her lips were bluish; she had only the curtest answers, and was obviously disinclined to speak at all.

"I'm afraid you stayed in the water too long," said Claudine, with a shade of anxiety.

"No," whispered Edna to her mother. "It's not that. She was simply terrified every minute! That snake, you know! And yet, of course, she would hover about the very spot where we saw it. . . . Don't speak to her, Mother darling! She'll be all right in a few minutes."

The supper was undeniably a triumph for Mr. Stephens. He had done wonders. Carefully concealed, he had caused to be brought a freezer of ice cream, great vacuum bottles of iced tea, and rum to flavour it for those who liked it. His bearers had lighted a fire before leaving, and in it were roasted potatoes and corn. There were also cold chicken and a fine boiled ham and a great number of other delicacies. The guests were hungry and complimentary.

Afterward he brought out that gold cigarette case and passed it about.

"Do you mind if I have one, Mother?" asked Andrée.

"I'd rather you didn't," said Claudine, coldly. There was nothing she disliked more.

But Mr. MacGregor intervened.

"As long as Miss Andrée isn't a singer," he said, "won't you be indulgent, Mrs. Vincelle? I believe they're very good for the nerves. In my younger days,

of course, such a thing would have been out of the question. But live and learn! My own sister—”

“Mercy, what a killing look!” murmured Edna to her sister. “He wants to show you how up-to-date and young he is!”

“Very well!” said Claudine, graciously. But it was not Mr. MacGregor’s plea which had persuaded her; it was the peculiar look on her child’s face. It would be unwise to cross her, she thought.

And Andrée smoked, leaning back against a tree, looking an abandoned, reckless young creature, surrounded by a subtle and dangerous atmosphere of adoration.

The moon came up . . . what further enchantment did she need than that light on her pale, dark face, than all that sweetness and mystery of the midsummer night about her?

The bearers came back and took away their burdens, and a little later the picnickers followed. Claudine walked a little in advance with Mr. MacGregor, and whenever, with a strange uneasiness, she turned to look behind her, she certainly saw two little points of light from two cigarettes among the shadows.

She condemned Mr. Stephens to Limbo.

§ iii

Naturally, when Gilbert came out the next week-end he wished to know all about this picnic, and he wished to know also, although he dared not ask, why his candidate, Mr. MacGregor, had appeared so obviously discouraged. They had become great friends; they dined

and went to the theatre together, and maintained a delightful bachelor intimacy, coming and going as they pleased. He had listened to MacGregor's praise of Claudine with a sore heart. She kept her charm, her affability, well hidden from her husband! There she sat beside him, on the veranda, her book politely closed on her lap, just wifely, no more.

"Who was the fellow who gave the picnic?" he asked. "I've never heard of him. You haven't mentioned his name in your letters."

"You'll see him in the dining-room this evening," said Claudine. "He's not—not quite our own sort, you know, Gilbert, but he's very nice and pleasant."

"Well, I'm no snob!" said Gilbert. He was in a wonderfully pleasant mood, his wife noticed, and if she had felt the least assurance of its keeping on, she would have unbent a little. But so many, many times had she hurried to meet him half way, only to see him retreat. . . . His thoughts would have astounded her.

"Why in God's name can't the woman be simple and friendly with me—and not so damned suspicious!" he said to himself. "She's always watching me out of the corners of her eyes. . . . If we're not—in love, there's no reason why we shouldn't be friends."

He was really anxious to be friendly that day, poor devil, who had never had a friend in his life, or ever been one!

"No, I'm not a snob," he went on. "That's a feminine failing. But I don't like my family making bosom friends of people I don't know."

"He's certainly not a bosom friend," said Claudine,

“and as for your not knowing him, how could that be helped, when you weren’t here?”

“Very well! Very well!” he said, impatiently. “We won’t argue. Introduce the fellow to me, and I’ll soon see what sort he is.”

No one could imagine Claudine’s dread and misery. She knew very well what Gilbert would think of Mr. Stephens.

His solitary little table was near a window, and a vagrant breeze that ruffled his light hair gave him a boyish and untidy look. He had a book propped up before him and he was eating absent-mindedly. She pointed him out with a smile which was the equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders, throwing the poor young fellow to the wolves.

“There he is, Gilbert!” she said.

Gilbert stared incredulously at the cheerful young man, with sleeves rolled up on his sunburnt arms, coatless, innocently absorbed in his book.

“What!” he said. “That fellow!”

“I told you he wasn’t quite—”

“And that’s the sort of man you encourage—and have hanging around your daughters, while you raise Cain about a gentleman like MacGregor!”

He stared again.

“You introduce him to me,” he said, “and I’ll soon settle his hash!”

“Don’t be rude to him, Gilbert! Remember we’ve accepted his hospitality. . . . You’ll put me in a very undignified position.”

“You’ve done that for yourself,” he said.

With what reluctance did she approach the unsuspect-

ing young man, and present him to Gilbert! He got up with alacrity and held out his hand, but Gilbert ignored it. He glanced round, and saw that Claudine had gone, and that he might therefore be rude without fear of interruption. He was terribly upset; he had a dim suspicion that Claudine had set up this man in opposition to his Mr. MacGregor, that it was altogether some beastly feminine plot.

"I want to thank you for your hospitality to my family," he said, slowly. "However—"

"However?" repeated Mr. Stephens, encouragingly, but Gilbert found it very difficult to go on. He stood with his hands behind his back, the very image of respectability and decent prosperity, lowering at "that grasshopper," as he mentally named the other.

"However," said Mr. Stephens. "It mustn't happen again. Is that it?" He was, it must be confessed, rather unduly sensitive to the social disapproval of capitalists.

"Yes!" said Gilbert. "I'm very particular—in regard to the acquaintances—about the people—about people I know nothing about—where my family is concerned."

"Well," said Stephens, "you can investigate, if you like. You can find out all about me. You can write to—"

"No! It won't do! . . . No, I'll have to ask you to —to discontinue the intimacy."

"There isn't any intimacy."

"There's not to be any intercourse whatever."

"I don't see how you can stop it," said Stephens.

"I forbid it!" said Gilbert, with a scowl.

"You can't forbid me, you know. As for your

'family,' I don't know whether you can forbid them or not. That's their business. If they consider it the best policy to knuckle down, why, I shan't think any the worse of them. It's the way of the world to dance when the fellow with the money fiddles. You—"

"Look here, you damned, impudent, vulgar jackanapes—"

"Don't begin calling names, or I might call you a damn' vulgar bully. But I won't. I don't lose my temper so easily. Fellows like me know that when they do lose their tempers, they've got to back it up with their fists. Something your sort never do, do you? You yell and curse, and that's the end of it."

They were disturbed by the distressful voice of Mrs. Dewey, outraged by these loud voices, but respectful before two such profitable persons.

"Gentlemen!" she said. "Please. . . .!"

Gilbert turned on his heel and strode out of the room. He went, of course, to his wife.

"I've been having a talk with that gentlemanly friend of yours," he said, with a desperate effort to steady his voice. "And I want to tell you, once and for all, I'll have—I'll have . . . I'll have . . . Understand me, both of you—and I want you to tell Andrée, too—you're not to speak to the fellow again. Under any circumstances."

"I'll have to answer him if he speaks to me," said Edna.

Both her parents were astonished.

"No, you don't!" said her father. "I won't have it!"

"I can't be rude to him," said Edna, in her most tranquil, sensible voice.

"I tell you!" shouted Gilbert. "I won't have it!"

Edna said nothing, but the expression of her face was not obedient. Gilbert didn't know how to proceed; he hesitated a moment, then he turned away.

"Claudine," he said, from the doorway, "this is your business! You brought them up, and now you can handle them. You see to it that my—wishes are carried out. Understand, I'll have no nonsense!"

"Oh, my dear child!" said Claudine, when the door had banged after him. "I wish you had more—tact! Surely Mr. Stephens isn't worth a quarrel with your own father!"

"I don't know, Mother. I think he's rather wonderful. I wouldn't be rude to him for anything. You know Andrée and I have seen a lot of him this week. We've been rowing with him, and walking, and he's been as nice as could be. You can't imagine! . . . He's so different from anyone else we've ever known. And even if he is common, he's not the least bit—objectionable. Why, Mother, you can see how trustworthy and honest he is! It's written all over him!"

"I know, my dear. But your father—"

"Father's not infallible. He makes mistakes. He's not a good judge of people at all. And I'm not going to be rude to the poor man. And I'm *sure* Andrée won't, either. She loves to hear him talk. She says he makes her ambitious."

Claudine was in despair. How did other mothers manage to impress their children? Was the trouble because she was singularly ineffectual or because her children were singularly rebellious? It didn't occur to her that it might be because she was wrong. She decided to try another tack.

“Edna!” she cried, fervently. “For my sake, dear, avoid any trouble with your father! You can’t think how it distresses me!”

“Mother!” said Edna, firmly. “That’s not fair! That’s just as bad as Father’s way. It isn’t fair to try to make me do what I don’t think is right.”

But she melted at the sight of her mother’s face.

“Very well, darling!” she said. “I hate to do it, but if it’ll make you any happier, I’ll be tactful. Father won’t know a thing about it. I’ll give Mr. Stephens a little hint. He’s never offended. I’ll only talk to him when Father isn’t here.”

And Claudine must be satisfied with this.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STEPHENS EXPLAINS HIMSELF

IT was perhaps a mistake not to have told all this to Andrée. She had been almost all the afternoon in the woodshed with two baby kittens she adored, quite happy there in the dim light and the quiet, and determined to avoid the possibility of a motor ride with her father. When she came in to dress for supper, everyone was calm again, and Mr. Stephens' name wasn't mentioned. After supper Gilbert had to return to the city, and his wife and Edna went with him to the station, but Andrée said she had a headache, and remained behind. She sat in a corner of the veranda, still in the same vague and happy mood in which she had passed the afternoon, glad to be alone.

Presently she saw a familiar figure in the lighted doorway, and she called out, cheerfully—

“Hello, Mr. Stephens!”

“Hello!” he answered, but to her amazement, instead of coming to her, he went on toward the steps.

“Where are you going?” she asked. “To the drug-store? I'll come with you.”

“No,” he answered. “No . . . I was going for a walk.”

“Wait a minute!” she said, and jumping up, went over to him.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “You’re—queer! Why don’t you sit down and talk to me?”

He glanced uneasily at the row of dark figures rocking behind them.

“Well . . . under the circumstances . . .” he murmured.

“What circumstances?”

“You know what your father said—”

“No, I don’t, and I don’t care, either. Tell me!”

“Not here.”

“Then let’s walk!”

They strolled over the lawn, beyond earshot of the veranda.

“Well,” said he. “We had—words. He told me not to speak to any of you again. I said, of course, I’d speak to you as long as you cared to speak to me. . . . But—”

“How beastly!” cried Andrée. “How horrible! But please don’t pay any attention to it. Edna and I never do.”

“At first I thought I wouldn’t. They’re free agents, I thought; it’s up to them to say whether they want to drop me or not. I’ve never had much respect for parental authority, in regard to adults. But when I’d thought it over—I saw it wouldn’t do. It’s not fair to you. You’re not free agents. It puts you in a rotten position.”

“So you’re not going to speak to us?”

“No, not that . . . I’m going away to-morrow morning.”

"No! No! Don't! I couldn't bear to think you were driven away like that! Please don't go!"

"I must. I've told Mrs. Dewey already. I—the whole thing has made me—sick. I've got to go!"

Andrée stopped short.

"Very well!" she said. "If that's all you care . . ."

"It has nothing to do with—caring."

"If you valued our friendship—as I do—"

"You don't!" he cried. "You don't! You can't! You don't know me. . . . I'm just a sort of—of freak—to amuse you on your holiday."

"Look here!" said Andrée, sternly. "What makes you think that? You're the last person in the world I'd have expected to be—silly and sensitive and imagining things like that. Can't you see that Edna and I like you?"

"I thought you did. . . . But to tell you the truth, I never know, with people like you, how much is real, and how much is politeness. I'm not polite; I'm not used to politeness."

"No one else ever thought that Edna and I were very polite," she observed, laughing.

"But I can't make you out!" he cried. "I never realized what a difference there was. . . . You're a mystery to me."

"Don't think like that," said Andrée, rather sharply. "What I admired so much about you was your way of looking at everyone as simply *human*."

They had turned down the road in the direction of the big hotel; in the dusk he could see her face, and never had anything seemed to him less simply human. She looked to him so wonderful, so strange, so troubling; all

his ideas about the frank and sensible companionship that ought to exist between man and woman were dissolving in her spell. Never had he felt less companionable—or less human. He was exalted and very unhappy. Humility was not one of his virtues; he had an honest consciousness of his own worth, and he did not feel humble now, but he was frightened. He knew very well that he was in love with her, and in a silly, unreasonable way, too. He saw no justification for adoring a woman, but he adored this one.

“Well . . .” he said. “Why do you like me, anyway?”

“Because you’re *real*,” answered Andrée, promptly. “And honest. And specially because you haven’t any limits.”

“Oh—outside the pale!” he cried, very much hurt.

Andrée was surprised.

“Why do you always think things like that?” she asked. “You seem to think that matters so much—that—that artificial difference. It doesn’t to me.”

“It has to. I know I’m touchy. I’m ashamed of it, but I can’t help it. I’m always looking for slights, and I generally find them. . . . But what did you mean then by my not having any limits?”

“I meant a sort of feeling—that I could tell you anything. You might not always understand, but you’d try. You’d listen. I couldn’t imagine you ever saying ‘This is *too* much!’ like Father. You haven’t put up any boundaries.”

“I see,” he said, gravely. “Well . . . it’s true, to some extent. I don’t pretend to understand everyone, but I can say I’ve never seen a soul yet that was really—well,

altogether strange to me. There's always something in common. . . . Now, with women, you know. Lots of these fellows—writers and all—they like to call woman a mystery. I know I said you were, but now I'm speaking in a general sense. My idea is—"

He stopped and looked a little anxiously at Andrée, and was reassured by her quiet attention. He had long ago grasped that strange quality of comprehension in her; she was not particularly clever or original, but she could grasp everything. She didn't know; she saw. It was like a seeress gazing into a crystal; she might not comprehend the significance of what was presented, but she *saw*, so clearly and justly. Experience in talking to feminine comrades had taught him how dangerously inclined they were to make personal applications; this girl would never do that. He went on, a little more easily.

"I don't see anything mysterious in women," he said. "I haven't any use for what you call 'chivalry.' I'd defend a woman—any woman, anywhere, but it wouldn't be because I—well—felt any reverence; it would be because she was weaker. I wouldn't try to make life easy for women—or for anyone. . . . Only a fair show. I'm a man; I expect to take a man's part in the world. And I look to women to take their own part, and do their own work, and shoulder their own burdens. . . . Here's the drug-store; shall we have a soda?"

Andrée assented and they went into the shop, which was filled with couples engaged in the same pursuit. He found a stool for Andrée, but there was none for himself; and he stood beside her, seriously consuming an elaborate thing of nuts, marshmallow, syrup and ice-cream. He was conscious all the time that he was en-

joying a luxury; this thing was to him no frappé, but a symbol, a part of his share of the benefits of civilization. He would have liked to arrange for every one of the workers of the world to have a due allowance of such confections. His thoughts at that moment were very far from Andrée; he was, in fact, concerned with the memory of a hokey-pokey vendor on the lower East Side, surrounded by dirty children pitifully eager for his poisonous wares. He might have been disappointed to know how personally Andrée had applied his words—and then, he might not have been.

His words—"I'm a man, and I expect to take a man's part in the world," had given her a curious thrill.

"He is a man!" she thought. "More so than anyone I've ever met." She glanced back over her shoulder at him, but his blue eyes were fixed upon the bourgeoisie consuming their unearned luxuries. She thought that among all the men there he stood forth notably as soldier, sturdier, oddly impressive in his utter honesty. And not bad-looking. His short blond hair showed a neat, well shaped head, the mouth beneath his absurd little mustache was a well cut one, resolute and very kindly; he carried himself splendidly.

"Well!" he said, at last. "Let's be getting on!"

Andrée got up, still thoughtful. He turned in the direction of Pine Villa, but she protested.

"I don't want to go back now!"

"Better," he said cheerfully. "Your mother'll be worried."

This did not please Andrée, for she felt that any such dutiful ideas should have come from herself. She was about to say something a little disagreeable, when they

caught sight of Claudine coming down the road, always an unmistakable figure by her gait and her bearing. The young man was disconcerted; he had no way of knowing how she had regarded her husband's hostility, and he was very much in dread of her politeness. It was too dark to see her face; he had to wait for her voice, and to his great relief, it came to him tranquil and friendly. She didn't say anything remarkable, only "Good evening," but it implied for him all sorts of astounding and exquisite things. She didn't mind his taking a walk with the matchless Andrée. . . .

"I hope you're not converting Andrée," she said, in just the light and agreeable tone she would have used toward any of the bourgeoisie. "I shouldn't like her to be a Revolutionary."

"I'm not, myself," he answered, seriously. "Did you ever read Dostoievsky, Mrs. Vincelle?"

"Yes," she answered, secretly amused at his fatal responsiveness.

"Well, I think that fellow's idea is the best philosophy I've ever come across. I believe to some extent in Conscious Evolution, but not so much through the development of a new type of humanity as through the development of compassion. You know. The kingdom of Heaven on earth. I think it's compassion rather than intelligence that can save the world. If you can learn to pity, you learn to help."

"Presupposing a little energy," said Claudine. He was very much aware of her resistance; she did not wish to argue; she had a dread of being serious; she was never, never, to be convinced. Her mind and her opinions were unalterably formed; she was willing enough

to listen, to think, but she accepted nothing. It was altogether different from talking to Andrée.

"I think it's quite possible to be compassionate and selfish at the same time," she went on.

"Well, there's nothing wrong in selfishness. It's vital. It's a force, not a vice. As long as you want the right things. . . . Specially for women. An unselfish man might be a hero, but an unselfish woman couldn't be anything but a victim. . . . Like a child. . . . Imagine an unselfish child. Of course it couldn't survive. What you've got to do is to learn to feel for other people so much that it hurts your selfishness—so that you can't be comfortable unless the rest are too."

Claudine found his earnestness a little wearying; she wondered how the impatient Andrée could endure much of him. He was admirable, and he was very touching, and not for any Gilbert on earth would she offend him, but she wished very much that he might be somewhat less obviously there. He had had his cue to vanish; he could have put such a nice, friendly end to the acquaintance, and been entirely in the right, but instead—there he was. She had no objection to Andrée's talking to him, but she felt that future walks were to be discouraged.

They crossed the lawn, black and spongy under the pines, and as a matter of course, she began to mount the steps of the veranda. But Andrée lingered.

"Come, my dear," said Claudine. "Edna's waiting for you."

"Half a minute," said Andrée, and her mother entered the house without her. Andrée leaned against the veranda, her head thrown back, looking up at the sky;

Stephens stood before her, and characteristically, he was looking down at the earth, very thoughtful. There was a long silence, which neither of them noticed.

“Good night,” said Andrée, suddenly, and he was startled to see her holding out her hand. He took it, rather reluctantly, and she gave him a firm, strong pressure, and didn’t let go. But he drew away almost roughly.

“Good night,” he said, and walked away.

No other man she had yet seen would have done that; she was accustomed to having her imperious impulses treated with at least a semblance of rapture; she went in, more thoughtful than ever.

The truth of it was, that for young Stephens there were no trifles; everything was significant. He was a man of strong passions and dearly bought wisdom; he knew no middle course between being indifferent or quite otherwise. He had been brought up in a class where a friendship between a man and a woman was unthinkable; or any sort of careless or meaningless intercourse. If you weren’t in love with a girl, or on the point of falling in love, you never thought of her. He had developed and he had learnt much; he had a remarkable command over himself; he would have been able to go on like this for ever and ever, simply talking and talking to Andrée, and being quite impersonal, but not if she were going to hold his hand. He really resented that. Old ideas which he fancied he had outgrown came back to him now, with force; a venomous distrust for women of Andrée’s sort. As a boy, when he had seen them in the streets, exquisitely dressed, in their carriages, it had given him comfort to believe them all wanton and worth-

less chaff. Later, when he had begun to read novels, all this had been confirmed; he had made more than one fiery and bitter speech to his comrades on that subject; on these pampered women with their jewels, their furs, their inordinate luxuries. He was honest enough even then to admit the existence of a leaven of desire in his sullen resentment.

“It’s the dream of most fellows like me,” he had thought, “to possess a superior woman. And there’s no chance of it. No matter what we do, or become, the finest and best of them are always out of reach.”

His candid opinion of the Vincelles would have shocked them one and all. He had studied the social conditions of his country with thoroughness, and he knew they weren’t the best, or even the second best. They belonged in a place he could never get to, but there were places above to which they could never attain; he was far better aware of this than they were. He knew that Andrée was half-educated and half-trained, that she was not useful and not, socially speaking, ornamental. And he had been able thus dispassionately to judge her because she had seemed so entirely impossible to him. He knew he loved her, but he had had no hope, and, obliged to withstand her allurements, he had been able to analyze it. The intractable and wayward spirit of her was what he loved; her elusiveness. Always and forever she would do what she wanted; every breath would sway her, but not the mightiest wind from heaven would dismay or turn her from her desire. There was no constancy, no steadfastness in her, but she was honest. She was very largely made up of faults, and they were faults he loved; wilfulness, recklessness, a sort of casual

and unconscious cruelty, a marvelous selfishness, innocent, unambitious, like that of a child. She would not strive, never fight for what she wanted, she would stretch out careless hands for what passing things took her fancy.

Just at the moment, he took her fancy. Well, he wasn't going to have it that way. He was going away, to forget her, before there was any more to forget. He wanted not to see that dark, mutinous face again, or to hear that nervous and exquisite voice, that seemed always to have a sob in it. Because he *was* constant and steadfast, and he had no wish to give so very much and to get nothing in return.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE THING IS ON THEM

§ i

THERE was a very great deal that young Stephens didn't know about himself, some of it that was obvious to other eyes. He did not go away the next morning; Edna met him after breakfast and entreated him not to do so.

"We're so dull and miserable here," she said. "And you're the only hope. Do you know what Mother calls you? The Breath of Life! Now after that you can't go, can you?"

He smiled, a little inattentively. There she stood, so pretty and serene, one of those women who considered it their right to make outrageous demands upon men. . . . He saw suddenly how difficult it must be to withstand their demands. He did not want to refuse Edna; he liked her very much, because she was frank and friendly; he didn't suspect that her frankness held a hundred times more reserve than Andrée's silences, that she, so smiling and affable, was infinitely more aloof, more mysterious, more unknowable, than her dark sister.

"The Breath of Life!" he said. "Why?"

"Because we're all very nearly dead, and you're so much alive," she said, tranquilly. "Can't we have one more nice day together?"

"I don't see . . ." he said, doubtfully. "After—well—your father, you know. . . ."

He had no clear conception of Gilbert's position; he had certainly seen many husbands and fathers who were bullies, but in a more primitive society this bullying carried weight and was not defied. He knew little of the civilized expedients of women; he didn't imagine that Claudine would stoop to deceive. Yet he didn't think her quite capable of independence.

"Oh, Father!" said Edna, carelessly. "He's just melodrama. . . . And we won't tell Mother, and she'll pretend not to know where we've gone. We can—"

"But I don't like it!" he protested. "It's a humiliating position for me."

"It really isn't, Mr. Stephens. We're the humiliated, deceitful ones, and we don't care. Do you know the country round here?"

"I was born a few miles down the river," he answered, soberly. "In Brownsville Landing."

Andrée came sauntering out of the house, and caught his words.

"I'd like to hear about you," she said, but he shook his head.

"No," he said. "That's a mistake. What used to be me isn't me now. It's—well, it's like these books—they start off when the fellow's a baby, and they tell you all the things he thought and all the ways he grew and changed, until you can't see him at all. I'm darned glad you never saw me or heard of me before, and you've got to see only what I am now." He smiled ingenuously. "It's not much," he said, "but it's what I've worked twenty-eight years on, anyway."

"Come on; let's start somewhere," said Edna. "Or Mother'll come out and have to not 'countenance' it. Let's take a 'ramble'; that's what Father calls a walk."

"It is a 'ramble,' too, with him," said Andrée.

"Well," said Stephens, "there's a nice place up the road five or six miles—nursery for all kinds of evergreens, and a little hotel. If you think you can do it—? It's a steep climb."

Edna ran in to leave a message for her mother with Mrs. Dewey, and they set off. It was a sultry, hazy morning; it seemed unaccountably oppressive to Stephens. He felt unpleasantly like a new toy to these greedy children; they looked to him to provide amusement; they weren't interested in his ideas, which were his life, and they had no faint idea of the wonder of him. He glanced down at his white flannel legs and buckskin shoes; he thought of his appearance in general, his immaculate cleanliness, the comfort of fine raiment, of himself strong, confident, carrying a cigarette case of purest gold and walking by these fabulous girls. And he thought of a sallow youth, ten years ago, lounging outside a pool room in Brownsville Landing, in a dirty grey flannel shirt and a villainous cap, dazed and stupid with incessant cigarettes, engaging in candid persiflage with the mill girls who passed. He had bridged that gulf all alone. . . .

The making of his money he regarded as a minor achievement. It was the regeneration of his spirit that was so remarkable; that, he felt, was little less than a miracle; he would have liked to tell that.

He had been in the hospital with a broken head, justifiably got in a saloon brawl; he had lain in the ward two

days, suffering and resentful because he couldn't smoke. No one came to see him; who was there to come? His father, who worked in the brick yards, was always drunk when he wasn't busy, and he had no other relatives; he didn't know what a friend was. He went about in a pack, a gang of youths of his own age, bound by no other tie than that of the pack instinct, all of them more or less vicious, in a pitiful way. They lacked ambition, that is, at eighteen or so, they showed a lamentable disinclination to work every day and all day in mill or factory. They wanted something better, and even now Stephens fancied that their sordid distractions *were* better, had a little more of the stuff of life in them.

In his restlessness and misery, he had turned his attention to the man in the next bed, a portly, pallid fellow of forty-five or so, with a black beard and a severe and dignified manner. He looked like a physician, some sort of professional man; he was actually a mill hand, an Englishman named Simms, a Manchester Socialist of the old school, austere and fanatic. He sat propped up in bed reading Huxley, but he was very willing to talk. And in five days he had expounded the world to the sallow "corner boy." Gesturing forcibly with his bandaged hand—he had been badly mangled at his machine—he set forth his Quixotic and beautiful doctrines. He had little humanity, no flexibility; he was uncompromising and stern as a Calvinist.

They had lived together for two years. It was Simms who had shown young Stephens the charm of cleanliness; he had a bare little room on the outskirts of the town which he scrubbed himself; his habits were fastidious and ascetic. He taught young Stephens sobriety and

continence and his own worth, and he taught him to read. His pupil was not docile; he joined the Y. M. C. A., which was anathema to Simms; he took courses in everything, he frequented the gymnasium. He made use of what the older man disdained; his ideas were more practical and less sublime.

He felt now that he was justified and he wished poor Simms were alive, to be argued with. He stole a glance at Andrée, and he felt a curious mixture of despair and defiance. He *was* good enough—but she would never think so.

§ ii

Claudine had watched them go from her window, with some uneasiness. People of his sort were so hard to handle! Why hadn't he the tact to go away? It was so difficult to keep a middle course between offending him and offending Gilbert; she dwelt with dismay, not for the first time, on the uncompromising nature of men, how rudely they upset all feminine niceties. Nothing might be implicit or vague with them. Even Bertie, her marvelous boy, had to tell her things, and be frank about his feelings, in a way Andrée and Edna never were.

She spent a peaceful day, reading and writing letters. The letters did her good, put her in touch with her own little world again, restored to her some measure of complacency. She was unhappy and her life very futile and insignificant, but it might have been so much worse; it might have been harmful. She re-read Lizzie Wiley's letter, full of the atrocious Bernardine Perceval, who had left her husband.

"I saw Bernardine," she wrote, "on the street car

with the little girl. What she will drag the child into I don't know. I thank God there are still a few like yourself left." And so on. Lizzie Wiley was a wealthy spinster of passionate moral views and her approval was not without weight. Claudine thought with a faint smile of her own bad moment, twenty years before, when she had wanted to leave Gilbert; she had a fairly definite idea that those moments occurred in most marriages; for an instant she wondered what had made her resist it. Duty? Fear? Lance? She didn't much want to know, and put the thought aside. The fact remained that she had stayed and done well, for Gilbert, for herself, for her children.

She wrote a plaintively humorous letter to Nina Sidell, whose Violet was just Andrée's age. Violet was a frightful worry, in a way her daughters would never be. Wasn't that something else to her credit? Then there was Connie Martinsburgh, whose four exuberant and handsome children were all troublesome. Perhaps, although she seemed to herself so entirely negative, she did after all exert a good influence over her family. . . That absurd young Stephens had upset her, with his terrific vitality; he had made her feel so pallid, so helpless, so useless. Poor Breath of Life, with his gold cigarette case!

§ iii

They returned from their "ramble" early in the afternoon, and the girls at once went upstairs to lie down. They were much more fatigued than they cared to admit.

"Lord! What a cyclone!" said Edna, taking the pins from her crisp, reddish hair and letting it fall

about her bare shoulders. "He can do everything and he knows everything. That lecture about coniferous trees. . . ! And yet he's amusing."

Andrée was stretched flat on her back on the bed.

"He's more than amusing," she said, with a frown.

"He's very fine. He's a man."

"Oh, hardly that!" said Edna, slipping into her kimono. She was startled by her sister suddenly sitting upright.

"You silly little snob!" she cried. "You make me tired! You don't know anything—you can't see anything!"

"Oh, Gosh!" thought Edna, in alarm. "I *do* see something now!"

Andrée went on, to point out to her younger sister the mental or moral excellencies of young Stephens; all in vain. She neglected to mention his endearing smile, that odd, tender look in his blue eyes.

Edna kept whatever she thought to herself.

"He said he was absolutely going away to-morrow," she reflected. "And she'll forget."

And by the light of this, the relations between Andrée and the Breath of Life seemed rather funny than anything else. Edna didn't mention her discovery to her mother, nor did she attempt to stop them or to go with them when they left the veranda that evening. She looked after them as they crossed the lawn, with a benevolent smile.

"That poor man's going to get a jolt," she reflected. "I dare say Andrée 'll get engaged to him this evening, just as she did to Johnnie Martinsburgh last winter. Then she'll get into a panic, and I'll very probably have

to get her out of it, the same way. Well! It can't be helped! That's Andrée, all over. She's so darned sincere every time."

"Let's take a walk over to your Fern Glen," Andrée was saying.

"I don't think—" he began, doubtfully.

"Yes," she insisted. "There'll be a moon, won't there, later on?"

"Your mother—"

"It's your last evening."

"I know," he said. "But we can talk here—"

"I believe you're afraid of me," she said, laughing.

"I am," he answered, and she suddenly stopped laughing.

"You'd better let me alone," he went on. "I don't understand your ways. Things you think are funny make me miserable."

"I don't want a bit to make you miserable, and I certainly don't see anything funny in—in this thing. Do come on! Mother and Edna will be home, and then we can't go."

She went on, and he reluctantly followed her white figure. They went along the road, walking quietly on its grassy border, he always a little behind her. It was a mild beautiful night, a night on which one could walk forever. Behind the pine trees there was a marvelous faint radiance, the path of the coming moon. The breeze blowing across the apple orchard they were passing brought a wine-like perfume and an exquisite rustling of leaves. The young man looked steadfastly down at his white tennis shoes moving soundlessly over the grass.

They came to the pasture through which Andrée had

once refused to go, and they saw the great, dim shapes of the cows standing motionless in there.

"I suppose you want to go around—" said hē.

"No; I shan't be afraid, if you'll stay near me," she answered.

He let down the bars, and carefully replaced them when they had gone through.

"Don't run," he said, "and they won't pay any attention to you."

To his surprise she took his arm and held it lightly.

"I do hate them!" she said. "What would you do if they were to run after us?"

"They never do," he answered, briefly, and fell silent. But she was amazed to feel his arm, his firm, strong arm, tremble beneath her touch. She smiled to herself in the dark.

They came at last to the glen, and sat down on a rock. The moon had risen just above the crags; the air was tremulous with its light.

"It's too bad there are nothing but owls here," she said. "I'd love to hear a nightingale sing."

"I've heard 'em, in England. I was there four years."

"Now, you see! With all the interesting things you've got to tell me, and that I want so much to hear, you talk about going away to-morrow. You can't!"

"I must!"

"Are you—going to write to me?"

"No. What would be the use?"

"Don't you want to go on being friends?"

"Look here—are you going to make me say—what I don't want to say?"

"Yes, if I can! I want everything clear and plain between us. You're the first real friend I've ever had, and I'm not going to lose you through any stupid misunderstanding."

"Well, then; I *couldn't* go on being friends. I'd . . . it would have to go on—to something else."

She was perfectly still.

"You know what I mean, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes . . . I know," she answered, in an odd, flat voice.

"And you don't want that. . . ."

"I don't know," she said, "whether I do or not."

He was so startled that he sprang to his feet.

"What!" he cried. "I don't believe you do understand!"

"I do! You mean you think—you might—later on—fall in love with me."

Her sublime candour touched him almost beyond endurance. He walked a few paces away from her, to the very edge of the pool, and tried to calm his heart with that unutterable beauty, that fall of water, like bright silver hair in the moonlight, like a stream from the moon itself, over the face of the cliff, without sound, into the radiant brightness of the pool. If there had been a nightingale to sing there, he thought, it would have broken his heart.

"As a matter of fact," he said, in a low voice, "I am in love with you now. I shouldn't have told you if you'd let me alone."

"Why shouldn't I know?"

"Because—I don't feel like amusing you that way."

"Oh, but I don't—really I don't look at it like that!"

How can you always think so of me? I'm not trivial and shallow," she cried, very much wounded. "You ought to have seen that I wasn't!"

"All right!" he said, grimly. "Now you know."

"And you're going away?" she asked.

"I am."

"Suppose I don't want you to go?"

"That would make me go all the quicker."

"You have a—a rather funny way of being in love," she said. "I should think—"

"Now, see here," he said, with a sort of desperation. "Won't you let me alone? I've told you. I didn't want to, but you made me. You can have all the satisfaction of knowing that you've—hurt me and humiliated me. And nothing's going to be any good any more."

"Why?" she enquired, in a reasonable tone. "There are so many things in your life."

"I don't want them. I don't want anything but you. I'm—of course you don't know and you don't care. You'll go home and laugh at the impudence of that vulgar—"

Andrée faced him, very angry.

"That is vulgar, if you like," she said. "To imagine my doing that—laughing at you."

She had come down to the edge of the water, beside him, very near him. She was contemptuous, she was indignant and hurt. And suddenly all that went. There, in that enchanted glen, with the moon on him, he was transfigured, or it may be revealed. There was nothing mean about him; his sensitiveness was no longer paltry, but tragic. He was no more and no less than a man; forlorn in his strength and his youth; betrayed

by the world he fancied he had conquered. Tears came into her eyes; she laid her hand on his shoulder.

“Oh . . . ! *I—laugh at you!*” she said.

He started away suddenly.

“Don’t,” he said. “Don’t do that!”

A fatal and overmastering curiosity possessed her; her arm went round his neck, her fingers gently touching his cheek. She was amazed, delighted to feel him tremble under that shadow of a caress; she was exultant with a sense of her miraculous power, never before suspected. In all innocence, she could comprehend his passion, in a great measure because she herself was quite devoid of passion, was able to look on at this. She was impressionable, terribly susceptible to the magic of love in others, intoxicated by the emotion she could so easily inspire in others; but within her was always a grain of something hard and cold, never to be touched. An artist, was *Andrée*, always a little aloof; she could never lose herself.

But she loved him then, humanly enough, with an immature and cruelly exacting love. If he had said one word, made one gesture, to offend her critical and fastidious spirit, she would have hated him. Fortunately he didn’t know this, and was not on his guard, not wary. He was as much concerned with his own feelings as she with hers; they were scarcely aware of each other.

“You can’t really like me,” he said, miserably.

“I do!” she said. “I do!”

“But not—love?” he said, looking at her with profound anxiety. Her glance fell and with eyes veiled, she was no longer so august. “You don’t love me?” he insisted. “That couldn’t be!”

She had no answer to make, but the very droop of her shoulders was acquiescent. He was astounded, incredulous, more appealing to her in his humility than in any other attitude he could have taken.

"Be honest with me!" he entreated. "I don't ask you for anything but that."

"I love you," she said, quietly. It was to them both a priceless boon conferred.

"But think what I am!" cried the pitifully honest lover. "I'm not in—your class. I don't know your ways. I couldn't live like you—"

Their arms were about each other, and what did all that matter? The strength and tenderness of his embrace, the reassurance she felt in his unalterable sympathy and kindness, made her weep. He was not strange to her; he was dearer and more familiar, even than her mother. There was security in him, and her deepest instinct required security.

"Don't cry, darling little Andrée," he said. "Are you afraid we can't be happy?"

He was, very greatly.

"No!" she said, scornfully. "Of course I'm not afraid."

They sat down, side by side, on a fallen log; he looked into her dark eyes, glittering with tears; he didn't know how to tell her how precious, how adorable she was.

"I'll do my best," he said. "Tell me just what you want, and what you don't like. . . . I can't help making you happy, when I love you so, can I, darling Andrée? I'll be the best kind of friend and lover I can to you, always. I'll never interfere."

"If you only won't," she said, eagerly. "I've grown

to rather hate the idea of ever marrying, because it means so much interfering. I want to be myself."

Stephens privately didn't believe in marriage at all; he had even written a brochure on the subject; he thought it an evil; he would tell you, asked, or unasked, that he had never seen a happy marriage, or even many endurable ones. He didn't believe in women being dependent; he loathed domesticity; he revolted at the idea of vows and promises. And now, at this moment, he became completely an apostate. What else could be done with a creature like Andrée? Of course they must be married; more than that, he voluntarily made to her then and there all those vows he condemned; he promised to make her happier than he possibly could, he promised eternal love and constancy, he promised that as this moment, so should all their lives be; he believed it, and so did she.

"We'll be friends, Andrée, always," he said. "We'll each have our own life and our own interests. We'll make it a different sort of marriage."

"Oh, let's!" said Andrée.

But while he was already envisaging the next ten years, she was held in thrall by this one minute. She listened to him for some time, but the intolerable feeling grew on her that he was wasting precious time.

"We don't know how it'll come out," she said, impatiently. "Let's not bother about it, but just be as happy as we can."

He was silenced by this admirable recklessness. He took her in his arms and kissed her, and this time she kissed him; then he rather abruptly said it was time for them to go home.

“No; why?” she said.

But he was quite firm about it. He knew himself better than she did. He was alarmed at his total lack of views and opinions just then; he was not as reasonable as he wished to be. He was mortally afraid that by some expression of his ardour he might offend his glorious Diana. They walked home with their arms about each other, through the fields and the woods, a walk in a dream, in moonlight and shadow.

He went up to his hot little room and sat there in the dark, heart-sick with the ecstasy of it. He was more troubled and unhappy than he had ever been before in his cocksure existence. This thing, made up of moonlight and Andrée’s dark eyes, had come crashing into his life, to break it in two. He had not wanted or imagined anything of the sort; he with his talk about biologic necessities. He was appalled at the idea of going on, because everything within him had stopped.

He was not easily daunted, but it was a long time before his courage was fully restored. He lighted a cigarette, and it tranquillized him.

“All right!” he said, aloud. “I made a new man of myself once. I’ll do it again. I’ve got to.”

That was what he thought.

CHAPTER NINE

BERTIE

§ i

CLAUDINE had put aside her philosophers that morning, and sat in her little glade, listless and wretched. An insufferable, intolerable summer, a summer altogether wrong and harmful. And inevitably six weeks' more of it.

"It isn't right to keep the children here in idleness," she said to herself. "Healthy, intelligent adults, wasting months and months. . . . They ought to be doing something. They ought to be busy and useful. . . . I suppose I got these ideas from poor little Mr. Stephens, but they're good ideas. There was something very admirable about him. . . ."

She smiled at the recollection of the "nice little beast," but the smile vanished instantly.

"They're both so discontented and restless—begging me to take them away. And I can't do anything! I haven't any power, any authority! I can't do the least thing—I can't even leave this place without Gilbert's consent. . . ."

A few miserable tears started to her eyes.

"That's the reason I have no control over them. A

mother ought to be wise and firm and—free. But I can't do what I think ought to be done. I've never been able to. I have to argue with Gilbert, or deceive him. That's what it really is, although I like to call it tact. They ought to go home, and study, or work. They don't need a holiday! But I can't make him see that; not possibly. He sneers about 'a lot of idle women,' but he won't let us be anything else. . . . And the older I get, the more—cowardly I become. I can't bear to argue and argue with him. I know I can't win. I haven't any influence over him. I can't—charm him, or coax him, and I can't convince him. He's so obstinate."

She clasped her hands.

"Oh!" she cried. "If I could only, only have had my darling Andrée alone, I could have done so much for her! So much! I could have been so wise, so gentle, so patient, that she would have loved me with all her heart! I could have influenced her and helped her—"

She hastily wiped her eyes, ashamed of her emotion.

"How did it happen? Why did I become so helpless? Whose fault is it? Gilbert's? No, I can't think that. Other women with husbands just as bad as Gilbert don't allow themselves to be submerged. It's my fault; it must be. There's something wrong with me, some horrible moral weakness."

Her eye fell upon Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus.

"No; they're no use—only a drug. I call it training my mind, but it's only trying to dull my feelings. I ought to fight and struggle. I must! I must! I must get hold of my children. Now when Bertie's coming, when he hasn't seen me for two months. . . . I ought to be able to do something with him. He adores me."

She fell into a reverie upon her incorrigible boy. No doubt that Bertie was lazy, frivolous, and something a little worse—"wild," her friends called him. And yet she never worried seriously about him. He was so obviously the sort of person who always comes out on top. It was impossible to imagine him defeated. He was the cleverest of all her children, alarmingly clever, and he was also in some ways the finest of them. He had more sensibility than his sisters, more heart. That was the reason she was so shamefully indulgent toward his follies; she was aware, almost by instinct, that they were of no significance.

She decided upon an attitude; she would not be so fond, and full of half-playful remonstrances. No; she would be friendly, but firm and wise; she would show him the significance of life.

§ ii

They went, one or the other of them, to meet all the reasonable trains.

"Why not?" said Andrée. "For mercy's sake, what else have we to do?"

But he did not come by any of them. As a sort of punishment for his shocking lack of industry during his late year at the Polytechnic Institute, he had been banished to a solitary camp in Maine with Lance, selected as a tutor of the most serious possible sort. And as Lance—who was perfectly indifferent to the boy's moral defects—wrote encouragingly of his mental attainments, he was allowed a two weeks' visit to his mother and sisters.

When he didn't come by the five o'clock train, they gave him up for that day. They were all dressed with

an eye to his acutely critical taste, and a little crestfallen at their unregarded condition. They came down onto the veranda to wait until the bell rang for dinner, and sat there patiently with the old ladies. . . . When there came, along the mountain road, a terrific roaring, a dense cloud of dust, and a motor-car came up at a hair-raising speed, an eccentric, purple car, very low, with a gigantic engine. From this affair sprang out a figure in a duster, wearing goggles and a plaid cap put on backward.

They all started up, joyfully, and Andrée rushed to meet him.

“Where did you get that thing?” she cried.

“It’s Pendleton’s. What do you think of it? It’s a French car.”

“It’s *très chic*. Come and see Mother!”

He sprang up the steps, pulled off cap and goggles, and kissed Claudine. And try as she would, she couldn’t help looking at him indulgently, instead of wisely. There was something about him. . . . He was a very slight boy, barely eighteen, with an unusually dark skin and sleek black hair; he had a trick of keeping his mouth open, which showed his brilliantly white teeth, and gave him a stupid air; he had a smooth, oval face, narrow eyes, a rather weak chin; he looked at first glance like a silly young ass. But after you had looked again you were more inclined to think him a most engaging young devil. He had an odd, sidelong glance and a grimace of gamin impudence; he was never bad-tempered or sullen, but sometimes a little malicious.

“How did you get on with Cousin Lance, my dear?” asked his mother.

“Splendidly!” he answered. “Aren’t you pretty, Mammy! But a bit spindly. Why don’t you drink ale?”

“I’m very well, Bertie. Why did you take Mr. Pendleton’s car? Isn’t it rather a risk?”

“His look out. He offered it. He’s a nice little playmate. He took me out to dinner the first night I got home, because the old man said he was busy. *Some* dinner! Andréé, what is there to do here?”

“Lots! You can knit and embroider and play solitaire—”

“We’ll change all that, don’t worry! Here’s the latest thing in evolution, as old Lance would say, come to put a little pep into the fossils. Mammy, don’t you think I’ve evolved a whole lot further than Father? Lance says it takes two million years to grow a new toe, or lose one, I forget which, but it seems to me—”

“That’s the dinner bell,” said Edna. “Come in just as you are. No one dresses here.”

“*Noblesse oblige!*” said Bertie. “I’m going to dress. Tell them to keep the kettle on the hob—whatever that is—for a few minutes.”

He came down again very promptly, with his black head sleek as a seal, and a new and marvelous dark suit. He disdained all the various washable materials; they were “a mess,” he said, no one had any business to be hot enough to want them. He was absolutely correct in every detail, a very model of fashion and deportment; how were they not to be proud of him and delighted with him? He was very attentive to his mother, and even if it were a rather ostentatious courtesy, it warmed her heart.

She grew annoyed, though, when he persisted in smoking cigarettes between courses.

"It's very bad manners," she said. "It's disrespectful to me and your sisters. And what's more, no one smokes here in the dining-room. It isn't a hotel."

"I'll teach it to be. And it's not disrespectful, dear creatures. It's simply being done now."

"And you're too young to smoke. It's very harmful at your age. I can't bear to see you, Bertie!"

"Mammy, don't spoil my poor little holiday! Two weeks—that's all! Up there with old Lance, I neither smoke, chew, drink, spit nor cuss. Let me have my brief day!"

When they went out onto the veranda after dinner, his quick ear caught the sound of distant music.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Dancing down at the hotel," answered Edna.

"Free for all, and leave your guns at the door?" he asked.

And after this, nothing would do, but that they must all stroll down to "look it over," and Bertie, entering ostensibly to buy a magazine in the lobby, looked in at the ballroom and said it looked "good enough."

"You and Edna sit out here on the piazza, and I'll take a few turns with Andréé," he said. "The music's not bad and the floor looks good."

"I'd rather you didn't," said Claudine. "They're not at all a nice sort of people here. I don't think it's quite the thing—"

Bertie fell back into Edna's arms like a log.

"Oh—h—h!" he groaned. "Why?"

"It's not dignified—"

"You don't have to be dignified till you get married or inherit money. Tell you what! You come, Mammy! You can dance some nice, old-fashioned sort of waltz. Come on!"

"I ought to!" she thought. "It's my duty to enter into their amusements—as long as I can't stop them."

But after half an hour spent there, she was more than ever determined to influence them—all of them—in an opposite direction, away from this unpalatable and promiscuous vulgarity.

"Don't you think it is better to be bored than to amuse yourselves in such a way as this?" she asked, on the way home.

"No!" said Andrée and Bertie, simultaneously.

"It seems a pity to me that young people like you—intelligent and well-bred, should be so mad about amusement," she said. "I can't understand it! If you were brainless and dull, it would be different. But there are so many really interesting things in the world, so many wholesome and fine recreations—"

"Never heard of them, Mammy! What are they?"

"When I was a girl, we thought it a pleasure to take a country walk with an interesting companion—"

"You wouldn't like the companions that we'd think were interesting," said Andrée.

"No," said Bertie, sadly. "There aren't any nice amusements left, Mammy. Evolution has done away with 'em."

She looked at the three faces, at that clever and devilish Bertie, at the sensible, clear-sighted Edna, at Andrée, filled with a strange and wayward inner light.

"But you can't enjoy that sort of thing!" she cried.

“You can’t like to be there, in a room crowded with vulgar, noisy people whom you don’t even know! You must see that these new dances are—to say the very least—ill-bred!”

“I accept!” said Bertie. “Lance was telling me about some fellow that made that his motto, and I think it’s a gol-durned good one! I accept—anything that comes my way.”

“But it doesn’t mean that, Bertie. It means resignation.”

“I know. And we are all resigned, except you. You want to—let’s see—put back the clock of human progress. Very wrong Mammy!”

§ iii

The next morning Bertie went again to the big hotel, and came back innocently with a new magazine for his mother. In the afternoon he went down to the garage and drove back in the startling purple car, and asked his mother to come for a drive. Filled with terror, she accepted, and spent two hours in mortal anguish, flying perilously along the edge of precipices, breathless from the terrific speed. There was no chance then for the serious talk she wished to have with her son, and after dinner he disappeared again, and didn’t return until midnight.

But she was waiting for him on the veranda.

“Bertie!” she said. “Where have you been?”

“Dancing around a little, Mammy!”

“With whom?”

“Some girls at the hotel. Very respectable and

humble, Mammy. I didn't have any trouble with them at all."

"I don't like it. And I'm sure your father wouldn't like it."

"So am I. But I'm used to that. It's crabbed age and youth—"

"Don't be disrespectful to your father! Bertie . . .! Did you—have anything to drink?"

"Oh, yes! A couple of seltzer lemonades."

"I mean—anything—intoxicating?"

"Nothing that intoxicated me, Mammy!"

"Don't be so flippant and provoking! Bertie, I really feel in despair about you. Haven't you any serious or—worthy thoughts or ambitions?"

"They haven't come yet. But I'm only a child. Give me a chance!"

"What do you expect to do with your life?"

"Don't you know," he said, solemnly, "that that's really a ridiculous question, Mammy? It doesn't lie with me. I'm a puppet in the hands of Nature. I'm going to be used by a Blind Force—"

"Please don't joke!"

"I don't think I am. It seems to me it really is like that. I don't see much use in spending all your life squirming. I'd rather go along with the rest of the crowd—wherever they're going. We don't count much. We're just one more generation. It'll take about a billion years to change us or improve us. So what care I?"

"Bertie!" she cried, quite shocked. "Where did you get such ideas?"

"Lance has corrupted me. I was a poor innocent child who wanted to be an engineer and build bridges.

But when I was taught to think a million years at a time, I lost interest."

"But you've got to pass your life in some sort of work, dear."

"I'll go into Father's office and show him how to run the show. Then I'll take a wad and buck the stock market and clean up a few millions and never worry again."

"Go to bed!" she said, half-laughing. "You're too silly to talk to! I suppose some time you'll grow up and be a man. And I hope with all my heart I'll be able to be proud of you."

His exploits that week, however, were certainly nothing to be proud of. He took a golden-haired maiden from the hotel out one afternoon and quite wrecked Mr. Pendleton's car, leaving it helpless on a mountain road to be taken back to the garage on a truck. He ran up a startling bill at the hotel for cigarettes, candies, and "seltzer lemonades" which she suspected strongly, and when she confronted him with it, he said, with chagrin:

"Pshaw! I told 'em not to send it till after I'd gone!"

She paid this herself from her own allowance, but the bill for the garage was beyond her. It was going to cost six hundred dollars to repair Mr. Pendleton's car.

"But he'll pay it himself!" Bertie protested. "He's a good sport. He knows I'm a young and inexperienced driver, and sure to have accidents."

"I'm ashamed of you, Bertie, to think of such a thing. I shall have to tell your father, and I'm afraid he'll be very angry."

"I don't believe in family rows. It might give him

apoplexy. I should think you'd rather sell your jewels."

But she did tell Gilbert, and he was furious. It was not a pleasant week-end, but it didn't depress Bertie.

"I'm the reed, you know, Mammy, that bows its head to the storm," he said. And the very next day, told her he wanted to, and was socially obliged to, give a dinner-party to some of his friends at the hotel.

"You can't, my dear. Mrs. Dewey wouldn't—"

"She says she will. I hinted at it. We can have it at eight, when the others have finished. She says she'll do it in grand style, for my sake."

"It would cost a great deal. Your father—"

"Andrée and Edna will pay for it, out of their little savings, like sisters should, for their brother's honour. All you have to do is to look lovely and be dignified."

"But I don't care to encourage those hotel people!"

"They won't bother you when I've gone. Besides, you can freeze 'em thoroughly at the dinner. I don't care how rude you are to them."

It was a horrible dinner, of the sort that Claudine most thoroughly detested. Silly, over-dressed girls and one or two of their mothers, and a handful of boys who seemed to her prejudiced eyes nothing but cheap travesties on her fascinating son. She was quite perfect, with the affability and politeness she never displayed so well as when among people she disliked.

But after he had gone away, she was very glad she had done this for Bertie. She missed him beyond measure; of all her children he was the one who had most of her own detached and fatalistic point of view, and he, like herself, could find but cold comfort in his

own heart. She understood him, how futile all achievement seemed to him, how terribly necessary was happiness. He *must* be happy; it was that alone which he required from life, not success, like Andrée, not self-approbation, like Edna, but joy in the moment, like herself.

She remembered him as a little boy, a beautiful child, a gay and cajoling little thing, his grandmother's favourite . . . certainly a very much spoiled child. She liked to remember his passionate admiration of her, how she had always stopped in at the nursery to let him see her, dressed for the evening. How he had called her "pretty Mammy," quite unabashed by his father's disgust for his effeminacy.

Even now, with all his weaknesses, his petty vices seemed to her very innocent, very unimportant. It was only his way of looking for happiness. She felt sure that when he grew older, he would find a better way. And if he remained as he was, frivolous, reckless, pleasure-loving, wasn't it better, after all, than being stolid, prudent, money-loving?

"My dear, dear boy!" she thought, with tears in her eyes, but a smile on her lips. "Poor Bertie!"

§ iv

The long, long summer wore away; wasted and arid days they seemed to her. She found but little pleasure in her flowers and birds, no more consolation in her philosophers.

"I suppose I'm growing old!" she thought, and she allowed herself to dally with the idea of growing really

old, when nothing would be expected of her, but dignity, which would be no trouble at all.

“But I’m barely forty!” she reflected. “I suppose there’ll be at least twenty years more of this!”

And her heart sank.

“It’s peace I want!” she said. “I’m not made for struggling or achieving. I’ve been a wretched failure. . . . I suppose I’ve even failed Gilbert—in some sort of way. All I can do is to go on blundering and trying—for all that terribly long time. . . . If I can only see the children on the right road! . . . And I don’t even know what the right road is!”

She was happy to see her daughters so full of new interest and energy when the time came for going home.

“I can live in them!” she said. “If they’ll let me!”

BOOK THREE
THE CUP IS OFFERED

CHAPTER ONE

ANDRÉE'S RECITAL

§ i

GILBERT was certainly very nervous. His nervousness took its usual form of a great rage and distress about his shirt, which he believed was inclined to bulge, and therefore to ruin and destroy him in the eyes of society. Moreover, his own image in the glass filled him with resentment, that portly and ungainly figure, his grey hair, his unromantic aspect. Nothing but a father, that's all he was, a money-maker. He strode around the bedroom, swearing bitterly and scowling, but toward this exhibition of ill-temper Claudine was neither frigid nor superior. She felt sorry for him. She chatted as she brushed her hair, and she succeeded in soothing him a little.

"You look very distinguished, Gilbert!" she said, and she was ready to believe it.

"Humph!" he said, hiding his pleasure. "That tailor's a fool. The coat wrinkles there, over the shoulders."

"Not when you stand up straight. I suppose you do, when you're being fitted, you know."

He straightened himself and looked again. It did look better.

"I hope she won't get into one of her freakish humours," he said. "Get stage fright, or anything of that sort."

"She won't," Claudine assured him. "She's not nervous in public. She's not the least bit upset. Listen! She's playing over her pieces now. . . . Oh, Gilbert! Isn't she wonderful?"

He went over to open the door into the hall, so that the sound might reach him better, and the great volume of it impressed him. It must certainly betoken a remarkable skill to do that with such sureness; Claudine had never played so loudly and majestically.

"You'd better hurry a little, Gilbert," said his wife. "I told Mary to serve dinner promptly at six, to give us plenty of time. I think I'll go and hurry Bertie a little."

But really the vain woman wanted her son's approval and admiration. She went upstairs to the room Gilbert had occupied in his bachelor days, and knocked at the door.

"It's I, Bertie!"

"Come in, Mammy!" he called, cheerfully, and as soon as she had entered, he cried:

"Oh, I say! Queen of them all! You *are* lovely! You'll be a riot!"

She smiled happily.

"You silly boy! Is it really a nice dress?"

"I wish you were going to sit up there on the platform and play. I'd rather hear you, and look at you, Mammy!"

"It might have been I," she thought to herself, with

a shade of bitterness. "I might have been a mother really to be proud of—a musician—a somebody."

But she smiled again, and glanced at herself in the mirror. It was the most shockingly expensive dress she had ever had, a real Paris frock of satin in an exquisite shade of green that became her perfectly, and set off her coppery hair and pale skin to their best advantage. She was proud of her small waist, her little feet, in spite of the fact that they were old-fashioned, she was pleased with her miniature neatness and delicacy.

She turned to her son. Gilbert had angrily insisted that a boy of eighteen had no business in evening dress; a dinner jacket was the thing for him. But Bertie had pointed out the fact that the thing had already been ordered and fitted, and would have to be paid for.

"I never imagined you'd kick," he had said, plaintively. "You're always so generous, Father."

He finished scrupulously tying his white tie.

"Do I look like a monkey?" he asked. "Father said I would."

He followed his mother downstairs into the dining-room, and the others joined them promptly. There was an air of general satisfaction at the dinner table. They were all pleased with themselves, individually and as a family; they were all unusually festive and spirited. Andrée, the heroine, was blazing with excitement.

"You'd better eat," said Lance, warningly to her. Music was no more to him than a passing phenomenon in the course of man's history; it served to show something of the development of his brain and æsthetic sense, but it would, he felt, in the course of time be regarded

as nothing more than a frivolity. It was interesting to see how seriously it was now regarded. Still, he was fond of Andrée, and he wished her to be successful, if only for her mother's sake. He had an unwavering loyalty for Claudine, never expressed, never quite comprehended by her, something which in a less preoccupied man might have been called devotion.

Bertie had once said that Lance had "mastered evolution"; certainly he never seemed to grow older. With his light, rather long hair parted in the middle, his tortoise-shell spectacles, his slender figure, he looked like a sober and enquiring youth, a juvenile professor. He was quite illustrious, in the not very extensive circles where paleontologists may shine, he had been on two noteworthy government expeditions, and had written a large book, but he hadn't made money. The most profitable thing he had ever done, financially, was to tutor young Bertie. But he was able to exist in comfortable independence, and he wanted no more. He had a calm self-assurance which impressed everyone, even Gilbert, and he was a guest not without honour, a friend of prestige.

He took out his watch.

"Time to start!" he announced, and they all rose.

§ ii

Mr. MacGregor expected a triumph that evening. He had hired a large hall, and had been promised the presence of several well-known musicians and critics, to say nothing of the important "society element." He had been for years steadily growing in favour, until he now

held a unique position as a master who was not only able to give to débutantes a very attractive accomplishment, but a man who trained and developed genuine artists. There was a certain youth from the Ghetto at present creating something of a furore as a concert player whom he had "made," and several lesser stars. And he had now up his sleeve two or three surprises, to be released this evening. He had a boy—a young Pole whom he had been teaching gratis and more or less supporting, he had a young woman of buxom charm and amazing technic, and he had Andrée, whose chief claim was not so much in technic—though hers was of a high order—but the originality of her interpretations. He knew that some of the critics would be indignant at a lack of classic reverence, but others would be charmed, and all of them would talk.

He himself didn't appear; he stood in the wings, watching and listening, his attention divided between his pupils and the audience. And there wasn't one chagrin; everything went beautifully. His young Russian aroused a sharp interest in the critics, the buxom young woman was at her best, and Andrée . . .! He was entranced with Andrée. She looked like the very spirit of music, filled with an innocent wild ardour, young, lovely, proud. His hopes, his personal hopes, that is, of ever becoming her husband had very nearly faded away, and he was able to regard her with a more impersonal eye. He had never summoned the courage to propose to her; he knew it would only make him ridiculous, and he was beginning to feel rather glad that he hadn't committed himself.

"She'll go a long way beyond me!" he reflected,

candidly. "She has a wonderful future before her—if she doesn't make a fool of herself!"

Her family sat listening to her with ecstatic pride, even Gilbert, who was constitutionally opposed to public life for women. They listened to the enthusiastic clapping, they watched her come back onto the stage again and take an encore, not at all the timid novice, but cool, careless, aloof as Diana herself. They heard whispered comments upon her all about—"a beautiful girl," "so distinguished," "a magnetic personality," and even a few remarks about her music, and when she joined them, when it was all over, they were at a loss what to say to her. Edna wept a little.

They got into the motor; even the chauffeur, who had been given a seat in the balcony, was beaming. They drove home, and went into the dining-room for a little supper, with champagne, to celebrate her triumph.

§ iii

Claudine was nearly asleep when she heard that light tap at the door, but any voice calling "Mother!" could have aroused her from any sleep but death. She hastily put on her dressing-gown and opened the door. It was *Andrée*.

"I want to speak to you!" she said.

All sleep or fatigue fled from Claudine at once. There was something in that tone, something in the expression of her child's face seen in the dim light of the hall, that froze her heart. She followed her to her own room, which was brilliantly illumined; it had somehow the appearance of a stage, a place pitilessly to expose

a secret tragedy; and Andrée in her white dressing-gown and her soft black hair unbound looked a fit figure for any drama. Claudine asked herself, with a sinking heart, what was to be her part. . . .?

"Is anything wrong, darling?" she asked.

"There's something I want to tell you."

Claudine smiled mechanically, but her knees were weak, and she sank down on the bed.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"It's very hard," said Andrée. "It's going to hurt you. . . ."

"Don't keep me waiting," her mother said, almost sharply. "Tell me, Andrée!"

Andrée sat down beside her, and lifted one of her mother's hands, looking at it with curious abstraction. Claudine didn't stir.

"Now it's come," she thought. "That horrible, nameless disaster I have always dreaded for this creature I love too much. This will be something I cannot endure."

At last Andrée's voice came, steady and low.

"You remember Mr. Stephens, don't you, Mother?"

"Yes. . . ." she murmured.

"We're going to be married to-morrow."

"Andrée! *Andrée!* What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, Mother."

At first this seemed to Claudine merely preposterous, almost laughable; one of Andrée's freaks.

"But, my dear, you don't know the man," she protested.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Andrée, calmly. "We've been writing to each other since last July, and I've seen him quite often lately. And I've made up my mind. I knew

everyone would make a row; that's why I didn't tell you until the last moment. Al's going to Europe on Saturday, and I'm going with him."

Nothing in that speech made the slightest impression upon Claudine except the name "Al." That seemed to her of tremendous significance; the vulgar name of a vulgar young man; it made the affair a fantasy. She was not so much worried now as surprised.

"My dear Andrée—" she said. "You. . . ." She paused, aware of the need for caution.

"I knew you wouldn't understand," said Andrée, bitterly. "You can't see beneath the surface. I knew all the arguing and talking and reasoning there'd be, but it's not going to make one bit of difference. I'm the one to decide, and I have decided. I want to be married quietly at the City Hall to-morrow, without any fuss and—talking. I wasn't even going to tell you until afterward but—" She frowned. "Somehow I couldn't. I wanted to make one more attempt to get you to understand."

"To give you your chance," was what she meant, and what her mother understood. This was the supreme moment to come close to her child—and she sat spell-bound, like a figure in a nightmare, unable to speak, unable to make even a pretense at comprehension.

"He's the finest man I've ever seen," Andrée went on. "He's honest and kind and—rather wonderful, I think."

"But—he's not suitable—" faltered Claudine.

"I knew you'd say that! You'll tell me it's disgraceful to marry a man 'beneath' me. Well, I don't think he is, in any way. You'll say—"

"If you're going to take my part as well as your own, *Andrée*, there's not much use in going on. I'm not so unsympathetic—or so narrow as you think. . . . I shouldn't have opposed you. I should only have asked you to wait a little—"

"Because you think I'd change?"

"Only until I felt you were sure."

"I am sure! I love *Al*! You don't know how I feel about him. He's so dear and—"

"Hush, *Andrée*!" she interrupted, almost sternly. There was a faint flush on her cheeks; this unrestraint, this vehemence, caused her a sort of shame. She had suddenly a thousand things to say—"Think if there should be children"—"Think of the personal habits of a man of his class"—And not one of them could she utter. Her almost morbid modesty, her long habit of restraint, forbade her. She grew desperate; she could urge nothing but her own love.

"*Andrée*," she said, "I will tell you what I have never told anyone else in the world. I love you more than my other children! I always have. I—I think I don't really love anyone else. You are all my life. You are all I care to live for. If you *knew* . . .! When you were a baby. . . . Oh, *Andrée*! I used to sit watching you when you were asleep . . . you were so pretty—and so strange. . . . It—made me turn away from God—I loved you so much more. . . . If you do this. . . ."

"Oh, how cruel you are!" cried *Andrée*. "And how—unfair! How can you want me to spoil all my life and give up all my happiness, if you love me? How can you not let me alone? Don't you see—don't you understand—how I love him?"

“Andrée, that love is nothing to mine—I know!”

“And you don’t try to argue, or give reasons, or convince me. Or listen to my reasons. You only want to play on my feelings!”

“You have no feelings!” cried Claudine. “You have no heart! You don’t care!”

“Oh, don’t I?” said Andrée, and she suddenly began to sob. “Go away! Go away! I’ve told you—now let me alone!” she sobbed.

Claudine crossed the room to the bureau and began moving about the little jars and bottles with trembling hands.

“I won’t—reproach you,” she said. “I won’t. . . . I’ll try to understand. . . . I want to see—Mr. Stephens. Where does he live?”

“I shan’t tell you.”

“Yes, you must. You can trust me, Andrée. I won’t—I promise you I won’t tell anyone else. I won’t do anything to stop you. . . . I only want to hear him. I want to hear—all he has to say.

Andrée hesitated a moment.

“Very well!” she said at last. “I think I’d like you to. I’ll trust you. . . . He’s at the Biltmore. . . . I’m not afraid of anything you can say to him!”

“No,” said Claudine, dully. She was folding up some bits of ribbon, quite mechanically, and putting them into the bureau drawer. The room was very untidy; there lay Andrée’s pretty dress across a chair, and her beribboned petticoat fallen on the floor. And her slippers on the dressing-table. . . . Was it worth while to pick them up? Was it worth while ever to draw another breath? She looked at Andrée, lying face down-

ward on the bed, and her heart was not moved. No; this was the last possible sensation, the very end of everything; she was going to sink now and be drowned. She went out of the room and closed the door.

Gilbert hadn't stirred. She lay down beside him and closed her eyes, and at once anguish, like a fierce beast, sprang at her throat.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BITTER TRIUMPH

"I'M going shopping early this morning," said Claudine, at the breakfast-table the next morning. "There are some very good bargains advertised. . . . How soon do you think you could send the car back, Gilbert?"

Now Gilbert, although he scoffed at feminine shopping and bargains, nevertheless respected all this as one of the bulwarks of family life. Women must and ought to go shopping. So he said:

"Take the car. I'll go in the Subway," in the tone of an exasperated martyr.

Her destination, however, was the Biltmore. She was filled with a feverish anxiety to get there; she was in terror lest Mr. Stephens should have gone out, that he would be beyond her reach, that Andrée might see him or hear from him before she did. She was going to the desk to enquire for him, when she caught sight of him, standing up, reading a newspaper, and she approached him and touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Stephens!" she said. "Have you a few moments to spare?"

He was not pleased to see her; she fancied that his face turned a little pale; but he greeted her with a sort of subdued courtesy.

"Where can we talk?" she asked. "I have something to say. . . ."

"I have a little sitting-room; if you don't mind—" he said.

She followed him into the lift, still smiling brightly, a smile which he saw reflected in the looking-glass and which alarmed him by its expression of triumph. If he could have read her thoughts as well, his alarm would have vanished. It was her firm resolution to look bright, brave, self-assured; she hoped that her air would not only impress him but herself as well.

"Oh, God!" she was praying under her breath. "Oh, just this once, make me equal to the situation! I always fail; I'm always beaten! Oh, let me, only this one time, win!"

He opened the door of his sitting-room, and they entered. She began at once, the instant the door closed behind them.

"Mr. Stephens," she said, "I have heard from Andrée what you propose to do."

He bowed his head, and said nothing. She realized, with surprise, that he was not without dignity; that there was nothing in any way contemptible either in his manner or his appearance.

"I am astonished," she went on, "that you should have done such an—unworthy thing. Andrée is very young and impressionable, and you have taken advantage of this to influence her. She neither knows nor realizes what she has undertaken."

"Excuse me," he said. "But I'm sure she does. I haven't tried to influence her. I've—I've given this a lot of thought, Mrs. Vincelle. At first I was afraid

Andrée couldn't be happy with me . . . but . . . now I do think so."

"Why, Mr. Stephens?"

His fair face flushed.

"It's pretty hard to explain," he said, "but I think—well, I think I understand her, and can get on with her. I—well—I know I'm—different, in some ways—but I can't see that that matters."

"It does matter," she said, gently. "More than you realize. It may be quite wrong, but it is a fact, Mr. Stephens, that marriages of—of this sort are very, very rarely successful."

"What kind are?" he asked, with equal gentleness. "As far as I can see, the chances are overwhelmingly against any marriage being really successful. It's—I see it like this: if two people love each other, they ought to take the risk, they ought to face all the chances as—as gallantly as they can, and do the best they can in what's bound to be a difficult position. Personally, I don't believe in marriage, but I can see that nothing else is practicable just now. All I can do is to make it as little like an ordinary marriage as possible—leave Andrée as free as I can—"

"Mr. Stephens—I'm sorry . . . but I cannot consent to this."

He looked full at her with a level and grave glance.

"The way I see it—it's a personal matter between Andrée and me. No one else has any right to interfere. And no one *can* interfere. I—you don't know how much I admire you, Mrs. Vincelle, but—I didn't think it was necessary to consult you, or anyone else. That's all very well in the case of a man who wants money—any sort

of favours from his wife's family. But I don't. It's only for Andrée to decide."

"And I simply don't count," said Claudine, with a slight smile.

"I know a mother's love is a very strong—" he began.

"You don't know anything about it! You think it's a sentiment; you think it's beautiful to see a mother bending over a cradle. You understand that women love their babies. But when the babies have grown up, you forget the mothers. Do you think they evaporate, or disappear? Or turn into troublesome, ridiculous mothers-in-law? But we don't! We go on! If Andrée were a child, you'd think I was right to struggle for her. You talk about mothers being left free to do what they think best for their children. But because she's older, and I still want to protect her—"

"But—don't you see?—you don't need to protect her from anyone—like me—who—who worships her! Do listen just for a moment! All I want in the world is to make her happy. I want her to have a splendid, free life. I don't want to tie her to me. I want her as she is now. I don't want to change her and—fetter her. I understand her. She'd never endure being bound; she's so proud and independent—"

"And so silly and unstable. That's what you don't understand! But it's no use arguing. I know what it would mean for her. I'm not talking about convictions. I'm talking about life as it is, as she will have to live it. Andrée's an egoist. She's fickle and headstrong, and so terribly unstable."

"Let her be," he said, stoutly. "I'm not. I'm

strong enough and—and earnest enough to put up with anything like that.”

“Oh, don’t you see? She’ll think anything you want to suggest to her, but she’ll always act according to her own impulses and desires.”

(“Just the contrary to me,” she reflected, irrelevantly. “People can make me do anything, but they never change my ideas. . . .”)

“But that’s just what I want her to do!” protested Stephens. “That’s my idea of marriage—that we should both—”

“Don’t argue!” she cried, with sudden violence. “You cannot do this! If you really think any of the things you once said to me—if you have any compassion, and kind human feeling, you can’t try to make your happiness on another person’s pain. You can’t ignore me!”

“But—” he began, “isn’t that just a little—selfish?” She clasped her hands desperately.

“You can’t do it!” she cried. “You’re kind. You cannot hurt me so!”

He wished to point out to her the extreme unfairness of her position but the sight of her anguish was too much for him. Even when he looked away, he seemed still to see her tear-filled eyes, her face suddenly so worn, so much older, its fine tranquillity, which he had so much admired, its dignity, gone. It was like a sacrilege.

“Please don’t! Please don’t!” he entreated. “I can’t bear to see you suffer! . . . If you’d only realize that I’m trying to make Andrée happy—”

“Can’t you have a little mercy on me?” she said. “Even if you think I’m wrong? Andrée is—my whole

life; I've let everything else go. I haven't any life of my own, or any hopes. . . . Nothing but her. Oh, I'd go on my knees to you!"

"No, no!" he cried, shocked profoundly, both by her suffering and by her amazing unscrupulousness. "Mrs. Vincelle! I beg you!"

"Then listen to me! Think of me! Put aside your theories and your principles. . . . Isn't it something to be kind—even to me? Isn't it better to be kind than—"

But she could not go on; she buried her face in her hands and wept silently. She looked so small, so helpless, so terribly fallen from her almost superhuman aloofness. . . .

"Please don't!" he entreated, again. "I've always had such a great respect for you. . . . I—you don't know how I've thought about you. . . . I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world! Look here! Really! . . . Please listen! We'll wait."

She looked up, careless of her tear-stained face, quick to seize her advantage.

"Give me my chance?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, a little alarmed.

"You've done all this—you've persuaded her secretly—behind my back. Let me have a little time!"

"To turn her against me?"

"Yes, if I can."

They were both silent for a moment.

"All right!" he said. "If she can be as easily turned as that, it had better be done before it's too late. . . . But I don't believe you can. I'm not afraid to have you try. I trust—Andrée."

"How long will you give me?"

“I’m going to England and Germany on—business. I’ll be gone about two months.”

“And will you promise not to write to her or to see her for two months?”

“I’ll have to see her once before I go, to explain. That’ll be to-day. After that, I’ll—” He paused and smiled a little, very kindly. “You’ll have your chance, Mrs. Vincelle!”

She rose and held out her hand, and he took it, rather timidly.

“Good-bye!” she said.

“But—if you find you can’t change her—” he said. “At the end of two months—will you consent to our being married?”

“What difference will it make, whether I do, or not?” she asked, bitterly.

CHAPTER THREE

ANDRÉE'S WEDDING

§ i

GILBERT was alone in his office, working in one of his characteristic fits of great energy. A sort of inspiration would seize him, he would map out astounding campaigns, design advertisements, write letters to his travelling salesmen which filled them with admiration and enthusiasm, humorous, racy letters, replete with valuable suggestions. The greater part of his time he was cross and wretched, but he had his glorious hours, his days of geniality and amazing penetration. The entire office staff would be enchanted, and ready to adore him, for he had a perverse charm about him, an elusive loveableness, a touch of the fascination so marked in his eldest child.

He always addressed his salesmen in his own writing, a very neat and legible one, and he was doing that now, his plump, well-kept hand travelling deliberately over the paper, and a faint smile on his lips, when there was a knock at the door and his young Cuban entered.

"Your daughter is outside, sir!" he announced, with all the homage of a courtier. He was profoundly attached to "the family"; he was not without hope of something happening similar to the things he had read of in French romances—that, as a reward for his furious

zeal, he would one day be invited to dinner, for instance, when he could be presented to the young ladies with due ceremony. After that, the rest would be easy. . . .

“Ask her to step in,” said Gilbert, and looking at his watch, decided that he would take Edna out to lunch. He took it for granted that it was Edna, because it always was. She was sent as an emissary by both Bertie and Andrée when they wanted money or permission for any unapproved enterprise, because she knew how to handle him.

He wheeled round in his chair, and was surprised to see Andrée standing there.

“Well, well!” he said, good-humouredly. “What do *you* want, eh?”

He thought she looked “queer,” and he stared at her more closely. She had a sort of desperate, defiant air, an unchanging smile.

“Sit down! Sit down!” he said. “What brings you here, Andrée?”

“I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to tell you something. . . . I wanted you to hear it from me instead of from Mother, so that you—wouldn’t fly at her.”

She knew that she was antagonizing him, but she could not help it. The only way she felt able to tell her monstrous piece of news was rudely and sternly, to deny even to herself the dread and shrinking she suffered. Her father’s face changed perceptibly.

“Well!” he said, impatiently.

She laid her pocket-book on his desk, a beautiful little pocket-book, for she had all her mother’s elegance in trifles—and stood looking down at him.

“I’m going to marry Mr. Stephens!” she said.

“Who the devil is Mr. Stephens?” he cried.

Andrée began to laugh.

“That man you had a fight with last summer, in the mountains.”

“What!” he cried, springing up. “What! That common, worthless little cad!”

“Yes!” she said, looking him steadfastly in the face, and smiling. “That common, worthless little cad. Don’t begin to rave at me. You can’t stop me. Mother’s been trying for weeks.”

“I’m not going to ‘rave,’ young woman. I have more effective means than that to put a stop to your nonsense. You’re not so independent as you imagine—”

“If you’ll just take it for granted that *I’m going to do it*, we can talk,” said Andrée. “Otherwise it’s no use, and I’d better go.”

“I see your mother’s hand in this!” he said. “Some of her—peculiar ideas—”

“No, you don’t. She doesn’t even know I’m going to tell you. She’s done all she could to persuade me—”

“Persuade isn’t the word I’d use. Look here, Andrée, my girl, I’m not going to argue with you. Put this idea out of your head once and for all—”

“Why?”

“Why? Because I tell you to. You’re too young to know what you’re doing, and you’ll have to listen to people who are older and know better.”

“But—about this—you don’t know better. You don’t know anything about him. And anyway, it’s not a question of knowing, it’s a question of—of feeling. I—like him. I’m older than Mother was when she married you. I know what I’m doing. His only crime is being—what

you call 'common.' He's very remarkable. If you knew him, you'd soon see it."

"You don't know enough of the world to realize that marriages between people of unequal social position are always unhappy."

"They're just as unhappy in other cases," said Andrée. "I don't believe social position has anything to do with it. It's—disposition. And Al has a wonderful disposition."

"Al!" her father repeated, contemptuously.

"Yes, Al! That's what he calls himself. I like it! It's so nice and jolly and—common!"

"Andrée!" said her father, sternly. "This is nothing but a whim—a freak of yours. . . . I think you're only trying to torment and worry the people who love you."

"You'll see if it's a whim!" she answered.

Suddenly he was disarmed; some gesture, some intonation of hers, had brought back to him the naughty little girl who had so perplexed and amused him, the scowling little rebel he had so often wanted to shake—and never had. He remembered her with surprising vividness as a child of six, spending a Saturday morning with him, sitting in the corner of this very office, cutting out paper dolls, while she waited for him to wind up his business and take her out to lunch and the circus.

"Andrée!" he said. "I'll tell you what. I'll let you go over to Germany with your mother to study music for a year."

"But I'm going to study here! That's what Al and I have arranged. I'm going to go on just the same!" she said, triumphantly. "And he's going to give me a grand piano for a wedding present!"

This put an end to his softness.

“If you don’t renounce this—mad idea—at once, and finally,” he said, “it will mean—that I wash my hands of you. That you’ll be entirely cut off from your family, including your mother, whom you pretend to love so much. You’ll disgrace—”

“Nonsense!” she interrupted. “It’s not true to say I’ll disgrace you, because I want to marry someone you don’t like. It’s—”

“Enough!” he said, frowning. “I’ve said all I’m going to. If you’re not prepared to tell me *now* that you will—obey me in this matter . . . or at least, agree to wait a year—”

“No, I’m not prepared to do that!”

“Then you may consider that you are no longer a member of my household!”

“What does that mean?” she asked, scornfully. “Does it mean you’re turning me out?”

“Yes!” he shouted. “If you haven’t the common decency to appreciate, or feel any gratitude for all that’s been done for you, you can try doing without for a while. You can go back now and talk it over with your mother, and when I come home this evening, I’ll tell you what I’ve decided.”

“No, thanks! I won’t go home. I’ll never go home again. It’s your home, not mine, I see. Good-by!”

He caught her by the arm.

“I won’t allow this! I insist upon your going home at once. Do you hear?”

“Of course I hear! Everyone in the office must. But I won’t go!”

“Yes, you will!” he said. He was furious, and very

much frightened. He had no idea what she might do. "I'm going to call a taxi and send you home."

"You'll have to get a policeman to go with me!" she said, laughing again. "I won't go! I don't mind a row once in a while, but I don't like the idea of a whole lot of them. It was hard enough to come and tell you about this, but you've made things impossible now. You won't treat me as a woman—"

"You're not a woman!" he cried. And certainly she had never looked less like one. She looked like a school-girl, reckless and ignorant of the consequences of her folly, her face alight with a defiance that was more mischievous than resolute.

"Good-by!" she said.

"Andrée! . . . Confound you! . . . Think of your mother! Go home, and we'll talk the thing over thoroughly this evening!"

"All right!" she said, suddenly, and left him without another word.

§ ii

It was due to Claudine that she remained in the house until her wedding three weeks later. The distracted woman went from one to the other of them, seeing the breach widen every day. She implored and entreated Andrée, she faced Gilbert with unparalleled firmness; she was able to keep up an outward semblance of dignity in the family. But it was a monstrous thing. Andrée and her father never spoke to each other. The meals were a nightmare, to see them there side by side, so bitterly hostile. She dreaded to speak herself, for fear

of hurting or angering one or the other of those inordinately sensitive creatures. Edna was grief-stricken; she had tried to remonstrate in the old friendly fashion with her sister, to make her realize the prodigious unfitness of Mr. Stephens, but she had been rudely rebuffed. Bertie was gravely displeased; he disapproved of Andrée and also of his parents for not preventing such a marriage.

“And these are the last days I’ll ever have Andrée with me!” thought the poor mother. “These bitter, wretched days! This is the end of her girlhood—and what an end! What a memory to take with her!”

The day after Stephens had returned from Europe he had invited her to tea with Andrée, without having made any attempt to see Andrée alone, or even to write to her. He had no need to ask Claudine whether she had succeeded in alienating Andrée from him; her face told him everything, her smile. He had a little table reserved for them in a corner of the tea-room, and they all sat down in silence.

But Claudine, glancing up, saw them looking at each other, and it was horrible to her. She saw in his kindly, honest face that least kindly, least honest of human desires, his mouth had a kind of grimness; he looked so entirely a man. . . . And Andrée! Was that the way a woman should look, who is about to decide her destiny? Her brilliant eyes were full on him, provocative, equivocal. . . .

They talked, very harmoniously. He told them about his trip in dutiful fashion, because he wanted Claudine to know his position.

“You see,” he said. “I’ve put about everything I

own into this English syndicate. It pays me well, but I put the biggest part of my income back into it again. I calculate that inside the next five years I and three pals of mine can pretty well buy the rest out, and then we expect to turn the thing into a co-operative enterprise, with the workers sharing the profits. Then, of course, I won't get so much as I'm getting now, but I'm getting too much now. But it'll be a good living—something more than that—for both of us, for the rest of our lives."

"But I'm going to work too, you know," said Andrée. "I'm going to study a few years more, and then I'll give concerts. All over Europe!"

"You won't have much of a home, will you?" asked Claudine.

"We don't want one!" said Stephens, cheerfully. "I never could see any reasonable connection between—well, marriage and housekeeping. Because I—love a woman, that doesn't mean I want her to look after my personal needs. I'd hate to see anyone like Andrée tied up to a house and a lot of dull, petty details. I'm not going to interfere with her life. Never! If I can help, I will, but if I can't, at least I won't hinder her."

"But—" began Claudine, and she was conscious of a slight flush which mortified her. They didn't mind talking of such things! "A home is supposed—isn't it?—to be a place for—bringing up children."

"Sure! But that doesn't imply that the mother and father have to spend all their time in it. There are people specially qualified to bring up children. Then let 'em do it!"

"That doesn't seem—" Claudine began, but she

stopped. What was the use? Perhaps he was right; if he wasn't, they would soon find out.

"You'll have to live somewhere," she said. "What will you do?"

"A suite in a nice, quiet hotel," said Andrée, "where I can have my piano."

So there was nothing to prepare for this young bride, no house-linen to mark, no silver to buy. Even her trousseau she insisted upon buying ready-made. Her mother did sew a few little things for her, but she felt all the time, with every stitch, how superfluous they were. There was nothing required of her; she too was superfluous.

§ iii

They sat in the motor car, well wrapped in furs, holding each other's gloved hands. In the corner was Lance, who was to give Andrée away, and facing them, Bertie and Edna. But the mother was not conscious of them; she felt quite alone in the world with her child.

They had left Gilbert in the most painful way. He couldn't really believe that Andrée would so flout him; he had continued to hope that at the last moment she would capitulate, and he longed for that moment. He had never asked about the progress of the affair, and Claudine had said nothing until a few days before the wedding.

"Remember, Andrée," he had said then, "if you do this outrageous, disgraceful thing, I'll never see you or speak to you again."

And the morning of that day he hadn't gone to his

office; he had remained in the dining-room, after breakfast, smoking and reading the newspaper. Claudine had come in to him.

"Gilbert!" she had said. "Gilbert! Please, please come to her wedding! No matter how you feel about it, she's your own—"

"No!" he had cried. "I won't sanction it! It's altogether wrong, and I won't countenance it! She's marrying a vulgar, underbred cur who's a disgrace to the family . . . the first and only time I saw the fellow he insulted me grossly. She's absolutely disregarded my authority. She's doing this against my wishes, and she knows it!"

Through the open door of the dining-room he had seen Andrée come down the stairs, quite ready, with her hat on. He had gone out into the hall and stood looking at her, with a terrible twinge of pain.

"Remember!" he said. "If you go out of this house—to marry that man, you can never set foot in here again!"

"I didn't expect to!" she answered, briefly. "Good-by, Father."

But he would not say good-by, he went back into the dining-room and from behind his paper he saw them all go. It was as if he were being deserted, rebuked by his family. His hand trembled, he bit his mustache. Andrée gone! And gone to her certain unhappiness. . . . She would be married, and her father would not be standing beside her. . . . He couldn't endure it. He sprang up and hurried to his bedroom, in a blind desire to escape his thoughts. But there was no comfort in that silent

house. He could think of no better refuge than his office. His child had gone without him. . . .

"And yet I'm right!" he cried to himself. "I'm right! I've done what I ought to have done! I've refused to sanction this thing!"

§ iv

Not one of the party gave him a thought. They reached the church and entered, and Mr. Stephens was waiting there, with two friends. No one else had been invited. Like a woman in a dream Claudine went into the vestry with Andrée, to take off their furs.

"Am I all right?" asked Andrée.

"Yes, darling, very nice!" she answered. She wanted to look forever and ever at that girl in her plain dark suit, her small hat, that gallant and heart-breaking young figure.

Suddenly Andrée crushed her in a fierce embrace.

"Mother!" she said. "Mother!"

"Don't cry, my heart's darling!"

"I won't; just in a minute. . . . Mother, are you satisfied—now?"

"Yes, my darling!"

"Tell me, Mother—I don't understand . . . why do you care so much about this—about this ceremony? What does it matter, if we care for each other?"

"I think it's this, Andrée. I think marriage is the only way to impress upon a man what a woman is giving to him. You know—almost all women know—how sacred and wonderful and terrible a thing it is. But I don't believe men quite understand. I think they would take

it very casually—if it weren't made as solemn and impressive as—”

Andrée flushed.

“It isn't sacred and wonderful!” she said. “I hate that sort of talk so! I don't want to impress poor little Al with my preciousness. He's just as valuable and good as I am. He gives up just as much.”

“Andrée—my baby—if you'll—”

“Don't give me any advice about managing him!” said Andrée, with her sudden laugh. “I'll never try! Hadn't we better go in, Mother?”

Claudine took her seat in a front pew.

“Now I must sit here and watch this horrible thing!” she said to herself. “Oh God! Oh God! Do other mothers feel like this? How can they smile? . . . How can they be pleased—and try to make matches? . . . Am I a morbid, perverted woman? It's her destiny to marry someone—and he's a kind man. . . . I must be glad!”

She heard their responses, both of their voices steady and clear, both of them making those promises.

“I must be happy!” she said, again. “It's just the beginning of her life. There is sure to be so much joy and accomplishment in it. . . . This is only one step. . . . I must have fortitude. I can't live her life for her. . . .”

She rose, to face the little man's wife. She kissed her pale, sombre face, she clasped his hand.

“Be happy!” she said.

Then she looked round in a sort of panic for Bertie.

“Bertie!” she whispered. “Take me home! Take me home!”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEGINNING

§ i

THAT day she brought an electric tea-pot. They laughed when she took it from its box, for she always brought something, she was trying to introduce an element of house-keeping into their business-like existence.

“But it will be very nice,” she said. “We can make our tea up here, all by ourselves, just as we like it. And I’ve brought a box of cakes from Sherry’s, the sort you like.”

Andrée was sitting at the piano, weary and a little dishevelled.

“It will be nice,” she said. “Better than going down to the tea-room, or having a tray sent up. . . . Gosh! I’ve been practicing over two hours!”

Al smiled.

“Doesn’t she look like a musical genius?” he asked Claudine. “With that hair?”

“Give me a cake!” said Andrée. “Mr. MacGregor came in last evening, Mother, and we played until someone downstairs asked us to stop. . . . But this one part of ‘Thais’ is lovely, even with a piano alone, isn’t it? We’re going to hear it again to-night.”

Claudine announced that the tea was ready and Andrée came over to sit beside her on the sofa. Al waited on them with a clumsiness which Claudine found very pitiful; she saw too that he was attempting an improvement in manners, not in a shamefaced way, as another man might have done, but carefully and frankly, watching them with earnestness.

Andrée rose.

"Come into the bedroom, won't you, Mother?" she said.

Claudine followed her into the little room, so bare, so impersonal, and stood for a moment by the window looking out over Central Park, bright under a new fall of snow.

"It's a rather nice view," she said, politely.

"Mother, look here, darling! I want you to help me to get up something for Christmas, will you?"

"Of course I will! What had you thought of?"

"I don't know. . . . Something nice and human. . . . You and Edna and Bertie. . . . Something like old times. . . . How's Father?"

"Very well. . . ."

"Does he ever mention my name? Lord! Isn't it romantic? A young bride, cut off by her father. . . . I wish there were someone to appreciate the situation—and me."

"I'm sure Alfred appreciates you, Andrée!"

"Well, he doesn't. He doesn't care about my music, and that's me. He's awfully fond of me, I know that, but he doesn't think I'm really any more important than all the other young females of twenty with black hair.

My 'group,' he'd call it. I wish he'd think a little more about me, and less about social justice. I'm sick of it!"

"My dear!"

"I am! Not sick of him, but just of his talking. Just imagine! When I've been playing extra well, I sometimes ask if I've been disturbing him—hoping he'll say he liked it. But what do you suppose he does say? 'Not a bit! I don't hear it at all when my mind's concentrated on my work.' He's writing some sort of silly book, you know."

"You shouldn't call it 'silly,' Andrée. It's not fair. He's not silly. He's a very intelligent, earnest man."

"That's the trouble with him! He's too earnest. When I want to talk to him about nice little things—about us—he's always so—oh, so *mighty*! We're all types, and everything we do is typical of something. Imagine! Last night Bertie brought in Gaston Matthews and Johnnie Martinsburgh—darling children—Bertie says it's chic to live like this in a hotel, without any squaw atmosphere—and Al would talk to them about his theories. Of course, they listened to him; he's generally interesting enough, but it's—I hated it! I suppose I wanted to do the boring myself, about music. And I know so well what they'd think of him if he weren't rich. . . . They call him eccentric now, but if he were poor!"

Andrée was lying on the bed, her arms clasped behind her head; how—intractable she looked, thought her mother!

"I'm thoroughly sick of it all! All this busy life. . . . I can't be busy. I don't know how. When I look back on the old days, it seems to me I spent most of my time

sitting around with you or Edna. That's what I want now, but there's no one to sit round with. Even when Al isn't working, he wants to 'take advantage' of his playtime and rush around and see instructive things and—"

"Andrée, it's not kind or wise to dwell so much on his little shortcomings. He has so many, many fine qualities—"

"He adores you. Mother, do you want to go and talk to him while I'm dressing? It's very unselfish of me, because I want you every moment. . . . And you're right. He is rather wonderful. He's not common inside of him, a bit. I don't believe he ever had a vulgar thought in his head. He's—really delicate. He's a nice person to—to live with. . . . If he only wouldn't talk so much!"

Claudine went back into the sitting-room and found her son-in-law hard at work with a German magazine and a dictionary.

"I've taught myself enough German to get the sense out of things," he explained. "We get out a little magazine we call 'Comrades,' with all sorts of stuff in it from the European Socialist papers, as a step toward Internationalism. I'd be satisfied if I could get just that one idea more generally accepted in my lifetime—that all the people in the world are just about the same, everywhere, that they all want the same things, and suffer from the same causes."

He stopped suddenly.

"Do you think Andrée's well and happy?" he asked.

"Yes. . . . She was speaking about Christmas. She thought it would be nice to have some sort of little celebration."

“Sure! We’ll invite some people, and I’ll reserve a table downstairs in the dining-room—”

“I don’t think that’s quite what she meant. I think something more—intimate, Alfred. . . .”

“I see! Then how about having a supper sent up here—champagne and so on?”

“That would be very nice, of course. . . . But—you know she’s very young for her years. . . . I thought if you and I could arrange a little surprise—a Christmas tree—”

“Great! I’ve never had one in my life!”

“You see, she’s always had one, since she was a baby. I suppose it seems silly—”

“Not to me, it doesn’t. It’s just one of those nice, pretty little ideas that I fall short in. My one idea is to buy things. It seems so wonderful to buy what you want. I’m not used to it yet. . . . Gosh! You can’t imagine how much I learn from you! That’s what we need—my kind. We need to learn how to live—oh—poetically, from the people like you. We never get those ideas. We’re too darned worried about food. At first I used to be pretty hard and vindictive, and talk about bringing the comfortable people down to earth. But now I’d like to take the other people a little bit *off* the earth—a little bit up.”

She thought as she went home in a taxi, what a loveable creature he was. He was everything that she had always imagined a husband ought to be, a comrade, kind, loyal, never interfering, never attempting to impose his own will. Their life was what she had often dreamed of; *Andrée* had freedom combined with love.

And yet—it wasn't satisfactory; it was so little satisfactory that it frightened her.

"Somehow," she thought, "all that isn't enough. . . . That bond—that tie of sex alone—isn't enough. Even love isn't enough. . . . Perhaps there must be more obligation with it."

§ ii

It was a charming Christmas. Claudine had her Christmas dinner decorously at home with her husband and various members of both families; there were all the proper presents and ceremonies, and she was happy. Happy because she could fly to Andrée in the afternoon. Her visits there were a secret of Polchinelle; Gilbert never mentioned them, nor Andrée. And yet to-day, as she was putting on her hat, he entered the bedroom and gave her a crumpled handful of bills.

"Buy something for her!" he said.

She was terribly touched, but she knew better than to show it.

"I will!" she said, brightly.

After he had gone, she smoothed out the bills and put them into an envelope, on which she wrote—"From Father."

She gave it to Andrée with a smile.

"Is he coming round?" asked Andrée.

"I don't know."

"I didn't expect him to until there was a little grandchild. That would be the proper thing, of course, and Father does love to do the proper thing. . . . I wish there was a little grandchild! That would be something important and interesting. Something real."

“Andrée, you’re not going to be trying to-day!”

“No, I’m not! I’m going to be lovely—the spirit of Christmas,” she said.

And she was. She was delighted with her glittering little tree, and with all their gifts. She was gay, loving, almost tender. She dominated everything; they all watched her with pleasure, moving about the little room; they listened while she played for them. At the end of the evening she and Edna and Bertie sang a Christmas carol they had learned as children, and it made her cry a little.

“Dear people!” she said. “Thank you all, so very much! You’ve given me such a happy Christmas!”

No one thought of denying that it was *her* Christmas, or that the common object had been her happiness.

She went out to the lift with them and kissed each one with particular ardour, her mother, her sister, her laughing brother.

“Good night!” she said, still looking after them, still smiling, as if she could not bear to see them go.

They were always glad to look back at that Christmas, for they were never to have another like it.

§ iii

Andrée went back into the room where the little man was sitting, under the Christmas tree. She fancied he looked a little disconsolate and forlorn, and her heart smote her.

“Al!” she said. “Are you happy?”

“Not so very!” he answered, candidly.

“But why? Haven’t we had a lovely, happy time?”

"I feel—a million miles away from you," he said. "I wonder if I'll ever get any nearer to you."

She sat down beside him and drew his head down on her shoulder.

"I wish you wouldn't!" she cried. "It—chills me so! I want us to be so very near to each other. I must have it so! I can't bear it if you don't understand everything about me. *Why* did you say that?"

"To-night," he said, "with this Christmas tree and all—I don't know—but you—it seemed to me that you were like a child—just playing at life. . . . And I can't play! I never did, in my life. I can tell you, that chilled *me!* You seem so very young and so pretty, and so—heedless—that it makes me feel so very old and worn—"

"You idiot!" she cried, laughing. "It's just the other way! You're a little boy; you're always talking and thinking about such new things, things that come and go. It makes me feel such a wise woman, a sort of Sibyl. I think that's why I love you—because you're so awfully earnest and serious about things that I know don't matter."

"What things don't matter? Human wretchedness and cruelty and pain?"

"You don't even know what makes human wretchedness. It isn't poverty. Why, Al, if you could make everyone perfectly comfortable this very night, if you could take away all hunger and want and injustice, it wouldn't give one little bit of happiness to any of the people who had lost someone they loved. It wouldn't help a woman who had lost her man, or a mother who'd lost a baby. That's what you don't know. Nothing

can ever, ever be done to spare people their anguish. . . . I always know—it comes across me in my very happiest moments—that the day is coming nearer and nearer when we'll have to part—one of us to leave the other forever. . . . What do you think you can do for that?"

"That's morbid," he said, curtly. "No healthy person thinks about death like that."

But he caught her close to his heart and looked down at her bent head with troubled eyes, stroked her soft hair with an uncertain hand.

"I've never heard you talk like this," he said. "I don't like it, darling! Don't you believe that we'll meet again—afterward?"

"It doesn't matter. It wouldn't do any good, even if we knew. People who do believe that suffer just as much. More, I think, because they haven't as much fortitude as the ones who don't believe. Look at you. You think all these miserable people are going to be made happy somewhere after they're dead, but it doesn't seem to give you much comfort."

"I don't look at it that way, Andrée. The world seems to me like a—sort of school, and I want to see everyone get a chance to learn all there is to know, in decency and—dignity, before it's over."

"Maybe your way isn't a good way. Maybe they learn more as things are."

"Injustice never teaches anyone anything but resentment and malice."

"I'm going to play!" she said, suddenly. "Oh, Al! Al! Why didn't you let me be happy? It may be only for such a little while!"

"I didn't mean to make you unhappy! I wouldn't

for anything in the world. I'm sorry! Don't play! That damned music sets you all on edge. Stay here and talk to me!"

"I'm tired of talking. . . . Al, you take up too much time! I'll never amount to anything with you around. You're always bursting into my nice, quiet little art world, and you're so earnest and busy and disturbing!"

"I know it!" he said, contritely. "It's one of my limitations, old girl. I don't appreciate art in any shape. I don't take it seriously. But I do take you and your development seriously. Very seriously. You go ahead with your own work, and I'll try to shut up about mine. We'll let each other alone, and just love each other."

"Love's a terrible disturbance!"

"It shouldn't be. It ought to be peace and completion. It's a help to me. Why, do you know, I have ten years' work planned out—three books. I have the data ready, but I haven't begun them yet. I've never worked so well in my life. And it's simply because I've found you, after looking for you all my life."

She smiled at him.

"But you see, I never expected you!" she said. "I never looked for you! You're a surprise—and a nuisance!"

She seized his hair in both hands and pulling down his head, kissed him roughly.

"And yet I suppose you're a sort of help," she said. "Because I'm determined to astonish you. I'm going to spoil all your nice peace and satisfaction, and trouble you and worry you and make you think about me and nothing else!"

"Perhaps I'm still a little dazzled and stupid by having got you," he said. "But don't think for a moment I take you for granted. You're the greatest wonder in the world to me. You're not the companion woman I thought I wanted. You're not a pal. You'll never be a friend. You're strange to me, and you always will be. When I look at you, I see some sense in poetry. I know what those fellows mean with that woman-worship I used to hate so."

"I *am* a friend to you!"

"Oh, no, you're not! You don't care a rap about my work and my plans. I don't exactly want you to. You haven't anything to do with everyday life. You're—you're my love."

"I'm afraid I'll have to be awfully nice," she said, "not to spoil all that."

"No. It doesn't matter what you do. You couldn't change what I love so in you. It's eternal."

"Till death do us part!" she said, with a sombre little smile.

"And after," he added.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HOUSEWARMING

§ i

Al didn't say what he thought; it seemed to him a singularly infelicitous time for that. He was beginning to learn the rudiments of a lamentable sort of tact; he followed Andrée about the new flat and admired all that was pointed out to him; seven rooms and two baths, fronting on Riverside Drive, all furnished now and ready for their installation. Claudine had so urged them to have a home that she had won over Andrée, and according to his principle, he had yielded to Andrée. He said to himself, in his customary struggle to square facts with ideas, that it might be a woman's instinct to have a home, and he was prepared to admit that women had almost all the instincts left to the race. He couldn't quite classify the instinct that made her spend so much money on the furnishings; she wasn't ostentatious, didn't do it to "show off"—a thing he could have understood—she didn't do it for him, nor was comfort her object. It was, he decided, her artistic desire for beauty.

Personally, he was ashamed of it. Riverside Drive itself had long been for him a sort of symbol; many, many times he had come to sit there and feast his eyes

upon the opulent women with their pet dogs. As a fat man in a white vest and a silk hat typified the Capitalist, so was a stout, well-dressed woman with a Pomeranian the outward and visible sign of all this inward corruption of private life. He saw many such from his windows; there had been one that day in the very lift with him.

On the question of servants he had been firm. And had been diddled.

"No," he said. "I can't have people paid to wait on my personal wants."

"People wait on you in hotels," said Andrée.

"Professionally," he said. "They serve the public, not me."

"But if we don't have servants, how can we be free to do our work?"

"That's one of the reasons these private homes are so bad," he said. "It means nothing but an autocratic—"

"I know," said Andrée, hastily. "Well, then, we can go out to dinner every night, and we'll have a visiting maid and a Jap for a few hours every day. They can still be serving some more of the public when they're not with us."

"That's nothing but compromise. But it's better than having anyone's life entirely given up to our personal service. I suppose it's a necessary part of—all this," he said, looking about his domain. He was inwardly miserable and humiliated; Andrée knew it, but she felt that he would soon enough get used to it. She wanted beauty and luxury about her, and she considered that several grosser souls might well be occupied in ministering to her.

“Servants aren’t unhappy, Al,” she said, “if they’re well treated.”

“No, I dare say they’re not. Neither are kept women. Or imbeciles,” he replied. He suppressed the rest of his thoughts, in deference to Andrée’s instincts, both feminine and artistic. As a woman she was apparently obliged to have a home, and as an artist, it had to be this sort of home. He was conscious himself of a very unreasonable instinct to give her everything she wanted; he consoled himself by the reflection that this desire to please women was what stimulated men to supreme effort—a condition which gave more credit to his sex than to hers, he thought. He had by this time almost entirely discarded his idea that men and women were not very different, were all simply human beings. He considered it generously; which, he asked himself, was the true normal human being, Man or Woman? Not both of them. . . .

“Perhaps what we call feminine traits are the really human ones,” he thought. “Woman’s compassion, her intuition, her flexibility. . . . Our masculine justice and logic may be aberrations from the normal. . . . Women are primarily concerned with reality—birth, love, death—”

Only Andrée was not. He felt discouraged, and went into his brand new bedroom to dress for this party he so dreaded. He had flatly refused to wear a dinner jacket—and not entirely from principle, either. Andrée had been unexpectedly nice about it. She came into his room now as he stood before the mirror in his shirt sleeves, and rumbled his wiry hair.

“That’s the way you ought to wear it,” she said,

laughing. "Every inch a Socialist! But you are a darling."

He saw her in the mirror, and it gave him a shock. She was lovely, radiant, in a low cut frock of silver cloth; he might have admired her impersonally on the stage. But as Mrs. Al Stephens, as his wife and comrade, it made his heart sink. He fastened his low collar and made a neat little bow of his neck-tie. . . . The two clear eyed and fearless comrades who were to face life together—to solve problems of living—this earnest young man in a blue serge suit, and this slender, seductive creature in silver.

"My God!" he said to himself. "The Life Urge works the wrong way—no doubt about it. It's *against* progress and clear thinking."

He was not given to facile caresses; he only looked at Andrée, with eyes sombre and doubtful.

"Am I outrageous?" she asked, smiling, utterly sure of her power. "Would you rather I had short hair and wore a red flannel blouse?"

"I don't know . . ." he answered, with a sigh. "I'm no better and no worse than lots of others . . . I'd be damned eternally for you."

She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"That's dear of you!" she cried. "Only I don't want you to be. I don't want to be a drag on you."

"A drag," he repeated, thoughtfully. She appeared to him not at all a drag, but a terrific impetus—in the wrong direction.

§ ii

Mr. MacGregor was watching Andrée with mild amusement. He had pupils who played better than she, who were undoubtedly more gifted, but he had never had one of whom he expected a more brilliant future. He was careful not to tell her that not through talent alone would she conquer, that, on the contrary, her greatest advantage was something quite different. It lay in her extraordinary and provocative charm. He believed that her beauty, the ardour and grace of her playing might atone for certain undeniable imperfections not only in technic, but in interpretation, a certain perilous latitude, an alarming tendency to anarchistic originality. She was standing in the centre of a group of her guests, all men, as befitted her; she was listening with her moody, unsmiling air, quite indifferent to any whisper of admiration. She knew very well how to take care of herself; she had her own particular sort of rudeness, an odd, innocent sort of bluntness; she wasn't in the least like a married woman. Mr. MacGregor was glad of this, because her husband was a grave error, and it was necessary to keep him in the background. Fortunately, he seemed willing to stay there; he appeared to be neither jealous nor uxurious. Mr. MacGregor had told her that if she wished to appear in public she couldn't possibly be called Mrs. Stephens, and he hoped that she would have sufficient tact not to look or to behave like Mrs. Stephens either.

He was approached by Claudine, who had a secret atonement to make; he understood how she felt; she had, in the matter of Andrée, gone farther and fared

worse. He was sorry for her, for having sent him away and thus left the field to Stephens. He liked Claudine; she was one of those agreeable people who took everything for granted and never said what she meant; there was a feeling of security in talking to her. She looked charming that evening because she was happy, bright with pride in her marvelous children. She was enthralled by Andrée in her beautiful dress; this was how she liked to see her; Andrée was born to be worshipped. The somewhat scandalous Bevan Martinsburgh stood beside her, and obviously approved. He was a fair, very tall young fellow of twenty-eight, casual, magnificent, good-humouredly regal; he had a habit of looking down from his great height into adoring feminine eyes up-lifted—Andrée's were not. He approved all the more. She was the only girl present who was making no effort to attract; she had the attitude of her father in his young days; it was for others to please her. She was notably unresponsive, not even critical. The conquering Bevan compared her with Vi Sidell, who was quite as good-looking and apparently as indifferent, but Vi's was a false indifference which covered a smouldering readiness to be pleased. Vi was insolent, while Andrée was only distrait. He had known Andrée more or less all her life, but never before had he bestowed attention upon her. It was her *cachet*; Claudine saw it as such. She couldn't help a little pang of regret at the sight of Al in his blue suit, off in a corner talking to that eccentric Cyril Smith—talking so much and so earnestly. Of course, Smith always looked blank and supercilious like that; and never answered, but she had an unpleasant conviction that he must be bored and indignant. He surely hadn't

come that evening for this. It was, she reflected, like the wedding guests and the Ancient Mariner, only that Al's tale was frequently by no means absorbingly interesting. No one else paid the least attention to the host; it really wasn't right. She smiled brightly at Mr. MacGregor, but her mind was on the Breath of Life. She saw him run his fingers through his hair in that familiar gesture, making himself so untidy and so touching. It was cruel to put him here, where none of his good qualities were visible. . . . Her belief, never shaken by experience or observation, that in a marriage, one or the other of the couple would inevitably change and conform to the other, was slightly disturbed at that moment. What if Alfred never became less opinionated, or Andrée more amenable? If they didn't change . . . ?

She was glad as a relief from this oppressive fancy to look at Edna with that young Malloy. He was entirely right. He had been brought over by Mr. Quillen from the English branch of the Line, and was reputed as promising; he was altogether a gentleman, and very handsome, and there was about him a romantic air which charmed her mother heart. When he first arrived in the country he had been instantly smitten by the graceless Vi Sidell, but quite of his own accord he had turned toward the simpler charms of little Edna. They were progressing slowly; Edna was not the sort to smite; she grew on you little by little, with her thoughtful, gracious air, and her infantile, dimpled smile. That would be such a good thing. . . .

Bertie too was entirely reassuring. He was never infatuated, like those other silly boys; he had a gallant and delightful air, but it hid a secret indifference. He

always knew what he was doing; he was no passionate fool, that boy of hers. He could be silly enough, but never without a certain grace; it was impossible for him to be ridiculous. He had characteristically passed over all the younger and prettier girls and concerned himself with poor Phyllis Jenkins, who already at twenty-five had learned not to take anyone seriously. She was penniless; years ago this had had a sort of romantic appeal, and she had been many times on the point of becoming engaged, to quite nice men. But that has its limits; it was a horrible fact, now, known to all men, that to be engaged to Phyllis Jenkins would be a joke. She knew it herself, and was obliged to be sprightly. She was an angular, almost pretty girl, nervously vivacious; she had had to be grateful so much that it had rather worn her down. She was wearing a superfluous bouquet of Edna's and a necklace universally recognized as a former possession of Mrs. Arnold's; she had come with the Sidells in their motor and someone else would be morally obliged to take her home. Let Bertie flatter and cajole her as much as he wished; it did him only credit and no harm.

It is probable that no one else enjoyed the evening quite so much as Claudine. Andrée was an inexperienced hostess and by no means solicitous for the pleasure of her guests. There was a sort of formality and stiffness that didn't wear off; there was dancing—Bertie saw to that—but it was dutiful and polite. The supper, provided waiters and all, by Santi, was good enough, but trite; Andrée lacked all hostess alchemy. Only Claudine retained the joyous air of a proud mother at a children's party.

At last it was over. Bertie had taken Phyllis home, everyone had gone but Claudine and Edna and the attentive Malloy. Andrée stood yawning by the piano.

"I'm glad it's over," she said, frankly.

"It was very nice," said her mother. "Where is Alfred?"

"I don't know. He went out with Cyril Smith long ago," Andrée answered, carelessly. Claudine didn't like that; she frowned slightly, but the presence of Malloy restrained her from speaking further. She kissed her beloved child and prepared to go; she took it for granted that the young man was coming with them, but Edna, with a nice perception for the psychologic moment for parting, thought otherwise. She and Malloy had had a little conversation to which she desired no anti-climax.

"Good night, Mr. Malloy," she said, with a smile there was no mistaking. The young man looked after her, astonished and rueful. He was for the moment forgetful of Andrée.

"That's that," he said aloud.

Andrée laughed, and he turned quickly; the light of a red-shaded lamp gave a strange lustre to her silver dress; she was sitting in a big chair, with her hands clasped behind her head, and she looked—she looked very unlike a Vincelle, he thought.

"Sit down, if you like," she said, "and smoke a cigarette before you go."

He was willing enough to do that.

"I thought I was taking them home," he observed, "but it seems I wasn't."

"Edna's like that," said Andrée, smiling. "Misleading."

He considered that the privilege of pretty girls. He was a chivalrous and rather artless young fellow, with a kind and susceptible heart; he was a little vain and unduly anxious to please; he was what would have been called a "firt" in Claudine's day, with all the innocence the word implied. He gratified Andrée's æsthetic eye; he was faultless, an ornament to the room. He was supple and tall, with a punctilious grace; he had a dark, lean face which might have been too regular in its beauty but for the attractive defects of cheek-bones that were too high and an upper lip a trifle too long. Andrée had long ago put him down as stupid as an owl, and had expressed to her mother her dislike for the way he "hovered" about Edna.

"He's like a stage lover," she had said.

But to-night she was tired, and his stupidity was agreeable; moreover she was annoyed at Al and wished to keep this handsome creature sitting here until he returned, to punish him.

He talked about her music, and very agreeably remembered all the various times he had heard her play, and gave her ardent praise.

"Oh, but you're not a critic," she said.

"No," he said, looking at her with a smile. "I'm certainly not a critic—of you."

It was agreeable of him, she thought, not to be serious, like Al, but to be frankly interested, just in her. She offered him a cigarette from a box on the table and lighted one herself.

"Al's late," she observed. "I suppose he's gone to

a meeting. He can't keep away from them. . . . Are you a Socialist, Mr. Malloy?"

"I don't really know what a Socialist is. I may be one without knowing it. But I'm afraid I'm frivolous."

"You're in business, though. That justifies you. I've heard often enough from Father what a prodigious struggle that is!"

"I've dabbled in music, too."

"What a horrible thing to say!"

"I'm not a bit ashamed of it. If you asked me, I'd sing for you."

"I couldn't accompany you now. I'm too tired."

"I accompany myself."

"Go ahead then! But don't forget that I *am* a critic!"

"You'd never have the heart to criticize my artless efforts."

He sat down at the piano and began playing in a loose, execrable style which made her frown. But when he began to sing, her frown vanished. He had a delightful voice, true, strong, and full of touching fervour. He emphasized his Irishness, he sang old Irish ballads, exactly as they should be sung. . . .

Andrée, leaning back in her chair and listening, was half amused at her own pleasure.

"Have I 'worked up' this mood?" she reflected. "What a darling he is! I'll be glad to have him in the family. . . . He'll be a nice foil for little ruffled Al."

With his strong and tender voice still sounding in her ears, she held out her hand to bid him good-by. And perhaps without quite meaning it, she gave him a glance that went to his head. She saw him kindle, and she smiled, withdrawing her hand.

"Indeed I didn't want to criticize!" she said. "It was very lovely!"

"You'd inspire a donkey!" he cried.

"Don't be a donkey!" she said, laughing. "It's late. You'd better go"

"May I come again?"

"Of course!" she answered, and almost without meaning it, smiled again, a little too nicely.

"You're wonderful," he cried, impulsively. "Like—"

"I know," she interrupted, laughing. "Never mind! Good night!"

"I shouldn't have been like that," she reflected, when he had gone. It had been the most insignificant little conversation in the world, and yet it took on the aspect of a betrayal. She was really uneasy about it; she wandered about the room, waiting for Al, in a most unpleasant frame of mind. Certainly she hadn't said or done anything to feel guilty about; it must have been some secret mutiny in her heart of which she was only half aware.

"Very silly of me," she said, almost surprised. "It might help Edna. . . . He's a dilatory suitor. . . . I can talk a lot about her, in an artful way. . . . If I see him again. . . ."

CHAPTER SIX

DISCORDS

§ 1

“**T**WICE in one day,” thought Al. “It won’t do! We can’t go on like this!”

He was walking up and down that bedroom he so hated, with its silly little four post bed and the thick carpet, and the offensive, dainty imitation masculinity of it—a woman’s idea of a man’s room. Two little blue shaded electric lamps, a fool of a little table—he kicked at the table as he passed it, and Andrée’s photograph on it fell down. He was profoundly disturbed, not so much angry as dismayed. Trapped; no way of getting out. . . .

“Why, damn it all!” he cried. “I can’t be like this! This isn’t me! This isn’t what I meant! We are interfering—every hour of the day, with each other. It won’t do!”

The first thing had been his fault, he admitted; he shouldn’t have been so vehement, or so hasty. But it had been the sort of thing hardest of all for him to endure with patience.

He had gone into the kitchen, where he was not expected to go, because he had been hungry at a wrong time, and there he had seen a hideous thing. It might

have looked to other people like a char-woman scrubbing the floor, but to him it was very much more than that. She didn't even look up; what concern was it of hers who came and went in this house? She was a wretched little old woman; he stood in the doorway looking down at her, at the tiny knob of white hair on her bony skull, her narrow shoulders working stiffly, at her clumsy hands pushing the brush back and forth. She breathed hard from her puny effort; she tried to appear more vigorous when she heard someone enter, being well aware that for the char-women of the world effort is accounted of more worth than accomplishment. He stared and stared at her, crawling slowly on her hands and knees, doing this work in the stupidest and cruellest way. . . . On the kitchen table her lunch was set out for her on a newspaper by the superior visiting maid; no one would come near her or speak to her; she was shut up here to scrub alone.

"Here! Get up!" he said, abruptly.

She looked round with bleared and watery eyes.

"Get up!" he said, again.

"But I ain't done," she protested.

"Get up!" he shouted. He could not tolerate for one instant longer the sight of this old creature at his feet; it was obscene. She clutched at the table and pulled herself to her feet.

"I can do it, if yer give me time," she said, with quivering indignation. "If I take longer, I don't charge so much."

Al knew everything in the world about her; she was the typical "case"; he knew where and how she lived, what she earned and how she spent it. He cross-

examined her and she answered him mendaciously, but he was able to sift the truth from the lies.

"Now, see here," he said. "You're sixty-five or so." She declared, for working purposes, that she was fifty. "You've earned a rest. You've worked all your life."

"I'm able—" she began.

"You're not. Now, see here! I want you to go home—now. I'll see that you get a living allowance from—from a certain source every week. It's not charity, d'you understand, not charity. It's what you have a right to demand from society. You can consider me the agent of society."

Her education was incomplete and she did not understand the meaning of his terms.

"The Society give me coal last winter," she observed. "I didn't never—"

He didn't trouble to explain that he represented nothing more than impartial justice.

"Take this now and go home," he said. "And for God's sake, don't go crawling round scrubbing up anyone else's floors, ever! Get drunk, if you want—"

"Oh, I never, never, never—"

"It's better," he said. "Better than this. It'll be your money—the allowance you'll get. Little enough, but you can waste it any way you like. Try to live."

From behind the kitchen door she took down a heart-breaking fuzzy black cape trimmed with jet, and the disreputable ghost of a hat; she tucked the money he gave her into a tremendous hand-bag and retied the clasps with string. She was not grateful, any more than one is grateful for sunshine; in an inexplicable world these benefits came sometimes upon the just and the unjust.

She had had a neighbor, mother of nine children, who had been miraculously sent off to the sea-side for two weeks of rest out of forty years of life; she knew of other things like that. She was only in a hurry to get away before further investigation revealed little weaknesses that might repel the Agent of Society.

Al had gone to his wife about this, and she had been angry.

"Who's going to finish the floor?" she demanded. "Jennie won't do that rough work."

"I don't care if it's never finished. I won't have that sort of thing in my house. It's just what I'd give my life to put an end to. It's—"

"I suppose you'd admire me if I did it?"

"Yes, I should," he answered. "You're better able to do it than that poor old skeleton."

"I don't care much about your admiration," said Andrée, slowly. "This is *your* house, is it? Not mine? That's just the way Father talks. '*My*' house . . . '*I*' won't have this and that—"

"I didn't mean to be arbitrary," he said, quickly contrite. "Only, don't you see . . .?"

He went on, to explain. Andrée could, as usual, see his point of view, but she didn't agree.

"She's a wretched, drunken old creature," she said.

"But, damn it all, why shouldn't she be?" he cried. "What's that got to do with it? You know plenty of people who drink, but you don't suggest condemning them to servitude for life, do you?"

"If you want to run the house, you can," she said. "You can settle this now. Jennie won't finish that floor, and I certainly won't."

“Then I will,” he said, and he did. Andrée hated him for that; she was not too aloof to be unconcerned with what Jennie would think and say of that performance.

They had lunch in absolute silence; and yet, little by little, they were weakening. They were neither of them quarrelsome or resentful, and they had a marked respect for each other’s obstinacy. One hour more would probably have seen them reconciled and laughing, if Tomlinson and Bucks hadn’t appeared. These comrades were more than Andrée could endure; she had in the beginning made a frigid attempt to be polite on Al’s account, but her politeness was neither desired nor understood. Tomlinson was a big, stout, brutal fellow with a jaw shaved blue; he didn’t hesitate to express his opinion of Al’s mode of living, and he did it profanely.

“How the hell you expect to have any influence?” he shouted. “You preach one thing and you practise another. You and your — flat and your servants and your — fine clothes!”

He was a professional Socialist, a politician; he was honest enough in his aims, but quite otherwise in his methods. He had to consult Al frequently, because Al had a considerable personal following in various clubs and centrals, and was quicker and more intelligent than he. He admired Al; he told him frankly enough of his shadiest transactions, because Al, although tiresomely honourable, knew life and was not squeamish. He wanted him now to accept a nomination on their ticket, which Al refused. He had a great many reasons for refusing and Tomlinson a great many for his accepting; it was

a very loud and furious argument, although neither of them was really angry.

Bucks didn't enter into it. He was a bald, scholarly little man with a full brown beard, a sort of secretary and mentor to Tomlinson. He rarely talked; he sat and smiled and watched, and was ready to give data at any moment. Andrée would have rather liked him for his mildness and courtesy, if his collars had been cleaner; she was not constituted to rise above that.

She shut herself into her room while they stayed this day; every sound of that loud discussion reached her, and filled her with rage and disgust. And then, to cap it—

“It's your wife!” shouted Tomlinson. “That's what it is! Your damn society lady with her fine airs—that's what's ruining you!”

“You shut up and mind your own business!” said Al, and no more than that, no other defense or praise of her.

Perhaps she didn't realize how tired he was, or how secretly guilty Tomlinson's reproaches had made him, for after the comrades had gone, she took occasion to speak her mind, and she found him unusually irritable. They took a long stride forward in frankness that afternoon. She called him vulgar and coarse, and he said she was idle and selfish.

All this Al remembered now, walking up and down the room.

“It mustn't be this way,” he thought. “It must not be. And I'm the one to change it. I'm older—I'm responsible. I knew there'd be difficulties—it's my job to explain and to reason, and not to quarrel with her. There must be some common ground. . . .”

“And even if there isn’t,” he went on. “Even if we never think alike, it needn’t matter. Good God! Haven’t I enough restraint and common decency to get along with the woman I love, even if she has different opinions? Let her be herself!”

He washed his flushed face in cold water and brushed his unruly hair; he subdued his spirit, and went to look for *Andrée*. He found her in the library, dressed for the street, drawing on her gloves.

“Going out?” he asked, unnecessarily.

She said “Yes,” curtly, and then her heart melted; he looked so neat and subdued and good.

“I’m going for a walk,” she said. “Do you want to come?”

They went out together into the bright Winter air; but try as they would, no words of reconciliation came from either of them. No words at all. . . .

Was it some subtle reflection of her own mood that made him feel so wretched? He was quite as tall as she, he was properly dressed, he carried himself well, he was strong, vigorous, not bad looking. Why then should he feel so small, and so—he had no other word for it—so cheap—as he walked beside her that day? Of course she was beautiful, but she always had been; of course she was proud and a little disdainful, but that also was nothing new. She looked very lovely in her furs; he saw people turn to look at her. . . . And suddenly, as plainly as if she had spoken the words, he knew that she was ashamed of him.

He stopped short.

“I forgot . . .” he said. “There’s something I must finish. I’ll go back.”

She made no attempt to dissuade him, she let him go without a word, with a smile which he knew was one of relief. When he turned back, he saw her, still walking down the drive, a distinguished and beautiful creature.

“Snob!” he said to himself. “Vain, fickle, cold-hearted snob! She didn’t want me with her. She doesn’t give a damn where I go, or what I do.”

A terrible grief assailed him, which he imagined was anger.

“I might have known it!” he told himself. “They’re all alike—her sort. Pampered and flattered. . . .”

He struggled desperately back to justice.

“I’m making a mountain out of a molehill. . . . She simply wanted to be alone. . . . Nothing very bad in that! . . . She’s only a kid, after all. . . . She cared enough for me to marry me. . . . She does care for me!”

§ ii

If he had been able to measure the molehill, he might not have been so sure of exaggeration. Andrée went on as if she could never walk enough, block after block, until the sun had gone, and twilight come, and lights began to glitter. She stopped in at the Plaza for a cup of tea.

“I’m ashamed of him! I’m ashamed of him!” she said to herself. “I’d be ashamed to have him here, with me. I only like him when we’re alone. I can’t bear for other people to see him. It’s like a nasty secret—*amour*. . . . It degrades me. . . . Oh, I ought to have had more pride than to throw myself away on a common little man like that! Oh, why didn’t someone stop me?”

§ iii

The next afternoon, at exactly the same hour, she was walking down Fifth Avenue with Malloy, and with him, went again into the Plaza for tea, no doubt to vindicate her pride.

And if it was a test, it was successful, for she was not ashamed of him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PASTRY-COOK'S DAUGHTER

§ i

CLAUDINE mounted the front steps with an unusual languor.

"I'm afraid I'm going to be ill," she thought. "This cold hangs on so. . . . I must have some hot tea and lie down."

To tell the truth, she would not really have been sorry to be ill. It would have been a respite from the nightmare life of the past weeks. Nothing but worry and distress about her son, nothing but disgraceful quarrels between him and his father, and an exasperation and irritability on the part of Gilbert which terrified her. He blamed her for everything, for his disappointment in the boy, for the costly folly of the boy's existence. Claudine was neither able to quarrel nor to keep silent. She felt obliged to defend Bertie, to make excuses for him, she even told lies for him, and paid his debts herself when she was able. Gilbert frequently found this out, and said that she deceived him treacherously, which was true. She was not at all contrite; she knew that with Bertie threats and bluster were of no use whatever; one had either to convince him by reasoning—which she

was incapable of—or to win him through his affection, which was what she tried to do. She knew that he loved her perhaps more than anyone else had ever loved her.

“How can you bear to make me so unhappy, Bertie!” she had asked him.

“It isn’t me that makes you unhappy, Mammy,” he had answered. “It’s Father. You wouldn’t worry about me, if he didn’t make you. You know I’m all right—a heart of gold under a rough exterior. A harmless buffoon. I’m just consciously being wild, as is proper for my years. It’s all Father’s fault.”

She acknowledged to herself, with some surprise, that he was right. Left to herself, she would not have worried over Bertie; there was a quality in even his most grave follies, a grace, an innate delicacy which in her eyes quite redeemed them. He didn’t love his vices, he played with them.

She rang the bell, and the door was opened instantly, not by the maid, but by Bertie himself.

“Hello, Mammy!” he cried. “I’ve been waiting for you! Your tea’s ready!”

She followed him into the front room, and found it charmingly prepared for her. He had lighted the gas logs, and had drawn up before the blaze a little gilt table never before used for such a purpose, on which he had arranged a silver tea-service always kept in state on the dining-room sideboard, and a bowl of red carnations.

“Why, Bertie!” she cried. “How dear of you!”

“Wasn’t it? Sit down, Mammy, and try a cake!”

“My dear boy! Did you buy the flowers and cakes for me yourself?”

"I bought the flowers. The cakes were a gage of love. Mammy, lookin' about you, don't you feel convinced that I'd be the best husband that ever was?"

"I dare say!" she answered, smiling.

"Mammy, don't you smell a rat?"

"What *do* you mean?"

"Why these preparations? Why this introduction of the topic of husbands?"

"Do explain! what new nonsense is this?"

"I'll tell you, Mammy! I'm going to be married!"

"Bertie!"

She frowned with displeasure.

"True!"

"I don't like to hear you say such things, even in joke. A boy of eighteen—"

"Oh, it wouldn't be for five years, Mammy!"

"You mustn't think of binding yourself to anything of that sort at your age. Surely you're sensible enough to know that you're sure to change—"

"I never do. But don't you see what a good idea it is? How it will keep me safe in the midst of all sorts of temptations which beset a handsome youth? I suppose I am a youth, aren't I? Although no one ever called me one."

"It's not right to expect any girl to wait five years for you. And what makes you think you'll be able to marry in five years, you silly boy? You've never earned a penny—"

"I'll explain all that presently. Mammy, seriously, I've arranged my future in a very remarkable way."

"And who on earth do you imagine will marry you, after waiting five years?"

"She is beautiful, good, and rich," said Bertie. "She's the daughter of the King of the Pastry-Cooks."

"Who?"

"Her name is Giulia Santigiorni."

"But who is she? An Italian?"

"Yes, her father's Santi, the caterer."

"Oh, Bertie!"

"I only ask you to see her. She's altogether lovely, and she's had one of those marvelous *nouveau riche* educations. You know the sort of thing—lessons in everything from the most expensive teachers. Sings, plays, paints, speaks all known languages, studied deportment and household management and First Aid. She's been for the last two years in a convent in Paris, and they've made one of those regular foreign young girls out of her. You know, modest and gentle, always on the alert to be respectful and polite to old people. . . . The King of the Pastry-Cooks is rather keen on society. He gives monster parties—you never saw anything like them; they're awfully pathetic. He gets paid entertainers, singers and dancers and—oh Lord!—wizards! He loves wizards. We sit in rows in the ball-room, while the wizard holds a show on the stage he's had put up. Then he serves a supper! Oh! Never in your life have you dreamed of such suppers! . . . And when you're going home, you each get a present. Not a favour, Mammy, but a genuine present—silver cigarette case, and so on. . . . Of course, he doesn't know half the people who come. He prowls around, a poor, fat, gloomy devil, and no one bothers with him. But he sees a crowd in his house, and that satisfies him."

"Where is the mother?"

"Dead, long ago. He has two daughters and two sons. They're all very nice and respectful."

"But do you think it's quite a suitable match?"

"Couldn't be more so! My Giulia is the most well-bred thing that ever drew breath. You'd feel quite ashamed before her. I believe she took lessons in how to behave in all European courts, and how to entertain royalty."

"But, my dear boy, how do you propose to live? On the—the pastry-cook father?"

"No; I'll get on, Mammy. I always do. I'll either go to Princeton next autumn, or go into Father's business, whichever you advise."

"No, Bertie, you're the one to decide. What do you want to do? What do you want to make of your life?"

"Whatever I can," he said. "I don't really care very much. I want to make a good show, that's all—earn a living."

"Bertie, dear boy, with your intelligence you ought to aim higher than making a living. Isn't there something you can put your heart into? Some sort of work you could really—"

"Not any more, Mammy. It's this ice-cap."

"What do you mean?"

"You ought to know. Old Lance talks enough about it. . . . It's going to cover the earth—a new glacial period—going to destroy life on this planet."

He rose and began walking about the room and when he spoke again, his voice had changed.

"I've always wanted to be useful. I'm so dam' sorry for people—for almost everyone. I welcomed Evolution like a long lost brother. I thought I could do something

to help it, perhaps. . . . I imagined us all evolving along into something magnificent. I didn't see any end to our possibilities. I agreed with Al that, if we got together, we could make a heavenly world out of this. . . . But then Lance sprang this ice-cap on me. And—"

He paused.

"It was something pretty much like despair. . . . Nothing seemed any use. The happier we got, the less would we want to be frozen, don't you see?"

She was terribly touched by the pain in his voice, by the suffering she divined in his queer soul.

"But it's millions of years away," she said.

"That doesn't matter, as long as it's sure."

"We might find a way to live in it, by the time it comes. It might even be a mistake."

"Lance couldn't be mistaken. You have only to look at him to know he's infallible. And—have you seen their fossils, and their reconstructed pre-historic animals? Those chaps know everything, Mammy, past, present and future."

"Come here!" she said. "Sit beside me, dear."

She drew his sleek head down on her breast.

"Did this idea bring you to—to any sort of—faith?" she asked.

"No, Mammy. I simply felt that the ice-cap ought to be kept a secret. I'd have been glad to be a martyr to humanity and kill all the scientists who knew about it, only I knew more would crop up. I even thought of being a fake scientist myself, and getting up something more cheerful, but that wouldn't get by."

She cried over him a little, and he sat quite still, with his head resting on her shoulder. She wished so pas-

sionately that she had something to give him, some invincibly right word.

"I think you'll get over this, dear boy," she said.

"Of course I shall," he answered promptly. "I'll get fat and pompous in fifteen years or so. You know that dish, Mammy—Angels on Horseback—oysters wrapped up in bacon? I'm in a hurry to wrap my little oyster of a soul in a lot of nice fat bacon. Then I'll be comfortable. Nothing better, is there, than making money and getting married?"

"Don't be cynical," she said, gently.

"You know I'm not. I'm only trying to do what I can. I know what's good for me. Little Giulia's good for me. She's all spirit, but it's the nice, old-fashioned, hopeful kind. I never could tell her anything about the ice-cap, for instance; nothing that would hurt her; and being by nature very candid, that'll help me to learn not to have anything to tell. I'll have to grow placid, don't you see?"

He sat up and looked at her, with his diabolic smile and his soft eyes.

"Now, then, will you tell Father in some nice mendacious way that I've got serious and want to settle down to something? Is it to be college or business?"

"I think college," she said, smiling back at him. "You know, after all, Bertie, there may be something left for you to learn."

"All right!" he answered, cheerfully. "And then—come with me to see my pastry-cook's daughter."

"But shouldn't you bring her here?"

"I want you to see her in all her gorgeousness."

“But it isn’t quite the thing. You see, you’re not—you can’t be actually engaged to her.”

“She considers that we are. Anyway, their code of etiquette isn’t inflexible. Please come! And—look here, Mammy, if you don’t like her, if you don’t agree that I’ve done a masterly thing in getting her, I’ll give her up!”

“I’ll go, Bertie,” she said. “But bear this in mind, dear boy. If you change your mind, for any reason whatever, about either of your plans, don’t hesitate to say so. Don’t go on in a wrong course, simply because you’ve entered upon it.”

“You know I wouldn’t. But this time I’m righter than I’ve ever been before.”

§ ii

She went with him the next afternoon, to the house near Prospect Park. The door was opened by a man servant in an elaborate livery.

“My idea of a flunkey, whatever that is!” Bertie murmured.

They were ushered into a drawing-room, an immense room, furnished with an out-of-date sort of magnificence; it gave Claudine a sudden insight into the pathos of the household.

“Look around you!” said Bertie. “You will see a pastry-cook’s dream. But you won’t have long to observe; Giulia would prefer death to keeping my mother waiting.”

He was right; she entered almost at once, and came up to Claudine with a most polite, a supplicating air,

held out her hand, raised to her face a pair of sorrowful and beautiful eyes. They sat down to talk but it was too much of a task even for Claudine's experience. She was as affable and impersonal as it was possible to be, she was really well-disposed toward this pretty little thing. But she could evoke from her nothing but a humble sort of politeness. It was evident that she adored Bertie, and that his mother was to her a person of superhuman augustness. She was well-bred, she had pretty manners and a sweet little voice; she was dressed very nicely in a dark blue *crêpe de chine*, which was simple, but excessively expensive. And she herself had an innocent and spiritual charm, like a little strayed angel. She was small and fragile, and she hadn't the least hint of a womanly figure—a child's body, with flat wrists and a tiny neck. Her dark, pallid face was broad at the brows and very narrow at the chin, which made her childish mouth look larger; she had a wonderful profile, a nose straight with the forehead, a short, full upper lip, a minute and heart-breaking perfection. But it was not her beauty which captured Claudine, it was the transparent sweetness and fidelity of the little soul. She was stupid, she was pliable, she was a baby, but she had a heart to appreciate Bertie, and a charm to hold him.

Tea was brought in by two men servants on a tea-waggon, and the signorina dispensed it with deftness. There were cakes and cakes and cakes, cheese straws, rolls, all sorts of sandwiches, and when these had been sampled, the servants returned with ices in the form of lilies lying on leaves of green almond paste.

Bertie didn't say much, but from time to time Claudine caught him looking at his Giulia with half a smile,

a look tender and a trifle amused. He wasn't going to take her too seriously, or expect too much of her. It was, in short, one of those loves which cause a mother very little pain; she knows she is not supplanted, not diminished. Singular that two of her children should "marry beneath them"!

She took leave of her future daughter-in-law with a kiss, and the man servant in the hall opened the door for them.

"It's pouring!" said Bertie. "Go in again, Mammy, and I'll send a few flunkies for a taxi."

"I'd rather not. We'll find one."

"You mustn't get wet, especially with that cold. I can't allow it!"

But she was briskly descending the steps, and he had to hurry after her.

"How obstinate you are, Mammy! If you won't think of your health, have some regard for your pretty little hat!"

She shook her head, laughing. She was so happy with this son, with his affectionate, half effeminate ways, his open admiration. She had with him a gay and coquettish little air no one else ever saw.

"Come along! We'll be sure to pick up a cab in a minute, Bertie! Look at the streams of them going by!"

But all the cabs were full. It was quite fifteen minutes before they stopped an empty one, and by that time Claudine was chilled to the bone, and shivering in her wet shoes and dripping skirts.

"I'm sorry, Bertie!" she said. "I was very stupid!"

He looked at her in silence, and when she was home and safely in bed, he telephoned for the doctor.

§ iii

Andrée and Al had been to the opera that evening and to supper afterward, so that they were late in getting back to the apartment. The desk clerk handed them a message received hours ago.

“Please ask Mrs. Stephens to go home at once. Her mother is ill.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

MUTINY

§ i

ANDRÉE was wandering about the "second parlour" that Sunday afternoon, in a state of joyful idleness, humming to herself. It was so blissful to be at home again, now that the horrible shadow was lifted from her mother. She felt a new and precious sense of lightness and irresponsibility, a return of girlhood. She loved the old life, the kindly servants, the jolly breakfasts with Bertie and Edna, she was even ready to love the stuffy and decorous Sundays she had once found so hateful. Her father was sitting by the open window, reading the paper, and she loved him too, because he looked just as he had always looked to her. She went over to him and kissed the top of his head. He glanced up and smiled.

"Well!" he said.

"Well!" she answered. "Are you happy? I am!"

They were thoroughly and beautifully reconciled now. In spite of his disappointment over the conduct of other people under the shadow of death, Gilbert knew that he

had acted properly. He had forgiven his daughter, and he intended, in due course of time, to forgive his son-in-law. He had been profoundly affected by Claudine's illness; he had wished to be with her constantly. But she had not wanted him; she had turned always to Andrée. He had certainly expected, although they had been more or less estranged for some years, that under the shadow of death she would come back to him. She *should* have said, "After all, we have lived more than twenty years together in storm and sunshine. Let us forget our differences!" But she had not. She had said nothing at all, except to thank him for the profusion of flowers he sent. They hadn't had a single touching conversation. On that night, which he had spent at her bedside, in agony and fear, she had not even seen him; she had lain gasping, exhausted, bathed in perspiration, with half-open eyes, as far away from him as if she were already dead. It was Edna who had consoled him, and led him away, and it was Andrée who had stayed by Claudine until the crisis was past. It was always Andrée's name she had murmured—"Andrée! Baby! My baby!"

He had done his best to be just and temperate about this, but it hurt. And as she began to grow better, and the danger was over, his old exasperation at her aloofness returned. He had really longed for a reconciliation; he would have told her frankly that he was sorry for many things in the past, and that he hoped with all his heart to understand her better in the future. It was his eternal passion for something perfect and beautiful in life; if only these twenty years could be crowned now with love, he could have been content. It was easy for

him to forgive and forget, the sins of other people as well as his own. But it was not easy for Claudine. He clung to her, for he had nothing else, but she had turned away from him to her children, and she had forgotten him.

He had made a very thoughtful provision for her convalescence. He had learned from her lawyer that her old home in Staten Island—which her father had left her at his death—was temporarily vacant, and he had secured it for a year. Half of it, that is, for her father had converted it into a double house, an improvement by which she had profited, for she had received rent for both halves for years. With the help of Edna he had removed from the storage warehouse as much of Mrs. Mason's old furniture as they thought good, and later in the spring, when Claudine was strong enough, she was to go there with Edna, to find it all prepared for her. This plan had touched her, she had thanked him with tears in her eyes. He would have gone there with them, if it had been suggested. . . .

“What's this?” asked Andrée.

He roused himself from his unpleasant meditation, and turned to look at the object she held in her hand.

“That? It's a game—‘Pigs in Clover.’ I remember your mother was very much amused with it when she was first married.”

Andrée smiled and began to manipulate it, singing again.

Now Gilbert had been brought up to distrust happiness, especially feminine happiness. His mother had never been happy. Claudine was never happy; the only permissible thing in that line was the benevolent,

and possibly alcoholically stimulated, high spirits of the *pater familias*, coming home bearing gifts. He loved Andrée, he was delighted to have the pretty, wilful creature about him again, but still, he could not help distrusting such gaiety.

"When do you expect to go home?" he asked.

"This is home!" said Andrée.

"Your home is with your husband, young lady!" he said, severely.

"I know! I'm going—pretty soon."

There wasn't the slightest need or reason for staying another hour. She had been there for four weeks, and her mother was now well on the road to recovery. Al telephoned every day, first he asked about Claudine, whose illness he had taken terribly to heart, and then he always said—

"When are you coming home, old girl?"

And she always answered "In a day or so."

"You know your old father likes nothing better than to have his girl at home," Gilbert went on. "But you're a married woman, and you have to think of your duty."

"I do think of it. But not all the time. . . . I think I'll run up and see if Mother's dressed."

She had started up the stairs, when the telephone rang, and she ran back to answer it. She was quite sure it would be Al; this was his regular hour.

His voice responded.

"Mrs. Stephens in?"

"This is Andrée!" she answered, brightly. "How are you, Alfred?"

"Your mother doing well?"

"Yes, very!"

And then, instead of his usual query, he said—

“It’s about time you were coming home, isn’t it?”

His voice was somewhat alarming, and she answered in her very pleasantest manner.

“Yes; I’m coming in a day or two, Al.”

“Suppose you come this evening?”

“Oh, I couldn’t! Not possibly!”

“Why not? I’ll come for you about eight.”

“No, Al, it’s not possible. My things aren’t packed.”

“Edna can pack them and send them after you to-morrow.”

“But how ridiculous! Why should I rush off like this?”

“Well,” he said slowly. “Suppose—because I particularly ask you to—?”

“You’re very unreasonable!”

“Humour me, then, for once.”

“No, Al!” she said, firmly. “I can’t come to-night. To-morrow—or the next day—I’ll let you know—”

“Look here, Andrée; I’m coming for you to-night!”

“But I tell you I’m not going home!”

“I insist!”

She laughed.

“What in the world is the matter with you, my dear boy? Do you imagine you can bully me?”

“I don’t want to. I’m asking you—to do me a favour.”

“It’s a ridiculous, selfish, unreasonable favour, and I shan’t do it.”

“I’m coming for you just the same, at eight o’clock!” he said.

She was going to remonstrate with him, but she found

that he had left the telephone. Her cheeks flushed, and she bit her lip.

"Little beast!" she said to herself. But some secret thought made her unusually indulgent, she shrugged her shoulders and dismissed the thought of him.

She went on up to her mother's room and knocked at the door.

"It's Andrée!" she announced in her triumphal voice, as if that name were a talisman to admit her anywhere.

Claudine was sitting at her dressing-table, brushing her hair. There was grey in it now, on the temples, and her face was thin and drawn. She wore a negligée with high collar and long sleeves, to conceal the pitiful emaciation of her neck and arms. Andrée couldn't look at her without a twinge of pain.

"I'll do your hair for you, darling!" she said, and Claudine willingly relinquished the brush to her.

"I am some use to you, aren't I, Mother?"

"I don't know what I should have done without you, dear!"

"Should have done! Then you don't need me now?"

"You know how dearly I love to have you with me, but—"

"But I ought to go home? I'm not useful any more, and I'm not wanted—"

"Don't be so unreasonable, my dear! It's only that I think it unfair to Alfred—"

"Why?" she demanded, impatiently.

"You shouldn't stay away from him."

"Why not? He's always saying he wants me to feel

free. He certainly shouldn't object to my taking a little holiday."

"And you ought to be at your work again."

"I can practice here for Doctor Jaas. The Conservatory can wait."

"You ought to go home!" her mother repeated.

Andrée frowned.

"Al's just been telephoning, to 'insist' upon my coming home this evening. I suppose you think he's right?"

"Yes."

"You mean you'd like me to rush off like that?"

"Yes, I should."

"I shan't!" said Andrée. "I don't suppose you'll mind my waiting until to-morrow to pack my things?"

"If I were you, I should go with Alfred this evening—"

"I wouldn't for anything! Just give in to his silly whim—"

"It's not a silly whim. . . . Andrée. . . . I wrote to him."

Andrée stared at her mother's reflection in the glass.

"What!" she cried.

Claudine opened the drawer of the dressing-table and looked into it.

"I thought—the sooner you went home, the better," she said, in a low voice.

Andrée did not ask why. She understood very well.

§ ii

It was a marvel to Claudine that no one else had noticed. There was a certain effrontery about them both, a smiling ease, but it should not have deceived Edna.

She herself had observed it the first time she had gone downstairs and seen them together. Andrée had been at the piano, and Malloy standing by her, to turn her music. She had looked up at him, and met his eyes, and it was not possible for Claudine to doubt that they understood each other too well. She could not help watching them. Malloy was attentive to Edna—rather too much so—but it was with an air of bravado, of displaying his versatility, his irresistible fascination. With a sidelong glance he would follow Andrée with his idiotic infatuation, his bedazzlement, plain in his face. The very fact that they so seldom spoke to each other made her quite sure that there was a great deal of which she knew nothing. She regarded Andrée's cool triumph with an aching heart. She was not shocked or astounded; it is a sad truth that no perfidy or evil could shock that woman. She was willing to believe both the best and the worst of anyone; whatever was presented to her, she accepted. She believed that now she was seeing the very worst of Andrée, the selfishness, the recklessness, the cruelty, which she knew better than anyone else. She didn't blame Malloy; not much was to be expected from him. He was kind-hearted and manly, and so on, but wax in hands like Andrée's. He didn't love Andrée; he wouldn't have thought of her if she hadn't made him. He had been happy with Edna, and he would be again—if he were let alone. And Andrée didn't love him; she would forget him. If it were stopped *now*.

That is the reason that Claudine had written to her son-in-law.

“I really think, Alfred, that for several reasons it would be wise to induce Andrée to go home to you as

soon as possible, and to take up her work again," she had written, and she had left it to his common sense to comprehend and to follow her hint.

But she hadn't reckoned with his unruly passions. He had put two and two together, to make a sum considerably more than four. He had seen Malloy once in their sitting-room at the hotel, where he had come to sing for Andrée. He had decidedly not liked him.

"If he's engaged to Edna—or going to be—why does he hang around here?" he had asked.

"I suppose he hasn't the same idea of etiquette as you," Andrée had answered, with an unpleasant smile. "However, if you don't like him, I'll tell him not to come. He'll understand."

She had intended to wound and anger him, and she had succeeded. But she had done something more; she had awakened in him that old and buried suspicion for women of Andrée's class.

Years before he had met Andrée that idea had been superseded. He had made his money, and had begun to know at least a little of that other world. And he saw that the women there were no more or less than human beings, very much hampered and hurt by their idleness. He had tried to see in Andrée not only the beloved woman, but a human being entitled to as many faults and weaknesses as he had himself, entitled to the same moderation of judgment that he himself required. He had deliberately put aside his suspicion of Malloy, he had conquered Andrée's irritability with his patient good-humour, and they had been getting along very nicely the week before Claudine's illness.

And now, by the words of Claudine's letter, all the

fruits of his reason were destroyed, and the old distrust and envy and utter misunderstanding came rushing back. He saw Andrée as a stranger of whom he knew really nothing, an unaccountable, alien creature. He knew at once that Claudine's letter referred to Malloy. No doubt the fellow was hanging about the house there all the time, singing to her. . . .

It was on Saturday night that he got it; he had reflected upon it all that night, and the next morning, and by the afternoon he was in a humour which would have caused Andrée no little astonishment. He hated the Vincelles and all their entourage; he believed that they were laughing at him, that he had been played with all these weeks, that now they fancied they had got well rid of him. All except Claudine; she wasn't like the others, of course. He wished that he could see her and talk to her, but that couldn't be. She had at least indicated to him what should be done.

§ iii

At eight o'clock he rang the door bell.

"I want to see Mrs. Stephens!" he said, curtly, to the servant.

"She's at supper, sir. Will you wait?"

"No; just ask her to step here and speak to me!"

"What name, please, sir?"

"Her husband," he said, grimly.

They were all in the dining-room, enjoying the "Sunday night tea" of their tradition. Gilbert sat at the head of the table and made jokes, like a patriarch; opposite him was Claudine, on one side Edna and Malloy; on

the other, Bertie and Andrée. They lingered; they had not yet thought of rising from the table when the maid entered with her message.

"Mr. Stephens is upstairs, ma'am!" she whispered to Andrée.

"Who is it?" asked Gilbert, in the tone of a man who is master in his own house.

"Mr. Stephens, sir," answered the girl.

He turned red; he was sorry he had asked; he was very much at a loss. And so was everyone else. This proscribed man actually under this roof! Gilbert was torn between his anger at the fellow's audacity and the respect due him as a husband. Propriety conquered.

"Ask Mr. Stephens to come down here and join us," he said. "Bertie, bring up another chair to the table!"

But the girl returned almost immediately.

"Mr. Stephens is sorry, sir, but he is in a hurry, and he would be obliged if Mrs. Stephens would come upstairs."

Andrée rose. But her expression alarmed her mother.

"Andrée!" she murmured, but her warning was unheeded. Andrée went slowly upstairs, and into the hall where her husband stood waiting. He had not removed his felt hat, but he had thrown open the fur-lined overcoat of which he was so absurdly proud. Never had his appearance so profoundly displeased her.

"What do you want?" she asked.

Her tone excited him to instant hostility.

"I told you I was coming," he said.

"And I told you not to come."

She looked at him.

"I didn't think even you would do a thing like this—

coming here—waiting in the hall—like a servant with a message—”

“That’s enough,” he said. “I only want to know whether you’re coming back, or not.”

“When I’m ready, I’ll come.”

“I’m ready now. I’ve waited as long as I’m going to wait.”

“Are you trying to threaten me?” she asked with cold surprise.

“No, I’m simply giving you your choice—to come with me, or to stay.”

“I’ll stay, thank you,” she said.

She had a sudden impulse of pity for him, he looked so desolate and lost. She thought it would be nice to have her cake and also to eat it.

“Let’s not quarrel!” she said. “Come downstairs and have supper with us!”

“No!” he said. “I’m going. . . . The servant’s delivered his message.”

He opened the door and went out, slamming it after him with a crash.

Andrée struggled against a great desire to cry, or to shout after him, she didn’t know which.

“Little beast!” she said, aloud. “Vulgar little bully!”

“What’s the meaning of this?” said a severe voice behind her, and she turned to see her father.

“There’s no meaning in it at all,” she answered. “Al’s gone home, that’s all.”

“Did you quarrel, Andrée?”

She was surprised; she had forgotten that fathers

were supposedly authorized to ask such impertinent questions.

“No,” she said. “He thought I would come home this evening, but I wasn’t ready.”

Gilbert saw some feminine mutiny in this.

“Did you refuse to accompany him?” he asked, in a portentous voice.

“Yes,” she answered. “Of course I did. Is that a crime? Am I supposed to humour every caprice?”

Gilbert stopped her with a gesture. He put himself in Alfred’s place; he knew how he would have felt under the circumstances, how humiliated and furious.

“No doubt he had very good reasons. You’ve already remained away for over five weeks—”

“Four weeks.”

“Four weeks, then. You have—in my opinion—you have neglected him.”

Andrée made no defense, but her air was not acquiescent. Gilbert became more fatherly.

“Now, I’ll tell you what you’ll do, Andrée. Telephone your husband, and tell him you’ll be home in an hour or so. And I’ll take you myself, and make the young man’s acquaintance, eh?”

“No, thank you, Father. I’m not ready to go.”

“Get ready then! Get ready! Bertie will telephone for you. Bertie!” he called. “Bertie! Just a moment, please!”

Bertie came running upstairs.

“Your sister’s going home—”

“I’m not!” said Andrée.

Gilbert was astounded.

“This is a serious matter,” he said. “I can’t permit it. It’s your duty to go home to your husband.”

"I'll just postpone the duty for a few days," said Andrée.

"I say no! He came for you this evening and—"

"What is the matter?" asked Claudine's low voice. She had come up after Bertie, and was standing in the shadow, outside the circle of light cast by the lamp on the newel post.

"I am telling Andrée that she must go home to-night. It seems her husband came to fetch her and she refused to go with him."

"She'll go to-morrow," said Claudine. "It's rather late now."

"Father," said Andrée, "I don't want to be rude—but it's my own affair. I can't let anyone tell me what I shall do. I'll go home when I think best."

"This is outrageous!" shouted Gilbert. "You can't adopt that tone toward me, young woman! You've been spoilt and indulged long enough! Bertie, go down to the garage and bring the car!"

"No!" cried Claudine.

"Do as I tell you! Now, Andrée, I'll give you fifteen minutes to pack what you need, and then you'll go, ready or not. This is my house, and what I say shall be done. Do you understand?"

"I believe I do!" she answered, carelessly. "You're putting me out, aren't you? Very well, I'll go!"

She turned and ran up the stairs.

Claudine turned upon Gilbert with desperation.

"Gilbert! Go after her! Tell her she can wait! Tell her—"

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" he answered. "I won't be defied in my own house—"

She seized his arms with her weak hands and actually tried to shake him.

"Stop her!" she cried. "Stop her! You don't realize what you're doing!"

He looked down at his wife with stupefaction.

"Stop her!" she cried, again. "Go after her and tell her to wait!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," he said, severely, "to suggest—"

But she didn't wait for him to finish.

"Then I'm going with her," she said.

With trembling knees she ascended the stairs, entered her room and began dressing. She hastily put into a little bag a few necessary clothes, her jewel case and her bank books, and came out again, just as Andrée had gone downstairs.

"Gilbert!" she whispered to her husband. "I must stay with her until they are reconciled. It's a matter of vital importance!"

He was touched; she was so ill, so weak, so terribly upset.

"Very well!" he said. "Bertie will take you to their house. Take care of yourself! You're not fit to go out."

She gave him a hasty kiss, and taking Bertie's arm, left the house. Andrée was already in the street, standing beside the car.

"I'll have to drive you," said Bertie. "Donald was out."

"But you won't drive me home, my child!" said Andrée. "You can take me to some other hotel."

"Take her wherever she wants, Bertie!" said Claudine, with a sob.

CHAPTER NINE

HOME AGAIN

§ 1

CLAUDINE sat down to answer her distressing correspondence. She took a long time to arrange her writing materials, to adjust the light, for her heart failed her, courage and hope were nearly gone. She sat before the same little rosewood desk she had used in her girlhood, in that little bedroom she had passed so many happy years in, she was at home again, in the house in which she had been born, and she had at this moment no better wish than that she might die there.

She had brought Andrée here the day after their flight, nearly a month ago. She had felt a presumptuous and sublime joy; for the first time in her life she was going to have Andrée alone, alone there in that house of gentle memories. She would take her for walks, show her the places she had so loved in her own young days, she would soften her heart and win her utterly. She would teach her to see the worth of her husband, the sacredness of their bond, with all her love, all her sad wisdom she would lead her back from this morass into which she

had strayed. She had felt sure that she could do this, now that they were alone. Andrée was susceptible, she could be persuaded. She had shown a passionate affection for her mother; she had wept in her arms that night, she had accused herself of selfishness and ingratitude.

There had been just two days of Paradise, two long days spent together in exquisite companionship. The granddaughter of Selma, Mrs. Mason's most devoted old servant, had come to wait on them, and she made them entirely comfortable. There was nothing to worry or disturb them. They had had their meals together alone, and quiet evenings in the drawing-room before a fine log fire. They hadn't mentioned Andrée's affair; Claudine was content to wait for that, filled with hope by her child's new softness.

And then on the third evening Malloy came. Evidently Andrée had sent for him, for she greeted him without surprise. He was troubled, anxious, very ill at ease; he had the unmistakable air of a man tormented by an unwelcome passion. He was afraid of Claudine, he was ashamed of his treachery to Edna, he was ashamed of his terrible bondage. But he could not escape. Andrée's mocking smile turned his heart to water. He adored her; he was unable to hide his madness.

Andrée didn't attempt to see him alone. She brought him into the room where her mother sat before the fire, and kept him there. She asked him to sing, and he did so, his fervent and touching voice sounded through the fire-lit room and moved the wretched mother to tears. What was she to do? She could see him with Andrée's eyes, she could so easily understand what it was that had captured that reckless and beauty-loving heart. He was

so handsome, so ardent, so entirely a lover. He had none of Alfred's preoccupations; he hadn't, she thought, any thoughts at all, nothing but sentiments and traditions. But a gallant gentleman—

He left early. It certainly had not been a pleasant evening for him. He had scarcely been able to speak, with Claudine present. But when he was going, and had said good-night to Andrée, who hadn't risen, she followed him out to the front door.

"Mr. Malloy!" she said. "Have you told—Edna?"

"No . . ." he said. "I'm ashamed to say I haven't. . . . But of course I shall . . ."

"Don't!" she entreated. "Please don't! Not just yet! If you can—won't you go to see her as usual?"

"But—do you think that's—honourable?" he asked, shocked.

"It's kind, Mr. Malloy!"

"But—isn't it—only putting it off, you know?"

"Sometimes it's better to do that," she said. "Please, Mr. Malloy, if you are able to—?"

"I'll try!" he said, quite miserably. "I suppose you don't want—me to say anything—until you're home again?"

"Yes," she answered.

The door closed behind him.

"Because I'm going to stop this!" she said to herself. "It can't be! I'm going to stop it!"

That was her one object—that nothing irreparable should be said or done. She was absolutely certain that the infatuation would not last, there was not one element in it to make it permanent. She was certain that if no monstrous irrevocable folly were committed, Malloy

would thankfully return to Edna, who really suited him, and that Andrée would go back to her husband.

But she was filled with terror at the possibility of that evil chance. She lay awake all that night, trying to plan how she could prevent it.

No enlightenment came. Malloy came again and again. She dreaded to speak to Andrée, for she knew how speech solidifies and strengthens the vaguest thoughts, but it could no longer be avoided. She could no longer be complaisant. She waited until Andrée was in bed one night and then she went into her room and sat beside her in the dark, at the foot of her bed.

“Andrée!” she said. “I must know!”

“I want you to, Mother. I’ve been waiting for you to ask me. . . .” She sat up and flung her arms round her mother.

“Oh, my darling!” she said. “I’m so terribly, terribly sorry! I know I’ve made you suffer. I know it’s a dreadful thing to do to dear little Edna! But I can’t help it! I thought at first it would only be a lark. I didn’t mean any harm. I never imagined *this* would come! But now it’s too late! I love him so, Mother! I never knew what love was before. I never, never felt like this about Al. . . . Oh, Mother! I’d stop if I could! I don’t want to hurt you or Edna. But I can’t help it!”

“You can, Andrée! It’s not necessary to do what you want.”

“You’re so cold and so—good, you can’t understand! I love Francis so that I can’t give him up. No matter what harm it does, to me, or anyone else.”

“What do you intend to do?”

“I’ve written to Al, to ask him to—for a divorce.”

"Oh!" cried her mother. "Why did you do that?"

"What else could I do? You didn't think I wanted a nasty underhand intrigue, did you, Mother? I wouldn't—I wouldn't even kiss Francis until I was free from Al. I'm not that sort."

"What did Alfred say?"

"Nothing. He didn't answer. But I know he'll do it. He's always said he'd never try to hold me if I wanted to be free."

"I think you ought to see him, my child."

"Why?"

Claudine had no intention of telling her true reason.

"It's the best and frankest way to do," she said. "If you like, I will write to him and ask him to come here. I wish you would see him—for my sake, Andrée."

Andrée sighed.

"I will, then, if you like, Mother. But it'll be horrible. We'll be horrible. We'll quarrel. All his commonness comes out when he's angry."

"You needn't quarrel. Then it's agreed that I'm to write?"

"Yes," said Andrée. "But it's not a bit of use to try your diplomacy, Mother dear! I see through you!"

And this very evening she was trying to write that letter. Andrée and Malloy were sitting on the porch, almost under her window, now and then she could hear the murmur of their voices.

"I'll write the other letters first!" she decided, in despair.

She wrote to Gilbert, the same sort of thing she had been writing all the month.

"I think it is very necessary to stay with Andrée until she and her husband are reconciled. It is a critical time. I hope and believe that all will turn out well."

He, of course, knew nothing at all of the Malloy complication; he believed it to be a simple quarrel.

Then she wrote to Edna:

My dear little girl:

It is always a pleasure to receive one of your cheerful letters. I can't thank you enough for taking such good care of Father, Bertie, and Cousin Lance. I am very glad you like Bertie's Giulia; she is a charming little creature, and very devoted to him. Your description of their ball was amusing, and, I thought, rather touching. Bertie had told me of Mr. Santi's predilection for wizards; I think I should enjoy them myself. Your dress must have been lovely. I am sorry your father thought it too short! Personally I think that style suits you; you don't look any older than when you were a little girl going to dancing school.

Write to me often, my dear little Edna. And don't expect any news from me, because there is none. I am very much better; you are *not* to worry. As soon as this most unfortunate affair is settled, I shall be at home again.

Very lovingly and gratefully,

YOUR MOTHER.

P. S. Be sure to send the furs to cold storage *this week!*

She looked again at the little pile of letters she had had from Edna, gay, pleasant, commonplace. And yet alarming. There was not a single mention of Malloy. Edna

was not one to wear her heart on her sleeve; she had no ability and no desire for expressing her emotions. Her mother blessed her for her seemly reticence; how easy it was to deal with people who didn't talk, who took so much for granted! She was quite certain that the poor little thing was very unhappy, but she was also certain that she was not desperate. She had no doubt noticed the change in her handsome lover, but she wished no consoling for it; she would console herself, she would endure with dignity and common sense.

And now for Alfred.

She hesitated for a long time, then began to write, in her careful and delicate hand:

My dear Alfred:

I have just learned of Andrée's decision, and I think I need not tell you how it grieved me. Not only on your account, but on hers, I believe that a divorce would be a terrible mistake, and I beg you to oppose it resolutely. I beg of you, Alfred, not to consent to it. No one understands Andrée as I do, and I know that this would be the very worst thing possible for her.

She has consented to see you and I entreat you to come and talk it over with her. I trust to your deep affection for her, and to your humanity. I know that she can never be happy and *safe* with any one but you.

Will you come on Sunday, if convenient for you?

Always your friend,

CLAUDINE VINCELLE.

She stamped and sealed it, and lay down on the bed, to read, to try to read and to forget her bitter anxiety.

§ ii

Sunday came, and no word from him. And on Sunday evening Mr. Malloy appeared. Claudine was very much taken aback; he had never before come on Sunday, and she had very humanly taken it for granted that he never would. She hadn't told Andrée that she expected Alfred; she had planned to take her by surprise, before she could adopt a difficult and dangerous mood. If he should come now! She sat upstairs in her room, in a state of tremulous agitation, looking out of her window, trying in vain to see the street through the fog that had risen, listening for his footfall, though what she could do to forestall him she didn't know.

Outside on the porch Andrée and Malloy were sitting, well-wrapped, coat collars turned up against the thick, chill mist of that April night. Their hands were clasped, but they spoke very little. They were in a mood of sombre depression, not unknown to lovers. Now and then Claudine heard the sound of their voices, forlorn and detached; if it had been Alfred, she thought, how different it would have been! A continuous flow of talk, and retorts from Andrée, irritated perhaps, but certainly interested. . . .

She fancied she heard a footstep on the hilly street; she opened her window softly and leaned out. The trees were dripping on the gravel drive; hoarse whistles sounded from the bay, and—yes, undoubtedly, that was the garden gate! A step on the porch, and Andrée's voice—

“I want to see Mrs. Vincelle!”

She flew down the stairs and opened the front door.

"Come in, Alfred!" she said.

He followed her into the sitting-room and stood before her, still in his overcoat and cap.

"So she's out there with him?" he said. "Do you think that's a fair way to treat me?"

"I'm sorry, Alfred. Very sorry. I had no idea he would come this evening. I wouldn't for worlds have—"

"He does come to see her then? In your house? And you don't mind?"

"Please sit down!" she said, gently. "I am so glad you came. I wanted so to talk to you—to explain—"

He took off his overcoat and cap and threw them on a chair. He was thinner; his face had lost its boyish and alert expression, it was set in an expression of bitterness and misery.

"I didn't want to come," he said. "It can't do any good. I knew what you thought would happen. You thought if we saw each other we'd—melt. That she'd change her mind. Well, I don't want that. We've had enough emotion. I don't want any—love that comes from caprice. No more moods and impulses. I—it wasn't that way with me. It was—real."

"Alfred, you mustn't be hard! It's not like you. If you love her, you must forgive her a hundred times. She's silly and—"

"It's not a question of forgiving. I don't see it that way. She's free to do as she pleases. It's simply that now I know she's not capable of loyalty."

"Alfred, I give you my word there's been nothing wrong—"

"Oh, I believe it! She's *respectable!*" he said, bit-

terly. "I'm not afraid of her being too generous with—anyone. She'll be like some of those singers and geniuses I've read of. She'll have half a dozen husbands, but she'll never do anything wrong."

"That's very cruel and unjust! Surely you've seen enough of the world to understand these—infatuations. . . . He's a very handsome and attractive man, and she has lost her head. That's all it is! It won't last!"

"I know it won't. But it will happen again. It isn't the infatuation that hits me so hard. I can understand that. It could happen to almost anyone. But it's the—the rank, beastly cruelty of it! To walk off and leave me without a word. I—you don't know—leaving all her little things there—all her little things—telling me all the time she'd come back in a few days. . . . It's . . ."

He got up and walked over to the fire.

"No," he said. "She can have her divorce. I always told her I'd never try to keep her against her will. But—I wish to God we'd never got married. . . . If we could only part now with some sort of decency . . . if she could just say, 'It's over. Good-by!' But now—I guess you don't realize—I'll have to be caught in a compromising situation—all the dirty, filthy business will have to be written down and talked about by a lot of lawyers. . . . The sort of thing I hate worse than death. It's what they call acting honourably for me to do that."

"Don't do it, Alfred! Don't do it, I beg you! I am sure she loves you!"

"She has a damn peculiar way of loving, then."

"I know she has. There are horrible things in her

nature. But I am sure that you know the good in her too. She is honest and—”

She covered her face with her hands.

“Can’t you see, Alfred? She needs you so! No one else can help. No one else can help her to grow into something better.”

“Please don’t cry!” he said, in great distress. “I’d do anything for you. You’re an angel!”

“I’m not! I’m not! I once—long ago—thought I’d leave *my* husband. But thank God I didn’t!”

“But it might have been better for you if you had,” he said, frankly.

She looked up in surprise.

“No!” she said. “It would have been—I am sure that self-sacrifice is the best way in life.”

“That depends on the object. If you sacrifice yourself for—well, humanity, it’s fine and good. But for one other human being, no!”

She had no intention of permitting an argument to begin. She pulled the conversation away from reason back to emotion, where it belonged.

“I don’t ask you to sacrifice yourself, Alfred. It would make you both happy.”

“I can’t do it!” he said, quietly. “She wants to leave me, and I must let her.”

“But you’ll see her?”

“No. Please don’t ask me any more. It’s settled. I’m sorry—on your account. I should be glad to do it for you—if I could. But I can’t.”

He went toward the chair where his coat lay and was about to put it on, when the door opened and Andrée entered. He turned and faced her. Her cheeks were

rosy from the damp air, her black hair curled about her forehead; her mother looked at her loveliness with a beating heart. Surely he could not resist her!

But he picked up his cap and threw his coat over his arm.

“Good-night!” he said.

The front door closed after him.

§ iii

Not fifteen minutes ahead of him Malloy was making his way to the ferry.

“My God, what a mess!” he was saying over and over to himself. He had never in his life felt so shabby, so shamefaced, as he had felt that evening. There was no triumph in this love; he was a thief. He had mortally stricken that poor little chap. He had humiliated and hurt Edna. He had involved himself and Andrée in a disgusting scandal.

“We never can be happy,” he said. “Not on such a foundation. . . . But I don’t care! I’d rather have her and be miserable all my life!”

CHAPTER TEN

DESTINY INTERVENES

§ i

ANDRÉE was very late that evening. She had gone to the city to do some shopping, and at eight o'clock she had not yet returned. Claudine sat down to supper alone, but she could not eat. She was filled with apprehension. She couldn't imagine what was keeping Andrée.

The weather had suddenly turned mild, the dining-room windows were open and a sweet damp breeze was blowing in from the garden. Rose had prepared an especially appetizing supper; she hovered about the silent woman, very anxious that she should eat it. The shaded lamp threw a warm light on the table, set out with Mrs. Mason's glowing old Crown Derby; there was the same order and quiet all about her that had so delighted her a few weeks ago. But now it frightened her. It was death-like. . . .

"There's no use trying to go on," she thought. "This must end! I'll have to tell Gilbert—and poor little Edna. I'll have to go back. . . . I've done all I can."

It was nearly a week since Alfred had come, and in the meantime Andrée had begun her divorce proceedings.

No miracle had happened; heaven had not intervened. This disaster, this ruin was approaching with a sure step.

"I really don't believe I can eat, Rose!" she said, apologetically. "I'm sorry; your little supper was so nice. Be sure to put something aside for Mrs. Stephens."

"I think I hear a taxi coming now, ma'am," said Rose.

They both listened. Rose was right, a taxi was stopping outside the house; a man's voice said "Thank you, Miss!" and there was a step on the veranda. Rose hurried to open the door, and in an instant Andrée entered the room.

Claudine sprang up.

"What is the matter?" she cried, alarmed at her child's face.

Andrée at once began to cry hysterically.

"Stop, child!" said her mother. "What is it? What has happened?"

Andrée sank into a chair by the table and leaned her head on her arms, shaking with sobs.

"It's too much!" she cried.

"Go away, Rose!" said Claudine. "Go into the kitchen and make Mrs. Stephens a nice hot cup of tea!"

Rose vanished.

"What is it, Andrée?" she asked again. "Don't torture me so! What has happened?"

Andrée sat up suddenly and began to laugh through her sobs.

"I went to see Doctor Lawrence!" she cried. "I was afraid—It's true! . . . There's going to be a baby!"

She began to shriek with laughter. Claudine seized her by the shoulders, and shook her.

"Be quiet! Be quiet, Andrée! Come upstairs!"

Andrée shook her head.

"No!" she cried. "No! I'm expecting company! Francis is coming! Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Isn't it funny! Won't he be pleased!"

"Hush! Come upstairs!" Claudine repeated, and half dragged her to her feet. She put her arm about her and supported her up the stairs to her own room.

"Lie down!" she said. "I'll bathe your face in cold water. Try to control yourself, Andrée!"

But Andrée could do nothing but weep and laugh. Claudine sat by her, patting her cold hands and stroking her hair, silent, waiting for her to become tranquil.

The doorbell rang, and Andrée sprang up, suddenly sobered.

"Mother! . . . It's Francis! You'll have to see him!"

"We'll tell Rose to say you're not at home."

"No! I want you to see him! Listen, Mother!"

"Yes?"

Andrée looked at her with a stern glance.

"You'll have to send him away," she said. "Tell him it's all over. I'll never see him again."

"Do you mean that, Andrée?"

"It would hardly do to introduce a little Stephens into our household," said Andrée, with a frigid smile.

"But what shall I say?"

"I don't care. Anything! Only, Mother, if you ever let him guess the truth, I'll never, never forgive you! My life is ruined. I've got to give him up. But—it's so ridiculous and humiliating. No one must ever know!"

"But they can't help knowing!"

"Francis won't. He's stupid. He won't put two and

two together. Tell him—anything. Say I've repented on account of Edna. Only get rid of him, for God's sake!"

"Hush, Andrée!"

"Oh, I'm so ashamed and wretched! Why did this horrible thing happen! I wouldn't believe it at first! It was too ridiculous and shameful! I won't have Francis know. I'll go away somewhere."

Claudine rose.

"You'll lie here quietly, won't you?" she asked.

Andrée assured her that she would, and closing the door after her, Claudine descended the stairs.

Of all the painful and awkward tasks she had yet had to do for her child, this was the worst. She couldn't suppress a wry little smile. She who so loved peace and dignity, who was so constitutionally averse to plain speaking!

Mr. Malloy was in the drawing-room, walking about. He stared a little at the sight of Claudine.

"Good-evening!" he said.

"Good-evening!" Claudine answered, brightly.

How was she to begin? She stood quite still, and her silence warned him of something unpleasant to come.

"It's very difficult—" she said. "Please sit down, Mr. Malloy!"

He did so, and she seated herself opposite him.

"I must be very firm!" she thought. "Oh, if I only can get rid of him!"

He waited for some time.

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Mrs. Vincelle," he said, at last.

"No . . . I should not call it wrong. . . . Indeed, I

think . . . I won't try to conceal from you, Mr. Malloy, that all this has been very painful for me. I have always had the greatest respect for Andrée's husband and I thought it a great—a terrible mistake for her to leave him."

He flushed.

"I'm sorry . . ." he said.

"Naturally I think first of her. I knew that this was not for her good. I knew—please forgive me—I knew she wouldn't be happy with you. But I couldn't stop her. She is very wilful."

"But—"

"But she has—changed, Mr. Malloy! She sees now that she was wrong. She has asked me to tell you so!"

He rose.

"No!" he cried. "No! It's impossible!"

"She asked me to tell you. She could not bear to do so herself. She—and I too, Mr. Malloy—we both rely upon your—fine feeling to understand. And to go away."

"But I can't believe it! Why, only three days ago—"

"I know. But you must believe me. She—it's so hard to tell you—she doesn't wish to see you again."

"Please let me see her!"

"She doesn't want to see you. I am sure you will understand that it is best so."

"What has happened? What has made her change?"

"It is impossible to say. A—a change of heart. . . . But I beg you to accept this as—final—and to go!"

"Very well!" he said. "I'll go!"

She held out her hand to him.

"Mr. Malloy!" she said. "Can't all this be as if it had never happened?"

"I don't see how," he said. "I'm afraid I can't forget so easily."

"But—some day I hope you will marry happily and—"

He shook his head.

"You will!" she assured him. "You are too much of a man to let this really hurt you! If you cannot have—exactly what you want, you must—"

She stopped, in confusion, and suddenly, in some inexplicable way, he guessed her meaning. He was astounded.

"You don't mean—" he began. "... Edna?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"But—after I've deceived her so?"

"The only question is—if you—care for her?"

"I do! I always have! Not as I did for—Andrée. . . . But she's the finest and truest girl in the world. . . . I can't tell how unutterably ashamed I've been of the way I've behaved toward her—"

"Repair it!"

"Don't you see that I can't!"

"She doesn't know, does she?"

"No. . . . But she's suspected that—there's something wrong—"

"It's not too late. If you really care for her, if you're really sorry for what you've done—"

"I do care for her. Too much to make a—second best of her."

"Oh, stupid! Stupid!" she cried to herself. "What does it matter!"

He went on, in a horrified voice.

“You surely wouldn’t recommend a marriage founded on a deception?”

A cynical thought occurred to her.

“They’re all founded on deceptions,” she reflected. “On lies that people believe about each other.”

“I’m not recommending anything,” she said, aloud. “I only want to say again that I’m very sorry for all this, Mr. Malloy.”

He went away, down the little garden walk for the last time.

“She’s not the high-minded woman I thought her!” he reflected. “She’s—her ideas are absolutely—sordid.”

And then he forgot her in his profound sorrow.

Claudina remained for a moment in the drawing-room.

“He’ll go back to Edna,” she said to herself. “I’m glad. . . . He’ll do as well as anyone else. He’s kind. And rather attractive. . . . She won’t expect too much.”

§ ii

She was just falling asleep that night, after having seen *Andrée* comfortably settled. She was mortally weary, unable even to think. She had a light burning low, as was her reprehensible custom, and she had a book beside her, in case she could not sleep. But, in spite of her trouble, the murmur of the night wind soothed her, and the air blowing across her face. She had closed her eyes, and a blissful numbness was stealing over her, when she was startled by *Andrée*’s voice.

“Mother!” she cried. “Mother!”

She was instantly wide awake. Andrée stood beside her, like a spectre in the dim light, in her night dress and her dark hair about her shoulders.

“I want Alfred!” she said. “Oh, Mother . . . ! I began to think—”

Claudine took her dressing-gown from the foot of the bed and laid it about her child’s shoulders.

“I’ve been so wicked!” she went on. “It frightens me! I want Al back! I want to see his kind face. . . . He’s so kind and so good! I want to go home to him! I want just him—and this baby. Please, please send for him!”

“I will, pet, as soon as it’s morning!”

“I can’t wait! I’m so unhappy! I want to hear his dear, kind voice!”

“Come in here and lie down beside me, darling. Talk to me!”

With that beloved head on her shoulder, Claudine grew calm and strong again. She would have listened to her all night. What did it matter if this were only a new caprice? It was a good one, a safe one.

She thought of her own life, of how her child had assuaged her bitterness and given her peace. She thought of the hopes she had relinquished—such little hopes compared with Andrée’s inordinate ambitions, and she believed that all that was to happen again. Andrée would be saved, if she would love her child better than herself. And she believed that this would happen. She looked very earnestly into her face; it was imperious, even cruel, but it was the cruelty of blindness, of one who inflicts suffering without knowing what suffering is.

She didn’t care in the least that Andrée’s brilliant

future was endangered. She didn't care how fettered and narrow her life might become. Better narrow and deep, she thought, than broad and shallow.

She listened quite unmoved to her child's tears and sobs. It didn't matter. She kissed her with a sublime sort of indifference. She had won; God had helped her, and she had won.

§ iii

Alfred came, promptly, the next morning, and Andrée received him alone.

"Al," she said. "Can we make a new start?"

He didn't look at her. When Claudine had telephoned so urgently for him to come, he had expected something of this sort.

"I suppose we could make any number of them," he said. "The question is, would there be any use in it?"

"You said—"

"I know all that I said. I said you could be free whenever you wanted. And that implied the same thing for me, Andrée."

"I don't want to be free."

"Why don't you?"

"Because—I want—"

She held out her arms, her eyes filled with tears. But he did not move toward her.

"Al!" she cried. "Do please come here!"

"No," he said. "Let's not complicate the thing with *that*. Just tell me what's changed you. I'm here to listen."

"Suppose—it was only that I'd found out I was wrong

—and that I missed you, and wanted you back? Wouldn't that be enough? Haven't you missed me?"

In spite of himself he was touched.

"I won't pretend I haven't. . . . It was a bit of a shock to me, you know. I'd never expected anything like that. I thought that you—that we were so—close—nothing could come between us."

"Couldn't you forget it? Al, it's hard for me to—to beg like this! I can't say anything more. I only ask you if you're willing to start again."

That was a voice which he found it hard indeed to withstand, a face that moved him beyond measure. Yet he was passionately anxious that no new mistake should be made.

"But what guarantee would we have that we'd do any better?" he cried.

"I think—" she began. "I think it would be different—now."

"But why, Andrée? Do you see things differently? I mean—"

She had begun to cry a little.

"You see, Al . . . there's going to be a baby. . . ."

"What!" he cried. His face had turned quite pale.

"What! My God! Really?"

"Very really!" she answered, with a faint smile.

He sprang up and caught her in his arms, in a sort of desperation.

"Oh, Andrée! I'm so sorry! My lovely, beautiful girl! I'm so sorry!"

"Don't!" she cried. "You make it worse! Be glad, can't you? I thought you would be. I thought every-

one would be—simply beaming. . . . I wanted you to be!”

“I’m not!” he said, doggedly. “I love you too much!”

“*Do* you?” she said, triumphantly.

“Now you’ve got it out of me,” he said. “I knew you would! Yes, I do love you—too much, I guess. I don’t want anyone but you, ever.”

“Oh, Al! Al! It’s so heavenly to have you back again, and hear you again, and see you—with your dear old rumpled hair. There’s no one like you!”

“I wish to God you didn’t have this before you!” he said, sombrely.

“But I’m glad, Al!” she told him. “It’s life!”

EPILOGUE

§ i

IT struck Claudine with the force of a blow. She put down the book and the night wind at once fluttered over the pages, as if by command of nature trying to divert her. But she turned back to the place again, all her heart fixed on the words like the eyes of a frightened child fixed upon an approaching light; she did not all at once grasp the meaning, but the significance was coming to her, illuminating and dispelling a familiar dusk, revealing to her what had always been there, but what she had not seen.

She had been turning over the pages of an old copy of Browning's poems, given her by Lance years ago, because he had fancied that so small and delicate and pretty a creature must necessarily feed on poetry. As a matter of fact, she had never been poetic, not even very romantic; she had always had a love for indigestible ideas, which had, in the main, done her very little harm. She might read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer; she remained none the less the Claudine who could wander gay and happy in a garden.

And now suddenly stood up this robust dead poet to

look into her soul and accuse her, to judge and condemn her. The thing had all the solemn horror of what her ancestors would have called the voice of an awakened conscience; it was the handwriting on the wall.

The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.

That was for her! That was an arrow for her heart.

She was quite alone in the house; Rose had gone out to a lodge meeting of the Lady Pioneers. Claudine was always glad to let her go; she was never so happy as when alone with her ghosts. When the stairs creaked, that was the stout figure of her mother in dull black silk, going about her benevolent household affairs; there was a rustle of paper; that was the boy Lance studying in his room upstairs; a faint tapping; that was her father emptying his pipe. The wind blowing across the garden brought back to her unblemished the old emotions, the sheltered security, that careless and formless hope that had filled her girlhood; she would forget, alone in her room, the reality she had found so bitter.

But to be a ghost among these other ghosts! That frightened her. She looked about the quiet lamp-lit room; in the bookcase her old books, on the walls her old pictures, on the bureau the photographs of her father and mother, and a pitiful little bottle of that Cherry Blossom perfume; only the old things; it was as if twenty years had been a dream. She was aware that she had tried to make them so, that she had tried with desperation not to live. Blasphemous effort, rewarded now by this numb anguish!

“A frustrate ghost!” she cried aloud, and her voice

seemed to have no sound. She had a preposterous idea that she was invisible and inaudible, that there was nothing in this room but the memory of her. She was only her own dream. She sprang up to look in the mirror, and saw there a white face and wide eyes; an apparition. . . . The wind blowing on her was suddenly chill, like a cold breath.

“No, no!” she said. “Oh, no! I want to be alive!”

There was for once no solace for her in that dear garden; she closed the window and pulled down the blind, to shut away the dark and the troubling sounds; she sat down and clasped her trembling hands; she tried to see herself once more in the stream of life, let it be never so cold and violent. She thought of Andrée; nothing but pain in that thought. Poor young Andrée and her poor little baby! Poor Al! She thought of Edna, hiding under her tranquillity an unforgettable humiliation, of Bertie, with his gallant despair; of Gilbert, unaccountably forlorn. There was a thin veil hung between her and these living, struggling creatures; she could see them but not reach them; she fancied them being swept past her and calling to her and needing her, while she looked on, standing apart.

“Oh, why haven’t I done something? Why haven’t I helped?” she demanded of her shrinking heart. And the inexorable response was “Begin now!”

But remorse came easier than effort. She passionately condemned herself. She saw herself an egoist; in her young days she had been gay and gracious because she had had what she wanted. And when that had been withdrawn from her, she had grown cold, aloof, finding peace in indifference. She thought of all she might have

done, of the influence she might have exerted. Not that she believed herself stronger or wiser than these four adult human beings for whom she felt responsible; it was a mystic belief in the power of a woman and a mother. She was convinced that she could give more than was in her, more than she had; she loathed herself for not having done so. She believed, as was natural, that if she had tried she must have succeeded. She knew that in her garden everything grew only according to its type; she believed nevertheless that human creatures might be so warmed by her love, so nourished by her tears, that they would grow not according to any laws, but according to her own desires.

She felt that this was the turning point in her life; she had wasted twenty years, dreamed them away; only God knew how few or how many remained to her. She was making the most painful effort of her life; it was not a struggle, she wished it were; it was an attempt to struggle. The lamp must be lit, the loin girded; she must no longer pass among the living as a gentle phantom. She must help all these people who belonged to her; she must by her valour and devotion compensate for what they were denied; she must inspire and fortify. But what was to breathe life into her? Love—even such love as she had for Andrée—had not done it. She was not religious; she could not turn to prayer. And her philosophers had nothing at all to give her. She sat up almost all that night, trying to fan her shrinking and mutinous spirit into a blaze. . . . Her life should be service; she clung to that idea.

It was the inevitable moment, due to everyone whose work is finished, to women whose children have grown;

it was a little death. But she did not recognize it as that; she felt it to be a spiritual re-birth. The world was empty and she was obliged to fill it with herself. And she was by no means large enough.

§ ii

She telephoned to Gilbert in his office the next morning; she was so affable that he was upset. She should have been home long ago, anyhow, instead of staying down there alone on Staten Island in that peculiar way. He felt that she was trying to be ingratiating, and this of course aroused his hostility and distrust. Her quiet, clear voice reaching him in the midst of his morning mail caused him all the usual feelings of annoyance induced by any thought of home life. She asked him about his health, and he knew she didn't care; she even asked that supremely irritating question "How is business?" Well did he know why his family asked that.

Then, amazingly, she said:

"If you're not too tired, Gilbert, won't you come down here for dinner? The garden is so lovely."

"Suppose you come home," he said, surlily, but it was only an instinctive reaction; the bear hitting out with his paw.

"Do come," she said, pleasantly. "It would be nice to be by ourselves. And the garden—"

"Very well! Very well!" he said. "I'll come. I can't spend the morning at the telephone. I'll come, Claudine. Good-by."

Now this disturbed him. He was inclined to suspect, with reason, all advances made by his family, and yet

he liked these advances. He felt fairly sure that his wife had some favour to ask, some feminine chicanery to execute, but he was like a king with his courtiers; he was grimly contemptuous of all this beguilement, but he relished the homage.

The idea of going back to that house on the hill to see Claudine stirred in him old and unpleasant memories. He felt himself no phantom; he was poignantly aware of the passing of twenty years and youth with them; he didn't feel that he had not tried, but that he had not succeeded. He had made money, just as he had intended, but the rewards of his activity had been unjustly withheld. He had the wrong sort of wife, the wrong sort of children, the wrong sort of life altogether. Still he would do the right thing, as he had always done. He stopped on his way to the ferry and bought Claudine a five-pound box of chocolates, the kinds she hated most and which he had bought for years and years, never being undeceived.

§ iii

But long before he got there, all Claudine's plans had been upset. She had gone about all the morning, seriously intent upon her scheme to win back her husband. This, she felt, was the first step along her new road; once he was won back, she would make him into something different, as it was her womanly duty to do; she would take him to concerts and persuade him to read. She had that idea common to good and inexperienced women, of the fascination she might wield if she chose, an idea in no way related to vanity, but a conception

necessary to existence. She had never yet consciously tried to be fascinating, but at the back of her mind had always been the thought of how powerful she might be, if she weren't so nice. She was obliged to believe this. If Gilbert, by analogy, had realized when he went out to lunch, that perhaps seven out of ten men that he passed could have knocked him flat on his back, he couldn't have endured life; he had to believe that he could hold his own, if he wanted. And she, too, must have her belief in her mystic power.

She had been sitting down to a delightful, solitary lunch; the dining-room with its shining waxed floor and well-polished mahogany furniture, the yellow roses in a great Delft bowl, the dim, cool peace all about her, filled her with serenity and courage. Certainly she would change Gilbert and everything else in her life; she intended to ask him to stop here with her for the rest of the summer; a real sacrifice, for it meant the end of this delicate and immaterial existence, and a hateful preoccupation with roasts and wines and laundry. Edna had gone to Easthampton with the Ryders, Bertie was away with Lance; Miss Dorothy could have the Brooklyn house to herself. This transplanting would make her work easier, but she realized that she would have to be notably charming in order to win his consent. She thought a good deal about what she should wear; she was engaged in this when Al came in. He was very hot and crumpled and cheerful.

"Oh . . . Alfred!" she cried. "Andrée . . .?"

"Fine!" he told her. "But I had a free afternoon—she had some friends there, and I thought I'd like to see *you*."

"There's nothing at all wrong?"

"Not a thing! Only—I don't know—I've been wanting to have a talk with you for a good while. . . . I know I talk too much, but just the same, it seems to me the best way to get anywhere."

"Sit down," she said, smiling. "I think you're very fortunate to be able to talk, Alfred. I can't think of anything nicer than to be able to express what you feel."

He did sit down opposite her, and at once assumed his serious, conversational look.

"It's a lot more than that," he said. "I have an idea that you can't really feel a thing until you do express it. That's the value of talking; not that it conveys your ideas to someone else, because generally it doesn't, but that it wakes up your own brain. . . . But this was going to be about Andrée. . . . There's something I want to get from you—something I can't get hold of."

"If you mean how best to get on with her—" she began, but he interrupted.

"No; it's not that. That's all a mistake—this 'getting on' with people. It means either humouring her, like a spoiled child, or trying to dominate her. Well, what I want is, to *let her alone*. And that's what I can't do. I'm always trying to make her see things my way."

"But you can't help doing that when you know you're right."

"I don't know; I only think. I'm only an experimenter. I may be wrong about lots of things. Anyway, she's experimenting, too, and she's altogether too fine to be bothered. I've spent the best part of my life shouting people down, and now it's hard to stop. It isn't that I've tried to cram my ideas down anyone's throat," he

assured her, earnestly. "All I ever wanted to do was to start people thinking. I've always tried to keep hold of that idea that I was an experimenter, but I'm too darned sure. I'm—well, I'm not humble enough, d'you see? I interfere. . . . Now, that's what I've always admired so in you. That's what makes you so wonderful. You *don't* interfere."

"But—Alfred!" said the frustrate ghost, with something like a gasp.

"I wish you'd explain to me—give me some idea how you do it. . . . How your mind works," he went on. "I mean, how can you watch, the way you do, without interfering?"

Many reasons prevented her from telling him that she had very often tried to interfere, and had invariably failed. She was silent for some time, while he waited anxiously for her words.

"I'd been thinking, only last night, that I didn't help—interfere—nearly enough," she said, at last. She raised her eyes to his face with a look he had never seen before, a glance troubled and appealing; she was making a heroic struggle for candour with her reticent and uncandid soul. No other living creature had seemed to her so human, so impersonal, so secure, as this young man; she felt that she could say to him as much as her heart would ever permit her to utter. She quite forgot that he was waiting for wisdom from her; she grew pale with the intensity of her desire to hold communion with her kind, to hear the truth without entirely telling it.

"Alfred . . ." she said. "It seemed to me—I'd wasted my life."

"But how?" he demanded.

“By not helping.”

“Well . . .” he said, honestly. “Of course there’s a lot that needs doing in the world, and the people with money and leisure—”

“I don’t mean *doing* anything,” she said, with an impatient little frown. “I mean—influencing. I haven’t tried to influence the people about me.”

He uttered a mild oath of himself. It was startling, to say the least, that she should talk like this, as if she hadn’t heard a word he had spoken—when he had been waiting for the secret of her non-intervention.

“I should have tried to help my children—to influence them,” she went on, with increasing agitation. “I’ve stood aside—”

“But don’t you see?” he cried. “That’s what’s so wonderful! That’s the fine thing about you—you’ve let them alone. Even if you haven’t accomplished much yourself, you’ve given other people a chance.”

He was distressed to see tears in her eyes.

“My children aren’t happy,” she said.

“They’re living,” he said. “They’re growing. They’re learning their own lessons in their own way. If you’d done what you call influence them, it would only mean that they saw things through your eyes.”

“I’ve accomplished nothing. I’ve only passed through life like—”

His glance fell on the Delft bowl.

“Like a flower,” he said, thoughtfully. “You’ve just existed, in a very sweet, gentle way. I think that’s a mighty fine thing. . . . I don’t believe there are many people who have done so little harm.”

He got up; he took her outstretched hand, and went off, without the sage advice he had come for, but consoled for lack of it by a variety of new ideas. And he left Claudine strangely assuaged.

§ iv

She went walking along, gravely inspecting her sweet peas, bending over them to inhale their perfume, to touch with a delicate finger their exquisite petals. They had done very well; she was proud of them. People passing along the street stopped to look at them in their incredible variety; a great bloom of colour against the high board fence, faint pink, pale yellow, lavender, rose, a strange, deep purple brown; they looked like little winged things, alighting for the moment on the fragile vines.

She came to the end of the row and turned the corner to the bed where the verbenas stood, and beside them a turbulent little sea of petunias, closely massed. The smell of the moist earth, of the grass freshly cut, of all the little flowers she had planted and tended, came to her on a tiny breeze, and a limitless joy filled her. Never before in her life had she felt so happy, so tranquil, so strong. Her glance embraced the smooth lawn stretching to the gravel drive that encircled the house, and the flower beds against the walls, filled with nasturtiums, thickly bordered with sweet alyssum, drenched in the sun, hot, fragrant, valiant little things. She was one with all of this, with no more purpose than they had.

Alfred's words had filled her with actual bliss. She might be a ghost, but she was no more frustrate than

that sweet pea that had swung loose from the string upon which it should have climbed, and swayed in the breeze, holding by nothing. She was an unlit lamp, but by the blaze of the sun, who needed her little flame? The world wanted nothing from her, and she had nothing to give. The turmoil of the night before was gone, her little effort ended.

She saw Gilbert coming up the hill; he looked hot and cross, with his straw hat pushed back on his head, and the box of chocolates under his arm. But now his crossness didn't seem to her alien and alarming; he was nothing but Gilbert, a familiar mystery. There was no need to understand him, no need for any excessive interest in him. She wasn't required to explain herself to him, or him to herself. She believed that she could never again be repelled by any strangeness in him, or disturbed by what he did. Her soul felt relieved of all its burdens, light, almost gay. He was one person, and she was another; they couldn't gravely affect each other, they were not inter-dependent; they were allied, but it was an alliance only for their interest, not to hurt or to hamper them. She went out to meet him, with a friendly smile she led him up on the veranda and left him there while she made an artful mint julep. Her friendliness didn't depend upon his being friendly; it was her own independent emotion. But it provoked an instant response from him.

"What's come over you?" he asked, curiously. "You haven't been like this for I don't know how long."

"Perhaps it's this dear garden," she answered, vaguely.

"You'd better stay in it, then," he said, with a sulky smile. "It agrees with you."

"That's what I'd like to do. Won't you come down here for the rest of the summer, Gilbert? It's very cool and quiet."

"I might," he answered, to her surprise.

The sun had gone down and a cheerful dusk had fallen, lively with the chirping of insects. They talked carelessly, of the small things that interested them; he too grew affable, almost tranquil. Astonishing how little he wanted! Not to be charmed, not to be comprehended, only to be accepted, casually and kindly, just as he was.

An absurd idea came to her of their two souls, sitting side by side, in rocking chairs, absorbed in the contemplation of life; she saw these souls as pliable white things, like half-melted candles, with great black eyes. It made her laugh aloud.

"What's the joke?" asked Gilbert.

"Only the silliest sort of fancy," she said, in a comfortable tone that didn't irritate him. He didn't ask again, because he didn't care. His desire had been always to be understood, never to understand others. And any woman who could sit in the dusk by him while he smoked, who talked so little, who made a julep like that, undoubtedly understood him. He was content.

