

Hope Anthony

The Intrusions of Peggy



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CHAPTER I

LIFE IS RECOMMENDED

The changeful April morning that she watched from the window of her flat looking over the river began a day of significance in the career of Trix Trevalla – of feminine significance, almost milliner's perhaps, but of significance all the same. She had put off her widow's weeds, and for the first time these three years back was dressed in a soft shade of blue; the harmony of her eyes and the gleams of her brown hair welcomed the colour with the cordiality of an old friendship happily renewed. Mrs. Trevalla's maid had been all in a flutter over the momentous transformation; in her mistress it bred a quietly retrospective mood. As she lay in an armchair watching the water and the clouds, she turned back on the course of her life, remembering many things. The beginning of a new era brought the old before her eyes in a protesting flash of vividness. She abandoned herself to recollections – an insidious form of dissipating the mind, which goes well with a relaxed ease of the body.

Not that Mrs. Trevalla's recollections were calculated to promote a sense of luxury, unless indeed they were to act as a provocative contrast.

There was childhood, spent in a whirling succession of lodging-houses. They had little individuality and retained hardly any separate identity; each had consisted of two rooms with folding doors between, and somewhere, at the back or on the floor above, a cupboard for her to sleep in. There was the first baby, her brother, who died when she was six; he had been a helpless, clinging child, incapable of living without far more sympathy and encouragement than he had ever got. Luckily she had been of hardier stuff. There was her mother, a bridling, blushing, weak-kneed woman (Trix's memory was candid); kind save when her nerves were bad, and when they were, unkind in a weak and desultory fashion that did not deserve the name of cruelty. Trix had always felt less anger than contempt for her half-hysterical outbursts, and bore no malice on their account. This pale visitor soon faded – as indeed Mrs. Trevalla herself had – into non-existence, and a different picture took its place. Here was the Reverend Algernon, her father, explaining that he found himself unsuited to pastoral work and indisposed to adopt any other active calling, that inadequate means were a misfortune, not a fault, that a man must follow his temperament, and that he asked only to be allowed to go his own way – he did not add to pay it – in peace and quiet. His utterances came back with the old distinction of manner and the distant politeness with which Mr. Trevalla bore himself towards all disagreeable incidents of life – under which head there was much reason to surmise that he ranked his daughter.

Was he unjust in that? Trix was puzzled. She recalled a sturdy, stubborn, rather self-assertive child. The freshness of delicacy is rubbed off, the appeal of shyness silenced, by a hand-to-mouth existence, by a habit of regarding the leavings of the first-floor lodger in the light of windfalls, by constant flittings unmarked by the discharge of obligations incurred in the abandoned locality, by a practical outlawry from the class to which we should in the ordinary course belong. Trix decided that she must have been an unattractive girl, rather hard, too much awake to the ways of the world, readily retorting its chilliness towards her. All this was natural enough, since neither death nor poverty nor lack of love was strange to her. Natural, yes; pleasant, no, Trix concluded, and with that she extended a degree of pardon to Mr. Trevalla. He had something to say for himself. With a smile she recalled what he always did say for himself, if anyone seemed to challenge the spotlessness of his character. On such painful occasions he would mention that he was, and had been for twenty years,

a teetotaler. There were reasons in the Trevalla family history which made the fact remarkable; in its owner's eyes the virtue was so striking and enormous that it had exhausted the moral possibilities of his being, condemned other excellencies to atrophy, and left him, in the flower-show of graces, the self-complacent exhibitor of a single bloom.

Yet he had become a party to the great conspiracy; it was no less, however much motives of love, and hopes ever sanguine, might excuse it in one of the parties to it – not the Reverend Algernon. They had all been involved in it – her father, old Lady Trevalla (her husband had been a soldier and K.C.B.), Vesey Trevalla himself. Vesey loved Trix, Lady Trevalla loved Vesey in a mother's conscienceless way; the mother persuaded herself that the experiment would work, the son would not stop to ask the question. The Reverend Algernon presumably persuaded himself too – and money was very scarce. So Trix was bidden to notice – when those days at Bournemouth came back to mind, her brows contracted into a frown as though from a quick spasm of pain – how Vesey loved her, what a good steady fellow he was, how safely she might trust herself to him. Why, he was a teetotaler too! 'Yes, though his gay friends do laugh at him!' exclaimed Lady Trevalla admiringly. They were actually staying at a Temperance Hotel! The stress laid on these facts did not seem strange to an ignorant girl of seventeen, accustomed to Mr. Trevalla's solitary but eloquent virtue. Rather weary of the trait, she pouted a little over it, and then forgot it as a matter of small moment one way or the other. So the conspiracy thrived, and ended in the good marriage with the well-to-do cousin, in being Mrs. Trevalla of Trevalla Haven, married to a big, handsome, ruddy fellow who loved her. The wedding-day stood out in memory; clearest of all now was what had been no more than a faint and elusive but ever-present sense that for some reason the guests, Vesey's neighbours, looked on her with pity – the men who pressed her hand and the women who kissed her cheek. And at the last old Lady Trevalla had burst suddenly into unrestrained sobbing. Why? Vesey looked very uncomfortable, and even the Reverend Algernon was rather upset. However, consciences do no harm if they do not get the upper hand till the work is done; Trix was already Vesey's wife.

He was something of a man, this Vesey Trevalla; he was large-built in mind, equitable, kind, shrewd, of a clear vision. To the end he was a good friend and a worthy companion in his hours of reason. Trix's thoughts of him were free from bitterness. Her early life had given her a tolerance that stood her in stead, a touch of callousness which enabled her to endure. As a child she had shrugged thin shoulders under her shabby frock; she shrugged her shoulders at the tragedy now; her heart did not break, but hardened a little more. She made some ineffectual efforts to reclaim him; their hopelessness was absurdly plain; after a few months Vesey laughed at them, she almost laughed herself. She settled down into the impossible life, reproaching nobody. When her husband was sober, she never referred to what had happened when he was drunk; if he threw a plate at her then, she dodged the plate: she seemed in a sense to have been dodging plates and suchlike missiles all her life. Sometimes he had suspicions of himself, and conjured up recollections of what he had done. 'Oh, what does last night matter?' she would ask in a friendly if rather contemptuous tone. Once she lifted the veil for a moment. He found her standing by the body of her baby; it had died while he was unfit to be told, or at any rate unable to understand.

'So the poor little chap's gone,' he said softly, laying his hand on her shoulder.

'Yes, Vesey, he's gone, thank God!' she said, looking him full in the eyes.

He turned away without a word, and went out with a heavy tread. Trix felt that she had been cruel, but she did not apologise, and Vesey showed no grudge.

The odd thing about the four years her married life lasted was that they now seemed so short. Even before old Lady Trevalla's death (which happened a year after the wedding) Trix had accommodated herself to her position. From that time all was monotony – the kind of monotony which might well kill, but, failing that, left little to mark out one day from another. She did not remember even that she had been acutely miserable either for her husband or for herself; rather she had come to disbelieve in acute feelings. She had grown deadened to sorrow as to joy, and to love,

the great parent of both; the hardening process of her youth had been carried further. When Vesey caught a chill and crumpled up under it as sodden men do, and died with a thankfulness he did not conceal, she was unmoved. She was not grateful for the deliverance, nor yet grieved for the loss of a friend. She shrugged her shoulders again, asking what the world was going to do with her next.

Mr. Trevalla took a view more hopeful than his daughter's, concluding that there was cause for feeling considerable satisfaction both on moral and on worldly grounds. From the higher standpoint Trix (under his guidance) had made a noble although unsuccessful effort, and had shown the fortitude to be expected from his daughter; while Vesey, poor fellow, had been well looked after to the end, and was now beyond the reach of temptation. From the lower – Mr. Trevalla glanced for a moment round the cosy apartment he now occupied at Brighton, where he was beginning to get a nice little library round him – yes, from the lower, while it was regrettable that the estate had passed to a distant cousin, Trix was left with twenty thousand pounds (in free cash, for Vesey had refused to make a settlement, since he did not know what money he would want – that is, how long he would last) and an ascertained social position. She was only twenty-two when left a widow, and better-looking than she had ever been in her life. On the whole, were the four years misspent? Had anybody very much to grumble at? Certainly nobody had any reason to reproach himself. And he wondered why Trix had not sent for him to console her in her affliction. He was glad she had not, but he thought that the invitation would have been natural and becoming.

'But I never pretended to understand women,' he murmured, with his gentle smile.

Women would have declared that they did not understand him either, using the phrase with a bitter intention foreign to the Reverend Algernon's lips and temper. His good points were so purely intellectual – lucidity of thought, temperance of opinion, tolerance, humour, appreciation of things which deserved it. These gifts would, with women, have pleaded their rarity in vain against the more ordinary endowments of willingness to work and a capacity for thinking, even occasionally, about other people. Men liked him – so long as they had no business relations with him. But women are moralists, from the best to the worst of them. If he had lived, Trix would probably have scorned to avail herself of his counsels. Yet they might well have been useful to her in after days; he was a good taster of men. As it was, he died soon after Vesey, having caught a chill and refused to drink hot grog. That was his doctor's explanation. Mr. Trevalla's dying smile accused the man of cloaking his own ignorance by such an excuse; he prized his virtue too much to charge it with his death. He was sorry to leave his rooms at Brighton; other very strong feeling about his departure he had none. Certainly his daughter did not come between him and his preparations for hereafter, nor the thought of her solitude distract his fleeting soul.

In the general result life seemed ended for Trix Trevalla at twenty-two, and, pending release from it in the ordinary course, she contemplated an impatient and provisional existence in Continental *pensions* – establishments where a young and pretty woman could not be suspected of wishing to reap any advantage from prettiness or youth. Hundreds of estimable ladies guarantee this security, and thereby obtain a genteel and sufficient company round their modest and inexpensive tables. It was what Trix asked for, and for two years she got it. During this period she sometimes regretted Vesey Trevalla, and sometimes asked whether vacancy were not worse than misery, or on what grounds limbo was to be preferred to hell. She could not make up her mind on this question – nor is it proposed to settle it here. Probably most people have tried both on their own account.

One evening she arrived at Paris rather late, and the isolation ward (metaphors will not be denied sometimes) to which she had been recommended was found to be full. Somewhat apprehensive, she was driven to an hotel of respectability, and, rushing to catch the flying coat-tails of *table d'hôte*, found herself seated beside a man who was apparently not much above thirty. This unwonted propinquity set her doing what she had not done for years in public, though she had never altogether abandoned the practice as a private solace: as she drank her cold soup, she laughed. Her neighbour, a shabby

man with a rather shaggy beard, turned benevolently inquiring eyes on her. A moment's glance made him start a little and say, 'Surely it's Mrs. Trevalla?'

'That's my name,' answered Trix, wondering greatly, but thanking heaven for a soul who knew her. In the *pensions* they never knew who you were, but were always trying to find out, and generally succeeded the day after you went away.

'That's very curious,' he went on. 'I daresay you'll be surprised, but your photograph stands on my bedroom mantel-piece. I knew you directly from it. It was sent to me.'

'When was it sent you?' she asked.

'At the time of your marriage.' He grew grave as he spoke.

'You were his friend?'

'I called myself so.' Conversation was busy round them, yet he lowered his voice to add, 'I don't know now whether I had any right.'

'Why not?'

'I gave up very soon.'

Trix's eyes shot a quick glance at him and she frowned a little.

'Well, I ought to have been more than a friend, and so did I,' she said.

'It would have been utterly useless, of course. Reason recognises that, but then conscience isn't always reasonable.'

She agreed with a nod as she galloped through her fish, eager to overtake the *menu*.

'Besides, I have – ' He hesitated a moment, smiling apologetically and playing nervously with a knife. 'I have a propensity myself, and that makes me judge him more easily – and myself not so lightly.'

She looked at his pint of *ordinaire* with eyebrows raised.

'Oh, no, quite another,' he assured her, smiling. 'But it's enough to teach me what propensities are.'

'What is it? Tell me.' She caught eagerly at the strange luxury of intimate talk.

'Never! But, as I say, I've learnt from it. Are you alone here, Mrs. Trevalla?'

'Here and everywhere,' said Trix, with a sigh and a smile.

'Come for a stroll after dinner. I'm an old friend of Vesey's, you know.' The last remark was evidently thrown in as a concession to rules not held in much honour by the speaker. Trix said that she would come; the outing seemed a treat to her after the *pensions*.

They drank beer together on the boulevards; he heard her story, and he said many things to her, waving (as the evening wore on) a pipe to and fro from his mouth to the length of his arm. It was entirely owing to the things which he said that evening on the boulevards that she sat now in the flat over the river, her mourning doffed, her guaranteed *pensions* forsaken, London before her, an unknown alluring sea.

'What you want,' he told her, with smiling vehemence, 'is a revenge. Hitherto you've done nothing; you've only had things done to you. You've made nothing; you've only been made into things yourself. Life has played with you; go and play with it.'

Trix listened, sitting very still, with eager eyes. There was a life, then – a life still open to her; the door was not shut, nor her story of necessity ended.

'I daresay you'll scorch your fingers; for the fire burns. But it's better to die of heat than of cold. And if trouble comes, call at 6A Danes Inn.'

'Where in the world is Danes Inn?' she asked, laughing.

'Between New and Clement's, of course.' He looked at her in momentary surprise, and then laughed. 'Oh, well, not above a mile from civilisation – and a shilling cab from aristocracy. I happen to lodge there.'

She looked at him curiously. He was shabby yet rather distinguished, shaggy but clean. He advised life, and he lived in Danes Inn, where an instinct told her that life would not be a very maddening or riotous thing.

'Come, you must live again, Mrs. Trevalla,' he urged.

'Do you live, as you call it?' she asked, half in mockery, half in a genuine curiosity.

A shade of doubt, perhaps of distress, spread over his face. He knocked out his pipe deliberately before answering.

'Well, hardly, perhaps.' Then he added eagerly, 'I work, though.'

'Does that do instead?' To Trix's new-born mood the substitute seemed a poor one.

'Yes – if you have a propensity.'

What was his tone? Sad or humorous, serious or mocking? It sounded all.

'Oh, work's your propensity, is it?' she cried gaily and scornfully, as she rose to her feet. 'I don't think it's mine, you know.'

He made no reply, but turned away to pay for the beer. It was a trifling circumstance, but she noticed that at first he put down three *sous* for the waiter, and then returned to the table in order to make the tip six. He looked as if he had done his duty when he had made it six.

They walked back to the hotel together and shook hands in the hall.

'6A Danes Inn?' she asked merrily.

'6A Danes Inn, Mrs. Trevalla. Is it possible that my advice is working?'

'It's working very hard indeed – as hard as you work. But Danes Inn is only a refuge, isn't it?'

'It's not fit for much more, I fear.'

'I shall remember it. And now, as a formality – and perhaps as a concession to the postman – who are you?'

'My name is Airey Newton.'

'I never heard Vesey mention you.'

'No, I expect not. But I knew him very well. I'm not an impostor, Mrs. Trevalla.'

'Why didn't he mention you?' asked Trix. Vesey had been, on the whole, a communicative man. He hesitated a moment before he answered.

'Well, I wrote to him on the subject of his marriage,' he confessed at last.

She needed no more.

'I see,' she said, with an understanding nod. 'Well, that was – honest of you. Good night, Mr. Newton.'

This meeting – all their conversation – was fresh and speaking in her brain as she sat looking over the river in her recovered gown of blue. But for the meeting, but for the shabby man and what he had said, there would have been no blue gown, she would not have been in London nor in the flat. He had brought her there, to do something, to make something, to play with life as life had played with her, to have a revenge, to die, if die she must, of heat rather than of cold.

Well, she would follow his advice – would accept and fulfil it amply. 'At the worst there are the *pensions* again – and there's Danes Inn!'

She laughed at that idea, but her laugh was rather hard, her mouth a little grim, her eyes mischievous. These were the marks youth and the four years had left. Besides, she cared for not a soul on earth.

CHAPTER II

COMING NEAR THE FIRE

At the age of forty (a point now passed by some half-dozen years) Mrs. Bonfill had become motherly. The change was sudden, complete, and eminently wise. It was accomplished during a summer's retirement; she disappeared a queen regnant, she reappeared a dowager – all by her own act, for none had yet ventured to call her *passée*. But she was a big woman, and she recognised facts. She had her reward. She gained power instead of losing it; she had always loved power, and had the shrewdness to discern that there was more than one form of it. The obvious form she had never, as a young and handsome woman, misused or over-used; she had no temptations that way, or, as her friend Lady Blixworth preferred to put it, 'In that respect dearest Sarah was always *bourgeoise* to the core.' The new form she now attained – influence – was more to her taste. She liked to shape people's lives; if they were submissive and obedient she would make their fortunes. She needed some natural capacities in her *protégés*, of course; but, since she chose cleverly, these were seldom lacking. Mrs. Bonfill did the rest. She could open doors that obeyed no common key; she could smooth difficulties; she had in two or three cases blotted out a past, and once had reformed a gambler. But she liked best to make marriages and Ministers. Her own daughter, of course, she married immediately – that was nothing. She had married Nellie Towler to Sir James Quinby-Lee – the betting had been ten to one against it – and Lady Mildred Haughton to Frank Cleveland – flat in the face of both the families. As for Ministers, she stood well with Lord Farringham, was an old friend of Lord Glentorly, and, to put it unkindly, had Constantine Blair fairly in her pocket. It does not do to exaggerate drawing-room influence, but when Beaufort Chance became a Whip, and young Lord Mervyn was appointed Glentorly's Under-Secretary at the War Office, and everybody knew that they were Mrs. Bonfill's last and prime favourites – well, the coincidence was remarkable. And never a breath of scandal with it all! It was no small achievement for a woman born in, bred at, and married from an unpretentious villa at Streatham. *La carrière ouverte* – but perhaps that is doing some injustice to Mr. Bonfill. After all, he and the big house in Grosvenor Square had made everything possible. Mrs. Bonfill loved her husband, and she never tried to make him a Minister; it was a well-balanced mind, save for that foible of power. He was very proud of her, though he rather wondered why she took so much trouble about other people's affairs. He owned a brewery, and was Chairman of a railway company.

Trix Trevalla had been no more than a month in London when she had the great good fortune to be taken up by Mrs. Bonfill. It was not everybody's luck. Mrs. Bonfill was particular; she refused hundreds, some for her own reasons, some because of the things Viola Blixworth might say. The Frickers, for example, failed in their assault on Mrs. Bonfill – or had up to now. Yet Mrs. Bonfill herself would have been good-natured to the Frickers.

'I can't expose myself to Viola by taking up the Frickers,' she explained to her husband, who had been not indisposed, for business reasons, to do Fricker a good turn. For Lady Blixworth, with no other qualities very striking to a casual observer, and with an appearance that the term 'elegant' did ample justice to, possessed a knack of describing people whom she did not like in a way that they did not like – a gift which made her respected and, on the whole, popular.

'The woman's like a bolster grown fat; the daughter's like a sausage filled unevenly; and the man – well, I wouldn't have him to a political party!'

Thus had Lady Blixworth dealt with the Frickers, and even Mrs. Bonfill quailed.

It was very different with Trix Trevalla. Pretty, presentable, pleasant, even witty in an unobtrusive sort of fashion, she made an immediate success. She was understood to be well-off too; the flat was not a cheap one; she began to entertain a good deal in a quiet way; she drove a remarkably neat brougham. These things are not done for nothing – nor even on the interest of twenty thousand

pounds. Yet Trix did them, and nobody asked any questions except Mrs. Bonfill, and she was assured that Trix was living well within her means. May not 'means' denote capital as well as income? The distinction was in itself rather obscure to Trix, and, Vesey Trevalla having made no settlement, there was nothing to drive it home. Lastly, Trix was most prettily docile and submissive to Mrs. Bonfill – grateful, attentive, and obedient. She earned a reward. Any woman with half an eye could see what that reward should be.

But for once Mrs. Bonfill vacillated. After knowing Trix a fortnight she destined her for Beaufort Chance, who had a fair income, ambition at least equal to his talents, and a chance of the House of Lords some day. Before she had known Trix a month – so engaging and docile was Trix – Mrs. Bonfill began to wonder whether Beaufort Chance were good enough. Certainly Trix was making a very great success. What then? Should it be Mervyn, Mrs. Bonfill's prime card, her chosen disciple? A man destined, as she believed, to go very high – starting pretty high anyhow, and starts in the handicap are not to be disregarded. Mrs. Bonfill doubted seriously whether, in that mental book she kept, she could not transfer Trix to Mervyn. If Trix went on behaving well – But the truth is that Mrs. Bonfill herself was captured by Trix. Yet Trix feared Mrs. Bonfill, even while she liked and to some extent managed her. After favouring Chance, Mrs. Bonfill began to put forward Mervyn. Whether Trix's management had anything to do with this result it is hard to say.

Practical statesmen are not generally blamed for such changes of purpose. They may hold out hopes of, say, a reduction of taxation to one class or interest, and ultimately award the boon to another. Nobody is very severe on them. But it comes rather hard on the disappointed interest, which, in revenge, may show what teeth it has.

Trix and Mervyn were waltzing together at Mrs. Bonfill's dance. Lady Blixworth sat on a sofa with Beaufort Chance and looked on – at the dance and at her companion.

'She's rather remarkable,' she was saying in her idle languid voice. 'She was meant to be vulgar, I'm sure, but she contrives to avoid it. I rather admire her.'

'A dangerous shade of feeling to excite in you, it seems,' he remarked sourly.

The lady imparted an artificial alarm to her countenance.

'I'm so sorry if I said anything wrong; but, oh, surely, there's no truth in the report that you're – ?' A motion of her fan towards Trix ended the sentence.

'Not the least,' he answered gruffly.

Sympathy succeeded alarm. With people not too clever Lady Blixworth allowed herself a liberal display of sympathy. It may have been all right to make Beaufort a Whip (though that question arose afterwards in an acute form), but he was no genius in a drawing-room.

'Dear Sarah talks so at random sometimes,' she drawled. 'Well-meant, I know, Beaufort; but it does put people in awkward positions, doesn't it?'

He was a conceited man, and a pink-and-white one. He flushed visibly and angrily.

'What has Mrs. Bonfill been saying about me?'

'Oh, nothing much; it's just her way. And you mustn't resent it – you owe so much to her.' Lady Blixworth was enjoying herself; she had a natural delight in mischief, especially when she could direct it against her beloved and dreaded Sarah with fair security.

'What did she say?'

'Say! Nothing, you foolish man! She diffused an impression.'

'That I – ?'

'That you liked Mrs. Trevalla! She was wrong, I suppose. *Voilà tout*, and, above all, don't look hot and furious; the room's stifling as it is.'

Beaufort Chance was furious. We forgive much ill-treatment so it is secret, we accept many benefits on the same understanding. To parade the benefit and to let the injustice leak out are the things that make us smart. Lady Blixworth had by dexterous implication accused Mrs. Bonfill of both

offences. Beaufort had not the self-control to seem less angry than he was. 'Surely,' thought Lady Blixworth, watching him, 'he's too stupid even for politics!'

'You may take it from me,' he said pompously, 'that I have, and have had, no more than the most ordinary acquaintance with Mrs. Trevalla.'

She nodded her head in satisfied assent. 'No, he's just stupid enough,' she concluded, smiling and yawning behind her fan. She had no compunctions – she had told nearly half the truth. Mrs. Bonfill never gossiped about her Ministers – it would have been fatal – but she was sometimes rather expansive on the subject of her marriages; she was tempted to collect opinions on them; she had, no doubt, (before she began to vacillate) collected two or three opinions about Beaufort Chance and Trix Trevalla.

Trix's brain was whirling far quicker than her body turned in the easy swing of the waltz. It had been whirling this month back, ever since the prospect began to open, the triumphs to dawn, ambition to grow, a sense of her attraction and power to come home to her. The *pensions* were gone; she had plunged into life. She was delighted and dazzled. Herself, her time, her feelings, and her money, she flung into the stream with a lavish recklessness. Yet behind the gay intoxication of the transformed woman she was conscious still of the old self, the wide-awake, rather hard girl, that product of the lodging-houses and the four years with Vesey Trevalla. Amid the excitement, the success, the folly, the old voice spoke, cautioning, advising, never allowing her to forget that there was a purpose and an end in it all, a career to make and to make speedily. Her eyes might wander to every alluring object; they returned to the main chance. Wherefore Mrs. Bonfill had no serious uneasiness about dear Trix; when the time came she would be sensible; people fare, she reflected, none the worse for being a bit hard at the core.

'I like sitting here,' said Trix to Mervyn after the dance, 'and seeing everybody one's read about or seen pictures of. Of course I don't really belong to it, but it makes me feel as if I did.'

'You'd like to?' he asked.

'Well, I suppose so,' she laughed as her eyes rambled over the room again.

Lord Mervyn was conscious of his responsibilities. He had a future; he was often told so in public and in private, though it is fair to add that he would have believed it unsolicited. That future, together with the man who was to have it, he took seriously. And, though of rank unimpeachable, he was not quite rich enough for that future; it could be done on what he had, but it could be done better with some more. Evidently Mrs. Bonfill had been captured by Trix; as a rule she would not have neglected the consideration that his future could be done better with some more. He had not forgotten it; so he did not immediately offer to make Trix really belong to the brilliant world she saw. She was very attractive, and well-off, as he understood, but she was not, from a material point of view, by any means what he had a right to claim. Besides, she was a widow, and he would have preferred that not to be the case.

'Prime Ministers and things walking about like flies!' sighed Trix, venting satisfaction in a pardonable exaggeration. It was true, however, that Lord Farringham had looked in for half an hour, talked to Mrs. Bonfill for ten minutes, and made a tour round, displaying a lofty cordiality which admirably concealed his desire to be elsewhere.

'You'll soon get used to it all,' Mervyn assured her with a rather superior air. 'It's a bore, but it has to be done. The social side can't be neglected, you see.'

'If I neglected anything, it would be the other, I think.'

He smiled tolerantly and quite believed her. Trix was most butterfly-like to-night; there was no hardness in her laugh, not a hint of grimness in her smile. 'You would never think,' Mrs. Bonfill used to whisper, 'what the poor child has been through.'

Beaufort Chance passed by, casting a scowling glance at them.

'I haven't seen you dancing with Chance – or perhaps you sat out? He's not much of a performer.'

'I gave him a dance, but I forgot.'

'Which dance, Mrs. Trevalla?' Her glance had prompted the question.

'Ours,' said Trix. 'You came so late – I had none left.'

'I very seldom dance, but you tempted me.' He was not underrating his compliment. For a moment Trix was sorely inclined to snub him; but policy forbade. When he left her, to seek Lady Blixworth, she felt rather relieved.

Beaufort Chance had watched his opportunity, and came by again with an accidental air. She called to him and was all graciousness and apologies; she had every wish to keep the second string in working order. Beaufort had not sat there ten minutes before he was in his haste accusing Lady Blixworth of false insinuations – unless, indeed, Trix were an innocent instrument in Mrs. Bonfill's hands. Trix was looking the part very well.

'I wish you'd do me a great kindness,' he said presently. 'Come to dinner some day.'

'Oh, that's a very tolerable form of benevolence. Of course I will.'

'Wait a bit. I mean – to meet the Frickers.'

'Oh!' Meeting the Frickers seemed hardly an inducement.

But Beaufort Chance explained. On the one side Fricker was a very useful man to stand well with; he could put you into things – and take you out at the right time. Trix nodded sagely, though she knew nothing about such matters. On the other hand – Beaufort grew both diplomatic and confidential in manner – Fricker had little ambition outside his business, but Mrs. and Miss Fricker had enough and to spare – ambitions social for themselves, and, subsidiary thereunto, political for Fricker.

'Viola Blixworth has frightened Mrs. Bonfill,' he complained. 'Lady Glentorly talks about drawing the line, and all the rest of them are just as bad. Now if you'd come –'

'Me? What good should I do? The Frickers won't care about me.'

'Oh, yes, they will!' He did not lack adroitness in baiting the hook for her. 'They know you can do anything with Mrs. Bonfill; they know you're going to be very much in it. You won't be afraid of Viola Blixworth in a month or two! I shall please Fricker – you'll please the women. Now do come.'

Trix's vanity was flattered. Was she already a woman of influence? Beaufort Chance had the other lure ready too.

'And I daresay you don't mind hearing of a good thing if it comes in your way?' he suggested carelessly. 'People with money to spare find Fricker worth knowing, and he's absolutely square.'

'Do you mean he'd make money for me?' asked Trix, trying to keep any note of eagerness out of her voice.

'He'd show you how to make it for yourself, anyhow.'

Trix sat in meditative silence for a few moments. Presently she turned to him with a bright friendly smile.

'Oh, never mind all that! I'll come for your sake – to please you,' she said.

Beaufort Chance was not quite sure that he believed her this time, but he looked as if he did – which serves just as well in social relations. He named a day, and Trix gaily accepted the appointment. There were few adventures, not many new things, that she was not ready for just now. The love of the world had laid hold of her.

And here at Mrs. Bonfill's she seemed to be in the world up to her eyes. People had come on from big parties as the evening waned, and the last hour dotted the ball-room with celebrities. Politicians in crowds, leaders of fashion, an actress or two, an Indian prince, a great explorer – they made groups which seemed to express the many-sidedness of London, to be the thousand tributaries that swell the great stream of its society. There was a little unusual stir to-night. A foreign complication had arisen, or was supposed to have arisen. People were asking what the Tsar was going to do; and, when one considers the reputation for secrecy enjoyed by Russian diplomacy, quite a surprising number of them seemed to know, and told one another with an authority only matched by the discrepancy between their versions. When they saw a man who possibly might know – Lord Glentorly

– they crowded round him eagerly, regardless of the implied aspersion on their own knowledge. Glentorly had been sitting in a corner with Mrs. Bonfill, and she shared in his glory, perhaps in his private knowledge. But both Glentorly and Mrs. Bonfill professed to know no more than there was in the papers, and insinuated that they did not believe that. Everybody at once declared that they had never believed that, and had said so at dinner, and the very wise added that it was evidently inspired by the Stock Exchange. A remark to this effect had just fallen on Trix's ears when a second observation from behind reached her.

'Not one of them knows a thing about it,' said a calm, cool, youthful voice.

'I can't think why they want to,' came as an answer in rich pleasant tones.

Trix glanced round and saw a smart, trim young man, and by his side a girl with beautiful hair. She had only a glimpse of them, for in an instant they disentangled themselves from the gossipers and joined the few couples who were keeping it up to the last dance.

It will be seen that Beaufort Chance had not given up the game; Lady Blixworth's pin-pricks had done the work which they were probably intended to do: they had incited him to defy Mrs. Bonfill, to try to win off his own bat. She might discard him in favour of Mervyn, but he would fight for himself. The dinner to which he bade Trix would at once assert and favour intimacy; if he could put her under an obligation it would be all to the good; flattering her vanity was already a valuable expedient. That stupidity of his, which struck Viola Blixworth with such a sense of its density, lay not in misunderstanding or misvaluing the common motives of humanity, but in considering that all humanity was common: he did not allow for the shades, the variations, the degrees. Nor did he appreciate in the least the mood that governed or the temper that swayed Trix Trevalla. He thought that she preferred him as a man, Mervyn as a match. Both of them were, in fact, at this time no more than figures in the great *ballet* at which she now looked on, in which she meant soon to mix.

Mrs. Bonfill caught Trix as she went to her carriage – that smart brougham was in waiting – and patted her cheek *more materno*.

'I saw you were enjoying yourself, child,' she said. 'What was all that Beaufort had to say to you?'

'Oh, just nonsense,' answered Trix lightly.

Mrs. Bonfill smiled amiably.

'He's not considered to talk nonsense generally,' she said; 'but perhaps there was someone you wanted to talk to more! You won't say anything, I see, but – Mortimer stayed late! He's coming to luncheon to-morrow. Won't you come too?'

'I shall be delighted,' said Trix. Her eyes were sparkling. She had possessed wit enough to see the vacillation of Mrs. Bonfill. Did this mean that it was ended? The invitation to lunch looked like it. Mrs. Bonfill believed in lunch for such purposes. In view of the invitation to lunch, Trix said nothing about the invitation to dinner.

As she was driven from Grosvenor Square to the flat by the river, she was marvellously content – enjoying still, not thinking, wondering, not feeling, making in her soul material and sport of others, herself seeming not subject to design or accident. The change was great to her; the ordinary mood of youth that has known only good fortune seemed to her the most wonderful of transformations, almost incredible. She exulted in it and gloated over the brightness of her days. What of others? Well, what of the players in the pantomime? Do they not play for us? What more do we ask of or about them? Trix was not in the least inclined to be busy with more fortunes than her own. For this was the thing – this was what she had desired.

How had she come to desire it so urgently and to take it with such recklessness? The words of the shabby man on the boulevards came back to her. 'Life has played with you; go and play with it. You may scorch your fingers; for the fire burns. But it's better to die of heat than of cold.'

'Yes, better of heat than of cold,' laughed Trix Trevalla triumphantly, and she added, 'If there's anything wrong, why, he's responsible!' She was amused both at the idea of anything being wrong and at the notion of holding the quiet shabby man responsible. There could be no link between his

life and the world she had lived in that night. Yet, if he held these views about the way to treat life, why did he not live? He had said he hardly lived, he only worked. Trix was in an amused puzzle about the shabby man as she got into bed; he actually put the party and its great *ballet* out of her head.

CHAPTER III IN DANES INN

Some men maintained that it was not the quantity, nor the quality, nor the colour of Peggy Ryle's hair that did the mischief, but simply and solely the way it grew. Perhaps (for the opinion of men in such matters is eminently and consciously fallible) it did not grow that way at all, but was arranged. The result to the eye was the same, a peculiar harmony between the waves of the hair, the turn of the neck, and the set of the head. So notable and individual a thing was this agreement that Arthur Kane and Miles Childwick, poet and critic, were substantially at one about it. Kane described it as 'the artistry of accident,' Childwick lauded its 'meditated spontaneity.' Neither gentleman was ill-pleased with his phrase, and each professed a polite admiration of the other's effort – these civilities are necessary in literary circles. Other young men painted or drew the hair, and the neck, and the head, till Peggy complained that her other features were neglected most disdainfully. Other young men again, not endowed with the gift of expression by tongue or by hand, contented themselves with swelling Peggy's court. She did not mind how much they swelled it. She had a fine versatility, and could be flirted with in rhyme, in polished periods, in modern slang, or in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet; the heart is, of course, the thing in such a matter, various forms of expression no more than its interpreters. Meanwhile Peggy learnt men and their manners, caused a good deal of picturesque misery – published and unpublished – and immensely increased the amenity of life wherever she went. And she went everywhere, when she could pay a cab fare and contrive a frock, or borrow one or both of these commodities. (Elfreda Flood, for instance, often had a frock.) She generally returned the cab fare, and you could usually regain the frock by personal exertions; it was not considered the correct thing to ask her directly for either. She had an income of forty pounds a year, and professed to be about to learn to paint in real earnest. There was also an uncle in Berlin who sent cheques at rare and irregular intervals. When a cheque came, Peggy gave a dinner-party; when there had been no cheque for a long while, Peggy accepted a dinner. That was all the difference it made. And anyhow there was always bread-and-butter to be had at Airey Newton's. Airey appeared not to dine, but there was tea and there was bread-and-butter – a thing worth knowing now and then to Peggy Ryle.

She had been acquainted with Airey Newton for two years – almost since her first coming to London. Theirs was a real and intimate friendship, and her figure was familiar to the dingy house whose soft-stone front had crumbled into a premature old age. Airey was on the third floor, front and back; two very large windows adorned his sitting-room – it was necessary to give all encouragement and opportunity to any light that found its way into the gloomy *cul-de-sac*. Many an afternoon Peggy sat by one of these windows in a dilapidated wicker arm-chair, watching the typewriting clerk visible through the corresponding big window opposite. Sometimes Airey talked, oftener he went on with his work as though she were not there; she liked this inattention as a change. But she was a little puzzled over that work of his. He had told her that he was an inventor. So far she was content, and when she saw him busy with models or working out sums she concluded that he was at his trade. It did not appear to be a good trade, for he was shabby, the room was shabbier, and (as has been mentioned) he did not, so far as her observation went, dine. But probably it kept him happy; she had always pictured inventors as blissful although poverty-stricken persons. The work-table then, a big deal one which blocked the other window, was intelligible enough. The mystery lay in the small table on the right hand of the fireplace; under it stood a Chubb's safe, and on it reposed a large book covered in red leather and fastened with a padlock. She had never seen either book or safe open, and when she had asked what was in them, Airey told her a little story about a Spartan who was carrying something under his cloak – a mode of retort which rather annoyed her. So she inquired no more. But she was sure that the locks were unfastened when she was gone. What was there? Was he writing

a great book? Or did he own ancestral plate? Or precious – and perhaps scandalous – documents? Something precious there must be; the handsomeness of the book, the high polish by which the metal of the safe shamed the surrounding dustiness, stood out sure signs and proofs of that.

Peggy had just bought a new frock – and paid for it under some pressure – and a cheque had not come for ever so long; so she ate bread-and-butter steadily and happily, interrupting herself only to pour out more tea. At last Airey pushed away his papers and models, saying, 'That's done, thank heaven!' and got up to light his pipe. Peggy poured out a cup of tea for him, and he came across the room for it. He looked much as when he had met Trix Trevalla in Paris, but his hair was shorter and his beard trimmed close and cut to a point; these improvements were due to Peggy's reiterated entreaties.

'Well?' he asked, standing before her, his eyes twinkling kindly.

'Times are hard, but the heart is light, Airey. I've been immortalised in a sonnet – '

'Dissected in an essay too?' he suggested with ironical admiration.

'I don't recognise myself there. And I've had an offer – '

'Another?'

'Not that sort – an offer of a riding-horse. But I haven't got a habit.'

'Nor a stable perhaps?'

'No, nor a stable. I didn't think of that. And you, Airey?'

'Barring the horse, and the sonnet, and the essay, I'm much as you are, Peggy.'

She threw her head back a little and looked at him; her tone, while curious, was also slightly compassionate.

'I suppose you get some money for your things sometimes?' she asked. 'I mean, when you invent a – a – well, say a corkscrew, they give you something?'

'Of course. I make my living that way. He smiled faintly at the involuntary glance from Peggy's eyes that played round the room. 'Yesterday's again!' he exclaimed suddenly, taking up the loaf. 'I told Mrs. Stryver I wouldn't have a yesterday's!' His tone was indignant; he seemed anxious to vindicate himself.

'It won't be to-morrow's, anyhow,' laughed Peggy, regarding the remaining and much diminished fragment in his hand. 'It wasn't badly stale.'

Airey took his pipe out of his mouth and spoke with the abruptness of a man who has just made up his mind to speak.

'Do you know a Mrs. Trevalla?' he asked.

'Oh, yes; by sight very well.'

'How does she strike you?'

'Well – certainly pretty; probably clever; perhaps – Is she a friend of yours?'

'I've known about her a long while and met her once.'

'Once! Well, then, perhaps unscrupulous.'

'Why do you think she's unscrupulous?'

'Why do you ask me about her?' retorted Peggy.

'She's written to me, proposing to come and see me.'

'Have you asked her? I can't have you having a lot of visitors, you know. I come here for quiet.'

Airey looked a little embarrassed. 'Well, I did give her a sort of general invitation,' he murmured, fingering his beard. 'That is, I told her to come if – if she was in any difficulty.' He turned an appealing glance towards Peggy's amused face. 'Have you heard of her being in any difficulty?'

'No; but I should think it's not at all unlikely.'

'Why?'

'Have you ever had two people in love with you at the same time?'

'Never, on my honour,' said Airey with obvious sincerity.

'If you had, and if you were as pleasant as you could be to both of them, and kept them going by turns, and got all you could out of both of them, and kept on like that for about two months – '

'Oh, that's how the land lies, is it?'

'Don't you think it possible you might be in a difficulty some day?'

'But, good heavens, that's not the sort of thing to bring to me!'

'Apparently Mrs. Trevalla thinks differently,' laughed Peggy. 'At least I can't think of any other difficulty she's likely to be in.'

Airey was obviously disturbed and displeased.

'If what you say is true,' he observed, 'she can't be a good sort of woman.'

'I suppose not.' Peggy's admission sounded rather reluctant.

'Who are the two men?'

'Lord Mervyn and Beaufort Chance.'

'M.P.'s, aren't they?'

'Among other things, Airey. Well, you can't tell her not to come, can you? After that sort of general invitation, you know.' Peggy's tone was satirical; she had rather strong views as to the way in which men made fools of themselves over women – or sometimes said she had.

'I was an old friend of her husband's.'

'Oh, you've nothing to apologise for. When does she want to come?'

'To-morrow. I say, oughtn't I to offer to go and call on her?'

'She'd think that very dull in comparison,' Peggy assured him. 'Let her come and sob out her trouble here.'

'You appear to be taking the matter in a flippant spirit, Peggy.'

'I don't think I'm going to be particularly sorry if Mrs. Trevalla is in a bit of a scrape.'

'You young women are so moral.'

'I don't care,' said Peggy defiantly.

'Women have an extraordinary gift for disliking one another on sight,' mused Airey in an injured voice.

'You seem to have liked Mrs. Trevalla a good deal on sight.'

'She looked so sad, so solitary, a mere girl in her widow's weeds.' His tone grew compassionate, almost tender, as he recalled the forlorn figure which had timidly stolen into the dining-room of the Paris hotel.

'You'll find her a little bit changed perhaps,' Peggy suggested with a suppressed malice that found pleasure in anticipating his feelings.

'Oh, well, she must come anyhow, I suppose.'

'Yes, let her come, Airey. It does these people good to see how the poor live.'

Airey laughed, but not very heartily. However, it was well understood that everybody in their circle was very poor, and Peggy felt no qualms about referring to the fact.

'I shall come the next day and hear all about the interview. Fancy these interesting things happening to you! Because, you know, she's rather famous. Mrs. Bonfill has taken her up, and the Glentorlys are devoted to her, and Lady Blixworth has said some of her best things about her. She'll bring you into touch with fashion.'

'Hang fashion!' said Airey. 'I wonder what her difficulty is.' He seemed quite preoccupied with the idea of Mrs. Trevalla's difficulty.

'I see you're going to be very romantic indeed,' laughed Peggy Ryle.

His eyes dwelt on her for a moment, and a very friendly expression filled them.

'Don't you get into any difficulties?' he said.

'There's never but one with me,' she laughed; 'and that doesn't hurt, Airey.'

There was a loud and cheerful knock on the door.

'Visitors! When people come, how do you account for me?'

'I say nothing. I believe you're taken for my daughter.'

'Not since you trimmed your beard! Well, it doesn't matter, does it? Let him in.'

The visitor proved to be nobody to whom Peggy needed to be accounted for; he was Tommy Trent, the smart, trim young man who had danced with her at Mrs. Bonfill's party.

'You here again!' he exclaimed in tones of grave censure, as he laid down his hat on the top of the red-leather book on the little table. He blew on the book first, to make sure it was not dusty.

Peggy smiled, and Airey relit his pipe. Tommy walked across and looked at the *débris* of the loaf. He shook his head when Peggy offered him tea.

A sudden idea seemed to occur to him.

'I'm awfully glad to find you here,' he remarked to her. 'It saves me going up to your place, as I meant. I've got some people dining to-night, and one of them's failed. I wonder if you'd come? I know it's a bore coming again so soon, but –'

'I haven't been since Saturday.'

'But it would get me out of a hole.' He spoke in humble entreaty.

'I'd come directly, but I'm engaged.'

Tommy looked at her sorrowfully, and, it must be added, sceptically.

'Engaged to dinner and supper,' averred Peggy with emphasis as she pulled her hat straight and put on her gloves.

'You wouldn't even look in between the two and – and have an ice with us?'

'I really can't eat three meals in one evening, Tommy.'

'Oh, chuck one of them. You might, for once!'

'Impossible! I'm dining with my oldest friend,' smiled Peggy. 'I simply can't.' She turned to Airey, giving him her hand with a laugh. 'I like you best, because you just let me –'

Both words and laughter died away; she stopped abruptly, looking from one man to the other. There was something in their faces that arrested her words and her merriment. She could not analyse what it was, but she saw that she had made both of them uncomfortable. They had guessed what she was going to say; it would have been painful to one of them, and the other knew it. But whom had she wounded – Tommy by implying that his hospitality was importunate and his kindness clumsy, or Airey by a renewed reference to his poverty as shown in the absence of pressing invitations from him? She could not tell; but a constraint had fallen on them both. She cut her farewell short and went away, vaguely vexed and penitent for an offence which she perceived but did not understand.

The two men stood listening a moment to her light footfall on the stairs.

'It's all a lie, you know,' said Tommy. 'She isn't engaged to dinner or to supper either. It's beastly, that's what it is.'

'Yours was all a lie too, I suppose?' Airey spoke in a dull hard voice.

'Of course it was, but I could have beaten somebody up in time, or said they'd caught influenza, or been given a box at the opera, or something.'

Airey sat down by the fireplace, his chin sunk on his necktie. He seemed unhappy and rather ashamed. Tommy glanced at him with a puzzled look, shook his head, and then broke into a smile – as though, in the end, the only thing for it was to be amused. Then he drew a long envelope from his pocket.

'I've brought the certificates along,' he said. 'Here they are. Two thousand. Just look at them. It's a good thing; and if you sit on it for a bit, it'll pay for keeping.' He laid the envelope on the small table by Airey's side, took up his hat, put it on, and lit a cigarette as he repeated, 'Just see they're all right, old chap.'

'They're sure to be right.' Airey shifted uncomfortably in his chair and pulled at his empty pipe.

Tommy tilted his hat far back on his head, turned a chair back foremost, and sat down on it, facing his friend.

'I'm your business man,' he remarked. 'I do your business and I hold my tongue about it. Don't I?'

'Like the tomb,' Airey acknowledged.

'And – Well, at any rate let me congratulate you on the bread-and-butter. Only – only, I say, she'd have dined with you, if you'd asked her, Airey.'

His usually composed and unemotional voice shook for an almost imperceptible moment.

'I know,' said Airey Newton. He rose, unlocked the safe, and threw the long envelope in. Then he unlocked the red-leather book, took a pen, made a careful entry in it, re-locked it, and returned to his chair. He said nothing more, but he glanced once at Tommy Trent in a timid way. Tommy smiled back in recovered placidity. Then they began to talk of inventions, patents, processes, companies, stocks, shares, and all manner of things that produce or have to do with money.

'So far, so good,' ended Tommy. 'And if the oxygen process proves commercially practicable – it's all right in theory, I know – I fancy you may look for something big.' He threw away his cigarette and stood up, as if to go. But he lingered a moment, and a touch of embarrassment affected his manner. Airey had quite recovered his confidence and happiness during the talk on money matters.

'She didn't tell you any news, I suppose?' Tommy asked.

'What, Peggy? No, I don't think so. Well, nothing about herself, anyhow.'

'It's uncommonly wearing for me,' Tommy complained with a pathetic look on his clear-cut healthy countenance. 'I know I must play a waiting game; if I said anything to her now I shouldn't have a chance. So I have to stand by and see the other fellows make the running. By Jove, I lie awake at nights – some nights, anyhow – imagining infernally handsome poets – Old Arty Kane isn't handsome, though! I say, Airey, don't you think she's got too much sense to marry a poet? You told me I must touch her imagination. Do I look like touching anybody's imagination? I'm about as likely to do it as – as you are.' His attitude towards the suggested achievement wavered between envy and scorn.

Airey endured this outburst – and its concluding insinuation – with unruffled patience. He was at his pipe again, and puffed out wisdom securely vague.

'You can't tell with a girl. It takes them all at once sometimes. Up to now I think it's all right.'

'Not Arty Kane?'

'Lord, no!'

'Nor Childwick? He's a clever chap, Childwick. Not got a *sou*, of course; she'd starve just the same.'

'She'd have done it before if it had been going to be Miles Childwick.'

'She'll meet some devilish fascinating chap some day, I know she will.'

'He'll ill-use her perhaps,' Airey suggested hopefully.

'Then I shall nip in, you mean? Have you been treating yourself to Drury Lane?'

Airey laughed openly, and presently Tommy himself joined in, though in a rather rueful fashion.

'Why the deuce can't we just like 'em?' he asked.

'That would be all right on the pessimistic theory of the world.'

'Oh, hang the world! Well, good-bye, old chap. I'm glad you approve of what I've done about the business.'

His reference to the business seemed to renew Airey Newton's discomfort. He looked at his friend, and after a long pause said solemnly:

'Tommy Trent!'

'Yes, Airey Newton!'

'Would you mind telling me – man to man – how you contrive to be my friend?'

'What?'

'You're the only man who knows – and you're my only real friend.'

'I regard it as just like drinking,' Tommy explained, after a minute's thought. 'You're the deuce of a good fellow in every other way. I hope you'll be cured some day too. I may live to see you bankrupt yet.'

'I work for it. I work hard and usefully.'

'And even brilliantly,' added Tommy.

'It's mine. I haven't robbed anybody. And nobody has any claim on me.'

'I didn't introduce this discussion.' Tommy was evidently pained. He held out his hand to take leave.

'It's an extraordinary thing, but there it is,' mused Airey. He took Tommy's hand and said, 'On my honour I'll ask her to dinner.'

'Where?' inquired Tommy, in a suspicious tone.

Airey hesitated.

'Magnifique?' said Tommy firmly and relentlessly.

'Yes, the – the Magnifique,' agreed Airey, after another pause.

'Delighted, old man!' He waited a moment longer, but Airey Newton did not fix a date.

Airey was left sorrowful, for he loved Tommy Trent. Though Tommy knew his secret, still he loved him – a fact that may go to the credit of both men. Many a man in Airey's place would have hated Tommy, even while he used and relied on him; for Tommy's knowledge put Airey to shame – a shame he could not stifle any more than he could master the thing that gave it birth.

Certainly Tommy deserved not to be hated, for he was very loyal. He showed that only two days later, and at a cost to himself. He was dining with Peggy Ryle – not she with him; for a cheque had arrived, and they celebrated its coming. Tommy, in noble spirits (the coming of a cheque was as great an event to him as to Peggy herself), told her how he had elicited the offer of a dinner from Airey Newton; he chuckled in pride over it.

How men misjudge things! Peggy sat up straight in her chair and flushed up to the outward curve of her hair.

'How dare you?' she cried. 'As if he hadn't done enough for me already! I must have eaten pounds of butter – of mere butter alone! You know he can't afford to give dinners.'

Besides anger, there was a hint of pride in her emphasis on 'dinners.'

'I believe he can,' said Tommy, with the air of offering a hardy conjecture.

'I know he can't, or of course he would. Do you intend to tell me that Airey – Airey of all men – is mean?'

'Oh, no, I – I don't say –'

'It's you that's mean! I never knew you do such a thing before. You've quite spoilt my pleasure this evening.' She looked at him sternly. 'I don't like you at all to-night. I'm very grievously disappointed in you.'

Temptation raged in Tommy Trent; he held it down manfully.

'Well, I don't suppose he'll give the dinner, anyhow,' he remarked morosely.

'No, because he can't; but you'll have made him feel miserable about it. What time is it? I think I shall go home.'

'Look here, Peggy; you aren't doing me justice.'

'Well, what have you got to say?'

Tommy, smoking for a moment or two, looked across at her and answered, 'Nothing.'

She rose and handed him her purse.

'Pay the bill, please, and mind you give the waiter half-a-crown. And ask him to call me a cab, please.'

'It's only half a mile, and it's quite fine.'

'A rubber-tired hansom, please, with a good horse.'

Tommy put her into the cab and looked as if he would like to get in too. The cabman, generalising from observed cases, held the reins out of the way, that Tommy's tall hat might mount in safety.

'Tell him where to go, please. Good-night,' said Peggy.

Tommy was left on the pavement. He walked slowly along to his club, too upset to think of having a cigar.

'Very well,' he remarked, as he reached his destination. 'I played fair, but old Airey shall give that dinner – I'm hanged if he sha'n't! – and do it as if he liked it too!'

A vicious chuckle surprised the hall-porter as Tommy passed within the precincts.

Peggy drove home, determined to speak plainly to Airey himself; that was the only way to put it right.

'He shall know that I do him justice, anyhow,' said she. Thanks to the cheque, she was feeling as the rich feel, or should feel, towards those who have helped them in early days of struggle; she experienced a generous glow and meditated delicate benevolence. At least the bread-and-butter must be recouped an hundredfold.

So great is the virtue of twenty pounds, if only they happen to be sent to the right address. Most money, however, seems to go astray.

CHAPTER IV

'FROM THE MIDST OF THE WHIRL'

'Really I must congratulate you on your latest, Sarah,' remarked Lady Blixworth, who was taking tea with Mrs. Bonfill. 'Trix Trevalla is carrying everything before her. The Glentorlys have had her to meet Lord Farringham, and he was delighted. The men adore her, and they do say women like her. All done in six weeks! You're a genius!'

Mrs. Bonfill made a deprecatory gesture of a *Non nobis* order. Her friend insisted amiably:

'Oh, yes, you are. You choose so well. You never make a mistake. Now do tell me what's going to happen. Does Mortimer Mervyn mean it? Of course she wouldn't hesitate.'

Mrs. Bonfill looked at her volatile friend with a good-humoured distrust.

'When you congratulate me, Viola,' she said, 'I generally expect to hear that something has gone wrong.'

'Oh, you believe what you're told about me,' the accused lady murmured plaintively.

'It's experience,' persisted Mrs. Bonfill. 'Have you anything that you think I sha'n't like to tell me about Trix Trevalla?'

'I don't suppose you'll dislike it, but I should. Need she drive in the park with Mrs. Fricker?' Her smile contradicted the regret of her tone, as she spread her hands out in affected surprise and appeal.

'Mrs. Fricker's a very decent sort of woman, Viola. You have a prejudice against her.'

'Yes, thank heaven! We all want money nowadays, but for my part I'd starve sooner than get it from the Frickers.'

'Oh, that's what you want me to believe?'

'Dearest Sarah, no! That's what I'm afraid her enemies and yours will say.'

'I see,' smiled Mrs. Bonfill indulgently. She always acknowledged that Viola was neat – as a siege-gun might admit it of the field artillery.

'Couldn't you give her a hint? The gossip about Beaufort Chance doesn't so much matter, but – ' Lady Blixworth looked as if she expected to be interrupted, even pausing an instant to allow the opportunity. Mrs. Bonfill obliged her.

'There's gossip about Beaufort, is there?'

'Oh, there is, of course – that can't be denied; but it really doesn't matter as long as Mortimer doesn't hear about it.'

'Was there never more than one aspirant at a time when you were young?'

'As long as you're content, I am,' Lady Blixworth declared in an injured manner. 'It's not my business what Mrs. Trevalla does.'

'Don't be huffy,' was Mrs. Bonfill's maternal advice. 'As far as I can see, everything is going splendidly.'

'It is to be Mortimer?'

'How can I tell, my dear? If Mortimer Mervyn should ask my advice, which really isn't likely, what could I say except that Trix is a charming woman, and that I know of nothing against it?'

'She must be very well off, by the way she does things.' There was an inflection of question in her voice, but no direct interrogatory.

'Doubtless,' said Mrs. Bonfill. Often the craftiest suggestions failed in face of her broad imperturbability.

Lady Blixworth smiled at her. Mrs. Bonfill shook her head in benign rebuke. The two understood one another, and on the whole liked one another very well.

'All right, Sarah,' said Lady Blixworth; 'but if you want my opinion, it is that she's out-running the constable, unless – '

'Well, go on.'

'You give me leave? You won't order me out? Well, unless – Well, as I said, why drive Mrs. Fricker round the Park? Why take Connie Fricker to the Quinby-Lees's dance?'

'Oh, everybody goes to the Quinby-Lees's. She's never offered to bring them here or anywhere that matters.'

'You know the difference; perhaps the Frickers don't.'

'That's downright malicious, Viola. And of course they do; at least they live to find it out. No, you can't put me out of conceit with Trix Trevalla.'

'You're so loyal,' murmured Lady Blixworth in admiration. 'Really Sarah's as blind as a bat sometimes,' she reflected as she got into her carriage.

A world of people at once inquisitive and clear-sighted would render necessary either moral perfection or reckless defiance; indifference and obtuseness preserve a place for that mediocrity of conduct which characterises the majority. Society at large had hitherto found small fault with Trix Trevalla, and what it said, when passed through Lady Blixworth's resourceful intellect, gained greatly both in volume and in point. No doubt she had very many gowns, no doubt she spent money, certainly she flirted, possibly she was, for so young and pretty a woman, a trifle indiscreet. But she gave the impression of being able to take care of herself, and her attractions, combined with Mrs. Bonfill's unwavering patronage, would have sufficed to excuse more errors than she had been found guilty of. It was actually true that, while men admired, women liked her. There was hardly a discordant voice to break in harshly on her triumph.

There is no place like the top – especially when it is narrow, and will not hold many at a time. The natives of it have their peculiar joy, those who have painfully climbed theirs. Trix Trevalla seemed, to herself at least, very near the top; if she were not quite on it, she could put her head up over the last ledge and see it, and feel that with one more hoist she would be able to land herself there. It is unnecessary to recite the houses she went to, and would be (save for the utter lack of authority such a list would have) invidious; it would be tiresome to retail compliments and conquests. But the smallest, choicest gatherings began to know her, and houses which were not fashionable but something much beyond – eternal pillars supporting London society – welcomed her. This was no success of curiosity, of whim, of a season; it was the establishment of a position for life. From the purely social point of view, even a match with Mervyn could do little more. So Trix was tempted to declare in her pride.

But the case had other aspects, of course. It was all something of a struggle, however victorious; it may be supposed that generally it is. Security is hard to believe in, and there is always a craving to make the strong position impregnable. Life alone at twenty-six is – lonely. These things were in her mind, as they might have been in the thoughts of any woman so placed. There was another consideration, more special to herself, which could not be excluded from view: she had begun to realise what her manner of life cost. Behold her sitting before books and bills that revealed the truth beyond possibility of error or of gloss! Lady Blixworth's instinct had not been at fault. Trix's mouth grew rather hard again, and her eyes coldly resolute, as she studied these disagreeable documents.

From such studies she had arisen to go to dinner with Beaufort Chance and to meet the Frickers. She sat next Fricker, and talked to him most of the time, while Beaufort was very attentive to Mrs. Fricker, and the young man who had been procured for Connie Fricker fulfilled his appointed function. Fricker was not a bad-looking man, and was better bred and less aggressive than his wife or daughter. Trix found him not so disagreeable as she had expected; she encouraged him to talk on his own subjects, and began to find him interesting; by the end of dinner she had discovered that he, or at least his conversation, was engrossing. The old theme of making money without working for it, by gaming or betting, by chance or speculation, by black magic or white, is ever attractive to the children of men. Fricker could talk very well about it; he produced the impression that it was exceedingly easy to be rich; it seemed to be anybody's own fault if he were poor. Only at the end did he throw in any qualification of this broad position.

'Of course you must know the ropes, or find somebody who does.'

'There's the rub, Mr. Fricker. Don't people who know them generally keep their knowledge to themselves?'

'They've a bit to spare for their friends sometimes.' His smile was quietly reflective.

Beaufort Chance had hinted that some such benevolent sentiments might be found to animate Mr. Fricker. He had even used the idea as a bait to lure Trix to the dinner. Do what she would, she could not help giving Fricker a glance, half-grateful, half-provocative. Vanity – new-born of her great triumph – made her feel that her presence there was really a thing to be repaid. Her study of those documents tempted her to listen when the suggestion of repayment came. In the drawing-room Trix found herself inviting Mrs. Fricker to call. Youthful experiences made Trix socially tolerant in one direction if she were socially ambitious in another. She had none of Lady Blixworth's shudders, and was ready to be nice to Mrs. Fricker. Still her laugh was conscious, and she blushed a little when Beaufort Chance thanked her for making herself so pleasant.

All through the month there were renewed and continual rumours of what the Tsar meant to do. A speech by Lord Farringham might seem to dispose of them, but there were people who did not trust Lord Farringham – who, in fact, knew better. There were telegrams from abroad, there were mysterious paragraphs claiming an authority too high to be disclosed to the vulgar, there were leaders asking whether it were actually the fact that nothing was going to be done; there was an agitation about the Navy, another final exposure of the methods of the War Office, and philosophic attacks on the system of party government. Churchmen began to say that they were also patriots, and dons to remind the country that they were citizens. And – in the end – what did the Tsar mean to do? That Potentate gave no sign. What of that? Had not generals uttered speeches and worked out professional problems? Lord Glentorly ordered extensive manoeuvres, and bade the country rely on him. The country seemed a little doubtful; or, anyhow, the Press told it that it was. 'The atmosphere is electric,' declared Mr. Liffey in an article in 'The Sentinel': thousands read it in railway carriages and looked grave; they had not seen Mr. Liffey's smile.

Things were in this condition, and the broadsheets blazing in big letters, when one afternoon a hansom whisked along Wych Street and set down a lady in a very neat grey frock at the entrance of Danes Inn. Trix trod the pavement of that secluded spot and ascended the stairs of 6A with an amusement and excitement far different from Peggy Ryle's matter-of-fact familiarity. She had known lodging-houses; they were as dirty as this, but there the likeness ended. They had been new, flimsy, confined; this looked old, was very solid and relatively spacious; they had been noisy, it was very quiet; they had swarmed with children, here were none; the whole place seemed to her quasi-monastic; she blushed for herself as she passed through. Her knock on Airey Newton's door was timid.

Airey's amazement at the sight of her was unmistakable. He drew back saying:

'Mrs. Trevalla! Is it really you?'

The picture he had in his mind was so different. Where was the forlorn girl in the widow's weeds? This brilliant creature surely was not the same!

But Trix laughed and chattered, insisting that she was herself.

'I couldn't wear mourning all my life, could I?' she asked. 'You didn't mean me to, when we had our talk in Paris?'

'I'm not blaming, only wondering.' For a moment she almost robbed him of speech; he busied himself with the tea (there was a cake to-day) while she flitted about the room, not omitting to include Airey himself in her rapid scrutiny. She marked the shortness of his hair, the trimness of his beard, and approved Peggy's work, little thinking it was Peggy's.

'It's delightful to be here,' she exclaimed as she sat down to tea.

'I took your coming as a bad omen,' said Airey, smiling; 'but I hope there's nothing very wrong?'

'I'm an impostor. Everything is just splendidly right, and I came to tell you.'

'It was very kind.' He had not quite recovered from his surprise yet.

'I thought you had a right to know. I owe it all to your advice, you see. You told me to come back to life. Well, I've come.'

She was alive enough, certainly; she breathed animation and seemed to diffuse vitality; she was positively eager in her living.

'You told me to have my revenge, to play with life. Don't you remember? Fancy your forgetting, when I've remembered so well! To die of heat rather than of cold – surely you remember, Mr. Newton?'

'Every word, now you say it,' he nodded. 'And you're acting on that?'

'For all I'm worth,' laughed Trix.

He sat down opposite her, looking at her with a grave but still rather bewildered attention.

'And it works well?' he asked after a pause, and, as it seemed, a conscientious examination of her.

'Superb!' She could not resist adding, 'Haven't you heard anything about me?'

'In here?' asked Airey, waving his arm round the room, and smiling.

'No, I suppose you wouldn't,' she laughed; 'but I'm rather famous, you know. That's why I felt bound to come and tell you – to let you see what great things you've done. Yes, it's quite true, you gave me the impulse.' She set down her cup and leant back in her chair, smiling brightly at him. 'Are you afraid of the responsibility?'

'Everything seems so prosperous,' said Airey. 'I forgot, but I have heard one person speak of you. Do you know Peggy Ryle?'

'I know her by sight. Is she a friend of yours?'

'Yes, and she told me of some of your triumphs.'

'Oh, not half so well as I shall tell you myself!' Trix was evidently little interested in Peggy Ryle. To Airey himself Peggy's doubts and criticism seemed now rather absurd; this bright vision threw them into the shade of neglect.

Trix launched out. It was the first chance she had enjoyed of telling to somebody who belonged to the old life the wonderful things about the new. Indeed who else of the old life was left? Graves, material or metaphorical, covered all that had belonged to it. Mrs. Bonfill was always kind, but with her there was not the delicious sense of the contrast that must rise before the eyes of the listener. Airey gave her that; he had heard of the lodging-houses, he knew about the four years with Vesey Trevalla; it was evident he had not forgotten the forlornness and the widow's weeds of Paris. He then could appreciate the change, the great change, that still amazed and dazzled Trix herself. It was not in ostentation, but in the pure joy of victory, that she flung great names at him, would have him know that the highest of them were familiar to her, and that the woman who now sat talking to him, friend to friend, amidst the dinginess of Danes Inn, was a sought-after, valued, honoured guest in all these houses. Peggy Ryle went to some of the houses also, but she had never considered that talk about them would interest Airey Newton. She might be right or wrong – Trix Trevalla was certainly right in guessing that talk about herself in the houses would.

'You seem to be going it, Mrs. Trevalla,' he said at last, unconsciously reaching out for his pipe.

'I am,' said Trix. 'Yes, do smoke. So will I.' She produced her cigarette-case. 'Well, I've arrears to make up, haven't I?' She glanced round. 'And you live here?' she asked.

'Always. I know nothing of all you've been talking about.'

'You wouldn't care about it, anyhow, would you?' Her tones were gentle and consolatory. She accepted the fact that it was all impossible to him, that the door was shut, and comforted him in his exclusion.

'I don't suppose I should, and at all events – ' He shrugged his shoulders. If her impression had needed confirmation, here it was. 'And what's to be the end of it with you?' he asked.

'End? Why should there be an end? It's only just begun,' cried Trix.

'Well, there are ends that are beginnings of other things,' he suggested. What Peggy had told him recurred to his mind, though certainly there was no sign of Mrs. Trevalla being in trouble on that or any other score.

Yet his words brought a shadow to Trix's face, a touch of irritation into her manner.

'Oh, some day, I daresay,' she said. 'Yes, I suppose so. I'm not thinking about that either just now. I'm just thinking about myself. That's what you meant me to do?'

'It seems to me that my responsibility is growing, Mrs. Trevalla.'

'Yes, that's it; it is!' Trix was delighted with the whimsicality of the idea. 'You're responsible for it all, though you sit quietly here and nobody knows anything about you. I shall come and report myself from time to time. I'm obedient up to now?'

'Well, I'm not quite sure. Did I tell you to – ?'

'Yes, yes, to take my revenge, you know. Oh, you remember, and you can't shirk it now.' She began to laugh at the half-humorous gravity of Airey's face, as she insisted on his responsibility. This talk with him, the sort of relations that she was establishing with him, promised to give a new zest to her life, a pleasant diversion for her thoughts. He would make a splendid onlooker, and she would select all the pleasant things for him to see. Of course there was nothing really unpleasant, but there were a few things that it would not interest him to hear. There were things that even Mrs. Bonfill did not hear, although she would have been able to understand them much better than he.

Trix found her host again looking at her with an amused and admiring scrutiny. She was well prepared for it; the most select of parties had elicited no greater care in the choice of her dress than this visit to Danes Inn. Was not the contrast to be made as wonderful and striking as possible?

'Shall I do you credit?' she asked in gay mockery.

'You're really rather marvellous,' laughed Airey. 'And I suppose you'll come out all right.'

A hint of doubt crept into his voice. Trix glanced at him quickly.

'If I don't, you'll have to look after me,' she warned him.

He was grave now, not solemn, but, as it seemed, meditative.

'What if I think only of myself too?' he asked.

Trix laughed at the idea. 'There'd be no sort of excuse for you,' she reminded him.

'I suppose not,' he admitted, rather ruefully.

'But I'm going to come out most splendidly all right, so we won't worry about that.' As she spoke she had been putting on her gloves, and now she rose from her chair. 'I must go; got an early dinner and a theatre.' She looked round the room, and then back to Airey; her lips parted in an appealing confidential smile that drew an answer from him, and made him feel what her power was. 'Do you know, I don't want – I positively don't want – to go, Mr. Newton.'

'The attractions are so numerous, so unrivalled?'

'It's so quiet, so peaceful, so out of it all.'

'That a recommendation to you?' He raised his brows.

'Well, it's all a bit of a rush and a fight, and – and so on. I love it all, but just now and then' – she came to him and laid her hand lightly on his arm – 'just now and then may I come again?' she implored. 'I shall like to think that I've got it to come to.'

'It's always here, Mrs. Trevalla, and, except for me, generally empty.'

'Generally?' Her mocking tone hid a real curiosity; but Airey's manner was matter-of-fact.

'Oh, Peggy Ryle comes, and one or two of her friends, now and then. But I could send them away. Any time's the same to them.'

'Miss Ryle comes? She's beautiful, I think; don't you?'

'Now am I a judge? Well, yes, I think Peggy's attractive.'

'Oh, you're all hypocrites! Well, you must think me attractive too, or I won't come.'

It was a long while since Airey Newton had been flirted with. He recognised the process, however, and did not object to it; it also appeared to him that Trix did it very well.

'If you come, I shall think you most attractive.'

Trix relapsed into sincerity and heartiness. 'I've enjoyed coming awfully,' she said. Airey found the sincerity no less attractive. 'I shall think about you.'

'From the midst of the whirl?'

'Yes, from the midst of the whirl! Good-bye.'

She left behind her a twofold and puzzling impression. There was the woman of the world, with airs and graces a trifle elaborate, perhaps, in their prettiness, the woman steeped in society, engrossed with its triumphs, fired with its ambitions. But there had been visible from time to time, or had seemed to peep out, another woman, the one who had come to see her friend, had felt the need of talking it all over with him, of sharing it and getting sympathy in it, and who had in the end dropped her graces and declared with a frank heartiness that she had enjoyed coming 'awfully.' Airey Newton pulled his beard and smoked a pipe over these two women, as he sat alone. With some regret he came to the conclusion that as a permanent factor, as an influence in guiding and shaping Trix Trevalla's life, the second woman would not have much chance against the first. Everything was adverse to the second woman in the world in which Trix lived.

And he had sent her to that world? So she declared, partly in mockery perhaps, enjoying the incongruity of the idea with his dull life, his dingy room, his shabby coat. Yet he traced in the persistence with which she had recurred to the notion something more than mere chaff. The idea might be fanciful or whimsical, but there it was in her mind, dating from their talk at Paris. Unquestionably it clung to her, and in some vague way she based on it an obligation on his part, and thought it raised a claim on hers, a claim that he should not judge her severely or condemn the way she lived; perhaps, more vaguely still, a claim that he should help her if ever she needed help.

CHAPTER V

THE WORLD RECALCITRANT

Beaufort Chance was no genius in a drawing-room – that may be accepted on Lady Blixworth's authority. In concluding that he was a fool in the general affairs of life she went beyond her premises and her knowledge. Mrs. Bonfill, out of a larger experience, had considered that he would do more than usually well; he was ingenious, hard-working, and conciliatory, of affable address and sufficient tact; Mrs. Bonfill seemed to have placed him with judgment, and Mr. Dickinson (who led the House) was content with his performances. Yet perhaps after all he was, in the finest sense of the term, a fool. He could not see how things would look to other people, if other people came to know them; he hardly perceived when he was sailing very near the wind; the probability of an upset did not occur to him. He saw with his own eyes only; their view was short, and perhaps awry.

Fricker was his friend; he had bestowed favours on Fricker, or at least on Fricker's belongings, for whose debts Fricker assumed liability. If Fricker were minded to repay the obligation, was there any particular harm in that? Beaufort could not see it. If, again, the account being a little more than squared, he in his turn equalised it, leaving Fricker's kindness to set him at a debit again, and again await his balancing, what harm? It seemed only the natural way of things when business and friendship went hand in hand. The Frickers wanted one thing, he wanted another. If each could help the other to the desired object, good was done to both, hurt to nobody. Many things are private which are not wrong; delicacy is different from shame, reticence from concealment. These relations between himself and Fricker were not fit subjects for gossip, but Beaufort saw no sin in them. Fricker, it need not be added, was clearly, and even scornfully, of the same opinion.

But Fricker's business affairs were influenced, indeed most materially affected, by what the Tsar meant to do, and by one or two kindred problems then greatly exercising the world of politics, society, and finance. Beaufort Chance was not only in the House, he was in the Government. Humbly in, it is true, but actually. Still, what then? He was not in the Cabinet. Did he know secrets? He knew none; of course he would never have used secrets or divulged them. Things told to him, or picked up by him, were *ex hypothesi* not secrets, or he would never have come to know them. Fricker had represented all this to him, and, after some consideration and hesitation, Fricker's argument had seemed very sound.

Must a man be tempted to argue thus or to accept such arguments? Beaufort scorned the idea, but, lest he should have been in error on this point, it may be said that there was much to tempt him. He was an extravagant man; he sat for an expensive constituency; he knew (his place taught him still better) the value of riches – of real wealth, not of a beggarly competence. He wanted wealth and he wanted Trix Trevalla. He seemed to see how he could work towards the satisfaction of both desires at the same time and along the same lines. Mervyn was his rival with Trix – every day made that plain. He had believed himself on the way to win till Mervyn was brought on the scene – by Mrs. Bonfill, whom he now began to hate. Mervyn had rank and many other advantages. To fight Mervyn every reinforcement was needed. As wealth tempted himself, so he knew it would and must tempt Trix; he was better informed as to her affairs than Mrs. Bonfill, and shared Lady Blixworth's opinion about them.

Having this opinion, and a lively wish to ingratiate himself with Trix, he allowed her to share in some of the benefits which his own information and Fricker's manipulation of the markets brought to their partnership. Trix, conscious of money slipping away, very ready to put it back, reckless and ignorant, was only too happy in the opportunity. She seemed also very grateful, and Beaufort was encouraged to persevere. For a little while his kindness to Trix escaped Fricker's notice, but not for

long. As soon as Fricker discovered it, his attitude was perfectly clear and, to himself, no more than reasonable.

'You've every motive for standing well with Mrs. Trevalla, I know, my dear fellow,' said he, licking his big cigar and placing his well-groomed hat on Beaufort's table. 'But what motive have I? Everybody we let in means one more to share the – the profit – perhaps, one might add, to increase the risk. Now why should I let Mrs. Trevalla in? Any more than, for instance, I should let – shall we say – Mrs. Bonfill in?' Fricker did not like Mrs. Bonfill since she had quailed before Viola Blixworth.

'Oh, if you take it like that!' muttered Beaufort crossly.

'I don't take it any way. I put the case. It would be different if Mrs. Trevalla were a friend of mine or of my family.'

That was pretty plain for Fricker. As a rule Mrs. Fricker put the things plainly to him, and he transmitted them considerably disguised and carefully wrapped in his dry humour. On this occasion he allowed his hint to be fairly obvious; he knew Beaufort intimately by now.

Beaufort looked at him, feeling rather uncomfortable.

'Friends do one another good turns; I don't go about doing them to anybody I meet, just for fun,' continued Fricker.

Beaufort nodded a slow assent.

'Of course we don't bargain with a lady,' smiled Fricker, thoughtfully flicking off his ash. 'But, on the other hand, ladies are very quick to understand. Eh, Beaufort? I daresay you could convey – ?' He stuck the cigar back into his mouth.

This was the conversation that led to the little dinner-party hereinbefore recorded; Fricker had gone to it not doubting that Trix Trevalla understood; Mrs. Fricker did not doubt it either when Trix had been so civil in the drawing-room. Trix herself had thought she ought to be civil, as has been seen; it may, however, be doubted whether Beaufort Chance had made her understand quite how much a matter of business the whole thing was. She did not realise that she, now or about to be a social power, was to do what Lady Blixworth would not and Mrs. Bonfill dared not – was to push the Frickers, to make their cause hers, to open doors for them, and in return was to be told when to put money in this stock or that, and when to take it out again. She was told when to do these things, and did them. The money rolled in, and she was wonderfully pleased. If it would go on rolling in like this, its rolling out again (as it did) was of no consequence; her one pressing difficulty seemed in a fair way to be removed. Something she did for the Frickers; she got them some minor invitations, and asked them to meet some minor folk, and thought herself very kind. Now and then they seemed to hint at more, just as now and then Beaufort Chance's attentions became inconveniently urgent. On such occasions Trix laughed and joked and evaded, and for the moment wriggled out of any pledge. As regards the seemliness of the position, her state of mind was very much Beaufort's own; she saw no harm in it, but she did not talk about it; some people were stupid, others malicious. It was, after all, a private concern. So she said nothing to anybody – not even to Mrs. Bonfill. There was little sign of Airey Newton's 'second woman' in her treatment of this matter; the first held undivided sway.

If what the Tsar meant to do and the kindred problems occupied Fricker in one way, they made no less claim on Mervyn's time in another. He was very busy in his office and in the House; he had to help Lord Glentorly to persuade the nation to rely on him. Still he made some opportunities for meeting Trix Trevalla; she was always very ready to meet him when Beaufort Chance and Fricker were not to the fore. He was a man of methodical mind, which he made up slowly. He took things in their order, and gave them their proper proportion of time. He was making his career. It could hardly be doubted that he was also paying attentions, and it was probable that he meant to pay his addresses, to Trix Trevalla. But his progress was leisurely; the disadvantages attaching to her perhaps made him slower, even though in the end he would disregard them. In Trix's eyes he was one or two things worse than leisurely. He was very confident and rather condescending. On this point she did

speak to Mrs. Bonfill, expressing some impatience. Mrs. Bonfill was sympathetic as always, but also, as always, wise.

'Well, and if he is, my dear?' Her smile appealed to Trix to admit that everything which she had been objecting to and rebelling against was no more than what any woman of the world would expect and allow for.

Trix's expression was still mutinous. Mrs. Bonfill proceeded with judicial weightiness.

'Now look at Audrey Pollington – you know that big niece of Viola's? Do you suppose that, if Mortimer paid her attentions, she'd complain of him for being condescending? She'd just thank her stars, and take what she could get.' (These very frank expressions are recorded with an apology.)

'I'm not Audrey Pollington,' muttered Trix, using a weak though common argument.

There are moments when youth is the better for a judicious dose of truth.

'My dear,' remarked Mrs. Bonfill, 'most people would say that what Audrey Pollington didn't mind, you needn't.' Miss Pollington was grand-daughter to a duke (female line), and had a pretty little fortune of her own. Mrs. Bonfill could not be held wrong for seeking to temper her young friend's arrogance.

'It's not my idea of making love, that's all,' said Trix obstinately.

'We live and learn.' Mrs. Bonfill implied that Trix had much to learn. 'Don't lose your head, child,' she added warningly. 'You've made plenty of people envious. Don't give them any chance.' She paused before she asked, 'Do you see much of Beaufort now?'

'A certain amount.' Trix did not wish to be drawn on this point.

'Well, Trix?'

'We keep friends,' smiled Trix.

'Yes, that's right. I wouldn't see too much of him, though.'

'Till my lord has made up his mind?'

'Silly!' That one word seemed to Mrs. Bonfill sufficient answer. She had, however, more confidence in Trix than the one word implied. Young women must be allowed their moods, but most of them acted sensibly in the end; that was Mrs. Bonfill's experience.

Trix came and kissed her affectionately; she was fond of Mrs. Bonfill and really grateful to her; it is possible, besides, that she had twinges of conscience; her conversations with Mrs. Bonfill were marked by a good deal of reserve. It was all very well to say that the matters reserved did not concern Mrs. Bonfill, but even Trix in her most independent mood could not feel quite convinced of this. She knew – though she tried not to think of it – that she was playing a double game; in one side of it Mrs. Bonfill was with her and she accepted that lady's help; the other side was sedulously hidden. It was not playing fair. Trix might set her teeth sometimes and declare she would do it, unfair though it was; or more often she would banish thought altogether by a plunge into amusement; but the thought and the consciousness were there. Well, she was not treating anybody half as badly as most people had treated her. She hardened her heart and went forward on her dangerous path, confident that she could keep clear of pitfalls. Only – yes, it was all rather a fight; once or twice she thought of Danes Inn with a half-serious yearning for its quiet and repose.

Some of what Mrs. Bonfill did not see Lady Blixworth did – distantly, of course, and mainly by putting an observed two together with some other observed but superficially unrelated two – a task eminently congenial to her mind. Natural inclination was quickened by family duty. 'I wish,' Lady Blixworth said, 'that Sarah would have undertaken dear Audrey; but since she won't, I must do the best I can for her myself.' It was largely with a view to doing the best she could for Audrey that Lady Blixworth kept her eye on Trix Trevalla – a thing of which Trix was quite unconscious. Lady Blixworth's motives command respect, and it must be admitted that Miss Pollington did not render her relative's dutiful assistance superfluous. She was a tall, handsome girl, rather inert, not very ready in conversation. Lady Blixworth, who was never absurd even in praise, pitched on the epithet 'statuesque' as peculiarly suitable. Society acquiesced. 'How statuesque Miss Pollington is!'

became the thing to say to one's neighbour or partner. Lady Blixworth herself said it with a smile sometimes; most people, content as ever to accept what is given to them, were grave enough.

Audrey herself was extremely pleased with the epithet, so delighted, indeed, that her aunt thought it necessary to administer a caution.

'When people praise you or your appearance for a certain quality, Audrey dear,' she observed sweetly, 'it generally means that you've got that quality in a marked degree.'

'Yes, of course, Aunt Viola,' said Audrey, rather surprised, but quite understanding.

'And so,' pursued Aunt Viola in yet more gentle tones, 'it isn't necessary for you to cultivate it consciously.' She stroked Audrey's hand with much affection. 'Because they tell you you're statuesque, for instance, don't try to go about looking like the Venus of Milo in a pair of stays.'

'I'm sure I don't, Auntie,' cried poor Audrey, blushing piteously. She was conscious of having posed a little bit as Mr. Guise, the eminent sculptor, passed by.

'On the contrary, it does no harm to remember that one has a tendency in a certain direction; then one is careful to keep a watch on oneself and not overdo it. I don't want you to skip about, my dear, but you know what I mean.'

Audrey nodded rather ruefully. What is the good of being statuesque if you may not live up to it?

'You aren't hurt with me, darling?' cooed Aunt Viola.

Audrey declared she was not hurt, but she felt rather bewildered.

With the coming of June, affairs of the heart and affairs of the purse became lamentably and unpoetically confounded in Trix Trevalla's life and thoughts. Mrs. Bonfill was hinting prodigiously about Audrey Pollington; Lady Blixworth was working creditably hard, and danger undoubtedly threatened from that quarter. Trix must exert herself if Mervyn were not to slip through the meshes. On the other hand, the problems were rather acute. Lord Farringham had been decidedly pessimistic in a speech in the House of Lords, Fricker was hinting at a great *coup*, Beaufort Chance was reminding her in a disagreeably pressing fashion of how much he had done for her and of how much he still could do. Trix had tried one or two little gambles on her own account and met with serious disaster; current expenses rose rather than fell. In the midst of all her gaiety Trix grew a little careworn and irritable; a line or two showed on her face; critics said that Mrs. Trevalla was doing too much, and must be more careful of her looks. Mrs. Bonfill began to be vaguely uncomfortable about her favourite. But still Trix held on her way, her courage commanding more admiration than any other quality she manifested at this time. Indeed she had moments of clear sight about herself, but her shibboleth of 'revenge' still sufficed to stiffen, if not to comfort, her.

Some said that Lord Farringham's pessimistic speech was meant only for home consumption, the objects being to induce the country to spend money freely and also to feel that it was no moment for seeking to change the Crown's responsible advisers. Others said that it was intended solely for abroad, either as a warning or, more probably, as an excuse to enable a foreign nation to retire with good grace from an untenable position. A minority considered that the Prime Minister had perhaps said what he thought. On the whole there was considerable uneasiness.

'What does it all mean, Mr. Fricker?' asked Trix, when that gentleman called on her, cool, alert, and apparently in very good spirits.

'It means that fools are making things smooth for wise men, as usual,' he answered, and looked at her with a keen glance.

'If you will only make them plain to one fool!' she suggested with a laugh.

'I presume you aren't interested in international politics as such?'

'Not a bit,' said Trix heartily.

'But if there's any little venture going – ' He smiled as he tempted her, knowing that she would yield.

'You've been very kind to me,' murmured Trix.

'It's a big thing this time – and a good thing. You've heard Beaufort mention the Dramoffsky Concessions, I daresay?'

Trix nodded.

'He'd only mention them casually, of course,' Fricker continued with a passing smile. 'Well, if there's trouble, or serious apprehension of it, the Dramoffsky Concessions would be blown sky-high – because it's all English capital and labour, and for a long time anyhow the whole thing would be brought to a standstill, and the machinery all go to the deuce, and so on.'

Again Trix nodded wisely.

'Whereas, if everything's all right, the Concessions are pretty well all right too. Have you noticed that they've been falling a good deal lately? No, I suppose not. Most papers don't quote them.'

'I haven't looked for them. I've had my eye on the Glowing Star.' Trix was anxious to give an impression of being business-like in one matter anyhow.

'Oh, that's good for a few hundreds, but don't you worry about it. I'll look after that for you. As I say, if there's serious apprehension, Dramoffskys go down. Well, there will be – more serious than there is now. And after that – '

'War?' asked Trix in some excitement.

'We imagine not. I'd say we know, only one never really knows anything. No, there will be a revival of confidence. And then Dramoffskys – well, you see what follows. Now it's a little risky – not very – and it's a big thing if it comes off, and what I'm telling you is worth a considerable sum as a marketable commodity. Are you inclined to come in?'

To Trix there could be but one answer. Coming in with Mr. Fricker had always meant coming out better for the process. She thanked him enthusiastically.

'All right. Lodge five thousand at your bankers' as soon as you can, and let me have it.'

'Five thousand!' Trix gasped a little. She had not done the thing on such a scale as this before.

'It's always seemed to me waste of time to fish for herrings with a rod and line,' observed Fricker; 'but just as you like, of course.'

'Does Beaufort think well of it?'

'Do you generally find us differing?' Fricker smiled ironically.

'I'll go in,' said Trix. 'I shall make a lot, sha'n't I?'

'I think so. Hold your tongue, and stay in till I tell you to come out. You can rely on me.'

Nothing more passed between them then. Trix was left to consider the plunge that she had made. Could it possibly go wrong? If it did – she reckoned up her position. If it went wrong – if the five thousand or the bulk of it were lost, what was left to her? After payment of all liabilities, she would have about ten thousand pounds. That she had determined to keep intact. On the interest of that – at last the distinction was beginning to thrust itself on her mind with a new and odious sharpness – she would have to live. To live – not to have that flat, or those gowns, or that brougham, or this position; not to have anything that she wanted and loved, but just to live. *Pensions* again! It would come to going back to *pensions*.

No, would it? There was another resource. Trix, rather anxious, a little fretful and uneasy, was sanguine and resolute still. She wrote to Beaufort Chance, telling him what she had done, thanking him, bidding him thank Fricker, expressing the amplest gratitude to both gentlemen. Then she sat down and invited Mervyn to come and see her; he had not been for some days, and, busy as he was, Trix thought it was time to see him, and to blot out, for a season at least, all idea of Audrey Pollington. She reckoned that an interview with her, properly managed, would put Audrey and her ally out of action for some little while to come.

Mervyn obeyed her summons, but not in a very cheerful mood. Trix's efforts to pump him about the problems and the complications were signally unsuccessful. He snubbed her, giving her to understand that he was amazed at being asked such questions. What, then, was Beaufort Chance doing, she asked in her heart. She passed rapidly from the dangerous ground, declaring with a pout

that she thought he might have told her some gossip, to equip her for her next dinner party. He responded to her lighter mood with hardly more cordiality. Evidently there was something wrong with him, something which prevented her spell from working on him as it was wont. Trix was dismayed. Was her power gone? It could not be that statuesque Miss Pollington had triumphed, or was even imminently dangerous.

At last Mervyn broke out with what he had to say. He looked, she thought, like a husband (not like Vesey Trevalla, but like the abstract conception), and a rather imperious one, as he took his stand on her hearthrug and frowned down at her.

'You might know – no, you do know – the best people in London,' he said, 'and yet I hear of your going about with the Frickers! I should think Fricker's a rogue, and I know he's a cad. And the women!' Aristocratic scorn embittered his tongue.

'Whom have you heard it from?'

'Lots of people. Among others, Viola Blixworth.'

'Oh, Lady Blixworth! Of course you'd hear it from her!'

'It doesn't matter who tells me, if it's true.'

That was an annoying line to take. It was easy to show Lady Blixworth's motive, but it was impossible to deny the accuracy of what she said. A hundred safe witnesses would have confounded Trix had she denied.

'What in the world do you do it for?' he asked angrily and impatiently. 'What can Fricker do for you? Don't you see how you lower yourself? They'll be saying he's bought you next!'

Trix did not start, but a spot of colour came on her cheeks; her eyes were hard and wary as they watched Mervyn covertly. He came towards her, and, with a sudden softening of manner, laid his hand on hers.

'Drop them,' he urged. 'Don't have anything more to do with such a lot.'

Trix looked up at him; there were doubt and distress in her eyes. He was affectionate now, but also very firm.

'For my sake, drop them,' he said. 'You know people can't come where they may meet the Frickers.'

Trix was never slow of understanding; she saw very well what Mervyn meant. His words might be smooth, his manner might be kind, and, if she wished it at the moment, ready to grow more than kind. With all this he was asking, nay, he was demanding, that she should drop the Frickers. How difficult the path had suddenly grown; how hard it was to work her complicated plan!

'A good many people know them. There's Mr. Chance – ' she began timidly.

'Beaufort Chance! Yes, better if he didn't!' His lips, grimly closing again, were a strong condemnation of his colleague.

'They're kind people, really.'

'They're entirely beneath you – and beneath your friends.'

There was no mistaking the position. Mervyn was delivering an ultimatum. It was little use to say that he had no right because he had made her no offer. He had the power, which, it is to be feared, is generally more the question. And at what a moment the ultimatum came! Must Trix relinquish that golden dream of the Dramoffsky Concessions, and give up those hundreds – welcome if few – from the Glowing Star? Or was she to defy Mervyn and cast in her lot with the Frickers – and with Beaufort Chance?

'Promise me,' he said softly, with as near an approach to a lover's entreaty as his grave and condescending manner allowed. 'I never thought you'd make any difficulty. Do you really hesitate between doing what pleases me and what pleases Chance or the Frickers?'

Trix would have dearly liked to cry 'Yes, yes, yes!' Such a reply would, she considered, have been wholesome for Mortimer Mervyn, and it would have been most gratifying to herself. She dared not give it; it would mean far too much.

'I can't be actually rude,' she pleaded. 'I must do it gradually. But since you ask me, I will break with them as much and as soon as I can.'

'That's all I ask of you,' said Mervyn. He bent and kissed her hand with a reassuring air of homage and devotion. But evidently homage and devotion must be paid for. They bore a resemblance to financial assistance in that respect. Trix was becoming disagreeably conscious that people expected to be paid, in one way or another, for most things that they gave. Chance and Fricker wanted payment. Mervyn claimed it too. And to pay both as they asked seemed now impossible.

Somehow life appeared to have an objection to being played with, the world to be rather unmalleable as material, the revenge not to be the simple and triumphant progress that it had looked.

Trix Trevalla, under pressure of circumstances, got thus far on the way towards a judgment of herself and a knowledge of the world; the two things are closely interdependent.

CHAPTER VI

CHILDREN OF SHADOW

'A Politician! I'd as soon be a policeman,' remarked Miles Childwick, with delicate scorn. 'I don't dispute the necessity of either – I never dispute the necessity of things – but it would not occur to me to become either.'

'You're not tall enough for a policeman, anyhow,' said Elfreda Flood.

'Not if it became necessary to take you in charge, I admit' (Elfreda used to be called 'queenly' and had played Hippolyta), 'but your remark is impertinent in every sense of the term. Politicians and policemen are essentially the same.'

Everybody looked at the clock. They were waiting for supper at the Magnifique; it was Tommy Trent's party, and the early comers sat in a group in the luxurious outer room.

'From what I know of policemen in the witness-box, I incline to agree,' said Manson Smith.

'The salaries, however, are different,' yawned Tommy, without removing his eyes from the clock.

'I'm most infernally hungry,' announced Arty Kane, a robust-looking youth, somewhat famous as a tragic poet. 'Myra Lacrimans' was perhaps his best-known work.

Mrs. John Maturin smiled; she was not great at repartee outside her writings. 'It is late,' she observed.

'But while policemen,' pursued Miles Childwick, sublimely careless of interruption, 'while policemen make things endurable by a decent neglect of their duties (or how do we get home at night?), politicians are constantly raising the income tax. I speak with no personal bitterness, since to me it happens to be a small matter, but I observe a laceration of the feelings of my wealthy friends.'

'He'd go on all night, whether we listened or not,' said Horace Harnack, half in despair, half in admiration. 'I suppose it wouldn't do to have a song, Tommy?'

His suggestion met with no attention, for at the moment Tommy sprang to his feet, exclaiming, 'Here's Peggy at last!'

The big glass doors were swung open and Peggy came in. The five men advanced to meet her; Mrs. John Maturin smiled in a rather pitying way at Elfreda, but Elfreda took this rush quite as a matter of course and looked at the clock again.

'Is Airey here?' asked Peggy.

'Not yet,' replied Tommy. 'I hope he's coming, though.'

'He said something about being afraid he might be kept,' said Peggy; then she drew Tommy aside and whispered, 'Had to get his coat mended, you know.'

Tommy nodded cautiously.

'And she hasn't come either?' Peggy went on.

'No; and whoever she is, I hate her,' remarked Arty Kane. 'But who is she? We're all here.' He waved his arm round the assembly.

'Going to introduce you to society to-night, Arty,' his host promised. 'Mrs. Trevalla's coming.'

'Duchesses I know, and countesses I know,' said Childwick; 'but who –'

'Oh, nobody expected you to know,' interrupted Peggy. She came up to Elfreda and made a rapid scrutiny. 'New frock?'

Elfreda nodded with an assumption of indifference.

'How lucky!' said Peggy, who was evidently rather excited. 'You're always smart,' she assured Mrs. John Maturin.

Mrs. John smiled.

Timidly and with unfamiliar step Airey Newton entered the gorgeous apartment. Relief was dominant on his face when he saw the group of friends, and he made a hasty dart towards them, giving on the way a nervous glance at his shoes, which showed two or three spots of mud – the pavements were wet outside. He hastened to hide himself behind Elfreda Flood, and, thus sheltered, surveyed the scene.

'I was just saying, Airey, that politicians –'

Arty Kane stopped further progress by the hasty suggestion of a glass of sherry, and the two went off together to the side room, where supper was laid, leaving the rest again regarding the clock – except Peggy, who had put a half-crown in her glove, or her purse, or her pocket, and could not find it, and declared that she could not get home unless she did; she created no sympathy and (were such degrees possible) less surprise, when at last she distinctly recollected having left it on the piano.

'Whose half-crown on whose piano?' asked Manson Smith with a forensic frown.

When the sherry-bibbers returned with the surreptitious air usual in such cases, the group had undergone a marked change; it was clustered round a very brilliant person in a gown of resplendent blue, with a flash of jewels about her, a hint of perfume, a generally dazzling effect. Miles Childwick came up to Manson Smith.

'This,' said Childwick, 'we must presume to be Mrs. Trevalla. Let me be introduced, Manson, before my eyes are blinded by the blaze.'

'Is she a new flame of Tommy's?' asked Manson in a whisper.

The question showed great ignorance; but Manson was comparatively an outsider, and Miles Childwick let it pass with a scornful smile.

'What a pity we're not supping in the public room!' said Peggy.

'We might trot Mrs. Trevalla through first, in procession, you know,' suggested Tommy. 'It's awfully good of you to come. I hardly dared ask you,' he added to Trix.

'I was just as afraid, but Miss Ryle encouraged me. I met her two or three nights ago at Mrs. Bonfill's.'

They went in to supper. Trix was placed between Tommy and Airey Newton, Peggy was at the other end, supported by Childwick and Arty Kane. The rest disposed themselves, if not according to taste, yet with apparent harmony; there was, however, a momentary hesitation about sitting by Mrs. John. 'Mrs. John means just one glass more champagne than is good for one,' Childwick had once said, and the remark was felt to be just.

'No, politicians are essentially concerned with the things that perish,' resumed Miles Childwick; he addressed Peggy – Mrs. John was on his other side.

'Everything perishes,' observed Arty Kane, putting down his empty soup-cup with a refreshed and cheerful air.

'Do learn the use of language. I said "essentially concerned." Now we are essentially concerned with –'

Trix Trevalla heard the conversation in fragments. She did not observe that Peggy took much part in it, but every now and then she laughed in a rich gurgle, as though things and people in general were very amusing. Whenever she did this, all the young men looked at her and smiled, or themselves laughed too, and Peggy laughed more and, perhaps, blushed a little. Trix turned to Tommy and whispered, 'I like her.'

'Rather!' said Tommy. 'Here, waiter, bring some ice.'

Most of the conversation was far less formidable than Miles Childwick's. It was for the most part frank and very keen discussion of a number of things and persons entirely, or almost entirely, unfamiliar to Trix Trevalla. On the other hand, not one of the problems with which she, as a citizen and as a woman, had been so occupied was mentioned, and the people who filled her sky did not seem to have risen above the horizon here. Somebody did mention Russia once, and Horace Harnack expressed a desire to have 'a slap' at that great nation; but politics were evidently an alien plant, and

soon died out of the conversation. The last play or the last novel, the most recent success on the stage, the newest paradox of criticism, were the topics when gossip was ousted for a few moments from its habitual and evidently welcome sway. People's gossip, however, shows their tastes and habits better than anything else, and in this case Trix was not too dull to learn from it; it reproduced another atmosphere and told her that there was another world than hers. She turned suddenly to Airey Newton.

'We talk of living in London, but it's a most inadequate description. There must be ten Londons to live in!'

'Quite – without counting the slums.'

'We ought to say London A, or London B, or London C. Social districts, like the postal ones; only far more of them. I suppose some people can live in more than one?'

'Yes, a few; and a good many people pay visits.'

'Are you Bohemian?' she asked, indicating the company with a little movement of her hand.

'Look at them!' he answered. 'They are smart and spotless. I'm the only one who looks the part in the least. And, behold, I am frugal, temperate, a hard worker, and a scientific man!'

'There are believed to be Bohemians still in Kensington and Chelsea,' observed Tommy Trent. 'They will think anything you please, but they won't dine out without their husbands.'

'If that's the criterion, we can manage it nearer than Chelsea,' said Trix. 'This side of Park Lane, I think.'

'You've got to have the thinking too, though,' smiled Airey.

Miles Childwick had apparently been listening; he raised his voice a little and remarked: 'The divorce between the theoretical bases of immorality – '

'Falsely so called,' murmured Hanson Smith.

'And its practical development is one of the most – '

It was no use; Peggy gurgled helplessly, and hid her face in her napkin. Childwick scowled for an instant, then leant back in his chair, smiling pathetically.

'She is the living negation of serious thought,' he complained, regarding her affectionately.

Peggy, emerging, darted him a glance as she returned to her chicken.

'When I published "Myra Lacrimans" – ' began Arty Kane.

In an instant everybody was silent. They leant forward towards him with a grave and eager attention, signing to one another to keep still. Tommy whispered: 'Don't move for a moment, waiter!'

'Oh, confound you all!' exclaimed poor Arty Kane, as he joined in the general outburst of laughter.

Trix found herself swelling it light-heartedly.

'We've found by experience that that's the only way to stop him,' Tommy explained, as with a gesture he released the grinning waiter. 'He'll talk about "Myra" through any conversation, but absolute silence makes him shy. Peggy found it out. It's most valuable. Isn't it, Mrs. John?'

'Most valuable,' agreed Mrs. John. She had made no other contribution to the conversation for some time.

'All the same,' Childwick resumed, in a more conversational tone, but with unabated perseverance, 'what I was going to say is true. In nine cases out of ten the people who are – ' He paused a moment.

'Irregular,' suggested Manson Smith.

'Thank you, Manson. The people who are irregular think they ought to be regular, and the people who are regular have established their right to be irregular. There's a reason for it, of course – '

'It seems rather more interesting without one,' remarked Elfreda Flood.

'No reason, I think?' asked Horace Harnack, gathering the suffrages of the table.

'Certainly not,' agreed the table as a whole.

'To give reasons is a slur on our intellects and a waste of our time,' pronounced Manson Smith.

'It's such a terribly long while since I heard anybody talk nonsense on purpose,' Trix said to Airey, with a sigh of enjoyment.

'They do it all the time; and, yes, it's rather refreshing.'

'Does Mr. Childwick mind?'

'Mind?' interposed Tommy. 'Gracious, no! He's playing the game too; he knows all about it. He won't let on that he does, of course, but he does all the same.'

'The reason is,' said Childwick, speaking with lightning speed, 'that the intellect merely disestablishes morality, while the emotions disregard it. Thank you for having heard me with such patience, ladies and gentlemen.' He finished his champagne with a triumphant air.

'You beat us that time,' said Peggy, with a smile of congratulation.

Elfreda Flood addressed Harnack, apparently resuming an interrupted conversation.

'If I wear green I look horrid, and if she wears blue she looks horrid, and if we don't wear either green or blue, the scene looks horrid. I'm sure I don't know what to do.'

'It'll end in your having to wear green,' prophesied Harnack.

'I suppose it will,' Elfreda moaned disconsolately. 'She always gets her way.'

'I happen to know he reviewed it,' declared Arty Kane with some warmth, 'because he spelt "dreamed" with a "t." He always does. And he'd dined with me only two nights before!'

'Where?' asked Manson Smith.

'At my own rooms.'

'Then he certainly wrote it. I've dined with you there myself.'

Trix had fallen into silence, and Airey Newton seemed content not to disturb her. The snatches of varied talk fell on her ears, each with its implication of a different interest and a different life, all foreign to her. The very frivolity, the sort of schoolboy and chaffy friendliness of everybody's tone, was new in her experience, when it was united, as here it seemed to be, with a liveliness of wits and a nimble play of thought. The effect, so far as she could sum it up, was of carelessness combined with interest, independence without indifference, an alertness of mind which laughter softened. These people, she thought, were all poor (she did not include Tommy Trent, who was more of her own world), they were none of them well known, they did not particularly care to be, they aspired to no great position. No doubt they had to fight for themselves sometimes – witness Elfreda and her battle of the colours – but they fought as little as they could, and laughed while they fought, if fight they must. But they all thought and felt; they had emotions and brains. She knew, looking at Mrs. John's delicate fine face, that she too had brains, though she did not talk.

'I don't say,' began Childwick once more, 'that when Mrs. John puts us in a book, as she does once a year, she fails to do justice to our conversation, but she lamentably neglects and misrepresents her own.'

Trix had been momentarily uneasy, but Mrs. John was smiling merrily.

'I miss her pregnant assents, her brief but weighty disagreements, the rich background of silence which she imparts to the entertainment.'

Yes, Mrs. John had brains too, and evidently Miles Childwick and the rest knew it.

'When Arty wrote a sonnet on Mrs. John,' remarked Manson Smith, 'he made it only twelve lines long. The outside world jeered, declaring that such a thing was unusual, if not ignorant. But we of the elect traced the spiritual significance.'

'Are you enjoying yourself, Airey?' called Peggy Ryle.

He nodded to her cordially.

'What a comfort!' sighed Peggy. She looked round the table, laughed, and cried 'Hurrah!' for no obvious reason.

Trix whispered to Airey, 'She nearly makes me cry when she does that.'

'You can feel it?' he asked in a quick low question, looking at her curiously.

'Oh, yes, I don't know why,' she answered, glancing again at the girl whose mirth and exultation stirred her to so strange a mood.

Her eyes turned back to Airey Newton, and found a strong attraction in his face too. The strength and kindness of it, coming home to her with a keener realisation, were refined by the ever-present shadow of sorrow or self-discontent. This hint of melancholy persisted even while he took his share in the gaiety of the evening; he was cheerful, but he had not the exuberance of most of them; he was far from bubbling over in sheer joyousness like Peggy; he could not achieve even the unruffled and pain-proof placidity of Tommy Trent. Like herself then – in spite of a superficial remoteness from her, and an obviously nearer kinship with the company in life and circumstances – he was in spirit something of a stranger there. In the end he, like herself, must look on at the fun rather than share in it wholeheartedly. There was a background for her and him, rather dark and sombre; for the rest there seemed to be none; their joy blazed unshadowed. Whatever she had or had not attained in her attack on the world, however well her critical and doubtful fortunes might in the end turn out, she had not come near to reaching this; indeed it had never yet been set before her eyes as a thing within human reach. But how naturally it belonged to Peggy and her friends! There are children of the sunlight and children of the shadow. Was it possible to pass from one to the other, to change your origin and name? It seemed to her that, if she had not been born in the shadow, it had fallen on her full soon and heavily, and had stayed very long. Had her life now, her new life with all its brilliance, quite driven it away? All the day it had been dark and heavy on her; not even now was it wholly banished.

When the party broke up – it was not an early hour – Peggy came over to Airey Newton. Trix did not understand the conversation.

'I got your letter, but I'm not coming,' she said. 'I told you I wouldn't come, and I won't.' She was very reproachful, and seemed to consider that she had been insulted somehow.

'Oh, I say now, Peggy!' urged Tommy Trent, looking very miserable.

'It's your fault, and you know it,' she told him severely.

'Well, everybody else is coming,' declared Tommy. Airey said nothing, but nodded assent in a manner half-rueful, half-triumphant.

'It's shameful,' Peggy persisted.

There was a moment's pause. Trix, feeling like an eavesdropper, looked the other way, but she could not avoid hearing.

'But I've had a windfall, Peggy,' said Airey Newton. 'On my honour, I have.'

'Yes, on my honour, he has,' urged Tommy earnestly. 'A good thumping one, isn't it, Airey?'

'One of my things has been a success, you know.'

'Oh, he hits 'em in the eye sometimes, Peggy.'

'Are you two men telling anything like the truth?'

'The absolute truth.'

'Bible truth!' declared Tommy Trent.

'Well, then, I'll come; but I don't think it makes what Tommy did any better.'

'Who cares, if you'll come?' asked Tommy.

Suddenly Airey stepped forward to Trix Trevalla. His manner was full of hesitation – he was, in fact, awkward; but then he was performing a most unusual function. Peggy and Tommy Trent stood watching him, now and then exchanging a word.

'He's going to ask her,' whispered Peggy.

'Hanged if he isn't!' Tommy whispered back.

'Then he must have had it!'

'I told you so,' replied Tommy in an extraordinarily triumphant, imperfectly lowered voice.

Yes, Airey Newton was asking Trix to join his dinner-party.

'It's – it's not much in my line,' he was heard explaining, 'but Trent's promised to look after everything for me. It's a small affair, of course, and – and just a small dinner.'

'Is it?' whispered Tommy with a wink, but Peggy did not hear this time.

'If you'd come –'

'Of course I will,' said Trix. 'Write and tell me the day, and I shall be delighted.' She did not see why he should hesitate quite so much, but a glance at Peggy and Tommy showed her that something very unusual had happened.

'It'll be the first dinner-party he's ever given,' whispered Peggy excitedly, and she added to Tommy, 'Are you going to order it, Tommy?'

'I've asked him to,' interposed Airey, still with an odd mixture of pride and apprehension.

Peggy looked at Tommy suspiciously.

'If you don't behave well about it, I shall get up and go away,' was her final remark.

Trix's brougham was at the door – she found it necessary now to hire one for night-work, her own horse and man finding enough to do in the daytime – and after a moment's hesitation she offered to drive Airey Newton home, declaring that she would enjoy so much of a digression from her way. He had been looking on rather vaguely while the others were dividing themselves into hansom-cab parties, and she received the impression that he meant, when everybody was paired, to walk off quietly by himself. Peggy overheard her invitation and said with a sort of relief: —

'That'll do splendidly, Airey.'

Airey agreed, but it seemed with more embarrassment than pleasure.

But Trix was pleased to prolong, even by so little, the atmosphere and associations of the evening, to be able to talk about it a little more, to question him while she questioned herself also indirectly. She put him through a catechism about the members of the party, delighted to elicit anything that confirmed her notion of their independence, their carelessness, and their comradeship. He answered what she asked, but in a rather absent melancholy fashion; a pall seemed to have fallen on his spirits again. She turned to him, attracted, not repelled, by his relapse into sadness.

'We're not equal to it, you and I,' she said with a laugh. 'We don't live there; we can only pay a visit, as you said.'

He nodded, leaning back against the well-padded cushions with an air of finding unwonted ease. He looked tired and worn.

'Why? We work too hard, I suppose. Yes, I work too, in my way.'

'It's not work exactly,' he said. 'They work too, you know.'

'What is it then?' She bent forward to look at his face, pale in the light of the small carriage lamp.

'It's the Devil,' he told her. Their eyes met in a long gaze. Trix smiled appealingly. She had to go back to her difficult life – to Mervyn, to the Chance and Fricker entanglement. She felt alone and afraid.

'The Devil, is it? Have I raised him?' she asked. 'Well, you taught me how. If I – if I come to grief, you must help me.'

'You don't know in the least the sort of man you're talking to,' he declared, almost roughly.

'I know you're a good friend.'

'I am not,' said Airey Newton.

Again their eyes met, their hearts were like to open and tell secrets that daylight hours would hold safely hidden. But it is not far – save in the judgment of fashion – from the Magnifique to Danes Inn, and the horse moved at a good trot. They came to a stand before the gates.

'I don't take your word for that,' she declared, giving him her hand. 'I sha'n't believe it without a test,' she went on in a lighter tone. 'And at any rate I sha'n't fail at your dinner-party.'

'No, don't fail at my party – my only party.' His smile was very bitter, as he relinquished her hand and opened the door of the brougham. But she detained him a moment; she was still reluctant to lose him, to be left alone, to be driven back to her flat and to her life.

'We're nice people! We have a splendid evening, and we end it up in the depths of woe! At least – you're in them too, aren't you?' She glanced past him up the gloomy passage, and gave a little shudder. 'How could you be anything else, living here?' she cried in accents of pity.

'You don't live here, yet you don't seem much better,' he retorted. 'You are beautiful and beautifully turned out – gorgeous! And your brougham is most comfortable. Yet you don't seem much better.'

Trix was put on her defence; she awoke suddenly to the fact that she had been very near to a mood dangerously confidential.

'I've a few worries,' she laughed, 'but I have my pleasures too.'

'And I've my pleasures,' said Airey. 'And I suppose we both find them in the end the best. Good-night.'

Each had put out a hand towards the veil that was between them; to each had come an impulse to pluck it away. But courage failed, and it hung there still. Both went back to their pleasures. In the ears of both Peggy Ryle's whole-hearted laughter, her soft merry 'Hurrah!' that no obvious cause called forth, echoed with the mockery of an unattainable delight. You need clear soul-space for a laugh like that.

CHAPTER VII

A DANGEROUS GAME

There were whispers about Beaufort Chance, and nods and winks such as a man in his position had better have given no occasion for; men told one another things in confidence at the club; they were quite sure of them, but at the same time very anxious not to be vouched as authority. For there seemed no proof. The list of shareholders of the Dramoffsky Concessions did not display his name; it did display, as owners of blocks of shares, now larger, now smaller, a number of names unknown to fame, social or financial; even Fricker's interest was modest according to the list, and Beaufort Chance's seemed absolutely nothing. Yet still the whispers grew.

Beaufort knew it by the subtle sense that will tell men who depend on what people say of them what people are saying. He divined it with a politician's sensitiveness to opinion. He saw a touch of embarrassment where he was accustomed to meet frankness, he discerned constraint in quarters where everything had been cordiality. He perceived the riskiness of the game he played. He urged Fricker to secrecy and to speed; they must not be seen together so much, and the matter must be put through quickly; these were his two requirements. He was in something of a terror; his manner grew nervous and his face careworn. He knew that he could look for little mercy if he were discovered; he had outraged the code. But he held on his way. His own money was in the venture; if it were lost he was crippled in the race on which he had entered. Trix Trevalla's money was in it too; he wanted Trix Trevalla and he wanted her rich. He was so hard-driven by anxiety that he no longer scrupled to put these things plainly to himself. His available capital had not sufficed for a big stroke; hers and his, if he could consider them as united, and if the big stroke succeeded, meant a decent fortune; it was a fine scheme to get her to make him rich while at the same time he earned her gratitude. He depended on Fricker to manage this; he was, by himself, rather a helpless man in such affairs. Mrs. Bonfill had never expected that he would rise to the top, even while she was helping him to rise as high as he could.

Fricker was not inclined to hurry himself, and he played with the plea for secrecy in a way that showed a consciousness of power over his associate. He had been in one or two scandals, and to be in another would have interfered with his plans – or at least with Mrs. Fricker's. Yet there is much difference between a man who does not want any more scandals and him who, for the sake of a great prize risking one, would be ruined if his venture miscarried. Fricker's shrewd equable face displayed none of the trouble which made Chance's heavy and careworn.

But there was hurry in Fricker's family, though not in Fricker. The season was half-gone, little progress had been made, effect from Trix Trevalla's patronage or favour was conspicuously lacking. Mrs. Fricker did not hesitate to impute double-dealing to Trix, to declare that she meant to give nothing and to take all she could. Fricker had a soul somewhat above these small matters, but he observed honour with his wife – for his oath's sake and a quiet life's. Moreover, be the affair what it would, suggest to him that he was being 'bested' in it, and he became dangerous.

A word is necessary about the position of Dramoffskys. They had collapsed badly on Lord Farringham's pessimistic speech. Presently they began to revive on the strength of 'inside buying'; yet their rise was slow and languid, the Stock Exchange was distrustful, the public would not come in. There was a nice little profit ('Not a scoop at present,' observed Fricker) for those who had bought at the lowest figure, but more rumours would stop the rise and might send quotations tumbling again. It was all-important to know, or to be informed by somebody who did, just how long to hold on, just when to come out. Dramoffskys, in fine, needed a great deal of watching; the operator in them required the earliest, best, and most confidential information that he could get. Fricker was the operator. Beaufort Chance had his sphere. Trix, it will be noticed, was inclined to behave purely as

a sleeping partner, which was all very well as regarded Dramoffskys themselves, but very far from well as it touched her relations towards her fellows in the game.

Trix was praying for speed and secrecy as urgently as Beaufort Chance himself; for secrecy from Mrs. Bonfill, from Mervyn, from all her eminent friends; for speed that the enterprise might be prosperously accomplished, the money made, and she be free again. No more ventures for her, if once she were free, she declared. If once she were – free! There she would pause and insist with herself that she had given Beaufort Chance no reason to expect more than the friendship which was all that he had openly claimed, nor the Frickers any right to look for greater countenance or aid than her own acquaintance and hospitality ensured them. Had she ever promised to marry Chance, or to take the Frickers to Mrs. Bonfill's or the Glentorly's? She defied them to prove any such thing – and looked forward with terror to telling them so.

At this point Mr. Liffey made entry on the scene with an article in 'The Sentinel.' Mr. Liffey had a terribly keen nose for misdeeds of all sorts and for secrets most inconvenient if disclosed. He was entirely merciless and inexhaustibly good-natured. He never abused anybody; he dealt with facts, leaving each person to judge those facts by his own moral standard. He had no moral standard of his own, or said so; but he had every idea of making 'The Sentinel' a paying property. He came out now with an article whose heading seemed to harm nobody – since people with certain names must by now be hardened to having their patronymics employed in a representative capacity. 'Who are Brown, Jones, and Robinson?' was the title of the article in 'The Sentinel.' As the reader proceeded – and there were many readers – he found no more about these names, and gathered that Mr. Liffey employed them (with a touch of contempt, maybe) to indicate those gentlemen who, themselves unknown to fame, figured so largely in the share list of Dramoffskys. With a persistence worthy of some better end than that of making fellow-creatures uncomfortable, or of protecting a public that can hardly be said to deserve it, Mr. Liffey tracked these unoffending gentlemen to the honourable, though modest, suburban homes in which they dwelt, had the want of delicacy to disclose their avocations and the amount of their salaries, touched jestingly on the probable claims of their large families (he had their children by name!), and ended by observing, with an innocent surprise, that their holdings in Dramoffskys showed them to possess either resources of which his staff had not been able to inform him, or, on the other hand, a commercial enterprise which deserved higher remuneration than they appeared to be enjoying. He then suggested that present shareholders and intending investors in Dramoffskys might find the facts stated in his article of some interest, and avowed his intention of pursuing his researches into this apparent mystery. He ended by remarking, 'Of course, should it turn out that these gentlemen, against whom I have not a word to say, hold their shares in a fiduciary capacity, I have no more to say – no more about them, at least.' And he promised, with cheerful obligingness, to deal further with this point in his next number.

Within an hour of the appearance of this article Beaufort Chance entered Fricker's study in great perturbation. He found that gentleman calm and composed.

'How much does Liffey know?' asked Chance, almost trembling.

Fricker shrugged his shoulders. 'It doesn't much matter.'

'If he knows that I'm in it, that I've –'

'He won't know you're in it, unless one of the fellows gives us away. Clarkson knows about you, and Tyrrwhitt – none of the rest. I think I can keep them quiet. And we'll get out now. It's not as good as I hoped, but it's pretty good, and it's time to go.' He looked up at Chance and licked his cigar. 'Now's the moment to settle matters with the widow,' he went on. 'You go and tell her what I want and what you want. I don't trust her, and I want to see; and, Beaufort, don't tell her about Dramoffskys till you find out what she means. If she's playing square, all right. If not' – he smiled pensively – 'she may find out for herself the best time for selling Dramoffskys – and Glowing Stars too.'

'Glowing Stars? She's not deep in them, is she? I know nothing about them.'

'A little private flutter – just between her and me,' Fricker assured him. 'Now there's no time to lose. Come back here and tell me what happens. Make her understand – no nonsense! No more shuffling! Be quick. I shall hold up the market a bit while our men got out, but I won't let you in for anything more.' Fricker's morals may have been somewhat to seek, but he was a fine study at critical moments.

'You don't think Liffey knows – ?' stammered Chance again.

'About those little hints of yours? I hope not. But I know, Beaufort, my boy. Do as well as you can for me with the widow.'

Beaufort Chance scowled as he poured himself out a whisky-and-soda. But he was Fricker's man and he must obey. He went out, the spectre of Mr. Liffey seeming to walk with him and to tap him on the shoulder in a genial way.

At eleven o'clock Beaufort Chance arrived at Trix Trevalla's and sent up his name. Mrs. Trevalla sent down to say that she would be glad to see him at lunch. He returned word that his business was important, and would not bear delay. In ten minutes he found himself in her presence. She wore a loose morning-gown, her hair was carefully dressed, she looked very pretty; there was an air of excitement about her; fear and triumph seemed to struggle for ascendancy in her manner. She laid a letter down on the table by her as he entered. While they talked she kept putting her hand on it and withdrawing it again, pulling the letter towards her and pushing it away, fingering it continually, while she kept a watchful eye on her companion.

'What's the hurry about?' she asked, with a languor that was not very plausible. 'Dramoffskys?'

'Dramoffskys are all right,' said he deliberately, as he sat down opposite her. 'But I want a talk with you, Trix.'

'Did we settle that you were to call me Trix?'

'I think of you as that.'

'Well, but that's much less compromising – and just as complimentary.'

'Business! business!' he smiled, giving her appearance an approving glance. 'Fricker and I have been having a talk. We're not satisfied with you, partner.' He had for the time conquered his agitation, and was able to take a tone which he hoped would persuade her, without any need of threats or of disagreeable hints.

'Am I not most amiable to Mr. Fricker, and Mrs., and Miss?' Trix's face had clouded at the first mention of Fricker.

'You women are generally hopeless in business, but I expected better things from you. Now let's come to the point. What have you done for the Frickers?'

Reluctantly brought to the point, Trix recounted with all possible amplitude what she considered she had done. Her hand was often on the letter as she spoke. At the end, with a quick glance at Beaufort, she said: —

'And really that's all I can do. They're too impossible, you know.'

He rose and stood on the hearthrug.

'That's all you can do?' he asked in a level smooth voice.

'Yes. Oh, a few more big squashes, perhaps. But it's nonsense talking of the Glentorlys or of any of Mrs. Bonfill's really nice evenings.'

'It's not nonsense. You could do it if you liked. You know Mrs. Bonfill, anyhow, would do it to please you; and I believe the Glentorlys would too.'

'Well, then, I don't like,' said Trix Trevalla.

He frowned heavily and seemed as if he were going to break out violently. But he waited a moment, and then spoke calmly again. The truth is that Fricker's interests were nothing to him. They might go, provided he could show that he had done his best for them; but doing his best must not involve sacrificing his own chances.

'So much for Fricker! I must say you've a cool way with you, Trix.'

'The way you speak annoys me very much sometimes,' remarked Trix reflectively.

'Why do you suppose he interested himself in your affairs?'

'I've done what I could.' Her lips shut obstinately. 'If I try to do more I sha'n't help the Frickers and I shall hurt myself.'

'That's candid, at all events.' He smiled a moment. 'Don't be in a hurry to say it to Fricker, though.'

'It'll be best to let the truth dawn on him gradually,' smiled Trix. 'Is that all you wanted to say? Because I'm not dressed, and I promised to be at the Glentorlys' at half-past twelve.'

'No, it's not all I've got to say.'

'Oh, well, be quick then.'

Her indifference was overdone, and Beaufort saw it. A suspicion came into his mind. 'So much for Fricker!' he had said. Did she dare to think of meting out the same cavalier treatment to him?

'I wish you'd attend to me and let that letter alone,' he said in a sudden spasm of irritation.

'As soon as you begin, I'll attend,' retorted Trix; 'but you're not saying anything. You're only saying you're going to say something.' Her manner was annoying; perhaps she would have welcomed the diversion of a little quarrel.

But Beaufort was not to be turned aside; he was bent on business. Fricker, it seemed, was disposed of. He remained. But before he could formulate a beginning to this subject, Trix broke in: —

'I want to get out of these speculations as soon as I can,' she said. 'I don't mind about not making any more money as long as I don't lose any. I'm tired of — of the suspense, and — and so on. And, oh, I won't have anything more to do with the Frickers!'

He looked at her in quick distrust.

'Your views have undergone a considerable change,' he remarked. 'You don't want to speculate? You don't mind about not making any more money?'

Trix looked down and would not meet his eyes.

'Going to live on what you've got?' he asked mockingly. 'Or is it a case of cutting down expenses and retiring to the country?'

'I don't want to discuss my affairs. I've told you what I wish.'

He took a turn across the room and came back. His voice was still calm, but the effort was obvious.

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