

**BENNETT  
ARNOLD**

LILIAN

Arnold Bennett

**Lilian**

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**Bennett A.**

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# Lilian

## PART I

### I

#### The Girl Alone

Lilian, in dark blue office frock with an embroidered red line round the neck and detachable black wristlets that preserved the ends of the sleeves from dust and friction, sat idle at her flat desk in what was called "the small room" at Felix Grig's establishment in Clifford Street, off Bond Street. There were three desks, three typewriting machines and three green-shaded lamps. Only Lilian's lamp was lighted, and she sat alone, with darkness above her chestnut hair and about her, and a circle of radiance below. She was twenty-three. Through the drawn blind of the window could just be discerned the backs of the letters of words painted on the glass: "Felix Grig. Typewriting Office. Open day and night." Seen from the street the legend stood out black and clear against the faintly glowing blind. It was 11 P.M.

That a beautiful young girl, created for pleasure and affection and expensive flattery, should be sitting by herself at 11 P.M. in a gloomy office in Clifford Street, in the centre of the luxurious, pleasure-mad, love-mad West End of London seemed shocking and contrary to nature, and Lilian certainly so regarded it. She pictured the shut shops, and shops and yet again shops, filled with elegance and costliness-ropes, hats, stockings, shoes, gloves, incredibly fine lingerie, furs, jewels, perfumes-designed and confectioned for the setting-off of just such young attractiveness as hers. She pictured herself rifling those deserted and silent shops by some magic means and emerging safe, undetected, in batiste so rare that her skin blushed through it, in a frock that was priceless and yet nothing at all, and in warm marvellous sables that no blast of wind or misfortune could ever penetrate-and diamonds in her hair. She pictured thousands of smart women, with imperious command over rich, attendant males, who at that very moment were moving quickly in automobiles from theatres towards the dancing-clubs that clustered round Felix Grig's typewriting office. At that very moment she herself ought to have been dancing. Not in a smart club; no! Only in the basement of a house where an acquaintance of hers lodged; and only with clerks and things like that; and only to a gramophone. But still a dance, a respite from the immense ennui and solitude called existence!

She had been kept late at the office because of Miss Grig's failure to arrive. Miss Grig, sister of Felix, was the mainspring of the establishment, which, except financially, belonged much more to her than to Felix. Miss Grig energized it, organized it, and disciplined it, in addition to loving it. Hers had been the idea-not quite original, but none the less very valuable as an advertisement-of remaining open all night. Clever men would tell simpletons in men's clubs about the typewriting office that was never closed-example of the inexhaustible wonderfulness of a great capital! – and would sometimes with a wink and a single phrase endow the office with a dubious and exciting reputation. Miss Grig herself was the chief night-watcher. She exulted in vigils. After attendance in the afternoon, if her health was reasonably good, she would come on duty again at 8 P.M. and go home by an early Tube train on the following morning. One of the day staff would remain until 8 P.M. in order to hand over to her; as a recompense this girl would be let off at 4 P.M. instead of 6 P.M. the next day. Justice reigned; and all the organization for dealing with rushes of work was inspired by Miss Grig's own admirable ideas of justice.

On this night Lilian had been appointed to stay till 8 o'clock. Eight o'clock-no Miss Grig. Eight-thirty o'clock-no Miss Grig. Nine, nine-thirty, ten o'clock-no Miss Grig. And now eleven o'clock and no Miss Grig. It was unprecedented and dreadfully disturbing. Lilian even foresaw a lonely, horrible night in the office, with nothing but tea, bread-and-butter, and the living gas-stove to comfort her. Agonizing prospect! She had spent nights in the office before, but never alone. She felt that she simply could not support the ordeal; yet-such was the moral, invisible empire of absent Miss Grig-she dared not shut up the office and depart. The office naturally had a telephone, but most absurdly there was no telephone at the Grigs' house-Felix's fault! – and so Lilian could only speculate upon the explanation of Miss Grig's absence. She speculated melodramatically.

Then her lovely little ear, quickened by apprehension, heard footsteps on the lower stairs. Heavy footsteps, but rapid enough! She flew through the ante-room to the outer door and fearfully opened it, and gazed downwards to the electric light that, somehow equivocally, invited wayfarers to pass through the ever-open street door and climb the shadowy steps to the second storey and behold there strange matters.

A villainous old fellow was hurrying up the echoing stairs. He wore a pea-jacket and a red cotton muffler. A moment ago she had had no thought of personal danger. Now, in an instant, she was petrified with fright. Her face turned from rose to grey... Of course it was a hold-up! Post offices, and box offices of theatres, and even banks had been held up of late. Banks, Felix Grig had heard, were taking precautions. Felix had suggested that he too ought to take precautions-revolvers, alarm-bells, etc. – but Miss Grig, not approving, had smiled her wise, condescending smile, and nothing had been done. Miss Grig (thought Lilian) had no imagination-that was what was wrong with her!

"Miss!" growled hoarsely the oncoming bandit, "give us a match, will ye?"

Yes, they always began thus innocently, did robbers. Lilian tried to speak and could not. She could not even dash within and bang and bolt the door. With certain crises she might possibly be able to deal, but not with this sort of crisis. She was as defenceless as a blossom. She thought passionately that destiny had no right to put her in such a terrible extremity, and that the whole world was to blame. She felt as once women used to feel in the sack of cities, faint with fear-and streaks of thrilled, eager, voluptuous anticipation running through the fear! She reflected that the matches were on the mantelpiece over the gas-stove.

The man stood on the landing. He had an odour. He was tall; he would have made four of Lilian. She knew that it was ridiculous to retreat into the office and find the matches demanded; she knew that the matches were only a pretext; she knew that she ought to hit on some brilliant expedient for outwitting the bandit and winning eternal glory in the evening papers; but she retreated into the office to find the matches. He followed heavily behind her. He was within her room... She could not have turned to face him for ropes of great pearls.

"Give us a box, miss. It's a windy night. Two of me lamps is blown out, and I dropped me matches into me tea-can-ha, ha! – and I ain't got no paper to carry a light from me fire, and I ain't seen a bobby for an hour. No, I hain't, though you wouldn't believe me."

Lilian was suddenly blinded by the truth. The roadway of Clifford Street and part of Bond Street was in the midst of a process of deep excavation; it was acutely "up," to the detriment of traffic and trade; and this fellow was the night-watchman who sat in a sentry-box by a burning brazier. She recognized him...

"Thank ye kindly, miss, and may God bless yer! I knowed ye was open all night. Good night. Hope I didn't frighten ye, miss." He laughed grimly, roguishly and honestly.

When he was gone Lilian laughed also, but hysterically. She did not at all want to laugh, but she laughed. Then she dropped into her chair and wept with painful sobbing violence. And as, regaining calm, she realized the horrors which might have happened to her, the resentment in her heart against destiny and against the whole world grew intense and filled her heart to the exclusion of every other feeling.

## II Early Years

Miss Share, as she was addressed in the office, was the only child of an art-master, and until she found the West End she had lived all her life in a long Putney "road," no house of which could truthfully say that it was in any way better than or different from its neighbours. This street realized the ideal of equality before God. It had been Lilian's prison, from which she was let out for regular daily exercise, and she hated it as ardently as any captive ever hated a prison. Lionel Share had had charge over the art side of an enormous polytechnic in another suburb. In youth he had won a national scholarship at South Kensington, and the glory of the scholarship never faded-not even when he was elected President of the Association of Art Masters. He was destined by fate to be a teacher of art, and appointed by heaven to be a headmaster and to reach the highest height of artistic pedagogy. He understood organization; the handling of committees, of under-masters and of pupils; the filling-up of forms; the engaging of models; and he understood profoundly the craft of pushing pupils successfully through examinations. His name was a sweet odour in the nostrils of the London County Council. He rehabilitated art and artists in Putney, which admitted that it had had quite a wrong notion of art and artists, having hitherto regarded art as unmanly, and artists as queer, loose, bankruptcy-bound fellows; whereas Mr. Share paid his rent promptly, went to Margate for his long holiday, wore a frock-coat, attended church, and had been mentioned as a suitable candidate for the Putney Borough Council. Until Mr. Share Putney had never been able to explain to itself the respectability of the National Gallery, which after all was full of art done by artists. The phenomenon of Mr. Share solved the enigma-the Old Masters must have been like Lionel Share.

At home Mr. Share was a fat man with a black beard and moustache, who adored his daughter and loved his wife. A strict monogamist, whose life would bear the fullest investigation, he was, nevertheless, what is euphemistically called "uxorious." He returned home of a night-often late, on account of evening classes-with ravishment. He knew that his wife and daughter would be ready to receive him, and they were. He kissed and fondled them. He praised them to their faces, asserting that their like could not be discovered among womankind, and he repeated again and again that his little Lilian was very beautiful. He ate and drank a good supper. If he loved his wife he loved also eating and drinking. Now and then he would arrive with half a bottle of champagne sticking out of his overcoat pocket. Not that he came within a thousand miles of "drinking"! He did not. He would not even keep champagne or any wine (except Australian burgundy) in the house; but he would pop in at the wine merchant's when the fancy took him.

He seldom worried his dears with his professional troubles. Only if organization and committees were specially exasperating would he refer, and then but casually, to the darker side of existence. As for art, he never mentioned it, save to deride some example of "Continental" or "advanced" or "depraved" or "perverse" art (comprehensively described as "futurist") which had regrettably got into the pages of *The Studio*, the only magazine to which he subscribed. Nor did he ever in his prime paint or sketch for pleasure. But at the beginning of every year he would set to work to do a small thing or two for the Royal Academy, which small thing or two were often accepted by the Royal Academy, though never, one is sorry to say, sold. The Royal Academy soirée was Lilian's sole outlet into the great world. She could not, however, be as enthusiastic about it as were her father and mother; for in the privacy of her mind she held the women thereat to be a most dowdy and frumpy lot.

The girl loved her father and mother; she also pitied her mother and hated her father. She pitied her mother for being an utterly acquiescent slave with no will of her own, and hated her father because he had not her ambition to rise above the state of the frumpy middle middle-class-and for other reasons. The man had realized his own ambitions, and was a merry soul sunk in contentment.

The world held nothing that he wanted and did not possess. He looked up to the upper classes without envy or jealousy, and read about them with ingenuous joy. He had no instinct for any sort of elegance.

Lilian was intensely ambitious, yearning after elegance. She saw illustrated advertisements of furniture in *The Studio* and of attire in the daily papers, and compared them with the smug ugliness of the domestic interior and her plain frocks, and was passionately sad. She read about the emancipation of girls and about the "new girl," and compared this winged creature with herself. Writers in newspapers seemed to assume that all girls were new girls, and Lilian knew the awful falsity of the assumption. She rarely left Putney, unless it was to go by motor-bus to Kew Gardens on a Saturday afternoon with papa and mamma. She did not reach the West End once in a thousand years, and when she did she came back tragic. She would have contrived to reach the West End oftener, but, though full of leisure, she had no money for bus fares. Mr. Share never gave her money except for a specific purpose; and she could not complain, for her mother, an ageing woman, never had a penny that she must not account for-not a penny. Never!

Mr. Share could not conceive what either of them could want with loose money. He was not averse, he admitted, from change and progress. With great breadth of mind he admitted that change and progress were inevitable. But his attitude towards these phenomena resembled that of the young St. Augustine towards another matter, who cried: "Give me chastity, O Lord, but not yet!" In Mr. Share's view his wife and daughter had no business in the world; and indeed his finest pride was to maintain them in complete ignorance of the world. Even during the war he dissuaded Lilian from any war-work, holding that she could most meetly help the Empire to triumph by helping to solace her father in the terrific troubles of keeping a large art school alive under D.O.R.A. and the Conscription Act.

Later, Mrs. Share was struck down by cancer on the liver and died after six months' illness, which cost Mr. Share a considerable amount of money-lavishly squandered, cheerfully paid. Mr. Share was heart-broken; he really grew quite old in a fortnight; and his mute appeal to Lilian for moral succour and the balm of filial tenderness was irresistible. Lilian had lost a mother, but the main fact in the situation was that Mr. Share had lost a peerless wife. Lilian became housekeeper and the two settled down together. Mr. Share adored his daughter more than ever, and more visibly. Her freedom, always excessively limited, was now retrenched. She was transfixed eternally as the old man's prop. Her twenty-first birthday passed, and not a word as to her future, as to a marriage for her, or as to her individuality, desires, hopes! She was papa's cherished darling.

Then Mr. Share caught pneumonia, through devotion to duty, and died in a few days; and at last Lilian felt on her lovely cheek the winds of the world; at last she was free. Of high paternal finance she had never in her life heard one word. In the week following the funeral she learnt that she would be mistress of the furniture and a little over one hundred pounds net. Mr. Share had illustrated the ancient maxim that it is easier to make money than to keep it. He had held shipping shares too long and had sold a fully paid endowment insurance policy in the vain endeavour to replace by adventurous investment that which the sea had swallowed up. And Lilian was helpless. She could do absolutely nothing that was worth money. She could not begin to earn a livelihood. As for relatives, there was only her father's brother, a Board School teacher with a large vulgar family and an income far too small to permit of generousities. Lilian was first incredulous, then horror-struck.

Leaving the youth of the world to pick up art as best it could without him, and fleeing to join his wife in paradise, the loving, adoring father had in effect abandoned a beautiful idolized daughter to the alternatives of starvation or prostitution. He had shackled her wrists behind her back and hobbled her feet and bequeathed her to wolves. That was what he had done, and what many and many such fathers had done, and still do, to their idolized daughters.

Herein was the root of Lilian's awful burning resentment against the whole world, and of her fierce and terrible determination by fair means or foul to make the world pay. Her soul was a horrid furnace, and if by chance Lionel Share leaned out from the gold bar of heaven and noticed it, the

sight must have turned his thoughts towards hell for a pleasant change. She was saved from disaster, from martyrdom, from ignominy, from the unnamable, by the merest fluke. The nurse who tended Lionel Share's last hours was named Grig. This nurse had cousins in the typewriting business. She had also a very kind heart, a practical mind, and a persuasive manner with cousins.

### III

## Advice to the Young Beauty

"Come, come now, now poor girl! You surely aren't crying like this because you've been kept away from your dance to-night?"

Lilian gave a great start, and an "Oh!" and, searching hurriedly for a handkerchief inadequate to the damming of torrents, dried up her tears at the source, but could not immediately control the sobs that continued to convulse her whole frame.

"N-no! Mr. Grig," she whimpered feebly.

Then she snatched at a sheet of paper and began to insert it in the machine before her, as though about to start some copying.

"Miss Grig is rather unwell," said Felix Grig. "She insisted that I should come up, and so I came." With that he tactfully left the room, obeying the wise rule of conduct under which a man conquers a woman's weeping by running away from it.

Lilian's face was red; it went still redder. She was tremendously ashamed of being caught blubbing, and by Mr. Grig! It would not have mattered if one of the girls had surprised her, or even Miss Grig. But Mr. Grig! Nor would it have mattered so much if circumstances had made possible any pretence, however absurd and false, that she was not in fact crying. But she had been trapped beyond any chance of a face-saving lie. She felt as though she had committed a sexual impropriety and could never look Mr. Grig in the eyes again. At the same time she was profoundly relieved that somebody belonging to the office, and especially a man, had arrived to break her awful solitude...

So Mr. Grig knew that she had a dance that night! There was something piquant and discomposing in that. Gertie Jackson must have chattered to Miss Grig-they were as thick as thieves, those two, or, at any rate, the good-natured Gertie flattered herself that they were-and Miss Grig must have told Felix. (Very discreetly the girls would refer among themselves to Mr. Grig as "Felix.") Brother and sister must have been talking about her and her miserable little dance. Still, a dance was a dance, and the mere word had a glorious sound. Nobody except herself knew that her dance was in a basement... So he had not come to the office to relieve and reassure her in her unforeseen night-watch, but merely to placate his sister! And how casually, lightly, almost quizzically, he had spoken! She was naught to him-a girl typist, one among a floating population of girl typists.

Miss Grig had no distinction-her ankles proved that-but Felix was distinguished, in manner, in voice, in everything he did. Felix was a swell, like the easy *flâneurs* in Bond Street that she saw when she happened to go out of the office during work-hours. It was said that he had been married and that his wife had divorced him. Lilian surmised that if the truth were known the wife more than Felix had been to blame.

All these thoughts were mere foam on the great, darkly heaving thought that Felix had horribly misjudged her. Not his fault, of course; but he had misjudged her. Crying for a lost dance, indeed! She terribly wanted him to be made aware that she was only crying because she had experienced an ordeal to which she ought not to have been exposed and to which no girl ought to have been exposed. Miss Grig again! It was Miss Grig, not Felix, who had sneered at hold-ups. There had been no hold-up, but there might have been a hold-up, and, in any case, she had passed through the worst sensations of a hold-up. Scandalous!

Anxious to be effective, she took up the typing of a novel which had been sent in by one of their principal customers, a literary agency, and tried to tap as prosaically as if the hour were 11.30 A.M. instead of 11.30 P.M. Bravado! She knew that she would have to do the faulty sheet again; but she must impress Felix. Then she heard Felix calling from the principals' room:

"Miss Share. Miss *Share!*" A little impatient as usual.

"Yes, Mr. Grig." She rushed to the mirror and patted herself with the tiny sponge that under Miss Grig's orders was supposed to be employed for wetting postage stamps-but never was so employed save in Miss Grig's presence.

"I shall tell him why I was crying," she said to herself as she crossed the ante-room. "And I shall tell him straight."

He was seated on the corner of the table in the principals' room, and rolling a cigarette. He had lighted the gas-stove. A very slim man of medium height and of no age, he might have been thirty-five with prematurely grizzled hair, or fifty with hair younger than the wrinkles round his grey eyes! Miss Grig had said or implied that she was younger than her brother, but the girls did not accept without reserve all that Miss Grig might say or imply. He had taken off his overcoat and now displayed a dinner-jacket and an adorably soft shirt. Lilian had never before seen him in evening-dress, for he did not come to the office at night, and nobody expected him to come to the office at night. He was wonderfully attractive in evening-dress, which he carried with the nonchalance of regular custom. So different from her father, who put on ceremonial attire about three times a year, and wore it with deplorable self-consciousness, as though it were a suit of armour! Mr. Grig was indeed a queer person to run a typewriting office. Lilian was aware that he had been to Winchester and Cambridge, and done all manner of unusual things before he lit on typewriting.

"Any work come in to-night, Miss Share?" he demanded in the bland, kindly, careless, official tone which he always employed to the girls-a tone rendering the slightest familiarity impossible. "Anybody called?"

Lilian knew that he was merely affecting an interest in the business, acting the rôle of managing proprietor. He had tired of the business long ago, and graciously left all the real power to his sister, who had no mind above typewriting.

"Someone did come in just before you, Mr. Grig," Lilian replied, seizing her chance, and in a half-challenging tone she related the adventure with the night-watchman. "It was that that upset me, Mr. Grig. It might have been a burglar-I made sure it *was*. And me all alone-

"Quite! Quite!" he stopped her. "I can perfectly imagine how you must have felt. You haven't got over it yet, even. Sit down. Sit down." He said no word of apology for his misjudgment of her, but his tone apologized.

"Oh! I'm perfectly all right now, thank you."

"Please!" He slipped off the table and pulled round Miss Grig's chair for her.

She obediently sat down, liking to be agreeable to him. He unlocked his own cupboard and brought out a decanter and a liqueur glass. "Drink this."

"Please, what is it?"

"Brandy. Poison." He smiled.

She smiled, sipped, and coughed as the spirit burned her throat.

"I can't drink any more," she appealed.

"That's all right. That's all right."

It was his humorous use of the word "poison" that touched her. This sole word changed their relations. Hitherto they had never for a moment been other than employer and employed. Now they were something else. She was deeply flattered, assuaged, and also excited. Brought up to scorn employment, the hardest task for her in her situation in the Grig office had been to admit by her department that there was a bar of class between her employer and herself. The other girls addressed Mr. Grig as "Sir"; but she-never! She always called him "Mr. Grig," and nothing could have induced her to say "Sir." Now, he was protecting her; he had become the attendant male; his protection enveloped her like a soft swansdown quilt, exquisite, delicious. And it was night. The night created romance. Romance suddenly filled the room like a magic vapour, transforming him, herself, and the commonest objects of the room into something ideal.

"Several times I've wanted to speak to you about a certain matter," said Mr. Grig quietly; and paused, gazing at the smoke from his cigarette.

"Oh, yes?" Lilian murmured nervously, and strove to accomplish the demeanour of a young woman of the world. (She much regretted that she had her wristlets on.) As he was not looking at her she could look at his face. And she looked at it as though she had never seen it before, or with fresh-perceiving eyes. A very clever, rather tired face; superior, even haughty, self-sure; fastidious, dissatisfied, the face of one accustomed to choose sardonically between two evils; impatient, bitter; humorous, with hints of benevolence. She thought: "Of course he's never spoken to me because of his sister. Even *he* has to mind his p's and q's with her. And he's one that hates a fuss. Now she isn't here-

She could not conceive what might be the "certain matter." She thrilled to learn it; but he would not be hurried. No, he would take his own time, Mr. Grig would. This was the most brilliant moment of her life.

He said, looking straight at her and forcing her to look straight at him:

"You know you've no business in a place like this, a girl like you. You're much too highly strung, for one thing. You aren't like Miss Jackson, for instance. You're simply wasting yourself here. Of course you're terribly independent, but you do try to please. I don't mean try to please merely in your work. You try to *please*. It's an instinct with you. Now in typing you'd never beat Miss Jackson. Miss Jackson's only alive, really, when she's typing. She types with her whole soul. You type well-I hear-but that's only because you're clever all round. You'd do anything well. You'd milk cows just as well as you'd type. But your business is marriage, and a good marriage! You're beautiful, and, as I say, you have an instinct to please. That's the important thing. You'd make a success of marriage because of that and because you're adaptable and quick at picking up. Most women when they're married forget that their job is to adapt themselves and to please. That's their *job*. They expect to be kowtowed to and spoiled and humoured and to be free to spend money without having to earn it, and to do nothing in return except just exist-and perhaps manage a household, pretty badly. They seem to forget that there are two sides to a bargain. It's dashed hard work, pleasing is, sometimes. I know that. But it isn't so hard as earning money, believe me! Now you wouldn't be like the majority of women. You'd keep your share of the bargain, and handsomely. If you don't marry, and marry fifty miles above you, you'll be very silly. For you to stop here is an outrage against common-sense. It's merely monstrous. If I wasn't an old man I wouldn't tell you this, naturally. Now you needn't blush. I expect I'm not far off thirty years older than you-and you're young enough to be wise in time."

She was blushing tremendously, and in spite of an effort of courage her gaze dropped from his. At length his gaze shifted, on the pretext of dropping cigarette-ash very carefully into an ash-tray.

He had, then, been thinking about her all those months, differentiating her from the others, summing her up! And how well he had summed her up, and how well he had expressed himself-so romantically (somehow) and yet with such obvious truth! (Of course he had been having a dig at his own wife, who had divorced him! You could see how embittered he was on the subject of wives!) She wondered if he had thought her beautiful for long. Fancy him moving about the office and forming ideas about all of them, and never a sign, never the slightest sign that he could tell one of them from another! And he had chosen that night to reveal his mind to her. She was inexpressibly flattered. Because Mr. Grig was clearly a connoisseur-she had always felt that. If Mr. Grig considered her beautiful...!

And in fact she had an established assurance of beauty. She knew a good deal about herself. Proudly she reflected, amid her blushes, upon the image of her face and hair-the eyes that matched her hair, the perfectly formed ears, the softness of the chin and the firmness of the nose, the unchallengeable complexion, the dazzling teeth. She was simple enough to be somewhat apologetic about the largeness of her mouth, unaware that a man of experience flees from a small rosebud mouth as from the devil, and that a large mouth is the certain sign of goodwill and understanding in a woman. She was apologetic, too, about the scragginess of her neck, and with better reason. But the

wrists and the ankles, the legs, the shoulders, the swelling of the hips, the truly astounding high, firm and abundant bosom! Beyond criticism! And she walked beautifully, throwing back her shoulders and so emphasizing the line of the waist at the back. She walked with her legs and hips, and the body swam forward above them. She had observed the effect thousands of times in street mirrors. The girls all admitted that she walked uniquely. Then, further, she had a smile (rarely used) which would intensify in the most extraordinary way the beauty of her face, lighting it, electrifying the eyes, radiating a charm that enraptured. She knew that also. A superlative physical pride rose up out of the subconscious into the conscious, and put her cheap pretty clothes to shame. It occurred to her that Mr. Grig had been talking very strangely, very unusually.

"I don't suppose I shall ever marry," she said plaintively. "How can I?" She meant, and without doubt he understood: "How can I possibly meet a man who is worth marrying?" She thought with destructive disdain of every youth who had ever reacted to her charm. The company at the dance she had missed seemed contemptible. They were still dancing. What a collection of tenth-rate fellows!

She became gloomy, pessimistic, as she saw the totality of her existence and its prospects. The home at Putney had been a prison. She had escaped from it, but only to enter another prison. She saw no outlet. She was trapped on every side. She could not break out of the infernal circle of poverty and of the conventions. Not in ten years could she save enough to keep her for a year. She had to watch every penny. If she was mad enough to go to a West End theatre she had to consider the difference between a half-crown and a three-shilling pit. Thousands of men and women negligently fling themselves into expensive taxis, but a rise in bus fares or Tube fares would seriously unbalance Lilian's budget. She passed most of her spare time in using a needle to set off her beauty, but what a farce was the interminable study and labour! She could not possibly aspire to even the best gloves; and as for the best stockings, or the second best! – the price of such a pair came to more than she could earn in a week. It was all absurd, tragic, pitiful. She had common-sense ample enough to see that her beauty was futile, her ambitions baseless, and her prospects nil. If she had been a vicious girl, she might have broken through the dreadful ring into splendours which she glimpsed and needed. But she was not vicious.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Mr. Grig impatiently. "You could marry anybody you liked if you put your mind to it."

And he spoke so scornfully of her lack of faith, so persuasively, so inspiringly, that she had an amazing and beautiful vision of herself worshipped, respected, alluring, seductive, arousing passion, reciprocating passion, kind, benevolent, eternally young, eternally lovely, eternally exercising for the balm and solace of mankind and a man the functions for which she was created and endowed-in a word, fulfilling herself. And for the moment, in the ecstasy of resolution to achieve the impossible, she was superb and magnificent and the finest thing that a man could ever hope to witness.

And she thought desperately:

"I'm twenty-three already. Time is rushing past me. To-morrow I shall be old."

After a silence Mr. Grig said:

"You're very tired. There's no reason why you shouldn't go home to bed."

"Indeed I shan't go home, Mr. Grig," she answered sharply, with grateful, eager devotion. "I shall stay. Supposing some work came in! It's not twelve o'clock yet."

She surprised quite a youthful look on Mr. Grig's face. Nearly thirty years older than herself? Ridiculous! There was nothing at all in a difference of years. Some men were never old. Back in the clerks' room she got out her vanity bag and carefully arranged her face. And as she looked in the glass she thought:

"After to-night I shall never be quite the same girl again... Did he really call me in to ask me about the work, or did he only do it because he wanted to talk to me?"

## IV The Clubman

Lilian was confused by a momentary magnificent, vague vision of a man framed in the doorway of the small room. The door, drawn backwards from without, hid the vision. Then there was a cough. She realized with alarm that she had been asleep, or at least dozing, over her machine. In the fifth of a second she was wide awake and alert.

"Who's there?" she called, steadying her voice to a matter-of-fact and casual tone.

The door was pushed open, and the man who had been a vision entered.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "I wasn't sure whether it was the proper thing to come in here. I looked into another room, and had a glimpse of a gentleman who seemed to be rather dormant."

"This is the room to come to," said Lilian, with a prim counterfeit of a smile.

"The office is open?"

"Certainly."

As he advanced into the room the man took off the glossy silk hat which he was wearing at the far back of his head. He had an overcoat, but carried it on his left arm. He was tall and broad-something, indeed, in the nature of a giant-with a florid, smooth face; aged perhaps thirty-three. He had a way of pinching his lips together and pressing his lower jaw against his high collar, thus making a false double chin or so; the result was to produce an effect of wise and tolerant good-humour, as of one who knew humanity and who while prepared for surprises was not going to judge us too harshly. He was in full evening-dress, and his clothes were superb. They glistened; they fitted without a crease. The vast curve of the gleaming stiff shirt-front sloped perfect in its contour; the white waistcoat was held round the stupendous form by three topaz buttons; from somewhere beneath the waistcoat a gold chain emerged and vanished somewhere into the hinterland of his person. The stout white kid gloves were thickly ridged on the backs and fitted the broad hands as well as the coat fitted the body-it was inconceivable that they had not been made to measure as everything else must have been made to measure. The man would have been overdressed had he not worn his marvellous and costly garments with absolute naturalness and simplicity.

Lilian thought:

"He must be a man-about-town, a clubman, the genuine article."

She was impressed, secretly flustered, and very anxious to meet him as an equal on his own ground of fine manners. She divined that, having entered the room once and fairly caught her asleep, he had had the good taste to withdraw and cough and make a new entry in order to spare her modesty; and she was softly appreciative, while quite determined to demonstrate by her demeanour that she had not been asleep.

She thought:

"Gertie Jackson wouldn't have known where to look, in my place."

Still, despite her disdain of Gertie Jackson's deportment, she felt herself to be terribly unproficient in the social art.

"Is it anything urgent?" she asked.

"Well, it is a bit urgent."

He had a strong, full, pleasant voice.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks."

He sat down, disposing his hat by the side of her machine, and his overcoat on another chair, and drawing off his gloves.

Lilian waited like a cat to pounce upon the slightest sign of familiarity and kill it; for she had understood that men-about-town regarded girl typists as their quarry and as nothing else. But there

was no least lapse from deferential propriety; the clubman might have been in colloquy with his sister's friend-and his sister listening in the next room. He pulled a manuscript from his breast-pocket, and, after a loving glance at it, offered it to her.

"I've only just written it," said he. "And I want to take it round to the *Evening Standard* office myself in the morning before 8.30. The editor's an acquaintance of mine and I might get it into to-morrow afternoon's paper. In fact, it must be to-morrow or never-because of the financial debate in the House, you see. Topical. I wonder whether you'd be good enough to do it for me."

"Let me see," said Lilian professionally. "About fifteen hundred words, or hardly. Oh, yes! I will do it myself."

"That's very kind of you. Will you mind looking at the writing? Do you think you'll be able to make it out? I was at a bit of a jolly to-night, and my hand's never too legible."

Without glancing further at the manuscript, Lilian answered:

"It's our business to make out writing."

Suddenly she gave him her full smile.

"I suppose it is," he said, also smiling. "Now shall I call for the copy about 8 o'clock?"

"I'm afraid the office won't be open at 8 o'clock," said Lilian. "We close at 6.30 for an hour or two. But what's the address? Is it anywhere near here?"

"6a Jermyn Street. You'll see it all on the back of the last page."

"It could be delivered-dropped into your letter-box-by 6.30 this morning, and you could take it out of the box any time after that." The idea seemed to have spontaneously presented itself to her. She forbore to say that her intention was to deliver the copy herself on her way home.

"But this is most awfully obliging of you!" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. You see, we specialize in urgent things... We charge double for night-work, I ought to tell you-in fact, three shillings a thousand, with a minimum."

"Of course! Of course! I quite understand that. Perhaps you'll put the bill in the envelope." He drew forth a watch that looked like a gold half-crown. "Two o'clock. And I can count on it being in the letter-box at six-thirty."

"Absolutely."

"Well, all I say is, it's very wonderful."

She smiled again: "It's just our business."

He bowed gracefully in departing.

As soon as he was gone she looked at the back of the last page. "Lord Mackworth." Never having heard of such a lord, she consulted the office *Who's Who*. Yes, he was there. "Mackworth, Lord. See Fermanagh, Earl of." She turned to the F pages. He was the *e. s.* of the Earl of Fermanagh. *E.s.* meant eldest son, she assumed. One day he would be an earl. She was thrilled.

Eagerly she read the manuscript before starting to copy it. The subject was the fall in the exchange value of the French franc. "Abstruse," she called it to herself. Frightfully learned! Yet the article was quite amusing to read. In one or two places it was almost funny enough to make her laugh. And Lord Mackworth illustrated his points by the prices of commodities and pleasure at Monte Carlo. Evidently he had just returned from Monte Carlo. What a figure! He had everything-title, blood, wealth, style, a splendid presence, perfect manners; he was intellectual, he was clever, he was political, he wrote for the Press. And withal he was a man of pleasure, for he had been to Monte Carlo, and that very night he had taken part in a "jolly" – whatever a jolly was!

No! He was not married; it was impossible that he should be married. But naturally he must keep mistresses. They always kept mistresses. Though what a man like him could see in that sort of girl passed Lilian. "You could marry *anybody* you liked if you put your mind to it," Mr. Grig had said. Absurdly, horribly untrue! How, for instance, could she set about to marry Lord Mackworth? She was for ever imprisoned; she could not possibly, by any device, break through the transparent, invisible, adamantine walls that surrounded her. Beautiful, was she? Gifts, had she? Well, she had sat

opposite this lord, close to him, in a room secure from interruption, in the middle of the night. She had been obliging. And he had not been sufficiently interested to swerve by a hair's breadth from his finished and nonchalant formal politeness. Her rôle in relation to Lord Mackworth was to tap out his clever article on the old Underwood and to deliver it herself in the chilly darkness of the morning before going exhausted to her miserable lodging! She, lovely! She, burning with ambition! ... The visit of the man of title and of parts was like an act of God to teach her the realities of her situation and the dangerous folly of dreams.

She tiptoed out of the room to see if Mr. Grig really was asleep as Lord Mackworth had suggested. She hoped that he was unconscious and that the visit was her secret. Either he was very soundly asleep or the stir of the arrival and departure must have awakened him. If he was awake she would pretend that she wanted to inform him of the job just come in, since he had previously enquired about the course of business. If not, she would say nothing of the affair-merely enter up the job in the night-book, and wait for any inquiries that might be made before opening her mouth.

Through the door ajar Mr. Grig could be seen fast asleep in his padded chair. His lower jaw had fallen, revealing a mouth studded with precious metal. He was generally spry, in his easy-going manner, and often had quite a youthful air, but now there could be no mistake about his age, which according to Lilian's standard of age was advanced. To Lilian forty was oldish, fifty quite old, and sixty venerable. What a contrast between the fresh, brilliant, authentic youth of Lord Mackworth and the imitation juvenility of Mr. Grig even at his spryest! The souvenir of Lord Mackworth's physical individuality made the sight of Mr. Grig almost repellent. She was divided from Mr. Grig by the greatest difference in the world, the difference between one generation and another.

She crept back, resolving to accomplish the finest piece of typescript that had ever been done in the office. Had she not brains to surpass Gertie Jackson at anything if she chose to try? Just as she was entering her own room the outer door of the office opened. More urgent work! It was Lord Mackworth again. She stood stock-still in the doorway, her head thrown back and turned towards him, her body nearly within the room. Agitated by a sudden secret anticipation, by a pleasure utterly un hoped for, she gave him a nervous, welcoming, enquiring smile, a smile without reserve, and full of the confidence due to one who had proved at once his reliability and his attractiveness. She had a feeling towards him as towards an old friend. She knew that her face was betraying her joy, but she did not care, because she trusted him; and, moreover, it would in any case have been impossible for her to hide her joy.

"There's just one thing," began Lord Mackworth in a cautious whisper, though previously he had put no restraint on his powerful voice, and paused.

"Will you come in?" she invited him, also in a whisper, and moved quickly from his line of sight. He followed her, and having entered her room softly shut the door, which at the previous interview had remained half open.

"Will you sit down?"

They both sat down in their original positions. Yes, they were like friends. More, they were like conspirators. Why? What would the next moment disclose? It seemed to her that the next moment must unfold into an unpredictable, beautiful blossom such as nobody had ever seen. She was intensely excited. She desired ardently that he should ask her to help him in some matter in which she alone could help him. She was a touching, wistful spectacle. All her defences had sunk away. He could not but see that he had made a conquest, that the city of loveliness had fallen into his hands.

"It just occurred to me-please tell me if I'm being indiscreet-that perhaps you wouldn't mind doing me a little service. I may oversleep myself in the morning, and I can't get at my man now. Would you mind giving me a ring up on the 'phone about six o'clock? You see, I have the telephone by my bed, and it would be sure to wake me-especially if you told the operator to keep on ringing. It's very necessary I should run along to the newspaper office and see the editor personally as soon

as he gets there. Otherwise I might be done in. Of course, I could sit up for the rest of the night-" He laughed shortly.

Nearly opposite the end of Clifford Street, in Bond Street, was a hosier's shop with the royal arms over the entrance and half a dozen pairs of rich blue-and-crimson pyjamas-and nothing else-displayed in the window against a chaste background of panelled acacia wood. Lilian saw a phantasm of her client's lordly chamber, with the bed and the telephone by the bed, and the great form of the man himself recumbent and moveless, gloriously and imperfectly covered in a suit of the blue-and-crimson pyjamas. She heard the telephone bell ring-ring-ring-ring-ring-ring, pertinaciously. The figure did not stir. Ring-ring-ring-ring! At last the figure stirred, turned over, half sat up, seized the telephone, which, pacified, ceased to ring, and the figure listened-to her voice! It was her voice that was heard in the chamber... The most sharply masculine hallucination that she had ever had, perhaps the only one. It moved her to the point of fright. The whole house might have rocked under her-rocked once, and then resumed its firmness. She felt faint, terror-struck, and excruciatingly, inexplicably happy. And she was ashamed; she was shocked by the mystery of herself. Flushing, she bent her face over the desk.

"Perhaps I'd better sit up all night," Lord Mackworth added apologetically.

"What's your number?" she asked in a low voice, not looking up.

"Regent 1067."

"Regent 1067," she repeated the number, even writing it on her note pad.

"You're really awfully kind. I hesitated to suggest it. I do hope you'll forgive me."

She looked up quickly, and into his eyes.

"I shall be delighted to give you a ring," she said, with sweet, smiling eagerness. "It's no trouble at all. None at all, I assure you."

She was the divine embodiment of the human and specially feminine desire to please, to please charmingly, to please completely, to please with the whole force and beauty of her individuality. The poor boy must get a few hours' sleep. A man needed sleep; sleep was important to him. As for her, the woman's task was to watch and work, and when the moment came she would wake the man-the child-who was incapable of waking himself.

"Well, thanks ever so much." He rose.

"I suppose you don't want a carbon of your article as well?" she suggested.

"It's an idea," he agreed. "You never know. I think I will have a carbon."

As he was leaving he said abruptly: "Do you know, I imagine I've seen you before-somewhere."

"I don't think so." She did not quite like this remark of his. It seemed to her to be a commonplace device for prolonging the interview; it shook her faith in his probity.

But he insisted, nodding his head.

"Yes. In Bond Street. I remember you were wearing an exceedingly pretty hat, with some yellow flowers in it."

She was dumbfounded, for she did possess a pretty hat with yellow flowers in it. She had done him an injustice. Fancy him noticing her, admiring, remembering! It was incredible. She must have made a considerable impression on him. She smiled her repentance for having doubted his probity even for a moment.

"You must have a very good memory," she said, in her gaze an exquisite admission of his rightness.

"Oh! I have!"

They shook hands. In holding out her hand she drew back her body. She had absurdly hoped that he would offer to shake hands, not really expecting him to do so. He departed with unimpeachable correctness and composure. What nice discretion he had shown in not referring earlier to the fact that her face was not unknown to him! Most men would have contrived to work it in at the very beginning of the conversation. But he had actually gone away, the first time, without mentioning it.

Lilian was left in such a state of exaltation that she could not immediately start to work. She was ecstatically inspired with a resolution, far transcending all previous yearnings of a similar nature, to fulfil herself, to be herself utterly, to bring her gifts to fruition despite all obstacles and all impossibilities. It was not that she desired to please Lord Mackworth (though she passionately desired to please him), nor to achieve luxury and costliness and elegance and a highly refined way of life. These things, however important and delectable, were merely the necessary incidentals to the supreme end of exploiting her beauty, charm and benevolence so that in old age she would not have to say, "I might have been."

## V The Devotee

It was after she had made some tea and was taking it, at her desk, without milk, but with a bun and a half left over from the previous afternoon's orgy of the small room clerks, that Lilian had the idea of a mighty and scarcely conceivable transgression, crime, depredation. None of the machines in the small room was in quite first-rate order. The machines were good, but they needed adjustment. Miss G. – the clerks referred to her as Miss G., instead of Miss Grig, when they were critical of her, which was often – was almost certainly a just woman, but she was mean, especially in the matter of wages; and she would always postpone rather too long the summoning of a mechanic to overhaul the typewriters. Such delay was, of course, disadvantageous to the office, but Miss G. was like that. Lilian, munching, inserted two sheets and a new carbon into her machine, and then pulled them out again with a swift swish. Why should she not abstract Miss G.'s own machine for the high purpose of typing Lord Mackworth's brilliant article? It was nearly a new one.

Miss G. was a first-rate typist. She typed all her own letters, and regularly at night even did copying; and she always had the star machine of the office. The one objection to Lilian's nefarious scheme was the fact that Miss G.'s machine ranked as the Ark of the Covenant, and the rule forbidding the profane to lay hands on it was absolute and awful. This rule was a necessity in the office, where every machine amounted to an individuality, and was loved or hated and shamelessly intrigued for or against. Lilian knew a little of Miss G.'s machine, for on its purchase she had had the honour of trying it and reinforcing Miss G.'s favourable judgment upon it, her touch being lighter than Gertie Jackson's, that amiable, tedious hack, and similar to Miss G.'s touch.

Lilian feared lest her own machine might give a slip towards the end of a page, throw a line out of the straight and spoil the whole page. Miss G.'s machine was on the small desk beneath the window in the principals' room. Having reflected, she decided to sin. If Mr. Grig was awake she would tell him squarely that her own machine was out of gear, that all the clerks' machines were out of gear, and if he still objected – and he might, for he ever feared Miss G. – she would bewitch him. She would put his own theory of her powers into practice upon himself.

She would be quite unscrupulous; she would stop at nothing. She went forth excited on her raid. He was still asleep. He might waken; if he did, so much the worse; she must risk it. She regarded him with friendly condescension. She had work to do; she had a sense of responsibility; and she was doing the work. He, theoretically in charge of the office, slept, probably after a day chiefly idle – the grey-haired, charming, useless irresponsible. And were not all men asleep rather absurd? She picked up the heavy machine; one of its indiarubber shoes dropped off, but she left that where it lay – there were plenty to replace it in her room. Soundlessly she left the sleeper. Triumphant, unscrupulous, reckless, she did not care what might happen.

At work on the article, exulting in the smooth excellence of Miss G.'s machine, she felt strangely happy. She liked Felix to be asleep; she liked the obscure sensation of fatigue at the back of her brain; she liked to be alone in the night, amid a resting or roystering world; she liked the tension of concentrating on the work, the effort after perfection. The very machine itself, and the sounds of the machine, the feel of the paper, the faint hiss of the gas-stove, were all friendly and helpful. How different were her sensations then from her sensations in the pother and racket and friction of the daytime! She forgot that she was beautiful and born to enchant. She was oblivious of both the past and the future. A moral exaltation, sweet and gentle, inspired, upheld and exhilarated her.

She heard the outer door open. The threatened interruption annoyed her almost to exasperation. It was essential that she should not be interrupted, for she was like a poet in full flow of creation. Footsteps, someone moving hesitatingly to and fro in the anteroom! There was the word "Enquiries" painted in black on the glass panel of the small room, thrown into relief by the light within the room,

and people had not the sense to see it. The public was really extraordinary. Even Lord Mackworth had not at first noticed it. Well, let whoever it might be find his way about unaided by her! She would not budge. If urgent work had arrived she did not want it, could not do it, and would not have it.

Then she caught voices. The visitor had got into the principals' room and wakened Mr. Grig. The voices were less audible now, but a conversation seemingly interminable was proceeding in the principals' room. The suspense vexed her and interfered with the fine execution of her task. She sighed, tapped her foot, and made sounds of protest with her tongue against her upper teeth. At length both Mr. Grig and the visitor emerged into the ante-room, still tirelessly gabbling. The visitor went, banging the outer door. Mr. Grig came into her room with a manuscript in his hand. Feigning absorption, she did not look up.

"Here's something wanted for eleven in the morning. It's going to be called for. Proof of a witness's evidence in a law case. Very urgent. It's pretty long. You'd better get on to it at once. Then one or two of them'll be able to finish it between nine and eleven."

Lilian accused him in her mind of merely imitating his sister's methods of organization and partition.

"I'm afraid I can't put this aside, Mr. Grig," she said gravely, uncompromisingly.

"What is it?"

"It's just come in."

"I never heard anybody," Felix snapped.

Lilian thought how queer and how unjust it was that she should be prevented by her inferior station from turning on him and bluntly informing him that he had been asleep instead of managing the office.

"It's an article by Lord Mackworth for to-morrow's *Evening Standard*, and it has to be at the *Standard* office by half-past eight, and I've promised to have it delivered at Jermyn Street by six-thirty."

"But who's going to deliver it?"

"I am, as I go home."

"But this is urgent too. And, what's more, I've definitely promised it," Mr. Grig protested, waving his manuscript somewhat forlornly. "What length's yours?"

"It's not the length. It has to be done with the greatest care."

"Yes, that's all very well, but--"

His attitude of helplessness touched her. She smiled in her serious manner.

"If you'll leave it to me to see to, Mr. Grig," she said soothingly, and yet a little superiorly, "I'll do the best I can. I'll start it, anyhow. And I'll leave an urgent note for Miss Jackson about it. After all, in two hours they ought to be able to do almost anything, and you know how reliable Miss Jackson is. Miss Grig always relies on her."

She held out her hand for the wretched manuscript. Mr. Grig yielded it up, pretending unwillingness and uneasiness, but in reality much relieved. A quarter of an hour later he returned to her room in overcoat and hat.

"I think I may as well go home now," said he, yawning enormously. "I'm a bit anxious about my sister. Nothing else likely to come in, is there? You'll be all right, I suppose."

"*Me!*" she exclaimed kindly. "Of *course*, Mr. Grig. I shall be perfectly all right."

She wondered whether he really was anxious about his sister. At any rate, he had not the stamina to sit up through all the night in the office. But she, Lilian, had. She was delighted to be alone again. She finished Lord Mackworth's article, read it and re-read it. Not a mistake. She bound it and stitched it. She entered the item in the night-book. She made out the bill. She typed the address on the envelope. Then, before fastening the envelope, she read through everything again. All these things she did with the greatest deliberation and nicety.

At the end she had ample time to make a start on the other work, but she could not or would not bring herself to the new task. She was content to write a note for Gertie Jackson, shifting all the responsibility on to Gertie. Gertie would have to fly round and make the others fly round. And if the work was late-what then? Lilian did not care. Her conscience seemed to have exhausted itself. She sat in a blissful trance. She recalled with satisfaction that she had said nothing to Felix about Lord Mackworth having called in person. She rose and wandered about the rooms, savouring the silent solitude. The telephone was in the principals' room. How awkward that might have been if Felix had stayed! But he had not stayed.

## VI The Telephone

"Hello, hello! Who is it?"

"Is that Regent 1067?"

"Yes."

"Is that Lord Mackworth?"

"Speaking. Who is it?"

"Grig's Typewriting Office. I'm so sorry to wake you up, but you asked us to. It's just past six o'clock."

"Thanks very much. Who is it speaking?"

"Grig's Typewriting Office."

"Yes. But *your* name? Miss-Miss-?"

"Oh! I see. Share. Share. Lilian Share... Not Spare, S-h-a-r-e."

"I've got it. Share. I recognized your voice, Miss Share. Well, it's most extraordinarily good-natured of you. Most. I can't thank you enough. Excuse me asking your name. I only wanted it so that I could thank you personally. Article finished?"

"It's all finished and ready to be delivered. It'll be dropped into your letter-box in about a quarter of an hour from now. You can rely on that."

"Then do you keep messengers hanging about all night for these jobs?"

"I'm going to deliver it myself; then I shall know it is delivered."

"D'you know, I half suspected all along you meant to do that. You oughtn't really to put yourself to so much trouble. I don't know how to thank you. I don't, really!"

"It's no trouble at all. It's on my way home."

"You're just going home, then? You must be very tired."

"Oh, no! I sleep in the daytime."

"Well, I hope you'll have a good *day's* rest." A laugh.

"And *I* hope now I've wakened you you won't turn over and go to sleep again." Another laugh, from the same end.

"No fear! I'm up now."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm up. Out of bed." A laugh from the Clifford Street end.

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye. And thanks again. By the way, you're putting the bill with it?"

"Oh, yes."

"And the carbon?"

"Yes. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Miss Share."

Lilian hung up the receiver, smiling. And she continued to smile as she left the room and went to her own room and took her street things out of the cupboard and put them on. Nothing could have been more banal, more ordinary, and nothing more exquisite and romantic than the telephone conversation. The secret charm of it was inexplicable to her... She saw him standing in the blue-and-crimson pyjamas by the bedside, a form distinguished and powerful... She revelled in his gratitude. How nice of him to ask her name so that he might thank her personally! He did not care to thank a nameless employee. He wanted to thank *somebody*. And now she was somebody to him.

Perhaps she had not been well-advised to give him her Christian name. The word, however, had come out of itself. Moreover, she liked her Christian name, and she liked nice people to know it. She certainly ought not to have said "that" about his not turning over and going to sleep again.

No. There was something "common" in it. But he had accepted the freedom in the right spirit, had not taken advantage of it.

She extinguished the gas-stove, restored the stolen typewriter, loosed the catch of the outer door, banged the door after her, and descended, holding the foolscap envelope in her shabbily-gloved hand. The forsaken solitude of the office was behind her.

Outside, an icy mist floated over wet pavements in the first dim, sinister unveiling of the London day! Lilian wore a thick, broad, woollen scarf which comforted her neck and bosom, and gave to beholders the absurd illusion that she was snugly enveloped; but the assaulting cold took her in the waist, and she shivered. Her feet began to feel damp immediately. There was the old watchman peeping out of his sentry-box by his glowing brazier! He recognized her quickly enough, and without a movement of the gnarled face held up her matchbox as a sign of the bond between them. How ridiculous to have classed him with burglars! She threw her head back and gave him a proud, bright and rather condescendingly gracious smile.

Along Clifford Street and all down Bond Street the heaped dustbins stood on the kerb waiting for the scavengers. In Piccadilly several Lyons' horse-vans, painted in Oxford and Cambridge blues, trotted sturdily eastwards; one of them was driven by a woman, wrapped in a great macintosh and perched high aloft with a boy beside her. Nothing else moving in the thoroughfare! The Ritz Hotel, formidable fortress of luxury, stood up arrogant like a Florentine palace, hiding all its costly secrets from the scorned mob. No. 6a Jermyn Street was just round the corner from St. James's Street: a narrow seven-storey building of flats, with a front-door as impassive and meaningless as the face of a footman. Lilian hesitated a moment and relinquished her packet into the brass-bordered letter-slit. She heard it fall. She turned away with a jerky gesture. She had not walked ten yards when a frightful lassitude and dejection attacked her with the suddenness of cholera. Scarcely could she command her limbs to move. The ineffable sadness, hopelessness, wretchedness, vanity of existence washed over her and beat her down. Only a very few could be glorious, and she was not and never could be of the few. She was shut out from brightness, – no better than a ragamuffin looking into a candy window.

She descended into the everlasting lamplit night of the Tube at Dover Street, where there was no dawn and no sunset. And all the employees, and all the meek, preoccupied travellers seemed to be her brothers and sisters in martyrdom. Her train was nearly empty; but the eastbound trains-train after train-were full of pathetic midgets urgently engaged upon the problem of making both ends meet. After Earl's Court the train ran up an incline into the whitening day. She got out at the next station, conveniently near to which she lodged.

The house was one of the heavily porched erections of the 'fifties and 'sixties, much fallen in prestige. The dirty kitchenmaid was giving the stone floor of the porch a lick and a promise, so that fortunately the front door stood open. Lilian had the tiny mean bedroom on the second floor over the hall; in New York it would have been termed a hall-bedroom. Nobody except the gawky, frowsy, stupid, good-natured maid had seen her. She shut her door and locked it. The room was colder even than the street. She looked into the mirror, which was so small that she had had to arrange a descending series of nails for it in order that piece by piece she might inspect the whole of herself. Her face was as pale as a corpse. Undressing and piling half her wardrobe on to the counterpane she slipped into the narrow bed, ravenous for sleep and oblivion, and drew the clothes right over her head. In an instant she was in a paradise of divine dreams.

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