GALSWORTHY JOHN

BEYOND

John Galsworthy

Beyond

Galsworthy J.

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Содержание

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Beyond

Part I

I

At the door of St. George's registry office, Charles Clare Winton strolled forward in the wake of the taxi-cab that was bearing his daughter away with "the fiddler fellow" she had married. His sense of decorum forbade his walking with Nurse Betty – the only other witness of the wedding. A stout woman in a highly emotional condition would have been an incongruous companion to his slim, upright figure, moving with just that unexaggerated swing and balance becoming to a lancer of the old school, even if he has been on the retired list for sixteen years.

Poor Betty! He thought of her with irritated sympathy – she need not have given way to tears on the door-step. She might well feel lost now Gyp was gone, but not so lost as himself! His pale-gloved hand – the one real hand he had, for his right hand had been amputated at the wrist – twisted vexedly at the small, grizzling moustache lifting itself from the corners of his firm lips. On this grey February day he wore no overcoat; faithful to the absolute, almost shamefaced quietness of that wedding, he had not even donned black coat and silk hat, but wore a blue suit and a hard black felt. The instinct of a soldier and hunting man to exhibit no sign whatever of emotion did not desert him this dark day of his life; but his grey-hazel eyes kept contracting, staring fiercely, contracting again; and, at moments, as if overpowered by some deep feeling, they darkened and seemed to draw back in his head. His face was narrow and weathered and thin-cheeked, with a clean-cut jaw, small ears, hair darker than the moustache, but touched at the side wings with grey – the face of a man of action, self-reliant, resourceful. And his bearing was that of one who has always been a bit of a dandy, and paid attention to "form," yet been conscious sometimes that there were things beyond. A man, who, preserving all the precision of a type, yet had in him a streak of something that was not typical. Such often have tragedy in their pasts.

Making his way towards the park, he turned into Mount Street. There was the house still, though the street had been very different then – the house he had passed, up and down, up and down in the fog, like a ghost, that November afternoon, like a cast-out dog, in such awful, unutterable agony of mind, twenty-three years ago, when Gyp was born. And then to be told at the door – he, with no right to enter, he, loving as he believed man never loved woman – to be told at the door that SHE was dead – dead in bearing what he and she alone knew was their child! Up and down in the fog, hour after hour, knowing her time was upon her; and at last to be told that! Of all fates that befall man, surely the most awful is to love too much.

Queer that his route should take him past the very house to-day, after this new bereavement! Accursed luck – that gout which had sent him to Wiesbaden, last September! Accursed luck that Gyp had ever set eyes on this fellow Fiorsen, with his fatal fiddle! Certainly not since Gyp had come to live with him, fifteen years ago, had he felt so forlorn and fit for nothing. To-morrow he would get back to Mildenham and see what hard riding would do. Without Gyp – to be without Gyp! A fiddler! A chap who had never been on a horse in his life! And with his crutch-handled cane he switched viciously at the air, as though carving a man in two.

His club, near Hyde Park Corner, had never seemed to him so desolate. From sheer force of habit he went into the card-room. The afternoon had so darkened that electric light already burned, and there were the usual dozen of players seated among the shaded gleams falling decorously on dark-

wood tables, on the backs of chairs, on cards and tumblers, the little gilded coffee-cups, the polished nails of fingers holding cigars. A crony challenged him to piquet. He sat down listless. That three-legged whist – bridge – had always offended his fastidiousness – a mangled short cut of a game! Poker had something blatant in it. Piquet, though out of fashion, remained for him the only game worth playing – the only game which still had style. He held good cards and rose the winner of five pounds that he would willingly have paid to escape the boredom of the bout. Where would they be by now? Past Newbury; Gyp sitting opposite that Swedish fellow with his greenish wildcat's eyes. Something furtive, and so foreign, about him! A mess – if he were any judge of horse or man! Thank God he had tied Gyp's money up – every farthing! And an emotion that was almost jealousy swept him at the thought of the fellow's arms round his soft-haired, dark-eyed daughter – that pretty, willowy creature, so like in face and limb to her whom he had loved so desperately.

Eyes followed him when he left the card-room, for he was one who inspired in other men a kind of admiration – none could say exactly why. Many quite as noted for general good sportsmanship attracted no such attention. Was it "style," or was it the streak of something not quite typical – the brand left on him by the past?

Abandoning the club, he walked slowly along the railings of Piccadilly towards home, that house in Bury Street, St. James's, which had been his London abode since he was quite young – one of the few in the street that had been left untouched by the general passion for puffing down and building up, which had spoiled half London in his opinion.

A man, more silent than anything on earth, with the soft, quick, dark eyes of a woodcock and a long, greenish, knitted waistcoat, black cutaway, and tight trousers strapped over his boots, opened the door.

"I shan't go out again, Markey. Mrs. Markey must give me some dinner. Anything'll do."

Markey signalled that he had heard, and those brown eyes under eyebrows meeting and forming one long, dark line, took his master in from head to heel. He had already nodded last night, when his wife had said the gov'nor would take it hard. Retiring to the back premises, he jerked his head toward the street and made a motion upward with his hand, by which Mrs. Markey, an astute woman, understood that she had to go out and shop because the gov'nor was dining in. When she had gone, Markey sat down opposite Betty, Gyp's old nurse. The stout woman was still crying in a quiet way. It gave him the fair hump, for he felt inclined to howl like a dog himself. After watching her broad, rosy, tearful face in silence for some minutes, he shook his head, and, with a gulp and a tremor of her comfortable body, Betty desisted. One paid attention to Markey.

Winton went first into his daughter's bedroom, and gazed at its emptied silken order, its deserted silver mirror, twisting viciously at his little moustache. Then, in his sanctum, he sat down before the fire, without turning up the light. Anyone looking in, would have thought he was asleep; but the drowsy influence of that deep chair and cosy fire had drawn him back into the long-ago. What unhappy chance had made him pass HER house to-day!

Some say there is no such thing as an affinity, no case – of a man, at least – made bankrupt of passion by a single love. In theory, it may be so; in fact, there are such men – neck-or-nothing men, quiet and self-contained, the last to expect that nature will play them such a trick, the last to desire such surrender of themselves, the last to know when their fate is on them. Who could have seemed to himself, and, indeed, to others, less likely than Charles Clare Winton to fall over head and ears in love when he stepped into the Belvoir Hunt ballroom at Grantham that December evening, twenty-four years ago? A keen soldier, a dandy, a first-rate man to hounds, already almost a proverb in his regiment for coolness and for a sort of courteous disregard of women as among the minor things of life – he had stood there by the door, in no hurry to dance, taking a survey with an air that just did not give an impression of "side" because it was not at all put on. And – behold! – SHE had walked past him, and his world was changed for ever. Was it an illusion of light that made her whole spirit seem to shine through a half-startled glance? Or a little trick of gait, a swaying, seductive balance

of body; was it the way her hair waved back, or a subtle scent, as of a flower? What was it? The wife of a squire of those parts, with a house in London. Her name? It doesn't matter – she has been long enough dead. There was no excuse – not an ill-treated woman; an ordinary, humdrum marriage, of three years standing; no children. An amiable good fellow of a husband, fifteen years older than herself, inclined already to be an invalid. No excuse! Yet, in one month from that night, Winton and she were lovers, not only in thought but in deed. A thing so utterly beyond "good form" and his sense of what was honourable and becoming in an officer and gentleman that it was simply never a question of weighing pro and con, the cons had it so completely. And yet from that first evening, he was hers, she his. For each of them the one thought was how to be with the other. If so – why did they not at least go off together? Not for want of his beseeching. And no doubt, if she had survived Gyp's birth, they would have gone. But to face the prospect of ruining two men, as it looked to her, had till then been too much for that soft-hearted creature. Death stilled her struggle before it was decided. There are women in whom utter devotion can still go hand in hand with a doubting soul. Such are generally the most fascinating; for the power of hard and prompt decision robs women of mystery, of the subtle atmosphere of change and chance. Though she had but one part in four of foreign blood, she was not at all English. But Winton was English to his back-bone, English in his sense of form, and in that curious streak of whole-hearted desperation that will break form to smithereens in one department and leave it untouched in every other of its owner's life. To have called Winton a "crank" would never have occurred to any one – his hair was always perfectly parted; his boots glowed; he was hard and reticent, accepting and observing every canon of well-bred existence. Yet, in that, his one infatuation, he was as lost to the world and its opinion as the longest-haired lentil-eater of us all. Though at any moment during that one year of their love he would have risked his life and sacrificed his career for a whole day in her company, he never, by word or look, compromised her. He had carried his punctilious observance of her "honour" to a point more bitter than death, consenting, even, to her covering up the tracks of their child's coming. Paying that gambler's debt was by far the bravest deed of his life, and even now its memory festered.

To this very room he had come back after hearing she was dead; this very room which he had refurnished to her taste, so that even now, with its satinwood chairs, little dainty Jacobean bureau, shaded old brass candelabra, divan, it still had an air exotic to bachelordom. There, on the table, had been a letter recalling him to his regiment, ordered on active service. If he had realized what he would go through before he had the chance of trying to lose his life out there, he would undoubtedly have taken that life, sitting in this very chair before the fire – the chair sacred to her and memory. He had not the luck he wished for in that little war – men who don't care whether they live or die seldom have. He secured nothing but distinction. When it was over, he went on, with a few more lines in his face, a few more wrinkles in his heart, soldiering, shooting tigers, pig-sticking, playing polo, riding to hounds harder than ever; giving nothing away to the world; winning steadily the curious, uneasy admiration that men feel for those who combine reckless daring with an ice-cool manner. Since he was less of a talker even than most of his kind, and had never in his life talked of women, he did not gain the reputation of a woman-hater, though he so manifestly avoided them. After six years' service in India and Egypt, he lost his right hand in a charge against dervishes, and had, perforce, to retire, with the rank of major, aged thirty-four. For a long time he had hated the very thought of the child – his child, in giving birth to whom the woman he loved had died. Then came a curious change of feeling; and for three years before his return to England, he had been in the habit of sending home odds and ends picked up in the bazaars, to serve as toys. In return, he had received, twice annually at least, a letter from the man who thought himself Gyp's father. These letters he read and answered. The squire was likable, and had been fond of HER; and though never once had it seemed possible to Winton to have acted otherwise than he did, he had all the time preserved a just and formal sense of the wrong he had done this man. He did not experience remorse, but he had always an irksome

feeling as of a debt unpaid, mitigated by knowledge that no one had ever suspected, and discounted by memory of the awful torture he had endured to make sure against suspicion.

When, plus distinction and minus his hand, he was at last back in England, the squire had come to see him. The poor man was failing fast from Bright's disease. Winton entered again that house in Mount Street with an emotion, to stifle which required more courage than any cavalry charge. But one whose heart, as he would have put it, is "in the right place" does not indulge the quaverings of his nerves, and he faced those rooms where he had last seen her, faced that lonely little dinner with her husband, without sign of feeling. He did not see little Ghita, or Gyp, as she had nicknamed herself, for she was already in her bed; and it was a whole month before he brought himself to go there at an hour when he could see the child if he would. The fact is, he was afraid. What would the sight of this little creature stir in him? When Betty, the nurse, brought her in to see the soldier gentleman with "the leather hand," who had sent her those funny toys, she stood calmly staring with her large, deep-brown eyes. Being seven, her little brown-velvet frock barely reached the knees of her thin, brown-stockinged legs planted one just in front of the other, as might be the legs of a small brown bird; the oval of her gravely wondering face was warm cream colour without red in it, except that of the lips, which were neither full nor thin, and had a little tuck, the tiniest possible dimple at one corner. Her hair of warm dark brown had been specially brushed and tied with a narrow red ribbon back from her forehead, which was broad and rather low, and this added to her gravity. Her eyebrows were thin and dark and perfectly arched; her little nose was perfectly straight, her little chin in perfect balance between round and point. She stood and stared till Winton smiled. Then the gravity of her face broke, her lips parted, her eyes seemed to fly a little. And Winton's heart turned over within him – she was the very child of her that he had lost! And he said, in a voice that seemed to him to tremble:

"Well, Gyp?"

"Thank you for my toys; I like them."

He held out his hand, and she gravely put her small hand into it. A sense of solace, as if some one had slipped a finger in and smoothed his heart, came over Winton. Gently, so as not to startle her, he raised her hand a little, bent, and kissed it. It may have been from his instant recognition that here was one as sensitive as child could be, or the way many soldiers acquire from dealing with their men – those simple, shrewd children – or some deeper instinctive sense of ownership between them; whatever it was, from that moment, Gyp conceived for him a rushing admiration, one of those headlong affections children will sometimes take for the most unlikely persons.

He used to go there at an hour when he knew the squire would be asleep, between two and five. After he had been with Gyp, walking in the park, riding with her in the Row, or on wet days sitting in her lonely nursery telling stories, while stout Betty looked on half hypnotized, a rather queer and doubting look on her comfortable face – after such hours, he found it difficult to go to the squire's study and sit opposite him, smoking. Those interviews reminded him too much of past days, when he had kept such desperate check on himself – too much of the old inward chafing against the other man's legal ownership – too much of the debt owing. But Winton was triple-proofed against betrayal of feeling. The squire welcomed him eagerly, saw nothing, felt nothing, was grateful for his goodness to the child. Well, well! He had died in the following spring. And Winton found that he had been made Gyp's guardian and trustee. Since his wife's death, the squire had muddled his affairs, his estate was heavily mortgaged; but Winton accepted the position with an almost savage satisfaction, and, from that moment, schemed deeply to get Gyp all to himself. The Mount Street house was sold; the Lincolnshire place let. She and Nurse Betty were installed at his own hunting-box, Mildenham. In this effort to get her away from all the squire's relations, he did not scruple to employ to the utmost the power he undoubtedly had of making people feel him unapproachable. He was never impolite to any of them; he simply froze them out. Having plenty of money himself, his motives could not be called in question. In one year he had isolated her from all except stout Betty. He had no qualms, for Gyp was no more happy away from him than he from her. He had but one bad half-hour. It came

when he had at last decided that she should be called by his name, if not legally at least by custom, round Mildenham. It was to Markey he had given the order that Gyp was to be little Miss Winton for the future. When he came in from hunting that day, Betty was waiting in his study. She stood in the centre of the emptiest part of that rather dingy room, as far as possible away from any good or chattel. How long she had been standing there, heaven only knew; but her round, rosy face was confused between awe and resolution, and she had made a sad mess of her white apron. Her blue eyes met Winton's with a sort of desperation.

"About what Markey told me, sir. My old master wouldn't have liked it, sir."

Touched on the raw by this reminder that before the world he had been nothing to the loved one, that before the world the squire, who had been nothing to her, had been everything, Winton said icily:

"Indeed! You will be good enough to comply with my wish, all the same."

The stout woman's face grew very red. She burst out, breathless:

"Yes, sir; but I've seen what I've seen. I never said anything, but I've got eyes. If Miss Gyp's to take your name, sir, then tongues'll wag, and my dear, dead mistress – "

But at the look on his face she stopped, with her mouth open.

"You will be kind enough to keep your thoughts to yourself. If any word or deed of yours gives the slightest excuse for talk – you go. Understand me, you go, and you never see Gyp again! In the meantime you will do what I ask. Gyp is my adopted daughter."

She had always been a little afraid of him, but she had never seen that look in his eyes or heard him speak in that voice. And she bent her full moon of a face and went, with her apron crumpled as apron had never been, and tears in her eyes. And Winton, at the window, watching the darkness gather, the leaves flying by on a sou'-westerly wind, drank to the dregs a cup of bitter triumph. He had never had the right to that dead, forever-loved mother of his child. He meant to have the child. If tongues must wag, let them! This was a defeat of all his previous precaution, a deep victory of natural instinct. And his eyes narrowed and stared into the darkness.

II

In spite of his victory over all human rivals in the heart of Gyp, Winton had a rival whose strength he fully realized perhaps for the first time now that she was gone, and he, before the fire, was brooding over her departure and the past. Not likely that one of his decisive type, whose life had so long been bound up with swords and horses, would grasp what music might mean to a little girl. Such ones, he knew, required to be taught scales, and "In a Cottage near a Wood" with other melodies. He took care not to go within sound of them, so that he had no conception of the avidity with which Gyp had mopped up all, and more than all, her governess could teach her. He was blind to the rapture with which she listened to any stray music that came its way to Mildenham – to carols in the Christmas dark, to certain hymns, and one special "Nunc Dimittis" in the village church, attended with a hopeless regularity; to the horn of the hunter far out in the quivering, dripping coverts; even to Markey's whistling, which was full and strangely sweet.

He could share her love of dogs and horses, take an anxious interest in her way of catching bumblebees in the hollow of her hand and putting them to her small, delicate ears to hear them buzz, sympathize with her continual ravages among the flowerbeds, in the old-fashioned garden, full of lilacs and laburnums in spring, pinks, roses, cornflowers in summer, dahlias and sunflowers in autumn, and always a little neglected and overgrown, a little squeezed in, and elbowed by the more important surrounding paddocks. He could sympathize with her attempts to draw his attention to the song of birds; but it was simply not in him to understand how she loved and craved for music. She was a cloudy little creature, up and down in mood – rather like a brown lady spaniel that she had, now gay as a butterfly, now brooding as night. Any touch of harshness she took to heart fearfully. She was the strangest compound of pride and sell-disparagement; the qualities seemed mixed in her so

deeply that neither she nor any one knew of which her cloudy fits were the result. Being so sensitive, she "fancied" things terribly. Things that others did to her, and thought nothing of, often seemed to her conclusive evidence that she was not loved by anybody, which was dreadfully unjust, because she wanted to love everyone – nearly. Then suddenly she would feel: "If they don't love me, I don't care. I don't want anything of anybody!" Presently, all would blow away just like a cloud, and she would love and be gay, until something fresh, perhaps not at all meant to hurt her, would again hurt her horribly. In reality, the whole household loved and admired her. But she was one of those delicate-treading beings, born with a skin too few, who – and especially in childhood – suffer from themselves in a world born with a skin too many.

To Winton's extreme delight, she took to riding as a duck to water, and knew no fear on horseback. She had the best governess he could get her, the daughter of an admiral, and, therefore, in distressed circumstances; and later on, a tutor for her music, who came twice a week all the way from London – a sardonic man who cherished for her even more secret admiration than she for him. In fact, every male thing fell in love with her at least a little. Unlike most girls, she never had an epoch of awkward plainness, but grew like a flower, evenly, steadily. Winton often gazed at her with a sort of intoxication; the turn of her head, the way those perfectly shaped, wonderfully clear brown eyes would "fly," the set of her straight, round neck, the very shaping of her limbs were all such poignant reminders of what he had so loved. And yet, for all that likeness to her mother, there was a difference, both in form and character. Gyp had, as it were, an extra touch of "breeding," more chiselling in body, more fastidiousness in soul, a little more poise, a little more sheer grace; in mood, more variance, in mind, more clarity and, mixed with her sweetness, a distinct spice of scepticism which her mother had lacked.

In modern times there are no longer "toasts," or she would have been one with both the hunts. Though delicate in build, she was not frail, and when her blood was up would "go" all day, and come in so bone-tired that she would drop on to the tiger skin before the fire, rather than face the stairs. Life at Mildenham was lonely, save for Winton's hunting cronies, and they but few, for his spiritual dandyism did not gladly suffer the average country gentleman and his frigid courtesy frightened women.

Besides, as Betty had foreseen, tongues did wag – those tongues of the countryside, avid of anything that might spice the tedium of dull lives and brains. And, though no breath of gossip came to Winton's ears, no women visited at Mildenham. Save for the friendly casual acquaintanceships of churchyard, hunting-field, and local race-meetings, Gyp grew up knowing hardly any of her own sex. This dearth developed her reserve, kept her backward in sex-perception, gave her a faint, unconscious contempt for men – creatures always at the beck and call of her smile, and so easily disquieted by a little frown – gave her also a secret yearning for companions of her own gender. Any girl or woman that she did chance to meet always took a fancy to her, because she was so nice to them, which made the transitory nature of these friendships tantalizing. She was incapable of jealousies or backbiting. Let men beware of such – there is coiled in their fibre a secret fascination!

Gyp's moral and spiritual growth was not the sort of subject that Winton could pay much attention to. It was pre-eminently a matter one did not talk about. Outward forms, such as going to church, should be preserved; manners should be taught her by his own example as much as possible; beyond this, nature must look after things. His view had much real wisdom. She was a quick and voracious reader, bad at remembering what she read; and though she had soon devoured all the books in Winton's meagre library, including Byron, Whyte-Melville, and Humboldt's "Cosmos," they had not left too much on her mind. The attempts of her little governess to impart religion were somewhat arid of result, and the interest of the vicar, Gyp, with her instinctive spice of scepticism soon put into the same category as the interest of all the other males she knew. She felt that he enjoyed calling her "my dear" and patting her shoulder, and that this enjoyment was enough reward for his exertions.

Tucked away in that little old dark manor house, whose stables alone were up to date – three hours from London, and some thirty miles from The Wash, it must be confessed that her upbringing

lacked modernity. About twice a year, Winton took her up to town to stay with his unmarried sister Rosamund in Curzon Street. Those weeks, if they did nothing else, increased her natural taste for charming clothes, fortified her teeth, and fostered her passion for music and the theatre. But the two main nourishments of the modern girl – discussion and games – she lacked utterly. Moreover, those years of her life from fifteen to nineteen were before the social resurrection of 1906, and the world still crawled like a winter fly on a window-pane. Winton was a Tory, Aunt Rosamund a Tory, everybody round her a Tory. The only spiritual development she underwent all those years of her girlhood was through her headlong love for her father. After all, was there any other way in which she could really have developed? Only love makes fruitful the soul. The sense of form that both had in such high degree prevented much demonstration; but to be with him, do things for him, to admire, and credit him with perfection; and, since she could not exactly wear the same clothes or speak in the same clipped, quiet, decisive voice, to dislike the clothes and voices of other men – all this was precious to her beyond everything. If she inherited from him that fastidious sense of form, she also inherited his capacity for putting all her eggs in one basket. And since her company alone gave him real happiness, the current of love flowed over her heart all the time. Though she never realized it, abundant love FOR somebody was as necessary to her as water running up the stems of flowers, abundant love FROM somebody as needful as sunshine on their petals. And Winton's somewhat frequent little runs to town, to Newmarket, or where not, were always marked in her by a fall of the barometer, which recovered as his return grew near.

One part of her education, at all events, was not neglected – cultivation of an habitual sympathy with her poorer neighbours. Without concerning himself in the least with problems of sociology, Winton had by nature an open hand and heart for cottagers, and abominated interference with their lives. And so it came about that Gyp, who, by nature also never set foot anywhere without invitation, was always hearing the words: "Step in, Miss Gyp"; "Step in, and sit down, lovey," and a good many words besides from even the boldest and baddest characters. There is nothing like a soft and pretty face and sympathetic listening for seducing the hearts of "the people."

So passed the eleven years till she was nineteen and Winton forty-six. Then, under the wing of her little governess, she went to the hunt-ball. She had revolted against appearing a "fluffy miss," wanting to be considered at once full-fledged; so that her dress, perfect in fit, was not white but palest maize-colour, as if she had already been to dances. She had all Winton's dandyism, and just so much more as was appropriate to her sex. With her dark hair, wonderfully fluffed and coiled, waving across her forehead, her neck bare for the first time, her eyes really "flying," and a demeanour perfectly cool – as though she knew that light and movement, covetous looks, soft speeches, and admiration were her birthright – she was more beautiful than even Winton had thought her. At her breast she wore some sprigs of yellow jasmine procured by him from town – a flower of whose scent she was very fond, and that he had never seen worn in ballrooms. That swaying, delicate creature, warmed by excitement, reminded him, in every movement and by every glance of her eyes, of her whom he had first met at just such a ball as this. And by the carriage of his head, the twist of his little moustache, he conveyed to the world the pride he was feeling.

That evening held many sensations for Gyp – some delightful, one confused, one unpleasant. She revelled in her success. Admiration was very dear to her. She passionately enjoyed dancing, loved feeling that she was dancing well and giving pleasure. But, twice over, she sent away her partners, smitten with compassion for her little governess sitting there against the wall – all alone, with no one to take notice of her, because she was elderly, and roundabout, poor darling! And, to that loyal person's horror, she insisted on sitting beside her all through two dances. Nor would she go in to supper with anyone but Winton. Returning to the ballroom on his arm, she overheard an elderly woman say: "Oh, don't you know? Of course he really IS her father!" and an elderly man answer: "Ah, that accounts for it – quite so!" With those eyes at the back of the head which the very sensitive possess, she could

see their inquisitive, cold, slightly malicious glances, and knew they were speaking of her. And just then her partner came for her.

"Really IS her father!" The words meant TOO much to be grasped this evening of full sensations. They left a little bruise somewhere, but softened and anointed, just a sense of confusion at the back of her mind. And very soon came that other sensation, so disillusioning, that all else was crowded out. It was after a dance – a splendid dance with a good-looking man quite twice her age. They were sitting behind some palms, he murmuring in his mellow, flown voice admiration for her dress, when suddenly he bent his flushed face and kissed her bare arm above the elbow. If he had hit her he could not have astonished or hurt her more. It seemed to her innocence that he would never have done such a thing if she had not said something dreadful to encourage him. Without a word she got up, gazed at him a moment with eyes dark from pain, shivered, and slipped away. She went straight to Winton. From her face, all closed up, tightened lips, and the familiar little droop at their corners, he knew something dire had happened, and his eyes boded ill for the person who had hurt her; but she would say nothing except that she was tired and wanted to go home. And so, with the little faithful governess, who, having been silent perforce nearly all the evening, was now full of conversation, they drove out into the frosty night. Winton sat beside the chauffeur, smoking viciously, his fur collar turned up over his ears, his eyes stabbing the darkness, under his round, low-drawn fur cap. Who had dared upset his darling? And, within the car, the little governess chattered softly, and Gyp, shrouded in lace, in her dark corner sat silent, seeing nothing but the vision of that insult. Sad end to a lovely night!

She lay awake long hours in the darkness, while a sort of coherence was forming in her mind. Those words: "Really IS her father!" and that man's kissing of her bare arm were a sort of revelation of sex-mystery, hardening the consciousness that there was something at the back of her life. A child so sensitive had not, of course, quite failed to feel the spiritual draughts around her; but instinctively she had recoiled from more definite perceptions. The time before Winton came was all so faint – Betty, toys, short glimpses of a kind, invalidish man called "Papa." As in that word there was no depth compared with the word "Dad" bestowed on Winton, so there had been no depth in her feelings towards the squire. When a girl has no memory of her mother, how dark are many things! None, except Betty, had ever talked of her mother. There was nothing sacred in Gyp's associations, no faiths to be broken by any knowledge that might come to her; isolated from other girls, she had little realisation even of the conventions. Still, she suffered horribly, lying there in the dark – from bewilderment, from thorns dragged over her skin, rather than from a stab in the heart. The knowledge of something about her conspicuous, doubtful, provocative of insult, as she thought, grievously hurt her delicacy. Those few wakeful hours made a heavy mark. She fell asleep at last, still all in confusion, and woke up with a passionate desire to KNOW. All that morning she sat at her piano, playing, refusing to go out, frigid to Betty and the little governess, till the former was reduced to tears and the latter to Wordsworth. After tea she went to Winton's study, that dingy little room where he never studied anything, with leather chairs and books which – except "Mr. Jorrocks," Byron, those on the care of horses, and the novels of Whyte-Melville – were never read; with prints of superequine celebrities, his sword, and photographs of Gyp and of brother officers on the walls. Two bright spots there were indeed – the fire, and the little bowl that Gyp always kept filled with flowers.

When she came gliding in like that, a slender, rounded figure, her creamy, dark-eyed, oval face all cloudy, she seemed to Winton to have grown up of a sudden. He had known all day that something was coming, and had been cudgelling his brains finely. From the fervour of his love for her, he felt an anxiety that was almost fear. What could have happened last night – that first night of her entrance into society – meddlesome, gossiping society! She slid down to the floor against his knee. He could not see her face, could not even touch her; for she had settled down on his right side. He mastered his tremors and said:

"Well, Gyp – tired?"

"No."

"A little bit?"

"No."

"Was it up to what you thought, last night?"

"Yes."

The logs hissed and crackled; the long flames ruffled in the chimney-draught; the wind roared outside – then, so suddenly that it took his breath away:

"Dad, are you really and truly my father?"

When that which one has always known might happen at last does happen, how little one is prepared! In the few seconds before an answer that could in no way be evaded, Winton had time for a tumult of reflection. A less resolute character would have been caught by utter mental blankness, then flung itself in panic on "Yes" or "No." But Winton was incapable of losing his head; he would not answer without having faced the consequences of his reply. To be her father was the most warming thing in his life; but if he avowed it, how far would he injure her love for him? What did a girl know? How make her understand? What would her feeling be about her dead mother? How would that dead loved one feel? What would she have wished?

It was a cruel moment. And the girl, pressed against his knee, with face hidden, gave him no help. Impossible to keep it from her, now that her instinct was roused! Silence, too, would answer for him. And clenching his hand on the arm of his chair, he said:

"Yes, Gyp; your mother and I loved each other." He felt a quiver go through her, would have given much to see her face. What, even now, did she understand? Well, it must be gone through with, and he said:

"What made you ask?"

She shook her head and murmured:

"I'm glad."

Grief, shock, even surprise would have roused all his loyalty to the dead, all the old stubborn bitterness, and he would have frozen up against her. But this acquiescent murmur made him long to smooth it down.

"Nobody has ever known. She died when you were born. It was a fearful grief to me. If you've heard anything, it's just gossip, because you go by my name. Your mother was never talked about. But it's best you should know, now you're grown up. People don't often love as she and I loved. You needn't be ashamed."

She had not moved, and her face was still turned from him. She said quietly:

"I'm not ashamed. Am I very like her?"

"Yes; more than I could ever have hoped."

Very low she said:

"Then you don't love me for myself?"

Winton was but dimly conscious of how that question revealed her nature, its power of piercing instinctively to the heart of things, its sensitive pride, and demand for utter and exclusive love. To things that go too deep, one opposes the bulwark of obtuseness. And, smiling, he simply said:

"What do you think?"

Then, to his dismay, he perceived that she was crying – struggling against it so that her shoulder shook against his knee. He had hardly ever known her cry, not in all the disasters of unstable youth, and she had received her full meed of knocks and tumbles. He could only stroke that shoulder, and say:

"Don't cry, Gyp; don't cry!"

She ceased as suddenly as she had begun, got up, and, before he too could rise, was gone.

That evening, at dinner, she was just as usual. He could not detect the slightest difference in her voice or manner, or in her good-night kiss. And so a moment that he had dreaded for years was over, leaving only the faint shame which follows a breach of reticence on the spirits of those who worship

it. While the old secret had been quite undisclosed, it had not troubled him. Disclosed, it hurt him. But Gyp, in those twenty-four hours, had left childhood behind for good; her feeling toward men had hardened. If she did not hurt them a little, they would hurt her! The sex-instinct had come to life. To Winton she gave as much love as ever, even more, perhaps; but the dew was off.

III

The next two years were much less solitary, passed in more or less constant gaiety. His confession spurred Winton on to the fortification of his daughter's position. He would stand no nonsense, would not have her looked on askance. There is nothing like "style" for carrying the defences of society – only, it must be the genuine thing. Whether at Mildenham, or in London under the wing of his sister, there was no difficulty. Gyp was too pretty, Winton too cool, his quietness too formidable. She had every advantage. Society only troubles itself to make front against the visibly weak.

The happiest time of a girl's life is that when all appreciate and covet her, and she herself is free as air – a queen of hearts, for none of which she hankers; or, if not the happiest, at all events it is the gayest time. What did Gyp care whether hearts ached for her – she knew not love as yet, perhaps would never know the pains of unrequited love. Intoxicated with life, she led her many admirers a pretty dance, treating them with a sort of bravura. She did not want them to be unhappy, but she simply could not take them seriously. Never was any girl so heart-free. She was a queer mixture in those days, would give up any pleasure for Winton, and most for Betty or her aunt – her little governess was gone – but of nobody else did she seem to take account, accepting all that was laid at her feet as the due of her looks, her dainty frocks, her music, her good riding and dancing, her talent for amateur theatricals and mimicry. Winton, whom at least she never failed, watched that glorious fluttering with quiet pride and satisfaction. He was getting to those years when a man of action dislikes interruption of the grooves into which his activity has fallen. He pursued his hunting, racing, card-playing, and his very stealthy alms and services to lame ducks of his old regiment, their families, and other unfortunates – happy in knowing that Gyp was always as glad to be with him as he to be with her. Hereditary gout, too, had begun to bother him.

The day that she came of age they were up in town, and he summoned her to the room, in which he now sat by the fire recalling all these things, to receive an account of his stewardship. He had nursed her greatly embarrassed inheritance very carefully till it amounted to some twenty thousand pounds. He had never told her of it – the subject was dangerous, and, since his own means were ample, she had not wanted for anything. When he had explained exactly what she owned, shown her how it was invested, and told her that she must now open her own banking account, she stood gazing at the sheets of paper, whose items she had been supposed to understand, and her face gathered the look which meant that she was troubled. Without lifting her eyes she asked:

"Does it all come from – him?"

He had not expected that, and flushed under his tan.

"No; eight thousand of it was your mother's."

Gyp looked at him, and said:

"Then I won't take the rest – please, Dad."

Winton felt a sort of crabbed pleasure. What should be done with that money if she did not take it, he did not in the least know. But not to take it was like her, made her more than ever his daughter – a kind of final victory. He turned away to the window from which he had so often watched for her mother. There was the corner she used to turn! In one minute, surely she would be standing there, colour glowing in her cheeks, her eyes soft behind her veil, her breast heaving a little with her haste, waiting for his embrace. There she would stand, drawing up her veil. He turned round. Difficult to believe it was not she! And he said:

"Very well, my love. But you will take the equivalent from me instead. The other can be put by; some one will benefit some day!"

At those unaccustomed words, "My love," from his undemonstrative lips, the colour mounted in her cheeks and her eyes shone. She threw her arms round his neck.

She had her fill of music in those days, taking piano lessons from a Monsieur Harmost, a grey-haired native of Liege, with mahogany cheeks and the touch of an angel, who kept her hard at it and called her his "little friend." There was scarcely a concert of merit that she did not attend or a musician of mark whose playing she did not know, and, though fastidiousness saved her from squirming in adoration round the feet of those prodigious performers, she perched them all on pedestals, men and women alike, and now and then met them at her aunt's house in Curzon Street.

Aunt Rosamund, also musical, so far as breeding would allow, stood for a good deal to Gyp, who had built up about her a romantic story of love wrecked by pride from a few words she had once let drop. She was a tall and handsome woman, a year older than Winton, with a long, aristocratic face, deep-blue, rather shining eyes, a gentlemanly manner, warm heart, and one of those indescribable, not unmelodious drawls that one connects with an unshakable sense of privilege. She, in turn, was very fond of Gyp; and what passed within her mind, by no means devoid of shrewdness, as to their real relationship, remained ever discreetly hidden. She was, so far again as breeding would allow, something of a humanitarian and rebel, loving horses and dogs, and hating cats, except when they had four legs. The girl had just that softness which fascinates women who perhaps might have been happier if they had been born men. Not that Rosamund Winton was of an aggressive type – she merely had the resolute "catch hold of your tail, old fellow" spirit so often found in Englishwomen of the upper classes. A cheery soul, given to long coats and waistcoats, stocks, and a crutch-handled stick, she – like her brother – had "style," but more sense of humour – valuable in musical circles! At her house, the girl was practically compelled to see fun as well as merit in all those prodigies, haloed with hair and filled to overflowing with music and themselves. And, since Gyp's natural sense of the ludicrous was extreme, she and her aunt could rarely talk about anything without going into fits of laughter.

Winton had his first really bad attack of gout when Gyp was twenty-two, and, terrified lest he might not be able to sit a horse in time for the opening meets, he went off with her and Markey to Wiesbaden. They had rooms in the Wilhelmstrasse, overlooking the gardens, where leaves were already turning, that gorgeous September. The cure was long and obstinate, and Winton badly bored. Gyp fared much better. Attended by the silent Markey, she rode daily on the Neroberg, chafing at regulations which reduced her to specified tracks in that majestic wood where the beeches glowed. Once or even twice a day she went to the concerts in the Kurhaus, either with her father or alone.

The first time she heard Fiorsen play she was alone. Unlike most violinists, he was tall and thin, with great pliancy of body and swift sway of movement. His face was pale, and went strangely with hair and moustache of a sort of dirt-gold colour, and his thin cheeks with very broad high cheek-bones had little narrow scraps of whisker. Those little whiskers seemed to Gyp awful – indeed, he seemed rather awful altogether – but his playing stirred and swept her in the most uncanny way. He had evidently remarkable technique; and the emotion, the intense wayward feeling of his playing was chiselled by that technique, as if a flame were being frozen in its swaying. When he stopped, she did not join in the tornado of applause, but sat motionless, looking up at him. Quite unconstrained by all those people, he passed the back of his hand across his hot brow, shoving up a wave or two of that queer-coloured hair; then, with a rather disagreeable smile, he made a short supple bow or two. And she thought, "What strange eyes he has – like a great cat's!" Surely they were green; fierce, yet shy, almost furtive – mesmeric! Certainly the strangest man she had ever seen, and the most frightening. He seemed looking straight at her; and, dropping her gaze, she clapped. When she looked again, his face had lost that smile for a kind of wistfulness. He made another of those little supple bows straight at her – it seemed to Gyp – and jerked his violin up to his shoulder. "He's going to play to me," she

thought absurdly. He played without accompaniment a little tune that seemed to twitch the heart. When he finished, this time she did not look up, but was conscious that he gave one impatient bow and walked off.

That evening at dinner she said to Winton:

"I heard a violinist to-day, Dad, the most wonderful playing – Gustav Fiorsen. Is that Swedish, do you think – or what?"

Winton answered:

"Very likely. What sort of a bounder was he to look at? I used to know a Swede in the Turkish army – nice fellow, too."

"Tall and thin and white-faced, with bumpy cheek-bones, and hollows under them, and queer green eyes. Oh, and little goldy side-whiskers."

"By Jove! It sounds the limit."

Gyp murmured, with a smile:

"Yes; I think perhaps he is."

She saw him next day in the gardens. They were sitting close to the Schiller statue, Winton reading The Times, to whose advent he looked forward more than he admitted, for he was loath by confessions of boredom to disturb Gyp's manifest enjoyment of her stay. While perusing the customary comforting animadversions on the conduct of those "rascally Radicals" who had just come into power, and the account of a Newmarket meeting, he kept stealing sidelong glances at his daughter.

Certainly she had never looked prettier, daintier, shown more breeding than she did out here among these Germans with their thick pasterns, and all the cosmopolitan hairy-heeled crowd in this God-forsaken place! The girl, unconscious of his stealthy regalement, was letting her clear eyes rest, in turn, on each figure that passed, on the movements of birds and dogs, watching the sunlight glisten on the grass, burnish the copper beeches, the lime-trees, and those tall poplars down there by the water. The doctor at Mildenham, once consulted on a bout of headache, had called her eyes "perfect organs," and certainly no eyes could take things in more swiftly or completely. She was attractive to dogs, and every now and then one would stop, in two minds whether or no to put his nose into this foreign girl's hand. From a flirtation of eyes with a great Dane, she looked up and saw Fiorsen passing, in company with a shorter, square man, having very fashionable trousers and a corseted waist. The violinist's tall, thin, loping figure was tightly buttoned into a brownish-grey frock-coat suit; he wore a rather broad-brimmed, grey, velvety hat; in his buttonhole was a white flower; his cloth-topped boots were of patent leather; his tie was bunched out at the ends over a soft white-linen shirt – altogether quite a dandy! His most strange eyes suddenly swept down on hers, and he made a movement as if to put his hand to his hat.

'Why, he remembers me,' thought Gyp. That thin-waisted figure with head set just a little forward between rather high shoulders, and its long stride, curiously suggested a leopard or some lithe creature. He touched his short companion's arm, muttered something, turned round, and came back. She could see him staring her way, and knew he was coming simply to look at her. She knew, too, that her father was watching. And she felt that those greenish eyes would waver before his stare – that stare of the Englishman of a certain class, which never condescends to be inquisitive. They passed; Gyp saw Fiorsen turn to his companion, slightly tossing back his head in their direction, and heard the companion laugh. A little flame shot up in her.

Winton said:

"Rum-looking Johnnies one sees here!"

"That was the violinist I told you of – Fiorsen."

"Oh! Ah!" But he had evidently forgotten.

The thought that Fiorsen should have picked her out of all that audience for remembrance subtly flattered her vanity. She lost her ruffled feeling. Though her father thought his dress awful, it was really rather becoming. He would not have looked as well in proper English clothes. Once, at least,

during the next two days, she noticed the short, square young man who had been walking with him, and was conscious that he followed her with his eyes.

And then a certain Baroness von Maisen, a cosmopolitan friend of Aunt Rosamund's, German by marriage, half-Dutch, half-French by birth, asked her if she had heard the Swedish violinist, Fiorsen. He would be, she said, the best violinist of the day, if – and she shook her head. Finding that expressive shake unquestioned, the baroness pursued her thoughts:

"Ah, these musicians! He wants saving from himself. If he does not halt soon, he will be lost. Pity! A great talent!"

Gyp looked at her steadily and asked:

"Does he drink, then?"

"Pas mal! But there are things besides drink, ma chere."

Instinct and so much life with Winton made the girl regard it as beneath her to be shocked. She did not seek knowledge of life, but refused to shy away from it or be discomfited; and the baroness, to whom innocence was piquant, went on:

"Des femmes – toujours des femmes! C'est grand dommage. It will spoil his spirit. His sole chance is to find one woman, but I pity her; sapristi, quelle vie pour elle!"

Gyp said calmly:

"Would a man like that ever love?"

The baroness goggled her eyes.

"I have known such a man become a slave. I have known him running after a woman like a lamb while she was deceiving him here and there. On ne peut jamais dire. Ma belle, il y a des choses que vous ne savez pas encore." She took Gyp's hand. "And yet, one thing is certain. With those eyes and those lips and that figure, YOU have a time before you!"

Gyp withdrew her hand, smiled, and shook her head; she did not believe in love.

"Ah, but you will turn some heads! No fear! as you English say. There is fatality in those pretty brown eyes!"

A girl may be pardoned who takes as a compliment the saying that her eyes are fatal. The words warmed Gyp, uncontrollably light-hearted in these days, just as she was warmed when people turned to stare at her. The soft air, the mellowness of this gay place, much music, a sense of being a rara avis among people who, by their heavier type, enhanced her own, had produced in her a kind of intoxication, making her what the baroness called "un peu folle." She was always breaking into laughter, having that precious feeling of twisting the world round her thumb, which does not come too often in the life of one who is sensitive. Everything to her just then was either "funny" or "lovely." And the baroness, conscious of the girl's chic, genuinely attracted by one so pretty, took care that she saw all the people, perhaps more than all, that were desirable.

To women and artists, between whom there is ever a certain kinship, curiosity is a vivid emotion. Besides, the more a man has conquered, the more precious field he is for a woman's conquest. To attract a man who has attracted many, what is it but a proof that one's charm is superior to that of all those others? The words of the baroness deepened in Gyp the impression that Fiorsen was "impossible," but secretly fortified the faint excitement she felt that he should have remembered her out of all that audience. Later on, they bore more fruit than that. But first came that queer incident of the flowers.

Coming in from a ride, a week after she had sat with Winton under the Schiller statue, Gyp found on her dressing-table a bunch of Gloire de Dijon and La France roses. Plunging her nose into them, she thought: "How lovely! Who sent me these?" There was no card. All that the German maid could say was that a boy had brought them from a flower shop "fur Fraulein Vinton"; it was surmised that they came from the baroness. In her bodice at dinner, and to the concert after, Gyp wore one La France and one Gloire de Dijon – a daring mixture of pink and orange against her oyster-coloured frock, which delighted her, who had a passion for experiments in colour. They had bought

no programme, all music being the same to Winton, and Gyp not needing any. When she saw Fiorsen come forward, her cheeks began to colour from sheer anticipation.

He played first a minuet by Mozart; then the Cesar Franck sonata; and when he came back to make his bow, he was holding in his hand a Gloire de Dijon and a La France rose. Involuntarily, Gyp raised her hand to her own roses. His eyes met hers; he bowed just a little lower. Then, quite naturally, put the roses to his lips as he was walking off the platform. Gyp dropped her hand, as if it had been stung. Then, with the swift thought: "Oh, that's schoolgirlish!" she contrived a little smile. But her cheeks were flushing. Should she take out those roses and let them fall? Her father might see, might notice Fiorsen's – put two and two together! He would consider she had been insulted. Had she? She could not bring herself to think so. It was too pretty a compliment, as if he wished to tell her that he was playing to her alone. The baroness's words flashed through her mind: "He wants saving from himself. Pity! A great talent!" It WAS a great talent. There must be something worth saving in one who could play like that! They left after his last solo. Gyp put the two roses carefully back among the others.

Three days later, she went to an afternoon "at home" at the Baroness von Maisen's. She saw him at once, over by the piano, with his short, square companion, listening to a voluble lady, and looking very bored and restless. All that overcast afternoon, still and with queer lights in the sky, as if rain were coming, Gyp had been feeling out of mood, a little homesick. Now she felt excited. She saw the short companion detach himself and go up to the baroness; a minute later, he was brought up to her and introduced – Count Rosek. Gyp did not like his face; there were dark rings under the eyes, and he was too perfectly self-possessed, with a kind of cold sweetness; but he was very agreeable and polite, and spoke English well. He was – it seemed – a Pole, who lived in London, and seemed to know all that was to be known about music. Miss Winton – he believed – had heard his friend Fiorsen play; but not in London? No? That was odd; he had been there some months last season. Faintly annoyed at her ignorance, Gyp answered:

"Yes; but I was in the country nearly all last summer."

"He had a great success. I shall take him back; it is best for his future. What do you think of his playing?"

In spite of herself, for she did not like expanding to this sphinxlike little man, Gyp murmured:

"Oh, simply wonderful, of course!"

He nodded, and then rather suddenly said, with a peculiar little smile:

"May I introduce him? Gustav – Miss Winton!"

Gyp turned. There he was, just behind her, bowing; and his eyes had a look of humble adoration which he made no attempt whatever to conceal. Gyp saw another smile slide over the Pole's lips; and she was alone in the bay window with Fiorsen. The moment might well have fluttered a girl's nerves after his recognition of her by the Schiller statue, after that episode of the flowers, and what she had heard of him. But life had not yet touched either her nerves or spirit; she only felt amused and a little excited. Close to, he had not so much that look of an animal behind bars, and he certainly was in his way a dandy, beautifully washed – always an important thing – and having some pleasant essence on his handkerchief or hair, of which Gyp would have disapproved if he had been English. He wore a diamond ring also, which did not somehow seem bad form on that particular little finger. His height, his broad cheek-bones, thick but not long hair, the hungry vitality of his face, figure, movements, annulled those evidences of femininity. He was male enough, rather too male. Speaking with a queer, crisp accent, he said:

"Miss Winton, you are my audience here. I play to you – only to you."

Gyp laughed.

"You laugh at me; but you need not. I play for you because I admire you. I admire you terribly. If I sent you those flowers, it was not to be rude. It was my gratitude for the pleasure of your face." His voice actually trembled. And, looking down, Gyp answered:

"Thank you. It was very kind of you. I want to thank you for your playing. It is beautiful – really beautiful!"

He made her another little bow.

"When I go back to London, will you come and hear me?"

"I should think any one would go to hear you, if they had the chance."

He gave a short laugh.

"Bah! Here, I do it for money; I hate this place. It bores me – bores me! Was that your father sitting with you under the statue?"

Gyp nodded, suddenly grave. She had not forgotten the slighting turn of his head.

He passed his hand over his face, as if to wipe off its expression.

"He is very English. But you – of no country – you belong to all!"

Gyp made him an ironical little bow.

"No; I should not know your country – you are neither of the North nor of the South. You are just Woman, made to be adored. I came here hoping to meet you; I am extremely happy. Miss Winton, I am your very devoted servant."

He was speaking very fast, very low, with an agitated earnestness that surely could not be put on. But suddenly muttering: "These people!" he made her another of his little bows and abruptly slipped away. The baroness was bringing up another man. The chief thought left by that meeting was: "Is that how he begins to everyone?" She could not quite believe it. The stammering earnestness of his voice, those humbly adoring looks! Then she remembered the smile on the lips of the little Pole, and thought: "But he must know I'm not silly enough just to be taken in by vulgar flattery!"

Too sensitive to confide in anyone, she had no chance to ventilate the curious sensations of attraction and repulsion that began fermenting in her, feelings defying analysis, mingling and quarrelling deep down in her heart. It was certainly not love, not even the beginning of that; but it was the kind of dangerous interest children feel in things mysterious, out of reach, yet within reach, if only they dared! And the tug of music was there, and the tug of those words of the baroness about salvation – the thought of achieving the impossible, reserved only for the woman of supreme charm, for the true victress. But all these thoughts and feelings were as yet in embryo. She might never see him again! And she certainly did not know whether she even wanted to.

IV

Gyp was in the habit of walking with Winton to the Kochbrunnen, where, with other patient-folk, he was required to drink slowly for twenty minutes every morning. While he was imbibing she would sit in a remote corner of the garden, and read a novel in the Reclam edition, as a daily German lesson.

She was sitting there, the morning after the "at-home" at the Baroness von Maisen's, reading Turgenev's "Torrents of Spring," when she saw Count Rosek sauntering down the path with a glass of the waters in his hand. Instant memory of the smile with which he had introduced Fiorsen made her take cover beneath her sunshade. She could see his patent-leathered feet, and well-turned, peg-top-trousered legs go by with the gait of a man whose waist is corseted. The certainty that he wore those prerogatives of womanhood increased her dislike. How dare men be so effeminate? Yet someone had told her that he was a good rider, a good fencer, and very strong. She drew a breath of relief when he was past, and, for fear he might turn and come back, closed her little book and slipped away. But her figure and her springing step were more unmistakable than she knew.

Next morning, on the same bench, she was reading breathlessly the scene between Gemma and Sanin at the window, when she heard Fiorsen's voice, behind her, say:

"Miss Winton!"

He, too, held a glass of the waters in one hand, and his hat in the other.

"I have just made your father's acquaintance. May I sit down a minute?"

Gyp drew to one side on the bench, and he sat down.

"What are you reading?"

"A story called 'Torrents of Spring.'"

"Ah, the finest ever written! Where are you?"

"Gemma and Sanin in the thunderstorm."

"Wait! You have Madame Polozov to come! What a creation! How old are you, Miss Winton?"

"Twenty-two."

"You would be too young to appreciate that story if you were not YOU. But you know much – by instinct. What is your Christian name – forgive me!"

"Ghita."

"Ghita? Not soft enough."

"I am always called Gyp."

"Gyp – ah, Gyp! Yes; Gyp!"

He repeated her name so impersonally that she could not be angry.

"I told your father I have had the pleasure of meeting you. He was very polite."

Gyp said coldly:

"My father is always polite."

"Like the ice in which they put champagne."

Gyp smiled; she could not help it.

And suddenly he said:

"I suppose they have told you that I am a mauvais sujet." Gyp inclined her head. He looked at her steadily, and said: "It is true. But I could be better – much."

She wanted to look at him, but could not. A queer sort of exultation had seized on her. This man had power; yet she had power over him. If she wished she could make him her slave, her dog, chain him to her. She had but to hold out her hand, and he would go on his knees to kiss it. She had but to say, "Come," and he would come from wherever he might be. She had but to say, "Be good," and he would be good. It was her first experience of power; and it was intoxicating. But – but! Gyp could never be self-confident for long; over her most victorious moments brooded the shadow of distrust. As if he read her thought, Fiorsen said:

"Tell me to do something – anything; I will do it, Miss Winton."

"Then – go back to London at once. You are wasting yourself here, you know. You said so!"

He looked at her, bewildered and upset, and muttered:

"You have asked me the one thing I can't do, Miss – Miss Gyp!"

"Please – not that; it's like a servant!"

"I AM your servant!"

"Is that why you won't do what I ask you?"

"You are cruel."

Gyp laughed.

He got up and said, with sudden fierceness:

"I am not going away from you; do not think it." Bending with the utmost swiftness, he took her hand, put his lips to it, and turned on his heel.

Gyp, uneasy and astonished, stared at her hand, still tingling from the pressure of his bristly moustache. Then she laughed again – it was just "foreign" to have your hand kissed – and went back to her book, without taking in the words.

Was ever courtship more strange than that which followed? It is said that the cat fascinates the bird it desires to eat; here the bird fascinated the cat, but the bird too was fascinated. Gyp never lost the sense of having the whip-hand, always felt like one giving alms, or extending favour, yet had a feeling of being unable to get away, which seemed to come from the very strength of the spell she laid

on him. The magnetism with which she held him reacted on herself. Thoroughly sceptical at first, she could not remain so. He was too utterly morose and unhappy if she did not smile on him, too alive and excited and grateful if she did. The change in his eyes from their ordinary restless, fierce, and furtive expression to humble adoration or wistful hunger when they looked at her could never have been simulated. And she had no lack of chance to see that metamorphosis. Wherever she went, there he was. If to a concert, he would be a few paces from the door, waiting for her entrance. If to a confectioner's for tea, as likely as not he would come in. Every afternoon he walked where she must pass, riding to the Neroberg.

Except in the gardens of the Kochbrunnen, when he would come up humbly and ask to sit with her five minutes, he never forced his company, or tried in any way to compromise her. Experience, no doubt, served him there; but he must have had an instinct that it was dangerous with one so sensitive. There were other moths, too, round that bright candle, and they served to keep his attentions from being too conspicuous. Did she comprehend what was going on, understand how her defences were being sapped, grasp the danger to retreat that lay in permitting him to hover round her? Not really. It all served to swell the triumphant intoxication of days when she was ever more and more in love with living, more and more conscious that the world appreciated and admired her, that she had power to do what others couldn't.

Was not Fiorsen, with his great talent, and his dubious reputation, proof of that? And he excited her. Whatever else one might be in his moody, vivid company, one would not be dull. One morning, he told her something of his life. His father had been a small Swedish landowner, a very strong man and a very hard drinker; his mother, the daughter of a painter. She had taught him the violin, but died while he was still a boy. When he was seventeen he had quarrelled with his father, and had to play his violin for a living in the streets of Stockholm. A well-known violinist, hearing him one day, took him in hand. Then his father had drunk himself to death, and he had inherited the little estate. He had sold it at once – "for follies," as he put it crudely. "Yes, Miss Winton; I have committed many follies, but they are nothing to those I shall commit the day I do not see you any more!" And, with that disturbing remark, he got up and left her. She had smiled at his words, but within herself she felt excitement, scepticism, compassion, and something she did not understand at all. In those days, she understood herself very little.

But how far did Winton understand, how far see what was going on? He was a stoic; but that did not prevent jealousy from taking alarm, and causing him twinges more acute than those he still felt in his left foot. He was afraid of showing disquiet by any dramatic change, or he would have carried her off a fortnight at least before his cure was over. He knew too well the signs of passion. That long, loping, wolfish fiddling fellow with the broad cheekbones and little side-whiskers (Good God!) and greenish eyes whose looks at Gyp he secretly marked down, roused his complete distrust. Perhaps his inbred English contempt for foreigners and artists kept him from direct action. He COULD not take it quite seriously. Gyp, his fastidious perfect Gyp, succumbing, even a little to a fellow like that! Never! His jealous affection, too, could not admit that she would neglect to consult him in any doubt or difficulty. He forgot the sensitive secrecy of girls, forgot that his love for her had ever shunned words, her love for him never indulged in confidences. Nor did he see more than a little of what there was to see, and that little was doctored by Fiorsen for his eyes, shrewd though they were. Nor was there in all so very much, except one episode the day before they left, and of that he knew nothing.

That last afternoon was very still, a little mournful. It had rained the night before, and the soaked tree-trunks, the soaked fallen leaves gave off a faint liquorice-like perfume. In Gyp there was a feeling, as if her spirit had been suddenly emptied of excitement and delight. Was it the day, or the thought of leaving this place where she had so enjoyed herself? After lunch, when Winton was settling his accounts, she wandered out through the long park stretching up the valley. The sky was brooding-grey, the trees were still and melancholy. It was all a little melancholy, and she went on and on, across the stream, round into a muddy lane that led up through the outskirts of a village, on

to the higher ground whence she could return by the main road. Why must things come to an end? For the first time in her life, she thought of Mildenham and hunting without enthusiasm. She would rather stay in London. There she would not be cut off from music, from dancing, from people, and all the exhilaration of being appreciated. On the air came the shrilly, hollow droning of a thresher, and the sound seemed exactly to express her feelings. A pigeon flew over, white against the leaden sky; some birch-trees that had gone golden shivered and let fall a shower of drops. It was lonely here! And, suddenly, two little boys bolted out of the hedge, nearly upsetting her, and scurried down the road. Something had startled them. Gyp, putting up her face to see, felt on it soft pin-points of rain. Her frock would be spoiled, and it was one she was fond of – dove-coloured, velvety, not meant for weather. She turned for refuge to the birch-trees. It would be over directly, perhaps. Muffled in distance, the whining drone of that thresher still came travelling, deepening her discomfort. Then in the hedge, whence the boys had bolted down, a man reared himself above the lane, and came striding along toward her. He jumped down the bank, among the birch-trees. And she saw it was Fiorsen – panting, dishevelled, pale with heat. He must have followed her, and climbed straight up the hillside from the path she had come along in the bottom, before crossing the stream. His artistic dandyism had been harshly treated by that scramble. She might have laughed; but, instead, she felt excited, a little scared by the look on his hot, pale face. He said, breathlessly:

"I have caught you. So you are going to-morrow, and never told me! You thought you would slip away – not a word for me! Are you always so cruel? Well, I will not spare you, either!"

Crouching suddenly, he took hold of her broad ribbon sash, and buried his face in it. Gyp stood trembling – the action had not stirred her sense of the ridiculous. He circled her knees with his arms.

"Oh, Gyp, I love you – I love you – don't send me away – let me be with you! I am your dog – your slave. Oh, Gyp, I love you!"

His voice moved and terrified her. Men had said "I love you" several times during those last two years, but never with that lost-soul ring of passion, never with that look in the eyes at once fiercely hungry and so supplicating, never with that restless, eager, timid touch of hands. She could only murmur:

"Please get up!"

But he went on:

"Love me a little, only a little – love me! Oh, Gyp!"

The thought flashed through Gyp: 'To how many has he knelt, I wonder?' His face had a kind of beauty in its abandonment – the beauty that comes from yearning – and she lost her frightened feeling. He went on, with his stammering murmur: "I am a prodigal, I know; but if you love me, I will no longer be. I will do great things for you. Oh, Gyp, if you will some day marry me! Not now. When I have proved. Oh, Gyp, you are so sweet – so wonderful!"

His arms crept up till he had buried his face against her waist. Without quite knowing what she did, Gyp touched his hair, and said again:

"No; please get up."

He got up then, and standing near, with his hands hard clenched at his sides, whispered:

"Have mercy! Speak to me!"

She could not. All was strange and mazed and quivering in her, her spirit straining away, drawn to him, fantastically confused. She could only look into his face with her troubled, dark eyes. And suddenly she was seized and crushed to him. She shrank away, pushing him back with all her strength. He hung his head, abashed, suffering, with eyes shut, lips trembling; and her heart felt again that quiver of compassion. She murmured:

"I don't know. I will tell you later – later – in England."

He bowed, folding his arms, as if to make her feel safe from him. And when, regardless of the rain, she began to move on, he walked beside her, a yard or so away, humbly, as though he had never poured out those words or hurt her lips with the violence of his kiss.

Back in her room, taking off her wet dress, Gyp tried to remember what he had said and what she had answered. She had not promised anything. But she had given him her address, both in London and the country. Unless she resolutely thought of other things, she still felt the restless touch of his hands, the grip of his arms, and saw his eyes as they were when he was kissing her; and once more she felt frightened and excited.

He was playing at the concert that evening – her last concert. And surely he had never played like that – with a despairing beauty, a sort of frenzied rapture. Listening, there came to her a feeling – a feeling of fatality – that, whether she would or no, she could not free herself from him.

V

Once back in England, Gyp lost that feeling, or very nearly. Her scepticism told her that Fiorsen would soon see someone else who seemed all he had said she was! How ridiculous to suppose that he would stop his follies for her, that she had any real power over him! But, deep down, she did not quite believe this. It would have wounded her belief in herself too much – a belief so subtle and intimate that she was not conscious of it; belief in that something about her which had inspired the baroness to use the word "fatality."

Winton, who breathed again, hurried her off to Mildenham. He had bought her a new horse. They were in time for the last of the cubbing. And, for a week at least, the passion for riding and the sight of hounds carried all before it. Then, just as the real business of the season was beginning, she began to feel dull and restless. Mildenham was dark; the autumn winds made dreary noises. Her little brown spaniel, very old, who seemed only to have held on to life just for her return, died. She accused herself terribly for having left it so long when it was failing. Thinking of all the days Lass had been watching for her to come home – as Betty, with that love of woeful recital so dear to simple hearts, took good care to make plain – she felt as if she had been cruel. For events such as these, Gyp was both too tender-hearted and too hard on herself. She was quite ill for several days. The moment she was better, Winton, in dismay, whisked her back to Aunt Rosamund, in town. He would lose her company, but if it did her good, took her out of herself, he would be content. Running up for the week-end, three days later, he was relieved to find her decidedly perked-up, and left her again with the easier heart.

It was on the day after he went back to Mildenham that she received a letter from Fiorsen, forwarded from Bury Street. He was – it said – just returning to London; he had not forgotten any look she had ever given him, or any word she had spoken. He should not rest till he could see her again. "For a long time," the letter ended, "before I first saw you, I was like the dead – lost. All was bitter apples to me. Now I am a ship that comes from the whirlpools to a warm blue sea; now I see again the evening star. I kiss your hands, and am your faithful slave – Gustav Fiorsen." These words, which from any other man would have excited her derision, renewed in Gyp that fluttered feeling, the pleasurable, frightened sense that she could not get away from his pursuit.

She wrote in answer to the address he gave her in London, to say that she was staying for a few days in Curzon Street with her aunt, who would be glad to see him if he cared to come in any afternoon between five and six, and signed herself "Ghita Winton." She was long over that little note. Its curt formality gave her satisfaction. Was she really mistress of herself – and him; able to dispose as she wished? Yes; and surely the note showed it.

It was never easy to tell Gyp's feelings from her face; even Winton was often baffled. Her preparation of Aunt Rosamund for the reception of Fiorsen was a masterpiece of casualness. When he duly came, he, too, seemed doubly alive to the need for caution, only gazing at Gyp when he could not be seen doing so. But, going out, he whispered: "Not like this – not like this; I must see you alone – I must!" She smiled and shook her head. But bubbles had come back to the wine in her cup.

That evening she said quietly to Aunt Rosamund:

"Dad doesn't like Mr. Fiorsen – can't appreciate his playing, of course."

And this most discreet remark caused Aunt Rosamund, avid – in a well-bred way – of music, to omit mention of the intruder when writing to her brother. The next two weeks he came almost every day, always bringing his violin, Gyp playing his accompaniments, and though his hungry stare sometimes made her feel hot, she would have missed it.

But when Winton next came up to Bury Street, she was in a quandary. To confess that Fiorsen was here, having omitted to speak of him in her letters? Not to confess, and leave him to find it out from Aunt Rosamund? Which was worse? Seized with panic, she did neither, but told her father she was dying for a gallop. Hailing that as the best of signs, he took her forthwith back to Mildenham. And curious were her feelings – light-hearted, compunctious, as of one who escapes yet knows she will soon be seeking to return. The meet was rather far next day, but she insisted on riding to it, since old Pettance, the superannuated jockey, charitably employed as extra stable help at Mildenham, was to bring on her second horse. There was a good scenting-wind, with rain in the offing, and outside the covert they had a corner to themselves – Winton knowing a trick worth two of the field's at-large. They had slipped there, luckily unseen, for the knowing were given to following the one-handed horseman in faded pink, who, on his bang-tailed black mare, had a knack of getting so well away. One of the whips, a little dark fellow with smouldery eyes and sucked-in weathered cheeks, dashed out of covert, rode past, saluting, and dashed in again. A jay came out with a screech, dived, and doubled back; a hare made off across the fallow – the light-brown lopping creature was barely visible against the brownish soil. Pigeons, very high up, flew over and away to the next wood. The shrilling voices of the whips rose from the covert-depths, and just a whimper now and then from the hounds, swiftly wheeling their noses among the fern and briers.

Gyp, crisping her fingers on the reins, drew-in deep breaths. It smelled so sweet and soft and fresh under that sky, pied of blue, and of white and light-grey swift-moving clouds – not half the wind down here that there was up there, just enough to be carrying off the beech and oak leaves, loosened by frost two days before. If only a fox would break this side, and they could have the first fields to themselves! It was so lovely to be alone with hounds! One of these came trotting out, a pretty young creature, busy and unconcerned, raising its tan-and-white head, its mild reproachful deep-brown eyes, at Winton's, "Loo-in Trix!" What a darling! A burst of music from the covert, and the darling vanished among the briers.

Gyp's new brown horse pricked its ears. A young man in a grey cutaway, buff cords, and jack-boots, on a low chestnut mare, came slipping round the covert. Oh – did that mean they were all coming? Impatiently she glanced at this intruder, who raised his hat a little and smiled. That smile, faintly impudent, was so infectious, that Gyp was melted to a slight response. Then she frowned. He had spoiled their lovely loneliness. Who was he? He looked unpardonably serene and happy sitting there. She did not remember his face at all, yet there was something familiar about it. He had taken his hat off – a broad face, very well cut, and clean-shaved, with dark curly hair, extraordinary clear eyes, a bold, cool, merry look. Where had she seen somebody like him?

A tiny sound from Winton made her turn her head. The fox – stealing out beyond those further bushes! Breathless, she fixed her eyes on her father's face. It was hard as steel, watching. Not a sound, not a quiver, as if horse and man had turned to metal. Was he never going to give the view-halloo? Then his lips writhed, and out it came. Gyp cast a swift smile of gratitude at the young man for having had taste and sense to leave that to her father, and again he smiled at her. There were the first hounds streaming out – one on the other – music and feather! Why didn't Dad go? They would all be round this way in a minute!

Then the black mare slid past her, and, with a bound, her horse followed. The young man on the chestnut was away on the left. Only the hunts-man and one whip – beside their three selves! Glorious! The brown horse went too fast at that first fence and Winton called back: "Steady, Gyp! Steady him!" But she couldn't; and it didn't matter. Grass, three fields of grass! Oh, what a lovely fox – going so

straight! And each time the brown horse rose, she thought: “Perfect! I CAN ride! Oh, I am happy!” And she hoped her father and the young man were looking. There was no feeling in the world like this, with a leader like Dad, hounds moving free, good going, and the field distanced. Better than dancing; better – yes, better than listening to music. If one could spend one’s life galloping, sailing over fences; if it would never stop! The new horse was a darling, though he DID pull.

She crossed the next fence level with the young man, whose low chestnut mare moved with a stealthy action. His hat was crammed down now, and his face very determined, but his lips still had something of that smile. Gyp thought: “He’s got a good seat – very strong, only he looks like ‘thrusting.’ Nobody rides like Dad – so beautifully quiet!” Indeed, Winton’s seat on a horse was perfection, all done with such a minimum expenditure. The hounds swung round in a curve. Now she was with them, really with them! What a pace – cracking! No fox could stand this long!

And suddenly she caught sight of him, barely a field ahead, scurrying desperately, brush down; and the thought flashed through her: ‘Oh! don’t let’s catch you. Go on, fox; go on! Get away!’ Were they really all after that little hunted red thing – a hundred great creatures, horses and men and women and dogs, and only that one little fox! But then came another fence, and quickly another, and she lost feelings of shame and pity in the exultation of flying over them. A minute later the fox went to earth within a few hundred yards of the leading hound, and she was glad. She had been in at deaths before – horrid! But it had been a lovely gallop. And, breathless, smiling rapturously, she wondered whether she could mop her face before the field came up, without that young man noticing.

She could see him talking to her father, and taking out a wisp of a handkerchief that smelled of cyclamen, she had a good scrub round. When she rode up, the young man raised his hat, and looking full at her said: “You did go!” His voice, rather high-pitched, had in it a spice of pleasant laziness. Gyp made him an ironical little bow, and murmured: “My new horse, you mean.” He broke again into that irrepressible smile, but, all the same, she knew that he admired her. And she kept thinking: ‘Where HAVE I seen someone like him?’

They had two more runs, but nothing like that first gallop. Nor did she again see the young man, whose name – it seemed – was Summerhay, son of a certain Lady Summerhay at Widrington, ten miles from Mildenham.

All that long, silent jog home with Winton in fading daylight, she felt very happy – saturated with air and elation. The trees and fields, the hay-stacks, gates, and ponds beside the lanes grew dim; lights came up in the cottage windows; the air smelled sweet of wood smoke. And, for the first time all day, she thought of Fiorsen, thought of him almost longingly. If he could be there in the cosy old drawing-room, to play to her while she lay back – drowsing, dreaming by the fire in the scent of burning cedar logs – the Mozart minuet, or that little heart-catching tune of Poise, played the first time she heard him, or a dozen other of the things he played unaccompanied! That would be the most lovely ending to this lovely day. Just the glow and warmth wanting, to make all perfect – the glow and warmth of music and adoration!

And touching the mare with her heel, she sighed. To indulge fancies about music and Fiorsen was safe here, far away from him; she even thought she would not mind if he were to behave again as he had under the birch-trees in the rain at Wiesbaden. It was so good to be adored. Her old mare, ridden now six years, began the series of contented snuffles that signified she smelt home. Here was the last turn, and the loom of the short beech-tree avenue to the house – the old manor-house, comfortable, roomy, rather dark, with wide shallow stairs. Ah, she was tired; and it was drizzling now. She would be nicely stiff to-morrow. In the light coming from the open door she saw Markey standing; and while fishing from her pocket the usual lumps of sugar, heard him say: “Mr. Fiorsen, sir – gentleman from Wiesbaden – to see you.”

Her heart thumped. What did this mean? Why had he come? How had he dared? How could he have been so treacherous to her? Ah, but he was ignorant, of course, that she had not told her father. A veritable judgment on her! She ran straight in and up the stairs. The voice of Betty, “Your

bath's ready, Miss Gyp," roused her. And crying, "Oh, Betty darling, bring me up my tea!" she ran into the bathroom. She was safe there; and in the delicious heat of the bath faced the situation better.

There could be only one meaning. He had come to ask for her. And, suddenly, she took comfort. Better so; there would be no more secrecy from Dad! And he would stand between her and Fiorsen if – if she decided not to marry him. The thought staggered her. Had she, without knowing it, got so far as this? Yes, and further. It was all no good; Fiorsen would never accept refusal, even if she gave it! But, did she want to refuse?

She loved hot baths, but had never stayed in one so long. Life was so easy there, and so difficult outside. Betty's knock forced her to get out at last, and let her in with tea and the message. Would Miss Gyp please to go down when she was ready?

VI

Winton was staggered. With a glance at Gyp's vanishing figure, he said curtly to Markey, "Where have you put this gentleman?" But the use of the word "this" was the only trace he showed of his emotions. In that little journey across the hall he entertained many extravagant thoughts. Arrived at the study, he inclined his head courteously enough, waiting for Fiorsen to speak. The "fiddler," still in his fur-lined coat, was twisting a squash hat in his hands. In his own peculiar style he was impressive. But why couldn't he look you in the face; or, if he did, why did he seem about to eat you?

"You knew I was returned to London, Major Winton?"

Then Gyp had been seeing the fellow without letting him know! The thought was chill and bitter to Winton. He must not give her away, however, and he simply bowed. He felt that his visitor was afraid of his frigid courtesy; and he did not mean to help him over that fear. He could not, of course, realize that this ascendancy would not prevent Fiorsen from laughing at him behind his back and acting as if he did not exist. No real contest, in fact, was possible between men moving on such different planes, neither having the slightest respect for the other's standards or beliefs.

Fiorsen, who had begun to pace the room, stopped, and said with agitation:

"Major Winton, your daughter is the most beautiful thing on earth. I love her desperately. I am a man with a future, though you may not think it. I have what future I like in my art if only I can marry her. I have a little money, too – not much; but in my violin there is all the fortune she can want."

Winton's face expressed nothing but cold contempt. That this fellow should take him for one who would consider money in connection with his daughter simply affronted him.

Fiorsen went on:

"You do not like me – that is clear. I saw it the first moment. You are an English gentleman" – he pronounced the words with a sort of irony – "I am nothing to you. Yet, in MY world, I am something. I am not an adventurer. Will you permit me to beg your daughter to be my wife?" He raised his hands that still held the hat; involuntarily they had assumed the attitude of prayer.

For a second, Winton realized that he was suffering. That weakness went in a flash, and he said frigidly:

"I am obliged to you, sir, for coming to me first. You are in my house, and I don't want to be discourteous, but I should be glad if you would be good enough to withdraw and take it that I shall certainly oppose your wish as best I can."

The almost childish disappointment and trouble in Fiorsen's face changed quickly to an expression fierce, furtive, mocking; and then shifted to despair.

"Major Winton, you have loved; you must have loved her mother. I suffer!"

Winton, who had turned abruptly to the fire, faced round again.

"I don't control my daughter's affections, sir; she will do as she wishes. I merely say it will be against my hopes and judgment if she marries you. I imagine you've not altogether waited for my leave. I was not blind to the way you hung about her at Wiesbaden, Mr. Fiorsen."

Fiorsen answered with a twisted, miserable smile:

"Poor wretches do what they can. May I see her? Let me just see her."

Was it any good to refuse? She had been seeing the fellow already without his knowledge, keeping from him – HIM – all her feelings, whatever they were. And he said:

"I'll send for her. In the meantime, perhaps you'll have some refreshment?"

Fiorsen shook his head, and there followed half an hour of acute discomfort. Winton, in his mud-stained clothes before the fire, supported it better than his visitor. That child of nature, after endeavouring to emulate his host's quietude, renounced all such efforts with an expressive gesture, fidgeted here, fidgeted there, tramped the room, went to the window, drew aside the curtains and stared out into the dark; came back as if resolved again to confront Winton; then, baffled by that figure so motionless before the fire, flung himself down in an armchair, and turned his face to the wall. Winton was not cruel by nature, but he enjoyed the writhings of this fellow who was endangering Gyp's happiness. Endangering? Surely not possible that she would accept him! Yet, if not, why had she not told him? And he, too, suffered.

Then she came. He had expected her to be pale and nervous; but Gyp never admitted being naughty till she had been forgiven. Her smiling face had in it a kind of warning closeness. She went up to Fiorsen, and holding out her hand, said calmly:

"How nice of you to come!"

Winton had the bitter feeling that he – he – was the outsider. Well, he would speak plainly; there had been too much underhand doing.

"Mr. Fiorsen has done us the honour to wish to marry you. I've told him that you decide such things for yourself. If you accept him, it will be against my wish, naturally."

While he was speaking, the glow in her cheeks deepened; she looked neither at him nor at Fiorsen. Winton noted the rise and fall of the lace on her breast. She was smiling, and gave the tiniest shrug of her shoulders. And, suddenly smitten to the heart, he walked stiffly to the door. It was evident that she had no use for his guidance. If her love for him was not worth to her more than this fellow! But there his resentment stopped. He knew that he could not afford wounded feelings; could not get on without her. Married to the greatest rascal on earth, he would still be standing by her, wanting her companionship and love. She represented too much in the present and – the past. With sore heart, indeed, he went down to dinner.

Fiorsen was gone when he came down again. What the fellow had said, or she had answered, he would not for the world have asked. Gulfs between the proud are not lightly bridged. And when she came up to say good-night, both their faces were as though coated with wax.

In the days that followed, she gave no sign, uttered no word in any way suggesting that she meant to go against his wishes. Fiorsen might not have existed, for any mention made of him. But Winton knew well that she was moping, and cherishing some feeling against himself. And this he could not bear. So, one evening, after dinner, he said quietly:

"Tell me frankly, Gyp; do you care for that chap?"

She answered as quietly:

"In a way – yes."

"Is that enough?"

"I don't know, Dad."

Her lips had quivered; and Winton's heart softened, as it always did when he saw her moved. He put his hand out, covered one of hers, and said:

"I shall never stand in the way of your happiness, Gyp. But it must BE happiness. Can it possibly be that? I don't think so. You know what they said of him out there?"

"Yes."

He had not thought she knew. And his heart sank.

"That's pretty bad, you know. And is he of our world at all?"

Gyp looked up.

"Do you think I belong to 'our world,' Dad?"

Winton turned away. She followed, slipping her hand under his arm.

"I didn't mean to hurt. But it's true, isn't it? I don't belong among society people. They wouldn't have me, you know – if they knew about what you told me. Ever since that I've felt I don't belong to them. I'm nearer him. Music means more to me than anything!"

Winton gave her hand a convulsive grip. A sense of coming defeat and bereavement was on him.

"If your happiness went wrong, Gyp, I should be most awfully cut up."

"But why shouldn't I be happy, Dad?"

"If you were, I could put up with anyone. But, I tell you, I can't believe you would be. I beg you, my dear – for God's sake, make sure. I'll put a bullet into the man who treats you badly."

Gyp laughed, then kissed him. But they were silent. At bedtime he said:

"We'll go up to town to-morrow."

Whether from a feeling of the inevitable, or from the forlorn hope that seeing more of the fellow might be the only chance of curing her – he put no more obstacles in the way.

And the queer courtship began again. By Christmas she had consented, still under the impression that she was the mistress, not the slave – the cat, not the bird. Once or twice, when Fiorsen let passion out of hand and his overbold caresses affronted her, she recoiled almost with dread from what she was going toward. But, in general, she lived elated, intoxicated by music and his adoration, withal remorseful that she was making her father sad. She was but little at Mildenham, and he, in his unhappiness, was there nearly all the time, riding extra hard, and leaving Gyp with his sister. Aunt Rosamund, though under the spell of Fiorsen's music, had agreed with her brother that Fiorsen was "impossible." But nothing she said made any effect on Gyp. It was new and startling to discover in this soft, sensitive girl such a vein of stubbornness. Opposition seemed to harden her resolution. And the good lady's natural optimism began to persuade her that Gyp would make a silk purse out of that sow's ear yet. After all, the man was a celebrity in his way!

It was settled for February. A house with a garden was taken in St. John's Wood. The last month went, as all such last months go, in those intoxicating pastimes, the buying of furniture and clothes. If it were not for that, who knows how many engagement knots would slip!

And to-day they had been married. To the last, Winton had hardly believed it would come to that. He had shaken the hand of her husband and kept pain and disappointment out of his face, knowing well that he deceived no one. Thank heaven, there had been no church, no wedding-cake, invitations, congratulations, fal-lals of any kind – he could never have stood them. Not even Rosamund – who had influenza – to put up with!

Lying back in the recesses of that old chair, he stared into the fire.

They would be just about at Torquay by now – just about. Music! Who would have thought noises made out of string and wood could have stolen her away from him? Yes, they would be at Torquay by now, at their hotel. And the first prayer Winton had uttered for years escaped his lips:

"Let her be happy! Let her be happy!"

Then, hearing Markey open the door, he closed his eyes and feigned sleep.

Part II

I

When a girl first sits opposite the man she has married, of what does she think? Not of the issues and emotions that lie in wait. They are too overwhelming; she would avoid them while she can. Gyp thought of her frock, a mushroom-coloured velvet cord. Not many girls of her class are married without "fal-lals," as Winton had called them. Not many girls sit in the corner of their reserved first-class compartments without the excitement of having been supreme centre of the world for some flattering hours to buoy them up on that train journey, with no memories of friends' behaviour, speech, appearance, to chat of with her husband, so as to keep thought away. For Gyp, her dress, first worn that day, Betty's breakdown, the faces, blank as hats, of the registrar and clerk, were about all she had to distract her. She stole a look at her husband, clothed in blue serge, just opposite. Her husband! Mrs. Gustav Fiorsen! No! People might call her that; to herself, she was Ghita Winton. Ghita Fiorsen would never seem right. And, not confessing that she was afraid to meet his eyes, but afraid all the same, she looked out of the window. A dull, bleak, dismal day; no warmth, no sun, no music in it – the Thames as grey as lead, the willows on its banks forlorn.

Suddenly she felt his hand on hers. She had not seen his face like that before – yes; once or twice when he was playing – a spirit shining though. She felt suddenly secure. If it stayed like that, then! – His hand rested on her knee; his face changed just a little; the spirit seemed to waver, to be fading; his lips grew fuller. He crossed over and sat beside her. Instantly she began to talk about their house, where they were going to put certain things – presents and all that. He, too, talked of the house; but every now and then he glanced at the corridor, and muttered. It was pleasant to feel that the thought of her possessed him through and through, but she was tremulously glad of that corridor. Life is mercifully made up of little things! And Gyp was always able to live in the moment. In the hours they had spent together, up to now, he had been like a starved man snatching hasty meals; now that he had her to himself for good, he was another creature altogether – like a boy out of school, and kept her laughing nearly all the time.

Presently he got down his practise violin, and putting on the mute, played, looking at her over his shoulder with a droll smile. She felt happy, much warmer at heart, now. And when his face was turned away, she looked at him. He was so much better looking now than when he had those little whiskers. One day she had touched one of them and said: "Ah! if only these wings could fly!" Next morning they had flown. His face was not one to be easily got used to; she was not used to it yet, any more than she was used to his touch. When it grew dark, and he wanted to draw down the blinds, she caught him by the sleeve, and said:

"No, no; they'll know we're honeymooners!"

"Well, my Gyp, and are we not?"

But he obeyed; only, as the hours went on, his eyes seemed never to let her alone.

At Torquay, the sky was clear and starry; the wind brought whiffs of sea-scent into their cab; lights winked far out on a headland; and in the little harbour, all bluish dark, many little boats floated like tame birds. He had put his arm round her, and she could feel his hand resting on her heart. She was grateful that he kept so still. When the cab stopped and they entered the hall of the hotel, she whispered:

"Don't let's let them see!"

Still, mercifully, little things! Inspecting the three rooms, getting the luggage divided between dressing-room and bedroom, unpacking, wondering which dress to put on for dinner, stopping to look

out over the dark rocks and the sea, where the moon was coming up, wondering if she dared lock the door while she was dressing, deciding that it would be silly; dressing so quickly, fluttering when she found him suddenly there close behind her, beginning to do up her hooks. Those fingers were too skilful! It was the first time she had thought of his past with a sort of hurt pride and fastidiousness. When he had finished, he twisted her round, held her away, looked at her from head to foot, and said below his breath:

"Mine!"

Her heart beat fast then; but suddenly he laughed, slipped his arm about her, and danced her twice round the room. He let her go demurely down the stairs in front of him, saying:

"They shan't see – my Gyp. Oh, they shan't see! We are old married people, tired of each other – very!"

At dinner it amused him at first – her too, a little – to keep up this farce of indifference. But every now and then he turned and stared at some inoffensive visitor who was taking interest in them, with such fierce and genuine contempt that Gyp took alarm; whereon he laughed. When she had drunk a little wine and he had drunk a good deal, the farce of indifference came to its end. He talked at a great rate now, slying nicknaming the waiters and mimicking the people around – happy thrusts that made her smile but shiver a little, lest they should be heard or seen. Their heads were close together across the little table. They went out into the lounge. Coffee came, and he wanted her to smoke with him. She had never smoked in a public room. But it seemed stiff and "missish" to refuse – she must do now as his world did. And it was another little thing; she wanted little things, all the time wanted them. She drew back a window-curtain, and they stood there side by side. The sea was deep blue beneath bright stars, and the moon shone through a ragged pine-tree on a little headland. Though she stood five feet six in her shoes, she was only up to his mouth. He sighed and said: "Beautiful night, my Gyp!" And suddenly it struck her that she knew nothing of what was in him, and yet he was her husband! "Husband" – funny word, not pretty! She felt as a child opening the door of a dark room, and, clutching his arm, said:

"Look! There's a sailing-boat. What's it doing out there at night?" Another little thing! Any little thing!

Presently he said:

"Come up-stairs! I'll play to you."

Up in their sitting-room was a piano, but – not possible; to-morrow they would have to get another. To-morrow! The fire was hot, and he took off his coat to play. In one of his shirt-sleeves there was a rent. She thought, with a sort of triumph: 'I shall mend that!' It was something definite, actual – a little thing. There were lilies in the room that gave a strong, sweet scent. He brought them up to her to sniff, and, while she was sniffing, stooped suddenly and kissed her neck. She shut her eyes with a shiver. He took the flowers away at once, and when she opened her eyes again, his violin was at his shoulder. For a whole hour he played, and Gyp, in her cream-coloured frock, lay back, listening. She was tired, not sleepy. It would have been nice to have been sleepy. Her mouth had its little sad tuck or dimple at the corner; her eyes were deep and dark – a cloudy child. His gaze never left her face; he played and played, and his own fitful face grew clouded. At last he put away the violin, and said:

"Go to bed, Gyp; you're tired."

Obediently she got up and went into the bedroom. With a sick feeling in her heart, and as near the fire as she could get, she undressed with desperate haste, and got to bed. An age – it seemed – she lay there shivering in her flimsy lawn against the cold sheets, her eyes not quite closed, watching the flicker of the firelight. She did not think – could not – just lay stiller than the dead. The door creaked. She shut her eyes. Had she a heart at all? It did not seem to beat. She lay thus, with eyes shut, till she could bear it no longer. By the firelight she saw him crouching at the foot of the bed; could just see his face – like a face – a face – where seen? Ah yes! – a picture – of a wild man crouching

at the feet of Iphigenia – so humble, so hungry – so lost in gazing. She gave a little smothered sob and held out her hand.

II

Gyp was too proud to give by halves. And in those early days she gave Fiorsen everything except – her heart. She earnestly desired to give that too; but hearts only give themselves. Perhaps if the wild man in him, maddened by beauty in its power, had not so ousted the spirit man, her heart might have gone with her lips and the rest of her. He knew he was not getting her heart, and it made him, in the wildness of his nature and the perversity of a man, go just the wrong way to work, trying to conquer her by the senses, not the soul.

Yet she was not unhappy – it cannot be said she was unhappy, except for a sort of lost feeling sometimes, as if she were trying to grasp something that kept slipping, slipping away. She was glad to give him pleasure. She felt no repulsion – this was man's nature. Only there was always that feeling that she was not close. When he was playing, with the spirit-look on his face, she would feel: 'Now, now, surely I shall get close to him!' But the look would go; how to keep it there she did not know, and when it went, her feeling went too.

Their little suite of rooms was at the very end of the hotel, so that he might play as much as he wished. While he practised in the mornings she would go into the garden, which sloped in rock-terraces down to the sea. Wrapped in fur, she would sit there with a book. She soon knew each evergreen, or flower that was coming out – aubretia, and laurustinus, a little white flower whose name was uncertain, and one star-periwinkle. The air was often soft; the birds sang already and were busy with their weddings, and twice, at least, spring came in her heart – that wonderful feeling when first the whole being scents new life preparing in the earth and the wind – the feeling that only comes when spring is not yet, and one aches and rejoices all at once. Seagulls often came over her, craning down their greedy bills and uttering cries like a kitten's mewing.

Out here she had feelings, that she did not get with him, of being at one with everything. She did not realize how tremendously she had grown up in these few days, how the ground bass had already come into the light music of her life. Living with Fiorsen was opening her eyes to much beside mere knowledge of "man's nature"; with her perhaps fatal receptivity, she was already soaking up the atmosphere of his philosophy. He was always in revolt against accepting things because he was expected to; but, like most executant artists, he was no reasoner, just a mere instinctive kicker against the pricks. He would lose himself in delight with a sunset, a scent, a tune, a new caress, in a rush of pity for a beggar or a blind man, a rush of aversion from a man with large feet or a long nose, of hatred for a woman with a flat chest or an expression of sanctimony. He would swing along when he was walking, or dawdle, dawdle; he would sing and laugh, and make her laugh too till she ached, and half an hour later would sit staring into some pit of darkness in a sort of powerful brooding of his whole being. Insensibly she shared in this deep drinking of sensation, but always gracefully, fastidiously, never losing sense of other people's feelings.

In his love-raptures, he just avoided setting her nerves on edge, because he never failed to make her feel his enjoyment of her beauty; that perpetual consciousness, too, of not belonging to the proper and respectable, which she had tried to explain to her father, made her set her teeth against feeling shocked. But in other ways he did shock her. She could not get used to his utter oblivion of people's feelings, to the ferocious contempt with which he would look at those who got on his nerves, and make half-audible comments, just as he had commented on her own father when he and Count Rosek passed them, by the Schiller statue. She would visibly shrink at those remarks, though they were sometimes so excruciatingly funny that she had to laugh, and feel dreadful immediately after. She saw that he resented her shrinking; it seemed to excite him to run amuck the more. But she could not

help it. Once she got up and walked away. He followed her, sat on the floor beside her knees, and thrust his head, like a great cat, under her hand.

"Forgive me, my Gyp; but they are such brutes. Who could help it? Now tell me – who could, except my Gyp?" And she had to forgive him. But, one evening, when he had been really outrageous during dinner, she answered:

"No; I can't. It's you that are the brute. You WERE a brute to them!"

He leaped up with a face of furious gloom and went out of the room. It was the first time he had given way to anger with her. Gyp sat by the fire, very disturbed; chiefly because she was not really upset at having hurt him. Surely she ought to be feeling miserable at that!

But when, at ten o'clock, he had not come back, she began to flutter in earnest. She had said a dreadful thing! And yet, in her heart, she did not take back her judgment. He really HAD been a brute. She would have liked to soothe herself by playing, but it was too late to disturb people, and going to the window, she looked out over the sea, feeling beaten and confused. This was the first time she had given free rein to her feeling against what Winton would have called his "bounderism." If he had been English, she would never have been attracted by one who could trample so on other people's feelings. What, then, had attracted her? His strangeness, wildness, the mesmeric pull of his passion for her, his music! Nothing could spoil that in him. The sweep, the surge, and sigh in his playing was like the sea out there, dark, and surf-edged, beating on the rocks; or the sea deep-coloured in daylight, with white gulls over it; or the sea with those sinuous paths made by the wandering currents, the subtle, smiling, silent sea, holding in suspense its unfathomable restlessness, waiting to surge and spring again. That was what she wanted from him – not his embraces, not even his adoration, his wit, or his queer, lithe comeliness touched with felinity; no, only that in his soul which escaped through his fingers into the air and dragged at her soul. If, when he came in, she were to run to him, throw her arms round his neck, make herself feel close, lose herself in him! Why not? It was her duty; why not her delight, too? But she shivered. Some instinct too deep for analysis, something in the very heart of her nerves made her recoil, as if she were afraid, literally scared of letting herself go, of loving – the subtlest instinct of self-preservation against something fatal; against being led on beyond – yes, it was like that curious, instinctive sinking which some feel at the mere sight of a precipice, a dread of going near, lest they should be drawn on and over by resistless attraction.

She passed into their bedroom and began slowly to undress. To go to bed without knowing where he was, what doing, thinking, seemed already a little odd; and she sat brushing her hair slowly with the silver-backed brushes, staring at her own pale face, whose eyes looked so very large and dark. At last there came to her the feeling: "I can't help it! I don't care!" And, getting into bed, she turned out the light. It seemed queer and lonely; there was no fire. And then, without more ado, she slept.

She had a dream of being between Fiorsen and her father in a railway-carriage out at sea, with the water rising higher and higher, swishing and sighing. Awakening always, like a dog, to perfect presence of mind, she knew that he was playing in the sitting-room, playing – at what time of night? She lay listening to a quivering, gibbering tune that she did not know. Should she be first to make it up, or should she wait for him? Twice she half slipped out of bed, but both times, as if fate meant her not to move, he chose that moment to swell out the sound, and each time she thought: 'No, I can't. It's just the same now; he doesn't care how many people he wakes up. He does just what he likes, and cares nothing for anyone.' And covering her ears with her hands, she continued to lie motionless.

When she withdrew her hands at last, he had stopped. Then she heard him coming, and feigned sleep. But he did not spare even sleep. She submitted to his kisses without a word, her heart hardening within her – surely he smelled of brandy! Next morning he seemed to have forgotten it all. But Gyp had not. She wanted badly to know what he had felt, where he had gone, but was too proud to ask.

She wrote twice to her father in the first week, but afterwards, except for a postcard now and then, she never could. Why tell him what she was doing, in company of one whom he could not bear to think of? Had he been right? To confess that would hurt her pride too much. But she began to long

for London. The thought of her little house was a green spot to dwell on. When they were settled in, and could do what they liked without anxiety about people's feelings, it would be all right perhaps. When he could start again really working, and she helping him, all would be different. Her new house, and so much to do; her new garden, and fruit-trees coming into blossom! She would have dogs and cats, would ride when Dad was in town. Aunt Rosamund would come, friends, evenings of music, dances still, perhaps – he danced beautifully, and loved it, as she did. And his concerts – the elation of being identified with his success! But, above all, the excitement of making her home as dainty as she could, with daring experiments in form and colour. And yet, at heart she knew that to be already looking forward, banning the present, was a bad sign.

One thing, at all events, she enjoyed – sailing. They had blue days when even the March sun was warm, and there was just breeze enough. He got on excellently well with the old salt whose boat they used, for he was at his best with simple folk, whose lingo he could understand about as much as they could understand his.

In those hours, Gyp had some real sensations of romance. The sea was so blue, the rocks and wooded spurs of that Southern coast so dreamy in the bright land-haze. Oblivious of "the old salt," he would put his arm round her; out there, she could swallow down her sense of form, and be grateful for feeling nearer to him in spirit. She made loyal efforts to understand him in these weeks that were bringing a certain disillusionment. The elemental part of marriage was not the trouble; if she did not herself feel passion, she did not resent his. When, after one of those embraces, his mouth curled with a little bitter smile, as if to say, "Yes, much you care for me," she would feel compunctious and yet aggrieved. But the trouble lay deeper – the sense of an insuperable barrier; and always that deep, instinctive recoil from letting herself go. She could not let herself be known, and she could not know him. Why did his eyes often fix her with a stare that did not seem to see her? What made him, in the midst of serious playing, break into some furious or desolate little tune, or drop his violin? What gave him those long hours of dejection, following the maddest gaiety? Above all, what dreams had he in those rare moments when music transformed his strange pale face? Or was it a mere physical illusion – had he any dreams? "The heart of another is a dark forest" – to all but the one who loves.

One morning, he held up a letter.

"Ah, ha! Paul Rosek went to see our house. 'A pretty dove's nest!' he calls it."

The memory of the Pole's sphinxlike, sweetish face, and eyes that seemed to know so many secrets, always affected Gyp unpleasantly. She said quietly:

"Why do you like him, Gustav?"

"Like him? Oh, he is useful. A good judge of music, and – many things."

"I think he is hateful."

Fiorsen laughed.

"Hateful? Why hateful, my Gyp? He is a good friend. And he admires you – oh, he admires you very much! He has success with women. He always says, 'J'ai une technique merveilleuse pour seduire une femme.'"

Gyp laughed.

"Ugh! He's like a toad, I think."

"Ah, I shall tell him that! He will be flattered."

"If you do; if you give me away – I – "

He jumped up and caught her in his arms; his face was so comically compunctious that she calmed down at once. She thought over her words afterwards and regretted them. All the same, Rosek was a sneak and a cold sensualist, she was sure. And the thought that he had been spying at their little house tarnished her anticipations of homecoming.

They went to Town three days later. While the taxi was skirting Lord's Cricket-ground, Gyp slipped her hand into Fiorsen's. She was brimful of excitement. The trees were budding in the gardens that they passed; the almond-blossom coming – yes, really coming! They were in the road now. Five,

seven, nine – thirteen! Two more! There it was, nineteen, in white figures on the leaf-green railings, under the small green lilac buds; yes, and their almond-blossom was out, too! She could just catch a glimpse over those tall railings of the low white house with its green outside shutters. She jumped out almost into the arms of Betty, who stood smiling all over her broad, flushed face, while, from under each arm peered forth the head of a black devil, with pricked ears and eyes as bright as diamonds.

"Betty! What darlings!"

"Major Winton's present, my dear – ma'am!"

Giving the stout shoulders a hug, Gyp seized the black devils, and ran up the path under the trellis, while the Scotch-terrier pups, squeezed against her breast, made confused small noises and licked her nose and ears. Through the square hall she ran into the drawing-room, which opened out on to the lawn; and there, in the French window, stood spying back at the spick-and-span room, where everything was, of course, placed just wrong. The colouring, white, ebony, and satinwood, looked nicer even than she had hoped. Out in the garden – her own garden – the pear-trees were thickening, but not in blossom yet; a few daffodils were in bloom along the walls, and a magnolia had one bud opened. And all the time she kept squeezing the puppies to her, enjoying their young, warm, fluffy savour, and letting them kiss her. She ran out of the drawing-room, up the stairs. Her bedroom, the dressing-room, the spare room, the bathroom – she dashed into them all. Oh, it was nice to be in your own place, to be – Suddenly she felt herself lifted off the ground from behind, and in that undignified position, her eyes flying, she turned her face till he could reach her lips.

III

To wake, and hear the birds at early practise, and feel that winter is over – is there any pleasanter moment?

That first morning in her new house, Gyp woke with the sparrow, or whatever the bird which utters the first cheeps and twitters, soon eclipsed by so much that is more important in bird-song. It seemed as if all the feathered creatures in London must be assembled in her garden; and the old verse came into her head:

"All dear Nature's children sweet
Lie at bride and bridegroom's feet,
Blessing their sense.
Not a creature of the air,
Bird melodious or bird fair,
Be absent hence!"

She turned and looked at her husband. He lay with his head snoozled down into the pillow, so that she could only see his thick, rumpled hair. And a shiver went through her, exactly as if a strange man were lying there. Did he really belong to her, and she to him – for good? And was this their house – together? It all seemed somehow different, more serious and troubling, in this strange bed, of this strange room, that was to be so permanent. Careful not to wake him, she slipped out and stood between the curtains and the window. Light was all in confusion yet; away low down behind the trees, the rose of dawn still clung. One might almost have been in the country, but for the faint, rumorous noises of the town beginning to wake, and that film of ground-mist which veils the feet of London mornings. She thought: "I am mistress in this house, have to direct it all – see to everything! And my pups! Oh, what do they eat?"

That was the first of many hours of anxiety, for she was very conscientious. Her fastidiousness desired perfection, but her sensitiveness refused to demand it of others – especially servants. Why should she harry them?

Fiorsen had not the faintest notion of regularity. She found that he could not even begin to appreciate her struggles in housekeeping. And she was much too proud to ask his help, or perhaps too wise, since he was obviously unfit to give it. To live like the birds of the air was his motto. Gyp would have liked nothing better; but, for that, one must not have a house with three servants, several meals, two puppy-dogs, and no great experience of how to deal with any of them.

She spoke of her difficulties to no one and suffered the more. With Betty – who, bone-conservative, admitted Fiorsen as hardly as she had once admitted Winton – she had to be very careful. But her great trouble was with her father. Though she longed to see him, she literally dreaded their meeting. He first came – as he had been wont to come when she was a tiny girl – at the hour when he thought the fellow to whom she now belonged would most likely be out. Her heart beat, when she saw him under the trellis. She opened the door herself, and hung about him so that his shrewd eyes should not see her face. And she began at once to talk of the puppies, whom she had named Don and Doff. They were perfect darlings; nothing was safe from them; her slippers were completely done for; they had already got into her china-cabinet and gone to sleep there! He must come and see all over.

Hooking her arm into his, and talking all the time, she took him up-stairs and down, and out into the garden, to the studio, or music-room, at the end, which had an entrance to itself on to a back lane. This room had been the great attraction. Fiorsen could practice there in peace. Winton went along with her very quietly, making a shrewd comment now and then. At the far end of the garden, looking over the wall, down into that narrow passage which lay between it and the back of another garden he squeezed her arm suddenly and said:

"Well, Gyp, what sort of a time?"

The question had come at last.

"Oh, rather lovely – in some ways." But she did not look at him, nor he at her. "See, Dad! The cats have made quite a path there!"

Winton bit his lips and turned from the wall. The thought of that fellow was bitter within him. She meant to tell him nothing, meant to keep up that lighthearted look – which didn't deceive him a bit!

"Look at my crocuses! It's really spring today!"

It was. Even a bee or two had come. The tiny leaves had a transparent look, too thin as yet to keep the sunlight from passing through them. The purple, delicate-veined crocuses, with little flames of orange blowing from their centres, seemed to hold the light as in cups. A wind, without harshness, swung the boughs; a dry leaf or two still rustled round here and there. And on the grass, and in the blue sky, and on the almond-blossom was the first spring brilliance. Gyp clasped her hands behind her head.

"Lovely – to feel the spring!"

And Winton thought: 'She's changed!' She had softened, quickened – more depth of colour in her, more gravity, more sway in her body, more sweetness in her smile. But – was she happy?

A voice said:

"Ah, what a pleasure!"

The fellow had slunk up like the great cat he was. And it seemed to Winton that Gyp had winced.

"Dad thinks we ought to have dark curtains in the music-room, Gustav."

Fiorsen made a bow.

"Yes, yes – like a London club."

Winton, watching, was sure of supplication in her face. And, forcing a smile, he said:

"You seem very snug here. Glad to see you again. Gyp looks splendid."

Another of those bows he so detested! Mountebank! Never, never would he be able to stand the fellow! But he must not, would not, show it. And, as soon as he decently could, he went, taking his lonely way back through this region, of which his knowledge was almost limited to Lord's Cricket-

ground, with a sense of doubt and desolation, an irritation more than ever mixed with the resolve to be always at hand if the child wanted him.

He had not been gone ten minutes before Aunt Rosamund appeared, with a crutch-handled stick and a gentlemanly limp, for she, too, indulged her ancestors in gout. A desire for exclusive possession of their friends is natural to some people, and the good lady had not known how fond she was of her niece till the girl had slipped off into this marriage. She wanted her back, to go about with and make much of, as before. And her well-bred drawl did not quite disguise this feeling.

Gyp could detect Fiorsen subtly mimicking that drawl; and her ears began to burn. The puppies afforded a diversion – their points, noses, boldness, and food, held the danger in abeyance for some minutes. Then the mimicry began again. When Aunt Rosamund had taken a somewhat sudden leave, Gyp stood at the window of her drawing-room with the mask off her face. Fiorsen came up, put his arm round her from behind, and said with a fierce sigh:

"Are they coming often – these excellent people?"

Gyp drew back from him against the wall.

"If you love me, why do you try to hurt the people who love me too?"

"Because I am jealous. I am jealous even of those puppies."

"And shall you try to hurt them?"

"If I see them too much near you, perhaps I shall."

"Do you think I can be happy if you hurt things because they love me?"

He sat down and drew her on to his knee. She did not resist, but made not the faintest return to his caresses. The first time – the very first friend to come into her own new home! It was too much!

Fiorsen said hoarsely:

"You do not love me. If you loved me, I should feel it through your lips. I should see it in your eyes. Oh, love me, Gyp! You shall!"

But to say to Love: "Stand and deliver!" was not the way to touch Gyp. It seemed to her mere ill-bred stupidity. She froze against him in soul, all the more that she yielded her body. When a woman refuses nothing to one whom she does not really love, shadows are already falling on the bride-house. And Fiorsen knew it; but his self-control about equalled that of the two puppies.

Yet, on the whole, these first weeks in her new home were happy, too busy to allow much room for doubting or regret. Several important concerts were fixed for May. She looked forward to these with intense eagerness, and pushed everything that interfered with preparation into the background. As though to make up for that instinctive recoil from giving her heart, of which she was always subconscious, she gave him all her activities, without calculation or reserve. She was ready to play for him all day and every day, just as from the first she had held herself at the disposal of his passion. To fail him in these ways would have tarnished her opinion of herself. But she had some free hours in the morning, for he had the habit of lying in bed till eleven, and was never ready for practise before twelve. In those early hours she got through her orders and her shopping – that pursuit which to so many women is the only real "sport" – a chase of the ideal; a pitting of one's taste and knowledge against that of the world at large; a secret passion, even in the beautiful, for making oneself and one's house more beautiful. Gyp never went shopping without that faint thrill running up and down her nerves. She hated to be touched by strange fingers, but not even that stopped her pleasure in turning and turning before long mirrors, while the saleswoman or man, with admiration at first crocodilic and then genuine, ran the tips of fingers over those curves, smoothing and pinning, and uttering the word, "moddam."

On other mornings, she would ride with Winton, who would come for her, leaving her again at her door after their outings. One day, after a ride in Richmond Park, where the horse-chestnuts were just coming into flower, they had late breakfast on the veranda of a hotel before starting for home. Some fruit-trees were still in blossom just below them, and the sunlight showering down from a blue sky brightened to silver the windings of the river, and to gold the budding leaves of the oak-trees.

Winton, smoking his after-breakfast cigar, stared down across the tops of those trees toward the river and the wooded fields beyond. Stealing a glance at him, Gyp said very softly:

"Did you ever ride with my mother, Dad?"

"Only once – the very ride we've been to-day. She was on a black mare; I had a chestnut – " Yes, in that grove on the little hill, which they had ridden through that morning, he had dismounted and stood beside her.

Gyp stretched her hand across the table and laid it on his.

"Tell me about her, dear. Was she beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Dark? Tall?"

"Very like you, Gyp. A little – a little" – he did not know how to describe that difference – "a little more foreign-looking perhaps. One of her grandmothers was Italian, you know."

"How did you come to love her? Suddenly?"

"As suddenly as" – he drew his hand away and laid it on the veranda rail – "as that sun came on my hand."

Gyp said quietly, as if to herself:

"Yes; I don't think I understand that – yet."

Winton drew breath through his teeth with a subdued hiss.

"Did she love you at first sight, too?"

He blew out a long puff of smoke.

"One easily believes what one wants to – but I think she did. She used to say so."

"And how long?"

"Only a year."

Gyp said very softly:

"Poor darling Dad." And suddenly she added: "I can't bear to think I killed her – I can't bear it!"

Winton got up in the discomfort of these sudden confidences; a blackbird, startled by the movement, ceased his song. Gyp said in a hard voice:

"No; I don't want to have any children."

"Without that, I shouldn't have had you, Gyp."

"No; but I don't want to have them. And I don't – I don't want to love like that. I should be afraid."

Winton looked at her for a long time without speaking, his brows drawn down, frowning, puzzled, as though over his own past.

"Love," he said, "it catches you, and you're gone. When it comes, you welcome it, whether it's to kill you or not. Shall we start back, my child?"

When she got home, it was not quite noon. She hurried over her bath and dressing, and ran out to the music-room. Its walls had been hung with Willesden scrim gilded over; the curtains were silver-grey; there was a divan covered with silver-and-gold stuff, and a beaten brass fireplace. It was a study in silver, and gold, save for two touches of fantasy – a screen round the piano-head, covered with brilliantly painted peacocks' tails, and a blue Persian vase, in which were flowers of various hues of red.

Fiorsen was standing at the window in a fume of cigarette smoke. He did not turn round. Gyp put her hand within his arm, and said:

"So sorry, dear. But it's only just half-past twelve."

His face was as if the whole world had injured him.

"Pity you came back! Very nice, riding, I'm sure!"

Could she not go riding with her own father? What insensate jealousy and egomania! She turned away, without a word, and sat down at the piano. She was not good at standing injustice – not good at all! The scent of brandy, too, was mixed with the fumes of his cigarette. Drink in the morning was

so ugly – really horrid! She sat at the piano, waiting. He would be like this till he had played away the fumes of his ill mood, and then he would come and paw her shoulders and put his lips to her neck. Yes; but it was not the way to behave, not the way to make her love him. And she said suddenly:

"Gustav; what exactly have I done that you dislike?"

"You have had a father."

Gyp sat quite still for a few seconds, and then began to laugh. He looked so like a sulky child, standing there. He turned swiftly on her and put his hand over her mouth. She looked up over that hand which smelled of tobacco. Her heart was doing the grand ecart within her, this way in compunction, that way in resentment. His eyes fell before hers; he dropped his hand.

"Well, shall we begin?" she said.

He answered roughly: "No," and went out into the garden.

Gyp was left dismayed, disgusted. Was it possible that she could have taken part in such a horrid little scene? She remained sitting at the piano, playing over and over a single passage, without heeding what it was.

IV

So far, they had seen nothing of Rosek at the little house. She wondered if Fiorsen had passed on to him her remark, though if he had, he would surely say he hadn't; she had learned that her husband spoke the truth when convenient, not when it caused him pain. About music, or any art, however, he could be implicitly relied on; and his frankness was appalling when his nerves were ruffled.

But at the first concert she saw Rosek's unwelcome figure on the other side of the gangway, two rows back. He was talking to a young girl, whose face, short and beautifully formed, had the opaque transparency of alabaster. With her round blue eyes fixed on him, and her lips just parted, she had a slightly vacant look. Her laugh, too, was just a little vacant. And yet her features were so beautiful, her hair so smooth and fair, her colouring so pale and fine, her neck so white and round, the poise of her body so perfect that Gyp found it difficult to take her glance away. She had refused her aunt's companionship. It might irritate Fiorsen and affect his playing to see her with "that stiff English creature." She wanted, too, to feel again the sensations of Wiesbaden. There would be a kind of sacred pleasure in knowing that she had helped to perfect sounds which touched the hearts and senses of so many listeners. She had looked forward to this concert so long. And she sat scarcely breathing, abstracted from consciousness of those about her, soft and still, radiating warmth and eagerness.

Fiorsen looked his worst, as ever, when first coming before an audience – cold, furtive, defensive, defiant, half turned away, with those long fingers tightening the screws, touching the strings. It seemed queer to think that only six hours ago she had stolen out of bed from beside him. Wiesbaden! No; this was not like Wiesbaden! And when he played she had not the same emotions. She had heard him now too often, knew too exactly how he produced those sounds; knew that their fire and sweetness and nobility sprang from fingers, ear, brain – not from his soul. Nor was it possible any longer to drift off on those currents of sound into new worlds, to hear bells at dawn, and the dews of evening as they fell, to feel the divinity of wind and sunlight. The romance and ecstasy that at Wiesbaden had soaked her spirit came no more. She was watching for the weak spots, the passages with which he had struggled and she had struggled; she was distracted by memories of petulance, black moods, and sudden caresses. And then she caught his eye. The look was like, yet how unlike, those looks at Wiesbaden. It had the old love-hunger, but had lost the adoration, its spiritual essence. And she thought: 'Is it my fault, or is it only because he has me now to do what he likes with?' It was all another disillusionment, perhaps the greatest yet. But she kindled and flushed at the applause, and lost herself in pleasure at his success. At the interval, she slipped out at once, for her first visit to the artist's room, the mysterious enchantment of a peep behind the scenes. He was coming down from

his last recall; and at sight of her his look of bored contempt vanished; lifting her hand, he kissed it. Gyp felt happier than she had since her marriage. Her eyes shone, and she whispered:

"Beautiful!"

He whispered back:

"So! Do you love me, Gyp?"

She nodded. And at that moment she did, or thought so.

Then people began to come; amongst them her old music-master, Monsieur Harmost, grey and mahogany as ever, who, after a "Merveilleux," "Tres fort" or two to Fiorsen, turned his back on him to talk to his old pupil.

So she had married Fiorsen – dear, dear! That was extraordinary, but extraordinary! And what was it like, to be always with him – a little funny – not so? And how was her music? It would be spoiled now. Ah, what a pity! No? She must come to him, then; yes, come again. All the time he patted her arm, as if playing the piano, and his fingers, that had the touch of an angel, felt the firmness of her flesh, as though debating whether she were letting it deteriorate. He seemed really to have missed "his little friend," to be glad at seeing her again; and Gyp, who never could withstand appreciation, smiled at him. More people came. She saw Rosek talking to her husband, and the young alabaster girl standing silent, her lips still a little parted, gazing up at Fiorsen. A perfect figure, though rather short; a dovelike face, whose exquisitely shaped, just-opened lips seemed to be demanding sugar-plums. She could not be more than nineteen. Who was she?

A voice said almost in her ear:

"How do you do, Mrs. Fiorsen? I am fortunate to see you again at last."

She was obliged to turn. If Gustav had given her away, one would never know it from this velvet-masked creature, with his suave watchfulness and ready composure, who talked away so smoothly. What was it that she so disliked in him? Gyp had acute instincts, the natural intelligence deep in certain natures not over intellectual, but whose "feelers" are too delicate to be deceived. And, for something to say, she asked:

"Who is the girl you were talking to, Count Rosek? Her face is so lovely."

He smiled, exactly the smile she had so disliked at Wiesbaden; following his glance, she saw her husband talking to the girl, whose lips at that moment seemed more than ever to ask for sugar-plums.

"A young dancer, Daphne Wing – she will make a name. A dove flying! So you admire her, Madame Gyp?"

Gyp said, smiling:

"She's very pretty – I can imagine her dancing beautifully."

"Will you come one day and see her? She has still to make her debut."

Gyp answered:

"Thank you. I don't know. I love dancing, of course."

"Good! I will arrange it."

And Gyp thought: "No, no! I don't want to have anything to do with you! Why do I not speak the truth? Why didn't I say I hate dancing?"

Just then a bell sounded; people began hurrying away. The girl came up to Rosek.

"Miss Daphne Wing – Mrs. Fiorsen."

Gyp put out her hand with a smile – this girl was certainly a picture. Miss Daphne Wing smiled, too, and said, with the intonation of those who have been carefully corrected of an accent:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, how beautifully your husband plays – doesn't he?"

It was not merely the careful speech but something lacking when the perfect mouth moved – spirit, sensibility, who could say? And Gyp felt sorry, as at blight on a perfect flower. With a friendly nod, she turned away to Fiorsen, who was waiting to go up on to the platform. Was it at her or at the girl he had been looking? She smiled at him and slid away. In the corridor, Rosek, in attendance, said:

"Why not this evening? Come with Gustav to my rooms. She shall dance to us, and we will all have supper. She admires you, Madame Gyp. She will love to dance for you."

Gyp longed for the simple brutality to say: "I don't want to come. I don't like you!" But all she could manage was:

"Thank you. I – I will ask Gustav."

Once in her seat again, she rubbed the cheek that his breath had touched. A girl was singing now – one of those faces that Gyp always admired, reddish-gold hair, blue eyes – the very antithesis of herself – and the song was "The Bens of Jura," that strange outpouring from a heart broken by love:

"And my heart reft of its own sun – "

Tears rose in her eyes, and the shiver of some very deep response passed through her. What was it Dad had said: "Love catches you, and you're gone!"

She, who was the result of love like that, did not want to love!

The girl finished singing. There was little applause. Yet she had sung beautifully; and what more wonderful song in the world? Was it too tragic, too painful, too strange – not "pretty" enough? Gyp felt sorry for her. Her head ached now. She would so have liked to slip away when it was all over. But she had not the needful rudeness. She would have to go through with this evening at Rosek's and be gay. And why not? Why this shadow over everything? But it was no new sensation, that of having entered by her own free will on a life which, for all effort, would not give her a feeling of anchorage or home. Of her own accord she had stepped into the cage!

On the way to Rosek's rooms, she disguised from Fiorsen her headache and depression. He was in one of his boy-out-of-school moods, elated by applause, mimicking her old master, the idolatries of his worshippers, Rosek, the girl dancer's upturned expectant lips. And he slipped his arm round Gyp in the cab, crushing her against him and sniffing at her cheek as if she had been a flower.

Rosek had the first floor of an old-time mansion in Russell Square. The smell of incense or some kindred perfume was at once about one; and, on the walls of the dark hall, electric light burned, in jars of alabaster picked up in the East. The whole place was in fact a sanctum of the collector's spirit. Its owner had a passion for black – the walls, divans, picture-frames, even some of the tilings were black, with glimmerings of gold, ivory, and moonlight. On a round black table there stood a golden bowl filled with moonlight-coloured velvety "palm" and "honesty"; from a black wall gleamed out the ivory mask of a faun's face; from a dark niche the little silver figure of a dancing girl. It was beautiful, but deathly. And Gyp, though excited always by anything new, keenly alive to every sort of beauty, felt a longing for air and sunlight. It was a relief to get close to one of the black-curtained windows, and see the westering sun shower warmth and light on the trees of the Square gardens. She was introduced to a Mr. and Mrs. Gallant, a dark-faced, cynical-looking man with clever, malicious eyes, and one of those large cornucopias of women with avid blue stares. The little dancer was not there. She had "gone to put on nothing," Rosek informed them.

He took Gyp the round of his treasures, scarabs, Rops drawings, death-masks, Chinese pictures, and queer old flutes, with an air of displaying them for the first time to one who could truly appreciate. And she kept thinking of that saying, "Une technique merveilleuse." Her instinct apprehended the refined bone-viciousness of this place, where nothing, save perhaps taste, would be sacred. It was her first glimpse into that gilt-edged bohemia, whence the generosities, the elans, the struggles of the true bohemia are as rigidly excluded as from the spheres where bishops moved. But she talked and smiled; and no one could have told that her nerves were crisping as if at contact with a corpse. While showing her those alabaster jars, her host had laid his hand softly on her wrist, and in taking it away, he let his fingers, with a touch softer than a kitten's paw, ripple over the skin, then put them to his lips. Ah, there it was – the – the TECHNIQUE! A desperate desire to laugh seized her. And

he saw it – oh, yes, he saw it! He gave her one look, passed that same hand over his smooth face, and – behold! – it showed as before, unmortified, unconscious. A deadly little man!

When they returned to the salon, as it was called, Miss Daphne Wing in a black kimono, whence her face and arms emerged more like alabaster than ever, was sitting on a divan beside Fiorsen. She rose at once and came across to Gyp.

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen" – why did everything she said begin with "Oh" – "isn't this room lovely? It's perfect for dancing. I only brought cream, and flame-colour; they go so beautifully with black."

She threw back her kimono for Gyp to inspect her dress – a girdled cream-coloured shift, which made her ivory arms and neck seem more than ever dazzling; and her mouth opened, as if for a sugar-plum of praise. Then, lowering her voice, she murmured:

"Do you know, I'm rather afraid of Count Rosek."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know; he's so critical, and smooth, and he comes up so quietly. I do think your husband plays wonderfully. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, you are beautiful, aren't you?" Gyp laughed. "What would you like me to dance first? A waltz of Chopin's?"

"Yes; I love Chopin."

"Then I shall. I shall dance exactly what you like, because I do admire you, and I'm sure you're awfully sweet. Oh, yes; you are; I can see that! And I think your husband's awfully in love with you. I should be, if I were a man. You know, I've been studying five years, and I haven't come out yet. But now Count Rosek's going to back me, I expect it'll be very soon. Will you come to my first night? Mother says I've got to be awfully careful. She only let me come this evening because you were going to be here. Would you like me to begin?"

She slid across to Rosek, and Gyp heard her say:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen wants me to begin; a Chopin waltz, please. The one that goes like this."

Rosek went to the piano, the little dancer to the centre of the room. Gyp sat down beside Fiorsen.

Rosek began playing, his eyes fixed on the girl, and his mouth loosened from compression in a sweetish smile. Miss Daphne Wing was standing with her finger-tips joined at her breast – a perfect statue of ebony and palest wax. Suddenly she flung away the black kimono. A thrill swept Gyp from head to foot. She COULD dance – that common little girl! Every movement of her round, sinuous body, of her bare limbs, had the ecstasy of natural genius, controlled by the quivering balance of a really fine training. "A dove flying!" So she was. Her face had lost its vacancy, or rather its vacancy had become divine, having that look – not lost but gone before – which dance demands. Yes, she was a gem, even if she had a common soul. Tears came up in Gyp's eyes. It was so lovely – like a dove, when it flings itself up in the wind, breasting on up, up – wings bent back, poised. Abandonment, freedom – chastened, shaped, controlled!

When, after the dance, the girl came and sat down beside her, she squeezed her hot little hand, but the caress was for her art, not for this moist little person with the lips avid of sugar-plums.

"Oh, did you like it? I'm so glad. Shall I go and put on my flame-colour, now?"

The moment she was gone, comment broke out freely. The dark and cynical Gallant thought the girl's dancing like a certain Napierkowska whom he had seen in Moscow, without her fire – the touch of passion would have to be supplied. She wanted love! Love! And suddenly Gyp was back in the concert-hall, listening to that other girl singing the song of a broken heart.

"Thy kiss, dear love —
Like watercress gathered fresh from cool streams."

Love! in this abode – of fauns' heads, deep cushions, silver dancing girls! Love! She had a sudden sense of deep abasement. What was she, herself, but just a feast for a man's senses? Her

home, what but a place like this? Miss Daphne Wing was back again. Gyp looked at her husband's face while she was dancing. His lips! How was it that she could see that disturbance in him, and not care? If she had really loved him, to see his lips like that would have hurt her, but she might have understood perhaps, and forgiven. Now she neither quite understood nor quite forgave.

And that night, when he kissed her, she murmured:

"Would you rather it were that girl – not me?"

"That girl! I could swallow her at a draft. But you, my Gyp – I want to drink for ever!"

Was that true? IF she had loved him – how good to hear!

V

After this, Gyp was daily more and more in contact with high bohemia, that curious composite section of society which embraces the neck of music, poetry, and the drama. She was a success, but secretly she felt that she did not belong to it, nor, in truth, did Fiorsen, who was much too genuine a bohemian, and artist, and mocked at the Gallants and even the Roseks of this life, as he mocked at Winton, Aunt Rosamund, and their world. Life with him had certainly one effect on Gyp; it made her feel less and less a part of that old orthodox, well-bred world which she had known before she married him; but to which she had confessed to Winton she had never felt that she belonged, since she knew the secret of her birth. She was, in truth, much too impressionable, too avid of beauty, and perhaps too naturally critical to accept the dictates of their fact-and-form-governed routine; only, of her own accord, she would never have had initiative enough to step out of its circle. Loosened from those roots, unable to attach herself to this new soil, and not spiritually leagued with her husband, she was more and more lonely. Her only truly happy hours were those spent with Winton or at her piano or with her puppies. She was always wondering at what she had done, longing to find the deep, the sufficient reason for having done it. But the more she sought and longed, the deeper grew her bewilderment, her feeling of being in a cage. Of late, too, another and more definite uneasiness had come to her.

She spent much time in her garden, where the blossoms had all dropped, lilac was over, acacias coming into bloom, and blackbirds silent.

Winton, who, by careful experiment, had found that from half-past three to six there was little or no chance of stumbling across his son-in-law, came in nearly every day for tea and a quiet cigar on the lawn. He was sitting there with Gyp one afternoon, when Betty, who usurped the functions of parlour-maid whenever the whim moved her, brought out a card on which were printed the words, "Miss Daphne Wing."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.