

HUME FERGUS

RED MONEY

Fergus Hume

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CHAPTER I.

THE DRAMA OF LITTLE THINGS

"Gypsies! How very delightful! I really must have my fortune told. The dear things know all about the future."

As Mrs. Belgrove spoke she peered through her lorgnette to see if anyone at the breakfast-table was smiling. The scrutiny was necessary, since she was the oldest person present, and there did not appear to be any future for her, save that very certain one connected with a funeral. But a society lady of sixty, made up to look like one of forty (her maid could do no more), with an excellent digestion and a constant desire, like the Athenians of old, for "Something New!" can scarcely be expected to dwell upon such a disagreeable subject as death. Nevertheless, Mrs. Belgrove could not disguise from herself that her demise could not be postponed for many more years, and examined the faces of the other guests to see if they thought so too. If anyone did, he and she politely suppressed a doubtful look and applauded the suggestion of a fortune-telling expedition.

"Let us make up a party and go," said the hostess, only too thankful to find something to amuse the house-party for a few hours. "Where did you say the gypsies were, Garvington?"

"In the Abbot's Wood," replied her husband, a fat, small round-faced man, who was methodically devouring a large breakfast.

"That's only three miles away. We can drive or ride."

"Or motor, or bicycle, or use Shanks' mare," remarked Miss Greeby rather vulgarly. Not that any one minded such a speech from her, as her vulgarity was merely regarded as eccentricity, because she had money and brains, an exceedingly long tongue, and a memory of other people's failings to match.

Lord Garvington made no reply, as breakfast, in his opinion, was much too serious a business to be interrupted. He reached for the marmalade, and requested that a bowl of Devonshire cream should be passed along. His wife, who was lean and anxious-looking even for an August hostess, looked at him wrathfully. He never gave her any assistance in entertaining their numerous guests, yet always insisted that the house should be full for the shooting season. And being poor for a titled pair, they could not afford to entertain even a shoeblack, much less a crowd of hungry sportsmen and a horde of frivolous women, who required to be amused expensively. It was really too bad of Garvington.

At this point the reflections of the hostess were interrupted by Miss Greeby, who always had a great deal to say, and who always tried, as an American would observe, "to run the circus." "I suppose you men will go out shooting as usual?" she said in her sharp, clear voice.

The men present collectively declared that such was their intention, and that they had come to "The Manor" for that especial purpose, so it was useless to ask them, or any one of them, to go on a fortune-telling expedition when they could find anything of that sort in Bond Street. "And it's all a lot of rot, anyhow," declared one sporting youth with obviously more muscle and money than brains; "no one can tell my fortune."

"I can, Billy. You will be Prime Minister," flashed out Miss Greeby, at which there was a general laugh. Then Garvington threw a bombshell.

"You'd better get your fortunes told to-day, if you want to," he grunted, wiping his mustache; "for to-morrow I'm going to have these rotters moved off my land straight away. They're thieves and liars."

"So are many other people," snapped Miss Greeby, who had lost heavily at bridge on the previous night and spoke feelingly.

Her host paid no attention to her. "There's been a lot of burglaries in this neighborhood of late. I daresay these gypsies are mixed up in them."

"Burglaries!" cried Mrs. Belgrove, and turned pale under her rouge, as she remembered that she had her diamonds with her.

"Oh, it's all right! Don't worry," said Garvinton, pushing back his chair. "They won't try on any games in this house while I'm here. If any one tries to get in I'll shoot the beast."

"Is that allowed by law?" asked an army officer with a shrug.

"I don't know and I don't care," retorted Garvinton. "An Englishman's house is his castle, you know, and he can jolly well shoot any one who tries to get into it. Besides, I shouldn't mind potting a burglar. Great sport."

"You'd ask his intentions first, I presume," said Lady Garvinton tartly.

"Not me. Any one getting into the house after dark doesn't need his intentions to be asked. I'd shoot."

"What about Romeo?" asked a poetic-looking young man. "He got into Juliet's house, but did not come as a burglar."

"He came as a guest, I believe," said a quiet, silvery voice at the end of the table, and every one turned to look at Lady Agnes Pine, who had spoken.

She was Garvinton's sister, and the wife of Sir Hubert Pine, the millionaire, who was absent from the house party on this occasion. As a rule, she spoke little, and constantly wore a sad expression on her pale and beautiful face. And Agnes Pine really was beautiful, being one of those tall, slim willowy-looking women who always look well and act charmingly. And, indeed, her undeniable charm of manner probably had more to do with her reputation as a handsome woman than her actual physical grace. With her dark hair and dark eyes, her Greek features and ivory skin faintly tinted with a tea-rose hue, she looked very lovely and very sad. Why she should be, was a puzzle to many women, as being the wife of a superlatively rich man, she had all the joys that money could bring her. Still it was hinted on good authority – but no one ever heard the name of the authority – that Garvinton being poor had forced her into marrying Sir Hubert, for whom she did not care in the least. People said that her cousin Noel Lambert was the husband of her choice, but that she had sacrificed herself, or rather had been compelled to do so, in order that Garvinton might be set on his legs. But Lady Agnes never gave any one the satisfaction of knowing the exact truth. She moved through the social world like a gentle ghost, fulfilling her duties admirably, but apparently indifferent to every one and everything. "Clippin' to look at," said the young men, "but tombs to talk to. No sport at all." But then the young men did not possess the key to Lady Agnes Pine's heart. Nor did her husband apparently.

Her voice was very low and musical, and every one felt its charm. Garvinton answered her question as he left the room. "Romeo or no Romeo, guest or no guest," he said harshly, "I'll shoot any beast who tries to enter my house. Come on, you fellows. We start in half an hour for the coverts."

When the men left the room, Miss Greeby came and sat down in a vacant seat near her hostess. "What did Garvinton mean by that last speech?" she asked with a significant look at Lady Agnes.

"Oh, my dear, when does Garvinton ever mean anything?" said the other woman fretfully. "He is so selfish; he leaves me to do everything."

"Well," drawled Miss Greeby with a pensive look on her masculine features, "he looked at Agnes when he spoke."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lady Garvinton sharply.

Miss Greeby gave a significant laugh. "I notice that Mr. Lambert is not in the house," she said carelessly. "But some one told me he was near at hand in the neighborhood. Surely Garvinton doesn't mean to shoot him."

"Clara." The hostess sat up very straight, and a spot of color burned on either sallow cheek. "I am surprised at you. Noel is staying in the Abbot's Wood Cottage, and indulging in artistic work of some sort. But he can come and stay here, if he likes. You don't mean to insinuate that he would climb into the house through a window after dark like a burglar?"

"That's just what I do mean," retorted Miss Greeby daringly, "and if he does, Garvinton will shoot him. He said so."

"He said nothing of the sort," cried Lady Garvinton, angrily rising.

"Well, he meant it. I saw him looking at Agnes. And we know that Sir Hubert is as jealous as Othello. Garvinton is on guard I suppose, and –"

"Will you hold your tongue?" whispered the mistress of the Manor furiously, and she would have shaken Miss Greeby, but that she had borrowed money from her and did not dare to incur her enmity. "Agnes will hear you; she is looking this way; can't you see?"

"As if I cared," laughed Miss Greeby, pushing out her full lower lip in a contemptuous manner. However, for reasons best known to herself, she held her peace, although she would have scorned the idea that the hint of her hostess made her do so.

Lady Garvinton saw that her guests were all chattering with one another, and that the men were getting ready to leave for the day's shooting, so she went to discuss the dinner in the housekeeper's room. But all the time she and the housekeeper were arguing what Lord Garvinton would like in the way of food, the worried woman was reflecting on what Miss Greeby had said. When the menu was finally settled – no easy task when it concerned the master of the house – Lady Garvinton sought out Mrs. Belgrove. That juvenile ancient was sunning herself on the terrace, in the hope of renewing her waning vitality, and, being alone, permitted herself to look old. She brisked up with a kittenish purr when disturbed, and remarked that the Hengishire air was like champagne. "My spirits are positively wild and wayward," said the would-be Hebe with a desperate attempt to be youthful.

"Ah, you haven't got the house to look after," sighed Lady Garvinton, with a weary look, and dropped into a basket chair to pour out her woes to Mrs. Belgrove. That person was extremely discreet, as years of society struggling had taught her the value of silence. Her discretion in this respect brought her many confidences, and she was renowned for giving advice which was never taken.

"What's the matter, my dear? You look a hundred," said Mrs. Belgrove, putting up her lorgnette with a chuckle, as if she had made an original observation. But she had not, for Lady Garvinton always appeared worn and weary, and sallow, and untidy. She was the kind of absent-minded person who depended upon pins to hold her garments together, and who would put on her tiara crookedly for a drawing-room.

"Clara Greeby's a cat," said poor, worried Lady Garvinton, hunting for her pocket handkerchief, which was rarely to be found.

"Has she been making love to Garvinton?"

"Pooh! No woman attracts Garvinton unless she can cook, or knows something about a kitchen range. I might as well have married a soup tureen. I'm sure I don't know why I ever did marry him," lamented the lady, staring at the changing foliage of the park trees. "He's a pauper and a pig, my dear, although I wouldn't say so to every one. I wish my mother hadn't insisted that I should attend cooking classes."

"What on earth has that to do with it?"

"To do with what?" asked Lady Garvinton absentmindedly. "I don't know what you're talking about, I'm sure. But mother knew that Garvinton was fond of a good dinner, and made me attend those classes, so as to learn to talk about French dishes. We used to flirt about soups and creams and haunches of venison, until he thought that I was as greedy as he was. So he married me, and I've been attending to his meals ever since. Why, even for our honeymoon we went to Mont St. Michel. They make splendid omelettes there, and Garvinton ate all the time. Ugh!" and the poor lady shuddered.

Mrs. Belgrove saw that her companion was meandering, and would never come to the point unless forced to face it, so she rapped her knuckles with the lorgnette. "What about Clara Greeby?" she demanded sharply.

"She's a cat!"

"Oh, we're all cats, mewling or spitting as the fit takes us," said Mrs. Belgrove comfortably. "I can't see why cat should be a term of opprobrium when applied to a woman. Cats are charmingly pretty animals, and know what they want, also how to get it. Well, my dear?"

"I believe she was in love with Noel herself," ruminated Lady Garvinton.

"Who was in love? Come to the point, my dear Jane."

"Clara Greeby."

Mrs. Belgrove laughed. "Oh, that ancient history. Every one who was anybody knew that Clara would have given her eyes – and very ugly eyes they are – to have married Noel Lambert. I suppose you mean him? Noel isn't a common name. Quite so. You mean him. Well, Clara wanted to buy him. He hasn't any money, and as a banker's heiress she is as rich as a Jew. But he wouldn't have her."

"Why wouldn't he?" asked Lady Garvinton, waking up – she had been reflecting about a new soup which she hoped would please her husband. "Clara has quite six thousand a year, and doesn't look bad when her maid makes her dress in a proper manner. And, talking about maids, mine wants to leave, and –"

"She's too like Boadicea," interrupted Mrs. Belgrove, keeping her companion to the subject of Miss Greeby. "A masculine sort of hussy. Noel is far too artistic to marry such a maypole. She's six foot two, if she's an inch, and her hands and feet –" Mrs. Belgrove shuddered with a gratified glance at her own slim fingers.

"You know the nonsense that Garvinton was talking; about shooting a burglar," said the other woman vaguely. "Such nonsense, for I'm sure no burglar would enter a house filled with nothing but Early Victorian furniture."

"Well? Well? Well?" said Mrs. Belgrove impatiently.

"Clara Beeby thought that Garvinton meant to shoot Noel."

"Why, in heaven's name! Because Noel is his heir?"

"I'm sure I can't help it if I've no children," said Lady Garvinton, going off on another trail – the one suggested by Mrs. Belgrove's remark. "I'd be a happier woman if I had something else to attend to than dinners. I wish we all lived on roots, so that Garvinton could dig them up for himself."

"My dear, he'd send you out with a trowel to do that," said Mrs. Belgrove humorously. "But why does Garvinton want to shoot Noel?"

"Oh, he doesn't. I never said he did. Clara Greeby made the remark. You see, Noel loved Agnes before she married Hubert, and I believe he loves her still, which isn't right, seeing she's married, and isn't half so good-looking as she was. And Noel stopping at that cottage in the Abbot's Wood painting in water-colors. I think he is, but I'm not sure if it isn't in oils, and the –"

"Well? Well? Well?" asked Mrs. Belgrove again.

"It isn't well at all, when you think what a tongue Clara Greeby has," snapped Lady Garvinton. "She said if Noel came to see Agnes by night, Garvinton, taking him for a burglar, might shoot him. She insisted that he looked at Agnes when he was talking about burglars, and meant that."

"What nonsense!" cried Mrs. Belgrove vigorously, at last having arrived at a knowledge of why Lady Garvinton had sought her. "Noel can come here openly, so there is no reason he should steal here after dark."

"Well, he's romantic, you know, dear. And romantic people always prefer windows to doors and darkness to light. The windows here are so insecure," added Lady Garvinton, glancing at the facade above her untidy hair. "He could easily get in by sticking a penknife in between the upper and lower sash of the window. It would be quite easy."

"What nonsense you talk, Jane," said Mrs. Belgrove, impatiently. "Noel is not the man to come after a married woman when her husband is away. I have known him since he was a Harrow schoolboy, so I have every right to speak. Where is Sir Hubert?"

"He is at Paris or Peking, or something with a 'P,'" said Lady Garvinton in her usual vague way. "I'm sure I don't know why he can't take Agnes with him. They get on very well for a married couple."

"All the same she doesn't love him."

"He loves her, for I'm sure he's that jealous that he can't scarcely bear her out of his sight."

"It seems to me that he can," remarked Mrs. Belgrove dryly. "Since he is at Paris or Peking and she is here."

"Garvinton is looking after her, and he owes Sir Hubert too much, not to see that Agnes is all right."

Mrs. Belgrove peered at Lady Garvinton through her lorgnette. "I think you talk a great deal of nonsense, Jane, as I said before," she observed. "I don't suppose for one moment that Agnes thinks of Noel, or Noel of Agnes."

"Clara Greeby says –"

"Oh, I know what she says and what she wishes. She would like to get Noel into trouble with Sir Hubert over Agnes, simply because he will not marry her. As to her chatter about burglars –"

"Garvinton's chatter," corrected her companion.

"Well, then, Garvinton's. It's all rubbish. Agnes is a sweet girl, and –"

"Girl?" Lady Garvinton laughed disdainfully. "She is twenty-five."

"A mere baby. People cannot be called old until they are seventy or eighty. It is a bad habit growing old. I have never encouraged it myself. By the way, tell me something about Sir Hubert Pine. I have only met him once or twice. What kind of a man is he?"

"Tall, and thin, and dark, and –"

"I know his appearance. But his nature?"

"He's jealous, and can be very disagreeable when he likes. I don't know who he is, or where he came from. He made his money out of penny toys and South African investments. He was a member of Parliament for a few years, and helped his party so much with money that he was knighted. That's all I know of him, except that he is very mean."

"Mean? What you tell me doesn't sound mean."

"I'm talking of his behavior to Garvinton," explained the hostess, touching her ruffled hair, "he doesn't give us enough money."

"Why should he give you any?" asked Mrs. Belgrove bluntly.

"Well, you see, dear, Garvinton would never have allowed his sister to marry a nobody, unless –"

"Unless the nobody paid for his footing. I quite understand. Every one knows that Agnes married the man to save her family from bankruptcy. Poor girl!" Mrs. Belgrove sighed. "And she loved Noel. What a shame that she couldn't become his wife!"

"Oh, that would have been absurd," said Lady Garvinton pettishly. "What's the use of Hunger marrying Thirst? Noel has no money, just like ourselves, and if it hadn't been for Hubert this place would have been sold long ago. I'm telling you secrets, mind."

"My dear, you tell me nothing that everybody doesn't know."

"Then what is your advice?"

"About what, my dear?"

"About what I have been telling you. The burglar, and –"

"I have told you before, that it is rubbish. If a burglar does come here I hope Lord Garvinton will shoot him, as I don't want to lose my diamonds."

"But if the burglar is Noel?"

"He won't be Noel. Clara Greeby has simply made a nasty suggestion which is worthy of her. But if you're afraid, why not get her to marry Noel?"

"He won't have her," said Lady Garvinton dolefully.

"I know he won't. Still a persevering woman can do wonders, and Clara Greeby has no self-respect. And if you think Noel is too near, get Agnes to join her husband in Pekin."

"I think it's Paris."

"Well then, Paris. She can buy new frocks."

"Agnes doesn't care for new frocks. Such simple tastes she has, wanting to help the poor. Rubbish, I call it."

"Why, when her husband helps Lord Garvinton?" asked Mrs. Belgrove artlessly.

Lady Garvinton frowned. "What horrid things you say."

"I only repeat what every one is saying."

"Well, I'm sure I don't care," cried Lady Garvinton recklessly, and rose to depart on some vague errand. "I'm only in the world to look after dinners and breakfasts. Clara Greeby's a cat making all this fuss about –"

"Hush! There she is."

Lady Garvinton fluttered round, and drifted towards Miss Greeby, who had just stepped out on to the terrace. The banker's daughter was in a tailor-made gown with a man's cap and a man's gloves, and a man's boots – at least, as Mrs. Belgrove thought, they looked like that – and carried a very masculine stick, more like a bludgeon than a cane. With her ruddy complexion and ruddy hair, and piercing blue eyes, and magnificent figure – for she really had a splendid figure in spite of Mrs. Belgrove's depreciation – she looked like a gigantic Norse goddess. With a flashing display of white teeth, she came along swinging her stick, or whirling her shillalah, as Mrs. Belgrove put it, and seemed the embodiment of coarse, vigorous health.

"Taking a sun-bath?" she inquired brusquely and in a loud baritone voice. "Very wise of you two elderly things. I am going for a walk."

Mrs. Belgrove was disagreeable in her turn. "Going to the Abbot's Wood?"

"How clever of you to guess," Miss Greeby smiled and nodded. "Yes, I'm going to look up Lambert"; she always spoke of her male friends in this hearty fashion. "He ought to be here enjoying himself instead of living like a hermit in the wilds."

"He's painting pictures," put in Lady Garvinton. "Do hermits paint?"

"No. Only society women do that," said Miss Greeby cheerfully, and Mrs. Belgrove's faded eyes flashed. She knew that the remark was meant for her, and snapped back. "Are you going to have your fortune told by the gypsies, dear?" she inquired amiably. "They might tell you about your marriage."

"Oh, I daresay, and if you ask they will prophesy your funeral."

"I am in perfect health, Miss Greeby."

"So I should think, since your cheeks are so red."

Lady Garvinton hastily intervened to prevent the further exchange of compliments. "Will you be back to luncheon, or join the men at the coverts?"

"Neither. I'll drop on Lambert for a feed. Where are you going?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said the hostess vaguely. "There's lots to do. I shall know what's to be done, when I think of it," and she drifted along the terrace and into the house like a cloud blown any way by the wind. Miss Greeby looked after her limp figure with a contemptuous grin, then she nodded casually to Mrs. Belgrove, and walked whistling down the terrace steps.

"Cat, indeed!" commented Mrs. Belgrove to herself when she saw Miss Greeby's broad back disappear behind the laurels. "Nothing half so pretty. She's like a great Flanders mare. And I wish Henry VIII was alive to marry her," she added the epithet suggesting that king, "if only to cut her head off."

CHAPTER II. IN THE WOOD

Miss Greeby swung along towards her destination with a masculine stride and in as great a hurry as though she had entered herself for a Marathon race. It was a warm, misty day, and the pale August sunshine radiated faintly through the smoky atmosphere. Nothing was clear-cut and nothing was distinct, so hazy was the outlook. The hedges were losing their greenery and had blossomed forth into myriad bunches of ruddy hips and haws, and the usually hard road was soft underfoot because of the penetrating quality of the moist air. There was no wind to clear away the misty greyness, but yellow leaves without its aid dropped from the disconsolate trees. The lately-reaped fields, stretching on either side of the lane down which the lady was walking, presented a stubbled expanse of brown and dim gold, uneven and distressful to the eye. The dying world was in ruins and Nature had reduced herself to that necessary chaos, out of which, when the coming snow completed its task, she would build a new heaven and a new earth.

An artist might have had some such poetic fancy, and would certainly have looked lovingly on the alluring colors and forms of decay. But Miss Greeby was no artist, and prided herself upon being an aggressively matter-of-fact young woman. With her big boots slapping the ground and her big hands thrust into the pockets of her mannish jacket, she bent her head in a meditative fashion and trudged briskly onward. What romance her hard nature was capable of, was uppermost now, but it had to do strictly with her personal feelings and did not require the picturesque autumn landscape to improve or help it in any way. One man's name suggested romance to bluff, breezy Clara Greeby, and that name was Noel Lambert. She murmured it over and over again to her heart, and her hard face flushed into something almost like beauty, as she remembered that she would soon behold its owner. "But he won't care," she said aloud, and threw back her head defiantly: then after a pause, she breathed softly, "But I shall make him care."

If she hoped to do so, the task was one which required a great amount of skill and a greater amount of womanly courage, neither of which qualities Miss Greeby possessed. She had no skill in managing a man, as her instincts were insufficiently feminine, and her courage was of a purely rough-and-tumble kind. She could have endured hunger and thirst and cold: she could have headed a forlorn hope: she could have held to a sinking ship: but she had no store of that peculiar feminine courage which men don't understand and which women can't explain, however much they may exhibit it. Miss Greeby was an excellent comrade, but could not be the beloved of any man, because of the very limitations of semi-masculinity upon which she prided herself. Noel Lambert wanted a womanly woman, and Lady Agnes was his ideal of what a wife should be. Miss Greeby had in every possible way offered herself for the post, but Lambert had never cared for her sufficiently to endure the thought of passing through life with her beside him. He said she was "a good sort"; and when a man says that of a woman, she may be to him a good friend, or even a platonic chum, but she can never be a desirable wife in his eyes. What Miss Greeby lacked was sex, and lacking that, lacked everything. It was strange that with her rough common sense she could not grasp this want. But the thought that Lambert required what she could never give – namely, the feminine tenderness which strong masculine natures love – never crossed her very clear and mathematical mind.

So she was bent upon a fool's errand, as she strode towards the Abbot's Wood, although she did not know it. Her aim was to capture Lambert as her husband; and her plan, to accomplish her wish by working on the heart-hunger he most probably felt, owing to the loss of Agnes Pine. If he loved that lady in a chivalrous fashion – and Miss Greeby believed that he did – she was absolutely lost to him as the wife of another man. Lambert would never degrade her into a divorce court appearance. And perhaps, after all, as Miss Greeby thought hopefully, his love for Sir Hubert's wife might have turned

to scorn that she had preferred money to true love. But then, again, as Miss Greeby remembered, with a darkening face, Agnes had married the millionaire so as to save the family estates from being sold. Rank has its obligation, and Lambert might approve of the sacrifice, since he was the next heir to the Garvinton title. "We shall see what his attitude is," decided Miss Greeby, as she entered the Abbot's Wood, and delayed arranging her future plans until she fully understood his feelings towards the woman he had lost. In the meantime, Lambert would want a comrade, and Miss Greeby was prepared to sink her romantic feelings, for the time being, in order to be one.

The forest – which belonged to Garvinton, so long as he paid the interest on the mortgage – was not a very large one. In the old days it had been of greater size and well stocked with wild animals; so well stocked, indeed, that the abbots of a near monastery had used it for many hundred years as a hunting ground. But the monastery had vanished off the face of the earth, as not even its ruins were left, and the game had disappeared as the forest grew smaller and the district around became more populous. A Lambert of the Georgian period – the family name of Lord Garvinton was Lambert – had acquired what was left of the monastic wood by winning it at a game of cards from the nobleman who had then owned it. Now it was simply a large patch of green in the middle of a somewhat naked county, for Hengshire is not remarkable for woodlands. There were rabbits and birds, badgers, stoats, and such-like wild things in it still, but the deer which the abbots had hunted were conspicuous by their absence. Garvinton looked after it about as much as he did after the rest of his estates, which was not saying much. The fat, round little lord's heart was always in the kitchen, and he preferred eating to fulfilling his duties as a landlord. Consequently, the Abbot's Wood was more or less public property, save when Garvinton turned crusty and every now and then cleared out all interlopers. But tramps came to sleep in the wood, and gypsies camped in its glades, while summer time brought many artists to rave about its sylvan beauties, and paint pictures of ancient trees and silent pools, and rugged lawns besprinkled with rainbow wild flowers. People who went to the Academy and to the various art exhibitions in Bond Street knew the Abbot's Wood fairly well, as it was rarely that at least one picture dealing with it did not appear.

Miss Greeby had explored the wood before and knew exactly where to find the cottage mentioned by Lady Garvinton. On the verge of the trees she saw the blue smoke of the gypsies' camp fires, and heard the vague murmur of Romany voices, but, avoiding the vagrants, she took her way through the forest by a winding path. This ultimately led her to a spacious glade, in the centre of which stood a dozen or more rough monoliths of mossy gray and weather-worn stones, disposed in a circle. Probably these were all that remained of some Druidical temple, and archaeologists came from far and near to view the weird relics. And in the middle of the circle stood the cottage: a thatched dwelling, which might have had to do with a fairy tale, with its whitewashed walls covered with ivy, and its latticed windows, on the ledges of which stood pots of homely flowers. There was no fence round this rustic dwelling, as the monoliths stood as guardians, and the space between the cottage walls and the gigantic stones was planted thickly with fragrant English flowers. Snapdragon, sweet-william, marigolds, and scented clove carnations, were all to be found there: also there was thyme, mint, sage, and other pot-herbs. And the whole perfumed space was girdled by trees old and young, which stood back from the emerald beauty of untrimmed lawns. A more ideal spot for a dreamer, or an artist, or a hermit, or for the straying prince of a fairy tale, it would have been quite impossible to find. Miss Greeby's vigorous and coarse personality seemed to break in a noisy manner – although she did not utter a single word – the enchanted silence of the solitary place.

However, the intruder was too matter-of-fact to trouble about the sequestered liveliness of this unique dwelling. She strode across the lawns, and passing beyond the monoliths, marched like an invader up the narrow path between the radiant flower-beds. From the tiny green door she raised the burnished knocker and brought it down with an emphatic bang. Shortly the door opened with a pettish tug, as though the person behind was rather annoyed by the noise, and a very tall, well-built, slim young man made his appearance on the threshold. He held a palette on the thumb of one

hand, and clutched a sheaf of brushes, while another brush was in his mouth, and luckily impeded a rather rough welcome. The look in a pair of keen blue eyes certainly seemed to resent the intrusion, but at the sight of Miss Greeby this irritability changed to a glance of suspicion. Lambert, from old associations, liked his visitor very well on the whole, but that feminine intuition, which all creative natures possess, warned him that it was wise to keep her at arm's length. She had never plainly told her love; but she had assuredly hinted at it more or less by eye and manner and undue hauntings of his footsteps when in London. He could not truthfully tell himself that he was glad of her unexpected visit. For quite half a minute they stood staring at one another, and Miss Greeby's hard cheeks flamed to a poppy red at the sight of the man she loved.

"Well, Hermit." she observed, when he made no remark. "As the mountain would not come to Mahomet, the prophet has come to the mountain."

"The mountain is welcome," said Lambert diplomatically, and stood aside, so that she might enter. Then adopting the bluff and breezy, rough-and-ready-man-to-man attitude, which Miss Greeby liked to see in her friends, he added: "Come in, old girl! It's a pal come to see a pal, isn't it?"

"Rather," assented Miss Greeby, although, woman-like, she was not entirely pleased with this unromantic welcome. "We played as brats together, didn't we?"

"Yes," she added meditatively, when following Lambert into his studio, "I think we are as chummy as a man and woman well can be."

"True enough. You were always a good sort, Clara. How well you are looking – more of a man than ever."

"Oh, stop that!" said Miss Greeby roughly.

"Why?" Lambert raised his eyebrows. "As a girl you always liked to be thought manly, and said again and again that you wished you were a boy."

"I find that I am a woman, after all," sighed the visitor, dropping into a chair and looking round; "with a woman's feelings, too."

"And very nice those feelings are, since they have influenced you to pay me a visit in the wilds," remarked the artist imperturbably.

"What are you doing in the wilds?"

"Painting," was the laconic retort.

"So I see. Still-life pictures?"

"Not exactly." He pointed toward the easel. "Behold and approve."

Miss Greeby did behold, but she certainly did not approve, because she was a woman and in love. It was only a pictured head she saw, but the head was that of a very beautiful girl, whose face smiled from the canvas in a subtle, defiant way, as if aware of its wild loveliness. The raven hair streamed straightly down to the shoulders – for the bust of the model was slightly indicated – and there, bunched out into curls. A red and yellow handkerchief was knotted round the brows, and dangling sequins added to its barbaric appearance. Nose and lips and eyes, and contours, were all perfect, and it really seemed as though the face were idealized, so absolutely did it respond to all canons of beauty. It was a gypsy countenance, and there lurked in its loveliness that wild, untamed look which suggested unrestricted roamings and the spacious freedom of the road.

The sudden, jealous fear which surged into Miss Greeby's heart climbed to her throat and choked her speech. But she had wisdom enough to check unwise words, and glanced round the studio to recover her composure. The room was small and barely furnished; a couch, two deep arm-chairs, and a small table filled its limited area. The walls and roof were painted a pale green, and a carpet of the same delicate hue covered the floor. Of course, there were the usual painting materials, brushes and easel and palettes and tubes of color, together with a slightly raised platform near the one window where the model could sit or stand. The window itself had no curtains and was filled with plain glass, affording plenty of light.

"The other windows of the cottage are latticed," said Lambert, seeing his visitor's eyes wander in that direction. "I had that glass put in when I came here a month ago. No light can filter through lattices – in sufficient quantity that is – to see the true tones of the colors."

"Oh, bother the window!" muttered Miss Greeby restlessly, for she had not yet gained command of her emotions.

Lambert laughed and looked at his picture with his head on one side, and a very handsome head it was, as Miss Greeby thought. "It bothered me until I had it put right, I assure you. But you don't seem pleased with my crib."

"It's not good enough for you."

"Since when have I been a sybarite, Clara?"

"I mean you ought to think of your position."

"It's too unpleasant to think about," rejoined Lambert, throwing himself on the couch and producing his pipe. "May I smoke?"

"Yes, and if you have any decent cigarettes I'll join you. Thanks!" She deftly caught the silver case he threw her. "But your position?"

"Five hundred a year and no occupation, since I have been brought up to neither trade nor profession," said Lambert leisurely. "Well?"

"You are the heir to a title and to a large property."

"Which is heavily mortgaged. As to the title" – Lambert shrugged his shoulders – "Garvington's wife may have children."

"I don't think so. They have been married ten years and more. You are certain to come in for everything."

"Everything consists of nothing," said the artist coolly.

"Well," drawled Miss Greeby, puffing luxuriously at her cigarette, which was Turkish and soothing, "nothing may turn into something when these mortgages are cleared off."

"Who is going to clear them off?"

"Sir Hubert Pine."

Lambert's brows contracted, as she knew they would when this name was mentioned, and he carefully attended to filling his pipe so as to avoid meeting her hard, inquisitive eyes. "Pine is a man of business, and if he pays off the mortgages he will take over the property as security. I don't see that Garvington will be any the better off in that case."

"Lambert," said Miss Greeby very decidedly, and determined to know precisely what he felt like, "Garvington only allowed his sister to marry Sir Hubert because he was rich. I don't know for certain, of course, but I should think it probable that he made an arrangement with Pine to have things put straight because of the marriage."

"Possible and probable," said the artist shortly, and wincing; "but old friend as you are, Clara, I don't see the necessity of talking about business which does not concern me. Speak to Garvington."

"Agnes concerns you."

"How objectionably direct you are," exclaimed Lambert in a vexed tone. "And how utterly wrong. Agnes does not concern me in the least. I loved her, but as she chose to marry Pine, why there's no more to be said."

"If there was nothing more to be said," observed Miss Greeby shrewdly, "you would not be burying yourself here."

"Why not? I am fond of nature and art, and my income is not enough to permit my living decently in London. I had to leave the army because I was so poor. Garvington has given me this cottage rent free, so I'm jolly enough with my painting and with Mrs. Tribb as housekeeper and cook. She's a perfect dream of a cook," ended Lambert thoughtfully.

Miss Greeby shook her red head. "You can't deceive me."

"Who wants to, anyhow?" demanded the man, unconsciously American.

"You do. You wish to make out that you prefer to camp here instead of admitting that you would like to be at The Manor because Agnes – "

Lambert jumped up crossly. "Oh, leave Agnes out of the question. She is Pine's wife, so that settles things. It's no use crying for the moon, and – "

"Then you still wish for the moon," interpolated the woman quickly.

"Not even you have the right to ask me such a question," replied Lambert in a quiet and decisive tone. "Let us change the subject."

Miss Greeby pointed to the beautiful face smiling on the easel. "I advise you to," she said significantly.

"You seem to have come here to give me good advice."

"Which you won't take," she retorted.

"Because it isn't needed."

"A man's a man and a woman's a woman."

"That's as true as taxes, as Mr. Barkis observed, if you are acquainted with the writings of the late Charles Dickens. Well?"

Again Miss Greeby pointed to the picture. "She's very pretty."

"I shouldn't have painted her otherwise."

"Oh, then the original of that portrait does exist?"

"Could you call it a portrait if an original didn't exist?" demanded the young man tartly. "Since you want to know so much, you may as well come to the gypsy encampment on the verge of the wood and satisfy yourself." He threw on a Panama hat, with a cross look. "Since when have you come to the conclusion that I need a dry nurse?"

"Oh, don't talk bosh!" said Miss Greeby vigorously, and springing to her feet. "You take me at the foot of the letter and too seriously. I only came here to see how my old pal was getting on."

"I'm all right and as jolly as a sandboy. Now are you satisfied?"

"Quite. Only don't fall in love with the original of your portrait."

"It's rather late in the day to warn me," said Lambert dryly, "for I have known the girl for six months. I met her in a gypsy caravan when on a walking tour, and offered to paint her. She is down here with her people, and you can see her whenever you have a mind to."

"There's no time like the present," said Miss Greeby, accepting the offer with alacrity. "Come along, old boy." Then, when they stepped out of the cottage garden on to the lawns, she asked pointedly, "What is her name?"

"Chaldea."

"Nonsense. That is the name of the country."

"I never denied that, my dear girl. But Chaldea was born in the country whence she takes her name. Down Mesopotamia way, I believe. These gypsies wander far and wide, you know. She's very pretty, and has the temper of the foul fiend himself. Only Kara can keep her in order."

"Who is Kara?"

"A Servian gypsy who plays the fiddle like an angel. He's a crooked-backed, black-faced, hairy ape of a dwarf, but highly popular on account of his music. Also, he's crazy about Chaldea, and loves her to distraction."

"Does she love him?" Miss Greeby asked in her direct fashion.

"No," replied Lambert, coloring under his tan, and closed his lips firmly. He was a very presentable figure of a man, as he walked beside the unusually tall woman. His face was undeniably handsome in a fair Saxon fashion, and his eyes were as blue as those of Miss Greeby herself, while his complexion was much more delicate. In fact, she considered that it was much too good a complexion for one of the male sex, but admitted inwardly that its possessor was anything but effeminate, when he had such a heavy jaw, such a firm chin, and such set lips. Lambert, indeed, at first sight did indeed look so amiable, as to appear for the moment quite weak; but danger always stiffened him into a

dangerous adversary, and his face when aroused was most unpleasantly fierce. He walked with a military swing, his shoulders well set back and his head crested like that of a striking serpent. A rough and warlike life would have brought out his best points of endurance, capability to plan and strike quickly, and iron decision; but the want of opportunity and the enervating influences of civilized existence, made him a man of possibilities. When time, and place, and chance offered he could act the hero with the best; but lacking these things he remained innocuous like gunpowder which has no spark to fire it.

Thinking of these things, Miss Greeby abandoned the subject of Chaldea, and of her possible love for Lambert, and exclaimed impulsively, "Why don't you chuck civilization and strike the out-trail?"

"Why should I?" he asked, unmoved, and rather surprised by the change of the subject. "I'm quite comfortable here."

"Too comfortable," she retorted with emphasis. "This loafing life of just-enough-to-live-on doesn't give you a chance to play the man. Go out and fight and colonize and prove your qualities."

Lambert's color rose again, and his eyes sparkled. "I would if the chance –"

"Ah, bah, Hercules and Omphale!" interrupted his companion.

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind," retorted Miss Greeby, who guessed that he knew what she meant very well. His quick flush showed her how he resented this classical allusion to Agnes Pine. "You'd carry her off if you were a man."

"Chaldea?" asked Lambert, wilfully misunderstanding her meaning.

"If you like. Only don't try to carry her off at night. Garvinton says he will shoot any burglar who comes along after dark."

"I never knew Garvinton had anything to do with Chaldea."

"Neither did I. Oh, I think you know very well what I mean."

"Perhaps I do," said the young man with an angry shrug, for really her interference with his affairs seemed to be quite unjustifiable. "But I am not going to bring a woman I respect into the Divorce Court."

"Respect? Love, you mean to say."

Lambert stopped, and faced her squarely. "I don't wish to quarrel with you, Clara, as we are very old friends. But I warn you that I do possess a temper, and if you wish to see it, you are going the best way to get what you evidently want. Now, hold your tongue and talk of something else. Here is Chaldea."

"Watching for you," muttered Miss Greeby, as the slight figure of the gypsy girl was seen advancing swiftly. "Ha!" and she snorted suspiciously.

"Rye!" cried Chaldea, dancing toward the artist. "Sarishan rye."

Miss Greeby didn't understand Romany, but the look in the girl's eyes was enough to reveal the truth. If Lambert did not love his beautiful model, it was perfectly plain that the beautiful model loved Lambert.

"O baro duvel atch' pa leste!" said Chaldea, and clapped her slim hands.

CHAPTER III. AN UNEXPECTED RECOGNITION

"I wish you wouldn't speak the calo jib to me, Chaldea," said Lambert, smiling on the beautiful eager face. "You know I don't understand it."

"Nor I," put in Miss Greeby in her manly tones. "What does Oh baro devil, and all the rest of it mean?"

"The Great God be with you," translated Chaldea swiftly, "and duvel is not devil as you Gorgios call it."

"Only the difference of a letter," replied the Gentile lady good-humoredly. "Show us round your camp, my good girl."

The mere fact that the speaker was in Lambert's company, let alone the offensively patronizing tone in which she spoke, was enough to rouse the gypsy girl's naturally hot temper. She retreated and swayed like a cat making ready to spring, while her black eyes snapped fire in a most unpleasant manner.

But Miss Greeby was not to be frightened by withering glances, and merely laughed aloud, showing her white teeth. Her rough merriment and masculine looks showed Chaldea that, as a rival, she was not to be feared, so the angry expression on the dark face changed to a wheedling smile.

"Avali! Avali! The Gorgios lady wants her fortune told."

For the sake of diplomacy Miss Greeby nodded and fished in her pocket. "I'll give you half a crown to tell it."

"Not me – not me, dear lady. Mother Cockleshell is our great witch."

"Take me to her then," replied the other, and rapidly gathered into her brain all she could of Chaldea's appearance.

Lambert had painted a very true picture of the girl, although to a certain extent he had idealized her reckless beauty. Chaldea's looks had been damaged and roughened by wind and rain, by long tramps, and by glaring sunshine. Yet she was superlatively handsome with her warm and swarthy skin, under which the scarlet blood circled freely. To an oval face, a slightly hooked nose and two vermilion lips, rather full, she added the glossy black eyes of the true Romany, peaked at the corners. Her jetty hair descended smoothly from under a red handkerchief down to her shoulders, and there, at the tips, became tangled and curling. Her figure was magnificent, and she swayed and swung from the hips with an easy grace, which reminded the onlookers of a panther's lithe movements. And there was a good deal of the dangerous beast-of-prey beauty about Chaldea, which was enhanced by her picturesque dress. This was ragged and patched with all kinds of colored cloths subdued to mellow tints by wear and weather. Also she jingled with coins and beads and barbaric trinkets of all kinds. Her hands were perfectly formed, and so doubtless were her feet, although these last were hidden by heavy laced-up boots. On the whole, she was an extremely picturesque figure, quite comforting to the artistic eye amidst the drab sameness of latterday civilization.

"All the same, I suspect she is a sleeping volcano," whispered Miss Greeby in her companion's ear as they followed the girl through the camp.

"Scarcely sleeping," answered Lambert in the same tone. "She explodes on the slightest provocation, and not without damaging results."

"Well, you ought to know. But if you play with volcanic fire you'll burn more than your clever fingers."

"Pooh! The girl is only a model."

"Ha! Not much of the lay figure about her, anyway."

Lambert, according to his custom, shrugged his shoulders and did not seek to explain further. If Miss Greeby chose to turn her fancies into facts, she was at liberty to do so. Besides, her attention was luckily attracted by the vivid life of the vagrants which hummed and bustled everywhere. The tribe was a comparatively large one, and – as Miss Greeby learned later – consisted of Lees, Loves, Bucklands, Hernes, and others, all mixed up together in one gypsy stew. The assemblage embraced many clans, and not only were there pure gypsies, but even many diddikai, or half-bloods, to be seen. Perhaps the gradually diminishing Romany clans found it better to band together for mutual benefit than to remain isolated units. But the camp certainly contained many elements, and these, acting co-operatively, formed a large and somewhat reckless community, which justified Garvinton's alarm. A raid in the night by one or two, or three, or more of these lean, wiry, dangerous-looking outcasts was not to be despised. But it must be admitted that, in a general way, law and order prevailed in the encampment.

There were many caravans, painted in gay colors and hung round with various goods, such as brushes and brooms, goat-skin rugs, and much tinware, together with baskets of all sorts and sizes. The horses, which drew these rainbow-hued vehicles, were pasturing on the outskirts of the camp, hobbled for the most part. Interspersed among the travelling homes stood tents great and small, wherein the genuine Romany had their abode, but the autumn weather was so fine that most of the inmates preferred to sleep in the moonshine. Of course, there were plenty of dogs quarrelling over bones near various fires, or sleeping with one eye open in odd corners, and everywhere tumbled and laughed and danced, brown-faced, lithe-limbed children, who looked uncannily Eastern. And the men, showing their white teeth in smiles, together with the fawning women, young and handsome, or old and hideously ugly, seemed altogether alien to the quiet, tame domestic English landscape. There was something prehistoric about the scene, and everywhere lurked that sense of dangerous primeval passions held in enforced check which might burst forth on the very slightest provocation.

"It's a migrating tribe of Aryans driven to new hunting grounds by hunger or over-population," said Miss Greeby, for even her unromantic nature was stirred by the unusual picturesqueness of the scene. "The sight of these people and the reek of their fires make me feel like a cave-woman. There is something magnificent about this brutal freedom."

"Very sordid magnificence," replied Lambert, raising his shoulders. "But I understand your feelings. On occasions we all have the nostalgia of the primitive life at times, and delight to pass from ease to hardship."

"Well, civilization isn't much catch, so far as I can see," argued his companion. "It makes men weaklings."

"Certainly not women," he answered, glancing sideways at her Amazonian figure.

"I agree with you. For some reason, men are going down while women are going up, both physically and mentally. I wonder what the future of civilized races will be."

"Here is Mother Cockleshell. Best ask her."

The trio had reached a small tent at the very end of the camp by this time, snugly set up under a spreading oak and near the banks of a babbling brook. Their progress had not been interrupted by any claims on their attention or purses, for a wink from Chaldea had informed her brother and sister gypsies that the Gentile lady had come to consult the queen of the tribe. And, like Lord Burleigh's celebrated nod, Chaldea's wink could convey volumes. At all events, Lambert and his companion were unmolested, and arrived in due course before the royal palace. A croaking voice announced that the queen was inside her Arab tent, and she was crooning some Romany song. Chaldea did not open her mouth, but simply snapped her fingers twice or thrice rapidly. The woman within must have had marvellously sharp ears, for she immediately stopped her incantation – the songs sounded like one – and stepped forth.

"Oh!" said Miss Greeby, stepping back, "I am disappointed."

She had every reason to be after the picturesqueness of the camp in general, and Chaldea in particular, for Mother Cockleshell looked like a threadbare pew-opener, or an almshouse widow who had seen better days. Apparently she was very old, for her figure had shrivelled up into a diminutive monkey form, and she looked as though a moderately high wind could blow her about like a feather. Her face was brown and puckered and lined in a most wonderful fashion. Where a wrinkle could be, there a wrinkle was, and her nose and chin were of the true nutcracker order, as a witch's should be. Only her eyes betrayed the powerful vitality that still animated the tiny frame, for these were large and dark, and had in them a piercing look which seemed to gaze not at any one, but through and beyond. Her figure, dried like that of a mummy, was surprisingly straight for one of her ancient years, and her profuse hair was scarcely touched with the gray of age. Arrayed in a decent black dress, with a decent black bonnet and a black woollen shawl, the old lady looked intensely respectable. There was nothing of the picturesque vagrant about her. Therefore Miss Greeby, and with every reason, was disappointed, and when the queen of the woodland spoke she was still more so, for Mother Cockleshell did not even interlard her English speech with Romany words, as did Chaldea.

"Good day to you, my lady, and to you, sir," said Mother Cockleshell in a stronger and harsher voice than would have been expected from one of her age and diminished stature. "I hope I sees you well," and she dropped a curtsy, just like any village dame who knew her manners.

"Oh!" cried Miss Greeby again. "You don't look a bit like a gypsy queen."

"Ah, my lady, looks ain't everything. But I'm a true-bred Romany – a Stanley of Devonshire. Gentilla is my name and the tent my home, and I can tell fortunes as no one else on the road can."

"Avali, and that is true," put in Chaldea eagerly. "Gentilla's a bori chovihani."

"The child means that I am a great witch, my lady," said the old dame with another curtsy. "Though she's foolish to use Romany words to Gentiles as don't understand the tongue which the dear Lord spoke in Eden's garden, as the good Book tells us."

"In what part of the Bible do you find that?" asked Lambert laughing.

"Oh, my sweet gentleman, it ain't for the likes of me to say things to the likes of you," said Mother Cockleshell, getting out of her difficulty very cleverly, "but the dear lady wants her fortune told, don't she?"

"Why don't you say dukkerin?"

"I don't like them wicked words, sir," answered Mother Cockleshell piously.

"Wicked words," muttered Chaldea tossing her black locks. "And them true Romany as was your milk tongue. No wonder the Gentiles don't fancy you a true one of the road. If I were queen of –"

A vicious little devil flashed out of the old woman's eyes, and her respectable looks changed on the instant. "Tol yer chib, or I'll heat the bones of you with the fires of Bongo Tem," she screamed furiously, and in a mixture of her mother-tongue and English. "Ja pukenus, slut of the gutter," she shook her fist, and Chaldea, with an insulting laugh, moved away. "Bengis your see! Bengis your see! And that, my generous lady," she added, turning round with a sudden resumption of her fawning respectability, "means 'the devil in your heart,' which I spoke witchly-like to the child. Ah, but she's a bad one."

Miss Greeby laughed outright. "This is more like the real thing."

"Poor Chaldea," said Lambert. "You're too hard on her, mother."

"And you, my sweet gentleman, ain't hard enough. She'll sell you, and get Kara to put the knife between your ribs."

"Why should he? I'm not in love with the girl."

"The tree don't care for the ivy, but the ivy loves the tree," said Mother Cockleshell darkly. "You're a good and kind gentleman, and I don't want to see that slut pick your bones."

"So I think," whispered Miss Greeby in his ear. "You play with fire."

"Aye, my good lady," said Mother Cockleshell, catching the whisper – she had the hearing of a cat. "With the fire of Bongo Tern, the which you may call The Crooked Land," and she pointed significantly downward.

"Hell, do you mean?" asked Miss Greeby in her bluff way.

"The Crooked Land we Romany calls it," insisted the old woman. "And the child will go there, for her witchly doings."

"She's too good-looking to lose as a model, at all events," said Lambert, hitching his shoulders. "I shall leave you to have your fortune told, Clara, and follow Chaldea to pacify her."

As he went toward the centre of the camp, Miss Greeby took a hesitating step as though to follow him. In her opinion Chaldea was much too good-looking, let alone clever, for Lambert to deal with alone. Gentilla Stanley saw the look on the hard face and the softening of the hard eyes as the cheeks grew rosy red. From this emotion she drew her conclusions, and she chuckled to think of how true a fortune she could tell the visitor on these premises. Mother Cockleshell's fortune-telling was not entirely fraudulent, but when her clairvoyance was not in working order she made use of character-reading with good results.

"Won't the Gorgios lady have her fortune told?" she asked in wheedling tones. "Cross Mother Cockleshell's hand with silver and she'll tell the coming years truly."

"Why do they call you Mother Cockleshell?" demanded Miss Greeby, waiving the question of fortune-telling for the time being.

"Bless your wisdom, it was them fishermen at Grimsby who did so. I walked the beaches for years and told charms and gave witchly spells for fine weather. Gentilla Stanley am I called, but Mother Cockleshell was their name for me. But the fortune, my tender Gentile –"

"I don't want it told," interrupted Miss Greeby abruptly. "I don't believe in such rubbish."

"There is rubbish and there is truth," said the ancient gypsy darkly. "And them as knows can see what's hidden from others."

"Well, you will have an opportunity this afternoon of making money. Some fools from The Manor are coming to consult you."

Mother Cockleshell nodded and grinned to show a set of beautifully preserved teeth. "I know The Manor," said she, rubbing her slim hands. "And Lord Garvinton, with his pretty sister."

"Lady Agnes Pine?" asked Miss Greeby. "How do you know, her?"

"I've been in these parts before, my gentle lady, and she was good to me in a sick way. I would have died in the hard winter if she hadn't fed me and nursed me, so to speak. I shall love to see her again. To dick a puro pal is as commoben as a aushti habben, the which, my precious angel, is true Romany for the Gentile saying, 'To see an old friend is as good as a fine dinner.' Avali! Avali!" she nodded smilingly. "I shall be glad to see her, though here I use Romany words to you as doesn't understand the lingo."

Miss Greeby was not at all pleased to hear Lady Agnes praised; as, knowing that Lambert had loved her, and probably loved her still, she was jealous enough to wish her all possible harm. However, it was not diplomatic to reveal her true feelings to Mother Cockleshell, lest the old gypsy should repeat her words to Lady Agnes, so she turned the conversation by pointing to a snow-white cat of great size, who stepped daintily out of the tent. "I should think, as a witch, your cat ought to be black," said Miss Greeby. Mother Cockleshell screeched like a night-owl and hastily pattered some gypsy spell to avert evil. "Why, the old devil is black," she cried. "And why should I have him in my house to work evil? This is my white ghost." Her words were accompanied by a gentle stroking of the cat. "And good is what she brings to my roof-tree. But I don't eat from white dishes, or drink from white mugs. No! No! That would be too witchly."

Miss Greeby mused. "I have heard something about these gypsy superstitions before," she remarked meditatively.

"Avo! Avo! They are in a book written by a great Romany Rye. Leland is the name of that rye, a gypsy Lee with Gentile land. He added land to the lea as he was told by one of our people. Such a nice gentleman, kind, and free of his money and clever beyond tellings, as I always says. Many a time has he sat pal-like with me, and 'Gentilla,' says he, 'your're a bori chovihani'; and that, my generous lady, is the gentle language for a great witch."

"Chaldea said that you were that," observed Miss Greeby carelessly.

"The child speaks truly. Come, cross my hand, sweet lady."

Miss Greeby passed along half a crown. "I only desire to know one thing," she said, offering her palm. "Shall I get my wish?"

Mother Cockleshell peered into the hands, although she had already made up her mind what to say. Her faculties, sharpened by years of chicanery, told her from the look which Miss Greeby had given when Lambert followed Chaldea, that a desire to marry the man was the wish in question. And seeing how indifferent Lambert was in the presence of the tall lady, Mother Cockleshell had no difficulty in adjusting the situation in her own artful mind. "No, my lady," she said, casting away the hand with quite a dramatic gesture. "You will never gain your wish."

Miss Greeby looked angry. "Bah! Your fortune-telling is all rubbish, as I have always thought," and she moved away.

"Tell me that in six months," screamed the old woman after her.

"Why six months?" demanded the other, pausing.

"Ah, that's a dark saying," scoffed the gypsy. "Call it seven, my hopeful-for-what-you-won't-get, like the cat after the cream, for seven's a sacred number, and the spell is set."

"Gypsy jargon, gypsy lies," muttered Miss Greeby, tossing her ruddy mane. "I don't believe a word. Tell me –"

"There's no time to say more," interrupted Mother Cockleshell rudely, for, having secured her money, she did not think it worth while to be polite, especially in the face of her visitor's scepticism. "One of our tribe – aye, and he's a great Romany for sure – is coming to camp with us. Each minute he may come, and I go to get ready a stew of hedgehog, for Gentile words I must use to you, who are a Gorgio. And so good day to you, my lady," ended the old hag, again becoming the truly respectable pew-opener. Then she dropped a curtsey – whether ironical or not, Miss Greeby could not tell – and disappeared into the tent, followed by the white cat, who haunted her footsteps like the ghost she declared it to be.

Clearly there was nothing more to be learned from Mother Cockleshell, who, in the face of her visitor's doubts, had become hostile, so Miss Greeby, dismissing the whole episode as over and done with, turned her attention toward finding Lambert. With her bludgeon under her arm and her hands in the pockets of her jacket, she stalked through the camp in quite a masculine fashion, not vouchsafing a single reply to the greetings which the gypsies gave her. Shortly she saw the artist chatting with Chaldea at the beginning of the path which led to his cottage. Beside them, on the grass, squatted a queer figure.

It was that of a little man, very much under-sized, with a hunch back and a large, dark, melancholy face covered profusely with black hair. He wore corduroy trousers and clumsy boots – his feet and hands were enormous – together with a green coat and a red handkerchief which was carelessly twisted round his hairy throat. On his tangled locks – distressingly shaggy and unkempt – he wore no hat, and he looked like a brownie, grotesque, though somewhat sad. But even more did he resemble an ape – or say the missing link – and only his eyes seemed human. These were large, dark and brilliant, sparkling like jewels under his elf-locks. He sat cross-legged on the sward and hugged a fiddle, as though he were nursing a baby. And, no doubt, he was as attached to his instrument as any mother could be to her child. It was not difficult for Miss Greeby to guess that this weird, hairy dwarf was the Servian gypsy Kara, of whom Lambert had spoken. She took advantage of the knowledge to be disagreeable to the girl.

"Is this your husband?" asked Miss Greeby amiably.

Chaldea's eyes flashed and her cheeks grew crimson. "Not at all," she said contemptuously. "I have no rom."

"Ah, your are not married?"

"No," declared Chaldea curtly, and shot a swift glance at Lambert.

"She is waiting for the fairy prince," said that young gentleman smiling. "And he is coming to this camp almost immediately."

"Ishmael Hearne is coming," replied the gypsy. "But he is no rom of mine, and never will be."

"Who is he, then?" asked Lambert carelessly.

"One of the great Romany."

Miss Greeby remembered that Mother Cockleshell had also spoken of the expected arrival at the camp in these terms. "A kind of king?" she asked.

Chaldea laughed satirically. "Yes; a kind of king," she assented; then turned her back rudely on the speaker and addressed Lambert: "I can't come, rye. Ishmael will want to see me. I must wait."

"What a nuisance," said Lambert, looking annoyed. "Fancy, Clara. I have an idea of painting these two as Beauty and the Beast, or perhaps as Esmeralda and Quasimodo. I want them to come to the cottage and sit now, but they will wait for this confounded Ishmael."

"We can come to-morrow," put in Chaldea quickly. "This afternoon I must dance for Ishmael, and Kara must play."

"Ishmael will meet with a fine reception," said Miss Greeby, and then, anxious to have a private conversation with Chaldea so as to disabuse her mind of any idea she may have entertained of marrying Lambert, she added, "I think I shall stay and see him."

"In that case, I shall return to my cottage," replied Lambert, sauntering up the pathway, which was strewn with withered leaves.

"When are you coming to The Manor?" called Miss Greeby after him.

"Never! I am too busy," he replied over his shoulder and disappeared into the wood. This departure may seem discourteous, but then Miss Greeby liked to be treated like a comrade and without ceremony. That is, she liked it so far as other men were concerned, but not as regards Lambert. She loved him too much to approve of his careless leave-taking, and therefore she frowned darkly, as she turned her attention to Chaldea.

The girl saw that Miss Greeby was annoyed, and guessed the cause of her annoyance. The idea that this red-haired and gaunt woman should love the handsome Gorgio was so ludicrous in Chaldea's eyes that she laughed in an ironical fashion. Miss Greeby turned on her sharply, but before she could speak there was a sound of many voices raised in welcome. "Sarishan pal! Sarishan ba!" cried the voices, and Chaldea started.

"Ishmael!" she said, and ran toward the camp, followed leisurely by Kara.

Anxious to see the great Romany, whose arrival caused all this commotion, Miss Greeby plunged into the crowd of excited vagrants. These surrounded a black horse, on which sat a slim, dark-faced man of the true Romany breed. Miss Greeby stared at him and blinked her eyes, as though she could not believe what they beheld, while the man waved his hand and responded to the many greetings in gypsy language. His eyes finally met her own as she stood on the outskirts of the crowd, and he started. Then she knew. "Sir Hubert Pine," said Miss Greeby, still staring. "Sir Hubert Pine!"

CHAPTER IV. SECRETS

The scouting crowd apparently did not catch the name, so busy were one and all in welcoming the newcomer. But the man on the horse saw Miss Greeby's startled look, and noticed that her lips were moving. In a moment he threw himself off the animal and elbowed his way roughly through the throng.

"Sir Hubert," began Miss Greeby, only to be cut short hastily.

"Don't give me away," interrupted Pine, who here was known as Ishmael Hearne. "Wait till I settle things, and then we can converse privately."

"All right," answered the lady, nodding, and gripped her bludgeon crosswise behind her back with two hands. She was so surprised at the sight of the millionaire in the wood, that she could scarcely speak.

Satisfied that she grasped the situation, Pine turned to his friends and spoke at length in fluent Romany. He informed them that he had some business to transact with the Gentile lady who had come to the camp for that purpose, and would leave them for half an hour. The man evidently was such a favorite that black looks were cast on Miss Greeby for depriving the Romany of his society. But Pine paid no attention to these signs of discontent. He finished his speech, and then pushed his way again toward the lady who, awkwardly for him, was acquainted with his true position as a millionaire. In a hurried whisper he asked Miss Greeby to follow him, and led the way into the heart of the wood. Apparently he knew it very well, and knew also where to seek solitude for the private conversation he desired, for he skirted the central glade where Lambert's cottage was placed, and finally guided his companion to a secluded dell, far removed from the camp of his brethren. Here he sat down on a mossy stone, and stared with piercing black eyes at Miss Greeby.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded imperiously.

"Just the question I was about to put to you," said Miss Greeby amiably. She could afford to be amiable, for she felt that she was the mistress of the situation. Pine evidently saw this, for he frowned.

"You must have guessed long ago that I was a gypsy," he snapped restlessly.

"Indeed I didn't, nor, I should think, did any one else. I thought you had nigger blood in you, and I have heard people say that you came from the West Indies. But what does it matter if you are a gypsy? There is no disgrace in being one."

"No disgrace, certainly," rejoined the millionaire, leaning forward and linking his hands together, while he stared at the ground. "I am proud of having the gentle Romany blood. All the same I prefer the West Indian legend, for I don't want any of my civilized friends to know that I am Ishmael Hearne, born and bred in a tent."

"Well, that's natural, Pine. What would Garvinton say?"

"Oh, curse Garvinton!"

"Curse the whole family by all means," retorted Miss Greeby coolly.

Pine looked up savagely, "I except my wife."

"Naturally. You always were uxorious."

"Perhaps," said Pine gloomily, "I'm a fool where Agnes is concerned."

Miss Greeby quite agreed with this statement, but did not think it worth while to indorse so obvious a remark. She sat down in her turn, and taking Lambert's cigarette case, which she had retained by accident, out of her pocket, she prepared to smoke. The two were entirely alone in the fairy dell, and the trees which girdled it were glorious with vivid autumnal tints. A gentle breeze sighing through the wood, shook down yew, crisp leaves on the woman's head, so that she looked like Danae in a shower of gold. Pine gazed heavily at the ground and coughed violently. Miss Greeby

knew that cough, and a medical friend of hers had told her several times that Sir Hubert was a very consumptive individual. He certainly looked ill, and apparently had not long to live. And if he died, Lady Agnes, inheriting his wealth, would be more desirable as a wife than ever. And Miss Greeby, guessing whose wife she would be, swore inwardly that the present husband should look so delicate. But she showed no sign of her perturbations, but lighted her cigarette with a steady hand and smoked quietly. She always prided herself on her nerve.

The millionaire was tall and lean, with a sinewy frame, and an oval, olive-complexioned face. It was clean-shaven, and with his aquiline nose, his thin lips, and brilliant black eyes, which resembled those of Kara, he looked like a long-descended Hindoo prince. The Eastern blood of the Romany showed in his narrow feet and slim brown hands, and there was a wild roving look about him, which Miss Greeby had not perceived in London.

"I suppose it's the dress," she said aloud, and eyed Pine critically.

"What do you say, Miss Greeby?" he asked, looking up in a sharp, startled manner, and again coughing in a markedly consumptive way.

"The cowl makes the monk in your case," replied the woman quietly. "Your corduroy breeches and velveteen coat, with that colored shirt, and the yellow handkerchief round your neck, seem to suit you better than did the frock coats and evening dress I have seen you in. You did look like a nigger of sorts when in those clothes; now I can tell you are a gypsy with half an eye."

"That is because you heard me called Ishmael and saw me among my kith and kin," said the man with a tired smile. "Don't tell Agnes."

"Why should I? It's none of my business if you chose to masquerade as a gypsy."

"I masquerade as Sir Hubert Pine," retorted the millionaire, slipping off the stone to sprawl full-length on the grass. "I am truly and really one of the lot in the camp yonder."

"Do they know you by your Gentile name?"

Pine laughed. "You are picking up the gypsy lingo, Miss Greeby. No. Every one on the road takes me for what I am, Ishmael Hearne, and my friends in the civilized world think I am Sir Hubert Pine, a millionaire with colored blood in his veins."

"How do you come to have a double personality and live a double life?"

"Oh, that is easily explained, and since you have found me out it is just as well that I should explain, so that you may keep my secret, at all events from my wife, as she would be horrified to think that she had married a gypsy. You promise?"

"Of course. I shall say nothing. But perhaps she would prefer to know that she had married a gypsy rather than a nigger."

"What polite things you say," said Pine sarcastically. "However, I can't afford to quarrel with you. As you are rich, I can't even bribe you to silence, so I must rely on your honor."

"Oh, I have some," Miss Greeby assured him lightly.

"When it suits you," he retorted doubtfully.

"It does on this occasion."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you that when you have related your story."

"There is really none to tell. I was born and brought up on the road, and thinking I was wasting my life I left my people and entered civilization. In London I worked as a clerk, and being clever I soon made money. I got hold of a man who invented penny toys, and saw the possibilities of making a fortune. I really didn't, but I collected enough money to dabble in stocks and shares. The South African boom was on, and I made a thousand. Other speculations created more than a million out of my thousand, and now I have over two millions, honestly made."

"Honestly?" queried Miss Greeby significantly.

"Yes; I assure you, honestly. We gypsies are cleverer than you Gentiles, and we have the same money-making faculties as the Jews have. If my people were not so fond of the vagrant life they would

soon become a power in the money markets of the world. But, save in the case of myself, we leave all such grubbing to the Jews. I did grub, and my reward is that I have accumulated a fortune in a remarkably short space of time. I have land and houses, and excellent investments, and a title, which," he added sarcastically, "a grateful Government bestowed on me for using my money properly."

"You bought the title by helping the political party you belonged to," said Miss Greeby with a shrug. "There was quite a talk about it."

"So there was. As if I cared for talk. However, that is my story."

"Not all of it. You are supposed to be in Paris, and – "

"And you find me here," interrupted Pine with a faint smile. "Well you see, being a gypsy, I can't always endure that under-the-roof life you Gentiles live. I must have a spell of the open road occasionally. And, moreover, as my doctor tells me that I have phthisis, and that I should live as much as possible in the open air, I kill two birds with one stone, as the saying is. My health benefits by my taking up the old Romany wandering, and I gratify my nostalgia for the tent and the wild. You understand, you und – " His speech was interrupted by a fresh fit of coughing.

"It doesn't seem to do you much good this gypsying," said Miss Greeby with a swift look, for his life was of importance to her plans. "You look pretty rocky I can tell you, Pine. And if you die your wife will be free to – " The man sat up and took away from his mouth a handkerchief spotted with blood. His eyes glittered, and he showed his white teeth. "My wife will be free to what?" he demanded viciously, and the same devil that had lurked in Mother Cockleshell's eye, now showed conspicuously in his.

Miss Greeby had no pity on his manifest distress and visible wrath, but answered obliquely: "You know that she was almost engaged to her cousin before you married her," she hinted pointedly.

"Yes, I know, d – him," said Pine with a groan, and rolled over to clutch at the grass in a vicious manner. "But he's not at The Manor now?"

"No."

"Agnes doesn't speak of him?"

"No."

Pine drew a deep breath and rose slowly to his feet, with a satisfied nod.

"I'm glad of that. She's a good woman is Agnes, and would never encourage him in any way. She knows what is due to me. I trust her."

"Do you? When your secretary is also stopping at The Manor?"

"Silver!" Pine laughed awkwardly, and kicked at a tuft of moss. "Well I did ask him to keep an eye on her, although there is really no occasion. Silver owes me a great deal, since I took him out of the gutter. If Lambert worried my wife, Silver would let me know, and then – "

"And then?" asked Miss Greeby hastily.

The man clenched his fists and his face grew stormy, as his blood untamed by civilization surged redly to the surface. "I'd twist his neck, I'd smash his skull, I'd – I'd – I'd – oh, don't ask me what I'd do."

"I should keep my temper if I were you," Miss Greeby warned him, and alarmed by the tempest she had provoked. She had no wish for the man she loved to come into contact with this savage, venerated by civilization. Yet Lambert was in the neighborhood, and almost within a stone's throw of the husband who was so jealous of him. "Keep your temper," repeated Miss Greeby.

"Is there anything else you would like me to do?" raged Pine fiercely.

"Yes. Leave this place if you wish to keep the secret of your birth from your wife. Lady Garvinton and Mrs. Belgrove, and a lot of people from The Manor, are coming to the camp to get their fortunes told. You are sure to be spotted."

"I shall keep myself out of sight," said Pine sullenly and suspiciously.

"Some of your gypsy friends may let the cat out of the bag."

"Not one of them knows there is a cat in the bag. I am Ishmael Hearne to them, and nothing else. But I shan't stay here long."

"I wonder you came at all, seeing that your wife is with her brother."

"In the daring of my coming lies my safety," said Pine tartly. "I know what I am doing. As to Lambert, if he thinks to marry my wife when I am dead he is mistaken."

"Well, I hope you won't die, for my sake!"

"Why for your sake?" asked Pine sharply.

"Because I love Lambert and I want to marry him."

"Marry him," said the millionaire hoarsely, "and I'll give you thousands of pounds. Oh! I forgot that you have a large income. But marry him, marry him, Miss Greeby. I shall help you all I can."

"I can do without assistance," said the woman coolly. "All I ask you to do is to refrain from fighting with Lambert."

"What?" Pine's face became lowering again. "Is he at The Manor? You said –"

"I know what I said. He is not at The Manor, but he is stopping in the cottage a stone's throw from here."

Pine breathed hard, and again had a spasm of coughing. "What's he doing?"

"Painting pictures."

"He has not been near The Manor?"

"No. And what is more, he told me to-day that he did not intend to go near the house. I don't think you need be afraid, Pine. Lambert is a man of honor, and I hope to get him to be my husband."

"He shall never be my wife's husband," said the millionaire between his teeth and scowling heavily. "I know that I shan't live to anything like three score and ten. Your infernal hot-house civilization has killed me. But if Lambert thinks to marry my widow he shall do so in the face of Garvington's opposition, and will find Agnes a pauper."

"What do you mean exactly?" Miss Greeby flung away the stump of her cigarette and rose to her feet.

Pine wiped his brow and breathed heavily. "I mean that I have left Agnes my money, only on condition that she does *not* marry Lambert. She can marry any one else she has a mind to. I except her cousin."

"Because she loves him?"

"Yes, and because he loves her, d – n him."

"He doesn't," cried Miss Greeby, lying fluently, and heartily wishing that her lie could be a truth. "He loves me, and I intend to marry him. Now you can understand what I meant when I declared that I had honor enough to keep your secret. Lambert is my honor."

"Oh, then I believe in your honor," sneered Pine cynically. "It is a selfish quality in this case, which can only be gratified by preserving silence. If Agnes knew that I was a true Romany tramp, she might run away with Lambert, and as you want him to be your husband, it is to your interest to hold your tongue. Thank you for nothing, Miss Greeby."

"I tell you Lambert loves me," cried the woman doggedly, trying to persuade her heart that she spoke truly. "And whether you leave your money to your wife, or to any one else, makes no manner of difference."

"I think otherwise," he retorted. "And it is just as well to be on the safe side. If my widow marries Lambert, she loses my millions, and they go to –" He checked himself abruptly. "Never mind who gets them. It is a person in whom you can take no manner of interest."

Miss Greeby pushed the point of her bludgeon into the spongy ground, and looked thoughtful. "If Lambert loves Agnes still, which I don't believe," she observed, after a pause, "he would marry her even if she hadn't a shilling. Your will excluding him as her second husband is merely the twisting of a rope of sand, Pine."

"You forget," said the man quickly, "that I declared also, he would have to marry her in the face of Garvinton's opposition."

"In what way?"

"Can't you guess? Garvinton only allowed me to marry his sister because I am a wealthy man. I absolutely bought my wife by helping him, and she gave herself to me without love to save the family name from disgrace. She is a good woman, is Agnes, and always places duty before inclination. Marriage with her pauper cousin meant practically the social extinction of the Lambert family, and nothing would have remained but the title. Therefore she married me, and I felt mean at the time in accepting the sacrifice. But I was so deeply in love with her that I did so. I love her still, and I am mean enough still to be jealous of this cousin. She shall never marry him, and I know that Garvinton will appeal to his sister's strong desire to save the family once more; so that she may not be foolish enough to lose the money. And two millions, more or less," ended Pine cynically, "is too large a sum to pay for a second husband."

"Does Agnes know these conditions?"

"No. Nor do I intend that she should know. You hold your tongue."

Miss Greeby pulled on her heavy gloves and nodded. "I told you that I had some notion of honor. Will you let Lambert know that you are in this neighborhood?"

"No. There is no need. I am stopping here only for a time to see a certain person. Silver will look after Agnes, and is coming to the camp to report upon what he has observed."

"Silver then knows that you are Ishmael Hearne?"

"Yes. He knows all my secrets, and I can trust him thoroughly, since he owes everything to me."

Miss Greeby laughed scornfully. "That a man of your age and experience should believe in gratitude. Well, it's no business of mine. You may be certain that for my own purpose I shall hold my tongue and shall keep Lambert from seeking your wife. Not that he loves her," she added hastily, as Pine's brows again drew together. "But she loves him, and may use her arts –"

"Don't you dare to speak of arts in connection with my wife," broke in the man roughly. "She is no coquette, and I trust her –"

"So long as Silver looks after her," finished Miss Greeby contemptuously. "What chivalrous confidence. Well, I must be going. Any message to your –"

"No! No! No!" broke in Pine once more. "She is not to know that I am here, or anything about my true position and name. You promised, and you will keep your promise. But there, I know that you will, as self-interest will make you."

"Ah, now you talk common sense. It is a pity you don't bring it to bear in the case of Silver, whom you trust because you have benefited him. Good-day, you very unsophisticated person. I shall see you again –"

"In London as Hubert Pine," said the millionaire abruptly, and Miss Greeby, with a good-humored shrug, marched away, swinging her stick and whistling gayly. She was very well satisfied with the knowledge she had obtained, as the chances were that it would prove useful should Lambert still hanker after the unattainable woman. Miss Greeby had lulled Pine's suspicions regarding the young man's love for Agnes, but she knew in her heart that she had only done so by telling a pack of miserable lies. Now, as she walked back to The Manor, she reflected that by using her secret information dexterously, she might improve such falsehood into tolerable truth.

Pine flung himself down again when she departed, and coughed in his usual violent manner. His throat and lungs ached, and his brow was wet with perspiration. With his elbows on his knees and his face between his hands, he sat miserably thinking over his troubles. There was no chance of his living more than a few years, as the best doctors in Europe and England had given him up, and when he was placed below ground, the chances were that Agnes would marry his rival. He had made things as safe as was possible against such a contingency, but who knew if her love for Lambert might not make her willing to surrender the millions. "Unless Garvinton can manage to arouse her

family pride," groaned Pine drearily. "She sacrificed herself before for that, and perhaps she will do so again. But who knows?" And he could find no answer to this question, since it is impossible for any man to say what a woman will do where her deepest emotions are concerned.

A touch on Pine's shoulder made him leap to his feet with the alertness of a wild animal on the lookout for danger. By his side stood Chaldea, and her eyes glittered, as she came to the point of explanation without any preamble. The girl was painfully direct. "I have heard every word," she said triumphantly. "And I know what you are, brother."

"Why did you come here?" demanded Pine sharply, and frowning.

"I wanted to hear what a Romany had to do with a Gorgio lady, brother. And what do I hear. Why, that you dwell in the Gentile houses, and take a Gentile name, and cheat in a Gentile manner, and have wed with a Gentile romi. Speaking Romanly, brother, it is not well."

"It is as I choose, sister," replied Pine quietly, for since Chaldea had got the better of him, it was useless to quarrel with her. "And from what I do good will come to our people."

Chaldea laughed, and blew from her fingers a feather, carelessly picked up while in the thicket which had concealed her eavesdropping. "For that, I care that," said she, pointing to the floating feather slowly settling. "I looks to myself and to my love, brother."

"Hey?" Pine raised his eyebrows.

"It's a Gorgio my heart is set on," pursued Chaldea steadfastly. "A regular Romany Rye, brother. Do you think Lambert is a good name?"

"It's the name of the devil, sister," cried Pine hastily.

"The very devil I love. To me sweet, as to you sour. And speaking Romanly, brother, I want him to be my rom in the Gentile fashion, as you have a romi in your Gorgious lady."

"What will Kara say?" said Pine, and his eyes flashed, for the idea of getting rid of Lambert in this way appealed to him. The girl was beautiful, and with her added cleverness she might be able to gain her ends, and these accomplished, would certainly place a barrier between Agnes and her cousin, since the woman would never forgive the man for preferring the girl.

"Kara plays on the fiddle, but not on my heart-strings," said Chaldea in a cool manner, and watched Pine wickedly. "You'd better help me, brother, if you don't want that Gorgious romi of yours to pad the hoof with the rye."

The blood rushed to Pine's dark cheeks. "What's that?"

"No harm to my rye and I tell you, brother. Don't use the knife."

"That I will not do, if a wedding-ring from him to you will do as well."

"It will do, brother," said Chaldea calmly. "My rye doesn't love me yet, but he will, when I get him away from the Gentile lady's spells. They draw him, brother, they draw him."

"Where do they draw him to?" demanded Pine, his voice thick with passion.

"To the Gorgious house of the baro rai, the brother of your romi. Like an owl does he go after dusk to watch the nest."

"Owl," muttered Pine savagely. "Cuckoo, rather. Prove this, my sister, and I help you to gain the love you desire."

"It's a bargain, brother" – she held out her hand inquiringly – "but no knife."

Pine shook hands. "It's a bargain, sister. Your wedding-ring will part them as surely as any knife. Tell me more!" And Chaldea in whispers told him all.

CHAPTER V. THE WOMAN AND THE MAN

Quite unaware that Destiny, that tireless spinner, was weaving sinister red threads of hate and love into the web of his life, Lambert continued to live quietly in his woodland retreat. In a somewhat misanthropic frame of mind he had retired to this hermitage, after the failure of his love affair, since, lacking the society of Agnes, there was nothing left for him to desire. From a garden of roses, the world became a sandy desert, and denied the sole gift of fortune, which would have made him completely happy, the disconsolate lover foreswore society for solitude. As some seek religion, so Lambert hoped by seeking Nature's breast to assuage the pains of his sore heart. But although the great Mother could do so much, she could not do all, and the young man still felt restless and weary. Hard work helped him more than a little, but he had his dark hours during those intervals when hand and brain were too weary to create pictures.

In one way he blamed Agnes, because she had married for money; in another way he did not blame her, because that same money had been necessary to support the falling fortunes of the noble family to which Lambert belonged. An ordinary person would not have understood this, and would have seen in the mercenary marriage simply a greedy grasping after the loaves and fishes. But Lambert, coming at the end of a long line of lordly ancestors, considered that both he and his cousin owed something to those of the past who had built up the family. Thus his pride told him that Agnes had acted rightly in taking Pine as her husband, while his love cried aloud that the sacrifice was too hard upon their individual selves. He was a Lambert, but he was also a human being, and the two emotions of love and pride strove mightily against one another. Although quite three years had elapsed since the victim had been offered at the altar – and a willing victim to the family fetish – the struggle was still going on. And because of its stress and strain, Lambert withdrew from society, so that he might see as little as possible of the woman he loved. They had met, they had talked, they had looked, in a conventionally light-hearted way, but both were relieved when circumstances parted them. The strain was too great.

Pine arranged the circumstances, for hearing here, there, and everywhere, that his wife had been practically engaged to her cousin before he became her husband, he looked with jealous eyes upon their chance meetings. Neither to Agnes nor Lambert did he say a single word, since he had no reason to utter it, so scrupulously correct was their behavior, but his eyes were sufficiently eloquent to reveal his jealousy. He took his wife for an American tour, and when he brought her back to London, Lambert, knowing only too truly the reason for that tour, had gone away in his turn to shoot big game in Africa. An attack of malaria contracted in the Congo marshes had driven him back to England, and it was then that he had begged Garvinton to give him The Abbot's Wood Cottage. For six months he had been shut up here, occasionally going to London, or for a week's walking tour, and during that time he had done his best to banish the image of Agnes from his heart. Doubtless she was attempting the same conquest, for she never even wrote to him. And now these two sorely-tried people were within speaking distance of one another, and strange results might be looked for unless honor held them sufficiently true. Seeing that the cottage was near the family seat, and that Agnes sooner or later would arrive to stay with her brother and sister-in-law, Lambert might have expected that such a situation would come about in the natural course of things. Perhaps he did, and perhaps – as some busybodies said – he took the cottage for that purpose; but so far, he had refrained from seeking the society of Pine's wife. He would not even dine at The Manor, nor would he join the shooting-party, although Garvinton, with a singular blindness, urged him to do so. While daylight lasted, the artist painted desperately hard, and after dark wandered round the lanes and roads and across the fields, haunting almost unconsciously the Manor Park, if only to see in moonlight and twilight the casket

which held the rich jewel he had lost. This was foolish, and Lambert acknowledged that it was foolish, but at the same time he added inwardly that he was a man and not an angel, a sinner and not a saint, so that there were limits, etc., etc., etc., using impossible arguments to quieten a lively conscience that did not approve of this dangerous philandering.

The visit of Miss Greeby awoke him positively to a sense of danger, for if she talked – and talk she did – other people would talk also. Lambert asked himself if it would be better to visit The Manor and behave like a man who has got over his passion, or to leave the cottage and betake himself to London. While turning over this problem in his mind, he painted feverishly, and for three days after Miss Greeby had come to stir up muddy water, he remained as much as possible in his studio. Chaldea visited him, as usual, to be painted, and brought Kara with his green coat and beloved violin and hairy looks. The girl chatted, Kara played, and Lambert painted, and all three pretended to be very happy and careless. This was merely on the surface, however, for the artist was desperately wretched, because the other half of himself was married to another man, while Chaldea, getting neither love-look nor caress, felt savagely discontented. As for Kara, he had long since loved Chaldea, who treated him like a dog, and he could not help seeing that she adored the Gentile artist – a knowledge which almost broke his heart. But it was some satisfaction for him to note that Lambert would have nothing to do with the siren, and that she could not charm him to her feet, sang she ever so tenderly. It was an unhappy trio at the best.

The gypsies usually came in the morning, since the light was then better for artistic purposes, but they always departed at one o'clock, so that Lambert had the afternoon to himself. Chaldea would fain have lingered in order to charm the man she loved into subjection; but he never gave her the least encouragement, so she was obliged to stay away. All the same, she often haunted the woods near the cottage, and when Lambert came out for a stroll, which he usually did when it became too dark to paint, he was bound to run across her. Since he had not the slightest desire to make love to her, and did not fathom the depth of her passion, he never suspected that she purposely contrived the meetings which he looked upon as accidental.

Since Chaldea hung round the house, like a moth round a candle, she saw every one who came and went from the woodland cottage. On the afternoon of the third day since Pine's arrival at the camp in the character of Ishmael Hearne, the gypsy saw Lady Agnes coming through the wood. Chaldea knew her at once, having often seen her when she had come to visit Mother Cockleshell a few months previously. With characteristic cunning, the girl dived into the undergrowth, and there remained concealed for the purpose of spying on the Gentile lady whom she regarded as a rival. Immediately, Chaldea guessed that Lady Agnes was on her way to the cottage, and, as Lambert was alone as usual for the afternoon, the two would probably have a private conversation. The girl swiftly determined to listen, so that she might learn exactly how matters stood between them. It might be that she would discover something which Pine – Chaldea now thought of him as Pine – might like to know. So having arranged this in her own unscrupulous mind, the girl behind a juniper bush jealously watched the unsuspecting lady. What she saw did not please her overmuch, as Lady Agnes was rather too beautiful for her unknown rival's peace of mind.

Sir Hubert's wife was not really the exquisitely lovely creature Chaldea took her to be, but her fair skin and brown hair were such a contrast to the gypsy's swarthy face and raven locks, that she really looked like an angel of light compared with the dark child of Nature. Agnes was tall and slender, and moved with a great air of dignity and calm self-possession, and this to the uncontrolled Chaldea was also a matter of offence. She inwardly tried to belittle her rival by thinking what a milk-and-water useless person she was, but the steady and resolute look in the lady's brown eyes gave the lie to this mental assertion. Lady Agnes had an air of breeding and command, which, with all her beauty, Chaldea lacked, and as she passed along like a cold, stately goddess, the gypsy rolled on the grass in an ecstasy of rage. She could never be what her rival was, and what her rival was, as she suspected, formed Lambert's ideal of womanhood. When she again peered through the bush, Lady

Agnes had disappeared. But there was no need for Chaldea to ask her jealous heart where she had gone. With the stealth and cunning of a Red Indian, the gypsy took up the trail, and saw the woman she followed enter the cottage. For a single moment she had it in her mind to run to the camp and bring Pine, but reflecting that in a moment of rage the man might kill Lambert, Chaldea checked her first impulse, and bent all her energies towards getting sufficiently near to listen to a conversation which was not meant for her ears.

Meanwhile, Agnes had been admitted by Mrs. Tribb, a dried-up little woman with the rosy face of a winter apple, and a continual smile of satisfaction with herself and with her limited world. This consisted of the cottage, in the wood, and of the near villages, where she repaired on occasions to buy food. Sometimes, indeed, she went to The Manor, for, born and bred on the Garvinton estates, Mrs. Tribb knew all the servants at the big house. She had married a gamekeeper, who had died, and unwilling to leave the country she knew best, had gladly accepted the offer of Lord Garvinton to look after the woodland cottage. In this way Lambert became possessed of an exceedingly clean housekeeper, and a wonderfully good cook. In fact so excellent a cook was Mrs. Tribb, that Garvinton had frequently suggested she should come to The Manor. But, so far, Lambert had managed to keep the little woman to himself. Mrs. Tribb adored him, since she had known him from babyhood, and declined to leave him under any circumstances. She thought Lambert the best man in the world, and challenged the universe to find another so handsome and clever, and so considerate.

"Dear me, my lady, is it yourself?" said Mrs. Tribb, throwing up her dry little hands and dropping a dignified curtsy. "Well, I do call it good of you to come and see Master Noel. He don't go out enough, and don't take enough interest in his stomach, if your ladyship will pardon my mentioning that part of him. But you don't know, my lady, what it is to be a cook, and to see the dishes get cold, while he as should eat them goes on painting, not but what Master Noel don't paint like an angel, as I've said dozens of times."

While Mrs. Tribb ran on in this manner her lively black eyes twinkled anxiously. She knew that her master and Lady Agnes had been, as she said herself, "next door to engaged," and knew also that Lambert was fretting over the match which had been brought about for the glorification of the family. The housekeeper, therefore, wondered why Lady Agnes had come, and asked herself whether it would not be wise to say that Master Noel – from old associations, she always called Lambert by this juvenile title – was not at home. But she banished the thought as unworthy, the moment it entered her active brain, and with another curtsy in response to the visitor's greeting, she conducted her to the studio. "Them two angels will never do no wrong, anyhow," was Mrs. Tribb's reflection, as she closed the door and left the pair together. "But I do hope as that black-faced husband won't ever learn. He's as jealous as Cain, and I don't want Master Noel to be no Abel!"

If Mrs. Tribb, instead of going to the kitchen, which she did, had gone out of the front door, she would have found Chaldea lying full length amongst the flowers under the large window of the studio. This was slightly open, and the girl could hear every word that was spoken, while so swiftly and cleverly had she gained her point of vantage, that those within never for one moment suspected her presence. If they had, they would assuredly have kept better guard over their tongues, for the conversation was of the most private nature, and did not tend to soothe the eavesdropper's jealousy.

Lambert was so absorbed in his painting – he was working at the Esmeralda-Quasimodo picture – that he scarcely heard the studio door open, and it was only when Mrs. Tribb's shrill voice announced the name of his visitor, that he woke to the surprising fact that the woman he loved was within a few feet of him. The blood rushed to his face, and then retired to leave him deadly pale, but Agnes was more composed, and did not let her heart's tides mount to high-water mark. On seeing her self-possession, the man became ashamed that he had lost his own, and strove to conceal his momentary lapse into a natural emotion, by pushing forward an arm-chair.

"This is a surprise, Agnes," he said in a voice which he strove vainly to render steady. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," and she took her seat like a queen on her throne, looking fair and gracious as any white lily. What with her white dress, white gloves and shoes, and straw hat tied under her chin with a broad white ribbon in old Georgian fashion, she looked wonderfully cool, and pure, and – as Lambert inwardly observed – holy. Her face was as faintly tinted with color as is a tea-rose, and her calm, brown eyes, under her smooth brown hair, added to the suggestive stillness of her looks. She seemed in her placidity to be far removed from any earthly emotion, and resembled a picture of the Madonna, serene, peaceful, and somewhat sad. Yet who could tell what anguished feelings were masked by her womanly pride?

"I hope you do not find the weather too warm for walking," said Lambert, reining in his emotions with an iron hand, and speaking conventionally.

"Not at all. I enjoyed the walk. I am staying at The Manor."

"So I understand."

"And you are staying here?"

"There can be no doubt on that point."

"Do you think you are acting wisely?" she asked with great calmness.

"I might put the same question to you, Agnes, seeing that you have come to live within three miles of my hermitage."

"It is because you are living in what you call your hermitage that I have come," rejoined Agnes, with a slight color deepening her cheeks. "Is it fair to me that you should shut yourself up and play the part of the disappointed lover?"

Lambert, who had been touching up his picture here and there, laid down his palette and brushes with ostentatious care, and faced her doggedly. "I don't understand what you mean," he declared.

"Oh, I think you do; and in the hope that I may induce you, in justice to me, to change your conduct, I have come over."

"I don't think you should have come," he observed in a low voice, and threw himself on the couch with averted eyes.

Lady Agnes colored again. "You are talking nonsense," she said with some sharpness. "There is no harm in my coming to see my cousin."

"We were more than cousins once."

"Exactly, and unfortunately people know that. But you needn't make matters worse by so pointedly keeping away from me."

Lambert looked up quickly. "Do you wish me to see you often?" he asked, and there was a new note in his voice which irritated her.

"Personally I don't, but –"

"But what?" He rose and stood up, very tall and very straight, looking down on her with a hungry look in his blue eyes.

"People are talking," murmured the lady, and stared at the floor, because she could not face that same look.

"Let them talk. What does it matter?"

"Nothing to you, perhaps, but to me a great deal. I have a husband."

"As I know to my cost," he interpolated.

"Then don't let me know it to *my* cost," she said pointedly. "Sit down and let us talk common sense."

Lambert did not obey at once. "I am only a human being, Agnes –"

"Quite so, and a man at that. Act like a man, then, and don't place the burden on a woman's shoulders."

"What burden?"

"Oh, Noel, can't you understand?"

"I daresay I can if you will explain. I wish you hadn't come here to-day. I have enough to bear without that."

"And have I nothing to bear?" she demanded, a flash of passion ruffling her enforced calm. "Do you think that anything but the direst need brought me here?"

"I don't know what brought you here. I am waiting for an explanation."

"What is the use of explaining what you already know?"

"I know nothing," he repeated doggedly. "Explain."

"Well," said Lady Agnes with some bitterness, "it seems to me that an explanation is really necessary, as apparently I am talking to a child instead of a man. Sit down and listen."

This time Lambert obeyed, and laughed as he did so. "Your taunts don't hurt me in the least," he observed. "I love you too much."

"And I love in return. No! Don't rise again. I did not come here to revive the embers of our dead passion."

"Embers!" cried Lambert with bitter scorn. "Embers, indeed! And a dead passion; how well you put it. So far as I am concerned, Agnes, the passion is not dead and never will be."

"I am aware of that, and so I have come to appeal to that passion. Love means sacrifice. I want you to understand that."

"I do, by experience. Did I not surrender you for the sake of the family name? Understand! I should think I did understand."

"I – think – not," said Lady Agnes slowly and gently. "It is necessary to revive your recollections. We loved one another since we were boy and girl, and we intended, as you know, to marry. There was no regular engagement between us, but it was an understood family arrangement. My father always approved of it; my brother did not."

"No. Because he saw in you an article of sale out of which he hoped to make money," sneered Lambert, nursing his ankle.

Lady Agnes winced. "Don't make it too hard for me," she said plaintively. "My life is uncomfortable enough as it is. Remember that when my father died we were nearly ruined. Only by the greatest cleverness did Garvinton manage to keep interest on the mortgages paid up, hoping that he would marry a rich wife – an American for choice – and so could put things straight. But he married Jane, as you know –"

"Because he is a glutton, and she knows all about cooking."

"Well, gluttony may be as powerful a vice as drinking and gambling, and all the rest of it. It is with Garvinton, although I daresay that seeing the position he was in, people would laugh to think he should marry a poor woman, when he needed a rich wife. But at that time Hubert wanted to marry me, and Garvinton got his cook-wife, while I was sacrificed."

"Seeing that I loved you and you loved me, I wonder –"

"Yes, I know you wondered, but you finally accepted my explanation that I did it to save the family name."

"I did, and, much as I hated your sacrifice, it was necessary."

"More necessary than you think," said Lady Agnes, sinking her voice to a whisper and glancing round, "In a moment of madness Garvinton altered a check which Hubert gave him, and was in danger of arrest. Hubert declared that he would give up the check if I married him. I did so, to save my brother and the family name."

"Oh, Agnes!" Lambert jumped up. "I never knew this."

"It was not necessary to tell you. I made the excuse of saving the family name and property generally. You thought it was merely the bankruptcy court, but I knew that it meant the criminal court. However, I married Hubert, and he put the check in the fire in my presence and in Garvinton's. He has also fulfilled his share of the bargain which he made when he bought me, and has paid off

a great many of the mortgages. However, Garvington became too outrageous in his demands, and lately Hubert has refused to help him any more. I don't blame him; he has paid enough for me."

"You are worth it," said Lambert emphatically.

"Well, you may think so, and perhaps he does also. But does it not strike you, Noel, what a poor figure I and Garvington, and the whole family, yourself included, cut in the eyes of the world? We were poor, and I was sold to get money to save the land."

"Yes, but this changing of the check also – "

"The world doesn't know of that," said Agnes hurriedly. "Hubert has been very loyal to me. I must be loyal to him."

"You are. Who dares to say that you are not?"

"No one – as yet," she replied pointedly.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded, flushing through his fair skin.

"I mean that if you met me in the ordinary way, and behaved to me as an ordinary man, people would not talk. But you shun my society, and even when I am at The Manor, you do not come near because of my presence."

"It is so hard to be near you and yet, owing to your marriage, so far from you," muttered the man savagely.

"If it is hard for you, think how hard it must be for me," said the woman vehemently, her passion coming to the surface. "People talk of the way in which you avoid me, and hint that we love one another still."

"It is true! Agnes, you know it is true!"

"Need the whole world know that it is true?" cried Agnes, rising, with a gust of anger passing over her face. "If you would only come to The Manor, and meet me in London, and accept Hubert's invitations to dinner, people would think that our attachment was only a boy and girl engagement, that we had outgrown. They would even give me credit for loving Hubert – "

"But you don't?" cried Lambert with a jealous pang.

"Yes, I do. He is my chosen husband, and has carried out his part of the bargain by freeing many of Garvington's estates. Surely the man ought to have something for his money. I don't love him as a wife should love her husband, not with heart-whole devotion, that is. But I give him loyalty, and I respect him, and I try to make him happy in every way. I do my part, Noel, as you do yours. Since I have been compelled to sacrifice love for money, at least let us be true to the sacrifice."

"You didn't sacrifice yourself wholly for money."

"No, I did not. It was because of Garvington's crime. But no one knows of that, and no one ever shall know. In fact, so happy am I and Hubert – "

"Happy?" said Lambert wincing.

"Yes," she declared firmly. "He thinks so, and whatever unhappiness I may feel, I conceal from him. But you must come to The Manor, and meet me here, there, and everywhere, so that people shall not say, as they are doing, that you are dying of love, and that, because I am a greedy fortune-hunter, I ruined your life."

"They do not dare. I have not heard any – "

"What can you hear in this jungle?" interrupted Lady Agnes with scorn. "You stop your ears with cotton wool, but I am in the world, hearing everything. And the more unpleasant the thing is, the more readily do I hear it. You can end this trouble by coming out of your lovesick retirement, and by showing that you no longer care for me."

"That would be acting a lie."

"And do I not act a lie?" she cried fiercely. "Is not my whole marriage a lie? I despise myself for my weakness in yielding, and yet, God help me, what else could I do when Garvington's fair fame was in question? Think of the disgrace, had he been prosecuted by Hubert. And Hubert knows that you and I loved; that I could not give him the love he desired. He was content to accept me on those

terms. I don't say he was right; but am I right, are you right, is Garvinton right? Is any one of us right? Not one, not one. The whole thing is horrible, but I make the best of it, since I did what I did do, openly and for a serious purpose of which the world knows nothing. Do your part, Noel, and come to The Manor, if only to show that you no longer care for me. You understand" – she clasped her hands in agony. "You surely understand."

"Yes," said Lambert in a low voice, and suddenly looked years older. "I understand at last, Agnes. You shall no longer bear the burden alone. I shall be a loyal friend to you, my dear," and he took her hand.

"Will you be a loyal friend to my husband?" she asked, withdrawing it.

"Yes," said Lambert, and he bit his lip. "God helping me, I will."

CHAPTER VI. THE MAN AND THE WOMAN

The interview between Lady Agnes and Lambert could scarcely be called a love-scene, since it was dominated by a stern sense of duty. Chaldea, lying at length amongst the crushed and fragrant flowers, herself in her parti-colored attire scarcely distinguishable from the rainbow blossoms, was puzzled by the way in which the two reined in their obvious passions. To her simple, barbaric nature, the situation appeared impossible. If he loved her and she loved him, why did they not run away to enjoy life together? The husband who had paid money for the wife did not count, nor did the brother, who had sold his sister to hide his criminal folly. That Lady Agnes should have traded herself to save Garvinton from a well-deserved punishment, seemed inexcusable to the gypsy. If he had been the man she loved, then indeed might she have acted rightly. But having thrown over that very man in this silly fashion, for the sake of what did not appear to be worth the sacrifice, Chaldea felt that Agnes did not deserve Lambert, and she then and there determined that the Gentile lady should never possess him.

Of course, on the face of it, there was no question of possession. The man being weaker than the woman would have been only too glad to elope, and thus cut the Gordian knot of the unhappy situation. But the woman, having acted from a high sense of duty, which Chaldea could not rise to, evidently was determined to continue to be a martyr. The question was, could she keep up that pose in the face of the undeniable fact that she loved her cousin? The listening girl thought not. Sooner or later the artificial barrier would be broken through by the held-back flood of passion, and then Lady Agnes would run away from the man who had bought her. And quite right, too, thought Chaldea, although she had no notion of permitting such an elopement to take place. That Agnes would hold to her bargain all her life, because Hubert had fulfilled his part, never occurred to the girl. She was not civilized enough to understand this problem of a highly refined nature.

Since the situation was so difficult, Lambert was glad to see the back of his cousin. He escorted her to the door, but did not attend her through the wood. In fact, they parted rather abruptly, which was wise. All had been said that could be said, and Lambert had given his promise to share the burden with Agnes by acting the part of a lover who had never really been serious. But it did not do to discuss details, as these were too painful, so the woman hurried away without a backward glance, and Lambert, holding his heart between his teeth, returned to the studio. Neither one of the two noticed Chaldea crouching amongst the flowers. Had they been less pre-occupied, they might have done so; as it was she escaped observation.

As soon as the coast was clear, Chaldea stole like a snake along the ground, through the high herbage of the garden, and beyond the circle of the mysterious monoliths. Even across the lawns of the glade did she crawl, so as not to be seen, although she need not have taken all this trouble, since Lambert, with a set face and a trembling hand, was working furiously at a minor picture he utilized to get rid of such moods. But the gypsy did not know this, and so writhed into the woods like the snake of Eden – and of that same she was a very fair sample – until, hidden by the boles of ancient trees, she could stand upright. When she did so, she drew a long breath, and wondered what was best to be done.

The most obvious course was to seek Ishmael and make a lying report of the conversation. That his wife should have been with Lambert would be quite enough to awaken the civilized gypsy's jealousy, for after all his civilization was but skin deep. Still, if she did this, Chaldea was clever enough to see that she would precipitate a catastrophe, and either throw Agnes into Lambert's arms, or make the man run the risk of getting Pine's knife tickling his fifth rib. Either result did not appeal to her. She wished to get Lambert to herself, and his safety was of vital importance to her. After some consideration, she determined that she would boldly face the lover, and confess that she had overheard

everything. Then she would have him in her power, since to save the wife from the vengeance of the husband, although there was no reason for such vengeance, he would do anything to keep the matter of the visit quiet. Of course the interview had been innocent, and Chaldea knew that such was the case. Nevertheless, by a little dexterous lying, and some vivid word-painting, she could make things extremely unpleasant for the couple. This being so, Lambert would have to subscribe to her terms. And these were, that he should leave Agnes and marry her. That there was such a difference in their rank mattered nothing to the girl. Love levelled all ranks, in her opinion.

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