

GLYN ELINOR

THE CAREER
OF KATHERINE
BUSH

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Elinor Glyn

The Career of Katherine Bush

CHAPTER I

Dusk was coming on when Katherine Bush left the office of the Jew money lenders, Livingstone and Devereux, in Holles Street. Theirs was a modest establishment with no indication upon the wire blind of the only street window as to the trade practised by the two owners of the aristocratic names emblazoned upon the dingy transparency. But it was very well known all the same to numerous young bloods who often sought temporary relief within its doors.

Katherine Bush had been the shorthand typist there since she was nineteen. They paid her well, and she had the whole of Saturday to herself.

She sat clicking at her machine most of the day, behind a half-high glass screen, and when she lifted her head, she could see those who came to the desk beyond – she could hear their voices, and if she listened very carefully, she could distinguish the words they said. In the three years in which she had earned thirty shillings a week sitting there, she had become quite a connoisseur in male voices, and had made numerous deductions therefrom. "Liv" and "Dev," as Mr. Percival Livingstone and Mr. Benjamin Devereux, were called with undue familiarity by their subordinates, often wondered how Katherine Bush seemed to know exactly the suitable sort of letter to write to each client, without being told. She was certainly a most valuable young woman, and worth the rise the firm meant to offer her shortly.

She hardly ever spoke, and when she did raise her sullen greyish-green eyes with a question in them, you were wiser to answer it without too much palaver. The eyes were darkly heavily lashed and were compelling and disconcertingly steady, and set like Greek eyes under broad brows. Her cheeks were flat, and her nose straight, and her mouth was full and large and red.

For the rest she was a colourless creature, with a mop of ashen-hued hair which gleamed with silvery lights. She was tall and slight, and she could at any moment have been turned by a clever dressmaker and hairdresser into a great beauty. But as it was, she gave no thought to her appearance, and looked unremarkable and ordinary and lower middle-class.

She had wonderful hands – Where they came from the good God alone knew! with their whiteness and their shape. They were strong, too, and perhaps appeared boyish rather than feminine. She did not inherit them from that excellent mother, retired to a better world some ten years before; nor from that astute auctioneer father, who, dying suddenly, had left that comfortable red-brick semi-detached villa at Bindon's Green, Brixton, as a permanent home for his large family.

But from whence come souls and bodies and hands and eyes? – and whither do they go? – Katherine Bush often asked herself questions like these, and plodded on until she could give herself some kind of answer.

Not one single moment of her conscious hours had ever been wasted. She was always learning something, and before she had reached sixteen, she had realised that power to rule will eventually be in the grasp of the man or woman who can reap the benefit of lessons.

She had enjoyed her work at the night schools, and the wet Sundays, curled up with a book in the armchair in the tiny attic, which she preferred to a larger bedroom, because she could have it alone unshared with a sister.

Her mind had become a storehouse of miscellaneous English literature, a good deal mispronounced in the words, because she had never heard it read aloud by a cultivated voice. She knew French grammatically, but her accent would have made a delicate ear wince. Her own voice was

singularly refined; it was not for nothing that she had diligently listened to the voices of impecunious aristocrats for over three years!

For the moment, Katherine Bush was in love. Lord Algy had happened to glance over the glass screen upon his first visit to Liv and Dev to be accommodated with a thousand pounds, and his attractive blue eyes had met the grey-green ones.

He had spoken to her when she came out to luncheon. But he had done it really intelligently, and Katherine was not insulted. Indeed, accustomed as she was to weigh everything in life, she accorded him a mead of praise for the manner in which he had carried out his intention to make her acquaintance. She had flouted him and turned him more or less inside out for over a month, but she had let him give her lunch – and now she had decided to spend the Saturday to Monday with him.

For the scheme of existence which she had planned out for herself, she decided her experience must be more complete. One must see life, she argued, and it was better to make a first plunge with a person of refinement, who knew the whole game, than with one of her own class who would be but a very sorry instructor.

Heavens! To spend a Saturday to Monday with the counterpart of her brothers Fred and Bert! The idea made her shudder. She disliked them and their friends enough as it was – and the idea of marriage in that circle never entered her level head. Of what use would be all her studies, and the lessons she had mastered, if she buried herself forever at Brixton with Charlie Prodgers or at Clapham with Percy Watson?

At this stage no moral questions troubled her at all, nor had she begun really to apply the laws of cause and effect in their full measure – although she was quite aware that what she proposed to do was the last thing she would have considered wise or safe for another woman to attempt. Rules of conduct were wisely made for communities she felt, and must be kept or disaster must inevitably follow. But in her own case she was willing to take risks, thoroughly believing in her own cool discrimination.

The outlook for her should always be vast.

Lord Algy was passionately devoted, and it was wiser early in life to know the nature of men. Thus she argued to herself, being totally unaware that her point of view was altogether affected because her heart and her senses pleaded hard, being touched for the first time in her twenty-two years.

She was quite untroubled by what the world calls morality – and she had no scruples. These were for a later date in her career.

The path looked clear and full of roses.

She had not been in the habit of consulting her family as to her movements, and had many times gone by herself for holidays to the seaside. No questions would be asked her when she returned on the Monday. If the matter could have created scandal, she would not have gone – to create scandal was not at all part of her game.

Lord Algy had arranged to take her to Paris by that Friday night's train. They would have all Saturday and Sunday, and then return on Monday night. Liv and Dev had granted her a holiday until the Tuesday. She had put on her best blue serge suit that morning, and had taken a small valise with what she considered necessary things. And now her heart beat rather fast as she turned into Oxford Street in the gathering October dusk.

For a few moments she wondered what it would have been like if she had been going to marry Lord Algy – before all the world. Quite a great pleasure no doubt for a month or two – But then? – He was the fourth son of a stingy Welsh marquis, and nothing would ever induce his family to pardon such a mésalliance. Of this she was well aware. It was the business of "Liv" and "Dev" to make themselves acquainted with a good deal about the peerage, and whatever her employers knew, Katherine Bush knew.

Life for her held no illusions. Her studies had convinced her that to be strong and perfectly honest were the only two things of any avail, and to acquire a thorough knowledge of human beings, so as then to be able to manipulate these pawns.

Lord Algy she believed was only a most agreeable part of her education, but of no vital importance. She would have been horrified if anyone had told her that she was mixing up sentiment in the affair!

To get everything down to its bedrock meaning had been her endeavour, ever since she had first read Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

"I shall have the experience of a widow," she said to herself, "and can then decide what is next to be done."

Lord Algy was a Guardsman – and knew, among other things, exactly how to spend an agreeable Saturday to Monday! He was piqued by Katherine Bush, and almost in love. He looked forward to his brief honeymoon with delight.

He was waiting for her in a taxicab at the corner of Oxford Circus, and when she got in with her little valise, he caught and kissed her hand.

"We will go and dine at the Great Terminus," he told her in his charming voice, "and don't you think it would be much nicer if we stayed there to-night, and went on by the morning train? – It is such a miserable hour to arrive in Paris otherwise – you would be knocked up for the day."

He was holding her hand, and the nearness of him thrilled her, in some new and delicious way. She hesitated, though, for a moment – she never acted on impulse. She crushed down a strange sensation of gasp which came in her throat. After all, of what matter if she stayed – or started to-night? – since she had already cast the die, and did not mean to shirk the payment of the stakes.

"Very well," she said, quite low.

"I hoped you would agree, pet," he whispered, encircling her with his arm, "I meant to persuade you, and I am going to make you so awfully happy – I sent my servant this afternoon to take the rooms for us, and everything will be ready."

This sounded agreeable enough, and Katherine Bush permitted herself to smile, which was a rare occurrence; she would spend hours and days without the flicker of one coming near her red lips.

In the uncertain light, Lord Algy felt it more than he actually saw it, and it warmed him. She was, as he had confessed to his best friend in the battalion, an enigma to him – hence her charm.

"She treats me as though I were the ground under her feet at times," he recounted to Jack Kilcourcy. "I don't think she cares two damned straws for me really, but, by Jove! she is worth while! She has no nonsense about her, and she is so awfully game!"

He had taken good care never to let Jack see her, though – or tell him her name!

It was not long before they reached the hotel, and Katherine Bush was a little angry with herself because she felt a quiver of nervousness when they were in the big hall.

Lord Algy knew all the ropes, and his air of complete insouciance reassured her. A discreet valet stepped forward and spoke to his master, and they were soon in the lift, and so to a well-lighted and warmed suite.

"These colours and this imitation Chippendale are rather awful, aren't they," Lord Algy said, looking round, "but we must not mind, as it is only for one night; the Palatial in Paris will be different – I am glad Hanson saw to the flowers."

Huge bunches of roses stood upon the table and mantelpiece. Katherine Bush thought it a splendid place, but if it appeared rather "awful" to him, she must not show her admiration.

"Tea will come in a moment – I mean chocolate, pet – and I think we shall be as jolly as can be. In there is your room; they will have brought up your valise by now, I expect."

Katherine Bush moved forward and went through the door. A cheery fire was burning, and the curtains were drawn, and on a chair there was a big cardboard box. She looked at it, it was addressed "Mrs. Rufus."

"Who – is that – ? – and what is it for?" she asked, in a voice deep as a well.

"It is just a fur-lined coat, darling," Lord Algy answered, as he pulled undone the string, "and a little wrap – I thought you would be so awfully cold on the boat – and probably would not have been able to bring much luggage."

A slight flush came into the young woman's white cheeks, something in her loathed taking presents.

"Thanks awfully – I'll be glad to have you lend them to me for this trip – but why is it addressed 'Mrs. Rufus'? – Mr. Devereux has got a sister of that name."

Lord Algy laughed.

"Well, you see, I could not have it 'Fitz-Rufus,' because every one knows that is the Merioneth name, given us poor devils by the Normans, because we were such a red-headed lot, and I bet they found our own too difficult to pronounce!" He began pulling out the coat and a soft pink silk dressing-gown from the box. "I always am just 'Rufus' when I come out like this." He laughed again a little constrainedly; it had just struck him that the latter part of his sentence was perhaps not very felicitously expressed – since he knew Katherine Bush was no chorus lady, accustomed to temporary wedded appellations!

She looked him straight in the eyes with her strange, disconcertingly steady grey-green ones – and then she smiled again – as the Sphinx might have done before being set in eternal immobility of stone.

Lord Algy felt stupidly uncomfortable, so he folded her in his arms with a fond caress, a far better plan he had always found than any argument or explanation with women.

Katherine Bush realised the joy of it. She was ready for every grade of pleasure as well as experience. This was how things were done in Lord Algy's world, then – So be it.

Together they looked at the coat and wrap, and he helped her to take off her hat and jacket, and try them on. They were very friendly, and Lord Algy suggested that as the dressing-gown was almost a teagown and was fairly pretty, she might wear it for dinner, which they would have in the sitting-room.

"You'll look sweet in pink, darling," he lisped, as he kissed her ear, "and it will be so soft and cosy."

Then the waiter knocked at the door and said the chocolate was ready, so they went back to the sitting room.

He was quite adorable as he assisted her to pour in the cream – but Katherine Bush now decided she would keep him at arm's length for a while; the game was really so entertaining, and its moves must be made to last as long as possible.

Lord Algy enjoyed fencing, too, so they talked in a more matter-of-fact way for an hour or more, and then she told him she would go and change for dinner, as it would be ready in twenty minutes.

"I'll have to be your maid, darling – I make an awfully good maid – I never bungle with the beastly hooks – and I should love to brush your hair!"

His eyes shone with light-hearted passion, and his good-looking face was close to her own.

"You shall perhaps – to-morrow," Katherine Bush retorted – and slipping into the room beyond she shut the door.

Lord Algy flung himself into an armchair, lit a cigarette and laughed softly. He had never had such an experience as this.

"She is a wonder!" he said to himself. "Astonishing for her class – for any class – She reminds me of some French heroine – what's her name – fellow wrote jolly nice stuff – oh – er —*Mademoiselle de Maupin*, of course! By Jove! I believe I am going to have a time like that chap had – only she won't go off into limbo on Monday night! – Confound it, I believe I'm in love!"

Then he threw away his cigarette end, and went round through the outer passage to his room beyond hers, where he found his servant turning on his bath in the bathroom which divided their apartments.

"Madame did not seem to require it – yet," Hanson said respectfully, "so I have turned on Your Lordship's first."

And in a few minutes Lord Algy was splashing in the Lubin scented water, while he gaily whistled a tune.

And Katherine Bush heard him as she was sponging her white face – and stopped and listened surprisedly.

"Whatever can he be having a bath for at this time of day," she said to herself, "and it is not Saturday!"

Then the thought came, it might be the custom of his class to bathe before dinner! A scarlet spot grew in each cheek – she must never forget to learn and profit by her lessons, so she deliberately went and knocked on the communicating door and called out:

"Algy! you are mean to take the first! – When you have finished, turn on mine."

And then she stood and trembled for a minute, while she piled up her great mass of ashen hair.

"All right, darling!" he called back. "Only I must have my reward!"

"When *I* please!" the young woman said to herself. "And not until."

At dinner, she looked quite pretty, the pink suited her pale skin, and the unusual feminine fluffiness of the garment altered her rather stern appearance. She had not yet begun to employ any art whatever, or to alter the rough bundling up of her hair, but now, out to enjoy herself under the most propitious and rose-coloured circumstances, her strange, sullen eyes shone with a subtle fascination, and her deep voice had tones in it which seduced the ear.

She had never dined with him before, only lunched, and now it behooved her to observe the ways of things, as she was quite ignorant of the art of dining out. Mr. Benjamin Devereux had made advances to her in her first year at Liv and Dev, but she had annihilated him, and withered his proposals for unlimited dinners and a generous settlement with scorn. There had never been a moment when she had contemplated her charms being wasted upon anything but an aristocrat, from whom she could acquire "tone."

No denizen of Bindon's Green – no friend of the family – no companion in the morning train had ever had so much as a kind word, much less the tip of one of her strong white fingers. She was as a bunch of grapes with perfect bloom retained.

She was taking in every line of Lord Algy as she sat there sipping her soup. She had refused oysters, and had watched him as he devoured his with the joy of an epicure. She had not been quite certain as to which was the right implement to employ. She supposed it was that little fork with the three prongs – but she determined to make no mistakes.

It was easy enough to gobble oysters soured in vinegar and red pepper, with huge slices of bread and butter, and a bottle of stout, as her brother Fred was wont to enjoy them at supper on Saturday nights. Or they could be pulled about in the mincing fashion in which his fiancée, that genteel Mabel Cawber, treated them, with little finger daintily curved, and the first and the thumb only in use! but before she, Katherine Bush, swallowed one, she would ascertain exactly how they were eaten in Lord Algy's world! No good out of this trip should be wasted.

As dinner advanced, he began to make more ardent love to her – and the champagne elevated both their spirits. He reproached her for her hardness in not having allowed him to play the part of maid, after all. She was a capricious little darling, but surely did not mean to go on being unkind?

No; she did not – but she had suddenly realised, while dressing, that some of her garments were not fine enough for the situation, and must be kept out of sight!

She did not tell him this, however, but continued to enact the rôle of condescending queen, while quietly she watched him as a cat watches a mouse.

She loved the way his hair was brushed – how different from Charlie Prodgers! – she loved the finely cut back of his head. She was perfectly aware that he showed outwardly every mark of breeding

in his weak, handsome face, and lean well-drilled figure. These things pleased her – especially the breeding; it was so very far from what she ever saw at Bindon's Green!

Lord Algy had the easy, pleasant manner of his kind, with a strong personal attraction, amply balancing absence of brain for general purposes, and he was versed in every art for the cajoling of women.

The dinner grew more and more agreeable, until when coffee and liqueurs came, Katherine Bush felt exalted into a strange heaven. She had analysed almost all emotions in the abstract, but not their possible effects upon herself. She found the ones she was experiencing now peculiarly delightful! To be twenty-two and in love for the first time in life, with an extremely delectable specimen of manhood – to be free as air – answerable to no one – untroubled by backward or forward thoughts, unworried by tormenting speculations as to whether the affair was right or wrong – wise or unwise – This was a state of things which made the cup worth drinking, and Katherine Bush knew it.

No possibility of bitter dregs to follow the last sip entered her calculations.

The imp gods laughed, no doubt, and Lord Algy's blue eyes were full of passionate delight!

Thus with all things *couleur de rose*, Katherine Bush began her brief honeymoon.

CHAPTER II

"And I shall not see you for a whole month, my precious pet!" Lord Algy whispered, as the train was approaching Charing Cross, at about eleven o'clock on the Monday night of the return journey. "I don't know how I shall bear it, but you will write every day, won't you? – Promise me, darling – I wish now that I had not taken first leave and arranged to shoot with my brother-in-law next week."

His arm still encircled her, and her ashen-hued head leaned against his shoulder, so that he could not see the expression in her sombre eyes. It was that of an animal in pain.

"No, I shall not write, Algy, and you must not, either – we have had a divine time, and I shall never forget it. But it is stupid to write – what good would it be to either of us?"

He pleaded that he would not be able to live without a word – after the three days of perfect bliss they had enjoyed – and, of course, they would enjoy many more, when he returned from Wales – !

Katherine Bush did not argue with him – of what use since her own mind was entirely made up? She just let him kiss her as much as he desired without speaking a word, and then she arranged her hat and veil, and was demurely ready to get out when the train should draw up at the platform.

Lord Algy could not have been more loverlike. He was really feeling full of emotion and awfully sorry to part. She had been so wonderful, he told himself. She had enjoyed the whole thing so simply, and was such a delightful companion. She had not asked any silly questions or plagued him with sentimental forever-and-ever kinds of suggestions, as lots of girls might have done with her limited experience of these transitory affairs. She had accepted the situation as frankly as a savage who had never heard that there could be any more binding unions. He really did not know how he was going to stand a whole month of separation, but perhaps it was just as well, as he was on the verge of being ridiculously in love, and to plunge in, he knew, would be a hopeless mistake. She was a thousand times nicer and more interesting than any girl he had ever met in his life. If she had only been a lady, and there would not be any row about it, he could imagine any fellow being glad to marry her.

She was not at all cold either – indeed, far from it – and seemed instinctively to understand the most enchanting passion – He thought of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* again – and felt he had been as equally blessed as *D'Albert*. She would make the sweetest friend for months and months, and he would rush back from Wales the moment he could break from his family, and seek solace in her arms – he would have got himself in hand again by then, so as not to do anything stupid. He always meant to be very, very good to her, though. Thus he dreamed, and grew more demonstrative, clasping her once again in a fond farewell embrace, during the last available moment, and his charming blue eyes, with their brown curly lashes, looked half full of tears.

"Say you love me, darling," he commanded, wishing, like all lovers, to hear the spoken words.

Katherine Bush was very pale, and there was concentrated feeling in her face which startled him. Then she answered, her voice deeper than usual:

"Yes – I love you, Algy – perhaps you will never know how much. I do not suppose I will ever really love anyone else in the same way in my life."

Then the train drew up at the station.

The people all looked unreal in the foggy October air under the glaring lights – and the whole thing appeared as a dream indeed when, half an hour later, Katherine sped through the suburban roads to Bindon's Green, alone in the taxi. Lord Algy had put her in and paid the man liberally, and with many last love words had bidden her good-night and —*au revoir*!

So this chapter was finished – she realised that. And it had been really worth while. An outlook had opened for her into a whole new world – where realities lived – where new beings moved, where new standpoints could be reached. She saw that her former life had been swept from her – and now, to look back upon, appeared an impossible tedium. She had mastered all the shades of what three days of most intimate companionship with *a gentleman* could mean, and the memory contained no flaw.

Algy's chivalry and courtesy had never faltered; she might have been a princess or his bride, from the homage he had paid her. Dear, much-loved Algy! Her passion for him was tinged with almost a mother love – there was something so tender and open-hearted about him. But now she must take stern hold of herself, and must have pluck enough to profit by what she had learned of life – Though to-night she was too tired to do more than retrospect.

Oh! the wonder of it all! – the wonder of love, and the wonder of emotion! She clenched her cold hands round the handle of her little valise. She was trembling. She had insisted upon his keeping the fur-lined coat for the present. How could she account for it to her family, she had argued? But she never meant to take it again.

No one was awake at Laburnum Villa when she opened the door with her latchkey, and she crept up to her little icy chamber under the roof, numb in mind and body and soul – and was soon shivering between the cotton sheets.

Oh! the contrast to the warm, flower-scented bedroom at the Palatial! And once she had not known the difference between linen and cotton!

She said this over to herself while she felt the nap – and then the tears gathered in her eyes one by one, and she sobbed uncontrollably for a while – Alas! to have to renounce all joy – forever more!

She fell asleep towards morning, and woke with a start as her alarm clock thundered. But her face was set like marble, and there was not a trace of weakness upon it when she appeared at the family scramble, which did duty for breakfast.

There had been a row between Fred and Gladys, the sister a year older than herself, who was a saleswoman at a fashionable dressmaker's establishment. Matilda, the eldest of the family, was trying to smooth matters while she sewed up a rent in the skirt which Ethel, the youngest, would presently wear to the school "for young ladies" which she daily attended. This, the most youthful Miss Bush, meanwhile sat in a very soiled Japanese quilted dressing gown, devouring sausages. There were bloaters on the table, too, and treacle – and the little general servant was just bringing in the unsavory coffee in the tin coffeepot.

Tea had been good enough for them always in the father's time, and Matilda for her part could not see why Fred had insisted upon having coffee, on the strength of a trip to Boulogne on bank holiday.

But there it was! When Fred insisted, things had to be done – even if one hated coffee!

Katherine Bush loathed most of her family. She had not an expansive nature, and was quite ruthless. Why should she love them just because they were her brothers and sisters? She had not asked to be born among them! They were completely uncongenial to her, and always had been. It was obviously ridiculous and illogical then to expect her to feel affection for them, just because of this accident of birth, so she argued. Matilda, the eldest, who had always been a mother to the rest, did hold one small corner of her heart.

"Poor old Tild," as she called her, "the greatest old fool living," and Matilda adored her difficult sister.

How doubly impossible they all appeared now to the unveiled eyes of Katherine!

"This is simply disgusting stuff, this coffee!" she said, putting her cup down with a grimace. "It is no more like French coffee than Ett looks like a Japanese because she has got on that dirty dressing-gown."

"What do you know of French coffee, I'd like to ask – What ho!" Bert, the brother just younger than herself, demanded, with one of his bright flashes. "Have you been to 'Boulong for a bit of a song,' like the Gov'nor?"

"I wish you'd give over calling me the Gov'nor, Bert!" Mr. Frederick Bush interposed, stopping for a moment his bicker with Gladys. "Mabel strongly objects to it. She says it is elderly and she dislikes slang, anyway."

But Albert Bush waved half a sausage on his fork, and subsided into a chuckle of laughter. He was the recognised wit of the family, and Ethel giggled in chorus.

Katherine never replied to any of their remarks, unless she wished to; there was no use in throwing down the gauntlet to her, it remained lying there. She did not even answer Matilda's tentative suggestion that she had always drunk the coffee before without abusing it!

If they only knew how significant the word "before" sounded to her that morning!

She finished her bit of burnt toast, and began putting on her hat at a side mirror preparatory to starting. She did not tell Gladys that she would be late if she did not leave also; that was her sister's own affair, she never interfered with people.

As she left the dining-room, she said to Matilda:

"I want a fire in my room when I come back this evening, please. I'll have one every day – Make out how much it will be, and Em'ly's extra work, and I'll pay for it."

"Whatever do you want that for, Kitten?" the astonished Matilda demanded. "Why, it is only October yet. No one ever has a fire until November, even in the drawing-room – let alone a bedroom. It is ridiculous, dearie!"

"That aspect does not matter at all to me," Katherine retorted. "I want it, and so I shall have it. I have some work to do, and I am not going to freeze."

Matilda knew better than to continue arguing. She had not lived with Katherine for twenty-two years for nothing.

"She takes after father in a way," she sighed to herself as she began helping the little servant to clear away the breakfast things, when they had all departed to the West End, where it was their boast to announce that they were all employed – they looked down upon the City!

"Yes, it's father, not mother or her family; father would have his way, and Fred has got this idea, too, but nothing like Kitten's! How I wish she'd look at Charlie Prodggers and get married and settled!"

Then she sighed again and sat down by the window to enjoy her one great pleasure of the day, the perusal of the *feuilleton* in the *Morning Reflector*. In these brief moments she forgot all family worries, all sordid cares – and revelled in the adventures of aristocratic villains and persecuted innocent governesses and actresses, and felt she, too, had a link with the great world. She was a good sound Radical in what represented politics to her, so she knew all aristocrats must be bad, and ought to be exterminated, but she loved to read about them, and hear first-hand descriptions of the female members from Gladys, who saw many in the showrooms of Madame Ermantine. "Glad *knows*," she often said to herself with pride.

Meanwhile, Katherine Bush – having snubbed Mr. Prodggers into silence in the train – where he manœuvred to meet her every morning – reached her employers' establishment, and began her usual typing.

There was work to be done by twelve o'clock in connection with the renewal of the loan to Lord Algernon Fitz-Rufus – the old Marquis would be obliged to pay before Christmas time, Mr. Percival Livingstone said.

Miss Bush, to his intense astonishment, gave a sudden short laugh – it was quite mirthless and stopped abruptly – but it was undoubtedly a laugh!

"What is amusing you?" he asked with a full lisp, too taken off his guard to be as refined and careful in tone as usual.

"The old Marquis having to pay, of course," Katherine responded.

Never once during the whole day did she allow her thoughts to wander from her work, which she accomplished with her usual precision. Even during her luncheon hour she deliberately read the papers. She had trained herself to do one thing at a time, and the moment for reflection would not come until she could be undisturbed. She would go back as soon as she was free, to her own attic, and there think everything out, and decide upon the next step to be taken in her game of life.

A few burnt sticks, and a lump of coal in the tiny grate, were all she discovered on her return that evening to her sanctuary. The maid-of-all-work was not a talented fire-lighter and objected to criticism. Katherine's level brows met with annoyance, and she proceeded to correct matters herself, while she muttered:

"Inefficient creature! and they say that we are all equal! Why can't she do her work, then, as well as I can mine!"

Her firm touch and common sense arrangement of paper and kindling soon produced a bright blaze, and when she had removed her outdoor things, she sat down to think determinedly.

She loved Lord Algy – that was the first and most dominant thing to face. She loved him so much that it would never be safe to see him again, since she had not the slightest intention of ever drifting into the position of being a man's mistress. She had tasted of the tree of knowledge with her eyes open, and the fruit that she had eaten was too dangerously sweet for continuous food. Love would obtain a mastery over her if things went on; she knew that she might grow not to care about anything else in the world but only Algy. Thus, obviously, all connection with him must be broken off at once, or her career would be at an end, and her years of study wasted. Even if he offered to marry her she could never take the position with a high hand. There would always be this delicious memory of illicit joys between them, which would unconsciously bias Algy's valuation of her. She had learned things of consequence which she could not have acquired in any other way, and now she must have strength to profit by them. She utterly despised weaklings and had no pity for lovesick maidens. For a woman to throw over her future for a man was to her completely contemptible. She probed the possible consequences of her course of action unflinchingly; she believed so in her own luck that she felt sure that no awkward accident could happen to her. But even if this should occur, there were ways which could be discovered to help her – and since the moment had not yet come, she would defer contemplating it, but would map out her plans regardless of this contingency. So she argued to herself.

She could not endure living under the family roof of Laburnum Villa any longer, that was incontestable; she must go out and learn exactly how the ladies of Lord Algy's world conducted themselves. Not that she wished to dawn once more upon his horizon as a polished *Vere de Vere* – but that for her own satisfaction she must make herself his equal in all respects. There had been so many trifles about which she had felt she had been ignorant, almost every moment of the three days had given her new visions, and had shown her her own shortcomings.

"There are no bars to anything in life but stupidity and vanity," she told herself, "and they at least shall not stand in my way."

The temptation to have one more farewell interview with him was great, but there was nothing the least dramatic about her, so that aspect did not appeal to her as it would have done to an ordinary woman who is ruled by emotional love for dramatic situations; she was merely drawn by the desire for her mate once more, and this she knew and crushed.

It would mean greater pain than pleasure to her afterwards, and would certainly spoil all chance of a career. She gloried in the fact that she had had the courage to taste of life's joys for experience, but she would have burned with shame to feel that she was being drawn into an equivocal position through her own weakness.

Katherine Bush was as proud as Lucifer. She fully understood – apart from moral questions which did not trouble her – that what she had done would have been fatal to a fool like Gladys, or to any girl except one with her exceptional deliberation and iron will. She truly believed that such experiments were extremely dangerous, and on no account to be adopted as a principle of action in general. The straight and narrow path of orthodox virtue was the only one for most women to follow; and the only one she would have advocated for her sisters or friends. The proof being that as a rule when women erred they invariably suffered because they had not the pluck or the strength to know when to stop.

Katherine Bush was absolutely determined that she should never be hampered, in her game, by her own emotions or weakness.

Before Lord Algy would return from Wales, she would have left Liv and Dev's. She had never given him her home address, and there would be no trace of her. She would look in the *Morning Post* for information, and then endeavour to secure some post as companion or secretary to some great lady. There she would pick up the rest of the necessary equipment to make herself into a person in whom no flaws could be found. And when she had accomplished this, then fate would have opened up some path worth following.

"Some day I shall be one of the greatest women in England," she told herself, as she looked unblinking into the glowing coals.

Then, having settled her plans, she allowed herself to go over the whole of her little holiday, incident by incident.

How utterly adorable Algy had been! She found herself thrilling again at each remembrance – How refined and how considerate! How easy were his manners; he was too sure of himself, and his welcome in life, ever to show the deplorable self-consciousness which marked the friends who came on Sundays, or the bumptious self-assertion of her brothers, Fred and Bert.

If only she had been born in his world, and had by right of birth those prerogatives which she meant to obtain by might of intelligence, how good it would have been to marry him – for a few years! But even now in her moment of fierce, passionate first love, which in her case was so largely made up of the physical, her brain was too level and speculative not to balance the pros and cons of such a situation. And while she felt she loved him with all her being, she knew that he was no match for her intellectually, and that when the glamour faded he would weary her.

But the wrench of present renunciation was none the less bitter – Never any more to feel his fond arms clasping her – never again to hear his caressing words of love!

If a coronet for her brow shone at the end of the climb, her heart at all events must turn to ice by the way, or so she felt at the moment.

He had talked so tenderly about their future meetings. How they would go again to Paris when he returned from Wales. How she must let him give her pretty clothes and a diamond ring, and how she was his darling pet, and his own girl. She knew that he was growing really to love her; Katherine Bush never deceived herself or attempted to throw dust in her own eyes. She had eaten her cake and could not have it. If she had held out and drawn him on, no doubt she could have been his wife, but it was only for one second that this thought agitated her. Yes, she could have been his wife – but to what end? Only one of humiliation. She was not yet ready to carry off such a position with a certainty of success; she knew she was ignorant, and that the knowledge of such ignorance would destroy her self-confidence and leave her at the mercy of circumstance. So all was for the best. She had not guessed that it would be so very painful to part from him – dear, attractive Algy! She could not sit still any longer. A convulsion of anguish and longing shook her, and she got up and stamped across the room. Then she put on her outdoor things again and stalked down into the gathering night, passionate emotion filling her soul.

But when she came back an hour later, after tramping the wet roads round the common, the battle was won.

And this night she fell asleep without any tears.

CHAPTER III

It was about a fortnight later that Katherine got Matilda to meet her at a Lyons' popular café for tea on a Wednesday afternoon. Livingstone and Devereux had given her a half holiday, being on country business bent; and having matured her plans, and having set fresh schemes in train, she thought she might as well communicate them to the one sister who mattered to her. Matilda loved an excuse to "get up to town," and had come in her best hat, with smiling face. Katherine was always very generous to her, though she was no more careless about money than she was about other things.

"It is all very well, Tild," she said, in her deep voice, after they had spoken upon indifferent subjects for a while. "But I am tired of it. I am absolutely tired of it, so there! I am tired of Liv and Dev – tired of the hateful old click of the machine with no change of work – I am tired of seeing the people of another class through the glass screen – and I mean to get out of it."

"Whatever are you talking of, Kitten!" the elder Miss Bush exclaimed, as she stirred her cocoa. "Why, Liv and Dev's as good a berth as you'd get – thirty bob a week, and a whole holiday on Saturday – to say nothing of off times like this – you must be mad, dearie!" Then something further in her sister's remark aroused comment.

"And what do you mean by people of 'another class'? Why, aren't we as good as anyone – if we had their money?"

Katherine Bush put down her empty cup before she replied:

"No, we're not – and if you weren't as ignorant as you are, dear old Tild, you'd know it. There are lots and lots of classes above us – they mayn't be any cleverer – indeed, they are often fools, and many aren't any richer – but they're ladies and gentlemen."

Matilda felt personally insulted.

"Upon my word, Kitten! – If you are such a poor thing that you don't consider yourself a young lady – I am not. I always did say that you would pick up rubbishy ideas bothering after those evening lectures and French classes – instead of coming with Glad and Bert and me to the cinema, like a decent Christian – it was a low sort of thing to do, I think, and looked as if we'd none of us had a proper education – and all they have done for you is to unsettle your mind, my dear – so I tell you."

Katherine Bush smiled complacently and looked at her sister straight in the eyes in her disconcerting way, which insured attention. Matilda knew that she would now have to listen probably to some home truths. She could manage Gladys very well in spite of her giggles and irresponsibility, but she had never been able to have the slightest influence upon Katherine from the moment of their mother's death, years before, when she had taken her place as head of the orphaned household. Katherine had always been odd. She had a vile temper as a child, and was silent and morose, and at constant war with that bright boy Bert, loved of the other sisters: Matilda remembered very well many scenes when Katherine had puzzled her. She was so often scornful and disapproving, and used to sit there with a book scowling at them on Sundays when a rowdy friend or two came in to tea, and never once joined in the chorus of the comic songs they sang, while she simply loathed the gramophone records.

"You say awfully silly things sometimes, Tild," Katherine announced calmly. "There would not be any good in my considering myself a young lady, because at my present stage anyone who really knew would know that I am not – but I mean to become one some day. You can do anything with will."

Matilda bridled.

"I don't know what more of a lady you could be than we all are – Why, Mabel Cawber always says that we are the most refined family of the whole lot at Bindon's Green – and Mabel ought to know surely!"

"Because her father was a solicitor, and she has never done a stroke of work in her life?" Katherine smiled again – it made Matilda feel uncomfortable.

"Mabel is a perfect lady," she affirmed indignantly.

"I will be able to tell you about that in a year's time, I expect," Katherine said, reflectively. "At present, I am not experienced enough to say, but I strongly feel that she is not. You see, Tild, you get your ideas of things from the trash you read – and from the ridiculous nonsense Fred and Albert talk after they come home from those meetings at the National Brotherhood Club – fool's stuff about the equality of all men –"

"Of course we are all equal!" broke in Matilda, still ruffled.

Katherine Bush smiled again. "Well, I wish you could see the difference between Fred and Bert and those gentlemen I see through the glass screen! They have all got eyes and noses and legs and arms in common, but everything else is different, and if you knew anything about evolution, you'd understand why."

"Should I!" indignantly.

"Yes. It is the something inside the head, something in the ideas, produced by hundreds of years of different environment and a wider point of view – and it is immensely in the little customs and manners of speech and action. If you had ever seen and spoken to a real gentleman, Tild, you would grasp it."

Matilda was quite unmollified and on the defensive.

"You can't have two more honourable, straightforward young fellows than our brothers in no family in England, and I expect lots of your gents borrowing money are as crooked as can be!"

Katherine became contemplative.

"Probably – the thing I mean does not lie in moral qualities – I suppose it ought to – but it doesn't – We had a real sharp last week, and to look at and to hear him talk he was a perfect gentleman, with refined and easy manners; he would never have done anything in bad taste like Fred and Bert often do."

"Bad taste!" snorted Matilda.

"Yes – we all do. No gentleman ever tells people in words that he is one – Fred and Bert say it once a week, at least. They lay the greatest stress on it. No real gentlemen get huffy and touchy; they are too sure of themselves and do not pretend anything, they are quite natural and you take them as they are. They don't do one thing at home at ease, and another when they are dressed up, and they aren't a bit ashamed of knowing anyone. Fred does not speak to Ernie Gibbs when he is out with Mabel, although they were at school together!"

"Ernie Gibbs! Why, Kitten, he is only a foreman in the Bindon Gas Works! Of course not! Mabel *would* take on!"

Matilda thought her sister was being too stupid!

"Yes, I am sure she would – that is just it –"

"And quite right, too!"

Katherine shrugged her shoulders. There was not much use in arguing with Matilda, she felt, Matilda who had never thought out any problem for herself in her life – Matilda who had not the privilege of knowing any attractive Lord Algys! – and who therefore could not have grasped the immeasurable gulf that she, Katherine, had found lay between his class and hers!

"They say Fred is a capable auctioneer because father and grandfather were – you hear people saying 'it is in the blood' – Well, why is it, Tild? – Because heredity counts just as it does in animals, of course. So why, if a man's father and grandfather, and much further back still, have been gentlemen commanding their inferiors, and fulfilling the duties of their station, should not the traits which mean that show as plainly as the auctioneer traits show in Fred –?"

Matilda had no answer ready, she felt resentful; but words did not come, so Katherine went on:

"You can't jump straight to things; they either have to come by instinct through a long line of forebears, or you have to have intelligence enough to make yourself acquire the outward signs of them, through watching and learning from those who you can see for yourself have what you want."

Matilda called for another cup of cocoa – she disliked these views of Katherine's.

"You see," that young woman went on, "no one who is a real thing ever has to tell people so in words. Liv and Dev don't have to say they are two of the sharpest business men in London – anyone can realise it who knows them. You, and all of us, don't have to tell people we belong to the lower middle class, because it is plain to be seen, but we would have to tell them we were ladies and gentlemen, because we are not. Lord Al – oh! any lord who comes to our office – does not have to say he is an aristocrat; you can see it for yourself in a minute by his ways. It is the shams that always keep shouting. Mabel Cawber insists upon it that she is a tip-top swell; Fred thinks he is deceiving everyone by telling them what a gentleman he is, and by not speaking to Ernie Gibbs, who is an awfully good fellow. Emily says she is a splendid general, and can't even light a fire, and won't learn how to. George Berker in our office says he is a first-class clerk, and muddles his accounts. Everything true speaks for itself. I always mean to be perfectly true, and win out by learning."

Matilda, though somewhat crushed, was still antagonistic.

"I'm sure I hope you'll succeed then, my dear!" she snapped.

"Yes, I shall." Katherine fired her bomb. "It may take me some time, but that does not matter, and the first step I have already taken is that I am leaving Liv and Dev's on Friday – and, I hope, going to be secretary to Sarah Lady Garribardine, at a hundred and ten Berkeley Square, and Blissington Court, Blankshire!"

"Well, there! You could have knocked me over with a feather!" as Matilda told Gladys later in the evening. "And wasn't it like Katherine never telling us a thing about it until everything was almost settled!" But at the moment, she merely breathed a strangled:

"Oh, my!"

"If I get it, I go to my new situation next week. I had a tremendous piece of luck coming across it."

"Well, however did you do it, Kitten?" Matilda demanded.

"I saw an advertisement in the *Morning Post* – it was quite a strange one, and seemed to be advertising for a kind of *Admirable Crichton* – someone who could take down shorthand at lightning speed, and typewrite and speak French – and read aloud, and who had a good knowledge of English literature, and thoroughly knew the duties of a secretary."

"Oh! My!" said Matilda again, "but you can't do half of those things, Kitten – we none of us know French, do we!"

Katherine smiled; how little her family understood her in any way!

"I wrote first and said they seemed to want a great deal, but as I had been with Livingstone and Devereux for three years, and accustomed to composing every sort of letter that a moneylender's business required, I thought I could soon become proficient in the other things."

"Well, I never! What cheek!"

"Then I got an answer saying Lady Garribardine liked my communication, and if I proved satisfactory in appearance, and had some credentials, she would engage me immediately, because her secretary, who had been with her for years, had gone to be married – the salary would be ninety pounds a year with a rise, so it's a slight move up, anyway, as I am to be kept, and live in the house."

"You are cocksure of getting it, Katherine?"

"Yes – I mean to – I am going to see her on Saturday."

"And what are your references besides Liv and Dev? Some folks don't like moneylenders."

"I wrote and said I had no others – but they would testify to my capacity. Liv nearly had a fit when I gave my notice – he almost cried to get me to stay on. I like the old boy – he is a good sort, and will tell the truth about me."

"And did they answer?"

"Yes – just to say I was to come for the interview on Saturday."

"They want to see you, anyway – what is the family, I wonder?"

Here Katherine recited the details from Debrett, in which volume she was very proficient.

"An old lady, then," Matilda commented, "and with no children except a married daughter! That will be easier for you – but why is she called 'Sarah'? I often have wondered about that, when I read names in the *Flare*. Why 'Sarah Lady Something' – and not plain Lady Something?"

"It's when the man in possession is married and you are not his mother," Katherine told her, "and if you are, and still have your Christian name tacked on, it is to make you sound younger. Dev says dowagers are quite out of fashion. Every widow is 'Sarah' or 'Cordelia' now in the high society, and when he first went to business, there were only two or three. Queen Victoria never stood any nonsense."

Matilda was very interested.

"Whatever will you do about your clothes, Kitten? You have nothing nobby and smart like Gladys. She could lend you her purple taffeta if you weren't so tall."

"Oh, I manage all right. I'll have a talk with Gladys to-night; she sees the right sort of people at Ermantine's, and can tell me what to get – and I'll buy it to-morrow in my lunch hour."

"Well, I am just rattled," Matilda admitted. "Then you'll be leaving home quite, dearie?"

"Yes, Tild – and I shan't be sorry except to be parted from you – but I daresay I shall be able to come and see you now and then."

Matilda looked tearful.

"You never were one of us, Katherine."

"No, I know I never was. I often have wondered what accident pitchforked me in among you, always the discordant note and the wet blanket. I hark back to someone, I suppose – I've always determined to get out, when I was ready."

"You never did care for us – never, Kitten."

Katherine Bush remained quite unmoved.

"No, never for the others – but always for you, Tild – and I'll never forget you, dear. There, don't be a donkey and cry – the people at the next table are looking at you."

This argument she knew would calm her sister – who was intensely sensitive to everyone's opinion.

"And supposing they don't take you?" Matilda suggested, in a still quavering voice, "and you've given notice to Liv and Dev – I call it awfully risky."

"Then I will look out for something else – I am determined to make a change, and see a new world, whatever happens."

After supper that evening, Gladys was invited up to the warmed attic with Matilda, an honour she duly appreciated. They all stood in irritated awe of Katherine.

"I want to talk about clothes, Glad," she said, when they neared the tiny fireplace. "I have told Tild I am going about a new berth on Saturday."

This caused the same astonishment and exclamations as Matilda had already indulged in – and when calm was restored, Gladys was only too pleased to show her superior knowledge.

"I don't want to hear about any of those actresses you dress, or those ladies who look like them, I want to know what a real, quiet, well-bred countess, say, would have, Glad."

Miss Gladys Bush smiled contemptuously.

"Oh, a regular frump, you mean – like the ones we can't persuade to have tight skirts when they are first the fashion, or loose ones when it changes – that is easy enough – it is to get 'the look' that is difficult."

"They probably would not engage me if I had 'the look,'" Katherine remarked cynically.

"You'd better have something like we made for Lady Beatrice Strobridge last week, then," Gladys suggested. "One of our hands can copy it at home, but there won't be time by Saturday. You'd better wear your best blue serge and get a new hat for the first meeting."

"Lady Beatrice Strobridge must be the Hon. Gerard Strobridge's wife, my new employer's late husband's nephew. Strobridge is the Garribardine name." Katherine had looked up diligently the whole family, and knew the details of each unit by heart.

"She only got married two years ago," Gladys continued. "She was Thorvil, before – Lady Beatrice Thorvil."

"Wife of the present man's younger brother," quoted Katherine, remembering Debrett. "He is about thirty-five; the present man is forty."

"She is a regular dowdy, anyway," Gladys remarked. "One of those – we have a bunch of them – that wants the things, and yet with their own touch on them, spoiling the style. They come together generally, and do make a lot of fuss over each other – calling 'darlings' and 'precious' all the time – fit to make me and the girls die laughing with their nonsense."

"What is she like – good-looking?" Katherine asked. She only questioned when she wanted specific information, never idly, and it was as well to know everything about her possible new employer's family.

"She would not be bad if she did not stoop so. She hasn't got 'the walk' neither, no more than the 'look'; sometimes she's all right – at least, the things are all right when they go home, but she adds bits herself afterwards, and spoils them."

Here Matilda interrupted.

"Anyway, she is one of the ladies you'll see in your new place, Kitten. I'd certainly have that same dress, it will just show them you are as good as they, if you have an Ermantine model."

But Katherine thought differently. She agreed she would have something in the same subdued style as Lady Beatrice would have chosen, but not the actual copy, and after settling details the other two sisters left her for bed.

When they had gone, she sat by the fire and looked deeply into it, while she thought for a few moments. Then she drew a letter from her blouse and reread it. It was from Lord Algy. A sweet little love epistle. Just to tell her he could not possibly wait for the whole month before seeing her – and was coming up to town the following week – and would not she lunch with him at the old place – and perhaps stay with him again at the Great Terminus? It ended with protestations of passionate devotion.

No – never again – she had tasted of the cup of bliss, and Fate was asking her to pay no price. She must have courage now to renounce all further pleasure. Once was an experience, twice would be weakness – which could grow into a habit – and thence lead to an abyss which she shuddered to think of.

Katherine Bush had never read Théophile Gautier's masterpiece – but there was something in her character, as Lord Algy had remarked, which resembled *Mademoiselle de Maupin's*.

She went to her little writing-case and got out a sheet of paper, and then, in her firm round hand which looked like a man's, she wrote him these few lines:

Dear Algy,

I want you to forget all about me – I loved our little trip, but I am never going on another. I shall have left Liv and Dev's before you get back, and you won't see me again. With best love always.

K. B.

She folded it, put it in the envelope – addressed it and stamped it – then she put it ready to post in the morning.

Her face was white and set. It takes a strong will to renounce tangible present happiness, however profound the beliefs in the future may be.

CHAPTER IV

Sarah Lady Garribardine said to her nephew, Gerard Strobridge, who had been lunching with her on that Saturday:

"You must go now, G. I am expecting a new secretary."

"How will you get on without Miss Arnott, Seraphim? I thought she was irreplaceable."

"So she is – I am interviewing quite a new type – she has been a moneylender's shorthand typist."

Mr. Strobridge raised his eyebrows – and smiled his whimsical smile. His Aunt Sarah always was original.

"Then I'll leave you – Beatrice has at last made up her mind not to chuck the Arberrys, so we motor down at three o'clock."

"Has Beatrice been unusually tiresome?"

"N-no – she has been writing odes all the morning."

"You ought never to have married, G. – You would not have if Alice Southerwood had not become a widow – a man can't always face his obvious obligations."

Gerard Strobridge laughed.

"Then I shall kiss your hand and say farewell until next week – wisest of aunts!"

He suited the action to the word, and left the room just as the butler was about to open the door and announce:

"Miss Bush, Your Ladyship."

He glanced quickly at Katherine – this was the young person who would take the estimable Miss Arnott's place, he supposed. She was quite ordinary looking. – He went on down the stairs.

"Come and sit here in the light, please," Lady Garribardine said, as Katherine Bush came towards her.

It was a very well-arranged Katherine, in the best blue serge – and a new hat – not of Gladys' choosing. The mop of hair was twisted tight without the least pretension to express "the look," – some grey suede gloves – bought in Paris by Lord Algy – were on the wonderful hands which remained perfectly still in their owner's lap.

"How old are you?" asked Lady Garribardine by way of a beginning.

"I was twenty-two last September." There was not a trace of nervousness in Katherine Bush's deep voice – indeed she felt none.

"And what does your family consist of – what is your status in life?" Lady Garribardine felt perhaps she ought to ascertain this before going further.

"We are just middle class. My father was an auctioneer at Bindon's Green where we live. He and my mother are both dead. I have a sister who is a saleswoman at Madame Ermantine's, the others are at home. My eldest brother has taken father's place, the younger one is in a bank."

"And how long have you been at this business?"

"Since I was nineteen – before that I kept the accounts at a pork butcher's."

"Indeed! – And what makes you think you would be capable of filling my situation?"

"It is not very easy to be a competent moneylender's secretary and a shorthand writer."

"No – perhaps not."

"Mr. Livingston and Mr. Devereux will tell you that I did not make a failure of it."

"Really?"

Katherine was silent.

"*Really*," Lady Garribardine repeated again. "You mean that you think you can pick up things quickly."

"Yes."

"It is certainly an advantage. I hoped to find something exceptional when I advertised."

"Yes, I noticed that – and it was because your advertisement was unusual that I applied for the post."

She rather wondered if she ought to have put in any "Ladyships"; she remembered Hanson, Lord Algy's valet, was very prodigal of such marks of respect – that is what had deterred her. Liv and Dev often used them, too – to new and prosperously connected clients – but she did not wish to be subservient more than was necessary. She would watch and listen – as she had watched about the oysters.

"Can you read aloud?"

Lady Garribardine was fixing her with her flashing brown eyes, which contrasted so unfavourably with the bronze-gold wig she wore so bravely.

"I have never tried. If I did it wrong the first time and you corrected me, I expect I wouldn't do it twice."

"That is something – and your voice is refined – you did not acquire that at the – er – pork butcher's?"

"No, I acquired it by listening to members of the upper classes who came to borrow money – I had a cockney twang like my sisters, I daresay, in the beginning."

"That shows you can learn things."

"Yes, it is only stupid people who can't."

"You are not stupid, then?"

"No, but Mr. Livingston or Mr. Devereux can tell you; either will speak for me."

Lady Garribardine was amused; she digressed a little from her cross-examination.

"You found Jews agreeable to work with?"

"Very. You know where you are with them. They do not pretend, and they are very generous."

"In-deed!"

"Yes – people have a preconceived notion of Jews, I find – quite faulty as a rule – they know what to pay for – they are far less fools than other races. I respect them."

"That is most interesting."

Katherine was silent again.

"Why did you leave them?" – after a pause in which Lady Garribardine was pitilessly scrutinising her possible secretary.

"Because I had learned all that I could there, and I wanted a new vista – "

"And you think you would find it with me?"

"With any lady in your world – you can learn things wherever you go, if you wish to."

"Very true. And how about French – you speak that?"

Katherine Bush reddened a little. A memory came to her of the profound shock that the French of Paris had been to her ear.

"I can write it quite correctly – but I have discovered that my pronunciation is ridiculous." She confessed it quite frankly.

"How did that happen?"

"I taught it to myself – mostly – and then I heard it spoken – and I knew mine would sound wrong."

"Do you think you could overcome that?"

"Yes, if I were in France long enough."

"Have you travelled?"

"No – not really. I have been to Paris for a holiday once – I have only learnt about places."

"And English literature?"

"It is the thing I care most for – I have read a great many books. I read usually until about one in the morning."

"Have you a good temper? You are not uppish, eh?"

"I suppose it depends – I know that when you take money to do a thing you have got to do it, and put up with orders and manners that you would not stand for one second if you were the person paying."

"That is quite a good definition of respectful service."

"It is common sense."

"You appear to have some of that."

Again silence.

"I have not a good temper!" Lady Garribardine laughed – she was greatly diverted.

"I guessed not."

"How?"

"I had to read characters quickly at Livingston and Devereux's – "

"You are observant?"

"I think so – "

"Can you play the piano?"

"I could once, and I had a queer gift for reading the notes – but I have never practised since we had a gramophone – I grew to loathe music."

"That is hopeful – "

Then Her Ladyship got up and went to her writing-table, terribly littered with all sorts of papers. She dived among a conglomerate mass – and picked up two letters.

"Would you oblige me by answering these, Miss – er – Bush? I could then better judge of your capabilities."

Katherine took them; on one envelope was written in a spidery hand in pencil, "Refuse gracefully;" upon the other, "Get out as best can."

She looked for a portion of the blotting pad which was clear enough to use, then she sat down and selected a pen, while she glanced up with her steady wise eyes.

"Has Your Ladyship any particular paper for this sort of thing?" Here was a suitable moment for the use of the honorific she felt.

"Yes, that white paper with the coronet in plain black and the address."

Lady Garribardine sat down by the fire and stared into it. She had not been so interested in a specimen of humanity for years.

Katherine Bush read the letters through carefully and the first one a second time, then she began to write:

To the Secretary of the League for Discouraging Polygamy among the Mohammedans of India:

Dear Sir,

I am asked by Sarah Lady Garribardine, to tell you that while sympathising deeply with the admirable object of your League, she thinks the field over which it must obviously be spread is too vast for a small contribution to be of much avail, and therefore, while thanking you for your interesting papers upon the subject, she is sorry that she is unable to forward you any more substantial help.

I am, dear sir,

Yours faithfully,

Katherine Bush (Secretary).

The other letter ran:

To the Matron of the Nonconformist Detention and Penitential Hostel for Lost Women:

Madam,

I beg to inform you that Sarah Lady Garribardine is leaving town shortly and therefore cannot avail herself of the pleasure and honour of visiting your useful institution. She desires me to express to you her thanks for your invitation.

I remain, madame,

Yours faithfully,

K. Bush (Sec.).

She looked carefully to see what style of address was necessary and wrote out the envelope – and when all was ready she rose and took them to the young-old lady by the fire.

She stood quite still while they were perused, and then smiled inwardly when Lady Garribardine gave a cynical chuckle.

"I think you will do very well, Miss Bush! Please find some stamps, and put them in that basket to be posted – and – er – you can ring the bell – I shall expect you – bag and baggage – on Wednesday next."

This was abrupt, but Katherine Bush felt it was what it should be.

"You do not require the testimony of Mr. Livingston or Mr. Devereux?"

"No – I can judge for myself – er – Good morning."

The bell had been answered almost instantly and so, bowing, Katherine Bush followed the servant down the stairs, and soon found herself in the street, a strange sense of content in her heart.

She knew the West End very well – and walked briskly along Hill Street and so on past Dorchester House – into the Park. All the leaves were off the trees. The November day was beautifully fine and bright and movement was a pleasure.

So the first part of her new game was won at all events.

She reviewed the whole set of impressions she had taken. Firstly, that the house was a fine one – it had "the look," if houses could be said to show this quality. That is, it was beautifully kept and filled with what she guessed from study at the Wallace Collection must be rare and costly furniture. There were some things she thought ugly – but "the look" was often ugly, she knew by experience – from Gladys' verbose descriptions to Ethel and Matilda.

Apart from "the look" it had an air of distinction. It was the abode of denizens of Lord Algy's world – that was evident. The man she had met on the threshold of the morning room door was certainly of his class – and rather nice-looking.

As for her future employer, she was a new specimen to her. Katherine meant what the French call a *type*, but she did not know this expression.

"She is certainly over sixty," she said to herself. "She is a dark woman naturally, and her hair ought to be grey. The whole thing is spoilt by that silly golden wig – curled tight like Royalty's. She would have quite a nice figure for her age if she were not all pushed up by those old-fashioned corsets. Why had she such big ears and such red hands for so great a lady? Her rings were buried in fat. The circulation was evidently wrong somewhere. As for her voice – it was one of *the* voices! The female counterpart of the echoes from over the glass screen – and the manner was quite as casual.

"Just as insolent as I shall be when I hold the same sort of place. She was born to it – I shall have acquired it – we both when we are dead will be said to have well filled our situations."

Thus mused Katherine Bush on a November day in Hyde Park – and turning out of Albert Gate suddenly she almost walked into the arms of Lord Algy.

CHAPTER V

"Darling pet! What a delightful surprise!"

"Algy! Where did you spring from?"

Then they both drew quick breaths.

"Come back towards the Serpentine, I must talk to you. Your horrid little note made me feel quite wretched, and I have been to Liv and Dev's to-day, and they refused to give me your address – why were you such a little cat, darling?"

"I was not a cat, Algy."

They had turned and were walking towards the Row.

"I meant what I wrote – I want you to forget all about me. Joys can't go on – I have other things to do, dear."

"But it is perfectly brutal of you, Katherine, when I love you so – and you love me – at least you told me that you did!"

Katherine Bush's heart was beating very fast – would she have courage to keep to her determination now that she saw him face to face?

He looked so extremely delectable, here in the lowering sunshine. He was everything that a woman could desire in the way of a lover.

"I am in the hell of a mess, too," he sighed. "My father has cut up awfully rough about my transactions with Liv and Dev – and I had a bad week at Doncaster. I am in for a regular facer and am obliged to agree to be transferred to the Egyptian army for three years. Everything, even you, are against me."

"No, I am not, Algy." There was quick sympathy and distress in her deep voice. "I hate to think that you are unhappy, and you know that I would help you in any way I could."

"Then be kind to me, darling – and don't say you never want to see me again."

Katherine Bush felt this was a supreme occasion – and that she must not waver. She so longed to comfort him, to let him kiss her and forget all his cares. The cynical side of her character, even at this moving moment, whispered that it was fortunate that they were out of doors!

"When do you start for Egypt?"

"As soon as I can get ready – my mother and sisters are going to winter out there, but probably I shall be sent to the Soudan!"

Katherine had heard that they killed lions or something in that part of the world, she knew that sport meant a great deal in Lord Algy's life.

"You will get some kind of shooting, won't you?" she suggested by way of consolation.

But Lord Algy looked full of misery. They had walked on, taking a side path and were now in sight of two chairs.

"Let us go and sit down," he pleaded. "I want to look at you. I can't, I won't believe, that you don't mean ever to be my own girl any more."

"Algy, I do mean it – just as much for you as for myself."

They had reached the chairs and sat down, Lord Algy pushed his hat to the back of his head; his immaculately brushed hair glistened bronze in the setting sun, and his forehead was puckered with distress. His attractive eyes sought hers with a fond persistence. Katherine Bush was obliged to clench her hands tight in the pockets of her coat.

"Why, what in Heaven's name for? Why must we part?" he demanded fiercely. "Katherine, I have missed you awfully – I have not known what to do with myself – and before this bother fell upon me, I had determined to come up to ask you to marry me – we'd be awfully happy married, darling – like we were in Paris. I have never loved anything half so much as our time together."

"It is dear of you to say that, but I would not marry you for anything in the world, it would spoil everything, destroy a memory that has not got any flaw in it. – Listen to me, Algy – I went with you because I wanted to – I wanted to understand life, and find out what is worth while, and what men are like. I am only at the beginning of existence and I intend to learn most of its meaning before I die. I thought that whatever cold, tiresome path I might have to follow afterwards, to carry out my scheme of things, I would at least have some good hours to remember with you, so I went deliberately – but I never meant to do it again. Let's both be grateful for what we have had and part friends."

"I simply can't," protested Lord Algy, growing more and more full of emotion, as he felt the attainment of his desires receding from him. "I call it awfully cold-blooded of you, Katherine, and I can't and won't consent to it. I want you – I want you now – to-night," and he stretched out his arms. "I am sick with longing for you – I mean it, darling. I have been away with other girls often before, Jack Kilcourcy and I stayed down the river with Laure de Laine and Mary Green this June. Laure was my friend, and she simply wasn't a patch on you, pet, in any way, and I didn't care a straw when it was over, although they are such celebrities, and it did make Berty Aberhams so mad, and was such a score off the bounder. I have never felt anything like I feel for you, darling – I want you to be my wife."

As he spoke, something withered a little in Katherine Bush; his unconscious placing of the affair galled her, although she knew that it was perfectly just; she had gone with him under no other pretence than had gone those ladies of the Frivolity Theatre. She analysed his simple directness, and appreciated the triumph conveyed to her in the final expression of his feelings, but it made her task rather easier. She saw so plainly what a renewal of their relations would mean. She looked and looked at him, seated dejectedly there beside her, and then she spoke, and her voice was full of quiet determination and very deep.

"You must be a man, Algy, dear, and go on and make something of your life, as I mean to do. You must be a great soldier. You come of such a grand old family, you ought to remember what all your ancestors have done, and try to be as fine as they were – It's so paltry to drift – You can remember me if you want to – as someone who wasn't weak, even though I am only a common girl, and much beneath you in class. If I was of your class I should now be tempted to marry you, and then I expect with my sort of nature I'd just shove you on into doing something great. But I couldn't as it is, all my time would be taken up with trying to educate myself to keep my own head above water, and trying to suppress my humiliation at the contempt of your friends. You are only a younger son, and they would never forgive you, and we would just lead a hole and corner sort of existence in wretched poverty, and grow to have quarrels and not love at all."

He was going to interrupt her but she put her grey gloved hand across his lips. "No, dear, don't say anything – I want to go away from you with the memory that you have asked me to be your wife – I cannot be that for both our sakes, and it would cut me to the heart to hear you say words, now that you know this, which would mean that you want me, failing that, to go on with the other relation." – She paused, for a second, and leaning forward, looked straight into his face – "Algy, I want to remember you as a really perfect gentleman."

She had gained her point with this last appeal. She saw that in an instant; he straightened himself and raised his handsome head, while the pride of race looked forth from his eyes for a moment, and then was quenched by the mist of tears.

"You are a splendid girl, Katherine," he said in a choking voice, "a far greater lady than the rotters I have to dance with at balls and see as my sisters' friends. You – by Jove! you have taught me to respect women. I should be honoured if you would marry me, and my family ought to be jolly glad to get such a good sort among them!"

"Thank you, Algy!" her voice now trembled, too. "Then you understand, dear, and I want you to do just as well as you can in Egypt – and, and – Algy, do try not to spend so much money, and when they have paid up for you, don't go and get back into any moneylender's hands. They are not all so honest as Liv and Dev. And now I want to say good-bye! I don't want to be silly and – cry –"

"Oh! it's too cruel!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands. "Katherine, you are like – only I think you mean to be kinder than she was —*Mademoiselle de Maupin*!"

She stiffened, and her eyes, which were growing very misty, became hard and bright. She thought he was referring to another lady of the half-world – of Paris, perhaps, this time. He saw that she had misunderstood him, and he added quickly:

"Darling, she is in a book – by a fellow called Théophile Gautier – she was a wonder and so are you – I've always thought you were like her, but – Oh! why do we talk such bosh about books in our few moments, I want to tell you that I love you. Oh! Katherine, if you knew how much!"

The hardness all melted from the young woman's grey-green eyes and was replaced by a divine sweetness.

"Algy," she whispered, "it is good to hear that, and you know that I love you, too, and now good-bye, my dear – I can't bear any more."

She rose quickly and drew her hand away. She passionately longed for him to take her in his arms.

He got up also, he was extremely pale, and more than a suspicion of mist hung upon his eyelashes. As a young, splendid lover, he could not have looked more desirable, but Katherine Bush never lost her head.

"Good-bye, Algy, and God bless you, dear."

Two people were approaching or he certainly would have kissed her – as it was they only wrung each other's hands and Katherine Bush turned and walked into the gathering twilight.

He watched her until she had disappeared and then sat down again. He felt quite wretched. She seemed to him to be a wonderful character.

"What an impotent wretch I am beside her," he said to himself. "But I should never be able to make the family see it. My mother would rather I married Elaine Percival with her five thousand a year – " then he laughed contemptuously – "Elaine Percival!"

For the first time in his life he began to reason about things. Katherine Bush was of course perfectly right. Marriage would have been madness, as he had always known before he became too much in love to think; and he knew he had been lately only entirely influenced by selfish desire, and had never so much as faced what the consequences would be either to himself or to her. He had been quite ready to make a hash of both their lives just because he wanted her so badly for the moment. What an incredible fool – and she, this fine girl, had pulled them both on to firm land. He was not of the type who could contemplate asking a woman to wait for him while he worked to obtain a home for her; such an idea, of course, never entered his head. He had no romantic illusions of this sort, and once having realised the hopelessness of the case he had stoicism enough to accept it. But the things she had said affected him deeply. He would try not to drift. – He would pull himself together and do his best to become a fine soldier. They should not say he had grumbled over going to Egypt. Oh! if there could only be a war, that he might go out and fight! But wars would never happen again at this time of the world's day!

The present pleasant, easy stage of his life had come to an end, and unpleasant realities must be dealt with, but he would keep ever the memory of this splendid girl in his heart, the memory that she had not been weak or permitted him to make a fool of himself or of her.

And as he walked on out of the Park he felt a new self-reliance and determination.

Meanwhile, Katherine Bush had got into an omnibus and was on the way to Victoria, and once arrived at Laburnum Villa and her attic, she carefully wrote down on the little book which she kept for jottings, "*Mademoiselle de Maupin*, in a book by Théophile Gautier," while her thoughts ran:

"He did not say what was the name of the story, but I can read the whole lot this man wrote. I'll go to a French library on Monday."

Then she sat down in her armchair by the fire and reviewed the entire chain of events.

She was embarked upon a new current which would help to carry her to some definite goal – she was out of the backwater. It was not a voyage to Cythera, but youth was at the prow, and ambition, not pleasure, at the helm; and there live philosophers who say these two things bring more lasting good than all the bliss that is to be snatched from the other combination. – Who knows! – They may be right!

Matilda was nervous with excitement when after supper she was told of the definite settlement of her sister's affairs.

"So you are really engaged, Kitten!" she exclaimed. "Now, do tell me all about it. There's a dear – and what was she like, and is it a grand house and are you going to be properly treated as a real lady?"

"Yes, I am engaged. I am to go in on Wednesday, 'bag and baggage,' as Lady Garribardine said."

"My! what a vulgar expression for a lady to use, Kitten – are you sure she's all right?"

Matilda hated what was not genteel.

"Oh! yes, Tild – she's all right – and the house is beautiful – and, yes, what you'd call grand – and you may be sure they will treat me exactly in the way I deserve to be treated. If you aren't respected it's your own fault – people don't make a mistake as to whom they are with a second time, even if they do the first. If anyone gets put upon continually, or gets snubbed, it's her own fault."

Matilda totally disagreed.

"There you are quite wrong. Why, look at Gladys! Bob treats her anyhow sometimes of a Sunday, and her as good as gold."

"Well, she has made him think that he can by not stopping it in the beginning. It is never a question of goodness as I often tell you about things, it is a question of force. Goodness does not count unless it is so perfect that it is a force, too – like Christ's."

"Oh, my! What awful things you do say, Katherine!"

Matilda felt so uncomfortable when her sister spoke of what she thought ought only to be mentioned in church!

"No, I merely tell the truth, it is the weaklings who do all the harm in the world, never the bad or good."

"Well, what was Lady Garribardine like?" Matilda was tired of abstract speculations.

"She was tall and rather stout, and had a golden wig – and black eyes – and she understood things. She knows how to order her house, because the servants had the same awe for her as the office-boy has for Liv. Her writing-table was awfully untidy, though. I expect she has not much method, and it is just personality and temper which causes her to be obeyed."

"You won't stand being ordered about ever, Kitten?"

"It will depend on how much good I feel I am getting out of it. If the place and people in it are being lessons for me, I shan't mind what she says – I shall stick it out and try never really to deserve a scolding."

"Was there anyone else there?" Matilda was still curious.

"Yes – a man left when I was going in. He had a clever face. I shall like him, I believe, if he comes there often."

"You won't go falling in love with any of them gentlemen, Kitten," Matilda pleaded affectionately.

She felt that things might develop as they did in the cases of the innocent actresses and governesses and the villains in her serials.

"Have I ever been given to falling in love?" Katherine asked with a humorous flash in her eyes. – "You have not seen me tumble into the arms of Charlie Prodgers or Percy Watson – have you?"

"No, dearie, but these gentlemen in your new biz might be different and might not mean so honest by you. I do wish I could hope to see you settled with Charlie some day. He is such a dear fellow, and very rising. He'll be head clerk at the estate agent's he is in very soon, and could give you a comfortable home like this is for your own; and no need to be hanging on for years like Glad and Bob."

"Can you picture me settled in a comfortable home with Charlie Prodgers, Tild!" Katherine laughed out at the idea, it seemed so comic to her. "He is as great a snob as Fred, and even more ignorant. I would not let him button my boots, much less call himself my husband! I'd as soon be dead as tied to that! At Brixton, too! With the prospect of being the mother of numbers of sandy-haired little Prodgers. What an outlook!"

Matilda was hurt. They had never spoken in words upon this secret hope of hers, but she had often hinted at it, and Katherine had been silent and seemingly preoccupied, but not actually scornful, and to have the scheme denounced with derision and the happy picture scoffed at was a blow to her which she could not bear in silence. She felt indignant.

"Charlie Prodgers is good enough for any young lady. Mabel herself thinks highly of him. He is one of the few of Fred's gentlemen friends that she thinks worthy to be asked into her mother's house – and I would have liked to have seen you married into her set safely before she becomes our sister-in-law, and can patronise you."

"Then I am afraid I must disappoint you, dear," Katherine now tried to hide her smile. "I have quite another game to play in life. But why don't you keep him for Ethel – she is nearly sixteen and will soon be looking out for a young man – or take him yourself?"

This was a new idea for Matilda. She had always been too loyal to dream of turning her eye in the direction of one whom she regarded as exclusively her sister's property.

She bridled a little – the picture was so glorious – if it only could be hers! Charlie Prodgers who scorned to be seen in anything but a frock coat, unless, of course, he went golfing – Charlie Prodgers who each Sunday attended the church parade in Hyde Park as a matter of course! But would he ever look at her? Proud, haughty fellow! and she not so pretty as Katherine – and not half so nobby as Gladys. But stranger things than that happened in her serials, and she need not feel that it was quite hopeless. But how could Kitten willingly relinquish such triumph? There must be something of a suffragette in her after all, since no girl in her senses could ask more of fortune!

The Sunday was spent by Katherine in packing up all her belongings and in selecting the books she meant to take with her, a volume or two of Voltaire, Bacon's Essays, Kant and Bergson, and a new acquisition, Otto Weininger's "Sex and Character." This latter had interested her deeply. There was a great deal of biting truth in his analysis of women, and it was probably also true that they did not possess souls; but she totally disagreed with his ending of the matter that the solution of the problem lay in a voluntary annihilation of the human species through abstinence from procreation. She, for her part, thought that it was taking things out of the Hand of God, or the Divine Essence, or whatever the great Principle should be called – and her eminently practical mind failed to see the use of such far-reaching speculations. "The poor man was mad, of course," she said, as she closed the book again before packing it. "But I will try to watch the feminine traits in myself and crush them. He has taught me that amount, in any case. And if I have no soul, I have a brain and a will, and so I am going to obtain as much as a woman can get with those two things. As for the infinite, men are welcome to that, as far as I am concerned!"

She looked forward with deep interest to perusing the story with *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in it. What could it be about? She had hardly thought that Lord Algy had read at all, he never spoke of books – but it was perhaps not surprising; they had been always too occupied in more agreeable converse. How good it was to remember all that, even though never in her life she should have such foolish sweetness again!

She had not the slightest sentiment about "leaving home"; she would have found such a thing quite ridiculous. On the contrary, a sense of exaltation filled her. She was going forever from this cramped, small attic and the uncongenial environment of the house. And she must hold herself in stern command and never waste an opportunity to improve herself in manner and mind. Of course, she might be liable to make a few mistakes at first, and the work might be hard, but if will was strong and emotions were checked, the road to success and development of her personality could not be a

long one. And when she had gained freedom – how splendidly would she use it! There should be no false values for her!

Her new dress, the one in the style of Lady Beatrice Strobridge, would be home by the Tuesday night, and she had got a "dressy" blouse from Oxford Street, in case she should ever have to appear in the evenings. She would do very well, she felt.

The family, with the exception of Matilda, were not sorry that she was departing. The father had left Laburnum Villa and a certain sum to keep it up for the benefit of the whole bunch of them; and when Mr. Frederick Bush would move into a house of his own with the refined Mabel Cawber, Gladys and Bert and Ethel looked forward to an uninterrupted time of jollity, unclouded by Katherine's aloofness and contempt.

Matilda alone grieved in secret. She thought Katherine was superior to them all in spite of her reserve, and the last evening, while she sat with her by the attic fire, she told her so.

"No, I am not, Tild – I am not superior. I am just different – all our aims are as wide apart as the poles. Glad and Ethel and the boys never want to learn anything – they resent the thought that there could be anything that they do not know. Their whole attitude is resentful towards any knowledge. They like to browse on deceiving themselves over every question and aspect of life. So they will all just stay where they are. Fred, an auctioneer, henpecked by Mabel; Bert, a clerk. Poor Glad, the downtrodden drudge of Bob Hartley, and Ethel probably something of the same. You, dear old Tild, will be a sentimental old maid looking after the others' children – because you are entirely a 'mother woman' – unless you take Charlie Prodgers, as I said the other day, and have heaps of little Prodgers! Oh! it is all just respectable, comfortable squalor – and words won't express how glad I am to get out of it!"

Matilda was quite incensed.

"I'd rather be a lady, however poor, in my own circle, and treated as such there, than a servant in a grand house as you're going to be, Kitten. I'd let them see I'd be above taking their orders!"

She hoped this taunt would tell, but Katherine only smiled.

"Poor, dear old Tild," she said. "You do not know, perhaps, that it is a wise man who understands how to obey those placed over him, and to exact the same obedience from those beneath. When I have learned my lessons and have obtained a place of command, then I shall not only enforce obedience, but I shall remove from my path anyone who crosses my will."

"Oh, my!" gasped Matilda.

"Do you suppose I argued with Liv and Dev and showed them that I would not take their orders? No, of course not; they valued me and raised my salary because I did what I was told to do. They were paying me money and were in a position to command. No one forced me to take their money; I went there of my own free will, and was to do specified things for a specified remuneration. I did them to the best of my ability, and so I am going on to something better. Lady Garribardine is paying me ninety pounds a year with a rise; and I am to be hers to command for certain things. When I have learned all that that situation can teach me, I shall get a larger and higher position, and so on until I reach my goal, when I shall rule – do not fear, Tild. *I shall rule.*"

"I daresay you will," Matilda admitted, awed.

Katherine's face had a strange, compelling force when she spoke thus.

"But we aren't all the same, Kitten. Glad, for instance, has more pride; look how she left Brown and Melbury's, where she was getting more than at Ermantine's, because she would not take orders from the new manager they put over her department."

"That sort of pride was entirely worthy of Gladys' intelligence, and it had landed her with a less salary, no one's added respect, and not much to look forward to in the future." And then, with a burst of feeling, "Oh! Tild, if I only could make laws, I would enforce education to such an extent that there could not be left any fools like Gladys!"

Then she said good-night to Matilda and gently pushed her from the room, where she looked as though she meant to stay for another half-hour, and returning to her armchair, she began to read that book of Théophile Gautier's which she had bought on the Monday morning, and discovered that its title was simply "Mademoiselle de Maupin."

CHAPTER VI

Lady Garribardine was having a tea-party with some good music, when Katherine Bush arrived. She realised immediately that it was stupid of her to have chosen the afternoon for her entrance into her new post, and Bronson, the dignified butler, left her in no doubt as to his view of the matter, as he directed the hurried transport of her luggage through the hall.

"Her Ladyship expected you this morning, miss," he said, severely.

"Then she should have told me at what hour I was to come," Katherine answered, quietly; "she mentioned none."

Bronson stared. Miss Arnott, clergyman's daughter though she was, would never have said a thing like that; she would have been nervous and apologetic in a minute, poor thing! But this young woman, whom Bronson had very good reason to believe, from what he had been able to gather, belonged merely to the lower middle class, had yet the audacity to give herself all the airs and calm assurance appertaining to a lady of the world!

Here the entrance of two guests took up his attention, a man and a woman.

Katherine stood back and waited for directions, while she watched closely. The man was the same that she had seen on the former occasion. The woman interested her; she was tall and droopy, with wide vague eyes, and a wisp of buffish chiffon about her neck inside her furs, which Bronson assisted her to remove. Then Katherine saw that she wore the dress which Gladys had described, and which in its general features had been taken more or less as the model for her own.

This must be Lady Beatrice Strobridge.

"Gerard," the lady said, rather querulously, "I don't mean to stay for more than ten minutes – so don't get away into some difficult corner with Lăo, if you mean to leave with me."

The man answered with polite indifference.

"Bronson will see you safely to the motor; I promised my aunt to stay to hear Venzoni; he is sure to be late."

Then they went on up the marble stairs and a young footman was sent with Katherine Bush in the lift at the back of the hall.

"'Gerard' – it is a nice name – and he looks a nice man," she mused, while they were carried aloft, "and he is bored with his wife. Gladys was quite right; why did she have that rag of chiffon? It spoils the whole dress."

The housekeeper met her when they arrived in the top passage, and took her under her wing.

"Some tea will be sent to your room, miss," she informed her, "and Her Ladyship said she would not have time to see you this evening, but you would doubtless have things to unpack and arrangements to make for yourself. Your trunks will be up in a minute."

And then she opened the door into a back room which faced west, so the afterglow of the setting sun made it not quite dark. There was a fire burning, and it all appeared gay when the housekeeper turned on the lights, with its old-fashioned rose-flowered chintz on a bright parrot-green ground. There was a scent of lavender, too, and Katherine Bush was pleasantly impressed; nothing looked cheap and gimcrack like the bedrooms in Laburnum Villa, she thought, or still more those at the house of Mabel Cawber, which were the envy of Matilda's soul. The furniture here was solid mahogany of early Victorian make, and the armchair gave the impression that it would be a pleasant place to rest in.

When she was alone, Katherine Bush made herself take in every detail. Lady Garribardine had suggested that she was observant; she must remember that and always cultivate this faculty, for she realised that every trifling thing would be different from anything she had ever known.

She liked the space of the place, she would not feel that she was tumbling over things. There was an empty bookcase awaiting her books, no doubt, and a big sensible writing-table there in the window where there would be plenty of light. The wardrobe was a monster, ample room in it for any

amount of clothes! How pleasant not to have to put most things away in cardboard boxes under one's bed – often to find them discoloured by dust when taking them out again! And how pretty and quaint was the china on the washstand, matching the chintz. And the towels! Of finer quality – and nearly as many as there had been at the Palatial in Paris, which she had supposed was a case of French hotel extravagance and not what would be the custom in private life.

She fingered them softly. They were arranged peculiarly, too, with the top fold turned back so that one could pick them up in a second. Katherine Bush smiled cynically when she remembered her two coarse huckabacks, changed only every Saturday at Laburnum Villa!

Everything gave the impression of spotless cleanliness and order. The brass hot-water can and the fender and the fire-irons all shone with superlative polishing.

Presently her tea was brought up by a housemaid in neatest black, with a cap and apron which would have made Em'ly snort with indignation had she been asked to wear them, so unmodish was their style! It was a joy to have a perfectly arranged tea-tray with shining silver and pretty porcelain, a tray all to herself, too, instead of a breakfast cup already poured out and mixed with milk and sugar, and probably a little of the contents upset into the saucer, which also contained a thick slice of bread and butter and a piece of cake! This is what she had always been accustomed to at the office, or on Saturday afternoons at home, while she read her books and a sister brought her tea up to her attic. And with the exceptions of a Lyons or an A. B. C. restaurant, and the brief time of glory in Paris, when chocolate was the order of the day, this one unappetizing cup had represented to her what many women look forward to as the most delightful meal of all.

The housemaid's manner had been quiet and respectful, as she drew the curtains and shut out the dying light, the muffin was done to a turn, and, above all, the tea tasted as tea had never tasted before. She was too ignorant as yet to know that it was China, not the rankest Ceylon which she was accustomed to, but she found it particularly nice, though rather weak. The whole room and the service and the atmosphere spoke of inhabitants who, somehow she knew, belonged to the same class as those whose voices she had always admired from beyond the half-high glass screen.

She sat and dreamed for a while before beginning her unpacking. Her heart ached underneath for Lord Algy – but aches are possible to bear when there is an element of triumph and self-glorification about them. She was quite aware that she had behaved remarkably well, and in a manner which Lord Algy could never look back upon but with respect. And to renounce happiness and union when the other person is clamouring for a continuance of relations, brings a great measure of consolation, because there is no wound to the self-love, no disastrous feeling that but for personal stupidity the ache need not be. There is even a melancholy pleasure in it, giving a pensive sadness not all pain.

After a while, she began to arrange her clothes and books, and it had struck seven o'clock before all was complete and she had sat down again to finish "Mademoiselle de Maupin," which had so thrilled her far into the night.

She read French quite easily, but she was not accustomed to judge of its style, and as yet hardly appreciated *nuances*, but the story, the cynical, enchanting, wonderful story, seized hold of her imagination. As she read the last words, the book dropped into her lap and she stared in front of her. She saw what Lord Algy had meant – and it flattered her greatly. She understood entirely *Thédore's* feelings. How wise she had been to go! How she had grasped the salient points of life! And she, Katherine Bush, no great lady, but a daughter of the lower middle class, had evolved some such instincts herself – had played her game with equal coolness, and had lived through some such joys.

She thrilled and thrilled. The subtle, whimsical, polished wit of the book seemed to open some new vista of comprehension to her. She did not perceive its immorality. She would read it over again and again – and everything else this man had written. It seemed that she was newly awakened to a sense of power that she had not known she possessed. If only she could have read this before she had gone to Paris, what a help it would have been!

"So Algy was not so ignorant, after all," she mused. "Of course, he must have thought I was, and so did not let me see that he himself was more than a fool – darling Algy." But, at all events, he had thought she was like *Théodore*, only kinder – that was good enough! Well, she would make that true some day, and meanwhile she was away from stultifying squalor – away from minds only interested in petty local affairs – away from sham gentility, away from gramophones and cinemas – away from pretence, away among the real things where she could learn to understand every shade of the meaning of life step by step! And at this stage of her musings, after a gentle knock the same housemaid opened the door with a can of hot water.

"Your dinner will be served in the secretary's room at eight o'clock, miss; it is half-past seven now. When would you like me to return to fasten you up?"

The two red spots appeared in Katherine Bush's cheeks. So she had been expected to change her dress – and she had not thought of doing so! She had not even imagined that she would go again downstairs or have any dinner after that wonderful tea! A little supper probably on a tray later on, or something like that.

But here was dinner! perhaps the same kind of meal as she had had with Lord Algy. Of course, she ought to have known that she must change her dress. She felt very angry with herself, and after the exaltation over her own instincts this was a fall! But she would never err again, and fortunately the housemaid would not know that she had been ignorant.

"My things fasten in the front, thank you, so that I need not trouble you," she answered, graciously; "but will you tell me, please, where I shall find the secretary's room?"

The housemaid gave directions – but one of the footmen would be certain to be in the hall and would show her. Thomas, the one who had brought her up, would wait on her.

"When you are ready, miss, will you please ring, and I will whistle down to say you are coming. We always did for Miss Arnott, and then they serve the dinner at once. This bell rings up and this one down; it is the upstairs one for me. I am Martha, the second housemaid, miss, and will be pleased to do anything I can for you."

Katherine Bush thanked the girl again and quickly began to dress, and at a minute or two to eight was on her way. This upper staircase she found descended to the ground floor independently of the stately, shallow marble one she had walked up on to the sitting-room on her former visit and which went no farther than the first floor.

Thomas was waiting for her and conducted her to a room down the corridor, whose windows she discovered later looked out on a dull, blank wall. It had comfortable, solid, leather-covered furniture, the relic possibly of some country smoking-room, and faded crimson silk brocade curtains, the discarded splendour of a salon, perhaps. These were cosily drawn, and there was plenty of electric light, and she saw that there would be space to do her typing on the solid, large table, and to keep all records in those capacious cupboards which lined the walls. The feeling that she was in space again gave her satisfaction; she had so often longed to break down the partition of her attic, or stretch out and push away the glass screen at Liv and Dev's. The room was very high, too – another advantage.

"I shall always have large, high rooms when I have won my game," she said to herself.

A small table by the fire was laid for one. She made herself notice the silver and the glass and the cloth, and almost immediately Thomas brought in a large tray with her dinner. There was soup in a quaint covered cup with two handles, and some hot silver dishes.

He placed them all with regularity within her reach, and then asked respectfully if she would please to ring when she was ready for her sweet. Miss Arnott was wont to take claret, he informed her, but what would she, Miss Bush, desire to drink?

"A cup of tea," almost escaped from the tip of Katherine's tongue – but she stopped herself. Probably one did not take tea with one's dinner even alone like this, and if she had it, Thomas would know that she was not accustomed to the regulation things. Water would be safest. So she indicated her wishes and Thomas left the room.

A sense of strangeness, almost of awe, stole over her, a sensation she had not felt even when with Lord Algy in the gilded luxury of the Paris hotel. She had known then that those surroundings were just part of any *demi-mondaine's* life, and could be had by the lowest for money – but these were quite different. These were rather shabby, but were the expression of people who had had them for countless years, and were, of course, ordinary and everyday in their existences – the whole atmosphere affected her.

She was glad that Thomas had gone out of the room. She knew that at the present stage she should hate to be watched, while she ate, by a silent servant.

"But I must accustom myself to that," she told herself, for Algy, she remembered, had never seemed to remark servants at all, and would go on talking to her, while his coat was being handed or his boots put on, as though Hanson did not exist.

She was hungry and began to break her bread. She wished she felt quite sure whether or no she was expected to turn the soup out into the soup plate or drink it as it was? She decided to try the former course, since of what use was the soup plate if it had not been brought for that purpose?

The food proved to be excellent; and the sweet and fruit just to her taste, and when all was finished, Thomas removed everything and folded up the small table and put it back into its, evidently, accustomed corner, and bringing her the evening papers, he made up the fire and left her alone.

This, she supposed, would be the time she would have to herself. She hardly noticed the headlines as she glanced at the news; her mind was too full of herself and her new life to take interest in outside things.

Where did that door lead to? she wondered – a heavy mahogany door; but she was soon to know, for it opened suddenly, and the man she had already twice seen came in, leaving it open after him, so that she could perceive that the room he had left was a dim, vast library; it was lined with books.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I have come for some large-sized paper. My aunt used to have it kept in this drawer, I think."

Katherine Bush rose while he went to get it out for himself – he was not her employer, and she did not yet know where things were kept, so she did not offer to help him. He was in evening dress, and his hair was as well groomed as Lord Algy's, but not cut quite so short, and it was brushed straight back from his forehead and was brown and thick. His face was tired and humorous and very distinguished, but for the moment he looked cross and impatient. The paper was evidently not where he had thought that it would be.

"Confound it!" he muttered, almost inaudibly, and then aloud, "I am in a great hurry. Will you please look in those cupboards while I look in these?"

Katherine Bush did as she was asked, and chanced upon the paper immediately. She handed it to him without a word. She noticed that he hardly looked at her, and did not take in her personality at all. She was just his aunt's new secretary and typist; and more important matters pressed.

"Thanks, awfully;" then he glanced at the table, where the typing machine used by Miss Arnott stood. "Oh! – er – I was wondering if you would be so awfully kind as to type this when I have written it; it is a letter I must send to the *Times*, and I shall have to go in to dinner in a minute."

"I have not seen how this machine works yet," Katherine Bush answered, "but if you care to dictate, I can take it down in shorthand and then write it out very quickly afterwards."

"That is most kind of you – will you come into the library then? – my notes are there."

She followed him silently, and when he had found some scribbled words written on the back of an envelope, he went to the hearth-rug, and, leaning against the mantelpiece, began to speak. Katherine had taken up a block and pencil and was waiting ready.

He was not coherent at first; he had neither Mr. Livingstone's precise, oily slowness, nor Mr. Devereux's crisp fluency. She took down exactly what he had said. Then he asked her to read it aloud.

"That is frightful English!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "I never can dictate properly, I must always write myself or my ideas do not flow."

"If the substance is all right and it is just the English you want regulated, I can do that when I copy it out."

He looked at her in doubt, and Katherine smiled to herself – this flattered her.

"It would be awfully kind of you if you would, though," he went on, hesitatingly. "I have kept them waiting a quarter of an hour as it is. Could you do it immediately and send it in to the dining-room by one of the footmen? I have my fountain-pen with me, I will sign it there. It is to be addressed to the Editor of the *Times*."

"Yes, I will."

Mr. Strobridge thanked his aunt's new secretary courteously as he went towards the door, and then he left the room. At the moment of his exit, Katherine Bush heard the sound of voices, male and female; they were evidently going in to dinner without waiting for him. She looked up at the clock, it was ten minutes to nine; then she smiled again and, going to the writing-table, she began her task, a very simple one to her who was accustomed to frame euphonious sentences. And when she had completed it, she went back into the secretary's room and rang the bell.

"This is to be taken to Mr. – is his name Strobridge? – Lady Garribardine's nephew," she told the astonished Thomas.

"Yes, miss. *Her Ladyship's* nephew is *the Honourable* Mr. Gerard Strobridge – if you mean him."

"Yes, I do – he is dining here and wants it at once."

She made no further explanation, but took up the paper and reseated herself in her chair by the fire; and Thomas could but obey orders.

"A cool card," he whistled to himself, as he disappeared.

Meanwhile, Gerard Strobridge was saying to the lady at his side:

"I had to repudiate Warrington's insolence in the *Central Gazette* to-night. I have written to the *Times* – that is what made me keep even you waiting, dearest lady. My aunt's new shorthand typist took it down, and I shall send it off in a few minutes. I hope it will not be too late."

"You look quite serious, G.," the lady laughed. "It is too attractive to see you in earnest over something!"

"I am always in earnest – especially when I tell you that I love you – why did you not come this afternoon, Lăo, I stayed late on purpose and you never turned up."

"I knew I should meet you to-night, G. – and I do not want soon to grow bored!"

Mr. Strobridge looked at her reproachfully. She was extremely pleasant to the eye, with her marvellous skin and dark hair, and her curly affected mouth. He was a cynic and an epicurean. He was not in the least disenchanted by his knowledge that the whole woman was a mass of affectation, from the conscious pouting of her red lips to the way she held her soup spoon. He rather admired the skill she showed in it all. She pleased his senses, had just enough wit to chirp like a parrot good things others had said, and was full of small talk – while she knew the game to her finger-tips. He did not want the repetition of a serious affair since he had so happily escaped by the skin of his teeth from Alice Southerwood. Lăo Delemar, widowed and rich and circumspect, promised an agreeable winter to him, with few complications.

Women were more or less necessities to Gerard Strobridge's life; they were his choruses, his solaces, his inspirations.

In a few minutes a footman brought the large envelope, and amidst general chaff he read aloud the letter, his astonishment momentarily growing at the apt rearrangement of his words.

"She is no fool, your new secretary, Seraphim," he called down the table to his aunt. "I do thank you for her services to-night."

Sarah Lady Garribardine laughed complacently.

"I told you, G., I had found a treasure in Miss Katherine Bush!"

CHAPTER VII

Over a week had gone by and Katherine Bush had completely fallen into her duties; they were not difficult, and she continued to keep her eyes and her intelligence on the alert, and by the second Sunday when she was to have the afternoon to meet Matilda, she had begun to feel that a whole ocean had rolled between the present Katherine and the creature of the days before the outing in Paris with Lord Algy!

She had made one or two annoying mistakes and had had one or two surprises, some pleasant ones. It was agreeable to have a cup of tea when one woke, and one's curtains drawn back by an attentive housemaid every morning, and a deep hot bath, instead of a scramble in a small tin tub on Saturday nights. There was a bathroom in Laburnum Villa, but during the week Matilda used it for keeping all sorts of things in, and there were such a number of them to have the bath in turns on Saturday and Sunday, that Katherine had preferred the indifferent comfort of a makeshift in her own attic. It seemed on looking back, after ten days of modest luxury, that it never could have been possible that she had gone on month after month, and year after year, in the family circle.

Her heart swelled with gratitude to Lord Algy; but for him she might never have known that there was anything different. At these moments she knew that she could easily slip into sentiment about him again, and so she invariably crushed her emotion and began some active work.

At nine o'clock in the morning it was her duty to go to Lady Garribardine in her bedroom, where she would find her propped up upon lacy pink silk pillows, a saucy cap and ribbons covering the greater part of a more coquettish and rather lighter golden wig than the one she wore in the day. Her face had not yet been arranged, and presented a sad contrast to these youthful allurements. Her temper was often very precarious.

Katherine stood by the bed, block in hand, and took down all instructions. Lady Garribardine's voluminous correspondence was only attended to in the morning; the accumulations of the later part of the day before were heaped up in one basket tray, and the early posts in another. While a third empty one awaited those communications which were to be answered either in type or in handwriting.

Now, after ten days of service, Katherine had mastered most of Lady Garribardine's affairs. She knew the wages of her servants, the expenditure of the house, the phrasing of her friends' letters, their points of views, little hatreds and little loves, their want or possession of good English and powers of expressing themselves – she fancied she could almost picture the faces, so vivid were these pen portraits of the writers that the notes showed. Lady Garribardine seldom answered even the most private with her own hand and Katherine had grown quite accustomed to signing "Sarah Garribardine" as "yours affectionately" or "yours sincerely." She even derived a cynical amusement from the fictions she was instructed to invent to one and another.

The life of a great lady, she saw, would be a very complicated affair to a novice, and each day she felt glad she was having the opportunity of learning its intricacies. She meant to make no mistakes when her own turn should come.

Lady Garribardine had not continued to exploit her for her personal diversion as she had done on the occasion of their initial meeting, she had been too occupied, perhaps; on the contrary, she kept strictly to her rôle of employer and hardly spoke except on business. Katherine realised that she looked upon her much as Lord Algy had looked upon Hanson, and far from its arousing the rageful resentment which it would have done in Matilda's feminine breast, she saw the justice of it, and considered it a proper arrangement.

"Some people have the luck to be born to high station," she reasoned to herself, "and those who would attain it for themselves must make themselves fitted for it first – besides there would be no good in it to me, if after I had obtained it I should have to hobnob with my own secretary. It is the distinctions and barriers that make the thing worth having."

As yet she had only rarely come across other members of the world beyond her employer on such occasions as, for instance, if she were sent for suddenly to the drawing-room to take down some instruction, or bring some charity list; but whenever she had the chance she observed them carefully. Some of them were far from what had been her ideal of what high birth and breeding would certainly show, but they all had that ease of manner which polished their casualnesses, and once she was still receiving instructions by the bedside when Stirling, the maid, came to know if Lady Beatrice Strobridge might come up.

"Confound the woman!" Her Ladyship exclaimed in her angelic voice, its refinement of pronunciation always a joy to Katherine's ear – whatever the bluntness of the words might be – "No, certainly not – my face is not done – but stay, Stirling, it may be something to do with to-night – give me the rouge and powder and a looking-glass. Don't go, Miss Bush – it is nothing private and she won't stay for more than a minute."

Katherine discreetly turned her eyes from the bed to the window, and when she looked round again, two blooming rose-coloured cheeks balanced the girlish curls, and Lady Garribardine was reposing languidly upon her pillows.

"Dearest Aunt Sarah, I had to come," cried Lady Beatrice in her plaintive discontented voice, "Gerard has been perfectly impossible, actually has refused to let me go to the Artist Model's ball as Ganymede, and I have got the most ducky dress, a pendant to Hebe Vermont's Iris."

"A few rags of chiffon, a cup and bare legs, I suppose," Lady Garribardine retorted not unkindly, as her niece sat upon the bed.

"You may describe it like that if you want to, Aunt Sarah! I assure you, though, it is most becoming, and it is too ridiculous when everyone we know is going, and all the Thorvils have such tiny ankles, too."

"The more reason for you not to expose them to the common herd. Go naked if you so desire to a ball in a private house among your own class – you'll lay yourself open only to criticisms of your charms there – but to let hoi polloi gaze at you undressed is to lower your order; I am with Gerard about that."

Lady Beatrice pouted.

"I really thought you were so up to date, Aunt Seraphim, darling, that you would be sure to side with me – of course I shall go, all the same; I should not think of paying any attention to Gerard – only it would be so much nicer if you had consented to scold him for me."

"I am up to date, I hope, in so far as I try to move with the times" – Lady Garribardine's face was good-naturedly contemptuous – "only, I consider that all of you who throw your bonnets over the windmills are cutting your own throats – You are destroying values, cheapening pleasures, breaking down hedges, and letting in the swine to feed upon your grapes – you are often very vulgar, you modern people."

Lady Beatrice got off the bed.

"Then there is no use talking, Aunt Sarah – I dare say we are – but what matter? I wish I knew what *does* matter? I am bored all the time; I get some momentary pleasure out of my poetry, and some out of my dear precious friends – but the rest of the day is one long yawn. You ought not to grudge my being Ganymede; every sort of quaint creature is at this ball, and I get quite amused each year when I go."

"Why don't you take a box, then, and watch them? I could quite understand that, and intend to do so myself – Miss Bush, by the way, did you write to say I would have number five?"

Katherine replied in the affirmative and Lady Beatrice suddenly became aware of her presence as she resumed her place on the bed.

"Oh, this is your new secretary, Aunt Sarah! I am sure you have a frightfully difficult time – er – Miss Bush!" And she laughed, "Her Ladyship expects perfection."

"Her Ladyship has quite a right to as good as can be got – since she pays for it."

Katherine's voice was deep and level, and contained no impertinence, only a grave statement of fact.

Lady Garribardine chuckled among her pillows.

"Miss Bush is much nearer the truth of things than any of you so-called psychological philosophers, Bee – analysing matters with little dilettante methods all day to the laughter of the gods. Miss Bush realises her obligations as a secretary, but you very often don't perceive yours as a duke's daughter, and a rising Foreign Office official's wife."

Lady Beatrice was not the least crushed. She laughed frankly.

"Dear, sweet Aunt! There never has been a scandal about me in my life – I am a model of circumspectness, demureness and present-day virtuous wifeliness. Why, I never interfere with Gerard – we hardly meet in the whole week – and I merely like my own simple friends, my own simple clothes, and my own simple pleasures!"

"Artless creature!" And the youthful curls shook. "Well, what did you come for, in so many words? To try to get me to influence Gerard not to play for once the ineffectual part of husband in authority, and so let you disgrace the name of Thorvil and Strobridge in peace?"

Lady Beatrice seized and stroked the fat hand lying upon the pink silk coverlet.

"You darling, ducky Aunt Seraphim! Just that! I want to wear my enchanting boy's dress – I must be Ganymede, the cupbearer!"

"Well, I'll be no party to it – be off with you. I have serious affairs to settle with Miss Bush and have no further time to waste."

Lady Beatrice saluted her obediently and got off the bed once more; she was laughing softly.

"Gerard is coming to lunch," Lady Garribardine called to her, "and Lăo Delemar, and they are going to see a winter exhibition afterwards."

"I can't stand Lăo," Lady Beatrice cooed from the doorway; "she pretends to be so full of sex and other dreadful natural things, she makes my innocent aesthetic flesh creep – Gerard always had fruity tastes – Bye-bye, dear Aunt Sarah!" And kissing her finger-tips she was at last gone, leaving Katherine wondering.

They had said very severe things to each other and neither was the least angry really – Gladys and Fred were not wont to bicker so.

"Call up Mr. Strobridge, Miss Bush – he will not have left home yet – you know his number – ask him to speak to me at once."

Katherine obeyed – she was an expert with the telephone and never raised her voice. Mr. Strobridge was soon at the other end of it, and she was about to hand the receiver to her employer when that lady frowned and told her to give the message herself.

"My right ear is troublesome to-day," she said, "you must do the business for me, Miss Bush."

"Hello! Her Ladyship wishes me to give you a message – will you wait a moment until I take it?"

"Hello! Yes."

"Say he is to come half an hour earlier to lunch to-day. I have things to talk over with him about to-night – He is to go to this ridiculous ball in my box – tell him so."

Katherine repeated the exact message.

"Tell her I am very much annoyed about the whole thing," Mr. Strobridge returned, "and have decided not to be present myself."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Lady Garribardine, when she was told, and, seizing the receiver from Katherine's hand, she roared:

"Don't be a fool, G. – it is too late in the day to stand upon your dignity – I'll tell you the rest when you come to lunch." – Upon which she closed the communication and called for Stirling.

"Take all this rubbish of letters away, Miss Bush – I must get up and cope with the humiliating defects of old age – you may go."

Katherine had a very busy morning in front of her. She sat steadily typing and writing in the secretary's room, until her lunch was brought and even then she hardly stopped to eat it, but on her own way to the dining-room Lady Garribardine came in. She looked at the hardly tasted food and blinked her black eyes:

"Tut, tut! You must eat, child —*pas trop de zèle*— Finish your pudding – and then bring me those two letters upon the report of the Wineberger charity – into the dining-room – You can have your coffee with us – Mr. Strobridge and I are alone, Mrs. Delemar is not coming, after all – By the way, do you have everything you want? The coffee they give you is good, eh? Servants always skimp the beans when left to themselves."

"I have everything I want, thank you – but I have not been offered coffee," Katherine replied.

Lady Garribardine's face assumed an indignant expression, and she sharply rang the bell.

"These are the things that happen when one does not know of them – you ought to have complained to me before, Miss Bush!"

Thomas answered the bell and whitened perceptibly when he saw his mistress's face. He was asked why Miss Bush had not been served with coffee, in a voice which froze his tongue, and the only excuse he could give was a stammering statement that Miss Arnott had not taken any, which aroused further wrath.

"Pampered wretches!" Lady Garribardine exclaimed. "Anything to save themselves trouble! I will speak to Bronson about this – but see that it never happens again, Thomas!" And the trembling footman was allowed to leave the room.

"I am glad you did not try to defend them, as the foolish Arnott would have done," Her Ladyship flashed. "She was always standing between my just wrath and the servant's delinquencies, always shielding them – one would have thought she was of their class. The result was no one in the house respected her – good creature though she was. See that you are respected, young woman, and obeyed when obedience is your due."

"I will try to be" – and an inscrutable expression played round Katherine's full red mouth. "I would never shield anyone from what he deserved."

"It seems to me you understand a good deal, girl! – Well, come into the dining-room in half an hour," and, smiling her comprehending smile, Lady Garribardine left the room.

"G., that is a wonderful creature, that new secretary of mine – have you noticed her yet?" she said later on to her nephew when they had finished the serious part of their luncheon, and she had rung her enamelled bell for the automatic entrance of the servants from behind the screen – they were only allowed in the room to change the courses at this meal. Numbers of politicians and diplomats frequently dropped in and preferred to discuss affairs with their hostess alone.

"No – not much," Mr. Strobridge admitted when they were again by themselves and coffee had come. "I thought she did my letter to the *Times* remarkably well, though."

"She has not done anything badly yet – when she makes a mistake in social trifles she always realises it, and corrects herself. Her reading aloud was grotesque at first, but I have never had to tell her how to pronounce a word twice. I lay traps for her; she is as smart as paint and as deep as a well."

"A treasure indeed – " but Mr. Strobridge's voice was absent, he was uninterested and was still smarting under the annoyance of the situation created by his wife.

Of course he could not make her stay at home by force – and he hated the idea of Ganymede and the bare legs. He reverted to the topic once more.

"I would really rather not go to see the freakish crew to-night," he said. "Beatrice is doing it merely from obstinacy; she is not like Hebe Vermont, a ridiculous *poseuse*, crazy for notoriety; she is a refined creature generally, though wearying. This is just to defy me."

"As I have always told you, G., you should never have married, you are made for an ardent and devoted lover, with a suitable change of inamorata every six months. In the rôle of husband you are – frankly – a little ridiculous! You have no authority. As Miss Bush put it just now about something

else, you usually act from good nature, not from a sense of justice; and Beatrice snaps her fingers at you and goes her own way."

"I don't mind as a rule – indeed, I am grateful to her for doing so. Can there be anything more tedious and bourgeois than the recognised relation of husband and wife? The only things which make intimacy with a woman agreeable are difficulty and intermittency. Bee fortunately expects nothing from me, and I expect nothing from her, beyond acting in a manner suitable to her race and station, and I don't think Ganymede in his original costume at an Artist Models' ball a harmonious part for my wife or a Thorvil to adopt."

"You don't know how to manage her, and you are too indifferent to try – so you had better swallow your outraged dignity and come with me in my box after all. Lăo will be there and you can sit and whisper in the back of it." And Lady Garribardine lit her cigarette, but Mr. Strobridge protested in whimsical distress:

"Heaven forbid! Would you kill this dawning romance, Seraphim? If Lăo and I are to be drafted off like a pair of fiancés, the whole charm is gone. I wish to *ménager* my emotions so that they may last over the Easter recess; after that I shall be too busy for them to matter. Don't be ruthless, sweet Aunt!"

Lady Garribardine laughed and at that moment Katherine Bush came in, the finished letters in her hand.

"Give Miss Bush some coffee, G., while I look over them," and Her Ladyship indicated the tray which had been placed by an attentive Bronson close to her hand.

Mr. Strobridge did as he was asked. His thoughts were far away, and beyond displaying the courtesy he used to all women, he never noticed Katherine at all. She was quite ordinary looking still – with the screwed up mop of ashen-hued hair, and her plain dark blouse, unless you chanced to meet her strange and beautiful eyes.

For some reason she felt a little piqued, the man's manner and phrasing attracted her, his voice was superlatively cultivated, and his words chosen with polished grace. Here was a person from whom something could be learned. She would have wished to have talked with him unrestrainedly and alone. She remained silent and listened when aunt and nephew again took up the ball of conversation together. How she would love to be able to converse like that! They were so sparkling – never in earnest seemingly, all was light as air, while Mr. Strobridge made allusions and quotations which showed his brilliant erudition, and Katherine hearkened with all her ears. Some of them she recognized and others she determined to look up, but his whole pronunciation of the sentences sounded different from what she had imagined they would be when she had read them to herself.

This was the first time she had heard a continued conversation between two people who she had already decided were worthy of note, and this half-hour stood out as the first milestone in her progress.

Presently they all rose – and she went back to her work with the sense of the magnitude of her task in climbing to the pinnacle of a great lady and cultivated woman of the world.

For a few moments she felt a little depressed – then a thought came to her.

"He could help me to knowledge of literature and art – he could teach me true culture – and since he is married there can be no stupid love-making. But for this he must first realise that I exist and for that when my chance comes I must arrest his attention through the ears and the eyes. He must for once look at me and see not only his aunt's secretary – and then I can learn from him all that I desire to know."

That this course of action could possibly cause the proposed teacher pain in the future never entered her head.

CHAPTER VIII

Matilda had been told to meet her sister, if it should be fine on this Sunday, in the Park by the Serpentine; they would walk about and then go and have an early tea at Victoria Station, whence Matilda could take a train back to Bindon's Green.

They met punctually at the time appointed on the bridge, and the elder Miss Bush was filled with joy. She had missed Katherine dreadfully, as browbeating husbands are often missed by meek wives, and she was full of curiosity to hear her news.

"You look changed somehow, Kitten!" she exclaimed, when they had greeted each other. "It isn't because you'd done your hair differently; you had it that way on the last day – it isn't a bit 'the look', but it suits you. No, it's not that – but you are changed somehow. Now tell me everything, dearie – I am dying to hear."

"I like it," began Katherine, "and I am learning lots of things."

This information did not thrill Matilda. Katherine's desire to be always learning was very fatiguing, she thought, and quite unnecessary. She wanted to hear facts of food and lodging and people and treatment, not unimportant moral developments.

"Oh – well," she said. "Are they kind to you?"

"Yes – I am waited on like a lady – and generally the work isn't half so heavy as at Liv and Dev's."

"Tell me right from the beginning. What you do when you get up in the morning until you go to bed."

Katherine complied.

"I am waked at half-past seven and given a cup of tea – real tea, Tild, not the stuff we called tea at home." (A slight toss of the head from Matilda.) "The second housemaid waits on me, and pulls up my blind, and then I have my bath in the bathroom across the passage – a nice, deep hot bath."

"Whatever for – every day?" interrupted Matilda. "What waste of soap and towels and things – do you like it, Kitten?"

"Of course, I do – we all seem to be very dirty people to me now, Tild – with our one tub a week; you soon grow to find things a necessity. I could not bear not to have a bath every day now."

Matilda snorted.

"Well – and then – ?"

"Then I go down and have my breakfast in the secretary's room – my sitting-room, in fact. It is a lovely breakfast, with beautiful china and silver and table-linen, and when I have finished that I take my block and pencil and go up to Lady Garribardine's bedroom to take down my instructions for the day in shorthand."

"Oh, Kitten, do tell me, what's her room like?" At last something interesting might be coming!

"It is all pink silk and lace and a gilt bed, and numbers of photographs, and a big sofa and comfortable chairs – and when she has rheumatism she stays there and has people up to tea."

"What! Folks to tea in her bedroom? Ladies, of course?"

"Oh! dear no! Men, too! She has heaps of men friends; they are devoted to her."

"Gentlemen in her bedroom! I do call that fast!" Matilda was frankly shocked.

"Why?" asked Katherine.

"Why? My dear! Just fancy – gentlemen where you sleep and dress! Mabel would not dream of doing such a thing – and I do hope she'll never hear you are in that kind of a house. She'd be sure to pass remarks."

"Lady Garribardine is over sixty years old, Tild! Don't you think you are being rather funny?" and Katherine wondered why she had never noticed before that Matilda was totally devoid of all sense of humour. And then she realised that the conception was new even to herself, and must have come

from her book reading, though she was conscious that it was a gift that she had always enjoyed. No one had spoken of the "senses of humour" in their home circle, and Matilda would not have understood what it meant or whether she did or did not possess it!

Things were things to Matilda, and had not different aspects, and for a lady to receive gentlemen in her bedroom if she were even over sixty years old and suffering from rheumatism was not proper conduct, and would earn the disapproval of Mabel Cawber and, indeed, of refined and select Bindon's Green in general.

"I don't see that age makes a difference; it's the idea of tea in a bedroom, dearie – with gentlemen!"

"But what do you think they would do to her, Tild?" Katherine with difficulty hid her smile.

"Oh! my! what dreadful things you do say, Katherine!" Matilda blushed. "Why, it's the awkwardness of it for them – I'm wondering whatever Fred and Bert and Charlie Prodggers would feel if Mabel had them up to hers of a Sunday, supposing she had a cold – and what *would* anyone say!"

"Yes, I am sure Bindon's Green would talk its head off, and Fred and Bert and Charlie Prodggers would be awfully uncomfortable and get every sort of extraordinary idea into their heads, and if a person like Mabel did do such a thing, as to have them up there, she would be fidgety herself – or she would be really fast and intend them to go ahead. But Lady Garribardine is always quite sure of herself, and her friends are, too, and they don't have to consider convention – they are really gentlemen, you see, and not worried at all as to what others think or say, and it seems quite natural to them to come up and see an old rheumatic lady anywhere they want to see her. That is just the difference in the class, Tild – the upper are perfectly real, and don't pretend anything, and aren't uncomfortable in doing natural things."

Matilda was still disapproving, and at once became antagonistic when her sister made reflections upon class.

"I call it very queer, anyway," she sniffed. "And wherever do they find room to sit – in a bedroom, dearie?"

Katherine laughed – she wondered if she had never had a glimpse of life and space and comfort with Lord Algy, should she, too, have been as ignorant and surprised at everything in her new sphere as Matilda was at the description of it. She supposed she would have been equally surprised, but would certainly have viewed it with an open mind. After ten days of peeps at a world where everything new and old was looked at and discussed with the broadest toleration, the incredible narrowness of the Bindon's Green outlook appalled her – the forces of ignorance and prejudice and ridiculous hypocrisy which ruled such hundreds of worthy people's lives!

She came back from these speculations to the reality of her sister's voice, reiterating her question as to where the visitors found place, and she answered, still smiling:

"It is a great big room, Tild, twice as big as the drawing-room at home – no – bigger still, and twenty people could sit in it without crowding."

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Matilda; "it must be grand."

"You see, you are such an old goose, Matilda. You think the whole world must be like Bindon's Green, although I have told you over and over again that other places, and other grades of life, are different, but you and Mabel and Fred and Bert, and the whole crew of you, measure everything with your own tiny measure. You make me gasp at your outlook sometimes."

Matilda bridled – and Katherine went on.

"Lady Garribardine's house does not seem to be a bit grand to her, nor to any of the people who come there. They are not conscious of it; it is just everyday to them, although some of them live in quite small houses themselves and aren't at all rich. She has two cousins – elderly ladies, who live in a tiny flat – but oh! the difference in it to Mabel's villa! I had to take them a message last week and waited in their mite of a drawing-room – it was exquisitely clean and simple, and they are probably poorer than we are."

Matilda felt too ruffled to continue this conversation; she always hated the way Katherine argued with her; she wanted to get back to the far more interesting subject of carpets and curtains and arrangements in the rooms of Lady Garribardine's house. Numbers of the people in her serials, of course, were supposed to own such places, and she had often seen bits of them on the stage, but until she found Katherine really lived now in one, somehow she had never believed in them as living actualities, or rather their reality had not been brought home to her. So she questioned Katherine, and soon had an accurate description of her ladyship's bedroom, and the rest of the house, then she got back to the happenings of her sister's day.

"Well, when you have got up there, you take down orders, and then?"

"I sort everything that has come by the post and mark on the envelopes how I am to answer them, and I sometimes read her the papers aloud if her eyes are tired."

"Yes?"

"And then I go down and write the letters; she hardly ever answers any herself, and I have to write them as if I were she. Her friends must wonder how her hand and style have changed since Miss Arnott left!"

Here was something thrilling again for Matilda.

"Oh, my! What a lot you must get to know about the smart set, Kitten; isn't it interesting!"

"Yes, as I told you, I am learning lessons."

"Oh, bother that! Well, what do they write about, do tell me – ?"

"All sorts of things; their movements, their charities – invitations, little witticisms about each other – politics, the last good story – and, some of them, books."

"And you have to answer as if you were her? However do you do it, Kitten?"

"She gives me the general idea – she showed me the first time for the private letters, and now I know, but sometimes perhaps I write as if it were me!"

"And don't they know it is not her hand?"

"Of course, but they don't care. She is a great lady and a character, and she is very powerful in their circle of society, and it is worth everyone's while to be civil to her."

"It is all funny. Well, what else do you do?"

"Sometimes I have to do errands – shopping and so on – and then my luncheon comes – the food is lovely, and I am waited on by a footman called Thomas; he is the third; and on Wednesday Lady Garribardine took his and the butler's heads off because I had not been given coffee. She means me to be perfectly treated, I can tell you!"

"Coffee after your lunch, how genteel! And my! what a lot of servants. Whatever do they all do?"

"Their work, I suppose. You forget it is a big house and everything is splendidly done and beautifully clean, and regular and orderly."

Here Matilda insisted upon a full list of all the retainers, and an account of their separate duties; her domestic soul revelled in these details, and at the end of the recital her awe knew no bounds. Katherine was able to give her a very circumstantial set of statements, as all accounts passed through her hands.

"Well, your old lady must spend pints of money," Matilda said, with a sigh, "but we've not got to your afternoons yet, dearie. Do you work all them, too?"

"When I am very busy – it depends how much I have to do; if I am not very occupied and I have not been out in the morning, I go for a walk before tea. I have to take her ladyship's two fox-terriers, Jack and Joe; they are jolly little fellows, and I love them. We scamper in the square, or go as far as the Park."

"And your tea? They bring you up a cup, I suppose, every day – regular?"

"Not a cup – a whole tray to myself, and lovely muffins and cream, Tild. Lady Garribardine has a Jersey herd of cows at her place in Blankshire, and the cream comes up each day from there."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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