GALSWORTHY JOHN

THE COUNTRY HOUSE

John Galsworthy
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Содержание

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PART I

CHAPTER I
A PARTY AT WORSTED SKEYNES

The year was 1891, the month October, the day Monday. In the dark outside the railway-station at Worsted Skeynes Mr. Horace Pendyce's omnibus, his brougham, his luggage-cart, monopolised space. The face of Mr. Horace Pendyce's coachman monopolised the light of the solitary station lantern. Rosy-gilled, with fat close-clipped grey whiskers and inscrutably pursed lips, it presided high up in the easterly air like an emblem of the feudal system. On the platform within, Mr. Horace Pendyce's first footman and second groom in long livery coats with silver buttons, their appearance slightly relieved by the rakish cock of their top-hats, awaited the arrival of the 6.15.

The first footman took from his pocket a half-sheet of stamped and crested notepaper covered with Mr. Horace Pendyce's small and precise calligraphy. He read from it in a

nasal, derisive voice:

"Hon. Geoff, and Mrs. Winlow, blue room and dress; maid, small drab. Mr. George, white room. Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, gold. The Captain, red. General Pendyce, pink room; valet, back attic. That's the lot."

The groom, a red-cheeked youth, paid no attention.

"If this here Ambler of Mr. George's wins on Wednesday," he said, "it's as good as five pounds in my pocket. Who does for Mr. George?"

"James, of course."

The groom whistled.

"I'll try an' get his loadin' to-morrow. Are you on, Tom?"

The footman answered:

"Here's another over the page. Green room, right wing – that Foxleigh; he's no good. 'Take all you can and give nothing' sort! But can't he shoot just! That's why they ask him!"

From behind a screen of dark trees the train ran in.

Down the platform came the first passengers – two cattlemen with long sticks, slouching by in their frieze coats, diffusing an odour of beast and black tobacco; then a couple, and single figures, keeping as far apart as possible, the guests of Mr. Horace Pendyce. Slowly they came out one by one into the loom of the carriages, and stood with their eyes fixed carefully before them, as though afraid they might recognise each other. A tall man in a fur coat, whose tall wife carried a small bag of silver and shagreen, spoke to the coachman:

"How are you, Benson? Mr. George says Captain Pendyce told him he wouldn't be down till the 9.30. I suppose we'd better – "

Like a breeze tuning through the frigid silence of a fog, a high, clear voice was heard:

"Oh, thanks; I'll go up in the brougham."

Followed by the first footman carrying her wraps, and muffled in a white veil, through which the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow's leisurely gaze caught the gleam of eyes, a lady stepped forward, and with a backward glance vanished into the brougham. Her head appeared again behind the swathe of gauze.

"There's plenty of room, George."

George Pendyce walked quickly forward, and disappeared beside her. There was a crunch of wheels; the brougham rolled away.

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow raised his face again.

"Who was that, Benson?"

The coachman leaned over confidentially, holding his podgy white-gloved hand outspread on a level with the Hon. Geoffrey's hat.

"Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, sir. Captain Bellew's lady, of the Firs."

"But I thought they weren't – "

"No, sir; they're not, sir."

"Ah!"

A calm rarefied voice was heard from the door of the omnibus:

"Now, Geoff!"

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow followed his wife, Mr. Foxleigh, and General Pendyce into the omnibus, and again Mrs. Winlow's voice was heard:

"Oh, do you mind my maid? Get in, Tookson!"

Mr. Horace Pendyce's mansion, white and long and low, standing well within its acres, had come into the possession of his great-great-great-grandfather through an alliance with the last of the Worsteds. Originally a fine property let in smallish holdings to tenants who, having no attention bestowed on them, did very well and paid excellent rents, it was now farmed on model lines at a slight loss. At stated intervals Mr. Pendyce imported a new kind of cow, or partridge, and built a wing to the schools. His income was fortunately independent of this estate. He was in complete accord with the Rector and the sanitary authorities, and not infrequently complained that his tenants did not stay on the land. His wife was a Totteridge, and his coverts admirable. He had been, needless to say, an eldest son. It was his individual conviction that individualism had ruined England, and he had set himself deliberately to eradicate this vice from the character of his tenants. By substituting for their individualism his own tastes, plans, and sentiments, one might almost say his own individualism, and losing money thereby, he had gone far to demonstrate his pet theory that the higher the individualism the more sterile the life of the community. If, however, the matter was thus put to him he grew both garrulous and angry, for he considered himself not an individualist, but what he called a

"Tory Communist." In connection with his agricultural interests he was naturally a Fair Trader; a tax on corn, he knew, would make all the difference in the world to the prosperity of England. As he often said: "A tax of three or four shillings on corn, and I should be farming my estate at a profit."

Mr. Pendyce had other peculiarities, in which he was not too individual. He was averse to any change in the existing order of things, made lists of everything, and was never really so happy as when talking of himself or his estate. He had a black spaniel dog called John, with a long nose and longer ears, whom he had bred himself till the creature was not happy out of his sight.

In appearance Mr. Pendyce was rather of the old school, upright and active, with thin side-whiskers, to which, however, for some years past he had added moustaches which drooped and were now grizzled. He wore large cravats and square-tailed coats. He did not smoke.

At the head of his dining-table loaded with flowers and plate, he sat between the Hon. Mrs. Winlow and Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, nor could he have desired more striking and contrasted supporters. Equally tall, full-figured, and comely, Nature had fixed between these two women a gulf which Mr. Pendyce, a man of spare figure, tried in vain to fill. The composure peculiar to the ashen type of the British aristocracy wintered permanently on Mrs. Winlow's features like the smile of a frosty day. Expressionless to a degree, they at once convinced the spectator that she was a woman of the best breeding. Had an

expression ever arisen upon these features, it is impossible to say what might have been the consequences. She had followed her nurse's adjuration: "Lor, Miss Truda, never you make a face – You might grow so!" Never since that day had Gertrude Winlow, an Honourable in her own right and in that of her husband, made a face, not even, it is believed, when her son was born. And then to find on the other side of Mr. Pendyce that puzzling Mrs. Bellew with the green-grey eyes, at which the best people of her own sex looked with instinctive disapproval! A woman in her position should avoid anything conspicuous, and Nature had given her a too-striking appearance. People said that when, the year before last, she had separated from Captain Bellew, and left the Firs, it was simply because they were tired of one another. They said, too, that it looked as if she were encouraging the attentions of George, Mr. Pendyce's eldest son.

Lady Malden had remarked to Mrs. Winlow in the drawing-room before dinner:

"What is it about that Mrs. Bellew? I never liked her. A woman situated as she is ought to be more careful. I don't understand her being asked here at all, with her husband still at the Firs, only just over the way. Besides, she's very hard up. She doesn't even attempt to disguise it. I call her almost an adventuress."

Mrs. Winlow had answered:

"But she's some sort of cousin to Mrs. Pendyce. The Pendyces are related to everybody! It's so boring. One never knows – "

Lady Malden replied:

"Did you know her when she was living down here? I dislike those hard-riding women. She and her husband were perfectly reckless. One heard of nothing else but what she had jumped and how she had jumped it; and she bets and goes racing. If George Pendyce is not in love with her, I'm very much mistaken. He's been seeing far too much of her in town. She's one of those women that men are always hanging about!"

At the head of his dinner-table, where before each guest was placed a menu carefully written in his eldest daughter's handwriting, Horace Pendyce supped his soup.

"This soup," he said to Mrs. Bellew, "reminds me of your dear old father; he was extraordinarily fond of it. I had a great respect for your father – a wonderful man! I always said he was the most determined man I'd met since my own dear father, and he was the most obstinate man in the three kingdoms!"

He frequently made use of the expression "in the three kingdoms," which sometimes preceded a statement that his grandmother was descended from Richard III., while his grandfather came down from the Cornish giants, one of whom, he would say with a disparaging smile, had once thrown a cow over a wall.

"Your father was too much of an individualist, Mrs. Bellew. I have a lot of experience of individualism in the management of my estate, and I find that an individualist is never contented. My tenants have everything they want, but it's impossible to satisfy them. There's a fellow called Peacock, now, a most pig-

headed, narrowminded chap. I don't give in to him, of course. If he had his way, he'd go back to the old days, farm the land in his own fashion. He wants to buy it from me. Old vicious system of yeoman farming. Says his grandfather had it. He's that sort of man. I hate individualism; it's ruining England. You won't find better cottages, or better farm-buildings anywhere than on my estate. I go in for centralisation. I dare say you know what I call myself – a 'Tory Communist.' To my mind, that's the party of the future. Now, your father's motto was: 'Every man for himself!' On the land that would never do. Landlord and tenant must work together. You'll come over to Newmarket with us on Wednesday? George has a very fine horse running in the Rutlandshire a very fine horse. He doesn't bet, I'm glad to say. If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's gambling!"

Mrs. Bellew gave him a sidelong glance, and a little ironical smile peeped out on her full red lips. But Mr. Pendyce had been called away to his soup. When he was ready to resume the conversation she was talking to his son, and the Squire, frowning, turned to the Hon. Mrs. Winlow. Her attention was automatic, complete, monosyllabic; she did not appear to fatigue herself by an over-sympathetic comprehension, nor was she subservient. Mr. Pendyce found her a competent listener.

"The country is changing," he said, "changing every day. Country houses are not what they were. A great responsibility rests on us landlords. If we go, the whole thing goes."

What, indeed, could be more delightful than this country-

house life of Mr. Pendyce; its perfect cleanliness, its busy leisure, its combination of fresh air and scented warmth, its complete intellectual repose, its essential and professional aloofness from suffering of any kind, and its soup – emblematically and above all, its soup – made from the rich remains of pampered beasts?

Mr. Pendyce thought this life the one right life; those who lived it the only right people. He considered it a duty to live this life, with its simple, healthy, yet luxurious curriculum, surrounded by creatures bred for his own devouring, surrounded, as it were, by a sea of soup! And that people should go on existing by the million in the towns, preying on each other, and getting continually out of work, with all those other depressing concomitants of an awkward state, distressed him. While suburban life, that living in little rows of slate-roofed houses so lamentably similar that no man of individual taste could bear to see them, he much disliked. Yet, in spite of his strong prejudice in favour of country-house life, he was not a rich man, his income barely exceeding ten thousand a year.

The first shooting-party of the season, devoted to spinneys and the outlying coverts, had been, as usual, made to synchronise with the last Newmarket Meeting, for Newmarket was within an uncomfortable distance of Worsted Skeynes; and though Mr. Pendyce had a horror of gaming, he liked to figure there and pass for a man interested in sport for sport's sake, and he was really rather proud of the fact that his son had picked up so good a horse as the Ambler promised to be for so little money, and was

racing him for pure sport.

The guests had been carefully chosen. On Mrs. Winlow's right was Thomas Brandwhite (of Brown and Brandwhite), who had a position in the financial world which could not well be ignored, two places in the country, and a yacht. His long, lined face, with very heavy moustaches, wore habitually a peevish look. He had retired from his firm, and now only sat on the Boards of several companies. Next to him was Mrs. Hussell Barter, with that touching look to be seen on the faces of many English ladies, that look of women who are always doing their duty, their rather painful duty; whose eyes, above cheeks creased and withered, once rose-leaf hued, now over-coloured by strong weather, are starry and anxious; whose speech is simple, sympathetic, direct, a little shy, a little hopeless, yet always hopeful; who are ever surrounded by children, invalids, old people, all looking to them for support; who have never known the luxury of breaking down – of these was Mrs. Hussell Barter, the wife of the Reverend Hussell Barter, who would shoot to-morrow, but would not attend the race-meeting on the Wednesday. On her other hand was Gilbert Foxleigh, a lean-flanked man with a long, narrow head, strong white teeth, and hollow, thirsting eyes. He came of a county family of Foxleighs, and was one of six brothers, invaluable to the owners of coverts or young, half-broken horses in days when, as a Foxleigh would put it, "hardly a Johnny of the lot could shoot or ride for nuts." There was no species of beast, bird, or fish, that he could not and did not destroy with

equal skill and enjoyment. The only thing against him was his income, which was very small. He had taken in Mrs. Brandwhite, to whom, however, he talked but little, leaving her to General Pendyce, her neighbour on the other side.

Had he been born a year before his brother, instead of a year after, Charles Pendyce would naturally have owned Worsted Skeynes, and Horace would have gone into the Army instead. As it was, having almost imperceptibly become a Major-General, he had retired, taking with him his pension. The third brother, had he chosen to be born, would have gone into the Church, where a living awaited him; he had elected otherwise, and the living had passed perforce to a collateral branch. Between Horace and Charles, seen from behind, it was difficult to distinguish. Both were spare, both erect, with the least inclination to bottle shoulders, but Charles Pendyce brushed his hair, both before and behind, away from a central parting, and about the back of his still active knees there was a look of feebleness. Seen from the front they could readily be differentiated, for the General's whiskers broadened down his cheeks till they reached his moustaches, and there was in his face and manner a sort of formal, though discontented, effacement, as of an individualist who has all his life been part of a system, from which he has issued at last, unconscious indeed of his loss, but with a vague sense of injury. He had never married, feeling it to be comparatively useless, owing to Horace having gained that year on him at the start, and he lived with a valet close to his club in

Pall Mall.

In Lady Malden, whom he had taken in to dinner, Worsted Skeynes entertained a good woman and a personality, whose teas to Working Men in the London season were famous. No Working Man who had attended them had ever gone away without a wholesome respect for his hostess. She was indeed a woman who permitted no liberties to be taken with her in any walk of life. The daughter of a Rural Dean, she appeared at her best when seated, having rather short legs. Her face was well-coloured, her mouth, firm and rather wide, her nose well-shaped, her hair dark. She spoke in a decided voice, and did not mince her words. It was to her that her husband, Sir James, owed his reactionary principles on the subject of woman.

Round the corner at the end of the table the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow was telling his hostess of the Balkan Provinces, from a tour in which he had just returned. His face, of the Norman type, with regular, handsome features, had a leisurely and capable expression. His manner was easy and pleasant; only at times it became apparent that his ideas were in perfect order, so that he would naturally not care to be corrected. His father, Lord Montrossor, whose seat was at Coldingham six miles away, would ultimately yield to him his place in the House of Lords.

And next him sat Mrs. Pendyce. A portrait of this lady hung over the sideboard at the end of the room, and though it had been painted by a fashionable painter, it had caught a gleam of that "something" still in her face these twenty years later. She was

not young, her dark hair was going grey; but she was not old, for she had been married at nineteen and was still only fifty-two. Her face was rather long and very pale, and her eyebrows arched and dark and always slightly raised. Her eyes were dark grey, sometimes almost black, for the pupils dilated when she was moved; her lips were the least thing parted, and the expression of those lips and eyes was of a rather touching gentleness, of a rather touching expectancy. And yet all this was not the "something"; that was rather the outward sign of an inborn sense that she had no need to ask for things, of an instinctive faith that she already had them. By that "something," and by her long, transparent hands, men could tell that she had been a Totteridge. And her voice, which was rather slow, with a little, not unpleasant, trick of speech, and her eyelids by second nature just a trifle lowered, confirmed this impression. Over her bosom, which hid the heart of a lady, rose and fell a piece of wonderful old lace.

Round the corner again Sir James Malden and Bee Pendyce (the eldest daughter) were talking of horses and hunting – Bee seldom from choice spoke of anything else. Her face was pleasant and good, yet not quite pretty, and this little fact seemed to have entered into her very nature, making her shy and ever willing to do things for others.

Sir James had small grey whiskers and a carved, keen visage. He came of an old Kentish family which had migrated to Cambridgeshire; his coverts were exceptionally fine; he was also a Justice of the Peace, a Colonel of Yeomanry, a

keen Churchman, and much feared by poachers. He held the reactionary views already mentioned, being a little afraid of Lady Malden.

Beyond Miss Pendyce sat the Reverend Hussell Barter, who would shoot to-morrow, but would not attend the race-meeting on Wednesday.

The Rector of Worsted Skeynes was not tall, and his head had been rendered somewhat bald by thought. His broad face, of very straight build from the top of the forehead to the base of the chin, was well-coloured, clean-shaven, and of a shape that may be seen in portraits of the Georgian era. His cheeks were full and folded, his lower lip had a habit of protruding, and his eyebrows jutted out above his full, light eyes. His manner was authoritative, and he articulated his words in a voice to which long service in the pulpit had imparted remarkable carrying-power – in fact, when engaged in private conversation, it was with difficulty that he was not overheard. Perhaps even in confidential matters he was not unwilling that what he said should bear fruit. In some ways, indeed, he was typical. Uncertainty, hesitation, toleration – except of such opinions as he held – he did not like. Imagination he distrusted. He found his duty in life very clear, and other people's perhaps clearer, and he did not encourage his parishioners to think for themselves. The habit seemed to him a dangerous one. He was outspoken in his opinions, and when he had occasion to find fault, spoke of the offender as "a man of no character," "a fellow like that," with such a ring of conviction

that his audience could not but be convinced of the immorality of that person. He had a bluff jolly way of speaking, and was popular in his parish – a good cricketer, a still better fisherman, a fair shot, though, as he said, he could not really afford time for shooting. While disclaiming interference in secular matters, he watched the tendencies of his flock from a sound point of view, and especially encouraged them to support the existing order of things – the British Empire and the English Church. His cure was hereditary, and he fortunately possessed some private means, for he had a large family. His partner at dinner was Norah, the younger of the two Pendyce girls, who had a round, open face, and a more decided manner than her sister Bee.

Her brother George, the eldest son, sat on her right. George was of middle height, with a red-brown, clean-shaved face and solid jaw. His eyes were grey; he had firm lips, and darkish, carefully brushed hair, a little thin on the top, but with that peculiar gloss seen on the hair of some men about town. His clothes were unostentatiously perfect. Such men may be seen in Piccadilly at any hour of the day or night. He had been intended for the Guards, but had failed to pass the necessary examination, through no fault of his own, owing to a constitutional inability to spell. Had he been his younger brother Gerald, he would probably have fulfilled the Pendyce tradition, and passed into the Army as a matter of course. And had Gerald (now Captain Pendyce) been George the elder son, he might possibly have failed. George lived at his club in town on an allowance of six

hundred a year, and sat a great deal in a bay-window reading Ruff's "Guide to the Turf."

He raised his eyes from the menu and looked stealthily round. Helen Bellew was talking to his father, her white shoulder turned a little away. George was proud of his composure, but there was a strange longing in his face. She gave, indeed, just excuse for people to consider her too good-looking for the position in which she was placed. Her figure was tall and supple and full, and now that she no longer hunted was getting fuller. Her hair, looped back in loose bands across a broad low brow, had a peculiar soft lustre.

There was a touch of sensuality about her lips. The face was too broad across the brow and cheekbones, but the eyes were magnificent – ice-grey, sometimes almost green, always luminous, and set in with dark lashes.

There was something pathetic in George's gaze, as of a man forced to look against his will.

It had been going on all that past summer, and still he did not know where he stood. Sometimes she seemed fond of him, sometimes treated him as though he had no chance. That which he had begun as a game was now deadly earnest. And this in itself was tragic. That comfortable ease of spirit which is the breath of life was taken away; he could think of nothing but her. Was she one of those women who feed on men's admiration, and give them no return? Was she only waiting to make her conquest more secure? These riddles he asked of her face a hundred times,

lying awake in the dark. To George Pendyce, a man of the world, unaccustomed to privation, whose simple creed was "Live and enjoy," there was something terrible about a longing which never left him for a moment, which he could not help any more than he could help eating, the end of which he could not see. He had known her when she lived at the Firs, he had known her in the hunting-field, but his passion was only of last summer's date. It had sprung suddenly out of a flirtation started at a dance.

A man about town does not psychologise himself; he accepts his condition with touching simplicity. He is hungry; he must be fed. He is thirsty; he must drink. Why he is hungry, when he became hungry, these inquiries are beside the mark. No ethical aspect of the matter troubled him; the attainment of a married woman, not living with her husband, did not impinge upon his creed. What would come after, though full of unpleasant possibilities, he left to the future. His real disquiet, far nearer, far more primitive and simple, was the feeling of drifting helplessly in a current so strong that he could not keep his feet.

"Ah yes; a bad case. Dreadful thing for the Sweetenhams! That young fellow's been obliged to give up the Army. Can't think what old Sweetenham was about. He must have known his son was hit. I should say Bethany himself was the only one in the dark. There's no doubt Lady Rose was to blame!" Mr. Pendyce was speaking.

Mrs. Bellew smiled.

"My sympathies are all with Lady Rose. What do you say,

George?"

George frowned.

"I always thought," he said, "that Bethany was an ass."

"George," said Mr. Pendyce, "is immoral. All young men are immoral. I notice it more and more. You've given up your hunting, I hear."

Mrs. Bellew sighed.

"One can't hunt on next to nothing!"

"Ah, you live in London. London spoils everybody. People don't take the interest in hunting and farming they used to. I can't get George here at all. Not that I'm a believer in apron-strings. Young men will be young men!"

Thus summing up the laws of Nature, the Squire resumed his knife and fork.

But neither Mrs. Bellew nor George followed his example; the one sat with her eyes fixed on her plate and a faint smile playing on her lips, the other sat without a smile, and his eyes, in which there was such a deep resentful longing, looked from his father to Mrs. Bellew, and from Mrs. Bellew to his mother. And as though down that vista of faces and fruits and flowers a secret current had been set flowing, Mrs. Pendyce nodded gently to her son.

CHAPTER II
THE COVERT SHOOT

At the head of the breakfast-table sat Mr. Pendyce, eating methodically. He was somewhat silent, as became a man who has just read family prayers; but about that silence, and the pile of half-opened letters on his right, was a hint of autocracy.

"Be informal – do what you like, dress as you like, sit where you like, eat what you like, drink tea or coffee, but – " Each glance of his eyes, each sentence of his sparing, semi-genial talk, seemed to repeat that "but".

At the foot of the breakfast-table sat Mrs. Pendyce behind a silver urn which emitted a gentle steam. Her hands worked without ceasing amongst cups, and while they worked her lips worked too in spasmodic utterances that never had any reference to herself. Pushed a little to her left and entirely neglected, lay a piece of dry toast on a small white plate. Twice she took it up, buttered a bit of it, and put it down again. Once she rested, and her eyes, which fell on Mrs. Bellow, seemed to say: "How very charming you look, my dear!" Then, taking up the sugar-tongs, she began again.

On the long sideboard covered with a white cloth reposed a number of edibles only to be found amongst that portion of the community which breeds creatures for its own devouring. At one end of this row of viands was a large game pie with a

triangular gap in the pastry; at the other, on two oval dishes, lay four cold partridges in various stages of decomposition. Behind them a silver basket of openwork design was occupied by three bunches of black, one bunch of white grapes, and a silver grape-cutter, which performed no function (it was so blunt), but had once belonged to a Totteridge and wore their crest.

No servants were in the room, but the side-door was now and again opened, and something brought in, and this suggested that behind the door persons were collected, only waiting to be called upon. It was, in fact, as though Mr. Pendyce had said: "A butler and two footmen at least could hand you things, but this is a simple country house."

At times a male guest rose, napkin in hand, and said to a lady: "Can I get you anything from the sideboard?" Being refused, he went and filled his own plate. Three dogs – two fox-terriers and a decrepit Skye circled round uneasily, smelling at the visitors' napkins. And there went up a hum of talk in which sentences like these could be distinguished: "Rippin' stand that, by the wood. D'you remember your rockettin' woodcock last year, Jerry?" "And the dear old Squire never touched a feather! Did you, Squire?" "Dick – Dick! Bad dog! – come and do your tricks. Trust-trust! Paid for! Isn't he rather a darling?"

On Mr. Pendyce's foot, or by the side of his chair, whence he could see what was being eaten, sat the spaniel John, and now and then Mr. Pendyce, taking a small portion of something between his finger and thumb, would say:

"John! – Make a good breakfast, Sir James; I always say a half-breakfasted man is no good!"

And Mrs. Pendyce, her eyebrows lifted, would look anxiously up and down the table, murmuring: "Another cup, dear; let me see – are you sugar?"

When all had finished a silence fell, as if each sought to get away from what he had been eating, as if each felt he had been engaged in an unworthy practice; then Mr. Pendyce, finishing his last grape, wiped his mouth.

"You've a quarter of an hour, gentlemen; we start at ten-fifteen."

Mrs. Pendyce, left seated with a vague, ironical smile, ate one mouthful of her buttered toast, now very old and leathery, gave the rest to "the dear dogs," and called:

"George! You want a new shooting tie, dear boy; that green one's quite faded. I've been meaning to get some silks down for ages. Have you had any news of your horse this morning?"

"Yes, Blacksmith says he's fit as a fiddle."

"I do so hope he'll win that race for you. Your Uncle Hubert once lost four thousand pounds over the Rutlandshire. I remember perfectly; my father had to pay it. I'm so glad you don't bet, dear boy!"

"My dear mother, I do bet."

"Oh, George, I hope not much! For goodness' sake, don't tell your father; he's like all the Pendyces, can't bear a risk."

"My dear mother, I'm not likely to; but, as a matter of fact,

there is no risk. I stand to win a lot of money to nothing."

"But, George, is that right?"

"Of course it's all right."

"Oh, well, I don't understand." Mrs. Pendyce dropped her eyes, a flush came into her white cheeks; she looked up again and said quickly: "George, I should like just a little bet on your horse – a real bet, say about a sovereign."

George Pendyce's creed permitted the show of no emotion. He smiled.

"All right, mother, I'll put it on for you. It'll be about eight to one."

"Does that mean that if he wins I shall get eight?"

George nodded.

Mrs. Pendyce looked abstractedly at his tie.

"I think it might be two sovereigns; one seems very little to lose, because I do so want him to win. Isn't Helen Bellew perfectly charming this morning! It's delightful to see a woman look her best in the morning."

George turned, to hide the colour in his cheeks.

"She looks fresh enough, certainly."

Mrs. Pendyce glanced up at him; there was a touch of quizzicality in one of her lifted eyebrows.

"I mustn't keep you, dear; you'll be late for the shooting."

Mr. Pendyce, a sportsman of the old school, who still kept pointers, which, in the teeth of modern fashion, he was unable to employ, set his face against the use of two guns.

"Any man," he would say, "who cares to shoot at Worsted Skeynes must do with one gun, as my dear old father had to do before me. He'll get a good day's sport – no barndoor birds" (for he encouraged his pheasants to remain lean, that they might fly the better), "but don't let him expect one of these battues – sheer butchery, I call them."

He was excessively fond of birds – it was, in fact, his hobby, and he had collected under glass cases a prodigious number of specimens of those species which are in danger of becoming extinct, having really, in some Pendycean sort of way, a feeling that by this practice he was doing them a good turn, championing them, as it were, to a world that would soon be unable to look upon them in the flesh. He wished, too, that his collection should become an integral part of the estate, and be passed on to his son, and his son's son after him.

"Look at this Dartford Warbler," he would say; "beautiful little creature – getting rarer every day. I had the greatest difficulty in procuring this specimen. You wouldn't believe me if I told you what I had to pay for him!"

Some of his unique birds he had shot himself, having in his youth made expeditions to foreign countries solely with this object, but the great majority he had been compelled to purchase. In his library were row upon row of books carefully arranged and bearing on this fascinating subject; and his collection of rare, almost extinct, birds' eggs was one of the finest in the "three kingdoms." One egg especially he would point to with pride as

the last obtainable of that particular breed. “This was procured,” he would say, “by my dear old gillie Angus out of the bird’s very nest. There was just the single egg. The species,” he added, tenderly handling the delicate, porcelain-like oval in his brown hand covered with very fine, blackish hairs, “is now extinct.” He was, in fact, a true bird-lover, strongly condemning cockneys, or rough, ignorant persons who, with no collections of their own, wantonly destroyed kingfishers, or scarce birds of any sort, out of pure stupidity. “I would have them flogged,” he would say, for he believed that no such bird should be killed except on commission, and for choice – barring such extreme cases as that Dartford Warbler – in some foreign country or remoter part of the British Isles. It was indeed illustrative of Mr. Pendyce’s character and whole point of view that whenever a rare, winged stranger appeared on his own estate it was talked of as an event, and preserved alive with the greatest care, in the hope that it might breed and be handed down with the property; but if it were personally known to belong to Mr. Fuller or Lord Quarryman, whose estates abutted on Worsted Skeynes, and there was grave and imminent danger of its going back, it was promptly shot and stuffed, that it might not be lost to posterity. An encounter with another landowner having the same hobby, of whom there were several in his neighbourhood, would upset him for a week, making him strangely morose, and he would at once redouble his efforts to add something rarer than ever to his own collection.

His arrangements for shooting were precisely conceived.

Little slips of paper with the names of the "guns" written thereon were placed in a hat, and one by one drawn out again, and this he always did himself. Behind the right wing of the house he held a review of the beaters, who filed before him out of the yard, each with a long stick in his hand, and no expression on his face. Five minutes of directions to the keeper, and then the guns started, carrying their own weapons and a sufficiency of cartridges for the first drive in the old way.

A misty radiance clung over the grass as the sun dried the heavy dew; the thrushes hopped and ran and hid themselves, the rooks cawed peacefully in the old elms. At an angle the game cart, constructed on Mr. Pendyce's own pattern, and drawn by a hairy horse in charge of an aged man, made its way slowly to the end of the first beat:

George lagged behind, his hands deep in his pockets, drinking in the joy of the tranquil day, the soft bird sounds, so clear and friendly, that chorus of wild life. The scent of the coverts stole to him, and he thought:

'What a ripping day for shooting!'

The Squire, wearing a suit carefully coloured so that no bird should see him, leather leggings, and a cloth helmet of his own devising, ventilated by many little holes, came up to his son; and the spaniel John, who had a passion for the collection of birds almost equal to his master's, came up too.

"You're end gun, George," he said; "you'll get a nice high bird!"

George felt the ground with his feet, and blew a speck of dust off his barrels, and the smell of the oil sent a delicious tremor darting through him. Everything, even Helen Bellew, was forgotten. Then in the silence rose a far-off clamour; a cock pheasant, skimming low, his plumage silken in the sun, dived out of the green and golden spinney, curled to the right, and was lost in undergrowth. Some pigeons passed over at a great height. The tap-tap of sticks beating against trees began; then with a fitful rushing noise a pheasant came straight out. George threw up his gun and pulled. The bird stopped in mid-air, jerked forward, and fell headlong into the grass sods with a thud. In the sunlight the dead bird lay, and a smirk of triumph played on George's lips. He was feeling the joy of life.

During his covert shoots the Squire had the habit of recording his impressions in a mental note-book. He put special marks against such as missed, or shot birds behind the waist, or placed lead in them to the detriment of their market value, or broke only one leg of a hare at a time, causing the animal to cry like a tortured child, which some men do not like; or such as, anxious for fame, claimed dead creatures that they had not shot, or peopled the next beat with imaginary slain, or too frequently "wiped an important neighbour's eye," or shot too many beaters in the legs. Against this evidence, however, he unconsciously weighed the more undeniable social facts, such as the title of Winlow's father; Sir James Malden's coverts, which must also presently be shot; Thomas Brandwhite's position in the

financial world; General Pendyce's relationship to himself; and the importance of the English Church. Against Foxleigh alone he could put no marks. The fellow destroyed everything that came within reach with utter precision, and this was perhaps fortunate, for Foxleigh had neither title, coverts, position, nor cloth! And the Squire weighed one thing else besides – the pleasure of giving them all a good day's sport, for his heart was kind.

The sun had fallen well behind the home wood when the guns stood waiting for the last drive of the day. From the keeper's cottage in the hollow, where late threads of crimson clung in the brown network of Virginia creeper, rose a mist of wood smoke, dispersed upon the breeze. Sound there was none, only that faint stir – the far, far callings of men and beasts and birds – that never quite dies of a country evening. High above the wood some startled pigeons were still wheeling, no other life in sight; but a gleam of sunlight stole down the side of the covert and laid a burnish on the turned leaves till the whole wood seemed quivering with magic. Out of that quivering wood a wounded rabbit had stolen and was dying. It lay on its side on the slope of a tussock of grass, its hind legs drawn under it, its forelegs raised like the hands of a praying child. Motionless as death, all its remaining life was centred in its black soft eyes. Uncomplaining, ungrudging, unknowing, with that poor soft wandering eye, it was going back to Mother Earth. There Foxleigh, too, some day must go, asking of Nature why she had murdered him.

CHAPTER III
THE BLISSFUL HOUR

It was the hour between tea and dinner, when the spirit of the country house was resting, conscious of its virtue, half asleep.

Having bathed and changed, George Pendyce took his betting-book into the smoking-room. In a nook devoted to literature, protected from draught and intrusion by a high leather screen, he sat down in an armchair and fell into a doze.

With legs crossed, his chin resting on one hand, his comely figure relaxed, he exhaled a fragrance of soap, as though in this perfect peace his soul were giving off its natural odour. His spirit, on the borderland of dreams, trembled with those faint stirrings of chivalry and aspiration, the outcome of physical well-being after a long day in the open air, the outcome of security from all that is unpleasant and fraught with danger. He was awakened by voices.

"George is not a bad shot!"

"Gave a shocking exhibition at the last stand; Mrs. Bellew was with him. They were going over him like smoke; he couldn't touch a feather."

It was Winlow's voice. A silence, then Thomas Brandwhite's:

"A mistake, the ladies coming out. I never will have them myself. What do you say, Sir James?"

"Bad principle – very bad!"

A laugh – Thomas Brandwhite's laugh, the laugh of a man never quite sure of himself.

"That fellow Bellew is a cracked chap. They call him the 'desperate character' about here. Drinks like a fish, and rides like the devil. She used to go pretty hard, too. I've noticed there's always a couple like that in a hunting country. Did you ever see him? Thin, high-shouldered, white-faced chap, with little dark eyes and a red moustache."

"She's still a young woman?"

"Thirty or thirty-two."

"How was it they didn't get on?"

The sound of a match being struck.

"Case of the kettle and the pot."

"It's easy to see she's fond of admiration. Love of admiration plays old Harry with women!"

Winlow's leisurely tones again

"There was a child, I believe, and it died. And after that – I know there was some story; you never could get to the bottom of it. Bellew chucked his regiment in consequence. She's subject to moods, they say, when nothing's exciting enough; must skate on thin ice, must have a man skating after her. If the poor devil weighs more than she does, in he goes."

"That's like her father, old Cheriton. I knew him at the club – one of the old sort of squires; married his second wife at sixty and buried her at eighty. Old 'Claret and Piquet,' they called him; had more children under the rose than any man in Devonshire. I

saw him playing half-crown points the week before he died. It's in the blood. What's George's weight? – ah, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Brandwhite. There's time for a hundred up before dinner if you care for a game, Winlow?"

The sound of chairs drawn back, of footsteps, and the closing of a door. George was alone again, a spot of red in either of his cheeks. Those vague stirrings of chivalry and aspiration were gone, and gone that sense of well-earned ease. He got up, came out of his corner, and walked to and fro on the tiger-skin before the fire. He lit a cigarette, threw it away, and lit another.

Skating on thin ice! That would not stop him! Their gossip would not stop him, nor their sneers; they would but send him on the faster!

He threw away the second cigarette. It was strange for him to go to the drawing-room at this hour of the day, but he went.

Opening the door quietly, he saw the long, pleasant room lighted with tall oil-lamps, and Mrs. Bellew seated at the piano, singing. The tea-things were still on a table at one end, but every one had finished. As far away as might be, in the embrasure of the bay-window, General Pendyce and Bee were playing chess. Grouped in the centre of the room, by one of the lamps, Lady Malden, Mrs. Winlow, and Mrs. Brandwhite had turned their faces towards the piano, and a sort of slight unwillingness or surprise showed on those faces, a sort of "We were having a most interesting talk; I don't think we ought to have been stopped" expression.

Before the fire, with his long legs outstretched, stood Gerald Pendyce. And a little apart, her dark eyes fixed on the singer, and a piece of embroidery in her lap, sat Mrs. Pendyce, on the edge of whose skirt lay Roy, the old Skye terrier.

"But had I wist, before I lost,
That love had been sae ill to win;
I had lockt my heart in a case of gowd
And pinn'd it with a siller pin…
O waly! waly! but love be bonny
A little time while it is new,
But when 'tis auld, it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew!"

This was the song George heard, trembling and dying to the chords of the fine piano that was a little out of tune.

He gazed at the singer, and though he was not musical, there came a look into his eyes that he quickly hid away.

A slight murmur occurred in the centre of the room, and from the fireplace Gerald called out, "Thanks; that's rippin!"

The voice of General Pendyce rose in the bay-window: "Check!"

Mrs. Pendyce, taking up her embroidery, on which a tear had dropped, said gently:

"Thank you, dear; most charming!"

Mrs. Bellew left the piano, and sat down beside her. George moved into the bay-window. He knew nothing of chess-indeed,

he could not stand the game; but from here, without attracting attention, he could watch Mrs. Bellew.

The air was drowsy and sweet-scented; a log of cedarwood had just been put on the fire; the voices of his mother and Mrs. Bellew, talking of what he could not hear, the voices of Lady Malden, Mrs. Brandwhite, and Gerald, discussing some neighbours, of Mrs. Winlow dissenting or assenting in turn, all mingled in a comfortable, sleepy sound, clipped now and then by the voice of General Pendyce calling, "Check!" and of Bee saying, "Oh, uncle!"

A feeling of rage rose in George. Why should they all be so comfortable and cosy while this perpetual fire was burning in himself? And he fastened his moody eyes on her who was keeping him thus dancing to her pipes.

He made an awkward movement which shook the chess-table. The General said behind him: "Look out, George! What – what!"

George went up to his mother.

"Let's have a look at that, Mother."

Mrs. Pendyce leaned back in her chair and handed up her work with a smile of pleased surprise.

"My dear boy, you won't understand it a bit. It's for the front of my new frock."

George took the piece of work. He did not understand it, but turning and twisting it he could breathe the warmth of the woman he loved. In bending over the embroidery he touched Mrs. Bellew's shoulder; it was not drawn away, a faint pressure

seemed to answer his own. His mother's voice recalled him:

"Oh, my needle, dear! It's so sweet of you, but perhaps"

George handed back the embroidery. Mrs. Pendyce received it with a grateful look. It was the first time he had ever shown an interest in her work.

Mrs. Bellew had taken up a palm-leaf fan to screen her face from the fire. She said slowly:

"If we win to-morrow I'll embroider you something, George."

"And if we lose?"

Mrs. Bellew raised her eyes, and involuntarily George moved so that his mother could not see the sort of slow mesmerism that was in them.

"If we lose," she said, "I shall sink into the earth. We must win, George."

He gave an uneasy little laugh, and glanced quickly at his mother. Mrs. Pendyce had begun to draw her needle in and out with a half-startled look on her face.

"That's a most haunting little song you sang, dear," she said.

Mrs. Bellew answered: "The words are so true, aren't they?"

George felt her eyes on him, and tried to look at her, but those half-smiling, half-threatening eyes seemed to twist and turn him about as his hands had twisted and turned about his mother's embroidery. Again across Mrs. Pendyce's face flitted that half-startled look.

Suddenly General Pendyce's voice was heard saying very loud, "Stale? Nonsense, Bee, nonsense! Why, damme, so it is!"

A hum of voices from the centre of the room covered up that outburst, and Gerald, stepping to the hearth, threw another cedar log upon the fire. The smoke came out in a puff.

Mrs. Pendyce leaned back in her chair smiling, and wrinkling her fine, thin nose.

"Delicious!" she said, but her eyes did not leave her son's face, and in them was still that vague alarm.

CHAPTER IV
THE HAPPY HUNTING-GROUND

Of all the places where, by a judicious admixture of whip and spur, oats and whisky, horses are caused to place one leg before another with unnecessary rapidity, in order that men may exchange little pieces of metal with the greater freedom, Newmarket Heath is "the topmost, and merriest, and best."

This museum of the state of flux – the secret reason of horse-racing being to afford an example of perpetual motion (no proper racing-man having ever been found to regard either gains or losses in the light of an accomplished fact) – this museum of the state of flux has a climate unrivalled for the production of the British temperament.

Not without a due proportion of that essential formative of character, east wind, it has at once the hottest sun, the coldest blizzards, the wettest rain, of any place of its size in the "three kingdoms." It tends – in advance even of the City of London – to the nurture and improvement of individualism, to that desirable "I'll see you d – d" state of mind which is the proud objective of every Englishman, and especially of every country gentleman. In a word – a mother to the self-reliant secretiveness which defies intrusion and forms an integral part in the Christianity of this country – Newmarket Heath is beyond all others the happy hunting-ground of the landed classes.

In the Paddock half an hour before the Rutlandshire Handicap was to be run numbers of racing-men were gathered in little knots of two and three, describing to each other with every precaution the points of strength in the horses they had laid against, the points of weakness in the horses they had backed, or vice versa, together with the latest discrepancies of their trainers and jockeys. At the far end George Pendyce, his trainer Blacksmith, and his jockey Swells, were talking in low tones. Many people have observed with surprise the close-buttoned secrecy of all who have to do with horses. It is no matter for wonder. The horse is one of those generous and somewhat careless animals that, if not taken firmly from the first, will surely give itself away. Essential to a man who has to do with horses is a complete closeness of physiognomy, otherwise the animal will never know what is expected of him. The more that is expected of him, the closer must be the expression of his friends, or a grave fiasco may have to be deplored.

It was for these reasons that George's face wore more than its habitual composure, and the faces of his trainer and his jockey were alert, determined, and expressionless. Blacksmith, a little man, had in his hand a short notched cane, with which, contrary to expectation, he did not switch his legs. His eyelids drooped over his shrewd eyes, his upper lip advanced over the lower, and he wore no hair on his face. The Jockey Swells' pinched-up countenance, with jutting eyebrows and practically no cheeks, had under George's racing-cap of "peacock blue" a subfusc hue

like that of old furniture.

The Ambler had been bought out of the stud of Colonel Dorking, a man opposed on high grounds to the racing of two-year-olds, and at the age of three had never run. Showing more than a suspicion of form in one or two home trials, he ran a bye in the Fane Stakes, when obviously not up to the mark, and was then withdrawn from the public gaze. The Stable had from the start kept its eye on the Rutlandshire Handicap, and no sooner was Goodwood over than the commission was placed in the hands of Barney's, well known for their power to enlist at the most appropriate moment the sympathy of the public in a horse's favour. Almost coincidentally with the completion of the Stable Commission it was found that the public were determined to support the Ambler at any price over seven to one. Barney's at once proceeded judiciously to lay off the Stable Money, and this having been done, George found that he stood to win four thousand pounds to nothing. If he had now chosen to bet this sum against the horse at the then current price of eight to one, it is obvious that he could have made an absolute certainty of five hundred pounds, and the horse need never even have started. But George, who would have been glad enough of such a sum, was not the man to do this sort of thing. It was against the tenets of his creed. He believed, too, in his horse; and had enough of the Totteridge in him to like a race for a race's sake. Even when beaten there was enjoyment to be had out of the imperturbability with which he could take that beating, out of a

sense of superiority to men not quite so sportsmanlike as himself.

"Come and see the nag saddled," he said to his brother Gerald.

In one of the long line of boxes the Ambler was awaiting his toilette, a dark-brown horse, about sixteen hands, with well-placed shoulders, straight hocks, a small head, and what is known as a rat-tail. But of all his features, the most remarkable was his eye. In the depths of that full, soft eye was an almost uncanny gleam, and when he turned it, half-circled by a moon of white, and gave bystanders that look of strange comprehension, they felt that he saw to the bottom of all this that was going on around him. He was still but three years old, and had not yet attained the age when people apply to action the fruits of understanding; yet there was little doubt that as he advanced in years he would manifest his disapproval of a system whereby men made money at his expense. And with that eye half-circled by the moon he looked at George, and in silence George looked back at him, strangely baffled by the horse's long, soft, wild gaze. On this heart beating deep within its warm, dark satin sheath, on the spirit gazing through that soft, wild eye, too much was hanging, and he turned away.

"Mount, jockeys!"

Through the crowd of hard-looking, hatted, muffled, two-legged men, those four-legged creatures in their chestnut, bay, and brown, and satin nakedness, most beautiful in all the world, filed proudly past, as though going forth to death. The last vanished through the gate, the crowd dispersed.

Down by the rails of Tattersall's George stood alone. He had screwed himself into a corner, whence he could watch through his long glasses that gay-coloured, shifting wheel at the end of the mile and more of turf. At this moment, so pregnant with the future, he could not bear the company of his fellows.

"They're off!"

He looked no longer, but hunched his shoulders, holding his elbows stiff, that none might see what he was feeling. Behind him a man said:

"The favourite's beat. What's that in blue on the rails?"

Out by himself on the far rails, out by himself, sweeping along like a home-coming bird, was the Ambler. And George's heart leaped, as a fish leaps of a summer evening out of a dark pool.

"They'll never catch him. The Ambler wins! It's a walk-over! The Ambler!"

Silent amidst the shouting throng, George thought: 'My horse! my horse!' and tears of pure emotion sprang into his eyes. For a full minute he stood quite still; then, instinctively adjusting hat and tie, made his way calmly to the Paddock. He left it to his trainer to lead the Ambler back, and joined him at the weighing-room.

The little jockey was seated, nursing his saddle, negligent and saturnine, awaiting the words "All right."

Blacksmith said quietly:

"Well, sir, we've pulled it off. Four lengths. I've told Swells he does no more riding for me. There's a gold-mine given away.

What on earth was he about to come in by himself like that? We shan't get into the 'City' now under nine stone. It's enough to make a man cry!"

And, looking at his trainer, George saw the little man's lips quiver.

In his stall, streaked with sweat, his hind-legs outstretched, fretting under the ministrations of the groom, the Ambler stayed the whisking of his head to look at his owner, and once more George met that long, proud, soft glance. He laid his gloved hand on the horse's lather-flecked neck. The Ambler tossed his head and turned it away.

George came out into the open, and made his way towards the Stand. His trainer's words had instilled a drop of poison into his cup. "A goldmine given away!"

He went up to Swells. On his lips were the words: "What made you give the show away like that?" He did not speak them, for in his soul he felt it would not become him to ask his jockey why he had not dissembled and won by a length. But the little jockey understood at once.

"Mr. Blacksmith's been at me, sir. You take my tip: he's a queer one, that 'orse. I thought it best to let him run his own race. Mark my words, he knows what's what. When they're like that, they're best let alone."

A voice behind him said:

"Well, George, congratulate you! Not the way I should have ridden the race myself. He should have lain off to the

distance. Remarkable turn of speed that horse. There's no riding nowadays!"

The Squire and General Pendyce were standing there. Erect and slim, unlike and yet so very much alike, the eyes of both of them seemed saying:

'I shall differ from you; there are no two opinions about it. I shall differ from you!'

Behind them stood Mrs. Bellew. Her eyes could not keep still under their lashes, and their light and colour changed continually. George walked on slowly at her side. There was a look of triumph and softness about her; the colour kept deepening in her cheeks, her figure swayed. They did not look at each other.

Against the Paddock railings stood a man in riding-clothes, of spare figure, with a horseman's square, high shoulders, and thin long legs a trifle bowed. His narrow, thin-lipped, freckled face, with close-cropped sandy hair and clipped red moustache, was of a strange dead pallor. He followed the figures of George and his companion with little fiery dark-brown eyes, in which devils seemed to dance. Someone tapped him on the arm.

"Hallo, Bellew! had a good race?"

"Devil take you, no! Come and have a drink?"

Still without looking at each other, George and Mrs. Bellew walked towards the gate.

"I don't want to see any more," she said. "I should like to get away at once."

"We'll go after this race," said George. "There's nothing

running in the last."

At the back of the Grand Stand, in the midst of all the hurrying crowd, he stopped.

"Helen?" he said.

Mrs. Bellew raised her eyes and looked full into his.

Long and cross-country is the drive from Royston Railway Station to Worsted Skeynes. To George Pendyce, driving the dog cart, with Helen Bellew beside him, it seemed but a minute – that strange minute when the heaven is opened and a vision shows between. To some men that vision comes but once, to some men many times. It comes after long winter, when the blossom hangs; it comes after parched summer, when the leaves are going gold; and of what hues it is painted – of frost-white and fire, of wine and purple, of mountain flowers, or the shadowy green of still deep pools – the seer alone can tell. But this is certain – the vision steals from him who looks on it all images of other things, all sense of law, of order, of the living past, and the living present. It is the future, fair-scented, singing, jewelled, as when suddenly between high banks a bough of apple-blossom hangs quivering in the wind loud with the song of bees.

George Pendyce gazed before him at this vision over the grey mare's back, and she who sat beside him muffled in her fur was touching his arm with hers. And back to them the second groom, hugging himself above the road that slipped away beneath, saw another kind of vision, for he had won five pounds, and his eyes were closed. And the grey mare saw a vision of her warm light

stall, and the oats dropping between her manger bars, and fled with light hoofs along the lanes where the side-lamps shot two moving gleams over dark beech-hedges that rustled crisply in the northeast wind. Again and again she sneezed in the pleasure of that homeward flight, and the light foam of her nostrils flicked the faces of those behind. And they sat silent, thrilling at the touch of each other's arms, their cheeks glowing in the windy darkness, their eyes shining and fixed before them.

The second groom awoke suddenly from his dream.

"If I owned that 'orse, like Mr. George, and had such a topper as this 'ere Mrs. Bellew beside me, would I be sittin' there without a word?"

CHAPTER V
MRS. PENDYCE'S DANCE

Mrs. Pendyce believed in the practice of assembling county society for the purpose of inducing it to dance, a hardy enterprise in a county where the souls, and incidentally the feet, of the inhabitants were shaped for more solid pursuits. Men were her chief difficulty, for in spite of really national discouragement, it was rare to find a girl who was not "fond of dancing."

"Ah, dancing; I did so love it! Oh, poor Cecil Tharp!" And with a queer little smile she pointed to a strapping red-faced youth dancing with her daughter. "He nearly trips Bee up every minute, and he hugs her so, as if he were afraid of falling on his head. Oh, dear, what a bump! It's lucky she's so nice and solid. I like to see the dear boy. Here come George and Helen Bellew. Poor George is not quite up to her form, but he's better than most of them. Doesn't she look lovely this evening?"

Lady Malden raised her glasses to her eyes by the aid of a tortoise-shell handle.

"Yes, but she's one of those women you never can look at without seeing that she has a – a – body. She's too-too – d'you see what I mean? It's almost – almost like a Frenchwoman!"

Mrs. Bellew had passed so close that the skirt of her seagreen dress brushed their feet with a swish, and a scent as of a flower-bed was wafted from it. Mrs. Pendyce wrinkled her nose.

"Much nicer. Her figure's so delicious," she said.

Lady Malden pondered.

"She's a dangerous woman. James quite agrees with me."

Mrs. Pendyce raised her eyebrows; there was a touch of scorn in that gentle gesture.

"She's a very distant cousin of mine," she said. "Her father was quite a wonderful man. It's an old Devonshire family. The Cheritons of Bovey are mentioned in Twisdom. I like young people to enjoy themselves."

A smile illumined softly the fine wrinkles round her eyes. Beneath her lavender satin bodice, with strips of black velvet banding it at intervals, her heart was beating faster than usual. She was thinking of a night in her youth, when her old playfellow, young Trefane of the Blues, danced with her nearly all the evening, and of how at her window she saw the sun rise, and gently wept because she was married to Horace Pendyce.

"I always feel sorry for a woman who can dance as she does. I should have liked to have got some men from town, but Horace will only have the county people. It's not fair to the girls. It isn't so much their dancing, as their conversation – all about the first meet, and yesterday's cubbing, and to-morrow's covert-shooting, and their fox-terriers (though I'm awfully fond of the dear dogs), and then that new golf course. Really, it's quite distressing to me at times." Again Mrs. Pendyce looked out into the room with her patient smile, and two little lines of wrinkles formed across her forehead between the regular arching of her eyebrows that were

still dark-brown. “They don’t seem able to be gay. I feel they don’t really care about it. They’re only just waiting till to-morrow morning, so that they can go out and kill something. Even Bee’s like that!”

Mrs. Pendyce was not exaggerating. The guests at Worsted Skeynes on the night of the Rutlandshire Handicap were nearly all county people, from the Hon. Gertrude Winlow, revolving like a faintly coloured statue, to young Tharp, with his clean face and his fair bullety head, who danced as though he were riding at a bullfinch. In a niche old Lord Quarryman, the Master of the Gaddesdon, could be discerned in conversation with Sir James Malden and the Reverend Hussell Barter.

Mrs. Pendyce said:

“Your husband and Lord Quarryman are talking of poachers; I can tell that by the look of their hands. I can’t help sympathising a little with poachers.”

Lady Malden dropped her eyeglasses.

“James takes a very just view of them,” she said. “It’s such an insidious offence. The more insidious the offence the more important it is to check it. It seems hard to punish people for stealing bread or turnips, though one must, of course; but I’ve no sympathy with poachers. So many of them do it for sheer love of sport!”

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

“That’s Captain Maydew dancing with her now. He is a good dancer. Don’t their steps fit? Don’t they look happy? I do like

people to enjoy themselves! There is such a dreadful lot of unnecessary sadness and suffering in the world. I think it's really all because people won't make allowances for each other."

Lady Malden looked at her sideways, pursing her lips; but Mrs. Pendyce, by race a Totteridge, continued to smile. She had been born unconscious of her neighbours' scrutinies.

"Helen Bellew," she said, "was such a lovely girl. Her grandfather was my mother's cousin. What does that make her? Anyway, my cousin, Gregory Vigil, is her first cousin once removed – the Hampshire Vigils. Do you know him?"

Lady Malden answered:

"Gregory Vigil? The man with a lot of greyish hair? I've had to do with him in the S.R.W.C."

But Mrs. Pendyce was dancing mentally.

"Such a good fellow! What is that – the – ?"

Lady Malden gave her a sharp look.

"Society for the Rescue of Women and Children, of course. Surely you know about that?"

Mrs. Pendyce continued to smile.

"Ah, yes, that is nice! What a beautiful figure she has! It's so refreshing. I envy a woman with a figure like that; it looks as if it would never grow old. 'Society for the Regeneration of Women'. Gregory's so good about that sort of thing. But he never seems quite successful, have you noticed? There was a woman he was very interested in this spring. I think she drank."

"They all do," said Lady Malden; "it's the curse of the day."

Mrs. Pendyce wrinkled her forehead.

"Most of the Totteridges," she said, "were great drinkers. They ruined their constitutions. Do you know Jaspar Bellew?"

"No."

"It's such a pity he drinks. He came to dinner here once, and I'm afraid he must have come intoxicated. He took me in; his little eyes quite burned me up. He drove his dog cart into a ditch on the way home. That sort of thing gets about so. It's such a pity. He's quite interesting. Horace can't stand him."

The music of the waltz had ceased. Lady Malden put her glasses to her eyes. From close beside them George and Mrs. Bellew passed by. They moved on out of hearing, but the breeze of her fan had touched the arching hair on Lady Malden's forehead, the down on her upper lip.

"Why isn't she with her husband?" she asked abruptly.

Mrs. Pendyce lifted her brows.

"Do you concern yourself to ask that which a well-bred woman leaves unanswered?" she seemed to say, and a flush coloured her cheeks.

Lady Malden winced, but, as though it were forced through her mouth by some explosion in her soul, she said:

"You have only to look and see how dangerous she is!"

The colour in Mrs. Pendyce's cheeks deepened to a blush like a girl's.

"Every man," she said, "is in love with Helen Bellew. She's so tremendously alive. My cousin Gregory has been in love with her

for years, though he is her guardian or trustee, or whatever they call them now. It's quite romantic. If I were a man I should be in love with her myself." The flush vanished and left her cheeks to their true colour, that of a faded rose.

Once more she was listening to the voice of young Trefane, "Ah, Margery, I love you!" – to her own half whispered answer, "Poor boy!" Once more she was looking back through that forest of her life where she had wandered so long, and where every tree was Horace Pendyce.

"What a pity one can't always be young!" she said.

Through the conservatory door, wide open to the lawn, a full moon flooded the country with pale gold light, and in that light the branches of the cedar-trees seemed printed black on the grey-blue paper of the sky; all was cold, still witchery out there, and not very far away an owl was hooting.

The Reverend Husell Barter, about to enter the conservatory for a breath of air, was arrested by the sight of a couple half-hidden by a bushy plant; side by side they were looking at the moonlight, and he knew them for Mrs. Bellew and George Pendyce. Before he could either enter or retire, he saw George seize her in his arms. She seemed to bend her head back, then bring her face to his. The moonlight fell on it, and on the full, white curve of her neck. The Rector of Worsted Skeynes saw, too, that her eyes were closed, her lips parted.

CHAPTER VI
INFLUENCE OF THE REVEREND HUSSELL BARTER

Along the walls of the smoking-room, above a leather dado, were prints of horsemen in night-shirts and nightcaps, or horsemen in red coats and top-hats, with words underneath such as:

"'Yeoicks' says Thruster; 'Yeoicks' says Dick. 'My word! these d – d Quornites shall now see the trick!'.rdquo;

Two pairs of antlers surmounted the hearth, mementoes of Mr. Pendyce's deer-forest, Strathbegally, now given up, where, with the assistance of his dear old gillie Angus McBane, he had secured the heads of these monarchs of the glen. Between them was the print of a personage in trousers, with a rifle under his arm and a smile on his lips, while two large deerhounds worried a dying stag, and a lady approached him on a pony.

The Squire and Sir James Malden had retired; the remaining guests were seated round the fire. Gerald Pendyce stood at a side-table, on which was a tray of decanters, glasses, and mineral water.

"Who's for a dhrop of the craythur? A wee dhrop of the craythur? Rector, a dhrop of the craythur? George, a dhrop – "

George shook his head. A smile was on his lips, and that smile

had in it a quality of remoteness, as though it belonged to another sphere, and had strayed on to the lips of this man of the world against his will. He seemed trying to conquer it, to twist his face into its habitual shape, but, like the spirit of a strange force, the smile broke through. It had mastered him, his thoughts, his habits, and his creed; he was stripped of fashion, as on a thirsty noon a man stands stripped for a cool plunge from which he hardly cares if he come up again.

And this smile, not by intrinsic merit, but by virtue of its strangeness, attracted the eye of each man in the room; so, in a crowd, the most foreign-looking face will draw all glances.

The Reverend Husell Barter with a frown watched that smile, and strange thoughts chased through his mind.

"Uncle Charles, a dhrop of the craythur a wee dhrop of the craythur?"

General Pendyce caressed his whisker.

"The least touch," he said, "the least touch! I hear that our friend Sir Percival is going to stand again."

Mr. Barter rose and placed his back before the fire.

"Outrageous!" he said. "He ought to be told at once that we can't have him."

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow answered from his chair:

"If he puts up, he'll get in; they can't afford to lose him." And with a leisurely puff of smoke: "I must say, sir, I don't quite see what it has to do with his public life."

Mr. Barter thrust forth his lower lip.

"An impenitent man," he said.

"But a woman like that! What chance has a fellow if she once gets hold of him?"

"When I was stationed at Halifax," began General Pendyce, "she was the belle of the place – "

Again Mr. Barter thrust out his lower lip.

"Don't let's talk of her – the jade!" Then suddenly to George: "Let's hear your opinion, George. Dreaming of your victories, eh?" And the tone of his voice was peculiar.

But George got up.

"I'm too sleepy," he said; "good-night." Curtly nodding, he left the room.

Outside the door stood a dark oak table covered with silver candlesticks; a single candle burned thereon, and made a thin gold path in the velvet blackness. George lighted his candle, and a second gold path leaped out in front; up this he began to ascend. He carried his candle at the level of his breast, and the light shone sideways and up over his white shirt-front and the comely, bulldog face above it. It shone, too, into his eyes, 'grey and slightly bloodshot, as though their surfaces concealed passions violently struggling for expression. At the turning platform of the stair he paused. In darkness above and in darkness below the country house was still; all the little life of its day, its petty sounds, movements, comings, goings, its very breathing, seemed to have fallen into sleep. The forces of its life had gathered into that pool of light where George stood listening. The beating of his

heart was the only sound; in that small sound was all the pulse of this great slumbering space. He stood there long, motionless, listening to the beating of his heart, like a man fallen into a trance. Then floating up through the darkness came the echo of a laugh. George started. "The d – d parson!" he muttered, and turned up the stairs again; but now he moved like a man with a purpose, and held his candle high so that the light fell far out into the darkness. He went beyond his own room, and stood still again. The light of the candle showed the blood flushing his forehead, beating and pulsing in the veins at the side of his temples; showed, too, his lips quivering, his shaking hand. He stretched out that hand and touched the handle of a door, then stood again like a man of stone, listening for the laugh. He raised the candle, and it shone into every nook; his throat clicked, as though he found it hard to swallow…

It was at Barnard Scrolls, the next station to Worsted Skeynes, on the following afternoon, that a young man entered a first-class compartment of the 3.10 train to town. The young man wore a Newmarket coat, natty white gloves, and carried an eyeglass. His face was well coloured, his chestnut moustache well brushed, and his blue eyes with their loving expression seemed to say, "Look at me – come, look at me – can anyone be better fed?" His valise and hat-box, of the best leather, bore the inscription, "E. Maydew, 8th Lancers."

There was a lady leaning back in a corner, wrapped to the chin in a fur garment, and the young man, encountering through

his eyeglass her cool, ironical glance, dropped it and held out his hand.

"Ah, Mrs. Bellew, great pleasure t'see you again so soon. You goin' up to town? Jolly dance last night, wasn't it? Dear old sort, the Squire, and Mrs. Pendyce such an awf'ly nice woman."

Mrs. Bellew took his hand, and leaned back again in her corner. She was rather paler than usual, but it became her, and Captain Maydew thought he had never seen so charming a creature.

"Got a week's leave, thank goodness. Most awf'ly slow time of year. Cubbin's pretty well over, an' we don't open till the first."

He turned to the window. There in the sunlight the hedgerows ran golden and brown away from the clouds of trailing train smoke. Young Maydew shook his head at their beauty.

"The country's still very blind," he said. "Awful pity you've given up your huntin'."

Mrs. Bellew did not trouble to answer, and it was just that certainty over herself, the cool assurance of a woman who has known the world, her calm, almost negligent eyes, that fascinated this young man. He looked at her quite shyly.

'I suppose you will become my slave,' those eyes seemed to say, 'but I can't help you, really.'

"Did you back George's horse? I had an awf'ly good race. I was at school with George. Charmin' fellow, old George."

In Mrs. Bellew's eyes something seemed to stir down in the depths, but young Maydew was looking at his glove. The handle

of the carriage had left a mark that saddened him.

"You know him well, I suppose, old George?"

"Very well."

"Some fellows, if they have a good thing, keep it so jolly dark. You fond of racin', Mrs. Bellew?"

"Passionately."

"So am I." And his eyes continued, 'It's ripping to like what you like,' for, hypnotised, they could not tear themselves away from that creamy face, with its full lips and the clear, faintly smiling eyes above the high collar of white fur.

At the terminus his services were refused, and rather crestfallen, with his hat raised, he watched her walk away. But soon, in his cab, his face regained its normal look, his eyes seemed saying to the little mirror, 'Look at me come, look at me – can anyone be better fed?'

CHAPTER VII
SABBATH AT WORSTED SKEYNES

In the white morning-room which served for her boudoir Mrs. Pendyce sat with an opened letter in her lap. It was her practice to sit there on Sunday mornings for an hour before she went to her room adjoining to put on her hat for church. It was her pleasure during that hour to do nothing but sit at the window, open if the weather permitted, and look over the home paddock and the squat spire of the village church rising among a group of elms. It is not known what she thought about at those times, unless of the countless Sunday mornings she had sat there with her hands in her lap waiting to be roused at 10.45 by the Squire's entrance and his "Now, my dear, you'll be late!" She had sat there till her hair, once dark-brown, was turning grey; she would sit there until it was white. One day she would sit there no longer, and, as likely as not, Mr. Pendyce, still well preserved, would enter and say, "Now, my dear, you'll be late!" having for the moment forgotten.

But this was all to be expected, nothing out of the common; the same thing was happening in hundreds of country houses throughout the "three kingdoms," and women were sitting waiting for their hair to turn white, who, long before, at the altar of a fashionable church, had parted with their imaginations and all the changes and chances of this mortal life.

Round her chair "the dear dogs" lay – this was their practice

too, and now and again the Skye (he was getting very old) would put out a long tongue and lick her little pointed shoe. For Mrs. Pendyce had been a pretty woman, and her feet were as small as ever.

Beside her on a spindley table stood a china bowl filled with dried rose-leaves, whereon had been scattered an essence smelling like sweetbriar, whose secret she had learned from her mother in the old Warwickshire home of the Totteridges, long since sold to Mr. Abraham Brightman. Mrs. Pendyce, born in the year 1840, loved sweet perfumes, and was not ashamed of using them.

The Indian summer sun was soft and bright; and wistful, soft, and bright were Mrs. Pendyce's eyes, fixed on the letter in her lap. She turned it over and began to read again. A wrinkle visited her brow. It was not often that a letter demanding decision or involving responsibility came to her hands past the kind and just censorship of Horace Pendyce. Many matters were under her control, but were not, so to speak, connected with the outer world. Thus ran the letter:

"S.R.W.C., HANOVER SQUARE,

"November 1, 1891.

"DEAR MARGERY,

"I want to see you and talk something over, so I'm running down on Sunday afternoon. There is a train of sorts. Any loft will do for me to sleep in if your house is full, as it may be, I suppose, at this time of year. On second thoughts I will tell you what I want

to see you about. You know, of course, that since her father died I am Helen Bellew's only guardian. Her present position is one in which no woman should be placed; I am convinced it ought to be put an end to. That man Bellew deserves no consideration. I cannot write of him coolly, so I won't write at all. It is two years now since they separated, entirely, as I consider, through his fault. The law has placed her in a cruel and helpless position all this time; but now, thank God, I believe we can move for a divorce. You know me well enough to realise what I have gone through before coming to this conclusion. Heaven knows if I could hit on some other way in which her future could be safeguarded, I would take it in preference to this, which is most repugnant; but I cannot. You are the only woman I can rely on to be interested in her, and I must see Bellew. Let not the fat and just Benson and his estimable horses be disturbed on my account; I will walk up and carry my toothbrush.

"Affectionately your cousin,

"GREGORY VIGIL."

Mrs. Pendyce smiled. She saw no joke, but she knew from the wording of the last sentence that Gregory saw one, and she liked to give it a welcome; so smiling and wrinkling her forehead, she mused over the letter. Her thoughts wandered. The last scandal – Lady Rose Bethany's divorce – had upset the whole county, and even now one had to be careful what one said. Horace would not like the idea of another divorce-suit, and that so close to Worsted Skeynes. When Helen left on Thursday he had said:

"I'm not sorry she's gone. Her position is a queer one. People don't like it. The Maldens were quite – "

And Mrs. Pendyce remembered with a glow at her heart how she had broken in:

"Ellen Malden is too bourgeoise for anything!"

Nor had Mr. Pendyce's look of displeasure effaced the comfort of that word.

Poor Horace! The children took after him, except George, who took after her brother Hubert. The dear boy had gone back to his club on Friday – the day after Helen and the others went. She wished he could have stayed. She wished – The wrinkle deepened on her brow. Too much London was bad for him! Too much – Her fancy flew to the London which she saw now only for three weeks in June and July, for the sake of the girls, just when her garden was at its best, and when really things were such a whirl that she never knew whether she was asleep or awake. It was not like London at all – not like that London under spring skies, or in early winter lamplight, where all the passers-by seemed so interesting, living all sorts of strange and eager lives, with strange and eager pleasures, running all sorts of risks, hungry sometimes, homeless even – so fascinating, so unlike —

"Now, my dear, you'll be late!"

Mr. Pendyce, in his Norfolk jacket, which he was on his way to change for a black coat, passed through the room, followed by the spaniel John. He turned at the door, and the spaniel John turned too.

"I hope to goodness Barter'll be short this morning. I want to talk to old Fox about that new chaff-cutter."

Round their mistress the three terriers raised their heads; the aged Skye gave forth a gentle growl. Mrs. Pendyce leaned over and stroked his nose.

"Roy, Roy, how can you, dear?"

Mr. Pendyce said:

"The old dog's losing all his teeth; he'll have to be put away."

His wife flushed painfully.

"Oh no, Horace – oh no!"

The Squire coughed.

"We must think of the dog!" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce rose, and crumpling the letter nervously, followed him from the room.

A narrow path led through the home paddock towards the church, and along it the household were making their way. The maids in feathers hurried along guiltily by twos and threes; the butler followed slowly by himself. A footman and a groom came next, leaving trails of pomatum in the air. Presently General Pendyce, in a high square-topped bowler hat, carrying a malacca cane, and Prayer-Book, appeared walking between Bee and Norah, also carrying Prayer-Books, with fox-terriers by their sides. Lastly, the Squire in a high hat, six or seven paces in advance of his wife, in a small velvet toque.

The rooks had ceased their wheeling and their cawing; the five-minutes bell, with its jerky, toneless tolling, alone broke the

Sunday hush. An old horse, not yet taken up from grass, stood motionless, resting a hind-leg, with his face turned towards the footpath. Within the churchyard wicket the Rector, firm and square, a low-crowned hat tilted up on his bald forehead, was talking to a deaf old cottager. He raised his hat and nodded to the ladies; then, leaving his remark unfinished, disappeared within the vestry. At the organ Mrs. Barter was drawing out stops in readiness to play her husband into church, and her eyes, half-shining and half-anxious, were fixed intently on the vestry door.

The Squire and Mrs. Pendyce, now almost abreast, came down the aisle and took their seats beside their daughters and the General in the first pew on the left. It was high and cushioned. They knelt down on tall red hassocks. Mrs. Pendyce remained over a minute buried in thought; Mr. Pendyce rose sooner, and looking down, kicked the hassock that had been put too near the seat. Fixing his glasses on his nose, he consulted a worn old Bible, then rising, walked to the lectern and began to find the Lessons. The bell ceased; a wheezing, growling noise was heard. Mrs. Barter had begun to play; the Rector, in a white surplice, was coming in. Mr. Pendyce, with his back turned, continued to find the Lessons. The service began.

Through a plain glass window high up in the right-hand aisle the sun shot a gleam athwart the Pendyces' pew. It found its last resting-place on Mrs. Barter's face, showing her soft crumpled cheeks painfully flushed, the lines on her forehead, and those shining eyes, eager and anxious, travelling ever from her husband

to her music and back again. At the least fold or frown on his face the music seemed to quiver, as to some spasm in the player's soul. In the Pendyces' pew the two girls sang loudly and with a certain sweetness. Mr. Pendyce, too, sang, and once or twice he looked in surprise at his brother, as though he were not making a creditable noise.

Mrs. Pendyce did not sing, but her lips moved, and her eyes followed the millions of little dust atoms dancing in the long slanting sunbeam. Its gold path canted slowly from her, then, as by magic, vanished. Mrs. Pendyce let her eyes fall. Something had fled from her soul with the sunbeam; her lips moved no more.

The Squire sang two loud notes, spoke three, sang two again; the Psalms ceased. He left his seat, and placing his hands on the lectern's sides, leaned forward and began to read the Lesson. He read the story of Abraham and Lot, and of their flocks and herds, and how they could not dwell together, and as he read, hypnotised by the sound of his own voice, he was thinking:

'This Lesson is well read by me, Horace Pendyce. I am Horace Pendyce – Horace Pendyce. Amen, Horace Pendyce!'

And in the first pew on the left Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes upon him, for this was her habit, and she thought how, when the spring came again, she would run up to town, alone, and stay at Green's Hotel, where she had always stayed with her father when a girl. George had promised to look after her, and take her round the theatres. And forgetting that she had thought this every autumn for the last ten years, she gently smiled and nodded. Mr.

Pendyce said:

"'And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.' Here endeth the first Lesson."

The sun, reaching the second window, again shot a gold pathway athwart the church; again the millions of dust atoms danced, and the service went on.

There came a hush. The spaniel John, crouched close to the ground outside, poked his long black nose under the churchyard gate; the fox-terriers, seated patient in the grass, pricked their ears. A voice speaking on one note broke the hush. The spaniel John sighed, the fox-terriers dropped their ears, and lay down heavily against each other. The Rector had begun to preach. He preached on fruitfulness, and in the first right-hand pew six of his children at once began to fidget. Mrs. Barter, sideways and unsupported on her seat, kept her starry eyes fixed on his cheek; a line of perplexity furrowed her brow. Now and again she moved as though her back ached. The Rector quartered his congregation with his gaze, lest any amongst them should incline to sleep. He spoke in a loud-sounding voice.

God-he said-wished men to be fruitful, intended them to be fruitful, commanded them to be fruitful. God – he said – made

men, and made the earth; He made man to be fruitful in the earth; He made man neither to question nor answer nor argue; He made him to be fruitful and possess the land. As they had heard in that beautiful Lesson this morning, God had set bounds, the bounds of marriage, within which man should multiply; within those bounds it was his duty to multiply, and that exceedingly – even as Abraham multiplied. In these days dangers, pitfalls, snares, were rife; in these days men went about and openly, unashamedly advocated shameful doctrines. Let them beware. It would be his sacred duty to exclude such men from within the precincts of that parish entrusted to his care by God. In the language of their greatest poet, "Such men were dangerous" – dangerous to Christianity, dangerous to their country, and to national life. They were not brought into this world to follow sinful inclination, to obey their mortal reason. God demanded sacrifices of men. Patriotism demanded sacrifices of men, it demanded that they should curb their inclinations and desires. It demanded of them their first duty as men and Christians, the duty of being fruitful and multiplying, in order that they might till this fruitful earth, not selfishly, not for themselves alone. It demanded of them the duty of multiplying in order that they and their children might be equipped to smite the enemies of their Queen and country, and uphold the name of England in whatever quarrel, against all who rashly sought to drag her flag in the dust.

The Squire opened his eyes and looked at his watch. Folding his arms, he coughed, for he was thinking of the chaff-cutter.

Beside him Mrs. Pendyce, with her eyes on the altar, smiled as if in sleep. She was thinking, 'Skyward's in Bond Street used to have lovely lace. Perhaps in the spring I could – Or there was Goblin's, their Point de Venise – '

Behind them, four rows back, an aged cottage woman, as upright as a girl, sat with a rapt expression on her carved old face. She never moved, her eyes seemed drinking in the movements of the Rector's lips, her whole being seemed hanging on his words. It is true her dim eyes saw nothing but a blur, her poor deaf ears could not hear one word, but she sat at the angle she was used to, and thought of nothing at all. And perhaps it was better so, for she was near her end.

Outside the churchyard, in the sun-warmed grass, the fox-terriers lay one against the other, pretending to shiver, with their small bright eyes fixed on the church door, and the rubbery nostrils of the spaniel John worked ever busily beneath the wicket gate.

CHAPTER VIII
GREGORY VIGIL PROPOSES

About three o'clock that afternoon a tall man walked up the avenue at Worsted Skeynes, in one hand carrying his hat, in the other a small brown bag. He stopped now and then, and took deep breaths, expanding the nostrils of his straight nose. He had a fine head, with wings of grizzled hair. His clothes were loose, his stride was springy. Standing in the middle of the drive, taking those long breaths, with his moist blue eyes upon the sky, he excited the attention of a robin, who ran out of a rhododendron to see, and when he had passed began to whistle. Gregory Vigil turned, and screwed up his humorous lips, and, except that he was completely lacking in embonpoint, he had a certain resemblance to this bird, which is supposed to be peculiarly British.

He asked for Mrs. Pendyce in a high, light voice, very pleasant to the ear, and was at once shown to the white morning-room.

She greeted him affectionately, like many women who have grown used to hearing from their husbands the formula "Oh! your people!" – she had a strong feeling for her kith and kin.

"You know, Grig," she said, when her cousin was seated, "your letter was rather disturbing. Her separation from Captain Bellew has caused such a lot of talk about here. Yes; it's very common, I know, that sort of thing, but Horace is so – ! All the squires and parsons and county people we get about here are just the same.

Of course, I'm very fond of her, she's so charming to look at; but, Gregory, I really don't dislike her husband. He's a desperate sort of person – I think that's rather, refreshing; and you know I do think she's a little like him in that!"

The blood rushed up into Gregory Vigil's forehead; he put his hand to his head, and said:

"Like him? Like that man? Is a rose like an artichoke?"

Mrs. Pendyce went on:

"I enjoyed having her here immensely. It's the first time she's been here since she left the Firs. How long is that? Two years? But you know, Grig, the Maldens were quite upset about her. Do you think a divorce is really necessary?"

Gregory Vigil answered: "I'm afraid it is."

Mrs. Pendyce met her cousin's gaze serenely; if anything, her brows were uplifted more than usual; but, as at the stirring of secret trouble, her fingers began to twine and twist. Before her rose a vision of George and Mrs. Bellew side by side. It was a vague maternal feeling, an instinctive fear. She stilled her fingers, let her eyelids droop, and said:

"Of course, dear Grig, if I can help you in any way – Horace does so dislike anything to do with the papers."

Gregory Vigil drew in his breath.

"The papers!" he said. "How hateful it is! To think that our civilisation should allow women to be cast to the dogs! Understand, Margery, I'm thinking of her. In this matter I'm not capable of considering anything else."

Mrs. Pendyce murmured: “Of course, dear Grig, I quite understand.”

“Her position is odious; a woman should not have to live like that, exposed to everyone’s foul gossip.”

“But, dear Grig, I don’t think she minds; she seemed to me in such excellent spirits.”

Gregory ran his fingers through his hair.

“Nobody understands her,” he said; “she’s so plucky!”

Mrs. Pendyce stole a glance at him, and a little ironical smile flickered over her face.

“No one can look at her without seeing her spirit. But, Grig, perhaps you don’t quite understand her either!”

Gregory Vigil put his hand to his head.

“I must open the window a moment,” he said.

Again Mrs. Pendyce’s fingers began twisting, again she stilled them.

“We were quite a large party last week, and now there’s only Charles. Even George has gone back; he’ll be so sorry to have missed you!”

Gregory neither turned nor answered, and a wistful look came into Mrs. Pendyce’s face.

“It was so nice for the dear boy to win that race! I’m afraid he bets rather! It’s such a comfort Horace doesn’t know.”

Still Gregory did not speak.

Mrs. Pendyce’s face lost its anxious look, and gained a sort of gentle admiration.

"Dear Grig," she said, "where do you go about your hair? It is so nice and long and wavy!"

Gregory turned with a blush.

"I've been wanting to get it cut for ages. Do you really mean, Margery, that your husband can't realise the position she's placed in?"

Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes on her lap.

"You see, Grig," she began, "she was here a good deal before she left the Firs, and, of course, she's related to me – though it's very distant. With those horrid cases, you never know what will happen. Horace is certain to say that she ought to go back to her husband; or, if that's impossible, he'll say she ought to think of Society. Lady Rose Bethany's case has shaken everybody, and Horace is nervous. I don't know how it is, there's a great feeling amongst people about here against women asserting themselves. You should hear Mr. Barter and Sir James Malden, and dozens of others; the funny thing is that the women take their side. Of course, it seems odd to me, because so many of the Totteridges ran away, or did something funny. I can't help sympathising with her, but I have to think of – of – In the country, you don't know how things that people do get about before they've done them! There's only that and hunting to talk of."

Gregory Vigil clutched at his head.

"Well, if this is what chivalry has come to, thank God I'm not a squire!"

Mrs. Pendyce's eyes flickered.

"Ah!" she said, "I've thought like that so often."

Gregory broke the silence.

"I can't help the customs of the country. My duty's plain. There's nobody else to look after her."

Mrs. Pendyce sighed, and, rising from her chair, said: "Very well, dear Grig; do let us go and have some tea."

Tea at Worsted Skeynes was served in the hall on Sundays, and was usually attended by the Rector and his wife. Young Cecil Tharp had walked over with his dog, which could be heard whimpering faintly outside the front-door.

General Pendyce, with his knees crossed and the tips of his fingers pressed together, was leaning back in his chair and staring at the wall. The Squire, who held his latest bird's-egg in his hand, was showing its spots to the Rector.

In a corner by a harmonium, on which no one ever played, Norah talked of the village hockey club to Mrs. Barter, who sat with her eyes fixed on her husband. On the other side of the fire Bee and young Tharp, whose chairs seemed very close together, spoke of their horses in low tones, stealing shy glances at each other. The light was failing, the wood logs crackled, and now and then over the cosy hum of talk there fell short, drowsy silences – silences of sheer warmth and comfort, like the silence of the spaniel John asleep against his master's boot.

"Well," said Gregory softly, "I must go and see this man."

"Is it really necessary, Grig, to see him at all? I mean – if you've made up your mind – "

Gregory ran his hand through his hair.

"It's only fair, I think!" And crossing the hall, he let himself out so quietly that no one but Mrs. Pendyce noticed he had gone.

An hour and a half later, near the railway-station, on the road from the village back to Worsted Skeynes, Mr. Pendyce and his daughter Bee were returning from their Sunday visit to their old butler, Bigson. The Squire was talking.

"He's failing, Bee-dear old Bigson's failing. I can't hear what he says, he mumbles so; and he forgets. Fancy his forgetting that I was at Oxford. But we don't get servants like him nowadays. That chap we've got now is a sleepy fellow. Sleepy! he's – What's that in the road? They've no business to be coming at that pace. Who is it? I can't see."

Down the middle of the dark road a dog cart was approaching at top speed. Bee seized her father's arm and pulled it vigorously, for Mr. Pendyce was standing stock-still in disapproval. The dog cart passed within a foot of him and vanished, swinging round into the station. Mr. Pendyce turned in his tracks.

"Who was that? Disgraceful! On Sunday, too! The fellow must be drunk; he nearly ran over my legs. Did you see, Bee, he nearly ran over – "

Bee answered:

"It was Captain Bellew, Father; I saw his face." "Bellew? That drunken fellow? I shall summons him. Did you see, Bee, he nearly ran over my – "

"Perhaps he's had bad news," said Bee. "There's the train

going out now; I do hope he caught it!"

"Bad news! Is that an excuse for driving over me? You hope he caught it? I hope he's thrown himself out. The ruffian! I hope he's killed himself."

In this strain Mr. Pendyce continued until they reached the church. On their way up the aisle they passed Gregory Vigil leaning forward with his elbows on the desk and his hand covering his eyes…

At eleven o'clock that night a man stood outside the door of Mrs. Bellew's flat in Chelsea violently ringing the bell. His face was deathly white, but his little dark eyes sparkled. The door was opened, and Helen Bellew in evening dress stood there holding a candle in her hand.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

The man moved into the light.

"Jaspar! You? What on earth – "

"I want to talk."

"Talk? Do you know what time it is?"

"Time – there's no such thing. You might give me a kiss after two years. I've been drinking, but I'm not drunk."

Mrs. Bellew did not kiss him, neither did she draw back her face. No trace of alarm showed in her ice-grey eyes. She said: "If I let you in, will you promise to say what you want to say quickly, and go away?"

The little brown devils danced in Bellew's face. He nodded. They stood by the hearth in the sitting-room, and on the lips of

both came and went a peculiar smile.

It was difficult to contemplate too seriously a person with whom one had lived for years, with whom one had experienced in common the range of human passion, intimacy, and estrangement, who knew all those little daily things that men and women living together know of each other, and with whom in the end, without hatred, but because of one's nature, one had ceased to live. There was nothing for either of them to find out, and with a little smile, like the smile of knowledge itself, Jaspar Bellew and Helen his wife looked at each other.

"Well," she said again; "what have you come for?"

Bellew's face had changed. Its expression was furtive; his mouth twitched; a furrow had come between his eyes.

"How – are – you?" he said in a thick, muttering voice.

Mrs. Bellew's clear voice answered:

"Now, Jaspar, what is it that you want?"

The little brown devils leaped up again in Jaspar's face.

"You look very pretty to-night!"

His wife's lips curled.

"I'm much the same as I always was," she said.

A violent shudder shook Bellew. He fixed his eyes on the floor a little beyond her to the left; suddenly he raised them. They were quite lifeless.

"I'm perfectly sober," he murmured thickly; then with startling quickness his eyes began to sparkle again. He came a step nearer.

"You're my wife!" he said.

Mrs. Bellew smiled.

"Come," she answered, "you must go!" and she put out her bare arm to push him back. But Bellew recoiled of his own accord; his eyes were fixed again on the floor a little beyond her to the left.

"What's that?" he stammered. "What's that – that black – ?"

The devilry, mockery, admiration, bemusement, had gone out of his face; it was white and calm, and horribly pathetic.

"Don't turn me out," he stammered; "don't turn me out!"

Mrs. Bellew looked at him hard; the defiance in her eyes changed to a sort of pity. She took a quick step and put her hand on his shoulder.

"It's all right, old boy – all right!" she said. "There's nothing there!"

CHAPTER IX
MR. PARAMOR DISPOSES

Mrs. Pendyce, who, in accordance with her husband's wish, still occupied the same room as Mr. Pendyce, chose the ten minutes before he got up to break to him Gregory's decision. The moment was auspicious, for he was only half awake.

"Horace," she said, and her face looked young and anxious, "Grig says that Helen Bellew ought not to go on in her present position. Of course, I told him that you'd be annoyed, but Grig says that she can't go on like this, that she simply must divorce Captain Bellew."

Mr. Pendyce was lying on his back.

"What's that?" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce went on

"I knew it would worry you; but really" – she fixed her eyes on the ceiling – "I suppose we ought only to think of her."

The Squire sat up.

"What was that," he said, "about Bellew?"

Mrs. Pendyce went on in a languid voice and without moving her eyes:

"Don't be angrier than you can help, dear; it is so wearing. If Grig says she ought to divorce Captain Bellew, then I'm sure she ought."

Horace Pendyce subsided on his pillow with a bounce, and he

too lay with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Divorce him!" he said – "I should think so! He ought to be hanged, a fellow like that. I told you last night he nearly drove over me. Living just as he likes, setting an example of devilry to the whole neighbourhood! If I hadn't kept my head he'd have bowled me over like a ninepin, and Bee into the bargain."

Mrs. Pendyce sighed.

"It was a narrow escape," she said.

"Divorce him!" resumed Mr. Pendyce – "I should think so! She ought to have divorced him long ago. It was the nearest thing in the world; another foot and I should have been knocked off my feet!"

Mrs. Pendyce withdrew her glance from the ceiling.

"At first," she said, "I wondered whether it was quite – but I'm very glad you've taken it like this."

"Taken it! I can tell you, Margery, that sort of thing makes one think. All the time Barter was preaching last night I was wondering what on earth would have happened to this estate if – if – " And he looked round with a frown. "Even as it is, I barely make the two ends of it meet. As to George, he's no more fit at present to manage it than you are; he'd make a loss of thousands."

"I'm afraid George is too much in London. That's the reason I wondered whether – I'm afraid he sees too much of – "

Mrs. Pendyce stopped; a flush suffused her cheeks; she had pinched herself violently beneath the bedclothes.

"George," said Mr. Pendyce, pursuing his own thoughts, "has

no gumption. He'd never manage a man like Peacock – and you encourage him! He ought to marry and settle down."

Mrs. Pendyce, the flush dying in her cheeks, said:

"George is very like poor Hubert."

Horace Pendyce drew his watch from beneath his pillow.

"Ah!" But he refrained from adding, "Your people!" for Hubert Totteridge had not been dead a year. "Ten minutes to eight! You keep me talking here; it's time I was in my bath."

Clad in pyjamas with a very wide blue stripe, grey-eyed, grey-moustached, slim and erect, he paused at the door.

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