

GALSWORTHY
JOHN

THE
PATRICIAN

John Galsworthy

The Patrician

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PART I

CHAPTER I

Light, entering the vast room – a room so high that its carved ceiling refused itself to exact scrutiny – travelled, with the wistful, cold curiosity of the dawn, over a fantastic storehouse of Time. Light, unaccompanied by the prejudice of human eyes, made strange revelation of incongruities, as though illuminating the dispassionate march of history.

For in this dining hall – one of the finest in England – the Caradoc family had for centuries assembled the trophies and records of their existence. Round about this dining hall they had built and pulled down and restored, until the rest of Monkland Court presented some aspect of homogeneity. Here alone they had left virgin the work of the old quasi-monastic builders, and within it unconsciously deposited their souls. For there were here, meeting the eyes of light, all those rather touching evidences of man's desire to persist for ever, those shells of his former bodies, the fetishes and queer proofs of his faiths, together with the remorseless demonstration of their treatment at the hands of Time.

The annalist might here have found all his needed confirmations; the analyst from this material formed the due equation of high birth; the philosopher traced the course of aristocracy, from its primeval rise in crude strength or subtlety, through centuries of power, to picturesque decadence, and the beginnings of its last stand. Even the artist might here, perchance, have seized on the dry ineffable pervading spirit, as one visiting an old cathedral seems to scent out the constriction of its heart.

From the legendary sword of that Welsh chieftain who by an act of high, rewarded treachery had passed into the favour of the conquering William, and received, with the widow of a Norman, many lands in Devonshire, to the Cup purchased for Geoffrey Caradoc; present Earl of Valleys, by subscription of his Devonshire tenants on the occasion of his marriage with the Lady Gertrude Semmering – no insignia were absent, save the family portraits in the gallery of Valleys House in London. There was even an ancient duplicate of that yellow tattered scroll royally, reconfirming lands and title to John, the most distinguished of all the Caradocs, who had unfortunately neglected to be born in wedlock, by one of those humorous omissions to be found in the genealogies of most old families. Yes, it was there, almost cynically hung in a corner; for this incident, though no doubt a burning question in the fifteenth century, was now but staple for an ironical little tale, in view of the fact that descendants of John's 'own' brother Edmund were undoubtedly to be found among the cottagers of a parish not far distant.

Light, glancing from the suits of armour to the tiger skins beneath them, brought from India but a year ago by Bertie Caradoc, the younger son, seemed recording, how those, who had once been foremost by virtue of that simple law of Nature which crowns the adventuring and strong, now being almost washed aside out of the main stream of national life, were compelled to devise adventure, lest they should lose belief in their own strength.

The unsparing light of that first half-hour of summer morning recorded many other changes, wandering from austere tapestries to the velvety carpets, and dragging from the contrast sure proof of a common sense which denied to the present Earl and Countess the asceticisms of the past. And then it seemed to lose interest in this critical journey, as though longing to clothe all in witchery. For the sun had risen, and through the Eastern windows came pouring its level and mysterious joy. And

with it, passing in at an open lattice, came a wild bee to settle among the flowers on the table athwart the Eastern end, used when there was only a small party in the house. The hours fled on silent, till the sun was high, and the first visitors came – three maids, rosy, not silent, bringing brushes. They passed, and were followed by two footmen – scouts of the breakfast brigade, who stood for a moment professionally doing nothing, then soberly commenced to set the table. Then came a little girl of six, to see if there were anything exciting – little Ann Shropton, child of Sir William Shropton by his marriage with Lady Agatha, and eldest daughter of the house, the only one of the four young Caradocs as yet wedded. She came on tiptoe, thinking to surprise whatever was there. She had a broad little face, and wide frank hazel eyes over a little nose that came out straight and sudden. Encircled by a loose belt placed far below the waist of her holland frock, as if to symbolize freedom, she seemed to think everything in life good fun. And soon she found the exciting thing.

“Here’s a bumble bee, William. Do you think I could tame it in my little glass bog?”

“No, I don’t, Miss Ann; and look out, you’ll be stung!”

“It wouldn’t sting me.”

“Why not?”

“Because it wouldn’t.”

“Of course – if you say so – ”

“What time is the motor ordered?”

“Nine o’clock.”

“I’m going with Grandpapa as far as the gate.”

“Suppose he says you’re not?”

“Well, then I shall go all the same.”

“I see.”

“I might go all the way with him to London! Is Auntie Babs going?”

“No, I don’t think anybody is going with his lordship.”

“I would, if she were. William!”

“Yes.”

“Is Uncle Eustace sure to be elected?”

“Of course he is.”

“Do you think he’ll be a good Member of Parliament?”

“Lord Miltoun is very clever, Miss Ann.”

“Is he?”

“Well, don’t you think so?”

“Does Charles think so?”

“Ask him.”

“William!”

“Yes.”

“I don’t like London. I like here, and I like Cotton, and I like home pretty well, and I love Pendridny – and – I like Ravensham.”

“His lordship is going to Ravensham to-day on his way up, I heard say.”

“Oh! then he’ll see great-granny. William – ”

“Here’s Miss Wallace.”

From the doorway a lady with a broad pale patient face said:

“Come, Ann.”

“All right! Hallo, Simmons!”

The entering butler replied:

“Hallo, Miss Ann!”

“I’ve got to go.”

“I’m sure we’re very sorry.”

“Yes.”

The door banged faintly, and in the great room rose the busy silence of those minutes which precede repasts. Suddenly the four men by the breakfast table stood back. Lord Valleys had come in.

He approached slowly, reading a blue paper, with his level grey eyes divided by a little uncharacteristic frown. He had a tanned yet ruddy, decisively shaped face, with crisp hair and moustache beginning to go iron-grey – the face of a man who knows his own mind and is contented with that knowledge. His figure too, well-braced and upright, with the back of the head carried like a soldier’s, confirmed the impression, not so much of self-sufficiency, as of the sufficiency of his habits of life and thought. And there was apparent about all his movements that peculiar unconsciousness of his surroundings which comes to those who live a great deal in the public eye, have the material machinery of existence placed exactly to their hands, and never need to consider what others think of them. Taking his seat, and still perusing the paper, he at once began to eat what was put before him; then noticing that his eldest daughter had come in and was sitting down beside him, he said:

“Bore having to go up in such weather!”

“Is it a Cabinet meeting?”

“Yes. This confounded business of the balloons.” But the rather anxious dark eyes of Agatha’s delicate narrow face were taking in the details of a tray for keeping dishes warm on a sideboard, and she was thinking: “I believe that would be better than the ones I’ve got, after all. If William would only say whether he really likes these large trays better than single hot-water dishes!” She contrived how-ever to ask in her gentle voice – for all her words and movements were gentle, even a little timid, till anything appeared to threaten the welfare of her husband or children:

“Do you think this war scare good for Eustace’s prospects, Father?”

But her father did not answer; he was greeting a new-comer, a tall, fine-looking young man, with dark hair and a fair moustache, between whom and himself there was no relationship, yet a certain negative resemblance. Claud Fresnay, Viscount Harbinger, was indeed also a little of what is called the ‘Norman’ type – having a certain firm regularity of feature, and a slight aquilinity of nose high up on the bridge – but that which in the elder man seemed to indicate only an unconscious acceptance of self as a standard, in the younger man gave an impression at once more assertive and more uneasy, as though he were a little afraid of not chaffing something all the time.

Behind him had come in a tall woman, of full figure and fine presence, with hair still brown – Lady Valleys herself. Though her eldest son was thirty, she was, herself, still little more than fifty. From her voice, manner, and whole personality, one might suspect that she had been an acknowledged beauty; but there was now more than a suspicion of maturity about her almost jovial face, with its full grey-blue eyes; and coarsened complexion. Good comrade, and essentially ‘woman of the world,’ was written on every line of her, and in every tone of her voice. She was indeed a figure suggestive of open air and generous living, endowed with abundant energy, and not devoid of humour. It was she who answered Agatha’s remark.

“Of course, my dear, the very best thing possible.”

Lord Harbinger chimed in:

“By the way, Brabrook’s going to speak on it. Did you ever hear him, Lady Agatha? ‘Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise – and with me rises the democratic principle –’”

But Agatha only smiled, for she was thinking:

“If I let Ann go as far as the gate, she’ll only make it a stepping-stone to something else tomorrow.” Taking no interest in public affairs, her inherited craving for command had resorted for expression to a meticulous ordering of household matters. It was indeed a cult with her, a passion – as though she felt herself a sort of figurehead to national domesticity; the leader of a patriotic movement.

Lord Valleys, having finished what seemed necessary, arose.

“Any message to your mother, Gertrude?”

“No, I wrote last night.”

“Tell Miltoun to keep – an eye on that Mr. Courtier. I heard him speak one day – he’s rather good.”

Lady Valleys, who had not yet sat down, accompanied her husband to the door.

“By the way, I’ve told Mother about this woman, Geoff.”

“Was it necessary?”

“Well, I think so; I’m uneasy – after all, Mother has some influence with Miltoun.”

Lord Valleys shrugged his shoulders, and slightly squeezing his wife’s arm, went out.

Though himself vaguely uneasy on that very subject, he was a man who did not go to meet disturbance. He had the nerves which seem to be no nerves at all – especially found in those of his class who have much to do with horses. He temperamentally regarded the evil of the day as quite sufficient to it. Moreover, his eldest son was a riddle that he had long given up, so far as women were concerned.

Emerging into the outer hall, he lingered a moment, remembering that he had not seen his younger and favourite daughter.

“Lady Barbara down yet?” Hearing that she was not, he slipped into the motor coat held for him by Simmons, and stepped out under the white portico, decorated by the Caradoc hawks in stone.

The voice of little Ann reached him, clear and high above the smothered whirring of the car.

“Come on, Grandpapa!”

Lord Valleys grimaced beneath his crisp moustache – the word grandpapa always fell queerly on the ears of one who was but fifty-six, and by no means felt it – and jerking his gloved hand towards Ann, he said:

“Send down to the lodge gate for this.”

The voice of little Ann answered loudly:

“No; I’m coming back by myself.”

The car starting, drowned discussion.

Lord Valleys, motoring, somewhat pathetically illustrated the invasion of institutions by their destroyer, Science. A supporter of the turf, and not long since Master of Foxhounds, most of whose soul (outside politics) was in horses, he had been, as it were, compelled by common sense, not only to tolerate, but to take up and even press forward the cause of their supplanters. His instinct of self-preservation was secretly at work, hurrying him to his own destruction; forcing him to persuade himself that science and her successive victories over brute nature could be wooed into the service of a prestige which rested on a crystallized and stationary base. All this keeping pace with the times, this immersion in the results of modern discoveries, this speeding-up of existence so that it was all surface and little root – the increasing volatility, cosmopolitanism, and even commercialism of his life, on which he rather prided himself as a man of the world – was, with a secrecy too deep for his perception, cutting at the aloofness logically demanded of one in his position. Stubborn, and not spiritually subtle, though by no means dull in practical matters, he was resolutely letting the waters bear him on, holding the tiller firmly, without perceiving that he was in the vortex of a whirlpool. Indeed, his common sense continually impelled him, against the sort of reactionaryism of which his son Miltoun had so much, to that easier reactionaryism, which, living on its spiritual capital, makes what material capital it can out of its enemy, Progress.

He drove the car himself, shrewd and self-contained, sitting easily, with his cap well drawn over those steady eyes; and though this unexpected meeting of the Cabinet in the Whitsuntide recess was not only a nuisance, but gave food for anxiety, he was fully able to enjoy the swift smooth movement through the summer air, which met him with such friendly sweetness under the great trees of the long avenue. Beside him, little Ann was silent, with her legs stuck out rather wide apart. Motoring was a new excitement, for at home it was forbidden; and a meditative rapture shone in her wide eyes above her sudden little nose. Only once she spoke, when close to the lodge the car slowed down, and they passed the lodge-keeper’s little daughter.

“Hallo, Susie!”

There was no answer, but the look on Susie’s small pale face was so humble and adoring that Lord Valleys, not a very observant man, noticed it with a sort of satisfaction. “Yes,” he thought, somewhat irrelevantly, “the country is sound at heart!”

CHAPTER II

At Ravensham House on the borders of Richmond Park, suburban seat of the Casterley family, ever since it became usual to have a residence within easy driving distance of Westminster – in a large conservatory adjoining the hall, Lady Casterley stood in front of some Japanese lilies. She was a slender, short old woman, with an ivory-coloured face, a thin nose, and keen eyes half-veiled by delicate wrinkled lids. Very still, in her grey dress, and with grey hair, she gave the impression of a little figure carved out of fine, worn steel. Her firm, spidery hand held a letter written in free somewhat sprawling style:

MONKLAND COURT, “DEVON. “MY DEAR, MOTHER,

“Geoffrey is motoring up to-morrow. He’ll look in on you on the way if he can. This new war scare has taken him up. I shan’t be in Town myself till Miltoun’s election is over. The fact is, I daren’t leave him down here alone. He sees his ‘Anonyma’ every day. That Mr. Courtier, who wrote the book against War – rather cool for a man who’s been a soldier of fortune, don’t you think? – is staying at the inn, working for the Radical. He knows her, too – and, one can only hope, for Miltoun’s sake, too well – an attractive person, with red moustaches, rather nice and mad. Bertie has just come down; I must get him to have a talk with Miltoun, and see if he cant find out how the land lies. One can trust Bertie – he’s really very astute. I must say, that she’s quite a sweet-looking woman; but absolutely nothing’s known of her here except that she divorced her husband. How does one find out about people? Miltoun’s being so extraordinarily strait-laced makes it all the more awkward. The earnestness of this rising generation is most remarkable. I don’t remember taking such a serious view of life in my youth.”

Lady Casterley lowered the coronetted sheet of paper. The ghost of a grimace haunted her face – she had not forgotten her daughter’s youth. Raising the letter again, she read on:

“I’m sure Geoffrey and I feel years younger than either Miltoun or Agatha, though we did produce them. One doesn’t feel it with Bertie or Babs, luckily. The war scare is having an excellent effect on Miltoun’s candidature. Claud Harbinger is with us, too, working for Miltoun; but, as a matter of fact, I think he’s after Babs. It’s rather melancholy, when you think that Babs isn’t quite twenty – still, one can’t expect anything else, I suppose, with her looks; and Claud is rather a fine specimen. They talk of him a lot now; he’s quite coming to the fore among the young Tories.”

Lady Casterley again lowered the letter, and stood listening. A prolonged, muffled sound as of distant cheering and groans had penetrated the great conservatory, vibrating among the pale petals of the lilies and setting free their scent in short waves of perfume. She passed into the hall; where, stood an old man with sallow face and long white whiskers.

“What was that noise, Clifton?”

“A posse of Socialists, my lady, on their way to Putney to hold a demonstration; the people are hooting them. They’ve got blocked just outside the gates.”

“Are they making speeches?”

“They are talking some kind of rant, my lady.”

“I’ll go and hear them. Give me my black stick.”

Above the velvet-dark, flat-toughed cedar trees, which rose like pagodas of ebony on either side of the drive, the sky hung lowering in one great purple cloud, endowed with sinister life by a single white beam striking up into it from the horizon. Beneath this canopy of cloud a small phalanx of dusty, dishevelled-looking men and women were drawn up in the road, guarding, and encouraging with cheers, a tall, black-coated orator. Before and behind this phalanx, a little mob of men and boys kept up an accompaniment of groans and jeering.

Lady Casterley and her ‘major-domo’ stood six paces inside the scrolled iron gates, and watched. The slight, steel-coloured figure with steel-coloured hair, was more arresting in its immobility than

all the vociferations and gestures of the mob. Her eyes alone moved under their half-drooped lids; her right hand clutched tightly the handle of her stick. The speaker's voice rose in shrill protest against the exploitation of 'the people'; it sank in ironical comment on Christianity; it demanded passionately to be free from the continuous burden of 'this insensate militarist taxation'; it threatened that the people would take things into their own hands.

Lady Casterley turned her head:

"He is talking nonsense, Clifton. It is going to rain. I shall go in."

Under the stone porch she paused. The purple cloud had broken; a blind fury of rain was deluging the fast-scattering crowd. A faint smile came on Lady Casterley's lips.

"It will do them good to have their ardour damped a little. You will get wet, Clifton – hurry! I expect Lord Valleys to dinner. Have a room got ready for him to dress. He's motoring from Monkland."

CHAPTER III

In a very high, white-panelled room, with but little furniture, Lord Valleys greeted his mother-in-law respectfully.

“Motored up in nine hours, Ma’am – not bad going.”

“I am glad you came. When is Miltoun’s election?”

“On the twenty-ninth.”

“Pity! He should be away from Monkland, with that – anonymous woman living there.”

“Ah! yes; you’ve heard of her!”

Lady Casterley replied sharply:

“You’re too easy-going, Geoffrey.”

Lord Valleys smiled.

“These war scares,” he said, “are getting a bore. Can’t quite make out what the feeling of the country is about them.”

Lady Casterley rose:

“It has none. When war comes, the feeling will be all right. It always is. Give me your arm. Are you hungry?” ...

When Lord Valleys spoke of war, he spoke as one who, since he arrived at years of discretion, had lived within the circle of those who direct the destinies of States. It was for him – as for the lilies in the great glass house – impossible to see with the eyes, or feel with the feelings of a flower of the garden outside. Soaked in the best prejudices and manners of his class, he lived a life no more shut off from the general than was to be expected. Indeed, in some sort, as a man of facts and common sense, he was fairly in touch with the opinion of the average citizen. He was quite genuine when he said that he believed he knew what the people wanted better than those who prated on the subject; and no doubt he was right, for temperamentally he was nearer to them than their own leaders, though he would not perhaps have liked to be told so. His man-of-the-world, political shrewdness had been superimposed by life on a nature whose prime strength was its practicality and lack of imagination. It was his business to be efficient, but not strenuous, or desirous of pushing ideas to their logical conclusions; to be neither narrow nor puritanical, so long as the shell of ‘good form’ was preserved intact; to be a liberal landlord up to the point of not seriously damaging his interests; to be well-disposed towards the arts until those arts revealed that which he had not before perceived; it was his business to have light hands, steady eyes, iron nerves, and those excellent manners that have no mannerisms. It was his nature to be easy-going as a husband; indulgent as a father; careful and straightforward as a politician; and as a man, addicted to pleasure, to work, and to fresh air. He admired, and was fond of his wife, and had never regretted his marriage. He had never perhaps regretted anything, unless it were that he had not yet won the Derby, or quite succeeded in getting his special strain of blue-ticked pointers to breed absolutely true to type. His mother-in-law he respected, as one might respect a principle.

There was indeed in the personality of that little old lady the tremendous force of accumulated decision – the inherited assurance of one whose prestige had never been questioned; who, from long immunity, and a certain clear-cut matter-of-factness, bred by the habit of command, had indeed lost the power of perceiving that her prestige ever could be questioned. Her knowledge of her own mind was no ordinary piece of learning, had not, in fact, been learned at all, but sprang full-fledged from an active dominating temperament. Fortified by the necessity, common to her class, of knowing thoroughly the more patent side of public affairs; armoured by the tradition of a culture demanded by leadership; inspired by ideas, but always the same ideas; owning no master, but in servitude to her own custom of leading, she had a mind, formidable as the two-edged swords wielded by her ancestors the Fitz-Harolds, at Agincourt or Poitiers – a mind which had ever instinctively rejected that inner knowledge of herself or of the selves of others; produced by those foolish practices of introspection,

contemplation, and understanding, so deleterious to authority. If Lord Valleys was the body of the aristocratic machine, Lady Casterley was the steel spring inside it. All her life studiously unaffected and simple in attire; of plain and frugal habit; an early riser; working at something or other from morning till night, and as little worn-out at seventy-eight as most women of fifty, she had only one weak spot – and that was her strength – blindness as to the nature and size of her place in the scheme of things. She was a type, a force.

Wonderfully well she went with the room in which they were dining, whose grey walls, surmounted by a deep frieze painted somewhat in the style of Fragonard, contained many nymphs and roses now rather dim; with the furniture, too, which had a look of having survived into times not its own. On the tables were no flowers, save five lilies in an old silver chalice; and on the wall over the great sideboard a portrait of the late Lord Casterley.

She spoke:

“I hope Miltoun is taking his own line?”

“That’s the trouble. He suffers from swollen principles – only wish he could keep them out of his speeches.”

“Let him be; and get him away from that woman as soon as his election’s over. What is her real name?”

“Mrs. something Lees Noel.”

“How long has she been there?”

“About a year, I think.”

“And you don’t know anything about her?”

Lord Valleys raised his shoulders.

“Ah!” said Lady Casterley; “exactly! You’re letting the thing drift. I shall go down myself. I suppose Gertrude can have me? What has that Mr. Courtier to do with this good lady?”

Lord Valleys smiled. In this smile was the whole of his polite and easy-going philosophy. “I am no meddler,” it seemed to say; and at sight of that smile Lady Casterley tightened her lips.

“He is a firebrand,” she said. “I read that book of his against War – most inflammatory. Aimed at Grant-and Rosenstern, chiefly. I’ve just seen, one of the results, outside my own gates. A mob of anti-War agitators.”

Lord Valleys controlled a yawn.

“Really? I’d no idea Courtier had any influence.”

“He is dangerous. Most idealists are negligible-his book was clever.”

“I wish to goodness we could see the last of these scares, they only make both countries look foolish,” muttered Lord Valleys.

Lady Casterley raised her glass, full of a bloody red wine. “The war would save us,” she said.

“War is no joke.”

“It would be the beginning of a better state of things.”

“You think so?”

“We should get the lead again as a nation, and Democracy would be put back fifty years.”

Lord Valleys made three little heaps of salt, and paused to count them; then, with a slight uplifting of his eyebrows, which seemed to doubt what he was going to say, he murmured: “I should have said that we were all democrats nowadays... What is it, Clifton?”

“Your chauffeur would like to know, what time you will have the car?”

“Directly after dinner.”

Twenty minutes later, he was turning through the scrolled iron gates into the road for London. It was falling dark; and in the tremulous sky clouds were piled up, and drifted here and there with a sort of endless lack of purpose. No direction seemed to have been decreed unto their wings. They had met together in the firmament like a flock of giant magpies crossing and re-crossing each others’ flight. The smell of rain was in the air. The car raised no dust, but bored swiftly on, searching out the road

with its lamps. On Putney Bridge its march was stayed by a string of waggons. Lord Valleys looked to right and left. The river reflected the thousand lights of buildings piled along her sides, lamps of the embankments, lanterns of moored barges. The sinuous pallid body of this great Creature, for ever gliding down to the sea, roused in his mind no symbolic image. He had had to do with her, years back, at the Board of Trade, and knew her for what she was, extremely dirty, and getting abominably thin just where he would have liked her plump. Yet, as he lighted a cigar, there came to him a queer feeling – as if he were in the presence of a woman he was fond of.

“I hope to God,” he thought, “nothing’ll come of these scares!” The car glided on into the long road, swarming with traffic, towards the fashionable heart of London. Outside stationers’ shops, however, the posters of evening papers were of no reassuring order.

‘THE PLOT THICKENS.’

‘MORE REVELATIONS.’

‘GRAVE SITUATION THREATENED.’

And before each poster could be seen a little eddy in the stream of the passers-by – formed by persons glancing at the news, and disengaging themselves, to press on again. The Earl of Valleys caught himself wondering what they thought of it! What was passing behind those pale rounds of flesh turned towards the posters?

Did they think at all, these men and women in the street? What was their attitude towards this vaguely threatened cataclysm? Face after face, stolid and apathetic, expressed nothing, no active desire, certainly no enthusiasm, hardly any dread. Poor devils! The thing, after all, was no more within their control than it was within the power of ants to stop the ruination of their ant-heap by some passing boy! It was no doubt quite true, that the people had never had much voice in the making of war. And the words of a Radical weekly, which as an impartial man he always forced himself to read, recurred to him. “Ignorant of the facts, hypnotized by the words ‘Country’ and ‘Patriotism’; in the grip of mob-instinct and inborn prejudice against the foreigner; helpless by reason of his patience, stoicism, good faith, and confidence in those above him; helpless by reason of his snobbery, mutual distrust, carelessness for the morrow, and lack of public spirit-in the face of War how impotent and to be pitied is the man in the street!” That paper, though clever, always seemed to him intolerably hifalutin!

It was doubtful whether he would get to Ascot this year. And his mind flew for a moment to his promising two-year-old Casetta; then dashed almost violently, as though in shame, to the Admiralty and the doubt whether they were fully alive to possibilities. He himself occupied a softer spot of Government, one of those almost nominal offices necessary to qualify into the Cabinet certain tried minds, for whom no more strenuous post can for the moment be found. From the Admiralty again his thoughts leaped to his mother-in-law. Wonderful old woman! What a statesman she would have made! Too reactionary! Deuce of a straight line she had taken about Mrs. Lees Noel! And with a connoisseur’s twinge of pleasure he recollected that lady’s face and figure seen that morning as he passed her cottage. Mysterious or not, the woman was certainly attractive! Very graceful head with its dark hair waved back from the middle over either temple – very charming figure, no lumber of any sort! Bouquet about her! Some story or other, no doubt – no affair of his! Always sorry for that sort of woman!

A regiment of Territorials returning from a march stayed the progress of his car. He leaned forward watching them with much the same contained, shrewd, critical look he would have bent on a pack of hounds. All the mistiness and speculation in his mind was gone now. Good stamp of man, would give a capital account of themselves! Their faces, flushed by a day in the open, were masked with passivity, or, with a half-aggressive, half-jocular self-consciousness; they were clearly not troubled by abstract doubts, or any visions of the horrors of war.

Someone raised a cheer 'for the Terriers!' Lord Valleys saw round him a little sea of hats, rising and falling, and heard a sound, rather shrill and tentative, swell into hoarse, high clamour, and suddenly die out. "Seem keen enough!" he thought. "Very little does it! Plenty of fighting spirit in the country." And again a thrill of pleasure shot through him.

Then, as the last soldier passed, his car slowly forged its way through the straggling crowd, pressing on behind the regiment – men of all ages, youths, a few women, young girls, who turned their eyes on him with a negligent stare as if their lives were too remote to permit them to take interest in this passing man at ease.

CHAPTER IV

At Monkland, that same hour, in the little whitewashed 'withdrawing-room' of a thatched, whitewashed cottage, two men sat talking, one on either side of the hearth; and in a low chair between them a dark-eyed woman leaned back, watching, the tips of her delicate thin fingers pressed together, or held out transparent towards the fire. A log, dropping now and then, turned up its glowing underside; and the firelight and the lamplight seemed so to have soaked into the white walls that a wan warmth exuded. Silvery dun moths, fluttering in from the dark garden, kept vibrating, like spun shillings, over a jade-green bowl of crimson roses; and there was a scent, as ever in that old thatched cottage, of woodsmoke, flowers, and sweetbriar.

The man on the left was perhaps forty, rather above middle height, vigorous, active, straight, with blue eyes and a sanguine face that glowed on small provocation. His hair was very bright, almost red, and his fiery moustaches which descended to the level of his chin, like Don Quixote's seemed bristling and charging.

The man on the right was nearer thirty, evidently tall, wiry, and very thin. He sat rather crumpled, in his low armchair, with hands clasped round a knee; and a little crucified smile haunted the lips of his lean face, which, with its parchmety, tanned, shaven cheeks, and deep-set, very living eyes, had a certain beauty.

These two men, so extravagantly unlike, looked at each other like neighbouring dogs, who, having long decided that they are better apart, suddenly find that they have met at some spot where they cannot possibly have a fight. And the woman watched; the owner, as it were, of one, but who, from sheer love of dogs, had always stroked and patted the other.

"So, Mr. Courtier," said the younger man, whose dry, ironic voice, like his smile, seemed defending the fervid spirit in his eyes; "all you say only amounts, you see, to a defence of the so-called Liberal spirit; and, forgive my candour, that spirit, being an importation from the realms of philosophy and art, withers the moment it touches practical affairs."

The man with the red moustaches laughed; the sound was queer – at once so genial and so sardonic.

"Well put!" he said: "And far be it from me to gainsay. But since compromise is the very essence of politics, high-priests of caste and authority, like you, Lord Miltoun, are every bit as much out of it as any Liberal professor."

"I don't agree!"

"Agree or not, your position towards public affairs is very like the Church's attitude towards marriage and divorce; as remote from the realities of life as the attitude of the believer in Free Love, and not more likely to catch on. The death of your point of view lies in itself – it's too dried-up and far from things ever to understand them. If you don't understand you can never rule. You might just as well keep your hands in your pockets, as go into politics with your notions!"

"I fear we must continue to agree to differ."

"Well; perhaps I do pay you too high a compliment. After all, you are a patrician."

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Courtier."

The dark-eyed woman stirred; her hands gave a sort of flutter, as though in deprecation of acerbity.

Rising at once, and speaking in a deferential voice, the elder man said:

"We're tiring Mrs. Noel. Good-night, Audrey, It's high time I was off." Against the darkness of the open French window, he turned round to fire a parting shot.

"What I meant, Lord Miltoun, was that your class is the driest and most practical in the State – it's odd if it doesn't save you from a poet's dreams. Good-night!" He passed out on to the lawn, and vanished.

The young man sat unmoving; the glow of the fire had caught his face, so that a spirit seemed clinging round his lips, gleaming out of his eyes. Suddenly he said:

“Do you believe that, Mrs. Noel?”

For answer Audrey Noel smiled, then rose and went over to the window.

“Look at my dear toad! It comes here every evening!” On a flagstone of the verandah, in the centre of the stream of lamplight, sat a little golden toad. As Miltoun came to look, it waddled to one side, and vanished.

“How peaceful your garden is!” he said; then taking her hand, he very gently raised it to his lips, and followed his opponent out into the darkness.

Truly peace brooded over that garden. The Night seemed listening – all lights out, all hearts at rest. It watched, with a little white star for every tree, and roof, and slumbering tired flower, as a mother watches her sleeping child, leaning above him and counting with her love every hair of his head, and all his tiny tremors.

Argument seemed child’s babble indeed under the smile of Night. And the face of the woman, left alone at her window, was a little like the face of this warm, sweet night. It was sensitive, harmonious; and its harmony was not, as in some faces, cold – but seemed to tremble and glow and flutter, as though it were a spirit which had found its place of resting.

In her garden, – all velvety grey, with black shadows beneath the yew-trees, the white flowers alone seemed to be awake, and to look at her wistfully. The trees stood dark and still. Not even the night birds stirred. Alone, the little stream down in the bottom raised its voice, privileged when day voices were hushed.

It was not in Audrey Noel to deny herself to any spirit that was abroad; to repel was an art she did not practise. But this night, though the Spirit of Peace hovered so near, she did not seem to know it. Her hands trembled, her cheeks were burning; her breast heaved, and sighs fluttered from her lips, just parted.

CHAPTER V

Eustace Cardoc, Viscount Miltoun, had lived a very lonely life, since he first began to understand the peculiarities of existence. With the exception of Clifton, his grandmother's 'majordomo,' he made, as a small child, no intimate friend. His nurses, governesses, tutors, by their own confession did not understand him, finding that he took himself with unnecessary seriousness; a little afraid, too, of one whom they discovered to be capable of pushing things to the point of enduring pain in silence. Much of that early time was passed at Ravensham, for he had always been Lady Casterley's favourite grandchild. She recognized in him the purposeful austerity which had somehow been omitted from the composition of her daughter. But only to Clifton, then a man of fifty with a great gravity and long black whiskers, did Eustace relieve his soul. "I tell you this, Clifton," he would say, sitting on the sideboard, or the arm of the big chair in Clifton's room, or wandering amongst the raspberries, "because you are my friend."

And Clifton, with his head a little on one side, and a sort of wise concern at his 'friend's' confidences, which were sometimes of an embarrassing description, would answer now and then: "Of course, my lord," but more often: "Of course, my dear."

There was in this friendship something fine and suitable, neither of these 'friends' taking or suffering liberties, and both being interested in pigeons, which they would stand watching with a remarkable attention.

In course of time, following the tradition of his family, Eustace went to Harrow. He was there five years – always one of those boys a little out at wrists and ankles, who may be seen slouching, solitary, along the pavement to their own haunts, rather dusty, and with one shoulder slightly raised above the other, from the habit of carrying something beneath one arm. Saved from being thought a 'smug,' by his title, his lack of any conspicuous scholastic ability, his obvious independence of what was thought of him, and a sarcastic tongue, which no one was eager to encounter, he remained the ugly duckling who refused to paddle properly in the green ponds of Public School tradition. He played games so badly that in sheer self-defence his fellows permitted him to play without them. Of 'fives' they made an exception, for in this he attained much proficiency, owing to a certain windmill-like quality of limb. He was noted too for daring chemical experiments, of which he usually had one or two brewing, surreptitiously at first, and afterwards by special permission of his house-master, on the principle that if a room must smell, it had better smell openly. He made few friendships, but these were lasting.

His Latin was so poor, and his Greek verse so vile, that all had been surprised when towards the finish of his career he showed a very considerable power of writing and speaking his own language. He left school without a pang. But when in the train he saw the old Hill and the old spire on the top of it fading away from him, a lump rose in his throat, he swallowed violently two or three times, and, thrusting himself far back into the carriage corner, appeared to sleep.

At Oxford, he was happier, but still comparatively lonely; remaining, so long as custom permitted, in lodgings outside his College, and clinging thereafter to remote, panelled rooms high up, overlooking the gardens and a portion of the city wall. It was at Oxford that he first developed that passion for self-discipline which afterwards distinguished him. He took up rowing; and, though thoroughly unsuited by nature to this pastime, secured himself a place in his College 'torpid.' At the end of a race he was usually supported from his stretcher in a state of extreme extenuation, due to having pulled the last quarter of the course entirely with his spirit. The same craving for self-discipline guided him in the choice of Schools; he went out in 'Greats,' for which, owing to his indifferent mastery of Greek and Latin, he was the least fitted. With enormous labour he took a very good degree. He carried off besides, the highest distinctions of the University for English Essays. The ordinary circles of College life knew nothing of him. Not once in the whole course of his University career,

was he the better for wine. He, did not hunt; he never talked of women, and none talked of women in his presence. But now and then he was visited by those gusts which come to the ascetic, when all life seemed suddenly caught up and devoured by a flame burning night and day, and going out mercifully, he knew not why, like a blown candle. However unsocial in the proper sense of the word, he by no means lacked company in these Oxford days. He knew many, both dons and undergraduates. His long stride, and determined absence of direction, had severely tried all those who could stomach so slow a pastime as walking for the sake of talking. The country knew him – though he never knew the country – from Abingdon to Bablock Hythe. His name stood high, too, at the Union, where he made his mark during his first term in a debate on a ‘Censorship of Literature’ which he advocated with gloom, pertinacity, and a certain youthful brilliance that might well have carried the day, had not an Irishman got up and pointed out the danger hanging over the Old Testament. To that he had retorted: “Better, sir, it should run a risk than have no risk to run.” From which moment he was notable.

He stayed up four years, and went down with a sense of bewilderment and loss. The matured verdict of Oxford on this child of hers, was “Eustace Miltoun! Ah! Queer bird! Will make his mark!”

He had about this time an interview with his father which confirmed the impression each had formed of the other. It took place in the library at Monkland Court, on a late November afternoon.

The light of eight candles in thin silver candlesticks, four on either side of the carved stone hearth, illumined that room. Their gentle radiance penetrated but a little way into the great dark space lined with books, panelled and floored with black oak, where the acrid fragrance of leather and dried roseleaves seemed to drench the very soul with the aroma of the past. Above the huge fireplace, with light falling on one side of his shaven face, hung a portrait – painter unknown – of that Cardinal Caradoc who suffered for his faith in the sixteenth century. Ascetic, crucified, with a little smile clinging to the lips and deep-set eyes, he presided, above the bluefish flames of a log fire.

Father and son found some difficulty in beginning.

Each of those two felt as though he were in the presence of someone else’s very near relation. They had, in fact, seen extremely little of each other, and not seen that little long.

Lord Valleys uttered the first remark:

“Well, my dear fellow, what are you going to do now? I think we can make certain of this seat down here, if you like to stand.”

Miltoun had answered: “Thanks, very much; I don’t think so at present.”

Through the thin fume of his cigar Lord Valleys watched that long figure sunk deep in the chair opposite.

“Why not?” he said. “You can’t begin too soon; unless you think you ought to go round the world.”

“Before I can become a man of it?”

Lord Valleys gave a rather disconcerted laugh.

“There’s nothing in politics you can’t pick up as you go along,” he said. “How old are you?”

“Twenty-four.”

“You look older.” A faint line, as of contemplation, rose between his eyes. Was it fancy that a little smile was hovering about Miltoun’s lips?

“I’ve got a foolish theory,” came from those lips, “that one must know the conditions first. I want to give at least five years to that.”

Lord Valleys raised his eyebrows. “Waste of time,” he said. “You’d know more at the end of it, if you went into the House at once. You take the matter too seriously.”

“No doubt.”

For fully a minute Lord Valleys made no answer; he felt almost ruffled. Waiting till the sensation had passed, he said: “Well, my dear fellow, as you please.”

Miltoun’s apprenticeship to the profession of politics was served in a slum settlement; on his father’s estates; in Chambers at the Temple; in expeditions to Germany, America, and the British

Colonies; in work at elections; and in two forlorn hopes to capture a constituency which could be trusted not to change its principles. He read much, slowly, but with conscientious tenacity, poetry, history, and works on philosophy, religion, and social matters.

Fiction, and especially foreign fiction, he did not care for. With the utmost desire to be wide and impartial, he sucked in what ministered to the wants of his nature, rejecting unconsciously all that by its unsuitability endangered the flame of his private spirit. What he read, in fact, served only to strengthen those profounder convictions which arose from his temperament. With a contempt of the vulgar gewgaws of wealth and rank he combined a humble but intense and growing conviction of his capacity for leadership, of a spiritual superiority to those whom he desired to benefit. There was no trace, indeed, of the common Pharisee in Miltoun, he was simple and direct; but his eyes, his gestures, the whole man, proclaimed the presence of some secret spring of certainty, some fundamental well into which no disturbing glimmers penetrated. He was not devoid of wit, but he was devoid of that kind of wit which turns its eyes inward, and sees something of the fun that lies in being what you are. Miltoun saw the world and all the things thereof shaped like spires – even when they were circles. He seemed to have no sense that the Universe was equally compounded of those two symbols, whose point of reconciliation had not yet been discovered.

Such was he, then, when the Member for his native division was made a peer.

He had reached the age of thirty without ever having been in love, leading a life of almost savage purity, with one solitary breakdown. Women were afraid of him. And he was perhaps a little afraid of woman. She was in theory too lovely and desirable – the half-moon in a summer sky; in practice too cloying, or too harsh. He had an affection for Barbara, his younger sister; but to his mother, his grandmother, or his elder sister Agatha, he had never felt close. It was indeed amusing to see Lady Valleys with her first-born. Her fine figure, the blown roses of her face, her grey-blue eyes which had a slight tendency to roll, as though amusement just touched with naughtiness bubbled behind them; were reduced to a queer, satirical decorum in Miltoun's presence. Thoughts and sayings verging on the risky were characteristic of her robust physique, of her soul which could afford to express almost all that occurred to it. Miltoun had never, not even as a child, given her his confidence. She bore him no resentment, being of that large, generous build in body and mind, rarely – never in her class – associated with the capacity for feeling aggrieved or lowered in any estimation, even its own. He was, and always had been, an odd boy, and there was an end of it! Nothing had perhaps so disconcerted Lady Valleys as his want of behaviour in regard to women. She felt it abnormal, just as she recognized the essential if duly veiled normality of her husband and younger son. It was this feeling which made her realize almost more vividly than she had time for, in the whirl of politics and fashion, the danger of his friendship with this lady to whom she alluded so discreetly as 'Anonyma.'

Pure chance had been responsible for the inception of that friendship. Going one December afternoon to the farmhouse of a tenant, just killed by a fall from his horse, Miltoun had found the widow in a state of bewildered grief, thinly cloaked in the manner of one who had almost lost the power to express her feelings, and quite lost it in presence of 'the gentry.' Having assured the poor soul that she need have no fear about her tenancy, he was just leaving, when he met, in the stone-flagged entrance, a lady in a fur cap and jacket, carrying in her arms a little crying boy, bleeding from a cut on the forehead. Taking him from her and placing him on a table in the parlour, Miltoun looked at this lady, and saw that she was extremely grave, and soft, and charming. He inquired of her whether the mother should be told.

She shook her head.

"Poor thing, not just now: let's wash it, and bind it up first."

Together therefore they washed and bound up the cut. Having finished, she looked at Miltoun, and seemed to say: "You would do the telling so much better than I."

He, therefore, told the mother and was rewarded by a little smile from the grave lady.

From that meeting he took away the knowledge of her name, Audrey Lees Noel, and the remembrance of a face, whose beauty, under a cap of squirrel's fur, pursued him. Some days later passing by the village green, he saw her entering a garden gate. On this occasion he had asked her whether she would like her cottage re-thatched; an inspection of the roof had followed; he had stayed talking a long time. Accustomed to women – over the best of whom, for all their grace and lack of affectation, high-caste life had wrapped the manner which seems to take all things for granted – there was a peculiar charm for Miltoun in this soft, dark-eyed lady who evidently lived quite out of the world, and had so poignant, and shy, a flavour. Thus from a chance seed had blossomed swiftly one of those rare friendships between lonely people, which can in short time fill great spaces of two lives.

One day she asked him: “You know about me, I suppose?” Miltoun made a motion of his head, signifying that he did. His informant had been the vicar.

“Yes, I am told, her story is a sad one – a divorce.”

“Do you mean that she has been divorced, or – ”

For the fraction of a second the vicar perhaps had hesitated.

“Oh! no – no. Sinned against, I am sure. A nice woman, so far as I have seen; though I'm afraid not one of my congregation.”

With this, Miltoun, in whom chivalry had already been awakened, was content. When she asked if he knew her story, he would not for the world have had her rake up what was painful. Whatever that story, she could not have been to blame. She had begun already to be shaped by his own spirit; had become not a human being as it was, but an expression of his aspiration...

On the third evening after his passage of arms with Courtier, he was again at her little white cottage sheltering within its high garden walls. Smothered in roses, and with a black-brown thatch overhanging the old-fashioned leaded panes of the upper windows, it had an air of hiding from the world. Behind, as though on guard, two pine trees spread their dark boughs over the outhouses, and in any south-west wind could be heard speaking gravely about the weather. Tall lilac bushes flanked the garden, and a huge lime-tree in the adjoining field sighed and rustled, or on still days let forth the drowsy hum of countless small dusky bees who frequented that green hostelry.

He found her altering a dress, sitting over it in her peculiar delicate fashion – as if all objects whatsoever, dresses, flowers, books, music, required from her the same sympathy.

He had come from a long day's electioneering, had been heckled at two meetings, and was still sore from the experience. To watch her, to be soothed, and ministered to by her had never been so restful; and stretched out in a long chair he listened to her playing.

Over the hill a Pierrot moon was slowly moving up in a sky the colour of grey irises. And in a sort of trance Miltoun stared at the burnt-out star, travelling in bright pallor.

Across the moor a sea of shallow mist was rolling; and the trees in the valley, like browsing cattle, stood knee-deep in whiteness, with all the air above them wan from an innumerable rain as of moondust, falling into that white sea. Then the moon passed behind the lime-tree, so that a great lighted Chinese lantern seemed to hang blue-black from the sky.

Suddenly, jarring and shivering the music, came a sound of hooting. It swelled, died away, and swelled again.

Miltoun rose.

“That has spoiled my vision,” he said. “Mrs. Noel, I have something I want to say.” But looking down at her, sitting so still, with her hands resting on the keys, he was silent in sheer adoration.

A voice from the door ejaculated:

“Oh! ma'am – oh! my lord! They're devilling a gentleman on the green!”

CHAPTER VI

When the immortal Don set out to ring all the bells of merriment, he was followed by one clown. Charles Courtier on the other hand had always been accompanied by thousands, who really could not understand the conduct of this man with no commercial sense. But though he puzzled his contemporaries, they did not exactly laugh at him, because it was reported that he had really killed some men, and loved some women. They found such a combination irresistible, when coupled with an appearance both vigorous and gallant. The son of an Oxfordshire clergyman, and mounted on a lost cause, he had been riding through the world ever since he was eighteen, without once getting out of the saddle. The secret of this endurance lay perhaps in his unconsciousness that he was in the saddle at all. It was as much his natural seat as office stools to other mortals. He made no capital out of errantry, his temperament being far too like his red-gold hair, which people compared to flames, consuming all before them. His vices were patent; too incurable an optimism; an admiration for beauty such as must sometimes have caused him to forget which woman he was most in love with; too thin a skin; too hot a heart; hatred of humbug, and habitual neglect of his own interest. Unmarried, and with many friends, and many enemies, he kept his body like a sword-blade, and his soul always at white heat.

That one who admitted to having taken part in five wars should be mixing in a by-election in the cause of Peace, was not so inconsistent as might be supposed; for he had always fought on the losing side, and there seemed to him at the moment no side so losing as that of Peace. No great politician, he was not an orator, nor even a glib talker; yet a quiet mordancy of tongue, and the white-hot look in his eyes, never failed to make an impression of some kind on an audience.

There was, however, hardly a corner of England where orations on behalf of Peace had a poorer chance than the Bucklandbury division. To say that Courtier had made himself unpopular with its matter-of-fact, independent, stolid, yet quick-tempered population, would be inadequate. He had outraged their beliefs, and roused the most profound suspicions. They could not, for the life of them, make out what he was at. Though by his adventures and his book, "Peace-a lost Cause," he was, in London, a conspicuous figure, they had naturally never heard of him; and his adventure to these parts seemed to them an almost ludicrous example of pure idea poking its nose into plain facts – the idea that nations ought to, and could live in peace being so very pure; and the fact that they never had, so very plain!

At Monkland, which was all Court estate, there were naturally but few supporters of Miltoun's opponent, Mr. Humphrey Chilcox, and the reception accorded to the champion of Peace soon passed from curiosity to derision, from derision to menace, till Courtier's attitude became so defiant, and his sentences so heated that he was only saved from a rough handling by the influential interposition of the vicar.

Yet when he began to address them he had felt irresistibly attracted. They looked such capital, independent fellows. Waiting for his turn to speak, he had marked them down as men after his own heart. For though Courtier knew that against an unpopular idea there must always be a majority, he never thought so ill of any individual as to suppose him capable of belonging to that ill-omened body.

Surely these fine, independent fellows were not to be hoodwinked by the jingoes! It had been one more disillusion. He had not taken it lying down; neither had his audience. They dispersed without forgiving; they came together again without having forgotten.

The village Inn, a little white building whose small windows were overgrown with creepers, had a single guest's bedroom on the upper floor, and a little sitting-room where Courtier took his meals. The rest of the house was but stone-floored bar with a long wooden bench against the back wall, whence nightly a stream of talk would issue, all harsh a's, and sudden soft u's; whence too a figure, a little unsteady, would now and again emerge, to a chorus of 'Gude naights,' stand still under the ash-trees to light his pipe, then move slowly home.

But on that evening, when the trees, like cattle, stood knee-deep in the moon-dust, those who came out from the bar-room did not go away; they hung about in the shadows, and were joined by other figures creeping furtively through the bright moonlight, from behind the Inn. Presently more figures moved up from the lanes and the churchyard path, till thirty or more were huddled there, and their stealthy murmur of talk distilled a rare savour of illicit joy. Unholy hilarity, indeed, seemed lurking in the deep tree-shadow, before the wan Inn, whence from a single lighted window came forth the half-chanting sound of a man's voice reading out loud. Laughter was smothered, talk whispered.

"He'm a-practisin' his spaches." "Smoke the cunnin' old vox out!" "Red pepper's the proper stuff." "See men sneeze! We've a-screed up the door."

Then, as a face showed at the lighted window, a burst of harsh laughter broke the hush.

He at the window was seen struggling violently to wrench away a bar. The laughter swelled to hooting. The prisoner forced his way through, dropped to the ground, rose, staggered, and fell.

A voice said sharply:

"What's this?"

Out of the sounds of scuffling and scattering came the whisper: "His lordship!" And the shade under the ash-trees became deserted, save by the tall dark figure of a man, and a woman's white shape.

"Is that you, Mr. Courtier? Are you hurt?"

A chuckle rose from the recumbent figure.

"Only my knee. The beggars! They precious nearly choked me, though."

CHAPTER VII

Bertie Caradoc, leaving the smoking-room at Monkland Court that same evening, – on his way to bed, went to the Georgian corridor, where his pet barometer was hanging. To look at the glass had become the nightly habit of one who gave all the time he could spare from his profession to hunting in the winter and to racing in the summer.’

The Hon. Hubert Caradoc, an apprentice to the calling of diplomacy, more completely than any living Caradoc embodied the characteristic strength and weaknesses of that family. He was of fair height, and wiry build. His weathered face, under sleek, dark hair, had regular, rather small features, and wore an expression of alert resolution, masked by impassivity. Over his inquiring, hazel-grey eyes the lids were almost religiously kept half drawn. He had been born reticent, and great, indeed, was the emotion under which he suffered when the whole of his eyes were visible. His nose was finely chiselled, and had little flesh. His lips, covered by a small, dark moustache, scarcely opened to emit his speeches, which were uttered in a voice singularly muffled, yet unexpectedly quick. The whole personality was that of a man practical, spirited, guarded, resourceful, with great power of self-control, who looked at life as if she were a horse under him, to whom he must give way just so far as was necessary to keep mastery of her. A man to whom ideas were of no value, except when wedded to immediate action; essentially neat; demanding to be ‘done well,’ but capable of stoicism if necessary; urbane, yet always in readiness to thrust; able only to condone the failings and to compassionate the kinds of distress which his own experience had taught him to understand. Such was Miltoun’s younger brother at the age of twenty-six.

Having noted that the glass was steady, he was about to seek the stairway, when he saw at the farther end of the entrance-hall three figures advancing arm-in-arm. Habitually both curious and wary, he waited till they came within the radius of a lamp; then, seeing them to be those of Miltoun and a footman, supporting between them a lame man, he at once hastened forward.

“Have you put your knee out, sir? Hold on a minute! Get a chair, Charles.”

Seating the stranger in this chair, Bertie rolled up the trouser, and passed his fingers round the knee. There was a sort, of loving-kindness in that movement, as of a hand which had in its time felt the joints and sinews of innumerable horses.

“H’m!” he said; “can you stand a bit of a jerk? Catch hold of him behind, Eustace. Sit down on the floor, Charles, and hold the legs of the chair. Now then!” And taking up the foot, he pulled. There was a click, a little noise of teeth ground together; and Bertie said: “Good man – shan’t have to have the vet. to you, this time.”

Having conducted their lame guest to a room in the Georgian corridor hastily converted to a bedroom, the two brothers presently left him to the attentions of the footman.

“Well, old man,” said Bertie, as they sought their rooms; “that’s put paid to his name – won’t do you any more harm this journey. Good plucked one, though!”

The report that Courtier was harboured beneath their roof went the round of the family before breakfast, through the agency of one whose practice it was to know all things, and to see that others partook of that knowledge, Little Ann, paying her customary morning visit to her mother’s room, took her stand with face turned up and hands clasping her belt, and began at once.

“Uncle Eustace brought a man last night with a wounded leg, and Uncle Bertie pulled it out straight. William says that Charles says he only made a noise like this” – there was a faint sound of small chumping teeth: “And he’s the man that’s staying at the Inn, and the stairs were too narrow to carry him up, William says; and if his knee was put out he won’t be able to walk without a stick for a long time. Can I go to Father?”

Agatha, who was having her hair brushed, thought:

“I’m not sure whether belts so low as that are wholesome,” murmured:

“Wait a minute!”

But little Ann was gone; and her voice could be heard in the dressing-room climbing up towards Sir William, who from the sound of his replies, was manifestly shaving. When Agatha, who never could resist a legitimate opportunity of approaching her husband, looked in, he was alone, and rather thoughtful – a tall man with a solid, steady face and cautious eyes, not in truth remarkable except to his own wife.

“That fellow Courtier’s caught by the leg,” he said. “Don’t know what your Mother will say to an enemy in the camp.”

“Isn’t he a freethinker, and rather – ”

Sir William, following his own thoughts, interrupted:

“Just as well, of course, so far as Miltoun’s concerned, to have got him here.”

Agatha sighed: “Well, I suppose we shall have to be nice to him. I’ll tell Mother.”

Sir William smiled.

“Ann will see to that,” he said.

Ann was seeing to that.

Seated in the embrasure of the window behind the looking-glass, where Lady Valleys was still occupied, she was saying:

“He fell out of the window because of the red pepper. Miss Wallace says he is a hostage – what does hostage mean, Granny?”

When six years ago that word had first fallen on Lady Valleys’ ears, she had thought: “Oh! dear! Am I really Granny?” It had been a shock, had seemed the end of so much; but the matter-of-fact heroism of women, so much quicker to accept the inevitable than men, had soon come to her aid, and now, unlike her husband, she did not care a bit. For all that she answered nothing, partly because it was not necessary to speak in order to sustain a conversation with little Ann, and partly because she was deep in thought.

The man was injured! Hospitality, of course – especially since their own tenants had committed the outrage! Still, to welcome a man who had gone out of his way to come down here and stump the country against her own son, was rather a tall order. It might have been worse, no doubt. If; for instance, he had been some ‘impossible’ Nonconformist Radical! This Mr. Courtier was a free lance – rather a well-known man, an interesting creature. She must see that he felt ‘at home’ and comfortable. If he were pumped judiciously, no doubt one could find out about this woman. Moreover, the acceptance of their ‘salt’ would silence him politically if she knew anything of that type of man, who always had something in him of the Arab’s creed. Her mind, that of a capable administrator, took in all the practical significance of this incident, which, although untoward, was not without its comic side to one disposed to find zest and humour in everything that did not absolutely run counter to her interests and philosophy.

The voice of little Ann broke in on her reflections.

“I’m going to Auntie Babs now.”

“Very well; give me a kiss first.”

Little Ann thrust up her face, so that its sudden little nose penetrated Lady Valleys’ soft curving lips...

When early that same afternoon Courtier, leaning on a stick, passed from his room out on to the terrace, he was confronted by three sunlit peacocks marching slowly across a lawn towards a statue of Diana. With incredible dignity those birds moved, as if never in their lives had they been hurried. They seemed indeed to know that when they got there, there would be nothing for them to do but to come back again. Beyond them, through the tall trees, over some wooded foot-hills of the moorland and a promised land of pinkish fields, pasture, and orchards, the prospect stretched to the far sea. Heat clothed this view with a kind of opalescence, a fairy garment, transmuting all values, so that the four square walls and tall chimneys of the pottery-works a few miles down the valley seemed

to Courtier like a vision of some old fortified Italian town. His sensations, finding himself in this galley, were peculiar. For his feeling towards Miltoun, whom he had twice met at Mrs. Noel's, was, in spite of disagreements, by no means unfriendly; while his feeling towards Miltoun's family was not yet in existence. Having lived from hand to mouth, and in many countries, since he left Westminster School, he had now practically no class feelings. An attitude of hostility to aristocracy because it was aristocracy, was as incomprehensible to him as an attitude of deference.

His sensations habitually shaped themselves in accordance with those two permanent requirements of his nature, liking for adventure, and hatred of tyranny. The labourer who beat his wife, the shopman who sweated his 'hands,' the parson who consigned his parishioners to hell, the peer who rode roughshod – all were equally odious to him. He thought of people as individuals, and it was, as it were, by accident that he had conceived the class generalization which he had fired back at Miltoun from Mrs. Noel's window. Sanguine, accustomed to queer environments, and always catching at the moment as it flew, he had not to fight with the timidities and irritations of a nervous temperament. His cheery courtesy was only disturbed when he became conscious of some sentiment which appeared to him mean or cowardly. On such occasions, not perhaps infrequent, his face looked as if his heart were physically fuming, and since his shell of stoicism was never quite melted by this heat, a very peculiar expression was the result, a sort of calm, sardonic, desperate, jolly look.

His chief feeling, then, at the outrage which had laid him captive in the enemy's camp, was one of vague amusement, and curiosity. People round about spoke fairly well of this Caradoc family. There did not seem to be any lack of kindly feeling between them and their tenants; there was said to be no griping destitution, nor any particular ill-housing on their estate. And if the inhabitants were not encouraged to improve themselves, they were at all events maintained at a certain level, by steady and not ungenerous supervision. When a roof required thatching it was thatched; when a man became too old to work, he was not suffered to lapse into the Workhouse. In bad years for wool, or beasts, or crops, the farmers received a graduated remission of rent. The pottery-works were run on a liberal if autocratic basis. It was true that though Lord Valleys was said to be a staunch supporter of a 'back to the land' policy, no disposition was shown to encourage people to settle on these particular lands, no doubt from a feeling that such settlers would not do them so much justice as their present owner. Indeed so firmly did this conviction seemingly obtain, that Lord Valleys' agent was not unfrequently observed to be buying a little bit more.

But, since in this life one notices only what interests him, all this gossip, half complimentary, half not, had fallen but lightly on the ears of the champion of Peace during his campaign, for he was, as has, been said, but a poor politician, and rode his own horse very much his own way.

While he stood there enjoying the view, he heard a small high voice, and became conscious of a little girl in a very shady hat so far back on her brown hair that it did not shade her; and of a small hand put out in front. He took the hand, and answered:

"Thank you, I am well – and you?" perceiving the while that a pair of wide frank eyes were examining his leg.

"Does it hurt?"

"Not to speak of."

"My pony's leg was blistered. Granny is coming to look at it."

"I see."

"I have to go now. I hope you'll soon be better. Good-bye!"

Then, instead of the little girl, Courtier saw a tall and rather florid woman regarding him with a sort of quizzical dignity. She wore a stiffish fawn-coloured dress that seemed to be cut a little too tight round her substantial hips, for it quite neglected to embrace her knees. She had on no hat, no gloves, no ornaments, except the rings on her fingers, and a little jewelled watch in a leather bracelet on her wrist. There was, indeed, about her whole figure an air of almost professional escape from finery.

Stretching out a well-shaped but not small hand, she said:

“I most heartily apologize to you, Mr. Courtier.”

“Not at all.”

“I do hope you’re comfortable. Have they given you everything you want?”

“More than everything.”

“It really was disgraceful! However it’s brought us the pleasure of making your acquaintance. I’ve read your book, of course.”

To Courtier it seemed that on this lady’s face had come a look which seemed to say: Yes, very clever and amusing, quite enjoyable! But the ideas – What? You know very well they won’t do – in fact they mustn’t do!

“That’s very nice of you.”

But into Lady Valleys’ answer, “I don’t agree with it a bit, you know!” there had crept a touch of asperity, as though she knew that he had smiled inside. “What we want preached in these days are the warlike virtues – especially by a warrior.”

“Believe me, Lady Valleys, the warlike virtues are best left to men of more virgin imagination.”

He received a quick look, and the words: “Anyway, I’m sure you don’t care a rap for politics. You know Mrs. Lees Noel, don’t you? What a pretty woman she is!”

But as she spoke Courtier saw a young girl coming along the terrace. She had evidently been riding, for she wore high boots and a skirt which had enabled her to sit astride. Her eyes were blue, and her hair – the colour of beech-leaves in autumn with the sun shining through – was coiled up tight under a small soft hat. She was tall, and moved towards them like one endowed with great length from the hip joint to the knee. Joy of life, serene, unconscious vigour, seemed to radiate from her whole face and figure.

At Lady Valleys’ words:

“Ah, Babs! My daughter Barbara – Mr. Courtier,” he put out his hand, received within it some gauntleted fingers held out with a smile, and heard her say:

“Miltoun’s gone up to Town, Mother; I was going to motor in to Bucklandbury with a message he gave me; so I can fetch Granny out from the station.”

“You had better take Ann, or she’ll make our lives a burden; and perhaps Mr. Courtier would like an airing. Is your knee fit, do you think?”

Glancing at the apparition, Courtier replied:

“It is.”

Never since the age of seven had he been able to look on feminine beauty without a sense of warmth and faint excitement; and seeing now perhaps the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld, he desired to be with her wherever she might be going. There was too something very fascinating in the way she smiled, as if she had a little seen through his sentiments.

“Well then,” she said, “we’d better look for Ann.”

After short but vigorous search little Ann was found – in the car, instinct having told her of a forward movement in which it was her duty to take part. And soon they had started, Ann between them in that peculiar state of silence to which she became liable when really interested.

From the Monkland estate, flowered, lawned, and timbered, to the open moor, was like passing to another world; for no sooner was the last lodge of the Western drive left behind, than there came into sudden view the most pagan bit of landscape in all England. In this wild parliament-house, clouds, rocks, sun, and winds met and consulted. The ‘old’ men, too, had left their spirits among the great stones, which lay couched like lions on the hill-tops, under the white clouds, and their brethren, the hunting buzzard hawks. Here the very rocks were restless, changing form, and sense, and colour from day to day, as though worshipping the unexpected, and refusing themselves to law. The winds too in their passage revolted against their courses, and came tearing down wherever there were combs or crannies, so that men in their shelters might still learn the power of the wild gods.

The wonders of this prospect were entirely lost on little Ann, and somewhat so on Courtier, deeply engaged in reconciling those two alien principles, courtesy, and the love of looking at a pretty face. He was wondering too what this girl of twenty, who had the self-possession of a woman of forty, might be thinking. It was little Ann who broke the silence.

“Auntie Babs, it wasn’t a very strong house, was it?”

Courtier looked in the direction of her small finger. There was the wreck of a little house, which stood close to a stone man who had obviously possessed that hill before there were men of flesh. Over one corner of the sorry ruin, a single patch of roof still clung, but the rest was open.

“He was a silly man to build it, wasn’t he, Ann? That’s why they call it Ashman’s Folly.”

“Is he alive?”

“Not quite – it’s just a hundred years ago.”

“What made him build it here?”

“He hated women, and – the roof fell in on him.”

“Why did he hate women?”

“He was a crank.”

“What is a crank?”

“Ask Mr. Courtier.”

Under this girl’s calm quizzical glance, Courtier endeavoured to find an answer to that question.

“A crank,” he said slowly, “is a man like me.”

He heard a little laugh, and became acutely conscious of Ann’s dispassionate examining eyes.

“Is Uncle Eustace a crank?”

“You know now, Mr. Courtier, what Ann thinks of you. You think a good deal of Uncle Eustace, don’t you, Ann?”

“Yes,” said Ann, and fixed her eyes before her. But Courtier gazed sideways – over her hatless head.

His exhilaration was increasing every moment. This girl reminded him of a two-year-old filly he had once seen, stepping out of Ascot paddock for her first race, with the sun glistening on her satin chestnut skin, her neck held high, her eyes all fire – as sure to win, as that grass was green. It was difficult to believe her Miltoun’s sister. It was difficult to believe any of those four young Caradocs related. The grave ascetic Miltoun, wrapped in the garment of his spirit; mild, domestic, strait-laced Agatha; Bertie, muffled, shrewd, and steely; and this frank, joyful conquering Barbara – the range was wide.

But the car had left the moor, and, down a steep hill, was passing the small villas and little grey workmen’s houses outside the town of Bucklandbury.

“Ann and I have to go on to Miltoun’s headquarters. Shall I drop you at the enemy’s, Mr. Courtier? Stop, please, Frith.”

And before Courtier could assent, they had pulled up at a house on which was inscribed with extraordinary vigour: “Chilcox for Bucklandbury.”

Hobbling into the Committee-room of Mr. Humphrey Chilcox, which smelled of paint, Courtier took with him the scented memory of youth, and ambergris, and Harris tweed.

In that room three men were assembled round a table; the eldest of whom, endowed with little grey eyes, a stubbly beard, and that mysterious something only found in those who have been mayors, rose at once and came towards him.

“Mr. Courtier, I believe,” he said bluffly. “Glad to see you, sir. Most distressed to hear of this outrage. Though in a way, it’s done us good. Yes, really. Grossly against fair play. Shouldn’t be surprised if it turned a couple of hundred votes. You carry the effects of it about with you, I see.”

A thin, refined man, with wiry hair, also came up, holding a newspaper in his hand.

“It has had one rather embarrassing effect,” he said. “Read this

“OUTRAGE ON A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

“LORD MILTOUN’S EVENING ADVENTURE.”

Courtier read a paragraph.

The man with the little eyes broke the ominous silence which ensued.

“One of our side must have seen the whole thing, jumped on his bicycle and brought in the account before they went to press. They make no imputation on the lady – simply state the facts. Quite enough,” he added with impersonal grimness; “I think he’s done for himself, sir.”

The man with the refined face added nervously:

“We couldn’t help it, Mr. Courtier; I really don’t know what we can do. I don’t like it a bit.”

“Has your candidate seen this?” Courtier asked.

“Can’t have,” struck in the third Committee-man; “we hadn’t seen it ourselves until an hour ago.”

“I should never have permitted it,” said the man with the refined face; “I blame the editor greatly.”

“Come to that – ” said the little-eyed man, “it’s a plain piece of news. If it makes a stir, that’s not our fault. The paper imputes nothing, it states. Position of the lady happens to do the rest. Can’t help it, and moreover, sir, speaking for self, don’t want to. We’ll have no loose morals in public life down here, please God!” There was real feeling in his words; then, catching sight of Courtier’s face, he added: “Do you know this lady?”

“Ever since she was a child. Anyone who speaks evil of her, has to reckon with me.”

The man with the refined face said earnestly:

“Believe me, Mr. Courtier, I entirely sympathize. We had nothing to do with the paragraph. It’s one of those incidents where one benefits against one’s will. Most unfortunate that she came out on to the green with Lord Miltoun; you know what people are.”

“It’s the head-line that does it,” said the third Committee-man; “they’ve put what will attract the public.”

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” said the little-eyed man stubbornly; “if Lord Miltoun will spend his evenings with lonely ladies, he can’t blame anybody but himself.”

Courtier looked from face to face.

“This closes my connection with the campaign,” he said: “What’s the address of this paper?” And without waiting for an answer, he took up the journal and hobbled from the room. He stood a minute outside finding the address, then made his way down the street.

CHAPTER VIII

By the side of little Ann, Barbara sat leaning back amongst the cushions of the car. In spite of being already launched into high-caste life which brings with it an early knowledge of the world, she had still some of the eagerness in her face which makes children lovable. Yet she looked negligently enough at the citizens of Bucklandbury, being already a little conscious of the strange mixture of sentiment peculiar to her countrymen in presence of herself – that curious expression on their faces resulting from the continual attempt to look down their noses while slanting their eyes upwards. Yes, she was already alive to that mysterious glance which had built the national house and insured it afterwards – foe to cynicism, pessimism, and anything French or Russian; parent of all the national virtues, and all the national vices; of idealism and muddle-headedness, of independence and servility; fosterer of conduct, murderer of speculation; looking up, and looking down, but never straight at anything; most high, most deep, most queer; and ever bubbling-up from the essential Well of Emulation.

Surrounded by that glance, waiting for Courtier, Barbara, not less British than her neighbours, was secretly slanting her own eyes up and down over the absent figure of her new acquaintance. She too wanted something she could look up to, and at the same time see damned first. And in this knight-errant it seemed to her that she had got it.

He was a creature from another world. She had met many men, but not as yet one quite of this sort. It was rather nice to be with a clever man, who had none the less done so many outdoor things, been through so many bodily adventures. The mere writers, or even the ‘Bohemians,’ whom she occasionally met, were after all only ‘chaplains to the Court,’ necessary to keep aristocracy in touch with the latest developments of literature and art. But this Mr. Courtier was a man of action; he could not be looked on with the amused, admiring toleration suited to men remarkable only for ideas, and the way they put them into paint or ink. He had used, and could use, the sword, even in the cause of Peace. He could love, had loved, or so they said: If Barbara had been a girl of twenty in another class, she would probably never have heard of this, and if she had heard, it might very well have dismayed or shocked her. But she had heard, and without shock, because she had already learned that men were like that, and women too sometimes.

It was with quite a little pang of concern that she saw him hobbling down the street towards her; and when he was once more seated, she told the chauffeur: “To the station, Frith. Quick, please!” and began:

“You are not to be trusted a bit. What were you doing?”

But Courtier smiled grimly over the head of Ann, in silence.

At this, almost the first time she had ever yet encountered a distinct rebuff, Barbara quivered, as though she had been touched lightly with a whip. Her lips closed firmly, her eyes began to dance. “Very well, my dear,” she thought. But presently stealing a look at him, she became aware of such a queer expression on his face, that she forgot she was offended.

“Is anything wrong, Mr. Courtier?”

“Yes, Lady Barbara, something is very wrong – that miserable mean thing, the human tongue.”

Barbara had an intuitive knowledge of how to handle things, a kind of moral sangfroid, drawn in from the faces she had watched, the talk she had heard, from her youth up. She trusted those intuitions, and letting her eyes conspire with his over Ann’s brown hair, she said:

“Anything to do with Mrs. N – ?” Seeing “Yes” in his eyes, she added quickly: “And M – ?”

Courtier nodded.

“I thought that was coming. Let them babble! Who cares?”

She caught an approving glance, and the word, “Good!”

But the car had drawn up at Bucklandbury Station.

The little grey figure of Lady Casterley, coming out of the station doorway, showed but slight sign of her long travel. She stopped to take the car in, from chauffeur to Courtier.

“Well, Frith! – Mr. Courtier, is it? I know your book, and I don’t approve of you; you’re a dangerous man – How do you do? I must have those two bags. The cart can bring the rest... Randle, get up in front, and don’t get dusty. Ann!” But Ann was already beside the chauffeur, having long planned this improvement. “H’m! So you’ve hurt your leg, sir? Keep still! We can sit three... Now, my dear, I can kiss you! You’ve grown!”

Lady Casterley’s kiss, once received, was never forgotten; neither perhaps was Barbara’s. Yet they were different. For, in the case of Lady Casterley, the old eyes, bright and investigating, could be seen deciding the exact spot for the lips to touch; then the face with its firm chin was darted forward; the lips paused a second, as though to make quite certain, then suddenly dug hard and dry into the middle of the cheek, quavered for the fraction of a second as if trying to remember to be soft, and were relaxed like the elastic of a catapult. And in the case of Barbara, first a sort of light came into her eyes, then her chin tilted a little, then her lips pouted a little, her body quivered, as if it were getting a size larger, her hair breathed, there was a small sweet sound; it was over.

Thus kissing her grandmother, Barbara resumed her seat, and looked at Courtier. ‘Sitting three’ as they were, he was touching her, and it seemed to her somehow that he did not mind.

The wind had risen, blowing from the West, and sunshine was flying on it. The call of the cuckoos – a little sharpened – followed the swift-travelling car. And that essential sweetness of the moor, born of the heather roots and the South-West wind, was stealing out from under the young ferns.

With her thin nostrils distended to this scent, Lady Casterley bore a distinct resemblance to a small, fine game-bird.

“You smell nice down here,” she said. “Now, Mr. Courtier, before I forget – who is this Mrs. Lees Noel that I hear so much of?”

At that question, Barbara could not help sliding her eyes round. How would he stand up to Granny? It was the moment to see what he was made of. Granny was terrific!

“A very charming woman, Lady Casterley.”

“No doubt; but I am tired of hearing that. What is her story?”

“Has she one?”

“Ha!” said Lady Casterley.

Ever so slightly Barbara let her arm press against Courtiers. It was so delicious to hear Granny getting no forwarder.

“I may take it she has a past, then?”

“Not from me, Lady Casterley.”

Again Barbara gave him that imperceptible and flattering touch.

“Well, this is all very mysterious. I shall find out for myself. You know her, my dear. You must take me to see her.”

“Dear Granny! If people hadn’t pasts, they wouldn’t have futures.”

Lady Casterley let her little claw-like hand descend on her grand-daughter’s thigh.

“Don’t talk nonsense, and don’t stretch like that!” she said; “you’re too large already...”

At dinner that night they were all in possession of the news. Sir William had been informed by the local agent at Staverton, where Lord Harbinger’s speech had suffered from some rude interruptions. The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow; having sent his wife on, had flown over in his biplane from Winkleigh, and brought a copy of ‘the rag’ with him. The one member of the small house-party who had not heard the report before dinner was Lord Dennis Fitz-Harold, Lady Casterley’s brother.

Little, of course, was said. But after the ladies had withdrawn, Harbinger, with that plain-spoken spontaneity which was so unexpected, perhaps a little intentionally so, in connection with his almost classically formed face, uttered words to the effect that, if they did not fundamentally kick that

rumour, it was all up with Miltoun. Really this was serious! And the beggars knew it, and they were going to work it. And Miltoun had gone up to Town, no one knew what for. It was the devil of a mess!

In all the conversation of this young man there was that peculiar brand of voice, which seems ever rebutting an accusation of being serious – a brand of voice and manner warranted against anything save ridicule; and in the face of ridicule apt to disappear. The words, just a little satirically spoken: “What is, my dear young man?” stopped him at once.

Looking for the complement and counterpart of Lady Casterley, one would perhaps have singled out her brother. All her abrupt decision was negated in his profound, ironical urbanity. His voice and look and manner were like his velvet coat, which had here and there a whitish sheen, as if it had been touched by moonlight. His hair too had that sheen. His very delicate features were framed in a white beard and moustache of Elizabethan shape. His eyes, hazel and still clear, looked out very straight, with a certain dry kindliness. His face, though unweathered and unseamed, and much too fine and thin in texture, had a curious affinity to the faces of old sailors or fishermen who have lived a simple, practical life in the light of an overmastering tradition. It was the face of a man with a very set creed, and inclined to be satiric towards innovations, examined by him and rejected full fifty years ago. One felt that a brain not devoid either of subtlety or aesthetic quality had long given up all attempts to interfere with conduct; that all shrewdness of speculation had given place to shrewdness of practical judgment based on very definite experience. Owing to lack of advertising power, natural to one so conscious of his dignity as to have lost all care for it, and to his devotion to a certain lady, only closed by death, his life had been lived, as it were, in shadow. Still, he possessed a peculiar influence in Society, because it was known to be impossible to get him to look at things in a complicated way. He was regarded rather as a last resort, however. “Bad as that? Well, there’s old Fitz-Harold! Try him! He won’t advise you, but he’ll say something.”

And in the heart of that irreverent young man, Harbinger, there stirred a sort of misgiving. Had he expressed himself too freely? Had he said anything too thick? He had forgotten the old boy! Stirring Bertie up with his foot, he murmured “Forgot you didn’t know, sir. Bertie will explain.”

Thus called on, Bertie, opening his lips a very little way, and fixing his half-closed eyes on his great-uncle, explained. There was a lady at the cottage – a nice woman – Mr. Courtier knew her – old Miltoun went there sometimes – rather late the other evening – these devils were making the most of it – suggesting – lose him the election, if they didn’t look out. Perfect rot, of course!

In his opinion, old Miltoun, though as steady as Time, had been a flat to let the woman come out with him on to the Green, showing clearly where he had been, when he ran to Courtier’s rescue. You couldn’t play about with women who had no form that anyone knew anything of, however promising they might look.

Then, out of a silence Winlow asked: What was to be done? Should Miltoun be wired for? A thing like this spread like wildfire! Sir William – a man not accustomed to underrate difficulties – was afraid it was going to be troublesome. Harbinger expressed the opinion that the editor ought to be kicked. Did anybody know what Courtier had done when he heard of it. Where was he – dining in his room? Bertie suggested that if Miltoun was at Valleys House, it mightn’t be too late to wire to him. The thing ought to be stemmed at once! And in all this concern about the situation there kept cropping out quaint little outbursts of desire to disregard the whole thing as infernal insolence, and metaphorically to punch the beggars’ heads, natural to young men of breeding.

Then, out of another silence came the voice of Lord Dennis:

“I am thinking of this poor lady.”

Turning a little abruptly towards that dry suave voice, and recovering the self-possession which seldom deserted him, Harbinger murmured:

“Quite so, sir; of course!”

CHAPTER IX

In the lesser withdrawing room, used when there was so small a party, Mrs. Winlow had gone to the piano and was playing to herself, for Lady Casterley, Lady Valleys, and her two daughters had drawn together as though united to face this invading rumour.

It was curious testimony to Miltoun's character that, no more here than in the dining-hall, was there any doubt of the integrity of his relations with Mrs. Noel. But whereas, there the matter was confined to its electioneering aspect, here that aspect was already perceived to be only the fringe of its importance. Those feminine minds, going with intuitive swiftness to the core of anything which affected their own males, had already grasped the fact that the rumour would, as it were, chain a man of Miltoun's temper to this woman.

But they were walking on such a thin crust of facts, and there was so deep a quagmire of supposition beneath, that talk was almost painfully difficult. Never before perhaps had each of these four women realized so clearly how much Miltoun – that rather strange and unknown grandson, son, and brother – counted in the scheme of existence. Their suppressed agitation was manifested in very different ways. Lady Casterley, upright in her chair, showed it only by an added decision of speech, a continual restless movement of one hand, a thin line between her usually smooth brows. Lady Valleys wore a puzzled look, as if a little surprised that she felt serious. Agatha looked frankly anxious. She was in her quiet way a woman of much character, endowed with that natural piety, which accepts without questioning the established order in life and religion. The world to her being home and family, she had a real, if gently expressed, horror of all that she instinctively felt to be subversive of this ideal. People judged her a little quiet, dull, and narrow; they compared her to a hen for ever clucking round her chicks. The streak of heroism that lay in her nature was not perhaps of patent order. Her feeling about her brother's situation however was sincere and not to be changed or comforted. She saw him in danger of being damaged in the only sense in which she could conceive of a man – as a husband and a father. It was this that went to her heart, though her piety proclaimed to her also the peril of his soul; for she shared the High Church view of the indissolubility of marriage.

As to Barbara, she stood by the hearth, leaning her white shoulders against the carved marble, her hands behind her, looking down. Now and then her lips curled, her level brows twitched, a faint sigh came from her; then a little smile would break out, and be instantly suppressed. She alone was silent – Youth criticizing Life; her judgment voiced itself only in the untroubled rise and fall of her young bosom, the impatience of her brows, the downward look of her blue eyes, full of a lazy, inextinguishable light:

Lady Valleys sighed.

“If only he weren't such a queer boy! He's quite capable of marrying her from sheer perversity.”

“What!” said Lady Casterley.

“You haven't seen her, my dear. A most unfortunately attractive creature – quite a charming face.”

Agatha said quietly:

“Mother, if she was divorced, I don't think Eustace would.”

“There's that, certainly,” murmured Lady Valleys; “hope for the best!”

“Don't you even know which way it was?” said Lady Casterley.

“Well, the vicar says she did the divorcing. But he's very charitable; it may be as Agatha hopes.”

“I detest vagueness. Why doesn't someone ask the woman?”

“You shall come with me, Granny dear, and ask her yourself; you will do it so nicely.”

Lady Casterley looked up.

“We shall see,” she said. Something struggled with the autocratic criticism in her eyes. No more than the rest of the world could she help indulging Barbara. As one who believed in the divinity of

her order, she liked this splendid child. She even admired – though admiration was not what she excelled in – that warm joy in life, as of some great nymph, parting the waves with bare limbs, tossing from her the foam of breakers. She felt that in this granddaughter, rather than in the good Agatha, the patrician spirit was housed. There were points to Agatha, earnestness and high principle; but something morally narrow and over-Anglican slightly offended the practical, this-worldly temper of Lady Casterley. It was a weakness, and she disliked weakness. Barbara would never be squeamish over moral questions or matters such as were not really, essential to aristocracy. She might, indeed, err too much the other way from sheer high spirits. As the impudent child had said: “If people had no pasts, they would have no futures.” And Lady Casterley could not bear people without futures. She was ambitious; not with the low ambition of one who had risen from nothing, but with the high passion of one on the top, who meant to stay there.

“And where have you been meeting this – er – anonymous creature?” she asked.

Barbara came from the hearth, and bending down beside Lady Casterley’s chair, seemed to envelop her completely.

“I’m all right, Granny; she couldn’t corrupt me.”

Lady Casterley’s face peered out doubtfully from that warmth, wearing a look of disapproving pleasure.

“I know your wiles!” she said. “Come, now!”

“I see her about. She’s nice to look at. We talk.”

Again with that hurried quietness Agatha said:

“My dear Babs, I do think you ought to wait.”

“My dear Angel, why? What is it to me if she’s had four husbands?”

Agatha bit her lips, and Lady Valleys murmured with a laugh:

“You really are a terror, Babs.”

But the sound of Mrs. Winlow’s music had ceased – the men had come in. And the faces of the four women hardened, as if they had slipped on masks; for though this was almost or quite a family party, the Winlows being second cousins, still the subject was one which each of these four in their very different ways felt to be beyond general discussion. Talk, now, began glancing from the war scare – Winlow had it very specially that this would be over in a week – to Brabrook’s speech, in progress at that very moment, of which Harbinger provided an imitation. It sped to Winlow’s flight – to Andrew Grant’s articles in the ‘Parthenon’ – to the caricature of Harbinger in the ‘Cackler’, inscribed ‘The New Tory. Lord H-rb-ng-r brings Social Reform beneath the notice of his friends,’ which depicted him introducing a naked baby to a number of coroneted old ladies. Thence to a dancer. Thence to the Bill for Universal Assurance. Then back to the war scare; to the last book of a great French writer; and once more to Winlow’s flight. It was all straightforward and outspoken, each seeming to say exactly what came into the head. For all that, there was a curious avoidance of the spiritual significances of these things; or was it perhaps that such significances were not seen?

Lord Dennis, at the far end of the room, studying a portfolio of engravings, felt a touch on his cheek; and conscious of a certain fragrance, said without turning his head:

“Nice things, these, Babs!”

Receiving no answer he looked up.

There indeed stood Barbara.

“I do hate sneering behind people’s backs!”

There had always been good comradeship between these two, since the days when Barbara, a golden-haired child, astride of a grey pony, had been his morning companion in the Row all through the season. His riding days were past; he had now no outdoor pursuit save fishing, which he followed with the ironic persistence of a self-contained, high-spirited nature, which refuses to admit that the mysterious finger of old age is laid across it. But though she was no longer his companion, he still had

a habit of expecting her confidences; and he looked after her, moving away from him to a window, with surprised concern.

It was one of those nights, dark yet gleaming, when there seems a flying malice in the heavens; when the stars, from under and above the black clouds, are like eyes frowning and flashing down at men with purposed malevolence. The great sighing trees even had caught this spirit, save one, a dark, spire-like cypress, planted three hundred and fifty years before, whose tall form incarnated the very spirit of tradition, and neither swayed nor souged like the others. From her, too close-fibred, too resisting, to admit the breath of Nature, only a dry rustle came. Still almost exotic, in spite of her centuries of sojourn, and now brought to life by the eyes of night, she seemed almost terrifying, in her narrow, spear-like austerity, as though something had dried and died within her soul. Barbara came back from the window.

“We can’t do anything in our lives, it seems to me,” she said, “but play at taking risks!”

Lord Dennis replied dryly:

“I don’t think I understand, my dear.”

“Look at Mr. Courtier!” muttered Barbara. “His life’s so much more risky altogether than any of our men folk lead. And yet they sneer at him.”

“Let’s see, what has he done?”

“Oh! I dare say not very much; but it’s all neck or nothing. But what does anything matter to Harbinger, for instance? If his Social Reform comes to nothing, he’ll still be Harbinger, with fifty thousand a year.”

Lord Dennis looked up a little queerly.

“What! Is it possible you don’t take the young man seriously, Babs?”

Barbara shrugged; a strap slipped a little off one white shoulder.

“It’s all play really; and he knows it – you can tell that from his voice. He can’t help its not mattering, of course; and he knows that too.”

“I have heard that he’s after you, Babs; is that true?”

“He hasn’t caught me yet.”

“Will he?”

Barbara’s answer was another shrug; and, for all their statuesque beauty, the movement of her shoulders was like the shrug of a little girl in her pinafore.

“And this Mr. Courtier,” said Lord Dennis dryly: “Are you after him?”

“I’m after everything; didn’t you know that, dear?”

“In reason, my child.”

“In reason, of course – like poor Eusty!” She stopped. Harbinger himself was standing there close by, with an air as nearly approaching reverence as was ever to be seen on him. In truth, the way in which he was looking at her was almost timorous.

“Will you sing that song I like so much, Lady Babs?”

They moved away together; and Lord Dennis, gazing after that magnificent young couple, stroked his beard gravely.

CHAPTER X

Miltoun's sudden journey to London had been undertaken in pursuance of a resolve slowly forming from the moment he met Mrs. Noel in the stone flagged passage of Burracombe Farm. If she would have him and since last evening he believed she would – he intended to marry her.

It has been said that except for one lapse his life had been austere, but this is not to assert that he had no capacity for passion. The contrary was the case. That flame which had been so jealously guarded smouldered deep within him – a smothered fire with but little air to feed on. The moment his spirit was touched by the spirit of this woman, it had flared up. She was the incarnation of all that he desired. Her hair, her eyes, her form; the tiny tuck or dimple at the corner of her mouth just where a child places its finger; her way of moving, a sort of unconscious swaying or yielding to the air; the tone in her voice, which seemed to come not so much from happiness of her own as from an innate wish to make others happy; and that natural, if not robust, intelligence, which belongs to the very sympathetic, and is rarely found in women of great ambitions or enthusiasms – all these things had twined themselves round his heart. He not only dreamed of her, and wanted her; he believed in her. She filled his thoughts as one who could never do wrong; as one who, though a wife would remain a mistress, and though a mistress, would always be the companion of his spirit.

It has been said that no one spoke or gossiped about women in Miltoun's presence, and the tale of her divorce was present to his mind simply in the form of a conviction that she was an injured woman. After his interview with the vicar, he had only once again alluded to it, and that in answer to the speech of a lady staying at the Court: "Oh! yes, I remember her case perfectly. She was the poor woman who – " "Did not, I am certain, Lady Bonington." The tone of his voice had made someone laugh uneasily; the subject was changed.

All divorce was against his convictions, but in a blurred way he admitted that there were cases where release was unavoidable. He was not a man to ask for confidences, or expect them to be given him. He himself had never confided his spiritual struggles to any living creature; and the unspiritual struggle had little interest for Miltoun. He was ready at any moment to stake his life on the perfection of the idol he had set up within his soul, as simply and straightforwardly as he would have placed his body in front of her to shield her from harm.

The same fanaticism, which looked on his passion as a flower by itself, entirely apart from its suitability to the social garden, was also the driving force which sent him up to London to declare his intention to his father before he spoke to Mrs. Noel. The thing should be done simply, and in right order. For he had the kind of moral courage found in those who live retired within the shell of their own aspirations. Yet it was not perhaps so much active moral courage as indifference to what others thought or did, coming from his inbred resistance to the appreciation of what they felt.

That peculiar smile of the old Tudor Cardinal – which had in it invincible self-reliance, and a sort of spiritual sneer – played over his face when he speculated on his father's reception of the coming news; and very soon he ceased to think of it at all, burying himself in the work he had brought with him for the journey. For he had in high degree the faculty, so essential to public life, of switching off his whole attention from one subject to another.

On arriving at Paddington he drove straight to Valleys House.

This large dwelling with its pillared portico, seemed to wear an air of faint surprise that, at the height of the season, it was not more inhabited. Three servants relieved Miltoun of his little luggage; and having washed, and learned that his father would be dining in, he went for a walk, taking his way towards his rooms in the Temple. His long figure, somewhat carelessly garbed, attracted the usual attention, of which he was as usual unaware. Strolling along, he meditated deeply on a London, an England, different from this flatulent hurly-burly, this 'omniuin gatherum', this great discordant symphony of sharps and flats. A London, an England, kempt and self-respecting; swept and garnished

of slums, and plutocrats, advertisement, and jerry-building, of sensationalism, vulgarity, vice, and unemployment. An England where each man should know his place, and never change it, but serve in it loyally in his own caste. Where every man, from nobleman to labourer, should be an oligarch by faith, and a gentleman by practice. An England so steel-bright and efficient that the very sight should suffice to impose peace. An England whose soul should be stoical and fine with the stoicism and fineness of each soul amongst her many million souls; where the town should have its creed and the country its creed, and there should be contentment and no complaining in her streets.

And as he walked down the Strand, a little ragged boy cheeped out between his legs:

“Bloodee discoveree in a Bank – Grite sensytion! Pi-er!”

Miltoun paid no heed to that saying; yet, with it, the wind that blows where man lives, the careless, wonderful, unordered wind, had dispersed his austere and formal vision. Great was that wind – the myriad aspiration of men and women, the praying of the uncounted multitude to the goddess of Sensation – of Chance, and Change. A flowing from heart to heart, from lip to lip, as in Spring the wistful air wanders through a wood, imparting to every bush and tree the secrets of fresh life, the passionate resolve to grow, and become – no matter what! A sighing, as eternal as the old murmuring of the sea, as little to be hushed, as prone to swell into sudden roaring!

Miltoun held on through the traffic, not looking overmuch at the present forms of the thousands he passed, but seeing with the eyes of faith the forms he desired to see. Near St. Paul’s he stopped in front of an old book-shop. His grave, pallid, not unhandsome face, was well-known to William Rimall, its small proprietor, who at once brought out his latest acquisition – a Mores ‘Utopia.’ That particular edition (he assured Miltoun) was quite unprocurable – he had never sold but one other copy, which had been literally, crumbling away. This copy was in even better condition. It could hardly last another twenty years – a genuine book, a bargain. There wasn’t so much movement in More as there had been a little time back.

Miltoun opened the tome, and a small book-louse who had been sleeping on the word ‘Tranibore,’ began to make its way slowly towards the very centre of the volume.

“I see it’s genuine,” said Miltoun.

“It’s not to read, my lord,” the little man warned him: “Hardly safe to turn the pages. As I was saying – I’ve not had a better piece this year. I haven’t really!”

“Shrewd old dreamer,” muttered Miltoun; “the Socialists haven’t got beyond him, even now.”

The little man’s eyes blinked, as though apologizing for the views of Thomas More.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose he was one of them. I forget if your lordship’s very strong on politics?”

Miltoun smiled.

“I want to see an England, Rimall, something like the England of Mores dream. But my machinery will be different. I shall begin at the top.”

The little man nodded.

“Quite so, quite so,” he said; “we shall come to that, I dare say.”

“We must, Rimall.” And Miltoun turned the page.

The little man’s face quivered.

“I don’t think,” he said, “that book’s quite strong enough for you, my lord, with your taste for reading. Now I’ve a most curious old volume here – on Chinese temples. It’s rare – but not too old. You can peruse it thoroughly. It’s what I call a book to browse on just suit your palate. Funny principle they built those things on,” he added, opening the volume at an engraving, “in layers. We don’t build like that in England.”

Miltoun looked up sharply; the little man’s face wore no signs of understanding.

“Unfortunately we don’t, Rimall,” he said; “we ought to, and we shall. I’ll take this book.”

Placing his finger on the print of the pagoda, he added: “A good symbol.”

The little bookseller’s eye strayed down the temple to the secret price mark.

“Exactly, my lord,” he said; “I thought it’d be your fancy. The price to you will be twenty-seven and six.”

Miltoun, pocketing the bargain, walked out. He made his way into the Temple, left the book at his Chambers, and passed on down to the bank of Mother Thames. The Sun was loving her passionately that afternoon; he had kissed her into warmth and light and colour. And all the buildings along her banks, as far as the towers at Westminster, seemed to be smiling. It was a great sight for the eyes of a lover. And another vision came haunting Miltoun, of a soft-eyed woman with a low voice, bending amongst her flowers. Nothing would be complete without her; no work bear fruit; no scheme could have full meaning.

Lord Valleys greeted his son at dinner with good fellowship and a faint surprise.

“Day off, my dear fellow? Or have you come up to hear Brabrook pitch into us? He’s rather late this time – we’ve got rid of that balloon business no trouble after all.”

And he eyed Miltoun with that clear grey stare of his, so cool, level, and curious. Now, what sort of bird is this? it seemed saying. Certainly not the partridge I should have expected from its breeding!

Miltoun’s answer: “I came up to tell you some thing, sir,” riveted his father’s stare for a second longer than was quite urbane.

It would not be true to say that Lord Valleys was afraid of his son. Fear was not one of his emotions, but he certainly regarded him with a respectful curiosity that bordered on uneasiness. The oligarchic temper of Miltoun’s mind and political convictions almost shocked one who knew both by temperament and experience how to wait in front. This instruction he had frequently had occasion to give his jockeys when he believed his horses could best get home first in that way. And it was an instruction he now longed to give his son. He himself had ‘waited in front’ for over fifty years, and he knew it to be the finest way of insuring that he would never be compelled to alter this desirable policy – for something in Lord Valleys’ character made him fear that, in real emergency, he would exert himself to the point of the gravest discomfort sooner than be left to wait behind. A fellow like young Harbinger, of course, he understood – versatile, ‘full of beans,’ as he expressed it to himself in his more confidential moments, who had imbibed the new wine (very intoxicating it was) of desire for social reform. He would have to be given his head a little – but there would be no difficulty with him, he would never ‘run out’ – light handy build of horse that only required steadying at the corners. He would want to hear himself talk, and be let feel that he was doing something. All very well, and quite intelligible. But with Miltoun (and Lord Valleys felt this to be no, mere parental fancy) it was a very different business. His son had a way of forcing things to their conclusions which was dangerous, and reminded him of his mother-in-law. He was a baby in public affairs, of course, as yet; but as soon as he once got going, the intensity of his convictions, together with his position, and real gift – not of the gab, like Harbinger’s – but of restrained, biting oratory, was sure to bring him to the front with a bound in the present state of parties. And what were those convictions? Lord Valleys had tried to understand them, but up to the present he had failed. And this did not surprise him exactly, since, as he often said, political convictions were not, as they appeared on the surface, the outcome of reason, but merely symptoms of temperament. And he could not comprehend, because he could not sympathize with, any attitude towards public affairs that was not essentially level, attached to the plain, common-sense factors of the case as they appeared to himself. Not that he could fairly be called a temporizer, for deep down in him there was undoubtedly a vein of obstinate, fundamental loyalty to the traditions of a caste which prized high spirit beyond all things. Still he did feel that Miltoun was altogether too much the ‘pukka’ aristocrat – no better than a Socialist, with his confounded way of seeing things all cut and dried; his ideas of forcing reforms down people’s throats and holding them there with the iron hand! With his way too of acting on his principles! Why! He even admitted that he acted on his principles! This thought always struck a very discordant note in Lord Valleys’ breast. It was almost indecent; worse-ridiculous! The fact was, the dear fellow had unfortunately a deeper habit of thought than was wanted in politics – dangerous – very! Experience might do something for

him! And out of his own long experience the Earl of Valleys tried hard to recollect any politician whom the practice of politics had left where he was when he started. He could not think of one. But this gave him little comfort; and, above a piece of late asparagus his steady eyes sought his son's. What had he come up to tell him?

The phrase had been ominous; he could not recollect Miltoun's ever having told him anything. For though a really kind and indulgent father, he had – like so many men occupied with public and other lives – a little acquired towards his offspring the look and manner: Is this mine? Of his four children, Barbara alone he claimed with conviction. He admired her; and, being a man who savoured life, he was unable to love much except where he admired. But, the last person in the world to hustle any man or force a confidence, he waited to hear his son's news, betraying no uneasiness.

Miltoun seemed in no hurry. He described Courtier's adventure, which tickled Lord Valleys a good deal.

“Ordeal by red pepper! Shouldn't have thought them equal to that,” he said. “So you've got him at Monkland now. Harbinger still with you?”

“Yes. I don't think Harbinger has much stamina.

“Politically?”

Miltoun nodded.

“I rather resent his being on our side – I don't think he does us any good. You've seen that cartoon, I suppose; it cuts pretty deep. I couldn't recognize you amongst the old women, sir.”

Lord Valleys smiled impersonally.

“Very clever thing. By the way; I shall win the Eclipse, I think.”

And thus, spasmodically, the conversation ran till the last servant had left the room.

Then Miltoun, without preparation, looked straight at his father and said:

“I want to marry Mrs. Noel, sir.”

Lord Valleys received the shot with exactly the same expression as that with which he was accustomed to watch his horses beaten. Then he raised his wineglass to his lips; and set it down again untouched. This was the only sign he gave of interest or discomfiture.

“Isn't this rather sudden?”

Miltoun answered: “I've wanted to from the moment I first saw her.”

Lord Valleys, almost as good a judge of a man and a situation as of a horse or a pointer dog, leaned back in his chair, and said with faint sarcasm:

“My dear fellow, it's good of you to have told me this; though, to be quite frank, it's a piece of news I would rather not have heard.”

A dusky flush burned slowly up in Miltoun's cheeks. He had underrated his father; the man had coolness and courage in a crisis.

“What is your objection, sir?” And suddenly he noticed that a wafer in Lord Valleys' hand was quivering. This brought into his eyes no look of compunction, but such a smouldering gaze as the old Tudor Churchman might have bent on an adversary who showed a sign of weakness. Lord Valleys, too, noticed the quivering of that wafer, and ate it.

“We are men of the world,” he said.

Miltoun answered: “I am not.”

Showing his first real symptom of impatience Lord Valleys rapped out:

“So be it! I am.”

“Yes?”, said Miltoun.

“Eustace!”

Nursing one knee, Miltoun faced that appeal without the faintest movement. His eyes continued to burn into his father's face. A tremor passed over Lord Valleys' heart. What intensity of feeling there was in the fellow, that he could look like this at the first breath of opposition!

He reached out and took up the cigar-box; held it absently towards his son, and drew it quickly back.

“I forgot,” he said; “you don’t.”

And lighting a cigar, he smoked gravely, looking straight before him, a furrow between his brows. He spoke at last:

“She looks like a lady. I know nothing else about her.”

The smile deepened round Miltoun’s mouth.

“Why should you want to know anything else?”

Lord Valleys shrugged. His philosophy had hardened.

“I understand for one thing,” he said coldly; “that there is a matter of a divorce. I thought you took the Church’s view on that subject.”

“She has not done wrong.”

“You know her story, then?”

“No.”

Lord Valleys raised his brows, in irony and a sort of admiration.

“Chivalry the better part of discretion?”

Miltoun answered:

“You don’t, I think, understand the kind of feeling I have for Mrs. Noel. It does not come into your scheme of things. It is the only feeling, however, with which I should care to marry, and I am not likely to feel it for anyone again.”

Lord Valleys felt once more that uncanny sense of insecurity. Was this true? And suddenly he felt Yes, it is true! The face before him was the face of one who would burn in his own fire sooner than depart from his standards. And a sudden sense of the utter seriousness of this dilemma dumbed him.

“I can say no more at the moment,” he muttered and got up from the table.

CHAPTER XI

Lady Casterley was that inconvenient thing – an early riser. No woman in the kingdom was a better judge of a dew carpet. Nature had in her time displayed before her thousands of those pretty fabrics, where all the stars of the past night, dropped to the dark earth, were waiting to glide up to heaven again on the rays of the sun. At Ravensham she walked regularly in her gardens between half-past seven and eight, and when she paid a visit, was careful to subordinate whatever might be the local custom to this habit.

When therefore her maid Randle came to Barbara's maid at seven o'clock, and said: "My old lady wants Lady Babs to get up," there was no particular pain in the breast of Barbara's maid, who was doing up her corsets. She merely answered "I'll see to it. Lady Babs won't be too pleased!" And ten minutes later she entered that white-walled room which smelled of pinks—a temple of drowsy sweetness, where the summer light was vaguely stealing through flowered chintz curtains.

Barbara was sleeping with her cheek on her hand, and her tawny hair, gathered back, streaming over the pillow. Her lips were parted; and the maid thought: "I'd like to have hair and a mouth like that!" She could not help smiling to herself with pleasure; Lady Babs looked so pretty – prettier asleep even than awake! And at sight of that beautiful creature, sleeping and smiling in her sleep, the earthy, hothouse fumes steeping the mind of one perpetually serving in an atmosphere unsuited to her natural growth, dispersed. Beauty, with its queer touching power of freeing the spirit from all barriers and thoughts of self, sweetened the maid's eyes, and kept her standing, holding her breath. For Barbara asleep was a symbol of that Golden Age in which she so desperately believed. She opened her eyes, and seeing the maid, said:

"Is it eight o'clock, Stacey?"

"No, but Lady Casterley wants you to walk with her."

"Oh! bother! I was having such a dream!"

"Yes; you were smiling."

"I was dreaming that I could fly."

"Fancy!"

"I could see everything spread out below me, as close as I see you; I was hovering like a buzzard hawk. I felt that I could come down exactly where I wanted. It was fascinating. I had perfect power, Stacey."

And throwing her neck back, she closed her eyes again. The sunlight streamed in on her between the half-drawn curtains.

The queerest impulse to put out a hand and stroke that full white throat shot through the maid's mind.

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