

Allen Grant

Miss Cayley's Adventures



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I

THE ADVENTURE OF THE CANTANKEROUS OLD LADY

On the day when I found myself with twopence in my pocket, I naturally made up my mind to go round the world.

It was my stepfather's death that drove me to it. I had never seen my stepfather. Indeed, I never even thought of him as anything more than Colonel Watts-Morgan. I owed him nothing, except my poverty. He married my dear mother when I was a girl at school in Switzerland; and he proceeded to spend her little fortune, left at her sole disposal by my father's will, in paying his gambling debts. After that, he carried my dear mother off to Burma; and when he and the climate between them had succeeded in killing her, he made up for his appropriations at the cheapest rate by allowing me just enough to send me to Girton. So, when the Colonel died, in the year I was leaving college, I did not think it necessary to go into mourning for him. Especially as he chose the precise moment when my allowance was due, and bequeathed me nothing but his consolidated liabilities.

'Of course you will teach,' said Elsie Petheridge, when I explained my affairs to her. 'There is a good demand just now for high-school teachers.'

I looked at her, aghast. '*Teach!* Elsie,' I cried. (I had come up to town to settle her in at her unfurnished lodgings.) 'Did you say *teach*? That's just like you dear good schoolmistresses! You go to Cambridge, and get examined till the heart and life have been examined out of you; then you say to yourselves at the end of it all, "Let me see; what am I good for now? I'm just about fit to go away and examine other people!" That's what our Principal would call "a vicious circle" – if one could ever admit there was anything vicious at all about *you*, dear. No, Elsie, I do *not* propose to teach. Nature did not cut me out for a high-school teacher. I couldn't swallow a poker if I tried for weeks. Pokers don't agree with me. Between ourselves, I am a bit of a rebel.'

'You are, Brownie,' she answered, pausing in her papering, with her sleeves rolled up – they called me 'Brownie,' partly because of my dark complexion, but partly because they could never understand me. 'We all knew that long ago.'

I laid down the paste-brush and mused.

'Do you remember, Elsie,' I said, staring hard at the paper-board,' when I first went to Girton, how all you girls wore your hair quite straight, in neat smooth coils, plaited up at the back about the size of a pancake; and how of a sudden I burst in upon you, like a tropical hurricane, and demoralised you; and how, after three days of me, some of the dear innocents began with awe to cut themselves artless fringes, while others went out in fear and trembling and surreptitiously purchased a pair of curling-tongs? I was a bomb-shell in your midst in those days; why, you yourself were almost afraid at first to speak to me.'

'You see, you had a bicycle,' Elsie put in, smoothing the half-papered wall; 'and in those days, of course, ladies didn't bicycle. You must admit, Brownie, dear, it *was* a startling innovation. You terrified us so. And yet, after all, there isn't much harm in you.'

'I hope not,' I said devoutly. 'I was before my time, that was all; at present, even a curate's wife may blamelessly bicycle.'

'But if you don't teach,' Elsie went on, gazing at me with those wondering big blue eyes of hers, 'whatever will you do, Brownie?' Her horizon was bounded by the scholastic circle.

'I haven't the faintest idea,' I answered, continuing to paste. 'Only, as I can't trespass upon your elegant hospitality for life, whatever I mean to do, I must begin doing this morning, when we've finished the papering. I couldn't teach' (teaching, like mauve, is the refuge of the incompetent); 'and I don't, if possible, want to sell bonnets.'

'As a milliner's girl?' Elsie asked, with a face of red horror.

'As a milliner's girl; why not? 'Tis an honest calling. Earls' daughters do it now. But you needn't look so shocked. I tell you, just at present, I am not contemplating it.'

'Then what *do* you contemplate?'

I paused and reflected. 'I am here in London,' I answered, gazing rapt at the ceiling; 'London, whose streets are paved with gold – though it *looks* at first sight like muddy flagstones; London, the greatest and richest city in the world, where an adventurous soul ought surely to find some loophole for an adventure. (That piece is hung crooked, dear; we shall have to take it down again.) I devise a Plan, therefore. I submit myself to fate; or, if you prefer it, I leave my future in the hands of Providence. I shall stroll out this morning, as soon as I've "cleaned myself," and embrace the first stray enterprise that offers. Our Bagdad teems with enchanted carpets. Let one but float my way, and, hi, presto, I seize it. I go where glory or a modest competence waits me. I snatch at the first offer, the first hint of an opening.'

Elsie stared at me, more aghast and more puzzled than ever. 'But, how?' she asked. 'Where? When? You *are* so strange! What will you do to find one?'

'Put on my hat and walk out,' I answered. 'Nothing could be simpler. This city bursts with enterprises and surprises. Strangers from east and west hurry through it in all directions. Omnibuses traverse it from end to end – even, I am told, to Islington and Putney; within, folk sit face to face who never saw one another before in their lives, and who may never see one another again, or, on the contrary, may pass the rest of their days together.'

I had a lovely harangue all pat in my head, in much the same strain, on the infinite possibilities of entertaining angels unawares, in cabs, on the Underground, in the aerated bread shops; but Elsie's widening eyes of horror pulled me up short like a hansom in Piccadilly when the inexorable upturned hand of the policeman checks it. 'Oh, Brownie,' she cried, drawing back, 'you *don't* mean to tell me you're going to ask the first young man you meet in an omnibus to marry you?'

I shrieked with laughter, 'Elsie,' I cried, kissing her dear yellow little head, 'you are *impayable*. You never will learn what I mean. You don't understand the language. No, no; I am going out, simply in search of adventure. What adventure may come, I have not at this moment the faintest conception. The fun lies in the search, the uncertainty, the toss-up of it. What is the good of being penniless – with the trifling exception of twopence – unless you are prepared to accept your position in the spirit of a masked ball at Covent Garden?'

'I have never been to one,' Elsie put in.

'Gracious heavens, neither have I! What on earth do you take me for? But I mean to see where fate will lead me.'

'I may go with you?' Elsie pleaded.

'Certainly *not*, my child,' I answered – she was three years older than I, so I had the right to patronise her. 'That would spoil all. Your dear little face would be quite enough to scare away a timid adventure.' She knew what I meant. It was gentle and pensive, but it lacked initiative.

So, when we had finished that wall, I popped on my best hat, and popped out by myself into Kensington Gardens.

I am told I ought to have been terribly alarmed at the straits in which I found myself – a girl of twenty-one, alone in the world, and only twopence short of penniless, without a friend to protect, a relation to counsel her. (I don't count Aunt Susan, who lurked in ladylike indigence at Blackheath, and whose counsel, like her tracts, was given away too profusely to everybody to allow of one's placing any very high value upon it.) But, as a matter of fact, I must admit I was not in the least alarmed.

Nature had endowed me with a profusion of crisp black hair, and plenty of high spirits. If my eyes had been like Elsie's – that liquid blue which looks out upon life with mingled pity and amazement – I might have felt as a girl ought to feel under such conditions; but having large dark eyes, with a bit of a twinkle in them, and being as well able to pilot a bicycle as any girl of my acquaintance, I have inherited or acquired an outlook on the world which distinctly leans rather towards cheeriness than despondency. I croak with difficulty. So I accepted my plight as an amusing experience, affording full scope for the congenial exercise of courage and ingenuity.

How boundless are the opportunities of Kensington Gardens – the Round Pond, the winding Serpentine, the mysterious seclusion of the Dutch brick Palace! Genii swarm there. One jostles possibilities. It is a land of romance, bounded on the north by the Abyss of Bayswater, and on the south by the Amphitheatre of the Albert Hall. But for a centre of adventure I choose the Long Walk; it beckoned me somewhat as the North-West Passage beckoned my seafaring ancestors – the buccaneering mariners of Elizabethan Devon. I sat down on a chair at the foot of an old elm with a poetic hollow, prosaically filled by a utilitarian plate of galvanised iron. Two ancient ladies were seated on the other side already – very grand-looking dames, with the haughty and exclusive ugliness of the English aristocracy in its later stages. For frank hideousness, commend me to the noble dowager. They were talking confidentially as I sat down; the trifling episode of my approach did not suffice to stem the full stream of their conversation. The great ignore the intrusion of their inferiors.

'Yes, it's a terrible nuisance,' the eldest and ugliest of the two observed – she was a high-born lady, with a distinctly cantankerous cast of countenance. She had a Roman nose, and her skin was wrinkled like a wilted apple; she wore coffee-coloured point-lace in her bonnet, with a complexion to match. 'But what could I do, my dear? I simply *couldn't* put up with such insolence. So I looked her straight back in the face – oh, she quailed, I can tell you; and I said to her, in my iciest voice – you know how icy I can be when occasion demands it' – the second old lady nodded an ungrudging assent, as if perfectly prepared to admit her friend's rare gift of iciness – 'I said to her, "Célestine, you can take your month's wages, and half an hour to get out of this house." And she dropped me a deep reverence, and she answered: "*Oui, madame; merci beaucoup, madame; je ne desire pas mieux, madame.*" And out she flounced. So there was the end of it.'

'Still, you go to Schlangenbad on Monday?'

'That's the point. On Monday. If it weren't for the journey, I should have been glad enough to be rid of the minx. I'm glad as it is, indeed; for a more insolent, upstanding, independent, answer-you-back-again young woman, with a sneer of her own, I never saw, Amelia – but I *must* get to Schlangenbad. Now, there the difficulty comes in. On the one hand, if I engage a maid in London, I have the choice of two evils. Either I must take a trapesing English girl – and I know by experience that an English girl on the Continent is a vast deal worse than no maid at all: *you* have to wait upon *her*, instead of her waiting upon you; she gets seasick on the crossing, and when she reaches France or Germany, she hates the meals, and she detests the hotel servants, and she can't speak the language, so that she's always calling you in to interpret for her in her private differences with the *fille-de-chambre* and the landlord; or else I must pick up a French maid in London, and I know equally by experience that the French maids one engages in London are invariably dishonest – more dishonest than the rest even; they've come here because they have no character to speak of elsewhere, and they think you aren't likely to write and enquire of their last mistress in Toulouse or St. Petersburg. Then, again, on the other hand, I can't wait to get a Gretchen, an unsophisticated little Gretchen of the Taunus at Schlangenbad – I suppose there *are* unsophisticated girls in Germany still – made in Germany – they don't make 'em any longer in England, I'm sure – like everything else, the trade in rustic innocence has been driven from the country. I can't wait to get a Gretchen, as I should like to do, of course, because I simply *daren't* undertake to cross the Channel alone and go all that long journey by Ostend or Calais, Brussels and Cologne, to Schlangenbad.'

'You could get a temporary maid,' her friend suggested, in a lull of the tornado.

The Cantankerous Old Lady flared up. 'Yes, and have my jewel-case stolen! Or find she was an English girl without one word of German. Or nurse her on the boat when I want to give my undivided attention to my own misfortunes. No, Amelia, I call it positively unkind of you to suggest such a thing. You're *so* unsympathetic! I put my foot down there. I will *not* take any temporary person.'

I saw my chance. This was a delightful idea. Why not start for Schlangenbad with the Cantankerous Old Lady?

Of course, I had not the slightest intention of taking a lady's-maid's place for a permanency. Nor even, if it comes to that, as a passing expedient. But *if* I wanted to go round the world, how could I do better than set out by the Rhine country? The Rhine leads you on to the Danube, the Danube to the Black Sea, the Black Sea to Asia; and so, by way of India, China, and Japan, you reach the Pacific and San Francisco; whence one returns quite easily by New York and the White Star Liners. I began to feel like a globe-trotter already; the Cantankerous Old Lady was the thin end of the wedge – the first rung of the ladder! I proceeded to put my foot on it.

I leaned around the corner of the tree and spoke. 'Excuse me,' I said, in my suavest voice, 'but I think I see a way out of your difficulty.'

My first impression was that the Cantankerous Old Lady would go off in a fit of apoplexy. She grew purple in the face with indignation and astonishment, that a casual outsider should venture to address her; so much so, indeed, that for a second I almost regretted my well-meant interposition. Then she scanned me up and down, as if I were a girl in a mantle shop, and she contemplated buying either me or the mantle. At last, catching my eye, she thought better of it, and burst out laughing.

'What do you mean by this eavesdropping?' she asked.

I flushed up in turn. 'This is a public place,' I replied, with dignity; 'and you spoke in a tone which was hardly designed for the strictest privacy. If you don't wish to be overheard, you oughtn't to shout. Besides, I desired to do you a service.'

The Cantankerous Old Lady regarded me once more from head to foot. I did not quail. Then she turned to her companion. 'The girl has spirit,' she remarked, in an encouraging tone, as if she were discussing some absent person. 'Upon my word, Amelia, I rather like the look of her. Well, my good woman, what do you want to suggest to me?'

'Merely this,' I replied, bridling up and crushing her. 'I am a Girton girl, an officer's daughter, no more a good woman than most others of my class; and I have nothing in particular to do for the moment. I don't object to going to Schlangenbad. I would convoy you over, as companion, or lady-help, or anything else you choose to call it; I would remain with you there for a week, till you could arrange with your Gretchen, presumably unsophisticated; and then I would leave you. Salary is unimportant; my fare suffices. I accept the chance as a cheap opportunity of attaining Schlangenbad.'

The yellow-faced old lady put up her long-handled tortoise-shell eyeglasses and inspected me all over again. 'Well, I declare,' she murmured. 'What are girls coming to, I wonder? Girton, you say; Girton! That place at Cambridge! You speak Greek, of course; but how about German?'

'Like a native,' I answered, with cheerful promptitude. 'I was at school in Canton Berne; it is a mother tongue to me.'

'No, no,' the old lady went on, fixing her keen small eyes on my mouth. 'Those little lips could never frame themselves to "schlecht" or "wunderschön"; they were not cut out for it.'

'Pardon me,' I answered, in German. 'What I say, that I mean. The never-to-be-forgotten music of the Fatherland's-speech has on my infant ear from the first-beginning impressed itself.'

The old lady laughed aloud.

'Don't jabber it to me, child,' she cried. 'I hate the lingo. It's the one tongue on earth that even a pretty girl's lips fail to render attractive. You yourself make faces over it. What's your name, young woman?'

'Lois Cayley.'

'Lois! *What* a name! I never heard of any Lois in my life before, except Timothy's grandmother. *You're* not anybody's grandmother, are you?'

'Not to my knowledge,' I answered, gravely.

She burst out laughing again.

'Well, you'll do, I think,' she said, catching my arm. 'That big mill down yonder hasn't ground the originality altogether out of you. I adore originality. It was clever of you to catch at the suggestion of this arrangement. Lois Cayley, you say; any relation of a madcap Captain Cayley whom I used once to know, in the Forty-second Highlanders?'

'His daughter,' I answered, flushing. For I was proud of my father.

'Ha! I remember; he died, poor fellow; he was a good soldier – and his' – I felt she was going to say 'his fool of a widow,' but a glance from me quelled her; 'his widow went and married that good-looking scapegrace, Jack Watts-Morgan. Never marry a man, my dear, with a double-barrelled name and no visible means of subsistence; above all, if he's generally known by a nickname. So you're poor Tom Cayley's daughter, are you? Well, well, we can settle this little matter between us. Mind, I'm a person who always expects to have my own way. If you come with *me* to Schlangenbad, you must do as I tell you.'

'*I think* I could manage it – for a week,' I answered, demurely.

She smiled at my audacity. We passed on to terms. They were quite satisfactory. She wanted no references. 'Do I look like a woman who cares about a reference? What are called *characters* are usually essays in how not to say it. You take my fancy; that's the point! And poor Tom Cayley! But, mind, I will *not* be contradicted.'

'I will not contradict your wildest misstatement,' I answered, smiling.

'*And* your name and address?' I asked, after we had settled preliminaries.

A faint red spot rose quaintly in the centre of the Cantankerous Old Lady's sallow cheek. 'My dear,' she murmured, 'my name is the one thing on earth I'm really ashamed of. My parents chose to inflict upon me the most odious label that human ingenuity ever devised for a Christian soul; and I've not had courage enough to burst out and change it.'

A gleam of intuition flashed across me, 'You don't mean to say,' I exclaimed, 'that you're called Georgina?'

The Cantankerous Old Lady gripped my arm hard. 'What an unusually intelligent girl!' she broke in. 'How on earth did you guess? It *is* Georgina.'

'Fellow-feeling,' I answered. 'So is mine, Georgina Lois. But as I quite agree with you as to the atrocity of such conduct, I have suppressed the Georgina. It ought to be made penal to send innocent girls into the world so burdened.'

'My opinion to a T! You are really an exceptionally sensible young woman. There's my name and address; I start on Monday.'

I glanced at her card. The very copperplate was noisy. 'Lady Georgina Fawley, 49 Fortescue Crescent, W.'

It had taken us twenty minutes to arrange our protocols. As I walked off, well pleased, Lady Georgina's friend ran after me quickly.

'You must take care,' she said, in a warning voice. 'You've caught a Tartar.'

'So I suspect,' I answered. 'But a week in Tartary will be at least an experience.'

'She has an awful temper.'

'That's nothing. So have I. Appalling, I assure you. And if it comes to blows, I'm bigger and younger and stronger than she is.'

'Well, I wish you well out of it.'

'Thank you. It is kind of you to give me this warning. But I think I can take care of myself. I come, you see, of a military family.'

I nodded my thanks, and strolled back to Elsie's. Dear little Elsie was in transports of surprise when I related my adventure.

'Will you really go? And what will you do, my dear, when you get there?'

'I haven't a notion,' I answered; 'that's where the fun comes in. But, anyhow, I shall have got there.'

'Oh, Brownie, you might starve!'

'And I might starve in London. In either place, I have only two hands and one head to help me.'

'But, then, here you are among friends. You might stop with me for ever.'

I kissed her fluffy forehead. 'You good, generous little Elsie,' I cried; 'I won't stop here one moment after I have finished the painting and papering. I came here to help you. I couldn't go on eating your hard-earned bread and doing nothing. I know how sweet you are; but the last thing I want is to add to your burdens. Now let us roll up our sleeves again and hurry on with the dado.'

'But, Brownie, you'll want to be getting your own things ready. Remember, you're off to Germany on Monday.'

I shrugged my shoulders. 'Tis a foreign trick I picked up in Switzerland. 'What have I got to get ready?' I asked. 'I can't go out and buy a complete summer outfit in Bond Street for twopence. Now, don't look at me like that: be practical, Elsie, and let me help you paint the dado.' For unless I helped her, poor Elsie could never have finished it herself. I cut out half her clothes for her; her own ideas were almost entirely limited to differential calculus. And cutting out a blouse by differential calculus is weary, uphill work for a high-school teacher.

By Monday I had papered and furnished the rooms, and was ready to start on my voyage of exploration. I met the Cantankerous Old Lady at Charing Cross, by appointment, and proceeded to take charge of her luggage and tickets.

Oh my, how fussy she was! 'You will drop that basket! I hope you have got through tickets, *viâ* Malines, *not* by Brussels – I won't go by Brussels. You have to change there. Now, mind you notice how much the luggage weighs in English pounds, and make the man at the office give you a note of it to check those horrid Belgian porters. They'll charge you for double the weight, unless you reduce it at once to kilogrammes. *I* know their ways. Foreigners have no consciences. They just go to the priest and confess, you know, and wipe it all out, and start fresh again on a career of crime next morning. I'm sure I don't know why I *ever* go abroad. The only country in the world fit to live in is England. No mosquitoes, no passports, no – goodness gracious, child, don't let that odious man bang about my hat-box! Have you no immortal soul, porter, that you crush other people's property as if it was blackbeetles? No, I will not let you take this, Lois; this is my jewel-box – it contains all that remains of the Fawley family jewels. I positively decline to appear at Schlangenbad without a diamond to my back. This never leaves my hands. It's hard enough nowadays to keep body and skirt together. *Have* you secured that *coupé* at Ostend?'

We got into our first-class carriage. It was clean and comfortable; but the Cantankerous Old Lady made the porter mop the floor, and fidgeted and worried till we slid out of the station. Fortunately, the only other occupant of the compartment was a most urbane and obliging Continental gentleman – I say Continental, because I couldn't quite make out whether he was French, German, or Austrian – who was anxious in every way to meet Lady Georgina's wishes. Did madame desire to have the window open? Oh, certainly, with pleasure; the day was so sultry. Closed a little more? *Parfaitement*, there *was* a current of air, *il faut l'admettre*. Madame would prefer the corner? No? Then perhaps she would like this valise for a footstool? *Permettez* – just thus. A cold draught runs so often along the floor in railway carriages. This is Kent that we traverse; ah, the garden of England! As a diplomat, he knew every nook of Europe, and he echoed the *mot* he had accidentally heard drop from madame's lips on the platform: no country in the world so delightful as England!

'Monsieur is attached to the Embassy in London?' Lady Georgina inquired, growing affable.

He twirled his grey moustache: a waxed moustache of great distinction. 'No, madame; I have quitted the diplomatic service; I inhabit London now *pour mon agrément*. Some of my compatriots call it *triste*; for me, I find it the most fascinating capital in Europe. What gaiety! What movement! What poetry! What mystery!'

'If mystery means fog, it challenges the world,' I interposed.

He gazed at me with fixed eyes. 'Yes, mademoiselle,' he answered, in quite a different and markedly chilly voice. 'Whatever your great country attempts – were it only a fog – it achieves consummately.'

I have quick intuitions. I felt the foreign gentleman took an instinctive dislike to me.

To make up for it, he talked much, and with animation, to Lady Georgina. They ferreted out friends in common, and were as much surprised at it as people always are at that inevitable experience.

'Ah yes, madame, I recollect him well in Vienna. I was there at the time, attached to our Legation. He was a charming man; you read his masterly paper on the Central Problem of the Dual Empire?'

'You were in Vienna then!' the Cantankerous Old Lady mused back. 'Lois, my child, don't stare' – she had covenanted from the first to call me Lois, as my father's daughter, and I confess I preferred it to being Miss Cayley'd. 'We must surely have met. Dare I ask your name, monsieur?'

I could see the foreign gentleman was delighted at this turn. He had played for it, and carried his point. He meant her to ask him. He had a card in his pocket, conveniently close; and he handed it across to her. She read it, and passed it on: 'M. le Comte de Laroche-sur-Loiret.'

'Oh, I remember your name well,' the Cantankerous Old Lady broke in. 'I think you knew my husband, Sir Evelyn Fawley, and my father, Lord Kynaston.'

The Count looked profoundly surprised and delighted. 'What! you are then Lady Georgina Fawley!' he cried, striking an attitude. 'Indeed, miladi, your admirable husband was one of the very first to exert his influence in my favour at Vienna. Do I recall him, *ce cher* Sir Evelyn? If I recall him! What a fortunate rencounter! I must have seen you some years ago at Vienna, miladi, though I had not then the great pleasure of making your acquaintance. But your face had impressed itself on my sub-conscious self!' (I did not learn till later that the esoteric doctrine of the sub-conscious self was Lady Georgina's favourite hobby.) 'The moment chance led me to this carriage this morning, I said to myself, "That face, those features: so vivid, so striking: I have seen them somewhere. With what do I connect them in the recesses of my memory? A high-born family; genius; rank; the diplomatic service; some unnameable charm; some faint touch of eccentricity. Ha! I have it. Vienna, a carriage with footmen in red livery, a noble presence, a crowd of wits – poets, artists, politicians – pressing eagerly round the landau." That was my mental picture as I sat and confronted you: I understand it all now; this is Lady Georgina Fawley!'

I thought the Cantankerous Old Lady, who was a shrewd person in her way, must surely see through this obvious patter; but I had under-estimated the average human capacity for swallowing flattery. Instead of dismissing his fulsome nonsense with a contemptuous smile, Lady Georgina perked herself up with a conscious air of coquetry, and asked for more. 'Yes, they were delightful days in Vienna,' she said, simpering; 'I was young then, Count; I enjoyed life with a zest.'

'Persons of miladi's temperament are always young,' the Count retorted, glibly, leaning forward and gazing at her. 'Growing old is a foolish habit of the stupid and the vacant. Men and women of *esprit* are never older. One learns as one goes on in life to admire, not the obvious beauty of mere youth and health' – he glanced across at me disdainfully – 'but the profounder beauty of deep character in a face – that calm and serene beauty which is imprinted on the brow by experience of the emotions.'

'I have had my moments,' Lady Georgina murmured, with her head on one side.

'I believe it, miladi,' the Count answered, and ogled her.

Thenceforward to Dover, they talked together with ceaseless animation. The Cantankerous Old Lady was capital company. She had a tang in her tongue, and in the course of ninety minutes she

had flayed alive the greater part of London society, with keen wit and sprightliness. I laughed against my will at her ill-tempered sallies; they were too funny not to amuse, in spite of their vitriol. As for the Count, he was charmed. He talked well himself, too, and between them I almost forgot the time till we arrived at Dover.

It was a very rough passage. The Count helped us to carry our nineteen hand-packages and four rugs on board; but I noticed that, fascinated as she was with him, Lady Georgina resisted his ingenious efforts to gain possession of her precious jewel-case as she descended the gangway. She clung to it like grim death, even in the chops of the Channel. Fortunately I am a good sailor, and when Lady Georgina's sallow cheeks began to grow pale, I was steady enough to supply her with her shawl and her smelling-bottle. She fidgeted and worried the whole way over. She *would* be treated like a vertebrate animal. Those horrid Belgians had no right to stick their deck-chairs just in front of her. The impertinence of the hussies with the bright red hair – a grocer's daughters, she felt sure – in venturing to come and sit on the same bench with *her* – the bench 'for ladies only,' under the lee of the funnel! 'Ladies only,' indeed! Did the baggages pretend they considered themselves ladies? Oh, that placid old gentleman in the episcopal gaiters was their father, was he? Well, a bishop should bring up his daughters better, having his children in subjection with all gravity. Instead of which – 'Lois, my smelling-salts!' This was a beastly boat; such an odour of machinery; they had no decent boats nowadays; with all our boasted improvements, she could remember well when the cross-Channel service was much better conducted than it was at present. But *that* was before we had compulsory education. The working classes were driving trade out of the country, and the consequence was, we couldn't build a boat which didn't reek like an oil-shop. Even the sailors on board were French – jabbering idiots; not an honest British Jack-tar among the lot of them; though the stewards were English, and very inferior Cockney English at that, with their off-hand ways, and their School Board airs and graces. *She'd* School Board them if they were her servants; *she'd* show them the sort of respect that was due to people of birth and education. But the children of the lower classes never learnt their catechism nowadays; they were too much occupied with literatoor, jography, and free-'and drawrin'. Happily for my nerves, a good lurch to leeward put a stop for a while to the course of her thoughts on the present distresses.

At Ostend the Count made a second gallant attempt to capture the jewel-case, which Lady Georgina automatically repulsed. She had a fixed habit, I believe, of sticking fast to that jewel-case; for she was too overpowered by the Count's urbanity, I feel sure, to suspect for a moment his honesty of purpose. But whenever she travelled, I fancy, she clung to her case as if her life depended upon it; it contained the whole of her valuable diamonds.

We had twenty minutes for refreshments at Ostend, during which interval my old lady declared with warmth that I *must* look after her registered luggage; though, as it was booked through to Cologne, I could not even see it till we crossed the German frontier; for the Belgian *douaniers* seal up the van as soon as the through baggage for Germany is unloaded. To satisfy her, however, I went through the formality of pretending to inspect it, and rendered myself hateful to the head of the *douane* by asking various foolish and inept questions, on which Lady Georgina insisted. When I had finished this silly and uncongenial task – for I am not by nature fussy, and it is hard to assume fussiness as another person's proxy – I returned to our *coupé* which I had arranged for in London. To my great amazement, I found the Cantankerous Old Lady and the egregious Count comfortably seated there. 'Monsieur has been good enough to accept a place in our carriage,' she observed, as I entered.

He bowed and smiled. 'Or, rather, madame has been so kind as to offer me one,' he corrected.

'Would you like some lunch, Lady Georgina?' I asked, in my chilliest voice. 'There are ten minutes to spare, and the *buffet* is excellent.'

'An admirable inspiration,' the Count murmured. 'Permit me to escort you, miladi.'

'You will come, Lois?' Lady Georgina asked.

'No, thank you,' I answered, for I had an idea. 'I am a capital sailor, but the sea takes away my appetite.'

'Then you'll keep our places,' she said, turning to me. 'I hope you won't allow them to stick in any horrid foreigners! They will try to force them on you unless you insist. I know their tricky ways. You have the tickets, I trust? And the *bulletin* for the *coupé*? Well, mind you don't lose the paper for the registered luggage. Don't let those dreadful porters touch my cloaks. And if anybody attempts to get in, be sure you stand in front of the door as they mount to prevent them.'

The Count handed her out; he was all high courtly politeness. As Lady Georgina descended, he made yet another dexterous effort to relieve her of the jewel-case. I don't think she noticed it, but automatically once more she waved him aside. Then she turned to me. 'Here, my dear,' she said, handing it to me, 'you'd better take care of it. If I lay it down in the *buffet* while I am eating my soup, some rogue may run away with it. But mind, don't let it out of your hands on any account. Hold it so, on your knee; and, for Heaven's sake, don't part with it.'

By this time my suspicions of the Count were profound. From the first I had doubted him; he was so blandly plausible. But as we landed at Ostend I had accidentally overheard a low whispered conversation when he passed a shabby-looking man, who had travelled in a second-class carriage from London. 'That succeeds?' the shabby-looking man had muttered under his breath in French, as the haughty nobleman with the waxed moustache brushed by him.

'That succeeds admirably,' the Count had answered, in the same soft undertone. '*Ça réussit à merveille!*'

I understood him to mean that he had prospered in his attempt to impose on Lady Georgina.

They had been gone five minutes at the *buffet*, when the Count came back hurriedly to the door of the *coupé* with a *nonchalant* air. 'Oh, mademoiselle,' he said, in an off-hand tone, 'Lady Georgina has sent me to fetch her jewel-case.'

I gripped it hard with both hands. '*Pardon, M. le Comte,*' I answered; 'Lady Georgina intrusted it to my safe keeping, and, without her leave, I cannot give it up to any one.'

'You mistrust me?' he cried, looking black. 'You doubt my honour? You doubt my word when I say that miladi has sent me?'

'*Du tout,*' I answered, calmly. 'But I have Lady Georgina's orders to stick to this case; and till Lady Georgina returns I stick to it.'

He murmured some indignant remark below his breath, and walked off. The shabby-looking passenger was pacing up and down the platform outside in a badly-made dust-coat. As they passed their lips moved. The Count's seemed to mutter, '*C'est un coup manqué.*'

However, he did not desist even so. I saw he meant to go on with his dangerous little game. He returned to the *buffet* and rejoined Lady Georgina. I felt sure it would be useless to warn her, so completely had the Count succeeded in gulling her; but I took my own steps. I examined the jewel-case closely. It had a leather outer covering; within was a strong steel box, with stout bands of metal to bind it. I took my cue at once, and acted for the best on my own responsibility.

When Lady Georgina and the Count returned, they were like old friends together. The quails in aspic and the sparkling hock had evidently opened their hearts to one another. As far as Malines they laughed and talked without ceasing. Lady Georgina was now in her finest vein of spleen: her acid wit grew sharper and more caustic each moment. Not a reputation in Europe had a rag left to cover it as we steamed in beneath the huge iron roof of the main central junction.

I had observed all the way from Ostend that the Count had been anxious lest we might have to give up our *coupé* at Malines. I assured him more than once that his fears were groundless, for I had arranged at Charing Cross that it should run right through to the German frontier. But he waved me aside, with one lordly hand. I had not told Lady Georgina of his vain attempt to take possession of her jewel-case; and the bare fact of my silence made him increasingly suspicious of me.

'Pardon me, mademoiselle,' he said, coldly; 'you do not understand these lines as well as I do. Nothing is more common than for those rascals of railway clerks to sell one a place in a *coupé* or a *wagon-lit*, and then never reserve it, or turn one out half way. It is very possible miladi may have to descend at Malines.'

Lady Georgina bore him out by a large variety of selected stories concerning the various atrocities of the rival companies which had stolen her luggage on her way to Italy. As for *trains de luxe*, they were dens of robbers.

So when we reached Malines, just to satisfy Lady Georgina, I put out my head and inquired of a porter. As I anticipated, he replied that there was no change; we went through to Verviers.

The Count, however, was still unsatisfied. He descended, and made some remarks a little farther down the platform to an official in the gold-banded cap of a *chef-de-gare*, or some such functionary. Then he returned to us, all fuming. 'It is as I said,' he exclaimed, flinging open the door. 'These rogues have deceived us. The *coupé* goes no farther. You must dismount at once, miladi, and take the train just opposite.'

I felt sure he was wrong, and I ventured to say so. But Lady Georgina cried, 'Nonsense, child! The *chef-de-gare* must know. Get out at once! Bring my bag and the rugs! Mind that cloak! Don't forget the sandwich-tin! Thanks, Count; will you kindly take charge of my umbrellas? Hurry up, Lois; hurry up! the train is just starting!'

I scrambled after her, with my fourteen bundles, keeping a quiet eye meanwhile on the jewel-case.

We took our seats in the opposite train, which I noticed was marked 'Amsterdam, Bruxelles, Paris.' But I said nothing. The Count jumped in, jumped about, arranged our parcels, jumped out again. He spoke to a porter; then he rushed back excitedly. '*Mille pardons*, miladi,' he cried. 'I find the *chef-de-gare* has cruelly deceived me. You were right, after all, mademoiselle! We must return to the *coupé*!'

With singular magnanimity, I refrained from saying, 'I told you so.'

Lady Georgina, very flustered and hot by this time, tumbled out once more, and bolted back to the *coupé*. Both trains were just starting. In her hurry, at last, she let the Count take possession of her jewel-case. I rather fancy that as he passed one window he handed it in to the shabby-looking passenger; but I am not certain. At any rate, when we were comfortably seated in our own compartment once more, and he stood on the footboard just about to enter, of a sudden he made an unexpected dash back, and flung himself wildly into a Paris carriage. At the self-same moment, with a piercing shriek, both trains started.

Lady Georgina threw up her hands in a frenzy of horror. 'My diamonds!' she cried aloud. 'Oh, Lois, my diamonds!'

'Don't distress yourself,' I answered, holding her back, for I verily believe she would have leapt from the train. 'He has only taken the outer shell, with the sandwich-case inside it. *Here* is the steel box!' And I produced it, triumphantly.

She seized it, overjoyed. 'How did this happen?' she cried, hugging it, for she loved those diamonds.

'Very simply,' I answered. 'I saw the man was a rogue, and that he had a confederate with him in another carriage. So, while you were gone to the *buffet* at Ostend, I slipped the box out of the case, and put in the sandwich-tin, that he might carry it off, and we might have proofs against him. All you have to do now is to inform the conductor, who will telegraph to stop the train to Paris. I spoke to him about that at Ostend, so that everything is ready.'

She positively hugged me. 'My dear,' she cried, 'you are the cleverest little woman I ever met in my life! Who on earth could have suspected such a polished gentleman? Why, you're worth your weight in gold. What the dickens shall I do without you at Schlangenbad?'

II

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SUPERCILIOUS *ATTACHÉ*

The Count must have been an adept in the gentle art of quick-change disguise; for though we telegraphed full particulars of his appearance from Louvain, the next station, nobody in the least resembling either him or his accomplice, the shabby-looking man, could be unearthed in the Paris train when it drew up at Brussels, its first stopping-place. They must have transformed themselves meanwhile into two different persons. Indeed, from the outset, I had suspected his moustache – 'twas so *very* distinguished.

When we reached Cologne, the Cantankerous Old Lady overwhelmed me with the warmth of her thanks and praises. Nay, more; after breakfast next morning, before we set out by slow train for Schlangenbad, she burst like a tornado into my bedroom at the Cologne hotel with a cheque for twenty guineas, drawn in my favour. 'That's for you, my dear,' she said, handing it to me, and looking really quite gracious.

I glanced at the piece of paper and felt my face glow crimson. 'Oh, Lady Georgina,' I cried; 'you misunderstand. You forget that I am a lady.'

'Nonsense, child, nonsense! Your courage and promptitude were worth ten times that sum,' she exclaimed, positively slipping her arm round my neck. 'It was your courage I particularly admired, Lois; because you faced the risk of my happening to look inside the outer case, and finding you had abstracted the blessed box: in which case I might quite naturally have concluded you meant to steal it.'

'I thought of that,' I answered. 'But I decided to risk it. I felt it was worth while. For I was sure the man meant to take the case as soon as ever you gave him the opportunity.'

'Then you deserve to be rewarded,' she insisted, pressing the cheque upon me.

I put her hand back firmly. 'Lady Georgina,' I said, 'it is very amiable of you. I think you do right in offering me the money; but I think I should do altogether wrong in accepting it. A lady is not honest from the hope of gain; she is not brave because she expects to be paid for her bravery. You were my employer, and I was bound to serve my employer's interests. I did so as well as I could, and there is the end of it.'

She looked absolutely disappointed; we all hate to crush a benevolent impulse; but she tore the cheque up into very small pieces. 'As you will, my dear,' she said, with her hands on her hips: 'I see, you are poor Tom Cayley's daughter. He was always a bit Quixotic.' Though I believe she liked me all the better for my refusal.

On the way from Cologne to Eltville, however, and on the drive up to Schlangenbad, I found her just as fussy and as worrying as ever. 'Let me see, how many of these horrid pfennigs make an English penny? I never *can* remember. Oh, those silly little nickel things are ten pfennigs each, are they? Well, eight would be a penny, I suppose. A mark's a shilling; ridiculous of them to divide it into ten pence instead of twelve; one never really knows how much one's paying for anything. Why these Continental people can't be content to use pounds, shillings, and pence, all over alike, the same as we do, passes *my* comprehension. They're glad enough to get English sovereigns when they can; why, then, don't they use them as such, instead of reckoning them each at twenty-five francs, and then trying to cheat you out of the proper exchange, which is *always* ten centimes more than the brokers give you? What, *we* use their beastly decimal system? Lois, I'm ashamed of you. An English girl to turn and rend her native country like that! Francs and centimes, indeed! Fancy proposing it at Peter Robinson's! No, I will *not* go by the boat, my dear. I hate the Rhine boats, crowded with nasty selfish pigs of Germans. What *I* like is a first-class compartment all to myself, and no horrid foreigners. Especially Germans. They're bursting with self-satisfaction – have such an exaggerated belief in their "land" and their "folk." And when they come to England, they do nothing but find fault with us. If

people aren't satisfied with the countries they travel in, they'd better stop at home – that's *my* opinion. Nasty pigs of Germans! The very sight of them sickens me. Oh, I don't mind if they *do* understand me, child. They all learn English nowadays; it helps them in trade – that's why they're driving us out of all the markets. But it *must* be good for them to learn once in a way what other people really think of them – civilised people, I mean; not Germans. They're a set of barbarians.'

We reached Schlangenbad alive, though I sometimes doubted it: for my old lady did her boisterous best to rouse some peppery German officer into cutting our throats incontinently by the way; and when we got there, we took up our abode in the nicest hotel in the village. Lady Georgina had engaged the best front room on the first floor, with a charming view across the pine-clad valley; but I must do her the justice to say that she took the second best for me, and that she treated me in every way like the guest she delighted to honour. My refusal to accept her twenty guineas made her anxious to pay it back to me within the terms of our agreement. She described me to everybody as a young friend who was travelling with her, and never gave any one the slightest hint of my being a paid companion. Our arrangement was that I was to have two guineas for the week, besides my travelling expenses, board, and lodging.

On our first morning at Schlangenbad, Lady Georgina sallied forth, very much overdressed, and in a youthful hat, to use the waters. They are valued chiefly for the complexion, I learned; I wondered then why Lady Georgina came there – for she hadn't any; but they are also recommended for nervous irritability, and as Lady Georgina had visited the place almost every summer for fifteen years, it opened before one's mind an appalling vista of what her temper might have been if she had *not* gone to Schlangenbad. The hot springs are used in the form of a bath. '*You* don't need them, my dear,' Lady Georgina said to me, with a good-humoured smile; and I will own that I did not, for nature has gifted me with a tolerable cuticle. But I like when at Rome to do as Rome does; so I tried the baths once. I found them unpleasantly smooth and oily. I do not freckle, but if I did, I think I should prefer freckles.

We walked much on the terrace – the inevitable dawdling promenade of all German watering-places – it reeked of Serene Highness. We also drove out among the low wooded hills which bound the Rhine valley. The majority of the visitors, I found, were ladies – Court ladies, most of them; all there for their complexions, but all anxious to assure me privately they had come for what they described as 'nervous debility.' I divided them at once into two classes: half of them never had and never would have a complexion at all; the other half had exceptionally smooth and beautiful skins, of which they were obviously proud, and whose pink-and-white peach-blossom they thought to preserve by assiduous bathing. It was vanity working on two opposite bases. There was a sprinkling of men, however, who were really there for a sufficient reason – wounds or serious complaints; while a few good old sticks, porty and whisty, were in attendance on invalid wives or sisters.

From the beginning I noticed that Lady Georgina went peering about all over the place, as if she were hunting for something she had lost, with her long-handled tortoise-shell glasses perpetually in evidence – the 'aristocratic outrage' I called them – and that she eyed all the men with peculiar attention. But I took no open notice of her little weakness. On our second day at the Spa, I was sauntering with her down the chief street – 'a beastly little hole, my dear; not a decent shop where one can buy a reel of thread or a yard of tape in the place!' – when I observed a tall and handsome young man on the opposite side of the road cast a hasty glance at us, and then sneak round the corner hurriedly. He was a loose-limbed, languid-looking young man, with large, dreamy eyes, and a peculiarly beautiful and gentle expression; but what I noted about him most was an odd superficial air of superciliousness. He seemed always to be looking down with scorn on that foolish jumble, the universe. He darted away so rapidly, however, that I hardly discovered all this just then. I piece it out from subsequent observations.

Later in the day, we chanced to pass a *café*, where three young exquisites sat sipping Rhine wines after the fashion of the country. One of them, with a gold-tipped cigarette held gracefully

between two slender fingers, was my languid-looking young aristocrat. He was blowing out smoke in a lazy blue stream. The moment he saw me, however, he turned away as if he desired to escape observation, and ducked down so as to hide his face behind his companions. I wondered why on earth he should want to avoid me. Could this be the Count? No, the young man with the halo of cigarette smoke stood three inches taller. Who, then, at Schlangenbad could wish to avoid my notice? It was a singular mystery; for I was quite certain the supercilious young man was trying his best to prevent my seeing him.

That evening, after dinner, the Cantankerous Old Lady burst out suddenly, 'Well, I can't for the life of me imagine why Harold hasn't turned up here. The wretch knew I was coming; and I heard from our Ambassador at Rome last week that he was going to be at Schlangenbad.'

'Who is Harold?' I asked.

'My nephew,' Lady Georgina snapped back, beating a devil's tattoo with her fan on the table. 'The only member of my family, except myself, who isn't a born idiot. Harold's not an idiot; he's an *attaché* at Rome.'

I saw it at a glance. 'Then he *is* in Schlangenbad,' I answered. 'I noticed him this morning.'

The old lady turned towards me sharply. She peered right through me, as if she were a Röntgen ray. I could see she was asking herself whether this was a conspiracy, and whether I had come there on purpose to meet 'Harold.' But I flatter myself I am tolerably mistress of my own countenance. I did not blench. 'How do you know?' she asked quickly, with an acid intonation.

If I had answered the truth, I should have said, 'I know he is here, because I saw a good-looking young man evidently trying to avoid you this morning; and if a young man has the misfortune to be born your nephew, and also to have expectations from you, it is easy to understand that he would prefer to keep out of your way as long as possible.' But that would have been neither polite nor politic. Moreover, I reflected that I had no particular reason for wishing to do Mr. Harold a bad turn; and that it would be kinder to him, as well as to her, to conceal the reasons on which I based my instinctive inference. So I took up a strong strategic position. 'I have an intuition that I saw him in the village this morning,' I said. 'Family likeness, perhaps. I merely jumped at it as you spoke. A tall, languid young man; large, poetical eyes; an artistic moustache – just a trifle Oriental-looking.'

'That's Harold!' the Cantankerous Old Lady rapped out sharply, with clear conviction. 'The miserable boy! Why on earth hasn't he been round to see me?'

I reflected that I knew why; but I did not say so. Silence is golden. I also remarked mentally on that curious human blindness which had made me conclude at first that the supercilious young man was trying to avoid *me*, when I might have guessed it was far more likely he was trying to avoid my companion. I was a nobody; Lady Georgina Fawley was a woman of European reputation.

'Perhaps he didn't know which hotel you were stopping at,' I put in. 'Or even that you were here.' I felt a sudden desire to shield poor Harold.

'Not know which hotel? Nonsense, child; he knows I come here on this precise date regularly every summer; and if he didn't know, is it likely I should try any other inn, when this is the only moderately decent house to stop at in Schlangenbad? And the morning coffee undrinkable at that; while the hash — *such* hash! But that's the way in Germany. He's an ungrateful monster; if he comes now, I shall refuse to see him.'

Next morning after breakfast, however, in spite of these threats, she hailed me forth with her on the Harold hunt. She had sent the *concierge* to inquire at all the hotels already, it seemed, and found her truant at none of them; now she ransacked the *pensions*. At last she hunted him down in a house on the hill. I could see she was really hurt. 'Harold, you viper, what do you mean by trying to avoid me?'

'My dear aunt, *you* here in Schlangenbad! Why, when did you arrive? And what a colour you've got! You're looking *so* well!' That clever thrust saved him.

He cast me an appealing glance. 'You will not betray me?' it said. I answered, mutely, 'Not for worlds,' with a faltering pair of downcast eyelids.

'Oh, I'm *well* enough, thank you,' Lady Georgina replied, somewhat mollified by his astute allusion to her personal appearance. He had hit her weak point dexterously. 'As well, that is, as one can expect to be nowadays. Hereditary gout – the sins of the fathers visited as usual. But why didn't you come to see me?'

'How can I come to see you if you don't tell me where you are? "Lady Georgina Fawley, Europe," was the only address I knew. It strikes me as insufficient.'

His gentle drawl was a capital foil to Lady Georgina's acidulous soprano. It seemed to disarm her. She turned to me with a benignant wave of her hand. 'Miss Cayley,' she said, introducing me; 'my nephew, Mr. Harold Tillington. You've heard me talk of poor Tom Cayley, Harold? This is poor Tom Cayley's daughter.'

'Indeed?' the supercilious *attaché* put in, looking hard at me. 'Delighted to make Miss Cayley's acquaintance.'

'Now, Harold, I can tell from your voice at once you haven't remembered one word about Captain Cayley.'

Harold stood on the defensive. 'My dear aunt,' he observed, expanding both palms, 'I have heard you talk of so *very* many people, that even *my* diplomatic memory fails at times to recollect them all. But I do better: I dissemble. I will plead forgetfulness now of Captain Cayley, since you force it on me. It is not likely I shall have to plead it of Captain Cayley's daughter.' And he bowed towards me gallantly.

The Cantankerous Old Lady darted a lightning glance at him. It was a glance of quick suspicion. Then she turned her Röntgen rays upon my face once more. I fear I burned crimson.

'A friend?' he asked. 'Or a fellow-guest?'

'A companion.' It was the first nasty thing she had said of me.

'Ha! more than a friend, then. A comrade.' He turned the edge neatly.

We walked out on the terrace and a little way up the zigzag path. The day was superb. I found Mr. Tillington, in spite of his studiously languid and supercilious air, a most agreeable companion. He knew Europe. He was full of talk of Rome and the Romans. He had epigrammatic wit, curt, keen, and pointed. We sat down on a bench; he kept Lady Georgina and myself amused for an hour by his crisp sallies. Besides, he had been everywhere and seen everybody. Culture and agriculture seemed all one to him.

When we rose to go in, Lady Georgina remarked, with emphasis, 'Of course, Harold, you'll come and take up your diggings at our hotel?'

'Of course, my dear aunt. How can you ask? Free quarters. Nothing would give me greater pleasure.'

She glanced at him keenly again. I saw she had expected him to fake up some lame excuse for not joining us; and I fancied she was annoyed at his prompt acquiescence, which had done her out of the chance for a family disagreement. 'Oh, you'll come then?' she said, grudgingly.

'Certainly, most respected aunt. I shall much prefer it.'

She let her piercing eye descend upon me once more. I was aware that I had been talking with frank ease of manner to Mr. Tillington, and that I had said several things which clearly amused him. Then I remembered all at once our relative positions. A companion, I felt, should know her place: it is not her *rôle* to be smart and amusing. 'Perhaps,' I said, drawing back, 'Mr. Tillington would like to remain in his present quarters till the end of the week, while I am with you, Lady Georgina; after that, he could have my room; it might be more convenient.'

His eye caught mine quickly. 'Oh, you're only going to stop a week, then, Miss Cayley?' he put in, with an air of disappointment.

'Only a week,' I nodded.

'My dear child,' the Cantankerous Old Lady broke out, 'what nonsense you do talk! Only going to stop a week? How can I exist without you?'

'That was the arrangement,' I said, mischievously. 'You were going to look about, you recollect, for an unsophisticated Gretchen. You don't happen to know of any warehouse where a supply of unsophisticated Gretchens is kept constantly in stock, do you, Mr. Tillington?'

'No, I don't,' he answered, laughing. 'I believe there are dodos and auks' eggs, in very small numbers, still to be procured in the proper quarters; but the unsophisticated Gretchen, I am credibly informed, is an extinct animal. Why, the cap of one fetches high prices nowadays among collectors.'

'But you will come to the hotel at once, Harold?' Lady Georgina interposed.

'Certainly, aunt. I will move in without delay. If Miss Cayley is going to stay for a single week only, that adds one extra inducement for joining you immediately.'

His aunt's stony eye was cold as marble.

So when we got back to our hotel after the baths that afternoon, the *concierge* greeted us with: 'Well, your noble nephew has arrived, high-well-born countess! He came with his boxes just now, and has taken a room near your honourable ladyship's.'

Lady Georgina's face was a study of mingled emotions. I don't know whether she looked more pleased or jealous.

Later in the day, I chanced on Mr. Tillington, sunning himself on a bench in the hotel garden. He rose, and came up to me, as fast as his languid nature permitted. 'Oh, Miss Cayley,' he said, abruptly, 'I do want to thank you so much for not betraying me. I know you spotted me twice in the town yesterday; and I also know you were good enough to say nothing to my revered aunt about it.'

'I had no reason for wishing to hurt Lady Georgina's feelings,' I answered, with a permissible evasion.

His countenance fell. 'I never thought of that,' he interposed, with one hand on his moustache. 'I – I fancied you did it out of fellow-feeling.'

'We all think of things mainly from our own point of view first,' I answered. 'The difference is that some of us think of them from other people's afterwards. Motives are mixed.'

He smiled. 'I didn't know my deeply venerated relative was coming here so soon,' he went on. 'I thought she wasn't expected till next week; my brother wrote me that she had quarrelled with her French maid, and 'twould take her full ten days to get another. I meant to clear out before she arrived. To tell you the truth, I was going to-morrow.'

'And now you are stopping on?'

He caught my eye again.

'Circumstances alter cases,' he murmured, with meaning.

'It is hardly polite to describe one as a circumstance,' I objected.

'I meant,' he said, quickly, 'my aunt alone is one thing; my aunt with a friend is quite another.'

'I see,' I answered. 'There is safety in numbers.'

He eyed me hard.

'Are you mediæval or modern?' he asked.

'Modern, I hope,' I replied. Then I looked at him again. 'Oxford?'

He nodded. 'And you?' half joking.

'Cambridge,' I said, glad to catch him out. 'What college?'

'Merton. Yours?'

'Girton.'

The odd rhyme amused him. Thenceforth we were friends – 'two 'Varsity men,' he said. And indeed it does make a queer sort of link – a freemasonry to which even women are now admitted.

At dinner and through the evening he talked a great deal to me, Lady Georgina putting in from time to time a characteristic growl about the *table-d'hôte* chicken – 'a special breed, my dear, with eight drumsticks apiece' – or about the inadequate lighting of the heavy German *salon*. She was worse than ever: pungent as a rule, that evening she was grumpy. When we retired for the night, to my

great surprise, she walked into my bedroom. She seated herself on my bed: I saw she had come to talk over Harold.

'He will be very rich, my dear, you know. A great catch in time. He will inherit all my brother's money.'

'Lord Kynaston's?'

'Bless the child, no. Kynaston's as poor as a church mouse with the tithes unpaid; he has three sons of his own, and not a blessed stiver to leave between them. How could he, poor dear idiot? Agricultural depression; a splendid pauper. He has only the estate, and that's in Essex; land going begging; worth nothing a year, encumbered up to the eyes, and loaded with first rent-charges, jointures, settlements. Money, indeed! poor Kynaston! It's my brother Marmaduke's I mean; lucky dog, *he* went in for speculation – began life as a guinea-pig, and rose with the rise of soap and cocoa. He's worth his half-million.'

'Oh, Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst'

Lady Georgina nodded. 'Marmy's a fool,' she said, briefly; 'but he knows which side of his bread is buttered.'

'And Mr. Tillington is – his nephew?'

'Bless the child, yes; have you never read your British Bible, the peerage? Astonishing, the ignorance of these Girton girls! They don't even know the Leger's run at Doncaster. The family name's Ashurst. Kynaston's an earl – I was Lady Georgina Ashurst before I took it into my head to marry and do for poor Evelyn Fawley. My younger brother's the Honourable Marmaduke Ashurst – women get the best of it there – it's about the only place where they do get the best of it: an earl's daughter is Lady Betty; his son's nothing more than the Honourable Tom. So one scores off one's brothers. My younger sister, Lady Guinevere Ashurst, married Stanley Tillington of the Foreign Office. Harold's their eldest son. Now, child, do you grasp it?'

'Perfectly,' I answered. 'You speak like Debrett. Has issue, Harold.'

'And Harold will inherit all Marmaduke's money. What I'm always afraid of is that some fascinating adventuress will try to marry him out of hand. A pretty face, and over goes Harold! *My* business in life is to stand in the way and prevent it.'

She looked me through and through again with her X-ray scrutiny.

'I don't think Mr. Tillington is quite the sort that falls a prey to adventuresses,' I answered, boldly.

'Ah, but there are faggots and faggots,' the old lady said, wagging her head with profound meaning. 'Never mind, though; *I'd* like to see an adventuress marry off Harold without my leave! *I'd* lead her a life! I'd turn her black hair gray for her!'

'I should think,' I assented, 'you could do it, Lady Georgina, if you gave your attention seriously to it.'

From that moment forth, I was aware that my Cantankerous Old Lady's malign eye was inexorably fixed upon me every time I went within speaking distance of Mr. Tillington. She watched him like a lynx. She watched *me* like a dozen lynxes. Wherever we went, Lady Georgina was sure to turn up in the neighbourhood. She was perfectly ubiquitous: she seemed to possess a world-wide circulation. I don't know whether it was this constant suggestion of hers that I was stalking her nephew which roused my latent human feeling of opposition; but in the end, I began to be aware that I rather liked the supercilious *attaché* than otherwise. He evidently liked me, and he tried to meet me. Whenever he spoke to me, indeed, it was without the superciliousness which marked his manner towards others; in point of fact, it was with graceful deference. He watched for me on the stairs, in the garden, by the terrace; whenever he got a chance, he sidled over and talked to me. Sometimes he stopped in to read me Heine: he also introduced me to select portions of Gabriele d'Annunzio. It is feminine to be touched by such obvious attention; I confess, before long, I grew to like Mr. Harold Tillington.

The closer he followed me up, the more did I perceive that Lady Georgina threw out acrid hints with increasing spleen about the ways of adventuresses. They were hints of that acrimonious generalised kind, too, which one cannot answer back without seeming to admit that the cap has fitted. It was atrocious how middle-class young women nowadays ran after young men of birth and fortune. A girl would stoop to anything in order to catch five hundred thousand. Guileless youths should be thrown among their natural equals. It was a mistake to let them see too much of people of a lower rank who consider themselves good-looking. And the clever ones were the worst: they pretended to go in for intellectual companionship.

I also noticed that though at first Lady Georgina had expressed the strongest disinclination to my leaving her after the time originally proposed, she now began to take for granted that I would go at the end of my week, as arranged in London, and she even went on to some overt steps towards securing the help of the blameless Gretchen.

We had arrived at Schlangenbad on Tuesday. I was to stop with the Cantankerous Old Lady till the corresponding day of the following week. On the Sunday, I wandered out on the wooded hillside behind the village; and as I mounted the path I was dimly aware by a sort of instinct that Harold Tillington was following me.

He came up with me at last near a ledge of rock. 'How fast you walk!' he exclaimed. 'I gave you only a few minutes' start, and yet even my long legs have had hard work to overtake you.'

'I am a fairly good climber,' I answered, sitting down on a little wooden bench. 'You see, at Cambridge, I went on the river a great deal – I canoed and sculled: and then, besides, I've done a lot of bicycling.'

'What a splendid birthright it is,' he cried, 'to be a wholesome athletic English girl! You can't think how one admires English girls after living a year or two in Italy – where women are dolls, except for a brief period of intrigue, before they settle down to be contented frumps with an outline like a barrel.'

'A little muscle and a little mind are no doubt advisable adjuncts for a housewife,' I admitted.

'You shall not say that word,' he cried, seating himself at my side. 'It is a word for Germans, "housewife." Our English ideal is something immeasurably higher and better. A companion, a complement! Do you know, Miss Cayley, it always sickens me when I hear German students sentimentalising over their *mädchen*: their beautiful, pure, insipid, yellow-haired, blue-eyed *mädchen*; her, so fair, so innocent, so unapproachably vacuous – so like a wax doll – and then think of how they design her in days to come to cook sausages for their dinner, and knit them endless stockings through a placid middle age, till the needles drop from her paralysed fingers, and she retires into frilled caps and Teutonic senility.'

'You seem to have almost as low an opinion of foreigners as your respected aunt!' I exclaimed, looking quizzically at him.

He drew back, surprised. 'Oh, no; I'm not narrow-minded, like my aunt, I hope,' he answered. 'I am a good cosmopolitan. I allow Continental nations all their own good points, and each has many. But their women, Miss Cayley – and their point of view of their women – you will admit that there they can't hold a candle to English women.'

I drew a circle in the dust with the tip of my parasol.

'On that issue, I may not be a wholly unprejudiced observer,' I answered. 'The fact of my being myself an Englishwoman may possibly to some extent influence my judgment.'

'You are sarcastic,' he cried, drawing away.

'Not at all,' I answered, making a wider circle. 'I spoke a simple fact. But what is *your* ideal, then, as opposed to the German one?'

He gazed at me and hesitated. His lips half parted. 'My ideal?' he said, after a pause. 'Well, *my* ideal – do you happen to have such a thing as a pocket-mirror about you?'

I laughed in spite of myself. 'Now, Mr. Tillington,' I said severely, 'if you're going to pay compliments, I shall have to return. If you want to stop here with me, you must remember that I am only Lady Georgina Fawley's temporary lady's-maid. Besides, I didn't mean that. I meant, what is your ideal of a man's right relation to his *mädchen*?'

'Don't say *mädchen*,' he cried, petulantly. 'It sounds as if you thought me one of those sentimental Germans. I hate sentiment.'

'Then, towards the woman of his choice.'

He glanced up through the trees at the light overhead, and spoke more slowly than ever. 'I think,' he said, fumbling his watch-chain nervously, 'a man ought to wish the woman he loves to be a free agent, his equal in point of action, even as she is nobler and better than he in all spiritual matters. I think he ought to desire for her a life as high as she is capable of leading, with full scope for every faculty of her intellect or her emotional nature. She should be beautiful, with a vigorous, wholesome, many-sided beauty, moral, intellectual, physical; yet with soul in her, too; and with the soul and the mind lighting up her eyes, as it lights up – well, that is immaterial. And if a man can discover such a woman as that, and can induce her to believe in him, to love him, to accept him – though how such a woman can be satisfied with any man at all is to me unfathomable – well, then, I think he should be happy in devoting his whole life to her, and should give himself up to repay her condescension in taking him.'

'And you hate sentiment!' I put in, smiling.

He brought his eyes back from the sky suddenly. 'Miss Cayley,' he said, 'this is cruel. I was in earnest. You are playing with me.'

'I believe the chief characteristic of the English girl is supposed to be common sense,' I answered, calmly, 'and I trust I possess it.' But indeed, as he spoke, my heart was beginning to make its beat felt; for he was a charming young man; he had a soft voice and lustrous eyes; it was a summer's day; and alone in the woods with one other person, where the sunlight falls mellow in spots like a leopard's skin, one is apt to remember that we are all human.

That evening Lady Georgina managed to blurt out more malicious things than ever about the ways of adventuresses, and the duty of relations in saving young men from the clever clutches of designing creatures. She was ruthless in her rancour: her gibes stung me.

On Monday at breakfast I asked her casually if she had yet found a Gretchen.

'No,' she answered, in a gloomy voice. 'All slatterns, my dear; all slatterns! Brought up in pigsties. I wouldn't let one of them touch my hair for thousands.'

'That's unfortunate,' I said, drily, 'for you know I'm going to-morrow.'

If I had dropped a bomb in their midst they couldn't have looked more astonished. 'To-morrow?' Lady Georgina gasped, clutching my arm. 'You don't mean it, child; you don't mean it?'

I asserted my Ego. 'Certainly,' I answered, with my coolest air. 'I said I thought I could manage you for a week; and I have managed you.'

She almost burst into tears. 'But, my child, my child, what shall I do without you?'

'The unsophisticated Gretchen,' I answered, trying not to look concerned; for in my heart of hearts, in spite of her innuendoes, I had really grown rather to like the Cantankerous Old Lady.

She rose hastily from the table, and darted up to her own room. 'Lois,' she said, as she rose, in a curious voice of mingled regret and suspicion, 'I will talk to you about this later.' I could see she was not quite satisfied in her own mind whether Harold Tillington and I had not arranged this *coup* together.

I put on my hat and strolled off into the garden, and then along the mossy hill path. In a minute more, Harold Tillington was beside me.

He seated me, half against my will, on a rustic bench. 'Look here, Miss Cayley,' he said, with a very earnest face; 'is this really true? Are you going to-morrow?'

My voice trembled a little. 'Yes,' I answered, biting my lip. 'I am going. I see several reasons why I should go, Mr. Tillington.'

'But so soon?'

'Yes, I think so; the sooner the better.' My heart was racing now, and his eyes pleaded mutely.

'Then where are you going?'

I shrugged my shoulders, and pouted my lips a little. 'I don't know,' I replied. 'The world is all before me where to choose. I am an adventuress,' I said it boldly, 'and I am in quest of adventures. I really have not yet given a thought to my next place of sojourn.'

'But you will let me know when you have decided?'

It was time to speak out. 'No, Mr. Tillington,' I said, with decision. 'I will *not* let you know. One of my reasons for going is, that I think I had better see no more of you.'

He flung himself on the bench at my side, and folded his hands in a helpless attitude. 'But, Miss Cayley,' he cried, 'this is so short a notice; you give a fellow no chance; I hoped I might have seen more of you – might have had some opportunity of – of letting you realise how deeply I admired and respected you – some opportunity of showing myself as I really am to you – before – before –' he paused, and looked hard at me.

I did not know what to say. I really liked him so much; and when he spoke in that voice, I could not bear to seem cruel to him. Indeed, I was aware at the moment how much I had grown to care for him in those six short days. But I knew it was impossible. 'Don't say it, Mr. Tillington,' I murmured, turning my face away. 'The less said, the sooner mended.'

'But I must,' he cried. 'I must tell you now, if I am to have no chance afterwards. I wanted you to see more of me before I ventured to ask you if you could ever love me, if you could ever suffer me to go through life with you, to share my all with you.' He seized my trembling hand. 'Lois,' he cried, in a pleading voice, 'I *must* ask you; I can't expect you to answer me now, but *do* say you will give me at least some other chance of seeing you, and then, in time, of pressing my suit upon you.'

Tears stood in my eyes. He was so earnest, so charming. But I remembered Lady Georgina, and his prospective half-million. I moved his hand away gently. 'I cannot,' I said. 'I cannot – I am a penniless girl – an adventuress. Your family, your uncle, would never forgive you if you married me. I will not stand in your way. I – I like you very much, though I have seen so little of you. But I feel it is impossible – and I am going to-morrow.'

Then I rose of a sudden, and ran down the hill with all my might, lest I should break my resolve, never stopping once till I reached my own bedroom.

An hour later, Lady Georgina burst in upon me in high dudgeon. 'Why, Lois, my child,' she cried. 'What's this? What on earth does it mean? Harold tells me he has proposed to you – proposed to you – and you've rejected him!'

I dried my eyes and tried to look steadily at her. 'Yes, Lady Georgina,' I faltered. 'You need not be afraid. I have refused him; and I mean it.'

She looked at me, all aghast. '*And* you mean it!' she repeated. 'You mean to refuse him. Then, all I can say is, Lois Cayley, I call it pure cheek of you!'

'What?' I cried, drawing back.

'Yes, cheek,' she answered, volubly. 'Forty thousand a year, and a good old family! Harold Tillington is my nephew; he's an earl's grandson; he's an *attaché* at Rome; and he's bound to be one of the richest commoners in England. Who are you, I'd like to know, miss, that you dare to reject him?'

I stared at her, amazed. 'But, Lady Georgina,' I cried, 'you said you wished to protect your nephew against bare-faced adventuresses who were setting their caps at him.'

She fixed her eyes on me, half-angry, half-tremulous.

'Of course,' she answered, with withering scorn. 'But, *then*, I thought you were trying to catch him. He tells me now you won't have him, and you won't tell him where you are going. I call it sheer insolence. Where do you hail from, girl, that you should refuse my nephew? A man that any woman

in England would be proud to marry! Forty thousand a year, and an earl's grandson! That's what comes, I suppose, of going to Girton!

I drew myself up. 'Lady Georgina,' I said, coldly, 'I cannot allow you to use such language to me. I promised to accompany you to Germany for a week; and I have kept my word. I like your nephew; I respect your nephew; he has behaved like a gentleman. But I will *not* marry him. Your own conduct showed me in the plainest way that you did not judge such a match desirable for him; and I have common sense enough to see that you were quite right. I am a lady by birth and education; I am an officer's daughter; but I am not what society calls "a good match" for Mr. Tillington. He had better marry into a rich stockbroker's family.'

It was an unworthy taunt: the moment it escaped my lips I regretted it.

To my intense surprise, however, Lady Georgina flung herself on my bed, and burst into tears. 'My dear,' she sobbed out, covering her face with her hands, 'I thought you would be sure to set your cap at Harold; and after I had seen you for twenty-four hours, I said to myself, "That's just the sort of girl Harold ought to fall in love with." I felt sure he would fall in love with you. I brought you here on purpose. I saw you had all the qualities that would strike Harold's fancy. So I had made up my mind for a delightful regulation family quarrel. I was going to oppose you and Harold, tooth and nail; I was going to threaten that Marmy would leave his money to Kynaston's eldest son; I was going to kick up, oh, a dickens of a row about it! Then, of course, in the end, we should all have been reconciled; we should have kissed and made friends: for you're just the one girl in the world for Harold; indeed, I never met anybody so capable and so intelligent. And now you spoil all my sport by going and refusing him! It's really most ill-timed of you. And Harold has sent me here – he's trembling with anxiety – to see whether I can't induce you to think better of your decision.'

I made up my mind at once. 'No, Lady Georgina,' I said, in my gentlest voice – positively stooping down and kissing her. 'I like Mr. Tillington very much. I dare not tell you how much I like him. He is a dear, good, kind fellow. But I cannot rest under the cruel imputation of being moved by his wealth and having tried to capture him. Even if *you* didn't think so, his family would. I am sorry to go; for in a way I like you. But it is best to adhere to our original plan. If *I* changed my mind, *you* might change yours again. Let us say no more. I will go to-morrow.'

'But you will see Harold again?'

'Not alone. Only at dinner.' For I feared lest, if he spoke to me alone, he might over-persuade me.

'Then at least you will tell him where you are going?'

'No, Lady Georgina; I do not know myself. And besides, it is best that this should now be final.'

She flung herself upon me. 'But, my dear child, a lady can't go out into the world with only two pounds in pocket. You *must* let me lend you something.'

I unwound her clasping hands. 'No, dear Lady Georgina,' I said, though I was loth to say it. 'You are very sweet and good, but I must work out my life in my own way. I have started to work it out, and I won't be turned aside just here on the threshold.'

'And you won't stop with me?' she cried, opening her arms. 'You think me too cantankerous?'

'I think you have a dear, kind old heart,' I said, 'under the quaintest and crustiest outside such a heart ever wore; you're a truculent old darling; so that's the plain truth of it.'

She kissed me. I kissed her in return with fervour, though I am but a poor hand at kissing, for a woman. 'So now this episode is concluded,' I murmured.

'I don't know about that,' she said, drying her eyes. 'I have set my heart upon you now; and Harold has set his heart upon you; and considering that your own heart goes much the same way, I daresay, my dear, we shall find in the end some convenient road out of it.'

Nevertheless, next morning I set out by myself in the coach from Schlangenbad. I went forth into the world to live my own life, partly because it was just then so fashionable, but mainly because fate had denied me the chance of living anybody else's.

III

THE ADVENTURE OF THE INQUISITIVE AMERICAN

In one week I had multiplied my capital two hundred and forty-fold! I left London with twopence in the world; I quitted Schlangenbad with two pounds in pocket.

'There's a splendid turn-over!' I thought to myself. 'If this luck holds, at the same rate, I shall have made four hundred and eighty pounds by Tuesday next, and I may look forward to being a Barney Barnato by Christmas.' For I had taken high mathematical honours at Cambridge, and if there is anything on earth on which I pride myself, it is my firm grasp of the principle of ratios.

Still, in spite of this brilliant financial prospect, a budding Klondike, I went away from the little Spa on the flanks of the Taunus with a heavy heart. I had grown quite to like dear, virulent, fidgety old Lady Georgina; and I felt that it had cost me a distinct wrench to part with Harold Tillington. The wrench left a scar which was long in healing; but as I am not a professional sentimentalist, I will not trouble you here with details of the symptoms.

My livelihood, however, was now assured me. With two pounds in pocket, a sensible girl can read her title clear to six days' board and lodging, at six marks a day, with a glorious margin of four marks over for pocket-money. And if at the end of six days my fairy godmother had not pointed me out some other means of earning my bread honestly – well, I should feel myself unworthy to be ranked in the noble army of adventuresses. I thank thee, Lady Georgina, for teaching me that word. An adventuress I would be; for I loved adventure.

Meanwhile, it occurred to me that I might fill up the interval by going to study art at Frankfort. Elsie Petheridge had been there, and had impressed upon me the fact that I must on no account omit to see the Städel Gallery. She was strong on culture. Besides, the study of art should be most useful to an adventuress; for she must need all the arts that human skill has developed.

So to Frankfort I betook myself, and found there a nice little *pension*– 'for ladies only,' Frau Bockenheifner assured me – at very moderate rates, in a pleasant part of the Lindenstrasse. It had dimity curtains. I will not deny that as I entered the house I was conscious of feeling lonely; my heart sank once or twice as I glanced round the luncheon-table at the domestically-unsympathetic German old maids who formed the rank-and-file of my fellow-boarders. There they sat – eight comfortable Fraus who had missed their vocation; plentiful ladies, bulging and surging in tightly stretched black silk bodices. They had been cut out for such housewives as Harold Tillington had described, but found themselves deprived of their natural sphere in life by the unaccountable caprice of the men of their nation. Each was a model Teutonic matron *manquée*. Each looked capable of frying Frankfort sausages to a turn, and knitting woollen socks to a remote eternity. But I sought in vain for one kindred soul among them. How horrified they would have been, with their fat pudding-faces and big saucer-eyes, had I boldly announced myself as an English adventuress!

I spent my first morning in laborious self-education at the Ariadneum and the Städel Gallery. I borrowed a catalogue. I wrestled with Van der Weyden; I toiled like a galley-slave at Meister Wilhelm and Meister Stephan. I have a confused recollection that I saw a number of stiff mediæval pictures, and an alabaster statue of the lady who smiled as she rode on a tiger, taken at the beginning of that interesting episode. But the remainder of the Institute has faded from my memory.

In the afternoon I consoled myself for my herculean efforts in the direction of culture by going out for a bicycle ride on a hired machine, to which end I decided to devote my pocket-money. You will, perhaps, object here that my conduct was imprudent. To raise that objection is to misunderstand the spirit of these artless adventures. I told you that I set out to go round the world; but to go round the world does not necessarily mean to circumnavigate it. My idea was to go round by easy stages, seeing the world as I went as far as I got, and taking as little heed as possible of the morrow. Most of

my readers, no doubt, accept that philosophy of life on Sundays only; on week-days they swallow the usual contradictory economic platitudes about prudential forethought and the horrid improvidence of the lower classes. For myself, I am not built that way. I prefer to take life in a spirit of pure inquiry. I put on my hat: I saunter where I choose, so far as circumstances permit; and I wait to see what chance will bring me. My ideal is breeziness.

The hired bicycle was not a bad machine, as hired bicycles go; it jolted one as little as you can expect from a common hack; it never stopped at a Bier-Garten; and it showed very few signs of having been ridden by beginners with an unconquerable desire to tilt at the hedgerow. So off I soared at once, heedless of the jeers of Teutonic youth who found the sight of a lady riding a cycle in skirts a strange one – for in South Germany the 'rational' costume is so universal among women cyclists that 'tis the skirt that provokes unfavourable comment from those jealous guardians of female propriety, the street boys. I hurried on at a brisk pace past the Palm-Garden and the suburbs, with my loose hair straying on the breeze behind, till I found myself pedalling at a good round pace on a broad, level road, which led towards a village, by name Fraunheim.

As I scurried across the plain, with the wind in my face, not unpleasantly, I had some dim consciousness of somebody unknown flying after me headlong. My first idea was that Harold Tillington had hunted me down and tracked me to my lair; but gazing back, I saw my pursuer was a tall and ungainly man, with a straw-coloured moustache, apparently American, and that he was following me on his machine, closely watching my action. He had such a cunning expression on his face, and seemed so strangely inquisitive, with eyes riveted on my treadles, that I didn't quite like the look of him. I put on the pace, to see if I could outstrip him, for I am a swift cyclist. But his long legs were too much for me. He did not gain on me, it is true; but neither did I outpace him. Pedalling my very hardest – and I can make good time when necessary – I still kept pretty much at the same distance in front of him all the way to Fraunheim.

Gradually I began to feel sure that the weedy-looking man with the alert face was really pursuing me. When I went faster, he went faster too; when I gave him a chance to pass me, he kept close at my heels, and appeared to be keenly watching the style of my ankle-action. I gathered that he was a connoisseur; but why on earth he should persecute me I could not imagine. My spirit was roused now – I pedalled with a will; if I rode all day I would not let him go past me.

Beyond the cobble-paved chief street of Fraunheim the road took a sharp bend, and began to mount the slopes of the Taunus suddenly. It was an abrupt, steep climb; but I flatter myself I am a tolerable mountain cyclist. I rode sturdily on; my pursuer darted after me. But on this stiff upward grade my light weight and agile ankle-action told; I began to distance him. He seemed afraid that I would give him the slip, and called out suddenly, with a whoop, in English, 'Stop, miss!' I looked back with dignity, but answered nothing. He put on the pace, panting; I pedalled away, and got clear from him.

At a turn of the corner, however, as luck would have it, I was pulled up short by a mounted policeman. He blocked the road with his horse, like an ogre, and asked me, in a very gruff Swabian voice, if this was a licensed bicycle. I had no idea, till he spoke, that any license was required; though to be sure I might have guessed it; for modern Germany is studded with notices at all the street corners, to inform you in minute detail that everything is forbidden. I stammered out that I did not know. The mounted policeman drew near and inspected me rudely. 'It is strongly undersaid,' he began, but just at that moment my pursuer came up, and, with American quickness, took in the situation. He accosted the policeman in choice bad German. 'I have two licenses,' he said, producing a handful. 'The Fräulein rides with me.'

I was too much taken aback at so providential an interposition to contradict this highly imaginative statement. My highwayman had turned into a protecting knight-errant of injured innocence. I let the policeman go his way; then I glanced at my preserver. A very ordinary modern St. George he looked, with no lance to speak of, and no steed but a bicycle. Yet his mien was reassuring.

'Good morning, miss,' he began – he called me 'Miss' every time he addressed me, as though he took me for a barmaid. 'Ex-cuse *me*, but why did you want to speed her?'

'I thought you were pursuing me,' I answered, a little tremulous, I will confess, but avid of incident.

'And if I was,' he went on, 'you might have con-jectured, miss, it was for our mutual advantage. A business man don't go out of his way unless he expects to turn an honest dollar; and he don't reckon on other folks going out of theirs, unless he knows he can put them in the way of turning an honest dollar with him.'

'That's reasonable,' I answered: for I am a political economist. 'The benefit should be mutual.' But I wondered if he was going to propose at sight to me.

He looked me all up and down. 'You're a lady of con-siderable personal attractions,' he said, musingly, as if he were criticising a horse; 'and I want one that sort. That's jest why I trailed you, see? Besides which, there's some style about you.'

'Style!' I repeated.

'Yes,' he went on; 'you know how to use your feet; and you have good understandings.'

I gathered from his glance that he referred to my nether limbs. We are all vertebrate animals; why seek to conceal the fact?

'I fail to follow you,' I answered frigidly; for I really didn't know what the man might say next.

'That's so!' he replied. 'It was *I* that followed *you*; seems I didn't make much of a job of it, either, anyway.'

I mounted my machine again. 'Well, good morning,' I said, coldly. 'I am much obliged for your kind assistance; but your remark was fictitious, and I desire to go on unaccompanied.'

He held up his hand in warning. 'You ain't going!' he cried, horrified. 'You ain't going without hearing me! I mean business, say! Don't chuck away good money like that. I tell you, there's dollars in it.'

'In what?' I asked, still moving on, but curious. On the slope, if need were, I could easily distance him.

'Why, in this cycling of yours,' he replied. 'You're jest about the very woman I'm looking for, miss. Lithe – that's what I call you. I kin put you in the way of making your pile, I kin. This is a *bonâ-fide* offer. No flies on *my* business! You decline it? Prejudice! Injures you; injures me! Be reasonable anyway!'

I looked round and laughed. 'Formulate yourself,' I said, briefly.

He rose to it like a man. 'Meet me at Fraunheim; corner by the Post Office; ten o'clock tomorrow morning,' he shouted, as I rode off, 'and ef I don't convince you there's money in this job, my name's not Cyrus W. Hitchcock.'

Something about his keen, unlovely face impressed me with a sense of his underlying honesty. 'Very well,' I answered, 'I'll come, if you follow me no further.' I reflected that Fraunheim was a populous village, and that only beyond it did the mountain road over the Taunus begin to grow lonely. If he wished to cut my throat, I was well within reach of the resources of civilisation.

When I got home to the Abode of Blighted Fraus that evening, I debated seriously with myself whether or not I should accept Mr. Cyrus W. Hitchcock's mysterious invitation. Prudence said *no*; curiosity said *yes*; I put the question to a meeting of one; and, since I am a daughter of Eve, curiosity had it. Carried unanimously. I think I might have hesitated, indeed, had it not been for the Blighted Fraus. Their talk was of dinner and of the digestive process; they were critics of digestion. They each of them sat so complacently through the evening – solid and stolid, stodgy and podgy, stuffed comatose images, knitting white woollen shawls, to throw over their capacious shoulders at *table d'hôte* – and they purred with such content in their middle-aged rotundity that I made up my mind I must take warning betimes, and avoid their temptations to adipose deposit. I prefer to grow upwards;

the Frau grows sideways. Better get my throat cut by an American desperado, in my pursuit of romance, than settle down on a rock like a placid fat oyster. I am not by nature sessile.

Adventures are to the adventurous. They abound on every side; but only the chosen few have the courage to embrace them. And they will not come to you: you must go out to seek them. Then they meet you half-way, and rush into your arms, for they know their true lovers. There were eight Blighted Fraus at the Home for Lost Ideals, and I could tell by simple inspection that they had not had an average of half an adventure per lifetime between them. They sat and knitted still, like Awful Examples.

If I had declined to meet Mr. Hitchcock at Fraunheim, I know not what changes it might have induced in my life. I might now be knitting. But I went boldly forth, on a voyage of exploration, prepared to accept aught that fate held in store for me.

As Mr. Hitchcock had assured me there was money in his offer, I felt justified in speculating. I expended another three marks on the hire of a bicycle, though I ran the risk thereby of going perhaps without Monday's dinner. That showed my vocation. The Blighted Fraus, I felt sure, would have clung to their dinner at all hazards.

When I arrived at Fraunheim, I found my alert American punctually there before me. He raised his crush hat with awkward politeness. I could see he was little accustomed to ladies' society. Then he pointed to a close cab in which he had reached the village.

'I've got it inside,' he whispered, in a confidential tone. 'I couldn't let 'em ketch sight of it. You see, there's dollars in it.'

'What have you got inside?' I asked, suspiciously, drawing back. I don't know why, but the word 'it' somehow suggested a corpse. I began to grow frightened.

'Why, the wheel, of course,' he answered. 'Ain't you come here to ride it?'

'Oh, the wheel?' I echoed, vaguely, pretending to look wise; but unaware, as yet, that that word was the accepted Americanism for a cycle. 'And I have come to ride it?'

'Why, certainly,' he replied, jerking his hand towards the cab. 'But we mustn't start right here. This thing has got to be kept dark, don't you see, till the last day.'

Till the last day! That was ominous. It sounded like monomania. So ghostly and elusive! I began to suspect my American ally of being a dangerous madman.

'Jest you wheel away a bit up the hill,' he went on, 'out o' sight of the folks, and I'll fetch her along to you.'

'Her?' I cried. 'Who?' For the man bewildered me.

'Why, the wheel, miss! *You* understand! This is business, you bet! And you're jest the right woman!'

He motioned me on. Urged by a sort of spell, I remounted my machine and rode out of the village. He followed, on the box-seat of his cab. Then, when we had left the world well behind, and stood among the sun-smitten boles of the pine-trees, he opened the door mysteriously, and produced from the vehicle a very odd-looking bicycle.

It was clumsy to look at. It differed immensely, in many particulars, from any machine I had yet seen or ridden.

The strenuous American fondled it for a moment with his hand, as if it were a pet child. Then he mounted nimbly. Pride shone in his eye. I saw in a second he was a fond inventor.

He rode a few yards on. Next he turned to me eagerly. 'This ma-chine,' he said, in an impressive voice, '*is* pro-pelled *by* an eccentric.' Like all his countrymen, he laid most stress on unaccented syllables.

'Oh, I knew you were an eccentric,' I said, 'the moment I set eyes upon you.'

He surveyed me gravely. 'You misunderstand me, miss,' he corrected. '*When* I say an eccentric, I mean, a crank.'

'They are much the same thing,' I answered, briskly. 'Though I confess I would hardly have applied so rude a word as *crank* to you.'

He looked me over suspiciously, as if I were trying to make game of him, but my face was sphinx-like. So he brought the machine a yard or two nearer, and explained its construction to me. He was quite right: it *was* driven by a crank. It had no chain, but was moved by a pedal, working narrowly up and down, and attached to a rigid bar, which impelled the wheels by means of an eccentric.

Besides this, it had a curious device for altering the gearing automatically while one rode, so as to enable one to adapt it to the varying slope in mounting hills. This part of the mechanism he explained to me elaborately. There was a gauge in front which allowed one to sight the steepness of the slope by mere inspection; and according as the gauge marked one, two, three, or four, as its gradient on the scale, the rider pressed a button on the handle-bar with his left hand once, twice, thrice, or four times, so that the gearing adapted itself without an effort to the rise in the surface. Besides, there were devices for rigidity and compensation. Altogether, it was a most apt and ingenious piece of mechanism. I did not wonder he was proud of it.

'Get up and ride, miss,' he said in a persuasive voice.

I did as I was bid. To my immense surprise, I ran up the steep hill as smoothly and easily as if it were a perfectly-laid level.

'Goes nicely, doesn't she?' Mr. Hitchcock murmured, rubbing his hands.

'Beautifully,' I answered. 'One could ride such a machine up Mont Blanc, I should fancy.'

He stroked his chin with nervous fingers. 'It ought to knock 'em,' he said, in an eager voice. 'It's geared to run up most anything in creation.'

'How steep?'

'One foot in three.'

'That's good.'

'Yes. It'll climb Mount Washington.'

'What do you call it?' I asked.

He looked me over with close scrutiny.

'In Amurrica,' he said, slowly, 'we call it the Great Manitou, because it kin do pretty well what it chooses; but in Europe, I am thinking of calling it the Martin Conway or the Whympfer, or something like that.'

'Why so?'

'Well, because it's a famous mountain climber.'

'I see,' I said. 'With such a machine you'll put a notice on the Matterhorn, "This hill is dangerous to cyclists."''

He laughed low to himself, and rubbed his hands again. 'You'll do, miss,' he said. 'You're the right sort, you are. The moment I seen you, I thought we two could do a trade together. Benefits me; benefits you. A mutual advantage. Reciprocity is the soul of business. You hev some go in you, you hev. There's money in your feet. You'll give these Meinherrs fits. You'll take the clear-starch out of them.'

'I fail to catch on,' I answered, speaking his own dialect to humour him.

'Oh, you'll get there all the same,' he replied, stroking his machine meanwhile. 'It was a squirrel, it was!' (He pronounced it *squirrel*.) 'It 'ud run up a tree ef it wanted, wouldn't it?' He was talking to it now as if it were a dog or a baby. 'There, there, it mustn't kick; it was a frisky little thing! Jest you step up on it, miss, and have a go at that there mountain.'

I stepped up and had a 'go.' The machine bounded forward like an agile greyhound. You had but to touch it, and it ran of itself. Never had I ridden so vivacious, so animated a cycle. I returned to him, sailing, with the gradient reversed. The Manitou glided smoothly, as on a gentle slope, without the need for back-peddalling.

'It soars!' he remarked with enthusiasm.

'Balloons are at discount beside it,' I answered.

'Now you want to know about this business, I guess,' he went on. 'You want to know jest where the reciprocity comes in, anyhow?'

'I am ready to hear you expound,' I admitted, smiling.

'Oh, it ain't all on one side,' he continued, eyeing his machine at an angle with parental affection. 'I'm a-going to make your fortune right here. You shall ride her for me on the last day; and ef you pull this thing off, don't you be scared that I won't treat you handsome.'

'If you were a little more succinct,' I said, gravely, 'we should get forrader faster.'

'Perhaps you wonder,' he put in, 'that with money on it like this, I should intrust the job *into* the hands of a female.' I winced, but was silent. 'Well, it's like this, don't you see; ef a female wins, it makes success all the more striking and con-spicuous. The world to-day *is* ruled *by* advertizement.'

I could stand it no longer. 'Mr. Hitchcock,' I said, with dignity, 'I haven't the remotest idea what on earth you are talking about.'

He gazed at me with surprise. 'What?' he exclaimed, at last. 'And you kin cycle like that! Not know what all the cycling world is mad about! Why, you don't mean to tell me you're not a professional?'

I enlightened him at once as to my position in society, which was respectable, if not lucrative. His face fell somewhat. 'High-toned, eh? Still, you'd run all the same, wouldn't you?' he inquired.

'Run for what?' I asked, innocently. 'Parliament? The Presidency? The Frankfort Town Council?'

He had difficulty in fathoming the depths of my ignorance. But by degrees I understood him. It seemed that the German Imperial and Prussian Royal Governments had offered a Kaiserly and Kingly prize for the best military bicycle; the course to be run over the Taunus, from Frankfort to Limburg; the winning machine to get the equivalent of a thousand pounds; each firm to supply its own make and rider. The 'last day' was Saturday next; and the Great Manitou was the dark horse of the contest.

Then all was clear as day to me. Mr. Cyrus W. Hitchcock was keeping his machine a profound secret; he wanted a woman to ride it, so that his triumph might be the more complete; and the moment he saw me pedal up the hill, in trying to avoid him, he recognised at once that I was that woman.

I recognised it too. 'Twas a pre-ordained harmony. After two or three trials I felt that the Manitou was built for me, and I was built for the Manitou. We ran together like parts of one mechanism. I was always famed for my circular ankle-action; and in this new machine, ankle-action was everything. Strength of limb counted for naught; what told was the power of 'clawing up again' promptly. I possess that power: I have prehistoric feet: my remote progenitors must certainly have been tree-haunting monkeys.

We arranged terms then and there.

'You accept?'

'Implicitly.'

If I pulled off the race, I was to have fifty pounds. If I didn't, I was to have five. 'It ain't only your skill, you see,' Mr. Hitchcock said, with frank commercialism. 'It's your personal attractiveness as well that I go upon. That's an element to consider in business relations.'

'My face is my fortune,' I answered, gravely. He nodded acquiescence.

Till Saturday, then, I was free. Meanwhile, I trained, and practised quietly with the Manitou, in sequestered parts of the hills. I also took spells, turn about, at the Städel Institute. I like to intersperse culture and athletics. I know something about athletics, and hope in time to acquire a taste for culture. 'Tis expected of a Girton girl, though my own accomplishments run rather towards rowing, punting, bicycling.

On Saturday, I confess, I rose with great misgivings. I was not a professional; and to find oneself practically backed for a thousand pounds in a race against men is a trifle disquieting. Still, having once put my hand to the plough, I felt I was bound to pull it through somehow. I dressed my hair

neatly, in a very tight coil. I ate a light breakfast, eschewing the fried sausages which the Blighted Fraus pressed upon my notice, and satisfying myself with a gently-boiled egg and some toast and coffee. I always found I rowed best at Cambridge on the lightest diet; in my opinion, the raw beef *régime* is a serious error in training.

At a minute or two before eleven I turned up at the Schiller Platz in my short serge dress and cycling jacket. The great square was thronged with spectators to see us start; the police made a lane through their midst for the riders. My backer had advised me to come to the post as late as possible, 'For I have entered your name,' he said, 'simply as Lois Cayley. These Deutschers don't think but what you're a man and a brother. But I am apprehensive of con-tingencies. When you put in a show they'll try to raise objections to you on account of your being a female. There won't be much time, though, and I shall rush the objections. Once they let you run and win, it don't matter to me whether I get the twenty thousand marks or not. It's the advertizement that tells. Jest you mark my words, miss, and don't you make no mistake about it – the world to-day is governed by advertizement.'

So I turned up at the last moment, and cast a timid glance at my competitors. They were all men, of course, and two of them were German officers in a sort of undress cycling uniform. They eyed me superciliously. One of them went up and spoke to the Herr Over-Superintendent who had charge of the contest. I understood him to be lodging an objection against a mere woman taking part in the race. The Herr Over-Superintendent, a bulky official, came up beside me and perpended visibly. He bent his big brows to it. 'Twas appalling to observe the measurable amount of Teutonic cerebation going on under cover of his round, green glasses. He was perpending for some minutes. Time was almost up. Then he turned to Mr. Hitchcock, having finally made up his colossal mind, and murmured rudely, 'The woman cannot compete.'

'Why not?' I inquired, in my very sweetest German, with an angelic smile, though my heart trembled.

'Warum nicht? Because the word "rider" in the Kaiserly and Kingly for-this-contest-provided decree is distinctly in the masculine gender stated.'

'Pardon me, Herr Over-Superintendent,' I replied, pulling out a copy of Law 97 on the subject, with which I had duly provided myself, 'if you will to Section 45 of the Bicycles-Circulation-Regulation-Act your attention turn, you will find it therein expressly enacted that unless any clause be anywhere to the contrary inserted, the word "rider," in the masculine gender put, shall here the word "rideress" in the feminine to embrace be considered.'

For, anticipating this objection, I had taken the precaution to look the legal question up beforehand.

'That is true,' the Herr Over-Superintendent observed, in a musing voice, gazing down at me with relenting eyes. 'The masculine habitually embraces the feminine.' And he brought his massive intellect to bear upon the problem once more with prodigious concentration.

I seized my opportunity. 'Let me start, at least,' I urged, holding out the Act. 'If I win, you can the matter more fully with the Kaiserly and Kingly Governments hereafter argue out.'

'I guess this will be an international affair,' Mr. Hitchcock remarked, well pleased. 'It would be a first-rate advertizement for the Great Manitou of England and Germany were to make the question into a *casus belli*. The United States could look on, and pocket the chestnuts.'

'Two minutes to go,' the official starter with the watch called out.

'Fall in, then, Fräulein Engländerin,' the Herr Over-Superintendent observed, without prejudice, waving me into line. He pinned a badge with a large number, 7, on my dress. 'The Kaiserly and Kingly Governments shall on the affair of the starting's legality hereafter on my report more at leisure pass judgment.'

The lieutenant in undress uniform drew back a little.

'Oh, if this is to be woman's play,' he muttered, 'then can a Prussian officer himself by competing not into contempt bring.'

I dropped a little curtsy. 'If the Herr Lieutenant is afraid even to *enter* against an Englishwoman – ' I said, smiling.

He came up to the scratch sullenly. 'One minute to go!' called out the starter.

We were all on the alert. There was a pause; a deep breath. I was horribly frightened, but I tried to look calm. Then sharp and quick came the one word 'Go!' And like arrows from a bow, off we all started.

I had ridden over the whole course the day but one before, on a mountain pony, with an observant eye and my sedulous American – rising at five o'clock, so as not to excite undue attention; and I therefore knew beforehand the exact route we were to follow; but I confess when I saw the Prussian lieutenant and one of my other competitors dash forward at a pace that simply astonished me, that fifty pounds seemed to melt away in the dim abyss of the Ewigkeit. I gave up all for lost. I could never make the running against such practised cyclists.

However, we all turned out into the open road which leads across the plain and down the Main valley, in the direction of Mayence. For the first ten miles or so, it is a dusty level. The surface is perfect; but 'twas a blinding white thread. As I toiled along it, that broiling June day, I could hear the voice of my backer, who followed on horseback, exhorting me in loud tones, 'Don't scorch, miss; don't scorch; never mind ef you lose sight of 'em. Keep your wind; that's the point. The wind, the wind's everything. Let 'em beat you on the level; you'll catch 'em up fast enough when you get on the Taunus!'

But in spite of his encouragement, I almost lost heart as I saw one after another of my opponents' backs disappear in the distance, till at last I was left toiling along the bare white road alone, in a shower-bath of sunlight, with just a dense cloud of dust rising gray far ahead of me. My head swam. It repented me of my boldness.

Then the riders on horseback began to grumble; for by police regulation they were not allowed to pass the hindmost of the cyclists; and they were kept back by my presence from following up their special champions. 'Give it up, Fräulein, give it up!' they cried. 'You're beaten. Let us pass and get forward.' But at the self-same moment, I heard the shrill voice of my American friend whooping aloud across the din, 'Don't you do nothing of the sort, miss! You stick to it, and keep your wind! It's the wind that wins! Them Germans won't be worth a cent on the high slopes, anyway!'

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