

Benson Edward Frederic

The Rubicon



Edward Benson

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

The little red-roofed town of Hayes lies in a furrow of the broad-backed Wiltshire Downs; it was once an important posting station, and you may still see there an eighteenth century inn, much too large for the present requirements of the place, and telling of the days when, three times a week, the coach from London used to pull up at its hospitable door, and wait there half-an-hour while its passengers dined. The inn is called the Grampound Arms, and you will find that inside the church many marble Grampounds recline on their tombs, or raise hands of prayer, while outside in the churchyard, weeping cherubs, with reversed torches, record other pious and later memories of the same family.

But almost opposite the Grampound Arms you will notice a much newer inn, where commercial gentlemen make merry, called the Aston Arms, and on reference to monumental evidence, you would also find that cherubs are shedding similar pious tears for a Sir James Aston, Bart., and his wife, and, thirty years later, for James Aston, first Lord Hayes, and his wife. But for the Astons, no marble knights keep watch on Gothic tombs.

The river Kennet, in its green wanderings, has already passed, before it reaches Hayes, two houses, one close down by the river, the other rather higher up and on the opposite bank. The smaller and older of the two is the residence of Mr. Grampound, the larger and newer of Lord Hayes. These trifling facts, which almost all the inhabitants of Hayes could tell you, will sufficiently indicate the mutual position of the two families in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Grampound House was a pretty, ivy-grown old place, with a lawn stretching southwards almost to the bank of the river, and shaded by a great cedar tree, redolent of ancestors and as monumental in its way as the marble, sleeping figures in the church. It was useful, however, as well as being ancestral, and at this moment Mrs. Grampound and her brother were having tea under it.

It was a still, hot day at the beginning of August, and through the broad, fan-like branches, stray sunbeams danced and twinkled, making little cores of light on the silver. Down one side of the lawn ran a terrace of grey stone, bordered by a broad gravel walk, and over the terrace pale monthly roses climbed and blossomed. Most of the windows in the house were darkened and eclipsed by Venetian blinds, to keep out the sun which still lingered on the face of it; and Mr. Martin, also – Mrs. Grampound's brother – was in a state of eclipse for the time being, for he wore a broad-brimmed Panama hat, which concealed the upper part of his face, while a large harlequin tea-cup prevented any detailed examination of his mouth. Mrs. Grampound sat opposite him in a low, basket chair, and appeared to be thinking. It is a privilege peculiar to owners of very fine, dark grey eyes, to appear to be thinking whenever they are not talking.

Mr. Martin finished his tea, and lit a cigarette.

"They've begun cutting the corn," he said; "it's very early."

Mrs. Grampound did not answer, and her brother, considering that he had made his sacrifice on the altar of conversation, relapsed into silence again.

Perhaps the obvious inference that the summer had been hot reminded her that the day was also hot, for in a minute or two she said, —

"Dear Eva! what a stifling journey she will have. She comes back to-night; she ought to be here by now."

"Where has she been staying?"

"At the Brabizons. Lord Hayes was there. He comes home at the end of the week; his mother arrived yesterday."

"The old witch," murmured Mr. Martin.

"Yes, but very old," said she, whose mind was apparently performing obligato variations on the theme of the conversation. "Haven't you noticed –"

She broke off, and presumably continued the obligato variations.

Mr. Martin showed no indications of having noticed anything at all, and the faint sounds of the summer evening pursued their whisperings unchecked until the distant rumble of carriage wheels began to overscore the dim noises, and came to a long pause, after a big crescendo, before the front door.

"That will be Eva," said her mother, filling up the teapot; "they will tell her we are here."

A few minutes afterwards, the drawing-room window was opened from inside, and a girl began to descend the little flying staircase.

Apparently she was in no hurry, for she stooped to stroke a kitten that was investigating the nature of blind cord with an almost fanatical enthusiasm. The kitten was quite as eager to investigate the nature of the human hand, and flew at Eva's outstretched fingers, all teeth and claws.

"You little brute!" she remarked, shaking it off. "Your claws want cutting. Oh! you are rather nice. Come, Kitty."

But the kitten was indignant, and bounced down the stairs in front of her, sat down on the path at the bottom, and pretended to be unaware of her existence. Eva stopped to pluck a rose from a standard tree, and fastened it in her dress. Her foot was noiseless on the soft grass, and neither her uncle or mother heard her approaching.

"The brute scratched me," she repeated as she neared them; "its claws want cutting."

Mrs. Grampound was a little startled, and got up quickly.

"Oh, Eva, I didn't hear you coming. I was just saying it was time you were here. How are you, and have you had a nice time?"

"Yes, quite nice; but the Brabizons are rather stupid people. Still, I enjoyed myself. I didn't see you, Uncle Tom; anyhow, I can't kiss you with that hat on."

She touched the top of his Panama hat lightly with the tips of her fingers, and sat down in her mother's chair, who was pouring her out a cup of tea.

"We had a tiresome journey," she went on. "Why will people live in Lancashire? Is this your chair, mother?"

Mr. Martin got up.

"I'm going in," he said; "you can have mine. At least, I'm going for a ride. Is the tea good, Eva? – it has been made for some time – or shall I tell them to send you out some more?"

"It seems to me very bad," said Eva, sipping it. "Yes, I should like some more. Are you going for a ride? Perhaps I'll come."

"Yes, it's cooler now," said he. "Do come with me."

"Will you order my horse, then, if you are going in? Perhaps you'd better tell them to have it ready only, and not to bring it round. I won't come just yet, anyhow. If I'm not ready, start without me, and I daresay I'll follow you, if you tell me where you are going."

"I want to ride up to the Whitestones' – to see him."

"Very well, I daresay I shall follow you."

Mr. Martin stood looking rather like a servant receiving orders. Eva always managed to make other people assume subordinate positions.

"How long do you think you will be?" he asked.

"Perhaps half-an-hour. But don't wait for me."

Eva threw off her hat impatiently.

"I have been horribly hot and dusty all day," she said, "and there was nearly an accident; at least, there was a bit of an accident. We were standing in a siding for the express to pass, and we weren't far enough back or far enough forward or something, and it crashed through a bit of the last carriage. That is what made me so late. It is very stupid that people, whose only business is to see about trains, can't avoid that sort of thing."

"My darling Eva," said her mother, "were you in the train?"

"Yes; in the next carriage – I and Lord Hayes. He was dreadfully nervous all the rest of the way. That is so silly. It is inconceivable that two accidents should happen on the same day to the same train."

"I thought he wasn't coming back till the end of the week."

"Yes, but he changed his mind and came with me," said Eva. "The Brabizons were furious. I sha'n't go there again. Really, people are very vulgar. I owe him three-and-sixpence for lunch. He said he would call for it, if he might – he always asks leave – to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Grampound did not reply, but the obligato variations went on jubilantly. Eva was lying back in her chair, looking more bored than ever with this stupid world. Her mother's eyes surveyed the slender figure with much satisfaction. It really was a great thing to have such a daughter. And Lord Hayes had changed the day of his departure obviously in order to travel with Eva, and he was coming to call to-morrow morning in order to ask for three-and six!

Eva, quite unconscious of this commercial scrutiny, was swinging her hat to and fro, looking dreamily out over the green distances.

"On the whole, I sha'n't go for a ride," she said at length. "I think I'll sit here with you, if you've got nothing to do; I rather want to talk to you."

"Certainly, dear," said her mother; "but hadn't you better send word to the stables? Then they needn't get Starlight ready. I must go into the house to get my work, but I sha'n't be a moment. I wonder what you want to talk to me about."

"No," said Eva, "don't get your work. You can't talk when you are working. Besides, I daresay I shall go later. Leave it as it is."

"Dear Eva," said Mrs. Grampound, "I am so anxious to hear what you have to say. Shall I be pleased?"

"I don't know," said Eva, slowly. "Well, the fact is that Lord Hayes – well – will have something to say to me when he comes for the three-and-six. He would have said it at the Brabizons, only I didn't allow him, and he would have said it in the train, only I said I couldn't bear people who talked in the train. I may be wrong, but I don't think I am. I like him, you know, very much; he is not so foolish as most people. But I do not feel sure about it."

"My darling Eva," began her mother with solemn gladness.

"It's all rather sudden," Eva interrupted. "I want to wait a little first. Do you know, I think I shall be out to-morrow when he comes, or I might send him the three-and-six by post. He is not stupid; he would easily understand what I meant."

To say that this was the cherished dream of her mother's heart would almost be understating the fact, and now the cherished dream was perhaps going to be transformed into a most cherishable reality. Mrs. Grampound, if not knowing exactly how to deal with Eva, at least was conscious of her ignorance and was cautious.

"Yes, darling, it's very sudden," she said. "Don't do anything in a hurry – of course I know how heavy the responsibilities will seem to you, as they must to every young girl who goes out from the what's-its-name of home life, and all that sort of thing, to those very much wider spheres, but you will do your best, dear, I know. Eva, darling, I must kiss you."

Mrs. Grampound surged out of her chair, and bent over Eva to kiss her. Eva received the kiss with absolute passivity, but sorry, perhaps, a moment afterwards, for her want of responsiveness, bent forward and kissed her again.

"It wasn't exactly the responsibilities I was thinking of," she said; "it was" – she got up from her chair quickly, and stood quite still, looking down over the lawn to the reddening sunset – "it was that I am not quite sure about myself."

Mrs. Grampound seized hold of anything tangible which Eva's speech conveyed, and sympathised with it.

"Yes, darling, I know," she said. "Just wait a little, and think about it. I think your plan about not seeing him to-morrow is very wise. He will, probably, in any case, write to your father first. It is very faint praise to say that he is not so foolish as most people. A most brilliant and well-informed man! He was telling me, the other day, about a flower he has in his conservatory which ate flies or something of the sort, which seems to me most extraordinary. Such an admirable landlord, too. He has just built some new labourers' cottages in Hayes, and I declare I want to go and live in them myself. I feel sure he will write to your father, and, no doubt, he will talk to you about it."

"You would like it, then, would you?" said Eva. "Tell me exactly what you think?"

Mrs. Grampound had a very decided opinion about it, and she expressed herself fully.

"Darling, that is so sweet of you. Ah, how can I have but one opinion! It is a girl's duty to marry as well as she can. This is a brilliant match. I know so many mothers – good, conscientious mothers – who think only of their children's happiness, who would give anything to have Lord Hayes as their son-in-law. A mother's happiness lies in the happiness of her children. They are bone of her bone, and all that sort of thing. How can they but wish for and pray for their happiness! You see, Eva, you are quite poor; your father will leave you next to nothing. Riches are a great blessing, because they enable you to do so much good. Of course they are not everything, and if you wanted to marry that dreadful Lord Symonds, whom they tell such horrible stories about, I would fall down on my knees and beseech you not to mind about poverty, or anything else. Or if I thought you would not be happy, for it is your duty to be happy. But this is exceptional in every way. You get position, wealth, title and a good husband. No one can deny that the aristocracy is the best class to marry into; indeed, for you it is the only class, and you bring him nothing but the love he bears you, of course, and your beauty."

"Yes; he pays a long price for my beauty," said Eva, meditatively.

"My dear Eva, we are all given certain natural advantages – or, if they are withheld, you may be sure that is only a blessing in disguise – talents, beauty, and so on – and it is our clear duty to make the most of them. Beauty has been given you in a quite unusual degree, and it is your duty to let it find its proper use. Don't you remember the parable of the ten talents? We had it in church only last Sunday, and I remember at the time that I was thinking of you and Lord Hayes, which was quite a remarkable coincidence. And then the good you can do as Lady Hayes is infinitely greater than the good you can do as the wife of a poor man. You have to look at the practical side of things, too. Ah, dear me, if life was only love, how simple and delightful it would all be! This is a work-a-day world, and we are not sent here just to enjoy ourselves."

Eva did not seem to be listening very closely.

"Tell me about your own engagement," she said at length. "I don't know what exactly one is supposed to feel. I have many reasons for wanting to marry Lord Hayes. I like and respect him very much. I believe he is a very good man; he is always agreeable and considerate."

"That is the best and surest basis for love to rest on," broke in her mother, who was charmed to find Eva so sensible. "That is just what I have always said. Love must spring out of these things, darling, just as the leaves and foliage of a tree spring out of the solid wood. So many girls have such foolish sentimental notions, just as if they had just come away from a morning performance at the Adelphi. That is not love; it is just silly, schoolgirl sentimentality, which silly schoolgirls feel for tenor singers, and a silky moustache, and slim, weak-eyed young men. Real love is the flower of respect and

admiration, and solid esteem. *Aimer c'est tout comprendre*; and to do that you must have no illusions – you must keep the lights dry – you must regard a man as he is, not as you think he is."

"Yes, I see," said Eva, slowly; "I daresay you are right. I certainly never felt any schoolgirl sentimentality for anyone. I think I shall go for a ride, mother; it is nice to get a breath of fresh air after a long journey."

Mrs. Grampound rose too, and drew her arm through Eva's.

"Yes, darling, it will do you good," she said. "And you can think about all this quietly. Your father is out still; he went down to the river just before you came, to see if he could get a trout or two. And Percy comes this evening. I will ring the bell in the drawing-room for your horse to come round, if you will go and get your habit on. Give me one more kiss, dear; it is so nice to have you home again."

Eva put her horse into a steady canter over the springy turf, and soon caught her uncle up, who was ambling quietly along on a grey pony. He was staying with his brother-in-law for a week or two, before going back to America, being a citizen of the United States. He rode for two reasons – indeed, he never did anything without a reason – both of which were excellent. Riding was a means of progressing from one place to another, and it was a sort of watch-key which wound up the mechanism of the body. He was rather hypochondriacal, and his doctor advised exercise, so he obeyed his doctor and rode. He did much more good than harm in this wicked world, but comparatively little of either.

His sister had married Mr. Grampound early in life. She had a considerable fortune left her by her father, by aid of which, as with a golden spade, she hope to bury her American extraction. This she had succeeded in doing, with very decent success, but her golden spade had, so to speak, been broken in the act of interment, for her husband had speculated rather wildly with her money, and had lost it. Mrs. Grampound cared very little for this; her golden spade had done its work. She had married into the English aristocracy, for the Grampounds, though their accounts at banks did not at all correspond to the magnificence of their origin, and though the family estates had been sold to the last possible acre, held, in the estimation of the world, that position which, though it takes only a generation or two of great wealth to raise, requires an infinite number of generations of poverty to demolish.

Eva found the society of her uncle very soothing on this particular afternoon. He very seldom disagreed with anybody, chiefly because he hated argument as a method of conversation, but his assent was not of that distressing order which is more irritating than a divergent view, for he always took the trouble to let it appear that he had devoted considerable thought to the question at issue, and had arrived at the same conclusions as his interlocutor.

It was nearly eight when they reached home, and the dusk was thickening into night. Mr. Grampound had just got in, when they dismounted at the door, and he greeted Eva in his usual dignified and slightly interested manner. The extreme finish of his face suggested that the number of Grampounds who had been turned out of the same mediæval mould, was very considerable.

Eva's father held the door open for her to pass into the inner hall, and Eva, going to the table to take a bedroom candle, noticed that there was a note lying there for him. She turned it over quickly, and saw a coronet and "Aston House" on the back. She handed it to her father, who took it and said, —

"From Lord Hayes. I thought he had not come home yet."

Eva was standing on the lowest step of the flight of stairs.

"Yes; he came home with me to-day," she said.

"Was he with you at the Brabizons?"

"Yes; we travelled together."

Eva went up to her room, not wishing to see the note opened in her presence. What it would contain she knew, or, at least, guessed. Five minutes later, Mr. Grampound also came upstairs and tapped at the door of his wife's room. She had not begun to dress, and he came in with the note in his hand. His cold, clean-shaven face showed a good deal of gentlemanly and quiet satisfaction.

"Of course there is only one answer," he said when she had finished reading it. "It is a splendid match for her."

"Eva spoke to me about it this afternoon," said his wife.

"Well?"

"She does not want to be hurried. She wants to have time to decide."

"There is no time like the present," observed Mr. Grampound.

"I hope you won't press her, Charles. You will get nothing by that. She wants to marry, I know; and I said a great many very sensible things to her this afternoon. She wants more than a quiet home-life can give her, and she likes Hayes."

"I must send some answer to him; and I certainly shall not tell him to keep away."

"Give her time. Say he may come in a week. There is no harm in waiting a little. Eva will not be forced into anything against her will."

"I shall speak to her to-night."

"Yes, do; but be careful. I must send you away now; it is time to dress. Percy has come."

Eva, meanwhile, was thinking over the talk she had had with her mother. Mrs. Grampound's affectionate consideration for her daughter's feelings, Eva knew quite well, might only be the velvet glove to an iron hand. But she was distinctly conscious that there was a great deal in what her mother had said. She had decided for herself that she was not going to fall in love with anyone; men seemed to her to be very little loveable. At the same time, she knew that, in her heart of hearts, she longed for the possibilities which a great marriage would give her. Perhaps then the world would open out; perhaps it was interesting after all. Her home-life bored her considerably. They were in the country nine months out of the twelve, living in a somewhat sparsely-populated district, and Eva was totally unable to make for herself active or engrossing occupation in the direction of district-visiting or Sunday schools, or those hundred and one ways in which "nice girls" are supposed to employ themselves. Her vitality was of that still, strong sort which can only be reached through the emotions, and is too indolent or too uninitiative to stir the emotions into creating interests for themselves. The vague imperative *need* of doing something never wound its horn to her. She could not throw herself into the first pursuit that offered, simply because she had to be doing something, and her emotional record was a blank. The pencil and paper were there, for she was two-and-twenty, but she had nothing to write. She was quite unable to transform her diversions into aims, a faculty which accounts completely for the busy lives some women lead.

Dinner was not till half-past eight, and, when Eva came down, the drawing-room was untenanted. The shaded lamp left the room in comparative dimness, but through the windows, which were open to let in the cool, evening air, the last glow of the sunset cast a red light on to the opposite wall. She stood at the window a moment and looked at the river, which lay like a string of crimson pools stretching west; and then, turning away impatiently, walked up and down the room, wondering where everyone was. That peaceful, sleeping landscape outside seemed to her an emblem of the quiet, deadly days that were to come. The slow to-morrow and to-morrow seemed suddenly impossible. The door was open to her – the door leading on all that the world had to offer. Perhaps it was all as uninteresting as this, but it would be something, at any rate, to know that – to be quite certain that life was dull to the core. Then she thought she could rest quiet, and, perhaps, would not mind so much. What vexed and irritated her, was to suspect that the world was interesting and not to find it so, and she was disposed to lay the blame of that on her own particular station in life. Yet – yet – she could hardly say she had an ideal, but there was that shrouded image called love, of which she only saw the dim outline. It would be a pity to smash it up before the coverings came off. It might be worth having, after all.

Her eye caught sight of a book on the table with a white vellum cover. Eva took it up. It was called *The Crown of Womanhood*, and something like a frown gathered on her face.

It was almost a relief when her mother entered rustling elaborately across the room, and snapping a bracelet on to her comely wrist.

"Ah! Eva, you are before me. Percy has come. I didn't expect him till to-morrow."

"I'm glad," said Eva listlessly.

"Such a lovely evening," continued Mrs. Grampound with a strong determination to be particularly neutral, and entirely unconscious of her talk with Eva before dinner. "Look at those exquisite tints, dear. The blue so tender as to be green," she quoted with a fine disregard of accuracy.

"Yes, it's beautiful," said Eva, not turning her head. "Ah! Percy, it's good to see you."

Eva got up and walked across to meet the newcomer. Percy was a favourite of hers, from the time he had teased her about her dolls onward.

"How long are you going to stop?" she continued. "Percy, stop here a long time; I want you."

"I can't," he said. "I'm going off to Scotland on the 12th, to the Davenports. I promised Reggie."

"Who's Reggie?"

"Reggie? Reggie Davenport. He's a friend of mine. I'm very fond of him. Haven't you ever seen him. He falls in love about once a fortnight. He's very amusing."

"He must be rather a fool," said Eva.

"Oh, but he's a nice fool. Really, he is very nice. He's so dreadfully young."

"Well, you're not very old, my lord," said Eva.

"But Reggie is much the youngest person I ever saw. He'll never grow old."

"Ah! well," said Eva. "I expect he's very happy."

The gong had sounded some minutes, when Mr. Martin shuffled in. He wore a somewhat irregular white tie and grey socks, and was followed almost immediately by Mr. Grampound.

Eva had already written a little note to Lord Hayes, and told her maid to enclose a three-and-six-penny postal order. She had also expressed a vague hope, so as not to block her avenues, that they would meet again soon. Her chief desire was to obtain a respite; the whole thing had been too sudden and she wished to think it over. Meantime, it was nice to see Percy again.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" she asked. "I notice that whenever young men go away in novels, they always fall in love before they get back, or get married, or make their fortunes or lose them. How many of these things have you done?"

"None of them," said Percy; "though I've been to Monte Carlo, I did not play there. It doesn't seem to me at all amusing."

"I suppose you haven't got the gambling instinct," said Eva; "that's a great defect. You know none of the joy of telling your cabman that you will give him a shilling extra if he catches a train. It's equivalent to saying, 'I bet you a shilling you don't;' only he doesn't pay if he loses, and you do. But that's immaterial. The joy lies in the struggle with time and space."

"Do you mean that you like to keep things in uncertainty as long as possible?" asked her father, looking at her.

Their eyes met, and they understood each other. Eva looked at him a moment, and then dropped her eyes.

"Yes; I'm sure I do."

"Even when you have all the data ready, do you like not deciding?"

"Oh! one never knows if one has all the data; something fresh may always turn up. For instance —"

"Well?"

"I was thinking just before dinner that I didn't know what in the world I should do with myself all the autumn, and now you see Percy's arrived. I shall play about with him."

"I go away in two days," said Percy.

"Oh! well, I daresay something else will turn up. I am like Mr. Micawber."

"No, not all," said Mr. Grampound; "he was always doing his best to make things turn up."

Mrs. Grampound remarked that things were always turning up when you expected them least, and Percy hoped that his gun would turn up, because no one could remember where it was.

The evening was so warm that Eva and her mother sat outside on the terrace after dinner, waiting for the others to join them. Mr. Grampond never sat long over his wine, and in a few minutes the gentlemen followed them. Eva was rather restless, and strolled a little way down the gravel path, and, on turning, found that her father had left the others and was walking toward her.

"Come as far as the bottom of the lawn, Eva," he said; "I should like a little talk with you."

They went on in silence for some steps, and then her father said, —

"I heard from Lord Hayes to-day. Your mother told me that you could guess what it was about."

She picked up a tennis-ball that was lying on the edge of the grass.

"How wet it is!" she said. "Yes, I suppose I know what he wrote about."

"Your mother and I, naturally, have your happiness very much at heart," said he, "and we both agree that this is a very sure and clear chance of happiness for you. It is a great match, Eva."

Eva as a child had always rather feared her father and at this moment she found her childish fear rising again in her mind. Tall, silent, rather scornful-looking men may not always command affection, but they usually inspire respect. Her old fear for her father had grown into very strong respect, but she felt now that the converse transformation was very possible.

"You would wish me to marry him?" she asked.

"I wish you to consider it very carefully. I have seen a good deal of the world, so I also wish you to consider what I say to you about it. I have thought about it, and I have arrived at the very definite conclusion I have told you. I shall write to him to-night, and, with your consent, will tell him that he may come and ask you in person in a few days' time. You know my wishes on the subject, and your mother's. Meanwhile, dear Eva, I must congratulate you on the very good fortune which has come in your way."

He bent from his great height and kissed her.

"I don't wish to force you in any way," he said, "and I don't wish you to say anything to me to-night about it. Think it over by yourself. I needn't speak of his position and wealth, because, though, of course, they are advantages, you will rate them at their proper value. But I may tell you that I am a very poor man, and that I know what these things mean."

"I should not marry him for those reasons," said Eva.

"There is no need for you to tell me that," said he. "But it is right to tell you that I can leave you nothing. In the same way I hope that any foolish notions you may have got about love, from the trash you may have read in novels, will not stand in your way either. I will leave the matter in the hands of your own good sense."

His words had an unreasonable mastery over Eva, for her father never spoke idly. He was quite aware of the value of speech, but knew that it is enhanced by its rarity. "No one pays any attention to a jabbering fool," he had said once to his wife, *à propos* of a somewhat voluble woman who had been staying in the house, and of whose abilities he and his wife entertained very contrary opinions. Eva had seldom heard him express his philosophy of life at such length, and she fully appreciated the weight it was intended to convey.

CHAPTER II

Lord Hayes found Eva's note waiting for him when he came down to breakfast next morning, but its contents did not take away his appetite at all. He was quite as willing that she should think it over as her father or mother, and he had no desire to force her to refuse. He was fairly certain that at his time of life, for he was over forty, he was not going to fall in love in the ordinary sense of the word; that sense, in fact, which Eva had herself confessed she never felt likely to experience. He had had a succession of eligible helpmeets hurled at his head by ambitious mothers for many years, and in sufficient numbers to enable him to draw the conclusion that the majority of eligible helpmeets were very much like one another.

They had ready for him smiles of welcome, slightly diverting small-talk, pretty faces, and any number of disengaged waltzes; and after having basked in their welcoming smiles, submitted to their small-talk, looked at their pretty faces, and hopped decorously round in their disengaged waltzes, he always finished by stifling a yawn and making his exit. It would convey an entirely wrong impression to describe him as either a misanthrope or a cynic; the charms of marriageable maidenhood simply did not appeal to him. But though he was neither misanthrope nor cynic, a little vein of malevolence ran through his system, and he had more than half made up his mind that he would have none of these. He was quite rich enough to afford a wife who would bring him nothing but unpaid bills; and provided that wife brought him something which he had not yet found, he was willing to pay them all.

That he was going to marry some time had long been a commonplace to him, but the sight of his forty-fifth milestone had lent it a loud insistence which was becoming quite distracting. The thought had begun to haunt him; he saw it in the withered flowers of his orchid house, it stuck in the corners of his coat pockets, his garden syringe gurgled it at him with its expiring efforts to emit the last drop of water; even the toad which he kept in his greenhouse had the knowledge of it lurking in its sickly eye.

He was very seldom at Aston; but in one of his visits there, he had met Eva and had been considerably struck by her. She was introduced to him, and bowed without smiling. He had asked her whether she played lawn-tennis, and she said, without simpering, that she did. He asked her whether she enjoyed the season, and she replied, without affectation, that she had got so tired of it by the middle of June that she had gone down into the country. He remarked that London was the loser, and she reminded him that, therefore, by exactly the same amount, the country was the gainer. Her eyes wandered vaguely over the green distance, and once met his, without shrinking from or replying to his gaze. She was astonishingly beautiful, and appeared quite unconscious of her charms. She looked so radically indifferent to all that was going on round her, that he had said, "These country parties are rather a bore!" and she replied candidly that she quite agreed with him. In a word, he felt that he might go farther and fare worse, and that he was forty-five years old.

During the next few months, he had come across her not infrequently, both in the country and in London, and at the end of the season they had both met at the Brabizons, where two Miss Brabizons were alternately launched at his hand and heart —*via* brilliant execution on the piano and district-visiting – by their devoted mother, and Eva's calm neutrality was rendered particularly conspicuous by the contrast. His attentions to her grew more and more marked, and Mrs. Brabizon metaphorically threw up the sponge when he changed the day of his departure without ceremony, in order to travel with Eva, and declared that she couldn't conceive what he found in that girl.

His mother always breakfasted alone, and spent the morning by herself, usually out of doors. Lord Hayes was vaguely grateful for this arrangement. Mr. Martin, as we know, had described her as an old witch, and even to her own son she seemed rather a terrific person. She was tall, very well preserved, and a rigid Puritan. Her hobby – for the most unbending of our race have their hobby – was Jaeger clothing. She wore large grey boots with eight holes in them, a drab-coloured dress, and a

head-gear that reminded the observer of a volunteer forage cap. This hobby she varied by a spasmodic interest in homœopathy, and she used to walk about the lanes like a mature Medea, gathering simples from the hedges, which she used to administer with appalling firmness to the village people; but, to do her justice, she always experimented with them first *in propriâ personâ*, and declared she felt a great deal better afterwards. For the practice of medicine-taking generally, she claimed that it fortified the constitution, and it must be confessed that her own constitution, at the age of sixty-five, appeared simply impregnable.

But in the morning her son was conscious of an agreeable relaxation. He was a neat, timid man, with a careful little manner, and he inherited from his mother a certain shrewdness that led him to grasp the practical issues of things with rapidity. For instance, on this present occasion, when he had finished his breakfast, he again read over Eva's letter, put it carefully away, and was quite content to wait.

Outside one of the dining-room windows opened a glass-covered passage leading into an orchid house, and he went down this passage with the heels of his patent leather shoes tapping on the tiles, and a large pair of scissors in his hand. Every morning he attended personally to the requirements of this orchid house; he snipped off dead sprays, he industriously blew tobacco smoke on small parasitic animals, and squirted them with soapy water, and this morning, being in a particularly good humour, he went so far as to tickle, with a wisp of hay, the back of the useful toad. That animal received his attentions with silent affability; it closed its eyes, and opened and shut its mouth like an old gentleman awaking from his after-dinner nap.

It was a warm morning, and when he had finished attending to the orchids he strolled round outside the house, back to the front door. The house stood high above the river, and commanded a good view of the green valley; and, in the distance, two miles away, the red-roofed village slanted upwards from the stream towards the downs. He stood looking out over the broad, pleasant fields for some moments, and his eyes wandered across the river to where the red front of Mr. Grampound's house, half hidden by the large cedar, stood, as if looking up to his. The flower-beds gleamed like jewels in the sunshine, and he could see two figures strolling quietly down the gravel path toward the river. One of them was a girl, tall, almost as tall as the man who walked by her side, and to whom she was apparently talking. Just as Lord Hayes looked, they stopped suddenly, and he saw her spread out her hands, which had been clasped in front of her, with a quick dramatic movement. The action struck him as slightly symbolical.

He was roused by the sound of crunched gravel, and, turning round, saw his mother walking towards him. She was in her hygienic dress, and had a small, tin botanical case slung over her shoulders. In her hand she held a pair of eminently useful scissors, the sort of scissors with which Atropos might sever the thread of life. Lord Hayes wore a slightly exotic look by her side.

"The under housemaid has fallen into a refreshing sleep," she announced, "and the action of the skin has set in. In fact, she will do very well now. And how are you, dear James, this morning?"

"I am very well," said he; "very well indeed, thank you, mother."

His mother looked at him with interest.

"You've got a touch of liver," she remarked truculently.

"No, I think not. I feel very well, thanks."

Lady Hayes snapped her scissors.

"I'm afraid the harvest will be very bad this year," she said. "There's been no rain, and no rain means no straw."

"Yes, the farmers are in a bad way," said Lord Hayes. "I shall have to make a reduction again."

"Well, dear," said his mother, "all I can say is that we shall probably be beggars. But porridge is wonderfully sustaining."

"We've still got a few acres in London," he remarked. "Really, in these depressed times, I don't know how a man could live without an acre or two there."

Old Lady Hayes laughed a hoarse, masculine laugh, and strode off, snapping her scissors again. Half-way across the lawn she stopped.

"The Grampounds are at home, I suppose," she said. "I want to see Mrs. Grampound some time."

"Oh, yes; I travelled with Miss Grampound yesterday. She said they were all at home."

"Ha! She is very handsome. But a modern young woman, I should think."

"She's not very ancient. She was staying with the Brabizons."

His mother frowned and continued her walk.

Lord Hayes always felt rather like a naughty child under his mother's eye. He did not at present feel quite equal to telling her what his relations with Eva were. Modernity was the one failing for which she had no sympathy, for it was a characteristic of which she did not possess the most rudimentary traces. To her it meant loss of dignity, Americanisms, contempt for orthodoxy, and general relaxation of all that is worthy in man. She preferred the vices of her own generation to the virtues of newer developments, and almost regretted the gradual extinction of the old three-bottle school, for they were, in her opinion, replaced by men who smoked while they were talking to women, while the corresponding women had given way to women who smoked themselves. For a man to drink port wine in company with other men was better, as being a more solid and respectable failing, than for him to talk to a woman with a cigarette between his lips.

Eva, as Lord Hayes had guessed from his point of vantage by the front door of his house, had strolled out into the garden after breakfast with Percy. She had not told him of Lord Hayes's offer, but she could not help talking to him with it in her mind. It was like a bracket preceded by a minus sign, which affected all that was within the bracket.

"I wish you weren't going away, Percy," she said. "When I woke up this morning, I thought with horror of all the slow days that were coming. I don't care a bit for doing all those things which 'nice girls' are supposed to do. I have no enthusiasms, and the enthusiasms of the people I see here are unintelligible to me. The sight of a dozen little boys in a Sunday school, with pomatum on their heads, inspires me with slight disgust – so do bedridden old women. I suppose I have no soul. That is quite possible. But, but –"

"Yes, I'm luckier than you," said Percy; "I like little quiet things. I like fishing, and reading the paper, and doing nothing."

"Yes, you're luckier than I am just now," said Eva, "but when I do get interested in things, I shall be in a better position than you. I'm sure there are lots of interests in the world, but I don't realise it."

"Well, I daresay you will discover them sometime," said Percy, consolingly.

"Who can tell? There are lots of women who do not feel any interest in anything – though, perhaps, fewer women than men. But why does London interest you so? It seems to me just as stupid in its way as this place."

"I like the sense of there being loads of people about," said Percy. "A lot of people together are not at all the same as a number of units."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it's just the same as with gunpowder. One grain of powder only spits if you set light to it, but if you were to throw a pound of gunpowder into the fire the result would be quite different from the effect of a thousand spits."

It was at this point that Lord Hayes was watching the two from his front door. Eva stopped suddenly in her walk, and spread out her hands, stretching her arms out.

"That's what I want," she said. "I want to develop and open. I fully believe the world is very interesting, but I am like a blind man being told about a sunset. It conveys nothing to me. And I don't believe that fifty million Sunday schools and mothers' meetings would do it for me. It must touch me somehow else. Religion and philanthropy are not the keys. I long to find out what the keys are."

"It's a pity you don't want to marry," said Percy.

"How do you know I don't want to marry?"

"You've told me so yourself, plenty of times. You said only a few weeks ago that you thought all men most uninteresting."

"Yes, I know. But I'm not so egotistical as not to suspect that the fault is mine. I don't know any men well, except you, and I don't think that you are at all uninteresting. If only I could be certain – " Eva broke off suddenly, but Percy asked her what she wished to be certain about.

"If I could be certain that I was right – right for me, that is – certain that for me life and men and women were quite uninteresting, I don't think I should mind so much. I would cease thinking about it altogether. I might even teach in the Sunday school. If all things are uninteresting, I may as well do that, and cease to expect interest in anything."

"But aren't you conscious of any change in yourself?" asked Percy; "and doesn't the very fact that you are getting more and more conscious that everything is very dull go to prove it?"

"I don't quite understand."

Percy looked vaguely about, mentally speaking, for a parallel, and his eyes, sympathetically following his mind, lighted on an autumn-flowering bulb, which was just beginning to push its juicy, green spike above the ground.

"There," he said, "are you not, perhaps, like what that bulb was three days ago? If it were conscious it would have felt, not that it was growing, but that the earth round it was pressing it more closely. Perhaps you are on the point of sprouting. It couldn't have known it was sprouting."

Eva stood thinking for a moment or two.

"What an excitement it must be, after having seen nothing but brown earth and an occasional worm all your life, suddenly to come out into the open air and see other plants and trees and sky. If I am sprouting, I hope the sky will be blue when I see it first."

"I expect grey sky and rain makes the bulb grow quicker."

"Oh! but I don't care what is good for me," said Eva; "I only care for what is interesting. Otherwise, I should have done all sorts of salutary things, all my life – certainly a great number of unpleasant things; one is always told that unpleasant things are salutary."

"I don't believe that," said Percy; "I think it's one's duty to be happy."

"Oh! but, according to the same idea, the salutary and unpleasant things produce ineffable joy, if you give them time," said Eva.

They walked back to the house in silence, but on the steps Eva stopped.

"Perhaps you're right, Percy," she said; "perhaps I am sprouting, though I don't know it. Certainly I feel more and more confined by all these dull days than I used to. I wonder what the world will look like when I get above ground. I hope you are right, Percy; I want to sprout."

"It is such a comfort to think that no crisis ever fails to keep its appointment," said he. "When one's nature is prepared for the crisis, the crisis comes. Anything will do for a crisis. It is not the incident itself that makes the difference, but the change that has been going on in oneself."

"Yes, that's quite true. It is no use wanting a crisis to come, or thinking that one is ready for it, if one only had a chance. If one really is ready for it, anything is a crisis. People who get converted, as they think, by hearing a hymn sung, think it is the hymn that has done it, and they don't realise that it is what has been going on in themselves first. Anything else would do as well."

For the next few days all Eva's surroundings combined to strengthen her already existing bias. Percy went away; her father was more stern and exacting than usual; her mother, Eva felt, was watching her, as one watches a barometer the day before a picnic, and tapping her to see whether she was inclining to fine weather or stormy. Moreover, the little talk she had had with Percy strengthened her desire to see and judge the world. Perhaps she would always find it uninteresting. If that was so, the sooner she knew it the better; but the probability was strongly against it, and if it was not uninteresting to the core, she was simply wasting time. These August days were more tedious than ever; she read novels, but they bored her; she tried to paint, but got tired of her picture almost before

she had drawn it in; all the neighbours – and there were not many of them – seemed to be away. Lord Hayes's apparently was the only house open, and of him she naturally saw nothing.

It was four days after Percy's departure that Lord Hayes came to call. Eva was sitting on the lawn behind the house when he arrived; she saw him coming out through the open French window in the drawing-room, and down the little iron staircase. She rose to meet him, and told the footman to bring tea out. Her choice, she knew, was imminent, and she had one momentary impulse to stop him, to give herself more time, but the instant afterwards the other picture rose before her – that flat perspective of level days, a country without hill or stream, her own life at home, and, on the other hand, the possibilities of her new sphere – the world and all it contained. Was this man, perhaps, the owner of the key which would unlock it all to her? Among other men she ranked him high, perhaps the highest; he had never pestered her, or stared at her as if she was a picture; he had never bored her; perhaps he understood her need; perhaps he could supply it.

They shook hands, and stood there for a moment silent. Then he said,

"You promised to show me your beautiful garden. I can see it like a jewel among the trees from Aston."

"Yes; the flowers are very bright just now," she said, speaking naturally. "Let us go down the terrace."

At the bottom of the terrace he stopped. The cedar hid them from the house, and they were alone.

"Your father told me I might call here," he said, "and tell you why I have come."

Eva was standing about three feet off him, with her hands clasped behind her. He made a step forward.

"Eva, you know – "

Still she made no sign.

"I have come to ask you whether you care for me at all – whether you will be my wife?"

"I will be your wife," she said, without smiling, but letting her hands drop down by her side.

He took one of her disengaged hands in his, and bent forward to kiss it. She looked at him steadily, as if questioning him – and the long perspective of level days had passed from her life for ever.

CHAPTER III

The account of Eva's wedding, the description of her dress, the dramatic tears which Mrs. Grampound shed as her daughter was led to the altar, the size of the celebrated family diamonds, are not these things written in the *Morning Post*? And as they are recorded there, by pens better fitted than mine to do honour to the glories of the old embroidery on Eva's train, the Valenciennes lace on her dress, the tulle, the pearls, the white velvet and all the unfading splendours of the matrimonial rite, I will merely say that everything was performed on a scale of the utmost magnificence, that two princes were there, and several dukes, one of whom was heard remark out loud in church, "By gad! she's exquisite," that another exalted personage replied, "Lucky fellow, Hayes," that the wife of the exalted personage fixed her lord with a stony stare and said "Sh-sh-sh-sh," and that he, in spite of his strawberry leaves and his pedigree and his frock coat, trembled in his patent leather shoes, and in his confusion was vividly impressed with the idea that his prayer-book consisted entirely of the service for the visitation of those of riper years, to be used at sea on the occasion of the Queen's accession. As these portentous facts are not recorded in the *Morning Post*, I have thought fit to mention them here, with one other little detail that escaped the vigilance of the newspaper reporters. It was merely that the bride smiled when she was asked whether she would love, honour and obey her husband. But she promised to do so in a firm, clear voice; so, of course, it was all right.

And now two months had passed, and the newly-married pair had emerged from those blissful weeks of solitude, which are designed to make them more used to their happiness, to help them to realise that nothing can come between them but death, that they have awoke from what seemed a dream and found that it was true, that a new life has begun for them, and that the gates of Paradise are henceforward going to stand permanently open.

They had been to the Riviera, where Lord Hayes had bought a large, white umbrella, under which he used to smoke innumerable cigarettes and go little strolls along the beach, sometimes with Eva, but oftener alone. Eva quite fulfilled all the requisites he had wished for in a wife; she was dignified, rather silent, more than presentable. It pleased him that crowds should stand and stare at his wife as she walked up and down the fashionable promenades at Monte Carlo, in her still scornful beauty, with her deep, unregarding eyes wearily unconscious of their scrutiny; that the magnates of the earth should stand by her chair, as she lounged the southern afternoons away, indolently indifferent to the gay chatter round her. She used to play sometimes at the Casino, with the same air of utter *ennui*; though, at times, when the luck went heavily in her favour or against her, her eye would brighten. She played by no system whatever. "If I had a system," she said, "the game would cease to interest me; by the doctrine of probabilities, my losses or gains would be slight if I stuck to the same number; in fact, in the long run, it would diminish the element of chance almost to nothing. But to me the whole point of the game lies in the utter uncertainty of it; just the blind rolling of that ball, the momentum of which no one knows, not even the man who sets it rolling."

On two occasions she laughed out loud at the tables. The first of these occasions was when she had been staking wildly on any number that happened to occur to her, and she had won, by almost miraculous luck, six times in succession. The other occasion was when she had lost ten times that sum, in a few minutes, by always betting on the same number. She liked the sensation of measuring herself with infinite and immeasurable forces, as exhibited in the laws of gravity and momentum.

But Lord Hayes had made, as the reader will have perceived, one grand mistake. He had wanted a presentable, dignified and reserved wife, a wife who was not silly, who did not simper or smirk, and he had got her. But what he had not recognised was that such characteristics do not make up a woman's soul, but are only one expression of it under certain circumstances, and that the soul that expressed itself in such a way was capable of expressing itself differently under other circumstances; that all these may only be the natural and legitimate signs of a want of development, and that they

give no hint whatever as to what form that development will take, or what the developed soul will be. In the month of June you may see everywhere, on chestnut trees, certain compact pyramids of folded buds, slightly glutinous to the touch. If you take one of these off a hundred chestnut trees, you will be unable to detect the least difference between them. But two months later, three-quarters of those chestnut trees are covered with spires of white blossoms, and one quarter with spires of red—*Fabula narratur*. But the presumption was that any given one would be white? Certainly; but it is well to remember that a certain number will be red.

Once or twice, then, Eva had shown, as it were, the first hint of a coming blossom, which, somehow, was strangely disconcerting to her lord; it was not quite the fair white blossom he had led himself to expect. Certain of these little episodes will be worth recording.

They had spent ten days at Mentone, among other places, and had met there a certain Mr. Armine, a young man of about thirty-two, of charming appearance and manner, who was amusing himself abroad for a month or two, while an army of contractors, builders and decorators were making his father's country house, to which he had succeeded by that gentleman's death, into a place more fitting for a fashionable young man to spend half the year in. He knew Lord Hayes rather well, and was quite willing to advance to the same degree of intimacy with his wife. Everyone called him Jim, for no better reason apparently than that his name was Plantagenet, but that, after all, was reason enough.

Eva had received this heavily-gilded youth with some cordiality, and he was clever enough to take advantage of it without subjecting the silver cord to too severe a strain. The silence and apathy of a Grecian-browed, velvet-eyed divinity is construed in quite a different manner to the interpretation put on the identical phenomena when exhibited by podgy though admirable members of the same sex. It is quite impossible to imagine that behind the Grecian brow, lurk thoughts that are not distinguished by the same magnificence as their frontlet.

In other words, Eva's silences, her long glances over the weary, blue horizon, her indifference to those round her, challenged conjecture, and roused eager interests, which the vivacity and attractiveness of other women might quite have failed to awaken.

Jim Armine began by finding immense pleasure in watching her beauty, as he might have watched a Greek statue, but in a few days his mere æsthetic pleasure in looking at her had dwindled to insignificance beside the fascination of something apart from her mere beauty. In those few weeks of married life, an essential change had come over her; her soul had awakened with throbs of surprised indignation, and it found its expression in a gathered intensity of indifference in her husband's presence.

She had no need to ask him why he had married her; the sense of his possession of her made itself felt as an insult and an outrage. She felt she had been duped, deceived, hoodwinked. The consciousness that she was his was like an open wound. She had sacrificed all her undeveloped possibilities to a loveless owner; all she had was no longer hers. Truly the red flowers were very different from the white.

To another man who was something of an observer, the signs of this which appeared on the surface, as the surface of dark water heaves and is stirred mysteriously and massively when the depths are moved, were profoundly interesting. The full import of this stirring, of course, he did not, could not guess. All he knew was, that this admirably beautiful woman had moods as profound as they were mysterious; he was pre-occupied with her, interested, fascinated.

They were sitting together on the verandah of the Beau Site one afternoon, in the enjoyment of the bright, winter sun. Lord Hayes had departed with his white umbrella, to see about the purchase of a small villa which was for sale, and which stood high and pleasantly among the olive woods.

They had been for a sail in the morning, and Eva said to herself that she was tired and would stop at home. She did not trouble to make any excuse at all to her husband. He had mentioned to her that he was going to see about the villa which she had admired.

"It will be a pleasant drive up there," he had said, "if you care to come. You said you wanted to see the villa."

Eva had rather wanted to see the villa, but the prospect appeared suddenly distasteful to her.

"I think I shall stop at home," she said, and left him standing on the hotel steps.

Jim Armine, it appeared, was going to stop at home, too, and the natural consequence of this was that, half an hour later, they met on the great verandah facing south.

"This place gets stupid," she said, seating herself in a low, basket chair. "I think we shall have to go away."

"Where are you going to?" he asked.

"I had thought of Algiers; we can't go north yet. They are having blizzards in England. Besides, February in England is always intolerable."

"I have never been to Algiers," said Jim, pregnantly.

Eva looked at him a moment.

"Well, I suppose there's no reason why you shouldn't come with us. We haven't got a monopoly of the line."

"I shouldn't come if you didn't want me," he said, rather sulkily.

"Fancy asking a bride on her honeymoon whether she wanted another man with her!" she said. "There is only one man in the moon, I've always heard."

Poor Jim found it rather hard to keep his temper, more especially as he knew that he had nothing to complain of. He shifted his position in his chair, and fixed his eye on a sail on the horizon, so that he could see Eva without looking at her.

"Algiers is quite a model place for a honeymoon, I should think," he said. "Of course, the object is to get out of the world. There is too large a piece of the world at Mentone. Don't you find it so?"

Eva raised her eyebrows. This last speech seemed to her to savour of impertinence, and needed no reply. Jim was clever enough to see that he had made a mistake, and his tone altered.

"Where are you going to stay in Algiers? I believe it is pleasanter out of the town, on the hills."

"Oh! Hayes has got a villa somewhere in Mustapha Supérieure. He has a passion for villas. He has a strong sense of possession. We have been making a sort of triumphal progress. He has a villa at Biarritz, which we stayed in, and now he has bought one here. Personally, I prefer a hotel, but, of course, villas are more suitable to honeymoons. You are more alone there. But they are rather spiderly affairs if they are never lived in."

"Oh! spiders belong to the class of idyllic insects," said Armine. "They swarm in hayfields on Sunday evenings, which is one of the most recognised idyllic settings."

"I don't think I can be idyllic," remarked Eva. "I never want to sit in hayfields. They make one feel creepy, and all sorts of strange things crawl down your back. It may be idyllic, but the consciousness of the creepy things makes one want to go for the idylls with a broom. Besides, spiders are so like a certain class of odious men."

Jim recalled at that moment a little thing that had struck his attention the same morning. Lord Hayes had been breakfasting in the verandah on the usual continental breakfast – a couple of rolls, two pieces of creamy butter, coffee, and a saucer of honey. A fly had found its way into the honey, and Hayes had extracted it with the butt end of his teaspoon. There was a methodical eagerness about this action that had made Jim think at that moment of a spider disentangling a fly from its web, and at Eva's words the scene flashed up before him again.

"I think I know what you mean," he said, feeling his way.

Eva, too, had noticed the scene in the morning, and Jim's remark made her wonder whether he also had it in his mind. When she had compared spiders to an odious class of men, she had not in the least thought of her husband. The possible impertinence of his first remark received some confirmation. She was willing to be like a spider, too, if necessary.

"I daresay you do," she said. "There is nothing very subtle about it. I remember thinking this morning that you looked so like a spider when you were helping that fly out of your honey. Not that you belong to the odious class of men."

Jim flushed. The whip tingled unpleasantly on his shoulders.

"It was your husband who rescued the fly out of his honey," he said.

"Was it?" asked Eva, negligently. "I thought it was you."

She did not feel angry with him. He had made a mistake and had been punished for it. Justice had been done.

"It's getting rather cold," she went on. "Take me for a stroll, and give me your arm if you care for convention as little as you say you do. I am a little tired."

They walked up and down the gay street in front of the hotel for half-an-hour or so. Eva felt a vague stimulus in the homage of this presentable young man, in spite of his slight awkwardnesses. She felt he was not a man whom it was easy to make a fool of, but she was making a somewhat complete fool of him, and it pleased her. For the first time, perhaps, she caught a glimpse of her own power as a beautiful and attractive woman. That glimpse roused no vanity in her, but considerable interest. The sense of personal power is always pleasant; no man or woman who is alive, in any sense of the word, will acquiesce in being a unit among units, or will fail to feel a delicate growing love of power. We brought nothing into the world, and we shall assuredly take nothing out; but while we are in the world, how we cling, with a persistence that no creed will shake, to the passionate desire for more and more and more. Eva was, in fact, on the threshold of the house called "Know Thyself." It is a house of varying size. To her it appeared large and well furnished.

They walked along the sea-wall westwards, and Eva sat down on the low balustrade. The air was still and windless, and forty feet below lay the smooth, grey backs of the rocks still shining with the salt water.

"What a frightful coward one is," she said, "not to throw oneself down and see what happens next. I always flatter myself that I'm brave; but I am not brave enough to risk anything, really. I think a year ago I might have thrown myself down if it had occurred very strongly to me, because I had nothing to risk. But now things are beginning to be interesting. I should risk a certain amount of amusement and pleasure if I just stepped over that wall. I wish you would step over and see, Mr. Armine; only that would be no good, you couldn't come and tell me about it afterwards."

"Of course, lots of things are a bore," said he, "but I can't imagine any existence where that wouldn't be the case. I couldn't frame a life in my mind where one wouldn't be bored."

"Well, I sympathise with you. I probably am incapable – in fact, I know I am incapable – of many emotions, but I feel bored no longer. I used to feel nothing else."

Armine was sitting near her, looking the other way.

"What emotions can't you feel?" he asked suddenly.

Eva laughed.

"Oh! plenty, and perhaps the most important of all. That is why I fully expect not to feel all the emotions that Algiers should inspire in me."

Armine thought this remark much less inconsequent than it sounded, but he kept his reflections to himself.

Two days afterwards, Eva and her husband left Mentone for Marseilles. Jim walked down with them to the station, accounting for his action by saying that he expected a box from England, and it had not arrived, though it was two days overdue. To Eva this appeared the most shallow and unnecessary of subterfuges. There was some slight delay in starting, and he stood by their carriage window with his arms on the sill until the train moved.

Eva was leaning back in her corner, talking slowly but somewhat continuously.

"I hope your box will have come," she was saying with fine cruelty. "You must have been very eager about it to come down through these dusty streets, when you might be having a sail. I really

thought you were coming to see us off till you explained about the box. I think I should have been rude enough to ask you to stop at home if it had been so. I hate being seen off. There is never anything to say; you feel as if you ought to make pretty little farewell speeches, but the farewell speeches always hang fire, I notice. And no one can continue an ordinary, rational, desultory conversation with fifty engines screaming at him. It is much better for everyone to pretend they are not going till the last moment, and then jump up quickly, say good-bye, and bundle into the cab. But at a railway station it is impossible to pretend you are not going. The apparatus of going is too obvious. Everyone is fussy and stupid at a station. Ah! we are really off, are we? Good-bye! I wish you were coming with us."

Eva smiled rather maliciously. The first impertinent remark had been settled with now, and they were quits again.

Jim Armine stood on the platform watching the smoke of the receding train. He made a monosyllabic remark which is not worth setting down, and went back to the hotel. The box which he was expecting might languish alone in the parcel office for all that he cared.

The bridal pair crossed in one of the French Trans-atlantique steamers, which are built long and narrow for the sake of speed, and the accurate observation of the effect of a cross sea. Eva, with her serene immunity from human weaknesses, was sitting near the bows of the vessel, enjoying the warm, winter sun, and watched the great heaving masses of water, rushing up against the side of the vessel, with a sympathetic gladness in their glorious unrestraint. The position presented itself in a somewhat different light to her husband, who retired, under the influence of the same glorious unrestraint, with anything but sympathetic gladness in his heart. Eva felt a little contemptuous pity for him, but enjoyed being alone. It was drawing near that supreme hour when the sun just touches the horizon of water, and the depth of colour in southern sea and sky grows almost unbearable in its cruel fulness, in its air of knowing something, of being able to tell one, if one could only hear its message, some mystery that would make things plain. Eva was sitting on the windward side of the vessel, looking west, and her eyes were filled with a still, questioning wonder. She had arrived at that most agonising stage of feeling sure that a mystery was there, without grasping what it was to which she wanted any answer. Her mind was full of a vague wonder and expectancy – the wonder and expectancy of a mind just awakened from its dreamless sleep of indifference. One arm was thrown back, and her hand grasped the taffrail to steady herself. She had taken off her hat, and her hair was blown about in the singing breeze. The human interest which had begun to dawn in her, which had stirred and woke from its sleep with a sudden, startled cry, a few weeks ago, would not let the other wonder slumber. The sense of the eternal mystery of things watched side by side with the sense of the eternal mystery of men. But for this half-hour she was alone with it; she was unconscious of the heaving and tossing of the vessel; all she knew was that she questioned, with something like passionate eagerness, the great walls of wine-dark water with their heraldry of foam, the hissing monsters that rose and fell round her, the luminous miracle that was sinking in the west.

In the meantime, Lord Hayes had got, so to speak, his second wind, had emerged from the privacy of his cabin, and was walking along the deck towards her with a battered, dishevelled air. The punctuation of his steps was rigidly but irregularly determined by the laws of gravity as exhibited by a vessel pitching heavily in a fluid medium. Eva had not seen him coming, and he stood by her a few moments in silence.

"I feel a little better," he remarked at length, in precise, well-modulated tones.

Eva started and frowned as if she had been struck. She turned on him with angry impatience.

"Ah, you have spoiled it all," she cried.

She looked at him a moment, and then broke out into a mirthless laugh. He had wrapped a grey shawl round his shoulders, and on his head was a brown, deerstalker cap.

"My dear Hayes," she said, "you are in vivid contrast with the sunset, and you startled me. I was thinking about the sunset. However, it is nearly over now. You look like a sea-sick picture of twilight. That grey shawl is very twilighty. Come into the saloon and get me some tea."

That gentleman was in too enfeebled a condition to feel resentment, even if he had been by nature resentful. It is notorious that certain emotions of the mind cannot exist under certain conditions of the body. No normal man feels a tendency to anger after a good dinner, or a tendency to patience in the ten minutes preceding that function. No one feels spiritually exalted in the middle of the morning, or heroic when suffering from slight neuralgia, and I venture to add that no one has spirit enough to feel resentful after an hour or two of sea-sickness.

The villa at Algiers was a charming, Moorish house, with a predominance of twisted pilasters and shining tiles, and bold, purple-belled creepers flaunting it over the white walls. It stood on the hills of Mustapha Supérieure, above the Eastern-looking town, surrounded by a rich, melodious garden, where the winter nightingales sang in the boughs of orange groves, which were bright with flower and fruit together, and where tall, listless eucalyptus trees shed their rough, odorous fruits thick on the path. But this soft beauty suited Eva's mind not so well as the bold, golden sun dropping into a wine-dark sea; in fact, she cordially detested the place. How much of her hatred was due to the fact that she was alone with her husband she did not care to ask herself. Certainly, the even monotony of one face, one low, well-modulated voice, was displeasing to her.

She found a malicious pleasure in giving him surprises. Her freshly-awakened interest in the human race sometimes took the bit in its teeth and ran riot, and, when it ran riot in his presence, she took no care to check it, but talked in a voluble, rather vicious vein, that startled him. For instance, at dinner one day, she had discussed certain books which he did not know women even read, and announced, somewhat vividly, views on life and being which were scarcely conventional. After dinner, they had sat out in the little passage that ran round the open square in the centre of the house, supported on twisted pillars, and Eva continued her newly-found confession of faith.

"Men seem to expect that women should be sexless replicas of themselves," she said. "All they would allow them is the inestimable privilege of being good. Virtue is its own reward, they say – so they cultivate their own pleasure with a fine disregard of virtue, and a curious pride in performing actions which certainly will lay up for them no store of virtuous and ineffable joy, while to the women they say, 'Be good; here is a blank cheque on the bank of Providence. The bigger the better. *Au revoir.*' A delightfully simple arrangement."

Lord Hayes gave a little cough, and added sugar to his coffee.

"I should always wish," he said, with the air of an after-dinner speaker; "I should always wish women to fulfil to the uttermost their own duties, which none but women can do."

"The duty of being good," said Eva. "Exactly so."

"I fail to see the justice of your remarks about the tendencies of men to regard women as sexless replicas of themselves," he said. "The province of women is quite different from that of men."

"Ah! let me explain," said Eva. "Men are bad and good mixed. Whether the bad or the good predominates is beside the point. Leave out the bad, and introduce no vivid good, and you get the sexlessness, and what remains is a sexless goodness, which is, as I say, the sexless replica of the man. That is a man's woman."

"No doubt it is my own stupidity," said Lord Hayes politely, "but I still fail to agree with you. You do not take into account what I ventured to call the province of women, which, I say again, is quite different from the province of men."

"*Da capo*," murmured Eva. "Let us agree to differ, Hayes. I am rather sleepy; I think I shall go to bed."

Lord Hayes lighted a candle for her, and waited till it had burned up.

"Good-night," said Eva, nodding at him.

He bent forward to kiss her, and, as before, she surrendered her face to be kissed.

The length of these episodes calls for an apology, but there is just this to be said. Life, for most of us, consists of episodes, of interruptions, of parentheses. We can few of us keep up the epic vein and go sublimely on, building up from great harmonious scenes a great harmonious whole. The scene-

shifter perspires and tugs at his mighty cardboard trees and impossible castles in the forest; they are stiff, they will not turn round. And he sits down – does this irresponsible and wholly unbusinesslike scene-shifter – and meditates. After all, is life really surrounded by these giants of the theatrical forest? Do we go into remote and virgin woods and chant our love in irreproachable epics? When we have made our great scene, when we stand in the pure, unselfish, heroic, villain-massacreing, devoted climax of our existence, are we quite sure that some one will throw the ethereal oxy-hydrogen light on to us at the right moment? Will the audience recognise how great we are: and, even if they do, will not the slightest accident with the oxy-hydrogen light turn our climax into an ante-climax? The irresponsible scene-shifter begins to see a more excellent way. Roll off your forest trees; send the manager of the oxy-hydrogen light home, give him eighteenpence to get drunk on – he will like it better than your heroic vein – let us have no scenery even. Just a few chairs and tables, a plain, grey sky, and no herpics. A few little episodes dealing of men who are not saints or silver kings, a few women who are not abbesses or Portias, who are in no epic mood, but in the mood of the majority of weak, unsatisfactory, careless, human beings, who can be unselfish and pure, but who are at times a little uncertain about the big riddle, unscrupulous, unkind, worldly. Besides, we are only in the first act at present. Perhaps the gigantic forest trees and the white light will come on later, but we do not promise. The irresponsible scene-shifter is right. So much, then, in praise of episode.

To return from the point at which we started before these unconscionable episodes found their way into the text, the honeymoon was over, the month was April, and Lord and Lady Hayes had returned to England. They were to spend a few days at Aston, and, after Easter, to go straight up to London. Old Lady Hayes was staying with her niece, who had married a certain Mr. Davenport, and had one son. Reggie Davenport was a favourite with the dowager, who bullied him incessantly, and who sometimes got furious, because he never lost his temper with her. She was to spend a fortnight in London with the Hayes, as a great concession, in order to make Eva's acquaintance, and would join them as soon as they had settled. It may be stated at once, that she regarded her son's marriage as a most unprincipled and selfish act, and as an insult levelled directly at herself.

Mrs. Grampound came up to see her daughter on the first day after their arrival.

"Your father would have come with me," she explained, "but he and Percy are away. I am quite alone at home. You are looking wonderfully well, dear, and I'm sure I needn't ask you whether you are happy?"

"Of course," said Eva, "those are the things that are taken for granted."

"I've come to have a little cosy talk with you," said Mrs. Grampound, settling herself in a chair and taking off her gloves.

A cosy little soliloquy would perhaps have been a more accurate description. She wandered on in a sort of pious intoxication at the contemplation of her daughter.

"The mistress of a great house like this has very great responsibilities, my darling," she said. "If dear James were not such a thoroughly able and upright man, I confess I should feel a wee bit nervous at seeing my darling whirled away into such a circle. Be very sure exactly how you are going to behave. There seems to me something very beautiful in the life of all those dear last-century, great ladies, whose husbands used to treat them with such charming old-fashioned courtesy, and lock them up whenever they went away, which must have been most tedious. Yes, and send a servant to tell the groom of the chambers to ask my lady if she would receive him. Dear me, yes."

"I don't think Hayes means to lock me up whenever he goes away," said Eva. "We haven't got a groom of the chambers, either."

"No, dear," said Mrs. Grampound; "I was just saying, wasn't I, that all that was changed. Husbands lounge in their wives' boudoirs now, and smoke cigarettes there. So much more human and natural. You don't mind the smell of smoke, do you, dear?"

"On the contrary," said Eva; "I smoke myself."

"Gracious, how shocking! What a wicked child. Of course, there's no harm in it, dear; lots of nice women smoke. I should not let Hayes know that. When a difficult time comes – there will be difficult times, of course, my Eva – there is no rose without its thorns – Let me see, what was I saying – ah! yes, those little indulgences, like letting a husband have a cigarette in the drawing-room every now and then, are very much appreciated. A little womanly tenderness," continued Mrs. Grampound, getting rather breathless, and volubly eloquent, "a little tact, a little wifely sympathy, just a look, the 'I know, I know,' which women can put into one little look, is all that is required to make those difficulties real advantages – concealed facilities, one might really call them; real renewals of the marriage vow; the rough places shall be plain, in fact, if we may use those words."

"We get on admirably together," said Eva; "he is most considerate for me, and most kind."

"I declare I positively love him," cried her mother. "Of course, in any case, I should teach myself – should compel myself – to love the man of your choice, but the first time I saw him, I said to myself, that is the husband for my Eva. It was one June evening," continued Mrs. Grampound with an impressional vagueness, "and we were dining somewhere, I can't remember where, and he was there too; dear me, I recollect it all as clearly as if it was yesterday. I remember old Lady Hayes telling us all that brown sherry was rank poison, and that she would as soon think of drinking a glass of laudanum. We all laughed a great deal, because our host had very famous brown sherry."

"It must have been very pleasant," said Eva.

"Dear old Lady Hayes," said Mrs. Grampound; "such a wonderful woman, such strong, shrewd common sense; I wonder if she will go on living with you, Eva? I don't think it's a very good plan myself – there is sure to be some little unpleasantness now and then."

"In spite of her strong, shrewd common sense?" asked Eva.

"Dear child, how you catch one's words up! Of course, her presence would be invaluable to you, if she stopped, and with such a guest constantly by you, of course you would learn a great deal. But I should make it quite plain what your relative positions must be. You are the mistress of the house, Eva; she is your husband's pensioner. Be very kind, very courteous, but very firm. Your rights are your rights. I daresay she will go to live at Brighton or Bournemouth or Bath, all those watering-places begin with a B; no doubt she has money of her own. You didn't think of asking Lord Hayes what would be done about that, did you, Eva? You might suggest it very gently and feelingly some time soon. Of course, you needn't express any opinion till you see what she is likely to do. Then, if it appears that she is proposing to live with you, just say very quietly that you will be very glad to have her. That will show, I think, that you know and are ready to insist on her occupying her proper position in the house. And you went to Algiers, did you not?" continued her mother; "that dear, white town set like a pearl and all that on the sapphire sea. I forget who said that about it, but it seems to me a very poetical description. I could almost find it in my heart to envy you, dearest."

"Yes, it's a very pretty place," assented Eva.

"Darling, why do you tell me so little," said Mrs. Grampound, more soberly. "I have been thinking so continuously about you all the time you have been away; you have lived in all my thoughts. I have said to myself, 'Eva will be at home in four weeks, three weeks, two days, one day; to-day I shall see my dearest again.'"

"What is there to tell you?" said Eva, slowly. "You assume I am happy, and I don't deny it. I am also amused and interested. I find things very entertaining. If you like I will show you some photographs of Mentone and Algiers. I lost two thousand francs at Monte Carlo. Hayes is very generous about money matters, and he has the further requirement of being very rich. He is bent on my being magnificent, and so, for that matter, am I. You shall see some fine things. I have, as you told me before my marriage, great natural advantages in the way of beauty. Diamonds suit me very well, and I have quantities of diamonds."

Poor Mrs. Grampound's mental intoxication was passing away rapidly, leaving behind a feeling of depression. At no time did her thoughts present themselves to her with distinctness; they were like

seaweeds waving about close to the surface of the water. Sometimes, after a big wave had passed, sundry little ends of them appeared above the sea for a second or two, and Mrs. Grampound made anxious little grabs at these before they disappeared again. Consequently, her descriptions of them, as reflected in her conversation, were somewhat scrappy and inorganic.

She appeared, in the short silence that followed Eva's remarks, to have got hold of a new sort of sea-weed – a bitter, prickly fragment. At any rate she said, somewhat piteously, —

"Eva, Eva, tell me you are satisfied. You don't blame me, do you, for urging it on you?"

Eva could be very cruel. The foam-born Aphrodite, when she came "from barren deeps to conquer all with love," had, we may be sure, many undesirable suitors, and to these, I expect, she did not show any particular kindness or sympathy. She was, to judge by her face, too divine to be cruel in petty, irritating ways, but she was too divine not to be very human.

Eva raised her eyebrows.

"Why should I blame you? I am amused and interested. After all, that is more important than anything else. Surely I ought to be grateful to you. But to speak quite frankly, I did not marry to please you; I married to please myself, and Hayes, of course," she added.

Mrs. Grampound was very nearly shedding a few vague tears, but the appearance of Lord Hayes made her decide to postpone them.

"My charming mother-in-law," he said, "I am delighted to see you. Very much delighted, in fact. And am I not to see my father-in-law? How do you think Eva is looking?"

"Eva is looking wonderfully well," said she briskening herself up a little. "She has been giving me the most delightful accounts of your honeymoon. Mentone, Algiers, all those charming, romantic places. But Monte Carlo! Really, I was shocked. And Eva tells me she lost two hundred thousand francs – or was it two thousand, Eva? In any case, it is quite shocking, and I feel I ought to scold you for leading my child into bad ways."

"He didn't lead me," said Eva. "I went by myself. I think you remonstrated, didn't you, Hayes? You didn't play yourself, I know. However, I got a good deal of fun out of it. It was really exciting sometimes. After all, that is the chief thing. Two thousand francs was cheap. Tell mother about the new villa. I must go – I've got a hundred things to do."

Old Lady Hayes also made inquiries of her son as to what was to happen to her. She was a direct old lady, and she said, —

"And what is to become of me?"

Lord Hayes quailed under these unmasked batteries and felt most thankful that he would not have to meet them alone any longer. He had great confidence in Eva's courage, and felt that she would be quite up to the mark on such occasions. But he had, for the present, to trust to his own forces, and, with the idea of making the scene as little unpleasant as possible, he replied, —

"Of course, dear mother, you will do whatever suits you best. Your position in the house will necessarily be somewhat changed."

"Necessarily," said Lady Hayes.

Her son found no pertinent reply ready.

CHAPTER IV

There is something peculiarly substantial and English about those houses which our aristocracy brighten with their presence, in the more fashionable parts of London, during several months of the year. Those lords of the earth, who cannot manage to breathe unless they have a thousand or more acres round their houses in the country, being sensible folk, are content to live, shoulder by shoulder, in rows of magnificent barracks, when they are in London. A porch supported by Ionic pillars, with a line of Renaissance balustrade along the top, a sprinkling of Japanese awnings, a couple of dozen large, square windows looking out on to what is technically known as "the square garden," partly because it is round, and partly because it is sparsely planted with sooty, stunted bushes, scattered about on what courtesy interprets to be grass, and surrounded by large, forbidding railings, are the characteristics of the best London houses. They may not be distinguished by any striking, artistic beauty, but they are eminently habitable.

Along one of these rows, one June afternoon, a smart victoria was being driven rapidly. It was hung on the best possible springs, and the wheels were circumscribed with the best possible india-rubber tires. A water-cart had just passed up the street, and the air was full of that indescribable freshness which we associate in the country with summer rain, and which, in London, makes us feel that art is really doing a great deal to rival Nature. The progress of the well-appointed victoria was therefore as free from noise, jolts, and dust as locomotion is permitted to be in this imperfect world. There was only one occupant of this piece of perfection – for, of course, the coachman and footman are part of the carriage – and she was as perfect as her equipment. In other words, Lady Hayes was going home to tea.

The carriage drew up with noiseless precision at the curb-stone, and Lady Hayes remained apparently unconscious of the stoppage till the powdered footman had rung the bell, and turned back the light crimson rug that covered her knees. Then she rose languidly and trailed her skirts across the pavement to the house. Above the porch was a square, canvas tent, with one side, away from the sun, open to admit the breeze, and Eva, as she passed upstairs, said to the man standing in the hall, "Tea upstairs, above the porch." This tent opened out of a low window in the drawing-room, through which Eva passed, and in which was sitting, as gaunt and forbidding as ever, her respected mother-in-law. That lady had grudgingly complied with the popular but misguided prejudices of London with regard to the skins wherewith the human animal clothes itself, but her stiff, black silk gown was as awe-inspiring as her grey, Jaeger dress and the boots with eight holes a-piece in them.

They had all been in London nearly a month, and the excellent old lady was living in a permanent equipment of heavy armour, with which to repel, assault, and batter her daughter-in-law. Eva, on the contrary, despised the old methods of warfare, and met these attacks, or led them, with no further implements than her own unruffled scorn, and a somewhat choice selection of small daggers and arrows, in the shape of a studied delicacy of sarcasm and polite impertinences. She resembled, in fact, an active and accomplished pea-shooter, who successfully pelted the joints of a mature and slowly-moving Goliath. The dowager glanced up as she entered. One of her laborious mottoes was "Punctuality is the root of virtue," and Eva, in consequence, held the view that punctuality is the last infirmity of possibly noble minds. She was quite willing to believe that her mother-in-law had an incomparably noble mind; she did not underrate her antagonist's strong points; in fact, her whole system was to emphasize them.

"Ah, you've come at last," said old Lady Hayes. "And pray, when are we to have tea?"

"I am late," said Eva. "I always am late, you know. Why didn't you have tea without me? Is Hayes in?"

"The servants have quite enough to do with the dance to-night without bringing up tea twice."

"Ah, that is so thoughtful and charming of you," said Eva, drawing off her long gloves. "The merciful man considers his beast. That is so good of you."

"And he considers his servants as well," said the dowager.

"Oh! I think servants are meant to be classed as a sort of beast. The good ones are machines, with volition; and if they are bad servants, of course they are beasts."

The dowager turned over the leaves of the current number of the *Lancet* with elaborate unconsciousness.

Eva finished taking off her gloves, and whistled a few bars of a popular tune.

"I don't know if it's customary for women to whistle now-a-days," said the old lady, for whistling, as Eva knew, was a safe draw, "but in my time it was thought most improper."

"Isn't there a French proverb – I daren't pronounce French before you – about 'we have changed all that?' That is a very silly proverb. It is the older generation who changed it themselves. They made their own system of life impossible. They reduced it to an absurdity."

The dowager, who spoke French with a fine Scotch accent, and knew it, finished buckling on, as it were, her greaves and cuirass, and presented arms.

"I confess I don't understand you. No doubt I am very stupid – I should like very much to know how we have reduced our life to an absurdity."

"I don't say the modern generation are not quite as absurd," said Eva, "but the difference is that they have not yet learned their absurdity. You see, the whole race of men, since b. c. 4004 – that is the correct date, is it not? – have been devoting themselves to the construction of any theory of life which would hold water, and one by one they have been abandoned. The new theory, that nothing matters at all, has not yet been disproved, and considering that no theory hitherto has ever been permanent, it would be absurd to abandon this one till it is disproved in as convincing a manner as all its predecessors."

"I imagine that no previous age has ever sunk so deep in mere sensuous gratifications," said the dowager, lunging heavily.

"Ah, do you think so?" said Eva. "Of course, it is impertinent in me to try to argue the matter with you, as experience is the only safe guide in such matters, and you have experience of at least one more generation than I. But that seems to me altogether untrue. As we know from the Bible, desire shall fail, because it has been gratified to the utmost that human desire can conceive, I imagine. Well, I think desire has failed to a great extent. The men of your generation, for instance, and the generation before, drank so much port wine that this generation drink none. The daily three bottles that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers indulged in, has fulfilled the desire of port to the uttermost. No one gets drunk now. I don't think I ever saw a man drunk. They used to fall under the table, did they not? What a charming state of things! But it has at least produced a fastidiousness in us, which considers heavy drinking coarse and low."

"My father was a teetotaler, and so was my husband," said the old lady, rather wildly.

"I think that the habit of drinking in men," continued Eva, "is really the fault of the women; you, of course, are an instance in point. Your husband was a teetotaler – surely, through your influence. If the men of the last generation were vile, the women, I think, were viler still. What is the word? Oh! yes, vicarious. The men sinned vicariously for the women."

"It is easy to speak lightly of the virtues of your forefathers," remarked the dowager; "much easier than to practice them yourself."

"Ah! you misunderstand me," said Eva. "Heaven forbid that I should speak lightly of them! Their virtues were as gigantic and as loathsome to them, as their vices are to me. They used to go to church with the most appalling regularity, and eat salt fish in Lent, and have their clergyman to dinner on Sunday, which meant no port wine to speak of. Of course, they made up for it by having a little quiet cock-fighting on Sunday afternoon, but you cannot expect perfection."

"Cock-fighting seems to me no more brutal than butchering hand-reared pheasants," said the dowager.

"Ah! that is the war-cry of people who don't know anything about shooting," said Eva. "The hand-reared pheasant comes over the guns at the height of about sixty feet, at forty miles an hour. I watched them shooting last year at home. There was a big wind, and Hayes missed seventeen birds in succession. Take a gun and try for yourself. Of course, you say the same thing about partridge-driving. You say the manly thing is to walk your partridges up instead of having them driven to you. The truth is that one of the reasons why men go partridge-driving now is because it is so much more difficult than walking them up. Certainly Hayes's butchery of hand-reared pheasants was a most humane proceeding. Did you ever see a cock-fight?"

"Cock-fighting improved the breed," said the other, "though I disapprove of it entirely."

"Well," said Eva, "it killed off the weak ones. The survival of the fittest, of course. And we reap the benefits by having particularly large eggs to eat; at least, I suppose a stalwart chicken begins life in a stalwart egg."

Old Lady Hayes rose with dignity.

"I think tea must be ready," she said. "In fact, it is probably cold by this time."

"Time does pass so in conversation," said Eva, languidly. "Ah! they have sent some orchids. How nice and cool they look." She snapped off a spray of the delicate, cultured blossoms, and fastened them, in her dress. "I think tea is put in the room above the porch. I rather expect Jim Armine," she said, as she settled herself in a low, basket chair. "I wonder when the absurd custom of women pouring out tea will go out; why a woman should have that abominable trouble I cannot think. Of course, when tea was rather a rarity, a sort of up-to-date luxury, it was natural. The hostess gave her guests a smart little present."

Old Lady Hayes accepted the challenge. She said:

"It used to be held to be the province of women to be matronly and womanly and domestic. They were in their places at the fireside, at the tea-table, not in the smoking-room and in grand stands."

"I am referring to the manual labour of pouring out tea," said Eva; "but whatever the province of women may be, they seem to me to fill it very inadequately when their husbands go to bed drunk every night. It is such a comfort to know that your father and husband were teetotalers, for I can say these things without being personal. Your father was a Presbyterian minister, was he not? How do you call it in the dear Scotch language – meenister, isn't it?"

"He was a learned, upright man."

"How nice!" said Eva. "I can add a meenister to my ancestry. Do you know who my great-grandfather was? He was a crossing-sweeper, originally, in New York. Then he went West, you know, and, being 'cute, made a pile."

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